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## Attitude of village Muslims towards girl's education: a different story

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Muslims constitute the second largest community in Kerala. Mappilas are the Muslim community living in the Northern part of Kerala, the area being known as Malabar since ancient times. Malabar was a district of Madras presidency during the colonial period. It has its own specific distinct culture, tradition, and heritage. The history of Malabar is often different from that of the other parts of Kerala. Overwhelming presence of Mappilas were the unique feature of this region.

Women in general and Muslim women in particular, are a downtrodden section in Indian society. The participation of Muslim women in public sphere is comparatively very poor even after the introduction of women reservation bill. The literacy rate of Muslim women was lower than that of their non-Muslim counterparts in the state.

Participation of Muslim women in higher education and even in professional education faced a drastic change after 1980's. It may be basically due to the changes that occurred in the outlook of the community as a result of the gulf boom, economic development and activities of various reform movements and leaders.

There were no schools or colleges to impart education to Muslim women in earlier days. Mosques served as the main centers of education, where

religious teachers taught Arabic and Islamic studies to youth and adult. 'Othupalli' and 'Dars' were the centers of Muslim education. 'Dars' was the centers of higher education and was exclusively meant for boys. Girls were taught Quran and Islamic studies from *Othupalli*. Majority of the girls got education from their mother or elder members of the family.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of reformist movements among all communities in Kerala. The Muslim reformers received philosophical energy and support from the so-called Pan Islamic movements and reformist leaders of the Islamic world. Imparting of secular education, reforming the existing Islamic education system and encouraging girls education were some of the objectives of these reformers.

One of the pioneers of Madrasa movement in Kerala was Chalilakath Kunhamad Haji. He was appointed as Sadarul Mudarisin (Head master) of the Tanmiyathul Uloom Madrasas at Vazhakad in 1909. The Madrasa was established in 1871 and run by famous Koyapathodi family <sup>(2)</sup>. He renamed the Madrasa as Darul Uloom Arabic college, and sought to turn it into a modern institution for the study of theology as well as modern secular subjects. Girls were permitted to attend the classes on regular basis <sup>(3)</sup>. However, he was forced to leave the institution by the opposition of the conservatives. Maadinul uloom Madrassa, founded by A.M.Koya Kunhi in 1911 at Kannur was another venture of that time <sup>(4)</sup>.

Similar initiative was led by Vakkom Abdul Kadar Moulavi in Travancore and in 1914, solely due to his effort the government began to employ Arabic teachers in several state owned schools. <sup>(5)</sup> All these measures boosted Muslim girls education in Kerala.

## **Muslim Girls and Secular Education**

Based on the charter Act of 1813 and report of committee on public instructions in 1823, the government allocated funds for the establishment of classical and vernacular language schools. But the government patronage to Muslim education was started only in 1870. British Government's hostile attitude towards this Muslim community after the revolt of 1857 may probably be the reason for this delay was quiet negative after 1857 revolt. The resolution put forward by government of India in 1871 and 1885 paved the way for improvement in the field of education among Muslims.

The number of Muslim students in government schools was very low during 1868-1870. Report of the Inspector of schools reveals the fact that the Mappila girls were reluctant to attend the new schools. The cohesive attachment of Muslims to their religion, culture language and tradition prevented them from modern education. The number of Mappila boys was far behind that of their

counter parts. This situations gradually changed by 1870 onwards when the government initiated several measures to educate the Mappila Muslims. In 1871, the Government of India issued a resolution to respond appropriately to improve educational level of Muslims. The resolutions directed to allow classical and vernacular languages of Muslims in all government schools and colleges. The resolution recommended establishing English schools in Muslim majority districts. Moreover, it appeared to give them Grand - In - Aid to open schools of their own and encourage Arabic studies in the university courses. <sup>(6)</sup> 96 Mappila schools were established and a total number of 3634 students were enrolled within two years of implementation of these special measures <sup>(7)</sup>. The government also provided special Grand-In-Aid for the improvement of Mappila education.

We can notice an immediate increase in the number of Muslim students, especially girls in the year 1883-84. The number of Muslim girls enrolled in government schools reached 1016 during 1883-84 <sup>(7)</sup> . It shows that the Grand-in -Aid of the government was highly influenced the Mappila's enrolment to schools. But, still, the number of school-going girls in Malabar was very low while comparing to other communities and regions. At the same time, the progress of female education had been very slow in comparison with that of boys.

