

# Unity in diversity: Religiosity of Muslims in Kerala

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## Abstract

Kerala is the state which has a glorious past to claim and an honorable position in the socio-cultural map of the world. India is known as the land of religions and civilizations, and is gifted with the legacy of the largest democracy and the slogan of unity in diversity. Among other states of India, Kerala is enriched with heritage and tradition in religiosity with its persevering stance in the contemporary cosmopolitan societies in the world.

Religiosity, in its broader sense, is a comprehensive sociological term used to refer to the numerous aspects of religious activity, dedication and belief, and in its narrower sense, deals more or less with how religious person is. All major world religions prevail in Kerala from ancient period. Jewish religion arrived in 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, Christianity came through St. Thomas in AD 52, and Islam came in eighth century AD. Indian religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were also introduced in Kerala in different times. Majority of population of Kerala are followers of Hinduism which prevailed from the ancient period and modified by various reformers in different epochs. It is noteworthy that there are also those who do not believe in any religion and pursue atheist doctrines. In spite of the diversity and multiplicity in the religious and socio-cultural arena of Kerala, the people of Kerala manifest an exemplary model of social harmony and tolerance which set away the roots of extremist forms of piety and fundamental concepts of religiosity. As followers of religion, Muslims of Kerala keep the traditional feature of tolerance which transmitted from generation to generation. History of religiosity of Muslims in Kerala witnessed the fact and credit for continuity of the harmonizing character of the society in peaceful manner goes to different religious organizations of Muslims.

Keywords; religiosity, Islam, tolerance, religious organisation, Muslim and Mosque.

## Islam in Kerala

The authentic annals of history validate the opinion that Islam reached the shores of Malabar during the period of the Prophet. If the written archives are referred and possibilities are interfered, the opinion would be authenticated and convinced that it is true because the biological territorial variations based on ideology and beliefs validate this argument. Compared to the beliefs and activities of other provinces or areas, the conserved and preserved Islamic charm in Kerala gives a good answer to our suspicions. The fact that the Keralites' articulation of the word 'Allahu', completely matches with the articulation of Arabs indicates that they had imbibed Islam directly from the *Swahabah* (The companion of the Prophet)<sup>1</sup>.

Even though there is disagreement on the advent of Islam in Malabar, It is not contradictory to the history to give credence to the belief that an administrator of Kerala had reached the proximity of Prophet and converted to Islam. The authentic historical records comprise of undeniable evidences for the two journeys. Therefore, it could be believed that the Kerala administrator who converted to Islam as Tajuddiin and Abdurrahman Samiri who travelled to Makkah for (Hajj) pilgrimage were buried in Shaharmukhalla and Lufar respectively<sup>2</sup>.The sheen of Islam spread over Malabar by the time Arab commercial groups came into Kerala for trade. Akbar Sha Khan had contended this in his book *A'inee Haqeeqat Nama*.The famous historian Abdul Qadir Faristha has also substantiated this<sup>3</sup>.The Adam Hill in Silone (Sri Lanka) had been a pilgrimage centre from the time immemorial. Many travelers comprising Arabs used to visit here. Ahmed Baladoori records that it was common and a usual thing in the second and third centuries of Hijra<sup>4</sup>.Those who visited Adam hill might have visited Malabar. The last Perumal administrator embraced Islam in this period<sup>5</sup>. Here it is relevant to quote words of M.G.S Narayanan, "There is no reason to reject the tradition that the last Chera king embraced Islam and went to Mecca, since it finds a place not only in Muslim chronicles, but also in Hindu Brahmanical chronicles, like *Keralolpathi*, which need not be expected to concoct such a story, which in no way serves to enhance the prestige or further the interests of the Brahmin or Hindu population"<sup>6</sup>.It

<sup>1</sup> CN Ahmed Moulavi, KK Muhammed Abdul Kareem, Mappila Sahithya Parambaryam, Kozhikode, Azad Book Stall, 1978), 56.

<sup>2</sup> CK Kareem, Prajeena Keralavum Muslim Avirbhavavum (Calicut: Islamic Sahithy Academy, 1999), 65

<sup>3</sup> KK Muhammed Abdul Kareem, Cheruman Perumal (Tirurangadi, Ch Muhammad Koya & sons, 1956), 75

<sup>4</sup> Shamsullaqadiri, prajeena Malabar, 1954, p; 28.

<sup>5</sup> KK Abdul kareem, cheruman perumal, 1956

<sup>6</sup> M G S Narayanan, *Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Kulashehara Empire*, Unpublished thesis submitted for Ph D In Kerala University 1972, pp 185-90

is true that some scholars ignored the importance of Perumal legend in the advent of Islam in Kerala because the lack of specific epigraphical evidence<sup>7</sup> but the circumstantial evidences support the fact that Islam reached Malabar soon after its origin in Mecca<sup>8</sup>. I.H. Qureshi observes from the close commercial and mercantile ties with Malabar that Islam therefore entered within a few years of the proclamation by the Prophet of his mission.<sup>9</sup>

## Mosques

It is undeniable fact that Malik Deenar and his companions reached Malabar and the ruler warmly welcomed them. He was rejoiced to see the letter written by Perumal and he facilitated the accommodation and needed facilities for Muslims. Then they established a Masjid there in Rajab 11 Hijra 21, which was branded as the first mosque in Kerala. Afterwards, they laid foundation stone to almost 10 mosques on the shores of Malabar in various places and appointed a Qazi with a view to preach Islam. It can be scheduled as below;-

