

SECULAR CULTURE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: KERALA EXPERIANCE

Edited By
FAIZAL T K



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Korambayil Ahamed Haji Memorial Unity women's College, Manjeri cherished the development of women as its core agenda since its establishment. In a mission to propagate the message of non-discrimination so as to fulfill the dreams like freedom and equality for women through education, department of history under the Institution has published a journal titled secular culture and social transformation: Kerala experience. The cross cultural and transnational exchanges made in the form of academic writing on the areas such as secular culture of Kerala in ancient, medieval and modern period. The journal was successful in identifying the possibilities where the secular culture among the human beings in India against the discrimination. The institution in this sense acted as the agent to convey this message to the region by enlightening the readers. The faculty not only the entire student community considered the experience as very informative and thought provoking and they felt immensely privileged and were extremely grateful to the authorities for that. The 'secular culture and social transformation: Kerala experience' focus on the social transformations of Kerala through the secular concept of people. The mythological legends regarding origin of Kerala are essentially Hindu in nature. Hindu's concept of 'vasudaiva kudumbam' usually practiced in Kerala society in the beginning of the history of Kerala. The journal is indeed an eye opener to the society that marginalized community by denying their Human rights.

Editor

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INTOLERABLE INTOLERANCE

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Secularism was defined in a comprehensive manner which meant the separation of religion from politics and the state, the treatment of religion as a private matter for individual, state neutrality towards or equal respect for all religions, absence of discrimination between followers of different religions and active opposition to communalism. In the congress session held at Karachi passed a resolution which declared that in free India, “every citizens shall enjoy freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practice his religion that all citizens would be equal before the law irrespective of caste, creed or sex, that no disability would attach to any citizen because of caste, creed or sex in regard to public employment, office of power or honor”

Gandhi believed that politics had to be based on morality and to him all religions were the source of morality. Religion was, in fact, he believed, itself morality in the Indian sense of dharma. During the pre and post independent India while communalists were using religion as a sectarian belief system to divide the people, he preached the separation of religion from politics. In 1942 he categorically stated that religion was a personal matter which should have no place in politics. Jawaharlal Nehru was the first Indian to see communalism as the Indian form of fascism. The national leaders criticized British rule invariably on the economic, political social or cultural factors and never are on religious grounds. Communalism contributed to partition and communal riots. It was because of the secular commitment of the national leaders, the independent India made secularism as the basic pillar of Indian constitution.

The constitution declares India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic. By the 42nd amendment in 1976, secular character of the constitution to be one of the basic features of Indian constitution. Further the

fundamental rights guarantees the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion and the rights to freedom of religion.

The debate over the meaning of the term secular in the Indian context has been a heated one. In India, the concept of secularism evolved as part of the struggle of nationalist forces against communal forces that wanted to use religion for political purpose and divide the emerging nation on the basis of religion. Nehru categorically states that we call our state a secular one. What exactly does it mean? It does not obviously mean a society where religion itself is discouraged. It means freedom of religion. It means free play of all religion.

Despite Indians immense cultural diversity, certain strands of common cultural heritage had developed over the centuries, knitting its people tougher and giving them as a sense of oneness. Elements of political, administrative and economic unity had developed especially under the Mughals. The colonialisation of Indian economy, society and polity further strengthened the process of Indians unification. India's complex diversity is its legend. It consists of a large number of linguistic, cultural and geographic economic zones. It has followers of different religions and casts.

Diversity could be used for divisive purpose and transformed into disruptive tendencies. The founding fathers stood for secularism as the basis for the nation. Undoubtedly by partition and the accompanying communal riots, they remained loyal to the secular vision of the national movement. They also dealt firmly with communal violence and on the whole succeeded in protecting the religious minorities.

Communalism and communal parties and organizations are very much a part of today's political environment. The communal appeal is used on a large scale for electoral mobilization. Communalism is today the most serious danger facing Indian society and polity. It is undermining secularism. Secularism ensures separation of religion from the state and politics and its being treated as a private personal affair. It also requires that the state should not discriminate against a citizen on the grounds of his or her religion or caste. Communalism is an ideology based on the belief that

the Indian society is divided into religious communities, whose economic, political, social and cultural interests diverge and are even hostile to each other because of their religious differences.

It was one of the great triumphs of the Indian national movement that despite the partition of India and the barbaric riots that accompanied it, the Indian people accepted secularism as a basic value, enshrined in the constitution, and set out to build a secular state and society. A major factor in the growth of communalism since independence has been the political opportunism towards practiced by secular parties, groups and individuals.

India is losing its face. Rising right wing intolerance is, in fact, blackening the very soul of pluralist nation. From ban culture to vigilantism and mob fury, attempts are on to rewrite the ethos of India. The *Modi* government which rose to power on the development plan is plying mute spectator. The beef bans imposed by the B.J.P. government in Maharashtra and Haryana were extremely regressive. Now, with its so-called development agenda failing, the government is ratcheting up tensions, and giving the impression that it would impose an all-India beef ban. That would be impossible. Beef is eaten not just by Muslims, but by Christians, *Dalit* groups and people across religions in north East, Kerala, Goa, and West Bengal. Being much cheaper than mutton, it is a source of protein for the poor.

The recent bans in BJP ruled states have extended to the slaughter of bulls as well as bullocks, earlier allowed based on a fit-for-slaughter certificate. While beef traders have been affected, farmers will be hurt most. A recent government report identified a 60 per cent fodder shortage in Maharashtra. By banning the slaughter of old and infirm animals, the government has only added to the burden on farmers. The beef ban gives scope for petty harassment and moral policing. It encourages citizens to suspect and spy on each other. We saw a wild example of this in *Dadri*. The sweeping bans are undemocratic and curb the freedom of individuals to eat or live as they want.

The nation is waking up to its gross error of last year. As *Modi* subtly undermines the fundamental values of our constitution, it has been left to our public

intellectuals to defend the idea of India. *Modi* led to victory in the general elections of 2014. His singular aim is necessarily in the preparation of the ground for Hindu Raj, which our nation has repeatedly bucked over close to seven decades of independence. For the BJP its victory is a small window of opportunity-for the nation is already waking up to its gross error of last year. To expect them to become sincere adherence of the liberty loving, secular, pluralistic ethos of the Indian constitution is as much an illusion as was the *rath yatra's* promise to hold their pledge to the constitution above their pledge to build the *ram mandir* only there. Destruction before construction –that has always been the motto of *hindutva*. Poet Ashok Vajpeyi says, we are on the brink of a tyranny of uniformity and parochialism, violence, murder, intolerance and bans are creating a fearful ethos. Being a minority is almost a crime. Another poet, Keki Daruwalla, decries the erosion of values that literature stands for, like freedom of expression against threat, upholding the right of the marginalized, speaking up against superstitions and intolerance of any kind. Novelist Shashi Deshpande declares this is the right time for writer's to reclaim their voice; silence is a form of abetment. Salman Rushdie foresees alarming times for free expression in India. Poet K. Sachidanandan points to cultural institutions being under threat.

In august 30 Kannada scholar M.M. Kulburgi shot dead by unidentified assailants. Rationalist Narendra Dabholkar and Govind Pansare also killed in Maharashtra the past two years. On September 25 Abdul Malik, an unemployed youth was arrested after he repeatedly stabbed a policemen outside a mosque in Yavatmal district of Maharashtra. The policeman survived. A local *Maulana* had allegedly instigated Malik to stab the cop to protest the state governments beef ban. The counter-terrorism agency is now looking for the *Maulana*. On September 28 Mohammad Akhlaq, 52, lynched by a 200 strong mob in *Dadri* in Utter Pradesh for allegedly slaughtering and eating a calf. All ten people named in the FIR arrested. Six of them reportedly related to local BJP leader Sanjay Rana. On october8 in Kashmiri trucker Zahid Bhat attacked with petrol bombs by *Hindu* groups following rumors that he killed cattle. He succumbed to injuries nine days later. Protests broke out throughout the state. Zahid,s death on politics of hate and intolerance which is a

grave challenge to the state and nations plurality. The Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar statement that Muslims may live in India but they should not eat beef created more problems. On October 20, Jammu Kashmir liberation front chairman Yasin Malik, who planned to stage a protest, was taken into preventive detention with four others. The public safety act slapped against five of the seven people arrested. On October 9 independent MLA Sheik Abdul Rashid assaulted by BJP MLA's in the Jammu and Kashmir assembly for hosting a beef party. On October 19, *Hindu Sena* members blackened his face with ink in Delhi during a news conference. On October 9 six persons on motorcycles hacked to death *Bajrang Dal* member Prasant Poojary in Moodabadri in Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka. He had been involved in raids on illegal slaughter houses. Eight persons were arrested in connection with the murder. On October 12 Shiva Sense workers doused in ink to former BJP leader Sudheendra Kulkarni, who organized the release of a book by former Pakistan foreign minister Khurshid Kasuri in Mumbai. Case registered against half a dozen unidentified persons .He was organizing the launch of the book *Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove* written by former Pakistani foreign secretary Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri in Mumbai. A few days earlier, after threats from the Shiva Sena, organizers had called off a concert featuring Pakistani ghazal singer Ghulam Ali. On October 12 a torn-up copy of the *Guru Granth Sahib* found in Faridkot district of Punjab. In the following days, six other similar incidents took place in the state. Police arrested two brothers and took 52 people into preventive detention. On October 16 a mob in Himaachal Pradesh's Nahan district lynched Noman Akhtar, an alleged cattle smuggler. Police arrested one person and launched a manhunt for the others. On October 17, an Australian couple allegedly harassed in Bengaluru over a shin tattoo of the goddess Yellamma. People threatened to skin matt Keith, 21, who wore the tattoo. He was forced to write a letter of apology. Should not have apologies for what is on my skin posted Keith on his face book page. On October 18 *Shiv Sena* members stormed the BCCI headquarters in Mumbai to protest the talks with Pakistan cricket board chairman Shahryar Khan. They were arrested. In response, the international cricket council pulled Pakistani umpire Aleem Dar from the ongoing India-south Africa ODI series. Commentators Wasim

Akram and Shoaib Akhtar pulled out from the fifth ODI amid security worries. On October 20 a *Dalit* couple and their toddler and infant were set afire in Faridabad in Haryana allegedly by upper-caste *Rajputs*. The children died and the mother was critically injured. The father's hands were burnt.

Modi's silence and inaction over the growing instances of intolerance are widely seen as tacit complicity. In the Faridabad district of Haryana, two *Dalit* baby were charred, as their house was set ablaze when they were asleep. It was part of a clash between some *Rajputs* and *Dalits*. The vulnerable appears to have become more so in the climate of intolerance. Former finance minister P. Chidambaram said liberal thought, pluralism and scientific temper would suffer because of the rising intolerance. The gainer will be polarization. Communities will become more inward-looking, selfish, protective and violent. Only the state-fearless, strong, secular and fiercely loyal to the constitution-can stand up to, and roll back, the growing threat of intolerance and violence.

In January, Tamil writer Perumal Murugan quit writing when some *hindu* activists and caste groups in Tamil Nadu campaigned against his book *Madhorubhagan*. First published in 2010, the novel narrates the emotional trauma of a poor, childless couple, and how the wife, who wants to conceive, takes part in an ancient *hindu* chariot festival. The festival at the famous *Ardhanareeswara* temple at Tiruchengode near Salem allows consensual sex between any man and woman for a night. Murugan could not withstand the pressure.

Though the RSS distanced itself from the *Dadri* killing, an article in its mouthpiece, *Panchajanya*, said the Vedas prescribed killing of sinners who slaughter cows and suggested that Madrasas inculcated in the minorities a hatred for the country's *hindu* tradition. If the prime minister does not speak up against such acts of intolerance, a wrong message goes out. Political parties across ideologies and alliances are blaming *Modi* for his silence and inaction. It took the president of India to make *Modi* to break his silence finally. Pranab Mukherji warned against letting India's core values of diversity and tolerance go waste. *Modi* reacted that the *Rashtrapathi* has shown us the way. There is no bigger inspiration than him, let's

follow his path, finance minister Arun Jaitley said the writers returning awards in protest of the growing intolerance was manufactured protest and a paper rebellion. Number of writers, who were returning their awards to protest the growing cultural and communal intolerance. Sahitya Akadamy award winner Sarah Joseph says, there is no freedom for people to eat what they like, or love a person of their choice. The Dadri incidents and protest against Ghulam Ali are unfortunate and undesirable.