The government appointed a separate Deputy Inspector, for Mappila schools in Malabar for further expansion of Mappila education and allocated a special Grant-in-Aid to the immediate effect of the measures was the increase in the number of students and schools in the region. The number of Muslim girl students increased from 874 in 1885-86 to 2196 in 1886-87<sup>(8)</sup>.

A Mappila female normal school was established at Calicut in 1883. By establishing such a school for Mappila girls the government had expected that it would help to extent female education among the Mappila community. In addition to this school, three preparatory or sectional schools to train teachers for the primary school examination were established at Thalassery, Malappuram and Tirur during 1889-90.

This effort for improving education was hampered greatly by the occurrence of violent peasant outbreaks in Malabar. The number of students attending schools was declining steadily during the time of outbreaks. The government introduced Mappila scholarship during this time. Apart from Muslim boys, Scholarships were reserved for girls also. The Mappila pupils, who attended training courses for the profession of teaching, were given an allowance of Rs. 2 per month. An additional allowance was given to Mappila female students who were under going training and did not reside at town where they were being trained.

The position of Muslim education, particularly the women situation, was pathetic even in the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Out of 19000 students, little over 300 were crossing 4<sup>th</sup> standard. During 1909-'10 total numbers of students in girls schools was 820 compared to 627 in 1900-01. The number of girl's schools and the strength of students increased to 14 and 805 from 12 and 655 during 1902-1905 <sup>(10)</sup>

Even though the community continued their opposition to the British, rule their indifference to education were slowly by breaking down after 1910. The establishment of Khilafat committees and the revolt of 1921 were a major setback for this steady improvement of Mappila education. Due to the Government initiative towards educating Mappilas and emergence for reform movements, we can notice a satisfactory growth in the number of enrolment into educational institutions after 1921. It was a significant turning point when six Mappila girls were admitted to the higher elementary grade during 1929-30<sup>(11)</sup>

There was a large increase in the number of Muslim girls who joined the schools in 1935-36. Five Muslim girls appeared sat for the Lower Grade Arabic Munshi's Examination. A Muslim lady graduate was deputed to undergo training in the Lady Willington College, Madras. 86 associations cooperated for doing propaganda work for girl's education through Grant –in-Aid <sup>(12)</sup>

In 1907 only two Mappila students were attending Arts Colleges. Muslim educational level in different provinces remained low under the colonial rule. It was not only the case of Malabar but India as a whole. During 1881-82, the enrolment rate of Muslims in various intuitions of Madras presidency was at 3.4% against 16.3% in UP and 25% in Punjab.

### **Muslim Girls education in Kodyathur Village**

In the second part of this paper, I am trying to explore some data related to the educational status of Muslim girls in a particular village in Malabar. The data collected from various schools in and around the village Kodyathur will help us to examine the position of women education in villages as well as the attitude of the community towards the same. Though, We cannot generalize the finding it will definitely there some light on the subject and will act as the basis for further discussions so as to formulate certain reliable conclusion of this study.

Kodyathur is one of the early Muslim settlements in Malabar. There was a very famous Dars (religious study centre) at Kodyathur juma mazjid. This Village happened to become a turtle the growth of soil for almost all traditional as well as modernist groups among the Muslims. The outlook and perspectives of Ulema of Kodyathur was comparatively progressive. The present study reveals the educational status of a Muslim majority village in Malabar.

Government Mapila School is the earliest secular educational institution in Kodyathur it was started in Kodyathur in 1911 as part of the government initiative to improve modern education among the Muslims. The study and comparison based on the enrolment register and other records of the school reveals the fact that the enrolment ratio of boys and girls in primary classes are comparatively low. The boy-girl ratio from the beginning to 1935 was 2:1 and sometimes it reached 3: 1 (1931). It shows that the enrolment to modern schools was not denied to village Muslim girls during that time. But majority of the girl students were not even completed fourth standard. It was basically due to the socio-economic issues of the region. The elder girls were assigned duty of their kitchen in place of their mother who were pregnant or delivered. Again they were assigned to look after their sisters and brothers. Due to these sorts of reasons, majority of girls were not able to complete their education. The society was also not in favor of importing to education the Muslim girls in higher levels. The following table shows the growth in enrolment of girls in Kodyathur Mappila Primary School.