No	Places	Year	Name of Qazi
1	Kodungallur	21 A.H. Rajab 11 Monday	Muhammad Ibn Malik Ibn Habib
2	Kollam	21A.H. Ramadan 27 Friday	Hasan Ibn Malik Ibn Habib
3	Madayi	21 A.H. Dhul Hijja 10 Thursday	Abdu Rahman Ibn Malik
4	Barkur	21 A.H. Rabeea Awal 10 Thursday	Ibrahim Ibn Malik
5	Mangalore	22 A.H.Jumadul Uoola 27 Friday	Musa Ibn Malik
6	Kasaragod	22 A.H.Rajab 13 Monday	Malik Ibn Ahmed Ibn Malik
7	Shreekandapuram	22 A.H.Sha'ban 1 Thursday	Shihabudheen Umar Ibn Muhammad Ibn Malik
8	Dharmadam	22 A.H.Shawal-29 Friday	Husain Ibn Muhammad Ibn Malik
9	Panthalayini	22 A.H. Shawal 29 Friday	Sa'adudheen Ibn Malik
10	Chaliyam	22 A.H. Shawal 21 Thursday	Zainudheen Ibn Muhammad Ibn Malik

<sup>7</sup> Sanskrit Chronograms gives different dates regarding the partitions of empire and Perumals conversion, K.V. Krishna Ayyar, pp. 77-80 as given foot not by Salahudheen O.P ,Anti-Europeans Struggle by The Mapplias of Malabar 1498-1921, Phd thesis, Department of History Aligarh Muslim University,Aligarh,2006

<sup>8</sup> Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Islam and Muslims in South Asia. Historical Perspective*, Delhi, 1987

<sup>9</sup> I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of Indo-Pak Subcontinent, 610-1947 AD*, New York, 1947 P:1

The eminent historian Zainuddin Makhdoom elucidates the sincere activities of Malik Ibn Dinar and his team: Malik Ibn Dinar Settled in Kodungallur and entrusted his cousin, Malik Ibn Habib to construct mosque throughout Malabar. Malik Ibn Habib and his wife with their son children left for Kollam and founded a mosque there. After leaving his children and wife in Kollam he left for Eazhimala and from there for Fakanur, Mangalore, Kasaragod etc. and constructed mosque in each place. They later returned to Eazhimala and settled there for three months. Then, he visited Shreekandapuram, Dharamadam, Panthalayini, and Chaliyam and launched mosques. After his settlement in Chaliyam which spanned for 5 months, he left for Kodungallur. He stayed there with Malik IbnDinar. He returned to Kodungallur with a gratification of sowing seeds of Islam in a soil having lack of fertility owing to profanation and polytheism. Then Malik Ibn Dinar and Malik Ibn Habib departed to Kollam and the former left for Shaharmukalla and succumbed to Demise at there. Malik Ibn Habib returned to Kodungallur with his wife leaving some of his children there. He and his wife breathed their last from there<sup>10</sup>.

After Malik Deenar, many missionaries reached Malabar and they preached Islam. So, the development of Islam and the formation of the community in Malabar was chronological process. In 11<sup>th</sup> century; Muslims established *Masjid* in Chaliyam (Kannam kulangara Palli).Zamorin helped Muslims for their accommodation. In CE 12<sup>th</sup> century, Zamorin could to expel Porlathiri from the sway with the support of Muslims and Arabians. It was in last of 12<sup>th</sup> century the new Kuttichira Juma Masjid was built. While Ibn Batutta (1304-1369) visited the place, Muslims had become a powerful group. Before that many Masjids were founded in Malabar such as Mudakara Masjid, Valiyangadi Masjid, and riverside *Masjid*.Idinyangara Sheik *Masjid* was built in memory of Kamukandakath Sheikh Mamukkoya. *Masjid* of Mudakara was established by merchants in 16<sup>th</sup> century and Muhyuddeen Masjid in Palayam is made in the supervision of Toppikalat leaders.Tippu Sultan made the *Masjids* for soldiers in 1782 by their application<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup>Zainudheen Makhdoom, Thuhfathul Mujahideen, trans. C. Hamsa, Al Huda Book Stall, Kozhikode, 2012, P:56

<sup>11</sup>Balakrishnakurupp K., Kohikodintecharithram, Mathrubhumi books, 2006, Kozhikode, p: 170-171.

## Muslims and Tolerance in contemporary Kerala

Now, Kerala is densely populated with Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities while the region of Malabar has a strong presence of the Muslim community. There have been no harsh conflicts and bloodshed riots among any of these communities in the Kerala context since they all live harmoniously. The Hindu-Muslim relations were negatively affected initially by the arrival of Portuguese and later it was further escalated by the British Colonial rulers. British policy of 'divide and rule' made the gap between Hindu and Muslims. Post-Colonial rule of the British witnessed the formation of communal politics of organizations as well as religious polarization. The riot of 1921 negatively influenced the Muslim community in Malabar and it paved the way for formation of different religious organizations. Samastha Kerala Jemi-yathul Ulama, Kerala Jamiyathul Ulama, Dakshina Kerala Jemiyyathul Ulama and Jamaat-e-Islami are the major organisations among Muslims of Kerala. The organizations influence the society in social, political, cultural and economical aspects and functioned well being the community. They worked for religious harmony and tolerance and did not cause to bloodshed revolt or not issued any statement which hinders the peace of the society.

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