The growth of communalism and communal parties and groups in despite recent years, India still has a basically healthy secular society. Even though communalism is, perhaps the most serious challenge, facing Indian society and polity today. Even when the communalists have succeeded in utilizing communalism as the quick and easy route to political power and have won elections, the people who have voted for them have done so into express their discontent with the existing state of political and economic affairs. The Indian people are basically secular. Popular consciousness has posed a major barrier to the spread of communalism to a significant extent in the rural areas and to large parts of urban India. The government should take strict action against this type of atrocities and intolerance. Otherwise it will affect countries past glory and defame the nation in the world. Unfortunately government would see and react as a mere spectator and it will create the problem more badly.

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BETWEEN TOLERANCE AND INTOLERANCE; ROLE OF PANAKKAD MUHAMMED ALI SHIHAB THANGAL IN MAINTAINING SECULAR PLATFORM IN KERALA.

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Introduction

The word Tolerance means willingness to accept behavior and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with it. Intolerance means

lack of Tolerance; unwillingness or refusal to tolerate or respect opinions or beliefs contrary to one's own. It is defined also as Unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behavior that differ from one's own. Religious tolerance has been an integral part of India's tradition. India has proved to be a peaceful haven for different religions and cultures and it believes in plurality. According to the Indian Constitution, Muslims have equal rights of citizenship in every aspect and there is no discrimination at all on the basis of religion. An increasing number of people from the world of literature, media, entertainment, science and finance have come forward to criticize the growing intolerance in India. Many of whom have returned their national awards of recognition in protest. The difficulty is that the government has not issued a strong statement against intolerance and in particular that of the religious discrimination. According to Mahatma Gandhi, intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit.

India, through ages has evolved in to a confluence of plurality and it has been a kaleidoscope of various classes, castes, community and religion since ancient period. The live pictures and vistas of this nation from earlier period endorse that people lived there holding hand in hand and sharing love and care, regardless of the differences in the religion and ideologies they professed in. That is why uniformity never had or has been the facet or motto of this nation, whereas it upheld avowedly the worthiest and most feasible motto of unity in diversity.

Though the majority of the inhabitants of this nation from rulers to ruled, from rich to poor, from educated to ignorant etc. contributed their best and most to the defense and maintenance of this beautiful fabric of confluence conforming in words and practices through tolerant co-existence, a meager minority showed intolerance and indifference towards it in whole periods. In such dubious situations, the vibrant presence and active interventions of many great leading personalities and epochal figures have been instrumental in the maintenance and restoration of it. Whenever it underwent to face threats and hazards.

Shihah Thangal was one of among the brightest figures who performed that leadable function successfully in the geographical and ideological context of Kerala in contemporary period

Panakkad Syed Mohammedali Shihab Thangal (1936-2009)

Panakkad Syed Mohammedali Shihab Thangal, is a great visionary and an Islamic scholar and reformer. He was born on May 4, 1936 in Malappuram, Kerala, as the eldest son of Panakkad Syed Ahmed Pookoya Thangal, who was a renowned Islamic leader of Kerala; Thangal had his primary education at the M.M. High School, Calicut. He continued his religious education at Thalakkadathur and Kananchery Dars under Ponmala Moideen Musliar. In 1958, he left for Egypt for further studies and obtained his master's degree in the Arabic literature from Jamia Al Azhar in 1961. He continued his studies in Cairo University. After spending about eight years in Egypt he returned home in 1966. . He was also Qazi to hundreds of Mahals in Kerala.

Sayyid, literally means leader or more generally every elites. But, according to Islamic epistemology the term denotes the descendants of Prophet Muhammad. Hasan and Husain were two beloved grandsons of Prophet Muhammad, through his daughter Fathima and her husband Ali; and the descendants of the Prophet were spread through them. Miller observes that "European blockade of Kerala shores cut off from the Muslims the source of their preachers and holy man, who had come from Arabia to guide and encourages them in faith". Story of Mohammadali Shihab Thangal starts many generations ago. His family is the descendent of the Prophet. Mohammadali Shihab is 40th generation away from the Prophet in his lineage. About

300 years ago his family arrived on the coast of Kerala from Tarim in Hadhramaut region of Yemen. They landed in Kannur and made it their home. They came here to spread the message of Islam in Kerala. Three hundred years later they continue to serve the cause of Islam.

He was not only a political leader but also a spiritual leader of the Muslim community in Malabar. He had been Muslim League President for about 34 years. Thangal's had been a moderating influence in the State politics. Thangal had been a key player in Kerala's coalition politics and a prominent part of the Congress-led UDF in the last three decades without ever contesting any election. More a statesman than a politician, Shihab Thangal, through judicious handling of sensitive issues, steered the League away from the path of communal politics and helped it to gain recognition as part of the secular mainstream. Instead of dealing with the problems of the Muslim community - it constitutes about a quarter of the population and is the largest single caste/religious group in the state - solely in the narrow context of their faith, he placed them in the broad context of the social, economic and educational backwardness of large sections of the population. He was an influential leader of high repute who contributed much to the consolidation of secular democratic traditions of the state. He had been venerated by lakhs of people as a spiritual leader cutting across all the barriers of religion, castes or parties. He was so associated with the people and his presence was much sought after.

Role in maintaining secular platform

Panakkad Muhammedali Shihab Thangal safeguarded the fragile fences of secularism at the Centre and in the state. In the Indian political arena, where the heaviest and loudest normally pull crowds, the modest, quiet and intellectual Panakkad Muhammedali Shihab Thangal proved to a contradiction. He never contested an election, but was always a key decision maker. He never played the king maker, but was the silent force who moulded many leaders and ruling combinations. Sitting in his ancestral house in Kerala's Malappuram district, Thangal scripted sociopolitical changes across the country's political landscape, much to the envy of many regional leaders who had to rely on muscle and lungpower to get their point across. What others won through boisterous arrogance,

Thangal managed through an elegant smile and a benign look: that was the power of his silence. It's this aura that saved Kerala from a communal catastrophe in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition. And his presence continued to prevent fallouts whenever aberrations made holes in the secular fabric.

If God's own country didn't flare up after the infamous events of Dec 6, 1992, then God has this steadfast disciple to thank. In the face of the gravest provocation, Shihab Thangal did not dilute his own secularism basis. And in hindsight, he was proven right; the man was avowedly secular, down to his bone marrow. He played a major role in preserving communal and social harmony at the most trying times like demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. He strongly ordered his followers to ensure the communal harmony is not disrupted. He specifically asked Muslims to take guard of Temples in Muslim localities and to ensure the safety of pilgrims travelling to the famous Shabarimala temple in the peak season of December. Imagine a Muslim leader saying this, just days after the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992. "Not a single stone will be thrown at a Hindu house. In fact, every Muslim will stand guard at his Hindu brethren's house."

According to BRP Baskar , Shihab Thangal faced two major challenges during his long stint as the chief of the League. He faced them, sticking unwaveringly to the Islamic ideal of brotherhood. First came the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, by Hindu fanatics to facilitate the construction of a temple dedicated to Ram, who, they believe, was born there in a remote period. Even as some sections of the community raised shrill cries of revenge, Shihab Thangal asked his followers to ensure that communal harmony was not disrupted. Then came two rounds of communal violence one at the coastal village of Marad and another at Nadapuram. Shihab Thangal exerted his influence to prevent the outbreak from spreading to other areas. The all credit for this belongs entirely to Shihab Thangal. Violence is not a method of Islam, be peaceful. Allah will be those who keep patience. Most of the medias gave required propagations to this advise .none of the Muslims ran with arms against temples .control yourself be the guardians of other religious worship places.”

Nadapuram Riot.

When EK Nayanar was the chief minister of Kerala, the Nadapuram Riot has murdered a Muslim leader kunyahammed haji .but the mourning procession with his dead body was prevented by police because of curfew at Nadapuram. How the body buried normally. It was the mourning procession under panakkad thangal's leadership brought back peace at Nadapuram.

Poonthura Riot-1992

In 1992, the most cursed chapter of Kerala history. At Poonthura a coastal village in Trivandrum. A communal violence held at seashore, both Muslims and Hindus fought each other. They fired fisherman's nets, huts, ferry and so on. The mosque and temples were burned. Five people were brutally murdered at the coast. During the critical moments, Thangal came as refuge and maintain peace in that area. He firstly visited the temples and interact the administrators.

His courage and commitment towards communal harmony was greatly appreciated and he assumed the role of a great wall denouncing the ultra-communal voices by fortune seekers being trespassed to blind mass. He always refused to make compromises for short-term gains. He never gave in to the cries from his critiques as well as from his followers to play with communal card considering on its short term benefit may lead to unbridgeable gulfs among communities.

Shihab Thangal succeeded in gaining for his party a public recognition as part of the secular mainstream, and credence as a party that upholds the secular ideal despite the religious tag in its name. He placed the problems of the Muslim community in the broad context of the social, economic and educational backwardness of large sections of the population, thus seeking solutions for community problems without triggering communal animosities.

Thangal in the eye of National Leaders and Media.

Dr.Manmohan Sing- Thangal sahib personified India's pluralism and commitment to multi-cultureless. Though a great religious leader, Thangal will long be remembered as the voice of democratic secular principles and a practitioner of secular solidarity .during the difficult period of country –wide communal unrest in

1992, his appeal for peace worked wonders in Kerala. All his life, Thangal sahib furthered the call of communal amity through his speeches and writings. Prathibha Pattil - Thangal was a prominent social worker, active in public life and the country has lost an eminent figure in secularism. Sonia Gandhi's words about Shihab Thangal, were that he was an influential ambassador of India.

A great son of India and of Kerala, Syed Muhammed Ali Shihab Thagal was widely respected and loved for his deep spirituality, his profound scholarship, his generous philanthropy. We would always count his wisdom and his experience, his strong commitment to secular values and his dedication to promoting education. In the opinion of V.S Achudananthan the former opposite leader in Kerala, Thangal was a protector of secularism. Mr. Thangal's strong and committed stand that preserved peace and amity in Kerala during the difficult days following the demolition of the Babari Masjid. (Ooman Chandy)

In the opinion of A.K Antony "shihab thangal was the sentinel of peace "according to Ravi Pilla famous business man "he was Mahatma Ghandi of Malabar". In the opinion of O.Rajagopal, famous BJP leader " Shihab Thangal was a man of a rain drops emanated from the abode of love" According to M.T Vasudevan Nair "he was a bastion of peace"

Shibu Baby John revealed the great role of Thangal recollecting one of his own experiences with Thangal. I was at Bangalore when the Babari Masjid was demolished. The riots and violence that happened there were so horrific, and even now I can't remember it without a panic. But, in that darkness of intolerance all over India, only Kerala stood with invaluable light. That was possible only because of the muscular and strong secular stances of Sayyid Muhammadali Shihab Thangal. In the time of riot, I managed to reach at Bangalore airport only after a long walk of kilometers from the lodge. While I arrived at Cochin, I was excited seeing the peaceful situation of Cochin. The same situation was all over in the Kerala. Sayyid Muhammadali Shihab Thangal's powerful and charismatic leadership and his attractive vocalizations led the minority-minds towards the right-path, which otherwise may deviate into intolerance and fanaticism.

He was described as the Kerala's most prominent symbol of secularism, peace and communal amity, Thangal was noted for his role in preserving communal and social harmony at the most trying times like demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992.

Conclusion

Mohammad Ali Shihab Thangal of Panakkad, who passed away on Saturday, belonged to a rare breed of politicians. While setting aside political differences, leaders from all parties paid homage to the late leader who upheld values of secularism and social harmony. Across Kerala's wide political spectrum, either on the right or the left, it is not possible to find another leader who was so totally free from the lure of office. Kerala, as a society of great values, has also indebted to the Thangal his timely deliberations and interventions to enrich secularist perspectives. Panakkad Sayyid Muhammed Ali Shihab Thnagal, was a strong guardian of Kerala secularism. He insisted on his followers to hold up secularism and universal brotherhood. It is highly pertinent now, at the time of widespread discussion on tolerance and intolerance. He elevated the message of love, charity and harmony among the peoples from all walks of life, irrespective of their caste, creed and community. By his short but philosophic words and his blissful attitude towards political and other issues, Thangal got undisputed acceptability from the entire Kerala community.