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Girls</b> | <b>Boys</b> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1925        | 14           | 30          |
| 1940        | 27           | 43          |
| 1960        | 24           | 26          |
| 1980        | 34           | 30          |
| 1990        | 37           | 29          |
| 2000        | 30           | 29          |
| 2010        | 29           | 23          |

The nearest upper primary school in the village was S.K.U.P school which was started in 1942 and got government recognition in 1949. Among the 164 students of the first batch there was only 5-6 girls who completed the upper primary classes.<sup>(15)</sup> Chennamangallur high school is the nearest high school of the village.

Among the nearest high school of the village in Chennamangalore . The school was started in 1964. Among the 101 students of the first batch, there were 14 girls and among this 5 were Muslims. But only one Muslims' girl (Kunhi Fathima) has qualified tenth standard.

The number of Muslim girls enrolled in chennamangallor high school denotes the approach of the the Muslim community towards the higher education. Educating the girls especially in higher level was not got much support in the society even in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Enrolment list of students at Channamamngllur High school

| Year    | Total students | Total Girls | Muslim Girls | Other Girls |
|---------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1965-66 | 92             | 11          | 3            | 8           |
| 1966-67 | 94             | 13          | 6            | 7           |
| 1968-69 | 113            | 16          | 7            | 9           |
| 1969-70 | 135            | 25          | 11           | 14          |
| 1970-71 | 172            | 42          | 11           | 31          |
| 1980-81 | 246            | 89          | 64           | 25          |

The attitude of the society towards women education was changed gradually in the villages by 1970's. It was due to many reasons. Apart from the continuous intervention of reformists and government, the then emerged 'Gulf boom' also played a vital role in these changes. There ultimate result was the surrounding a trend of educating girls in higher level by 1980's. Statistics regarding the admission of students in schools and colleges shows a striking contrast to earlier figures<sup>(16)</sup>

According to the random study on Kodyathur village, one of the earliest Muslim majority settlement in Malabar, reveal the fact that the general aversion of Muslim community towards secular education was, more or less the same in towns and villages. The Muslim community was not stood against educating their girls but were reluctant to send them for higher studies. Muslim women were quite absent in the public sphere.

### End Note

1. See more in *Prabodhanam special issue on Kerala Muslim Reformation*, (Malayalm) , 1998 April – V.A. Kabeer.
2. Prof.U. Muhammead, *Educational Empowerment of Kerala Muslims, A socio-Historical perspective*, other books, Calicut, 2007, p 32.
3. E.K. Ahmad kutty, *Islam and reformist movements in Kerala*, Calicut, 1982, p 12
4. Ibid
5. Pro.U. Muhammad, *OP, Cite*, p,32
6. K.K Ali, *Moonu Muslim Parishkarthikal*, 1PH, Calicut, 2004, p 31.
7. K.T. Muhammed Ali, *The Development of Education among the Mappilas of Malabar (1800-1965)*, Nunes publishers, New Delhi, 1990,pp.73-74.
8. *Ibid*, p 82.
9. *Report of the Inspector of schools, 6<sup>th</sup> circle (Malabar) for the year 1885-87*, Quoted in Shabeerali K.K, *The Development of Muslim Women's*

- Education*, Un published M. Phil thesis, centre of Arabic and African studies, JNU, 2005, pp.47-48.
10. *Report on public instruction*, Madrass presidency for the year 1890-10, quoted in Shabeerali K.K, Ibid, 48
  11. *Report on public institutions* , *Madrass presidency for the year 1890-10*, Quoted Shabeerali,.K.K, Ibid, 48
  12. *Ibid*, p 50.
  13. *Ibid*, p 52
  14. K.T.Muhamadali, *Op cit*, p 134
  15. School enrolment register is not available from its began years. The tables is a random study based on the available enrolment register
  16. No official records available in the school, Most of the early records were perished. The present data is collected from the students of the first and second batch of the schools, Mr. Muhamadunni Master and Mr. Chekutty Master.
  17. Pro.U. Muhammed, *Ibid*.