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Gods Rush in Where Fools Fear to Tread: Secular Practices in Religious Institutions in South Kerala

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Abstract:-

When India was burning in the fire of mutual hatred which emerged as an aftermath of partition Kerala became an abode of refuge to the Muslim brotheren who could never think of forsaking India for the newly formed state of Muslims. This small tip of sea surrounded land welcomed all the refugees coming from that part which was then in Pakisthan with open hands. Even when the ruling British was harping with their divide and rule policy, Malayalees embraced all faiths and never alienated the people who believed in another God. Here we cannot see places reserved for people strictly based on one religion. When political parties took over Britishers they always segregated people based on their religions just for gaining vote banks. Then also Kerala remained comparatively secular. This secularism is a quality which can be imitated by the rest of the Indians has its roots in the religious practices which were followed for many centuries. Otherwise even with the high literacy rates Kerala might not have become a model for the secular states of the world. This study aims to explore these secular practices and religious unity in four religious institutions in Southern Kerala via Sabarimala, Vettukad Church, Bemapalli Mosque and Attukal. These temples, church and mosques are visited regularly by people of all religions and the Gods become the protectors of the Malayalees when each and every one look upon them as a way of comfort, salvation and spiritual upliftment.

Introduction

Why is Kerala comparatively secular among the Indian states? Sociologists give many reasons for this. One group argues that this secular atmosphere results from the fact that every religion is followed by approximately equal number of people in Kerala. But we know that such a situation alone cannot bring forth secularism. Another next to true reason is the high literacy rate Kerala has. Kerala's literacy rate is far higher than the national average. An average Keralite is at least

school final passed. More than fifty percentage of the total population have attended colleges. This intermingling of all religions at a very early age wipes out the religious prejudices of our children. Even if these are the reasons for the less communalism in the minds of Keralites, there are other reasons for this as well. The religious leaders of Kerala have provided best examples for religious tolerance as well. During Sundays when Holy Mass is going on in Churches temples switch off their loudspeakers. During Fridays children who live near mosques are forbidden from making loud noises in order to facilitate smooth functioning of Namaaz in Mosques. Many religious institutions in Kerala attract pilgrims belonging to other religions too.

This study analyses the secularism associated with Sabarimala pilgrimage with special reference to Erumely Pettathrullal, Arthunkal Church visit by Sabarimala pilgrims, Attukal Ponkala. Beemapalli Mosque Uroos , Padapooja in Vettukad Church. Tehe rituals stand out when Gods themselves propogate religious harmony and universal brotherhood. All these practices had a major role in saving Kerala from the Communal fire which rages in other states too often. Such practices prove that the aim of every religion is love and it is never mutual hatred.

Sabarimala pilgrimage which starts by middle of November and ends by mid January, is never complete without Mandala Pooja and Makara vilakku. Erumely Pettathullal is usually associated with the latter. Situated in deep forests, Erumely is the gateway to Sabarimala, the hillock shrine of Lord Ayyappa. The place got its name from two words, Eruma(buffalo) and Veli(fence). The place name might have etymologically derived from the fence constructed to save oneself against the attack of wild buffaloes. Not surprising that this place is associated with Mahishi, the buffalo faced she demon who troubled, plundered and tortured people. Lord Ayyappa gained glory when he killed her and performed spiritual dance on her dead body. Pettathullal is performed to commemorate this act. It is beleveld that Lord Ayyappa is a divine incarnation to fulfill the prayers of people who were troubled by Mahishi.

While performing Pettathullal, the barefooted pilgrims smear their bodies and faces with various colours, wear black dresses decorate their heads with twigs and flowers, carry toy bows and arrows and dance chanting Ayyappa Thin thakathom, Swamy Thinthakathom. “ This ritual signifies the defeat of flesh over spirit and good over evil.”([www.sabarimala](http://www.sabarimala.org) Org) The secularism of this ritual starts in front of a small temple known as Kochambalam. From here the procession proceeds to Vavar Mosque which is situated in the opposite side of the temple. The procession is welcomed with great pomp and splendor in the Mosque where the muslim elders and chief priests join the procession after performing the religious rites there and the pilgrims offer black pepper to the deity there. There are many legends about Vavar Swamy and his association with Lord Ayyappa. Some say that he was a Muslim Saint who came to the coasts of Kerala to spread Islam. Others say that he was a pirate who used to plunder ships. Once Lord Ayyappa had a fight with him and he was defeated. Vavar became an ardent admirer and follower of Ayyappa after that. Legends say that it was Ayyappa who requested the ruler of Pandalam Desam to build a mosque in Erumely to honour Vavar Swamy. The procession will proceed to the big Dharmasastha temple (Valiambalam) only after the muslim priest blesses it and perform rites. This rite is unique in an era when Hindus destroy Mosques and Churches with the full support of political parties and claim that they did it for their Gods.

Another religious place which has close association with Sabarimala is Arthungal Church. It is a catholic church situated in the coastal hamlet of Alappuzha district, Arthungal. The church was supposed to be built by the Portuguese missionaries during the sixteenth century. It is a model of religious harmony with the tradition of hosting the Sabarimala pilgrims returning from their pilgrimage. Pilgrims from across the state visit St. Andrews Church Arthungal pay respects to St. Andrews during the pilgrimage season. Legends say that one of the early priests of the church, popularly called Arthungal Veluthachan (fair skinned priest) was a friend and class mate of Lord Ayyappa in Cheerappanchira Kalari where both studied martial arts. “ The visiting pilgrims commemorate the bond they shared especially as the priest was loved by the local people who believed that he had

healing powers.”(Darlymple;234). Rev. Fr. Jacomo Fenicio, supposedly the priest in the legend linking Sabarimala and the church became Vicar in 1584. In the church premises, a number of temporary bathrooms are constructed to facilitate the pilgrims. The pilgrims are also provided slots for offering prayers inside the church.

“Many of the rituals have been given up for centuries, the spiritual bond between Sabarimala and Arthungal church is still intact. There has been a steady decrease in the number of pilgrims over the years. But the church authorities consider it as their duty to spread the message that every religion stands for universal love.”(Chronicle 13th March,2013). In the past the pilgrims considered their pilgrimage complete only after offering prayers at Vavar Mosque and Arthungal Church. Usually the pilgrims saale vavar before they reach Ayyappa’s abode and end their pilgrimage by taking off their holy neck chain in Arthungal church, which is treasured in the church till date.

Attukal temple is a small temple located within two kilometers from Trivandrum city. The temple attracts many pilgrims during the ten day festival which signals its closure with Pongala. Women from and around Trivandrum will gather around the temple premises and cook holy offering out of rice, jiggery and ghee. Initially participation was limited to women from Trivandrum. Now pongala has gained so much popularity that around seven lakh women offered pongala to Attukal Devi in the year 2015. For the past seven years there was a steady increase in the participation rates. About whole of the city becomes a giant pongala cite when the festival approaches. “Because of such mass participation the event found place in the Guinness Book of World Records.” Even if the majority of participants are Hindu women except certain exceptions, the temples and mosque authorities give women some space in the church and mosque premises to offer pongala. Not just this they join hands with the volunteers to give refreshments and drinking water to the women pilgrims. This event has gained much attention worldwide because of such mass participation from women. Christina a researcher in Anthropology from Sweden has been participating in the event for the past eighteen years. Attukal pongala is unique in many respects. It gives a message of universal brotherhood because the

pilgrims get all the support and blessings from all religious groups and all religious institutions of Trivandrum.

Madre De Deus Church Vettukad situated at two kilometers distance from Trivandrum International Airport. The name bears Portuguese and Latin words meaning ‘mother of God’ The church is under the Latin Arch Diocese of Trivandrum. The church was established by Portuguese. The parish of Vettukad bears a history of more than five centuries. It is believed that St. Francis Xavier, the Portuguese missionary visited Vettukad somewhere between 1543 and 1547 to evangelise the faithful of the region. He proclaimed the Good News of Jesus Christ to the locals and converted the traditional fisher men who belonged to the Dalit Araya community to Christianity. People from all parts of Kerala irrespective of caste, creed and religious beliefs come to the church seeking blessings from Christ the King and his holy mother. The most popular ritual of the church is Padapooja. During Padapooja the devotees make prayer requests to Divine Mother and Holy Son after confessing their sins with tear filled eyes. So it is a ritual flavoured by religious devotion and fervour. The ritual is based on the belief that God will answer our prayers speedily if we season it with our tears of repentance. God loves a sinner who repents more than any holy believer. The devotees from other religions outnumber the Christians when the statistics of daily visitors are taken.

Beemapalli Mosque, a renowned Muslim mosque situated in the south west of Trivandrum city. The Mosque is named after Beema Beevi, a descendent of Prophet Muhammed. The full name of Beema Beevi is Syedunnisa Beema Beevi. She is believed to have arrived in Kerala from Mecca to spread Islam. She is believed to have spiritual powers. The Mosque houses the tomb of Beema Beevi and her son Abubacker. The Durgah Sharif (mausoleum) is situated next to the mosque. The memorial is visited and worshipped by people of all religions. Chandanakudam or Beemapalli Uroos is celebrated every year on the death anniversary of Beema Beevi to commemorate Beevi who had powers of healing and prophesy. The devotees carry money in earthen pots smeared with sandal wood paste and decorated with flowers, garlands and incense sticks and hence the festival got its

name and go around the mosque and chant prayers. The people from all religions visit this mosque to meet the priest who is supposed to have healing powers like Beevi. When troubles of life over power the people of Trivandrum they seeks refuge in the hands of holy mother.

While examining the secular practices in Trivandrum, some interesting facts caught attention. Trivandrum being the state capital has a number of Government offices ranging from the Government Secretariat to the Head offices of various departments. People from all over the state come to Trivandrum as officials in these departments. Their was an old dames tale popular in this region that if ones gets government salary for the first time he must spend thee whole money to buy alms to the destitutes sitting near Attukal, Vettukad and Beemapalli mosque. “A Person who fulfills this condition will always be rewarded by God because he climbs up the ladder of official hierarchy with great speed.” (**Gopalakrishnan,124**).

Whether is true or not the secular practices in these religious institutions have guarded the minds of the average Keralite so that the venom of religious fanaticism will find it hard to enter there. Such temples, churches and mosques will always work towards the spiritual upliftment of the average Malayalee aand prevent communal fire from devouring up his secular mentality. That is why Kerala will always remain a model to be imitated by rest of India when secularism is concerned.

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Honouring the Versatile: The Role of Sayyyid Alavi Pookoya Thangal in Kerala Secularism

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Secularism is one of the most important movements in the history of the modern West, helping differentiate the West not only from the Middle Ages and more ancient eras, but also from other cultural regions around the world. The modern West is what it is largely because of secularism; for some, that is a reason to cheer, but for others it is a reason to mourn. A better understanding of the history and nature of secularism will help people understand its role and influence in society today. Why did a secular vision of society develop in Western culture but not so much elsewhere in the world? Despite its importance, there isn't always a great deal of agreement on just what secularism really is. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the concept of "secular" can be used in a couple of ways which, while closely related, are nevertheless different enough to make it difficult to know for sure what people might mean. The word secular means "of this world" in Latin and is the opposite of religious. As a doctrine, secularism is usually used to describe any philosophy which forms its ethics without reference to religious dogmas and which promotes the development of human art and science.

It is believed Islam came to Kerala in the life time of the Prophet Muhammed, and Mappilas of Malabar had over the period of time became integrated into the life of the state. The Mappila community is an integral part of the History of Kerala from medieval to modern period. The community has richly contributed to the political, religious, socio and cultural history of the land and has been the centre of attraction of scholarly interest in the recent years. The Mappila Muslims of Malabar is highly influenced by the localized indigenous systems and their practices, which were prevalence amongst the contemporary society.

For centuries the most important religious leaders of the Mappilas were immigrants from Arabia, who passed their own knowledge and training to indigenous Mappilas. According to Rolland E Miller these religious leaders may be divided into two categories. One included the leaders of Charismatic qualities, possession of these powers being usually connected with the membership in a specific saintly family. The others represented the orthodox Moulavis, who carried on cultic and educational monasteries in community. Mappia theology to modern times was depended on the training and teaching of these traditional leaders.

There were one hundred and sixty clans in Yemen and Hadramawt of south Arabia who claimed their origin from Prophet Muhammed through his daughter Fathima and cousins Ali. Almost all these clans were commonly known as Hadrami Sayyids. Nor can any branch of the numerous sharif and Sayyid families founded over fourteen centuries ago claim a more varied sphere of activity of achievements indeed than the Alawi sayyids of Hadramawt. However the noble descent of Ba-Alawis said to have been challenged in the year AD1000 one of the Sayyids of Ba-Alawi clan went to Busarah and produced same sixty respected Busarans to at least the relationship with the Iraqi Sayyids in presence of the Hadrami counting at the Meccan pilgrimage.

Sayyid Alawi was one of the most famous of the Ba-Alwai sayyids of Kerala. Sayyid Hasan Jifri was his maternal uncle. Though we have little knowledge about his early life, he is known to have been directly involved in mappila uprisings of the 19th century. There are ample sources to reconstruct his life and career in Malabar. Sayyid Alawi was born in 1750 AD [1163 AH] at Tarim of Hadramawt. His father sayyid Muhammed Ibn Sahl Mauludhaveela was a renowned scholar and theologian of Tarim. Sayyid for nobility and charity was his mother. He had lost his parents at the early age of his life.

Sayyid Alawi had acquired knowledge to recite the currant by hear, at an early age. He completed his primary education under a respectable scholar of Tarim. He was born and brought up in a spiritual atmosphere. The early training helped him very much to mould his career. Just like his predecessors he upheld the

puritan and uncompromising Islamic ideology. He played an important role to spread secularism among the Mappilas of Malabar.

Sayyid Alawi has arrived in Malabar on February 7 1768 AD at the age of seventeen and settle down at mamburam. Where his maternal uncle sayyid Hasan Jifri had been religious teacher. He came to Keral, probably, at the invitation of sayyid sheikh jifri. Because of his noble descent ,he enjoyed are religion authority unmatched by anybody else in Malabar at that time. Following the proud traditions of the Ba- Alwi sayyids, sayyid Alawi took special interest in missionary activites. He travelled throughout Ernad and walluwanad taluks for this purpose. He had a realized the importance of mosques in Islamic solidarity of mappilas and so took initiative to erect mosques in various parts of Ernad and walluwanad following were the mosques erected by the Tangal. Muniyur odungat mosque muttiara mosque and ponmundam mosque etc....

Sayyid Alawi's sense of justice and equality as well as his courage to protest against evils is illustrated by his Arrestment of a rich and noble man of kalpakanchery. In the course of his country wide journey sayyid Alawi visited the Banglow of Mandayapurath Ahammed kuty moopan of kalpakanchery. Moopan's servant served food to sayyid Alwai when friends. Moopan's repented and the Tangal was allowed fore turn only with a beautiful of rice and vegetables. Sayyid Alawi neither established any tariqah nor introduced practices and customs widen to the spirit of Islam. He had a called up on the Muslims to the teachings of holy Quran and Sunnah. This kondotti faqir belonged to none of these groups but to the Bohra which came under an extreme heretic shia groups called Rawthiz. During his career his achieved an undying reputation and holds a firm place as the greatest of the Ba- Alawi saints of Kerala. His life hid described as an epitome of Islamic virtues . He was keen in observing the requirements of fad and sunah. He was a well wisher of the poor and destitute so. He observed fast weekly and slept little . He has spent his time in studying quran. Hadith and meditation . He had practiced what he had preached. This was the secret behind his success as a missionary.

Sayyid Alawi was not a narrow minded aggressive missionary. He was an angle of communal harmony and brotherhood. Though he was not ready to compromise with un-Islamic practices, he never marked at the custom and traditions of others religious sectors. A large number of Hindus approached him for blessing. He maintained cordial relation with upper caste Hindu noble as well as lower castes. Sayyid Alawi viwed by the Hindus particularly belonging to the low caste. Kozhi kallyatum of muttiara, a low caste festival connecting with the being of raining season and agricultural activities was sanctioned by Sayyid Alawi. He even fixed its day as Friday being a holiday for mappilas to ensure their participation as a taken of communal harmony.

As a result Sayyid Alawi's missionary activities Mappila Muslim's large scale returned to the true faith and practices of Islam. The wide spread belief among Mappilas that the Mampuram Tanagal could do miracles also prompted them to follow his loot prints. Members of Hindu community were also moved by his supernatural powers. Sticking to the tradition of his predecessors of Malabar in particular and Ba- Alawi saints of Hadramawt in general Sayyid Alawi was always ready to help the needy the poor and the destitute. His rich disciples and devotes donated rice, vegetables , money gold and silver to the Tangal. That was given to the needy irrespective of caste and creed. Therefore there is no wonder that this saint had conquered the heart of Mappilas as well as the oppressed classes of Malabar

It is already mentioned that Sayyids Alawi and his son Sayyid Fazal adopted strong anti- colonial policy due to the change in circumstance. During the British period, British authorities did their best to appease the Tangal the religious leaders of the Mappila community. Non- co- operation was the method adopted by the Tangal and other Ulema of Malabar of the time towards the British Government. His anti- colonial outlook is Cleary depicted in famous work Assaif al Battar. This work is a collection of fatwa issued by sayyid Alawi- against the British. It is the reply of sayyid Alawi to eight questions raised by Abdulla Ibn Abdu Bari Abdul Tangal of quilandi. Sayyid Fazal compiled it and publish it

along with other fatwa of Arabi- Hindi theologians from Egypt in 1856-57 AD titled . Uddat al Umara wal Hukum Li thantil Kafarat Wa- Abdul at Asnam. Assaif. al- Battan

Sayyid Alawi gave his views in detail regarding the attitude of believers towards colonial rulers. Sayyids Alawi declares that jihad becomes compulsory for the moments the infidels exerted the country. In such a situation all including those up on whom military service is not compulsory such as old, women and children also should participate in jihad. In fatwa sayyid Alawi stated that Europeans are the worst unbelieved. If any Muslims praises the Christians and their role. It is a sin and he should represent for it. If one praises the Christians beliefs he become an infidel and God's anger will be full up on him. Those Muslims who praise the role of Kuffar are tools and they may be following all the vice of Kuffar and will become among them.

Sayyid Alawi exhorted the Muslim took take by heart the sufi texts like Nafaris at Durar , Aldayat al adkal and jawhanath Jawhid hill the English leave the country because these works are the food of swntlymen. Along with his religious factor ,socio- economic policies of the British prompted the tungal to adopt such a stand Tipu ceded Malabar to the British through the treaty of srirang patanam in 1792. British official suspected that Sayyid Alawi was behind the mappila uprising led by unni Mutha moopan manjeri. Athan Gurukkal and chemban poker during 1800-1801. Thus they had even contemplated his arrest . What held then back was fear of a possible protest riot. The reason for the proposed arrest was that two of the participants of revolt were found in the Tirurangadi mosque.

Manjeri Athan Gurikkal was killed in the revolt of 1801. His land was escheated by the state in march 1817, his son Athan Gurikkal led hundreds of Mappila brigades to besiege and occupy the lands which his father previously held. Tramal Tungal Arab by birth who had been settled in the province for upwards 40 years and whose reputation for sanctity is so great that every. Mappila muslaman in Malabar looks up on him almost as a prophet. Sayyid Alawi active involvement in the revolt of 1817. After the revolt of 1817 ,sayyid was summoned to Calicut to

report before the collector Sayyid Alavi reached with a large bond of armed party . Vowing never to surrender himself to the authority . Actually he was summoned to Calicut to be imprisoned. This fact as is clear from the message sent by the collector to his higher authorities, expressing his inability to arrest him.

The Muttiara riot of 1841 this lies on the north Western parts of mamburam apparently two Miles away from the seat of Sayyid Alavi. Tottachery Tachu panikar was an influential jenmi of the locality. He lodged a complaint against the Muslims that they encroached upon his land and one waste land belonging to him. But Mapilas denied this charge through a writing left by them and found after their Murder. Strange pointed out that if Mappilas had any complaint against the land lord, they might simply have gone to the taluk butchery . Mappila of the locality had intimated the matter to Sayyid Alawi . He advised them to resist from such activities and appended them to maintain communal harmony. Mappilas returned agreeing to abide by the order of the Tangal.

Cherur riot was the last incident which accrued during the life time of Sayyid Alawi. Therefore enough official as well as local sources to recreate the uprising in full historical light. It is a revolt of complex nature. But religious and socio-economic factors had played a dominant role in the uprising. Kaprat Krishna panikar the adigharee was the centre figure of the riot. In August 1843 a complaint was made by the mappilas of Tirurangadi village that he had thrown great dishonor on mappilas by forcing a lower caste Hindu woman convert to apostatize from Islam. Kapart Kirshna panikkar whose at recites paved the way for cherur riot, had close contact with sayyid Alawi and used to send present to the Tangal. A number of Mapilas of cherur were his employees. In order to avoid a possible rising of Hindu- Muslim brethren against colonialism. British officials explained the rift that arose between upper caste Hindus and Muslims as a result of the conversion of an ezhava woman. They moreover asked them to have their work on Friday for better observation of religious obligations. They formed the idea of congregational worship on a fixed day, and work being a necessary daily routine, they did not regularize attend Friday prayers in the mosques.

British officials had strongly suspected the involvement of Sayyid Alawi in the outbreaks which occurred during this period. Therefore the govt is reluctant to take any action against Sayyid Alawi and his family members. Though they were reluctant to take measures against Sayyid Alawi and other Arab priests, they never spread any chance to warn them against the dire consequence of their activities. There was a firm belief among the mappilas of Tiruragadi that sayyid Alawi fought incognito in the cherur riot British troops were asked to move to Tirurangadi. Then the shirestadar made a personal inquiring on the where about of Sayyid Alawi. He had a sent his agent to the tangal to persuade him to warn the insurgents against mis propriety of their conduct who were roaming in and around Tirurangadi with arms. Sayyid Alawi was said to have attributed all these workers to the power of Allah. Sayyid Alawi as a man who possessed supernatural powers arrested the attention of mappilas in particular and people belonging to other castes in general. Along with this, he is known to have hated the British and evidently offered his sanctified prestige in support of the activities of the rebels. Sayyid Alawi died in the night of January 29th 1844 AD. He has suffered from serious illness for several months. A number of local physicians had treated him. Before his death he summoned his close disciples and devotees and advised them to propagate the message of Islam in Kerala peacefully and told them to safeguard the Hindu- Muslim unity and revitalize the freedom struggle of the people. When he died his close friend, Umar Quzi of veliyankode mourned. His dead body was buried near the tomb of Sayyid it as an jifri at Mamburam.

The historical analysis of the life and career of Ba- Alawi Sayyids in Kerala reveals certain basic issues relating to the socio- religious as well as economic features of Mappilia society during the 18th and 19th c. Alawi Sayyids succeeded to bring notable changes in the then Mappila society. It is true that their reforms and preaching's in this respect brought about substantial results, when the history of Mappilas of the period taken as whole. On closer examination of the status of the lower caste in particular and the tenants in general, the teachings of Ba- Sayyids could be looked as an earnest effort to revolutionize the social structure of the society.

Ba- Alawi Sayyids especially Sayyid Fazal succeeded to certain extent to connect their reform activities with the reformist movements that worked among Muslims in all over the world. Therefore, the religious- social reform movements of Malabar under the guidance and leaderships of Ba- Alawi Sayyids was not an isolated phenomenon in the history of Malabar

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VAKKOM ABDUL KHADAR MOULAVI: PIONEER IN MOULDING MUSLIM PUBLIC SPHERE IN KERALA

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The history of the renaissance of the Kerala Muslim minority is an interesting area of research. The Muslim public sphere created by socio-religious leaders in the early 19th & 20th c was an encouraging factor in the modern secular Kerala. The term public sphere coined by the well known German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, acknowledged the fact that it was a common space to discuss and share the common interest of the group or individual to reach a positive outcome¹. According to David Randall, " ...public sphere was preceded by a literary public sphere whose favoured genres revealed the interiority of the self and emphasized an audience – oriented subjectivity"².

The secular face was the outcome of the writings and movements of Social reformers to extend scientific values in the society. Those who work for the socio religious transformation of the community work hard to unearth the original ideas of their religion. There was no difference of opinion in the case of Swami Vivekanandan, Dayananda Saraswathi, Sree Narayana guru, Chattambi Swamikal, and the like to find cause and course from their own scriptures. The same was the case of Kerala Muslim reformers who work for the religious revivalism as a tool in the secular sphere.

In the course of history of Kerala underwent major transformation under the direct and indirect rule of the British Raj in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The East India Company and British crown tried to impose new laws and rules towards modernization. Many illicit social customs and practices were shattered by law in this period. The abolition of slavery (Malabar1843³, Cochin1854⁴ and Travancore1855⁵), the collapse of the matrilineal system, and introduction of girls' education were some of them⁶.

Another important impact of the British colonialism on Kerala was the development of modern Malayalam language and literature⁷. The same was

inaugurated by the modern press and publications in Kerala as a tool for social transformation and freedom struggle. The present Kerala enlightened society is the result of untold sacrifice and dedication of many great socio political leaders. Kerala stamped her place in the process of freedom struggle and making of modern India.

The present Kerala Muslim society had undergone many timely changes before its present face. The contribution of Mamburam Sayyid Alavi Thangal, Sayyid Fazal Pukoya Thangal, Makthooms of *Ponnani*, Valiyemkode Omar Gazi, Makthi thangal⁸, Vakkom Moulavi and the like and diverse organizations led to a formal completion about the Muslim renaissance. While examining the present index of the socio economic and political status of Kerala Muslims, in comparison to that of the Muslims in other parts of the subcontinent, one can arrive at the conclusion that the Muslim minority in Kerala has very secular outlook.

The purpose of the article is to examine, against the broad context stated above, the role of Vakkom Moulavi in the process of creating a Muslim public sphere in Kerala through his writings and movements. The present article discourse the contributions of Vakkom Moulavi in the field of literature, journalism, education, Arabic schooling, women empowerment, constitutional provisions, organization skills and social reforms as an open up Muslim public sphere.

Vakkom Abdul khadar Moulavi was born at Vakkom, in the princely State of Travancore on December 28, 1873, as the fifth child of Aisha Beevi and Muhammed Kunju. His house name was Poonthran, a traditionally rich Muslim family in the princely state. Earlier this family migrated from Madurai to Travancore and worked under high military posts of Travancore princely state⁹. The well to do family background enabled Moulavi get good education by inviting great teachers to his family. His father also set up a well furnished library and gave opportunity to interact with great scholars. It is worth mentioning that Sree Narayana Guru had frequent visits and discussed various topics with Maulavi. No doubt, both of these stalwarts contributed to the reformation in the Kerala society in their own ways. In an early age of 58 Maulavi passed away on October 31, 1932, leaving a great light of renaissance to the then least modernized Muslim society. He was a literary figure, freedom fighter, pioneer of Muslim modernization and theologian in its true spirit.

He is cherished by the Kerala Muslims in respect of their enlightenment¹⁰. The Vakom Maulavi Foundation Trust was founded in the year 1987 to spread and enrich his social entity in the society.

Maulavi made great contribution to the field of education. A scholar deeply learnt in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Malayalam, he dedicated his whole life to impart education for the upliftment of his community. He worked in a community which believed that modern education provided by the colonialists was a tool for evangelization. So the Muslims considered modern education as “haram” or prohibited by ideology. They stood against English and Malayalam learning.

It is quite paradoxical that in the holy text of the Muslims the first chapter revealed by prophet was *Al-Alaq*¹¹ and the first revealed word is to read. The Arabs could conquer the medieval world only through its scientific knowledge and practice of well nurtured education. By the tradition of Prophet Mohammed (mbph), a Muslim should acquire knowledge even if it is in far away china or he is limping, without considering the physical and geographical limitation, he must attain that piece of knowledge¹². But the Muslims in Kerala or people who converted to Islam from the so called lower caste practiced it in very vague or absurd manner. They, in one way or another followed the idea of demoralized traditional Ulamas, keeping away from the modern scientific knowledge and development. Moulavi tried to translate the Holy Quran into Malayalam for acquiring the real teachings of Islam by the common Malayali. But the so called traditional Ulamas worked against the Quran translation.

Moulavi also tried to impart Arabic language among the Muslims. He appealed the Travancore raja to start special schools for Muslims and appoint Arabic *munshy* and Quran teacher, where not less than twenty five Muslim students were studying. He requested the government for the appointment of school inspectors. He was appointed as the Chairman of the Travancore State Arabic Language Board, the first of its kind in the State. The Board had the power to prepare the syllabus and select the teaching materials for schools. He also appointed by the government as the president of Text Book Committee¹³. Using all this privilege and positions, he tried to impart modern Arabic language to the schools. He prepared special text books for

primary section as one of the earliest in Kerala entitled as *Thahleemul Qirath* and *Ahakkamu Thajuveed*¹⁴. Today Arabic is one of the second languages taught in Kerala by appointing special Arabic teachers. It is also interesting to check the increase in the number of Mappila schools set up by the democratic Kerala governments which was the result of Muslim emancipation.

Kerala Muslim traditional society followed many superstitions and rituals. The ignorance and ambiguity of the society were exploited by the traditional *Ulamas*. The teachings of Islam never provide any space for superstitions and omens. Even though there was no scope for all these taboos in the scriptures of religion, practicing Muslims followed some of these rituals and rites. They used to practice rituals like *kathukuth kalynam*, *margakalyanam*, *vayasariyikal* etc. as the part and parcel of traditional Kerala social customs. Moulavi started uncompromising struggle against all kinds of social evils. He acquired the Islamic revivalist ideas of Jamaluddin Al Afgani, Muhammed Abduh and Rashid Rida, which is published through *Al-Manar*, an Arabic journal published from Egypt¹⁵. Their rejection of blind following of earlier scholars, their efforts to integrate Islam and modern culture, their instances in return to Quran and authentic *Hadith*(prophetic traditions), their criticism of legalistic divisiveness and their attempt to establish a rational and scientific approach to revealed theology influenced Vakkom Maulavi, and through him all of Kerala Muslims. So he condemned the *Nercha*, *Moulid*, *Rathib* etc. well prevailed in the Muslim society. It is quite evident that it was the result of cultural symbiosis what renowned historian MGS Narayanan point out¹⁶. The present societies have a good idea that all worship is none other than the realisation of the almighty God. Roland Miller rightly points out that there is no doubt that Vakkom Moulavi five issues of *Al Islam* sowed the seeds of Muslim public sphere in Kerala. They created a storm which swept through one end of Kerala to the other¹⁷. It was the result of reforms among the Muslims inaugurated by Vakkom Moulavi and all other social leaders.

The present Kerala Muslim society is divided into different sects by ideology and politics. Other than the negative impact of division among the society it can be considered as an organizational strength. These different groups run educational

institutions and orphanages to render service to the society. The Muslims in Kerala at present are the well organized community that runs professional colleges and various institutions in the society to compete with any other community in the State.

In 1920 he founded the *Travancore Muslim Mahajana Sabha*, to breathe life into the Muslim public sphere. His wholehearted support and enthusiasm led the formation of the establishment of *Aykya Sankham* in Cochin State in 1922. The organization expanded its work among the entire Malayalis, with Kodungallor as center and spread the modern idea of education among the illiterate masses. Sangam rendered its priceless effort to establish many primary and high schools, and later it supported to establish the Farook College, the first Muslim college in Kerala.

Maulavi was the one of the pioneers in organizational skills, having been the part of Alappuzha *Lajjnathul muhammadiay*. It runs higher grade schools as the good example and forerunner in the field of Muslim education. Maulavi modernized the Madrasa system in Kerala¹⁸. The present Kerala Muslim society overcomes all its limitations in the field of education at par with the missionary schools and professional colleges. The works of MES in the field of education are worth mentioning. Today there are hundreds of Muslim oriented organizations that work very much in the society. By the establishment the Muslim League, the political organ of the community, its leaders began to represent different portfolios of the government. Perhaps, the present higher status enjoyed by at least the elite section of the Muslims in Kerala, when compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the country, is due to the representation of the IUML in power.

The Sachar Committee Report about the Muslim minority in India was an eye opener to the major political parties to think seriously of a solution to end the backwardness of the Muslims. The commission rightly points out that the present minority Muslims of India are far behind the tribal people in case of social and material conditions. The Muslims of Kerala are improved in all walks of life and stand ahead when compared to their counterparts in the nation as a whole especially in the human development index.

The work of Vakkom Maulavi is worth mentioning, particularly in the case of female education. He worked with the society where Muslims kept away from the

modern education and new system of schooling. Even the education availed by a microscopic minority was confined to religious education. Even after their hard work for the social emancipation through education, the orthodox sections of the society took strong decisions like prohibition of school education to the female child. The resolution taken by the *Samstha Kerala Jamiathul Ulama* banned Muslim women's education in its Mannarakkad resolution (17th March, 1930)¹⁹. It is interesting to note that the same sect runs many schools and colleges, including professional colleges, at present, as a gateway to the modern society.

One cannot estimate the contributions of Vakom Maulavi on the basis of his contributions in any one field only. But his contribution in the field of press led the Kerala society far ahead. By the inauguration of *Swadeshabhimani* (1905) Vakom Maulavi opened a fresh area to democratize the demands of the people. He remains till day the pioneer and exemplar for the publishers in India. He never interfered with the affairs of news published by the then editor of the paper, Ramakrishna pillai. Ramakrishna pillai's criticisms against the misrule of the Dewan, resulting in his expel (1910) was quite a tragic experience to Moulavi²⁰. Maulavi was very friendly and good support to his editor. He often passed over the confiscation of the press, but was restless in case of Ramakrishna pillai. Maulavi strongly believed in and practiced the freedom of the press by his newspaper slogan ***bhaya koudilya lopangal, valarkilloru nadinay***....., that follows in its true sense²¹. He also printed and published other journals like *Muslim* (1906, monthly), *Al Irshad*, *Al Islah*, *Ikyam*, *Al Islam*²², *Deepika* for social transformation. It was the first in its kind and today the Muslim community own and publish half a dozen newspapers, dozens of weekly or monthly, in addition to the operation of satellite TV channels.

Maulavi wrote many articles and translated important works of imam Gazzali's *Kimiyaya sada* and Sulaiman Nadvi's *Ahalu Sunnathul Jamath* that were very enlightened in the Islamic philosophy²³. His attempts to translate holy text invited severe criticism from the orthodox section of Islam. But it was one of the positive movements to expose the difference between the actual teachings and traditional practices of the Kerala Muslim community. Moulavi worked hard to eradicate the evils of sorcery among the people. Today the followers of Islam in

Kerala have a good idea about the true spirit of the religion whether it is practiced or not. As a result of untiring reform zeal, the education among the Muslims, limited into the Madrasa, Moulavi and reformers could be brought out of it and the idea of modern education and schooling attained popularity among the community. Sachar committee found the pathetic situation of the Muslims except Kerala, especially the north Indian Bihar and UP, where people depend even today only on the Madrasa teachings for education²⁴. In fact, they are excluded from the main stream. The same committee also finds the fact that it has been one of the causes behind the Muslims lacking proportional representation in the sector of government service.

No other social reformer in the history of the Muslims of Kerala worked to revive the community like Vakkom Moulavi. He will be remembered forever as a reformer of the very early days when the community lived in utter poverty and ignorance. Moulavi's works were worth full for the revival of the Muslims following the true spirit of the religion. As the pioneer in the field of Muslim community renaissance he faced more challenges and barriers in attainment of his goals. He is a good educationist, reformer, organizer, journalist, writer, orator and more over harbinger of modernization among the Muslims of Kerala. He was nominated to the membership of SNDP, formed under the leadership of Sree Narayana Guru It is reflexive of the spirit of secularism possessed by him in public life²⁵. It is worthy to conclude that achievements of the Kerala Muslim community in the field of both material and social developments are the result of the reform zeal and spirit of enlightenment of Vakkom Moulavi, the pioneer who create Muslim public sphere in Kerala.

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Kerala Culture and a Critical View of Secular Society

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Kerala is the land of cultural diversity, and secularist nature, is a complete whole made up of a blending of various religions, communities, regional cultures and language variations. Kerala culture can be compared to a chain made of different colored beads and the thread through which the beads are strung is the Malayalam language. The cultural variety of Kerala was developed by its unique geographic features as it lies between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats¹. Rich in rain forests, its ancient trade relations with foreign lands, entry of immigrant communities during different periods, agricultural tradition, cuisine and its tradition of art – literature – science and all these make the land, Kerala. It also constitute a some traditional way to the secular society

Though Kerala had remained as a unique cultural zone from ancient times, it became politically united with the formation of the Kerala state. This land, which lay divided into the Travancore and Kochi Kingdoms, and Malabar district in the Madras Presidency under the British rule, became a single state on November 1, 1956². Kerala is bordered by Tamil Nadu on its East and South; by Karnataka on its north and north-east; and by the Arabian Sea on its west. Lakshadweep, which is a union territory lying on the Arabian Sea and Mayyazhi, which is an enclave of Puthucherry state lying within Kerala are part of Kerala culture both in terms of language and culture.

Kerala's cultural heritage is centuries old. The culture of Kerala is an amalgam of native art forms, language, literature, architectural style, music, festivals, cuisine, archaeological monuments, heritage centres and so on. There are many cultural institutions dedicated to protect these as well³.

Kerala has a distinctive architectural tradition. Places of worship and ancient houses were built according to "Thachushastra." And also distinct temple architectural style. Thantra Samuchayam, Shilpachandrika and Manushyalaya

Chandrika are some of the famous books on the science of architecture. The artistic field of Kerala comprises ancient classical art, folk art as well as modern artistic forms like the cinema.

Malayalam cinema field is one of the strongest in India. Kerala has contributed a number of film personalities who are well-known worldwide. The first cinema show in Kerala was held in Kozhikode in the year 1906⁴. Mobile cinema screening practice gave way to permanent cinema halls by the third decade of the twentieth century.

In the early days, usually Tamil pictures were shown. The first Malayalam cinema is Vigatha Kumaran, a silent movie by J. C. Daniel who deserves the title of the Father of Malayalam Cinema. In 1933, the second movie Marthanda Varma also was screened. The first talking movie in Malayalam is Balan (1938). The first cinema studio Udaya was established in Alappuzha in the year 1948.

The main food of the people of Kerala is rice. The typical Kerala cuisine comprises cooked rice along with curries of vegetables, fish, meat and eggs. Rice is also used to make a whole variety of other dishes. Rather than native Kerala food, today Kerala has a multicultural cuisine. Rice and coconut form the basis of Kerala food.

The entire vivacity of Kerala life appears during the land's festivals. There are festivals related to religions and places of worship, as well as secular festivals. Onam is the national festival of Kerala. This state has its own native sports culture and folk games. Kalaripayattu is the martial art form developed in Kerala. Diverse cultural heritage and exalted social signifiers are distinctive features of Kerala. The state which boasts the highest literacy, gender equality, and lowest mother-infant mortality ratio is also at the forefront as regards health standards, education for all, public distribution system, social justice, law and order, and influence of press and other media. The much applauded Kerala model of development has these distinctive features as basis.

The cultural frameworks have developed interreligious programs which entire community accepted like Mappila songs sings various other religious persons. Even though all religions proclaim the universal brotherhood of man, history is full of bloody, violent conflicts between members of different religions. Many battles for capturing lands were fought between Muslims and Christians, Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Christian and so on in the past. It was in Kerala context inter cast human harassing were there. Higher casts were not accepting the lower cast and suppress as their will. Many such struggles are going on in deferent ways even now also. A deeper analysis of the causative factors of these conflicts shows that in all these situations non-religious, often political and economic interests were instrumental to these problems. Religious identity was used as a mask to cover up the vested interests of the conflicting parties. Therefore the root cause of communalism is not the presence of many religions in the country. When religious sentiments are exploited with an economic or political motive the resultant effect gives rise to the genesis of communalism. According to Madan communalism is the political expression of religion. He defined communalism as an ideology, which envisages the religious community as a political group committed to the protection and promotion of its social and economic interests and cultural values⁵. Furthermore the contemporary secular Kerala facing threats from power oriented politics. After the creation of kerala state first fifty years Political parties like Indian national congress and communist parties propagated clearly secular thoughts but after the comings of communalised Barthiya Janatha party as a national ruling party by the help of Sangh Parivar, the elite parties also started to hold soft hinduthva policies to prevent the growth of communalized national power. It was often Brocken the harts of minority religious groups and Deliths.

It is well known that Kerala is one of the main targets of Hindu communal forces, which have been consistently trying to extend their influence in the State. But the collection of coalition politics in the State and the abundance of political forces representing a multitude of Hindu communities have made any advance on the political plane an uphill task. Yet, there are repeated warnings from secular observers that the Sangh Parivar has put to effective use its all-India strategy of

gaining acceptance in the State through persistent socio-cultural interventions — a thoroughly rewarding platform that has been left vacant by secular political formations, including the Left and the Congress⁶.

Over the past decade, there has been a proliferation of such activities by the Sangh Parivar, beginning with the hijacking of the conduct of temple festivals and the starting of 'catch them young schools' all over the State, to the import of purely north Indian religious practices such as Rakshabandan and customs associated with Hindu festivals such as Janmashtami, Ram Navami and Vinayaka Chaturthi. The State has also seen exaggerated efforts to revive religious observances during the 'Ramayana Month' and create new ones such as the 'Bhagavatha Month' on similar lines, and form 'temple renovation committees', 'pilgrim protection committees' and so on. The RSS constellation has also created an umbrella of security and managerial cover in institutions run by Hindu religious personalities such as Amritanandamayi, who has attracted a huge, dedicated, missionary following over a short period of time, and the Chenkottukonam Swami, whose religious activities often bordered on the political. Clearly, such attempts were aimed at mobilising public support that has been elusive, on a fairly less competitive socio-cultural platform left idle by secular political organisations.

The Hindu communal propaganda has been effective to the extent that it has invited competitive communalism and fundamentalism from other communities and has vitiated the secular atmosphere. Funds from abroad are available easily to many communal organisations. Religious revivalism is evident in the number of temples, mosques, churches, seminaries, meditation centres and *madrassas* that have mushroomed in Kerala over the past few decades and the renovation of religious sites, with the aid of generous funds sourced from Malayalees living overseas. Religious publications and institutions imparting religious teachings have proliferated. A major effort is on to propagate Sanskrit or Arabic as desirable languages for the religious-minded⁷.

Moreover, mainstream Malayalam media give ample coverage to activities and propaganda that serve various communal interests. Religiosity has taken over public space, and public expression of one's faith has become the fashion. Thus, a

basis for a transformation to communalism has been created, although subtly, and the Sangh Parivar seems to be hoping that in the long run, such efforts could ease its passage on to the political arena. The influence of communal groups in the religious sphere has become pronounced in Kerala over the past decade. And the result has been an increase of incidents ignited by communal passions.

A strategy that the Sangh Parivar has pursued ruthlessly all over India to smoothen its way forward is an offensive against everybody who challenges its dream of a Hindu Rashtra, notably, secular intellectuals. This tactic has become pronounced in Kerala only in the past one year. Defamatory letters and articles about well known intellectuals and their writings and speeches have become a regular feature in the saffron brigade's limited-circulation publications.

The result is that on the one hand Kerala is slowly witnessing the withdrawal of the independent intelligentsia from secular discussions. In place of the liberal, Marxist, left radical discourse, which was the norm, and the cultured discussions at the socio-political and ideological levels, communal discourse is gaining acceptance. Quite a few secular intellectuals have either fallen silent or are being won over by the saffron brigade. Some of them have refused to respond to the disparaging of fellow writers; some others, who have opted to remain silent on the activities of communal, fundamentalist forces⁸.

The grand design is to make those who raise their voices against communalism unacceptable to society. It is as much a warning as it is a manifestation of the pernicious religious communalism that is gnawing at the secular fabric of Kerala.

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Muslims under Hindu rulers in Malabar

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The Muslims are the foremost section of the Malabar society. So the advent and legitimization of Islam in Malabar is an interesting story of Kerala history. The presence of Muslims in Malabar was closely related to the long distance trade between Malabar and Arabs. It was the major factors of the spread of Islam in Malabar in earlier time. The Arabs played a leading role in the trading activity in Indian Ocean. The Arabs were probably the careers and merchants of the Indian Ocean before anybody elseⁱ. So that before the spread of Muhammadan' ideology in the world the Arabs were settled in Malabar Coast long time. The Arab traders who were in close commercial and mercantile ties with the Malabaries played crucial role in bringing the teaching and ideology of Prophet Muhammed to the land of cultural symbiosis i.e. Keralaⁱⁱ. I.H. Qureshi observes that Islam therefore entered within a few years of the proclamation by the Prophet of his missionⁱⁱⁱ. S S Nadvis views that, it is an open fact that long before the Muslims settled in north India, there were colonies in southern India^{iv}.

The advent and spread of Islam in Malabar is concerned the local tradition of the conversion of the Chera ruler may be scrutinized. This tradition has also been recorded in 'Keralolpathi'^v. The local Hindu tradition recorded in Keralolpathi (Origin of Kerala) also agrees in general with the Muslim tradition and the conversion of Cheraman, the last Perumal ruler. The main difference is that according to Keralolpathi Cheraman partitioned his empire among his relatives and dependents before his departure to Mecca^{vi}. The tradition believes the current among both native Hindus and Muslim represents the conversion and migration of the last Cera ruler to Arabia.

The spread of Muslim community from 7th to 11th century in Malabar, Roland E. Miller writes that "Islam grew as it began, peacefully and it grew steadily^{vii}". The first four centuries of Mappila growth following the establishment of Islam in Kerala were marked by a calm forward movement. The peaceful contact

and development stand in sharp contrast to the progress of Islam in north India^{viii}. Commenting on the same Nafis Ahmad also writes that 'Islam has come to these region without any political help whatsoever and remained rooted in the soil for centuries away from the turmoil of Mahmud's invasion of India, and the struggle between the cross and crescent in the world of West^{ix}. Prominent local historian K .M Panicker (1896-1963) also accredits this fact by stating that "Malabar was leading a comparatively happy though politically isolated life. In many her organization was primitive, but she had evolved a system in which trade flourished, different communities lived together without fraction and absolute religious toleration existed^x.

The co-operation of the local rulers like a Zamorin of Calicut, Kolathiri Rajas to the north, and Cochin Rajas to the south and the inland Valluvanad Rajas, who ruled over the region from 11th century to 16th centuries, provided them protection and had given full support for their commercial settlement and religious activities in their territories. It also they provided circumstantial facilities for the spread of Islam in Malabar. The rulers had taken from the Muslims only a tenth part of the Income of their trade.

One of the most interesting and important factors of the spread of Islam on the Malabar Coast was the role played by Zamorin rulers of Calicut, who ordered that, "In every family of fisherman in his dominion one or more of the male members should be brought up as Muhammadans"^{xi}. It enabled an adequate supply of manpower to man his navy and sea trade, because the Hindus were averse to sea and sea-trade, and left such 'vulgar' professions either to the lower castes or to the foreigners. This helped in the large scale conversion of fisherman community now known as Puisselan, poosalan evidently a corruption of Pudu Islam (New Muslims)^{xii}. Tara Chand observed the purpose of this deliberate encouragement of conversion of lower castes of sailors was to obtain mariners to man his warships and to conduct his sea-trade^{xiii}. This policy strengthened the Muslim power in coastal area.

Another best example, which shows the influence of Muslims, is mentioned in the pioneering works, 'The Zamorins of Calicut', in describing the coronation

procession of Zamorin, K.V. Krishna Ayyar notes: The Muhammadan 'Qazi' or Judge, Sabandra Koya as former of port duties, Tura Marakkyar or Chief pilot and the Palli Musliyar or eider in charge of Mosque should be at Jetty for akampati (escort)^{xiv}. Also the Zamorin received betel leaf from a Muslim, dressed as lady of certain family. Another example of greatest honour was the right of 'Kozhikottu Koya' (The Muslim chieftain of Calicut) to stand on the right side of Zamorin in the prestigious Mamankam Festival^{xv}. Because, according to tradition, it was the Calicut Koya who recommended to the Zamorin the conquest of Valluvanad in order to acquire the custodianship of the Mamankam festival of Tirunavaya. The financial and military support provided by the Muslims helped the Zamorin to extend his sway over Valluvanad. Thus the need of the hour and political exigencies compelled him to create a congenial atmosphere, resulting in the increase of Arab trade and the consequent spread of Islamic ideology in Kerala. It created ties of dependence between ruler and traders. So the Muslim merchants enjoyed good status in the Zamorin's court.

The rulers of Malabar other than Zamorin also largely supported the Muslim merchants. Their generous support ultimately contributed to the steady growth of the Mappila community. In the north of Calicut, Ali Raja established the Arakkal Swarupom in Cannanore. By twelfth century the influence of the Ali Rajas of Arakkal often called Arakkal Srarupam had increased so much that the Kolathiris, were induced to seek their help by bestowing Laccdives Island on them.

Farther north, in the kingdom of "Eli Mala" also Muslims were honorably treated. In the 'Musakavamsakavya', an eleventh century Sanskrit work, there are references to the foundation of two cities of Marahi (Madayi) and Vallabhappattanam (Valapattanam), where merchants from distant islands were settled for trade. These two cities and surrounding areas became important Muslim activities. Valapattanam, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries became an important center of Islamic learning and here the Sufis also played a major role in propagating the religion^{xvi}.

In southern part of the Kerala, the rulers provided good status and facilities for the Muslim merchants. As mentioned earlier the importance of Muslim merchant

communities in Quilon (Kollam) is attested by the Terisapalli copper plates of Ayyan Atikal Tiru Atikal^{xvii}. We also noticed one of the ten mosques constructed by Malik Ibn Dinar. It shows the presence of a large Muslim settlement. Another mosque situated at Kodungallure (Muziris) and the influential presence of Muslim community in Cochin was a deciding factor in fixing the price of spices^{xviii}.

The support of the native rulers encouraged large scale conversion to Islam. People of lower castes who were suffering from the cruel inhibitions of the Hindu caste system came forward in large numbers to embrace the new religion.

It is the warm reception that the Muslim Arabs received by local Hindu rulers may also be taken into consideration. The religious teachings of Muslim scholars and appreciation of Islam by Hindu kings also played their part. The native kings not only respected the new faith, but also rendered all possible help and protection for its propagation. Thus Islam took roots and its adherents increased in number^{xix}. The Muslims steadily increased in number by Immigration and proselytization. Traders from different parts of the world began to flock to the coastal towns and new inland as well coastal centers developed.

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Tipu Sultan and his Religious policy: An Appraisal

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The emergence of Mysore as a significant power in the mid-eighteenth century was most spectacular. It was the part of Vijayanagara Empire gradually it transformed into an autonomous principality by the Wodayar dynasty. Traditionally Mysore was ruled by the Hindu rulers, but with the emergence of Haider Ali this concept was changed and it followed by his son Tipu Sultan. Generally Tipu Sultan was represented as an usurper, the illegitimate conqueror of Mysore and Tipu's exercise of power took the form of religious bigotry, as he destroyed the Hindu places of worship across his kingdom and forced his predominantly Hindu populace to convert to Islam against their will. The famous historians like Roberts, Sardesai and Dodwell depicted Tipu as an 'intolerant bigot'. Kirkpatrick calls Tipu the intolerant bigot or the furious fanatic.^{xx} These people were deviated from the factual point of looking to the activities of Tipu Sultan. This article mainly tries to analyze that Tipu Sultan never persecuted Hindus, nor forced them to become Muslims as described as British. On the contrary, he appointed them to high positions in his Kudad Sarkar (Government), granted complete freedom of worship conferred grants on temples and Brahmins, gave money for the consecration of images and even ordered the building of temple. Sometimes he ill-treated his non Muslim subjects not because of their religion but because of their guilty of disloyalty. He also treated his Muslim subjects with equal harshness when they committed similar crimes.

From the third Anglo Mysore War onwards Tipu Sultan was portrayed as a religious bigot and a fanatical Muslim ruler, a characterization which had been absent from the previous conflict. This was an attractive claim for the East India Company to make as a means of driving a barrier between Tipu and the people of Mysore, a region with a Hindu population approaching 90% of the total.^{xxi} The Malabar coastal region of Tipu's domains also had a sizeable Christian minority population (about 25%), which served as another potentially disaffected group. There was little doubt that Tipu himself was a devout practitioner of his Islamic faith; Alexander Dirom wrote in his history of the war that Tipu announced himself to be the restorer of the faith, and "sent forth proclamations inviting all true Musalmen to join his standard," adding the enthusiasm of religion to traditional military discipline.^{xxii} Modern historians have concurred with these

sentiments, and Tipu has frequently been celebrated as a pan-Islamic hero.^{xxiii} Roderick Mackenzie further linked together accusations of Tipu's religious cruelty with the expansion of Company territory by writing in his history of the war how the Hindu rajahs were "the original, genuine and true princes of Hindostan," which now looked to the British nation "for protection against the oppressive power of the Mysorean Prince."^{xxiv} These accounts representing Tipu as an Islamic fanatic were no accident, but a deliberate attempt to provide further justification for the ongoing war, and pave the way for annexation of Company territory afterwards.

The above observations are clearly spoken about Tipu Sultan what he was, made by colonial powers. Through this depiction they were succeeded to propagate their intentions among the people. Even though Tipu made some religious conversions and temple attacks, he was not much as a religious bigot depicted by British. It is very clear from the secular activities made by Tipu Sultan in his capital as well as other parts of his territory. Tipu appointed Hindus to posts of responsibility in his state, Purnaiya held the very important post of *mir asaf*, while Krishna Rao was the treasurer. Shama Iyengar was the minister of post and police and his brother Ranga Iyengar and Narasinga Rao held high position at Seringapattanam. Srinivasa Rao and Appaji Ram were Tipu's chief confidants and they were sent on important diplomatic missions. Mool Chand and Sujan Rai were his chief agent at the Mughal court.^{xxv} Narasaiya, one of his Munshis was also a Hindu. Nagappaya, a Brahmin was appointed faujdhar of Coorg. A Brahmin was given the exclusive privilege of cutting the timber forests in Malabar and another Brahmin was appointed Asaf of Coimbatore and afterwards of Palakkad.^{xxvi}

Rao Bahadur K. Narasimhachar, the Director of Archaeology in Mysore discovered a bundle of letters in the temple of Sringeri in 1916. They were addressed by Tipu to the Abbot of the palace and they throw a flood of light on his religious policy. This letter mainly concerned about the Maratha raid over Sringeri Matt under Ragunath Rao and its consequences. It explains, they killed and wounded many people, plundered monastery and sacrilege of displacing the sacred image of the goddess Sarada. When Tipu heard this, he ordered his Asaf of Bedannur to supply the Swami with 200 rahatis (fanams) in cash, 200 rahatis worth of grains and other articles, if required, for the consecration of the goddess Sarada.^{xxvii}

Tipu did not confine his patronage only to the Sringeri temple; he extended it to the other temples of the kingdom as well. From the inscriptions on four silver cups, a silver plate and a silver spittoon belonging to the Lakshmikanta temple in the village of Kalale in Nanjagad taluk, it appears that the vessels were presents from Tipu.^{xxviii} Not only this, in many cases Tipu granted lands and money to Brahmins and temples. According to a Marathi Sanad issued by him to his amildar Konappa, the swami of Pushpagiri matt was allowed to enjoy the revenues of Thongapalli and Gollapalli villages.^{xxix} In 1794 the Sultan granted to a Brahmin named Maharaja Hariipa an inam in the Maharajbad taluk. A Sanskrit verse in Kanarese script records that Tipu granted lands to the temples and Brahmins on the banks of the Tungabadra.^{xxx}

The above facts clearly show that Tipu was not a religious bigot but an enlightened ruler who paid due regard to the religious interests of his Hindu Subjects. He hasn't any ulterior motive, but he believed in tolerance and justice. It is not only towards the Hindus, the same attitude also seen to the Christian subjects of his territory. Even though truth exists, Tipu was represented as a fanatical Islamic bigot and he said to persecute the mostly Hindu populace of his kingdom, by destroying their temples and forcing them to convert to Islam or face execution. Although these claims proved to be untrue, British commentators used the widespread belief that Tipu was a despotic ruler to suggest that Mysore would be better governed by the British Company, and the people would prefer the blessings of British rule to their current state.

Gandhiji wrote in Young India that Tipu was an embodiment of Hindu Muslim unity. His letters to Sringeri Mutt and religious gifts and land grants to several Hindu temples speak about his deep respect towards Hindus. Therefore, to labeled Tipu a bigot is highly erroneous.

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Cooking for the Society: A Historical Study of Food in Nercca

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Food is a necessity for human existence. Food has emerged as the largest industry in the modern world, owing to its importance in our human relationships and frequent indulgence. It has been used to communicate messages of group solidarity, status, gender, role, ethnicity, religion, identity, and other socially constructed regimes in every society on the planet since ancient times¹. Feeding people has always been the primary concern of the human species, and finding, growing, and trading food products has been the primary catalyst in human history more than any other factor². Food is life for humans, and it can be used to study and comprehend life³.

We know that each community has its own culture, which is very well expressed in the traditions, beliefs, values, and attitudes that members of a group and community practice and accept. Food, as a cultural product, serves as a lens through which a region or community can be seen and comprehended. Food practices serve as cultural criteria for determining a social group's cultural identity. As a result, it is an important concept in the development of cultural identity and community feeling. Ingredients, preparation method, preservation technique, type of food eaten, table etiquette, eating style, and so on vary by culture. Food reveals and shapes social relationships, connects the past to the present, and opens up possibilities for the future. In fact, food can help us understand a culture better.

Food can tell us a lot about the evolution of human societies, including how people lived and how they managed to create a food supply. Man's need and quest for food dates back to ancient times. Palaeolithic people, who lived by collecting food and hunting animals, began to produce food and settle in one place with the advent of agriculture during the Neolithic period. Similarly the role of cooking in the growth and evolution of mankind is immense. Neolithic man

began to cultivate and cook a variety of products that played a major role in the civilization of mankind. Even today, cooking plays a major role in defining the family as a unit of state. In the words of Peter Atkins “Cooking is a moral process, transferring raw matter from nature to the state of ‘culture’ and thereby taming and domesticating it. Food is therefore ‘civilized’ by cooking, not simply at the level of practice, but at the level of imagination”⁴.

Humans' desire for various foods prompted them to travel to various parts of the world. It is said that in ancient times, the Israelites came to the shores of Malabar on the ships of Emperor Solomon and Queen Sheba to collect spices⁵. Europeans used spices to preserve food and to prepare tasty food. This quest for flavorful spices has shaped the map of the world. It created opportunities for cultural exchange as well as colonial struggle in the modern era by opening up new trade routes, bringing people from all over the world together. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate how the redistribution of food products shaped political power in the ancient Tamilakam. The Tamil Sangam contains references to the collection of food products from various sections by the Muventers, and their redistribution caused to the increase in their power. It is true that agricultural surplus production over time has resulted in the formation of power relations in societies. In the modern period, food became industrialised especially during the period of industrial revolution⁶. Climate change in the twenty-first century has had a significant impact on human species, prompting people to consider natural ecosystem conservation for all. Even today, as was evident during the cold war, cutting off the enemy's access to food is the most effective way of defeating them. As a result, it is presumed that the food we eat changes history, and the history of food has always been inextricably linked with both human development and power structures.

One way humans define themselves as civilised is through food. Identity (religious, national, and ethnic) is inextricably linked with food. Every group considers itself to be unique and exceptional, and uses food to demonstrate this: "This is what we eat. That is what they [religion, ethnic group, country] eat." Whether you drink your tea with cream, sugar, and small sandwiches in the afternoon; green in a special ceremony; ice cold; spiced and known as chai; or use the leaves to smoke foods or tell your fortune depends on where you live: England, Japan, the United States, India, China, or Turkey. Alcohol, like other drugs, is used differently in different cultures. Wine has always been an important part of the Jewish and Christian religions. In ancient Greece, wine was consumed after the meal at a symposium, a religious and political ritual attended only by men. In ancient Rome, men and women both drank wine with their meals. Because they couldn't wait for the meal, impatient Americans invented the cocktail⁷. "You are what you eat," as the proverb goes, encapsulates the concept of food and identity, and the process of selecting and consuming food includes psychological, social, economic, cultural, and biological factors, all of which play a role in the development of identity surrounding food consumption⁸.

The Food Traditions of the Mappila Muslims of Malabar is an interesting topic to study. The Mappilas are the Muslims of North Kerala. They are either Arab traders' descendants or Hindu converts to Islam. From the fourth century AD onwards, the Malabar Coast became the primary centre of Arab trading activity, and from the seventh century onwards, they began to settle in Malabar's port cities. The Muslim population in the Malabar region began to grow from the 9th century to the 16th century, which is noted by scholars like Durant Barbosa and Shaik Zainudheen. During the colonial period, they had to shift from the coastal areas to the interior parts of Malabar. In the 20th century, most of the Mappila population became rural cultivators,

landless peasants, petty traders, and tenants. Foreigners, Mysoreans, South Kerala Christians, and locals all have an impact on their food culture. Among the Mappilas, there are many gastronomic traditions related to Ramadan fasting, Salkaram (customary feast), Nercca (offering to God), Marriage, Death, and Birth. Knowledge of these gastronomic traditions may help us to understand the link between Malabar Mappila and other regions and communities. It also helps us understand the role of food in shaping the Mappila community's identity. A study of the Mappila gastronomic traditions also aids in understanding how food fosters community solidarity among its members and how food practices help in the development of better human relationships with other communities.

Among the Malabar Mappila Food Traditions, practices associated with Nercca or saint worship are significant because they reveal the syncretic tradition of mutual understanding and cooperation among the area's various religious communities. Dale and Gangatharan present nercca as the largest Mappila public festival in their article, which is actually a regional variation of saint worship found in most Islamic societies¹⁰. Nerccas, according to them, are expensive and elaborate ceremonies that mix nominally Islamic features with aspects of local folk festivals, especially an adaptation of native Hindu festivals such as velas and purams. These nercca festivals are held to honour a pir, shaykh, or shahid within a ritual framework. Malabar's most prominent nerchas include Kondotty, Malappuram, Pukottur, Kuttayi, Mamburam, and others. Many other minor nerccas were held in various parts of Malabar, and all played an important role in the formation of community feeling among the Mappilas of Malabar. One thing that all of these nerccas have in common is the distribution of food to festival goers. Special congregations were held at mosques linked to nercca, specifically to recite of devotional songs. Here I describe

the gastronomic practises associated with various nerccas held throughout South Malabar each year.

Across Malabar, the annual nercca is organised by a committee formed under an important mosque or the shahid's name at various villages in Malabar. Detailed arrangements are made to organise the nercca with a procession, Mouloud, community prayers, and distribution of food. The committee raised funds for the nercca by collecting money from locals by providing beef meat, and soliciting various types of voluntary contributions from the villagers. Traditionally, the villagers prepared Pathiri (rice bread) and offered coconut, chicken, aracunut, and other items to the committee. Arrangements were made by the villagers to ensure their contribution to the nercca. The majority of their contributions were in the form of food. Almost all of the villagers, including non-Muslims, took part in the nercca, particularly by donating money and receiving food. According to Dr. P P Abdul Razak, "During the British era, Hindus actively took part in Nerchas held throughout Malabar..." Such a custom is still practised today¹¹. The food received by the committee was later mixed together, which was later combined with the delicious beef meat. Following mouloud, Mala songs, and prayers, the committee distributed food to the assembled crowd around mid-night. A long line could be seen everywhere to receive the food from the committee members¹².

Offering the Nercha feast to members of different religious group is considered as part of their religious responsibilities, and they assume that Almighty will reward them for their actions. Beef and thengachor (coconut rice) preparation was a common feature of these nerccas' gastronomic tradition. The committee made arrangements for the food to be prepared. A local cook volunteered to help prepare the beef and rice. Food was frequently prepared on the ground next to the mosque. There were also plans to distribute the cooked food from that location. Few

people eat at the establishment itself. In the earlier period, the food was served on a large plate, and 6 to 8 people ate it while sitting around the table where the nercca chor was served¹³. The mappila community felt a sense of unity and brotherhood as a result of this. The committee recently established new rules for food distribution. Each family sends one person to collect the food for the rest of the family. On occasion, representatives of the Nercha committee pack food and deliver it to homes where nobody has been able to gather it. Nonetheless, they made certain that the food prepared as part of the Nercha was distributed to every household in the village. In the modern era, nercca feasts are first served to contributors and then to those who have gathered in lines. Previously, food was distributed at night, but today it was distributed shortly after the noon prayer. The flavour of nercca feast is delectable. People, including non-Muslims, were drawn to the nercca feast for its delicious taste. Nercca provided villagers with a rare opportunity to enjoy a tasty meal, which they also consumed the next day. The previous generation remembers the Nercha and many of its distinctive features evolving over time. The modification occurred primarily as a result of criticism from "reformist" Mujahids¹⁴. As a result, nerccas are much more limited in scope, limiting themselves to the supply of food to people who visit and the reading of the Qur'an.

In conclusion, gastronomic practices associated with nercca can tell us the role of a tradition, which is important for the existence of a group or community. The distribution of food at the time of the Nercca festival plays a major role in bringing various religious groups under one roof. For mappilas, it is an important occasion to foster community feelings and develop solidarity with other communities. Distribution of food provides them a chance to taste the delicious food and also a time to spend in devotional ways. Nercca food is believed to be sacred to them, hence most care is taken while eating the food. Even food was served to domestic pets.

The acceptance of nercca food by lining together is an occasion of patience and dedication. The preparation and serving of nercca food is also significant as it shows the community solidarity of Mappilas.

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Social media and transforming secular ideas and attitudes among keralites:

In the context of recent debates on intolerance in India

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Introduction

As I was doing the finishing touches of this paper, the suicide of a Dalit student in the University of Hyderabad had snowballed into a raging issue nationwide. Protests and debates over the suicide of Rohith Vemula were held across the nation and for the media this was the latest incidence of ‘intolerance’ against backward castes and minorities of our country. I came to know about this news through some of my friends’ Facebook post soon after the unfortunate incident that took place in the Hyderabad University. If it was only five or eight years ago, the news might not have reached me so fast since technology was not so advanced then and the internet was accessible only to a few.

Today’s age is a highly technologically-driven one. These days we find most walking on the streets with their heads turned down, their fingers swiping the touch-screens and their minds submerged in their smart phones. Technology has advanced so much that people now feel that ‘the world is at their fingertip’. The advent of technology and social networking sites has helped us in getting information quickly and also in communicating our own ideas, thoughts and feelings almost instantly. In this paper, I will try to examine how the social media is being used as a public platform to discuss today’s burning issues – anti-secularism and intolerance.

The problem and methods of the study

Secularism is not just a constitutional term, but more importantly it is the practice of being tolerant to the beliefs of people following different religions (Brass, 1991). It also covers the socio-cultural aspects of the society which have emerged through various historical phases and incidents that exclusive to each society and community. In this way, every society has its own identity, tradition, culture, and attitudes. This unique identity of a society will be reflected in their social practices. Hence secularism, or openness to different beliefs, allows people belonging to different communities to express their thoughts through organizations, movements, speeches,

writings, celebrating different religious festivals and so on. In this modern society, the means of secular expressions have changed along with the advance of technology. Now it turns to Visual and Social Media and it can make a quicker impact in the society. It also gives every individual (those who are able to handle such kind of devices) an equal chance to express their ideas and opinion as well as to support or oppose others'. Sometimes, it is used for mass mobilization. In this context, this paper will discuss the impact of social media on the practice of secularism, in terms of expressing thoughts and ideas, especially against the backdrop of the ongoing debates on 'rising intolerance' in India. The study particularly focuses on the Malayali Community and how the recent national issues as they have been communicated through social media has impacted the society in Kerala. The method used in this study is basically a content analysis of various online posts on different social media websites. Secondary materials, including newspapers and opinion pieces have also been referred.

Social media and secularism

Different types of mass media, whether traditional or modern, are the major means of expressing idea and thoughts on secularism apart from other social issues. Many national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru had effectively used newspapers and radio to convey their thoughts on democracy, unity and secularism to public. They had called for mass mobilization against the British rule through the traditional media. Even though the channels of communication were fewer in the earlier days, impact the traditional media had on people was very high. This was because of the credibility and the social acceptance of national leaders who delivered the messages in those days (Aggarwal and Gupta 2002).

In this modern society, the means of secular expressions have also changed along with the advance in technology. Now the society has turned to visual and social media and therefore it can make a quick impact in the society. It is also gives every individual (almost anyone with a smart phone and an internet connection) an equal chance to express their ideas and opinion. Sometimes it even results in mass mobilization.

When we look into the history of the emergence of different types of media and their role in promoting the secular state of India, we will have to start with the gathering of a few people with a common interest somewhere. The place of their gathering may be a small room, a hall or even a stage. These gatherings used to act as bilateral talks or discussions. The members who attended

these gatherings would spread their messages among the people. People mainly communicated through actions, dialogues, music, theatre and folksongs. Later, the print media took up that responsibility. Even till recently, several political uprisings and reforms that involved socio-political ideologies were communicated through notices, magazines, newspapers and so on (Mehta 1992). In India, many reformists, renaissance leaders and social movements have used the print media to fight the social evils and to maintain the unity and fraternity of our nation. Some national leaders themselves have started their own newspapers to convey their thoughts until recently. Later on, audio and visual media took over this task and finally now, it is the turn of the digital media and internet to do the same.

Social media has grown exponentially in the last decade and millions of people all over the world use it these days. It has the power of communication that is effectively used by people from all walks of life including politicians and businessmen irrespective of their age or sex. In this internet age, we need to accept the fact that most Indians are in a transition phase. Our way of thinking, mindsets and opinions about what is happening around us is changing in a big way. As the mindset changes, it also changes the way we communicate and interact with each other. With electronic gadgets like tablets and smart phones that are now affordable to most, people can easily access the internet to voice their thoughts. They use social media for all kinds for social interaction. When they are happy, they share their happiness with others. Similarly, sadness, anger, excitement and all kinds of feelings are shared on social media these days. In short, social media has become an inevitable element of our everyday social life. Social networking sites have become representations of our social thinking and the majority of users are young adults. Sites like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp to name a few, serve as the primary means of self-expression for their users. These new-age avenues were not available in the traditional mass media.

Intolerance debates in Social Media

Social media has opened the doors of freedom of expression at an individual level. Social media does not limit itself to forging of personal relationships at an emotional level, but rather goes beyond that to connecting people who share information, exchange their views, discuss and also upload photos and videos to support their claims. On the debate of rising intolerance in the country, a lot has been exchanged over Facebook messages and Twitter timelines apart from

individual blogs. Whatsapp groups also serve the same purpose, but on a smaller but more intimate scale.

During the last year, we have witnessed many acts of alleged intolerance in India and the Malayali community has effectively reacted to select incidents like the ones that happened in Dadri. Why are Malayalees highly selective in taking up issues to react on the social media? There was the Ghar wapsi campaign, the Kalburgi murders in Karnataka, death of two Dalit kids in Haryana, the opinions made by Shahrukh Khan and Amir Khan on rising intolerance in India. But, Malayalees restricted themselves mostly to the Dadri incident.

To understand how social media is being utilized to transform opinions or to support or oppose a particular issue, a content analysis of online posts and comments and some interviews with a few active personalities on social media has been followed. It is derived that the average Malayalees' ethnicity and innate consciousness influence the selection of issues to which they respond. A majority of Malayalees has a highly secular attitude, which is formed over generations and it is one of the most important features of the ethnicity of the average Malayali.

The driving factor which led to the reaction against anti-secular activities and intolerance is also the outcome of their psychological decisions which is always influenced by their ethnic background. This is the main reason why Keralites were highly sensitive to particular incidents such as the one in Dadri in UP where a 50-year-old man, Mohammad Akhlaq, was beaten to death and his 22-year-old son was left severely injured after the villagers allegedly found that the family had stored beef in their house and consumed the same. Later it was proved that the meat that was found in Akhlaq's house was not beef. While protests against this anti-secular and intolerant act were going raging across the nation, Maharashtra Government went ahead and imposed a ban on beef in the state. While this issue is viewed as an anti-secular move against Muslims in general, Keralites took it as violation of the right to choose one's own food. They expressed their displeasure over the development and emphasized that beef was a 'secular food' for Malayalees across the globe irrespective of their caste, creed, sex or religion. Therefore, any attempt to restrict beef consumption will trigger a backlash from the Malayali community.

They used different tools including photos, Videos and cartoons to spread the message. Social media also became the platform for the organizers of the beef festival in Kerala. This incident also brought out a rare unity among Kerala's politicians after the police raided the Kerala House canteen in New Delhi following rumours that cow meat was served there. But what united

Malayalis were not just their palates, but the Sangh Parivar's efforts to dictate what one should eat. The demand to ban beef is not only seen as an attempt to curtail people's right to choice of food but also to intimidate religious minorities and impose a politics of food. Recognizing that beef could trigger a backlash against the party, BJP leaders in Kerala have clarified that they do not advocate a ban on beef in the state.

But when something is politicised, two groups with opposing political ideologies spread hatred. This issue has also found a mention in the Facebook and twitter timelines. The controversy over the Beef Festival organized on the campus of Kerala Varma College and the consequent threat against a professor by a group of students that follows a particular ideology was also a widely discussed issue on the social media. Some group of people reacted to the beef festival by holding pork festivals in some parts of Kerala. Some Muslims also took part in the pork festival by offering pork dishes to their friends. While these protests were initially meant to express the solidarity with victims of Dadri incident they turned out to be wider agitations against anti-secular and intolerant acts taking place in our country. In this way, the social media has become a very important platform to protest.

Yet, Keralites are very selective in taking up issues on the social media. Why? Keralites are considered as one ethnic group. They speak a common language, have similar food and dressing habits, share the same history and have been brought up under identical social conditions. Therefore, their socio-cultural attitudes have evolved through several historical events which have always been rooted in secularism. The Malayalees' ancestors have always been open to all religions and various traditional rituals followed by them. They gave space for comfortable co-existence and there was never any communal tension. They also have the history of having fought together against the foreign rulers irrespective of their religious loyalties. Many social leaders and reformers like Ayyankali, Srinarayana guru, Sahodaran ayyappan and K Kelappan to name a few have all hailed from Kerala. Those historical incidents and social reforms are valued as 'social capital' for the keralites' collective ethnicity. This tradition governs the way in which Keralites behave and express themselves in a society or react to a social condition.

The ethnicity of one society will be reflected in their various social practices. The term ethnicity has been defined in a broader sense to signify the self-consciousness of a group of people united or closely related by shared experiences including language, beliefs, food, dressing habits, common heritage and so on. Ethnic identity signifies the collective response of a group in a

society. Practicing Secularism is one such social practice though people choose different means to express their secular attitudes such as organizations, movements, speeches, writings, and celebration of different religious festivals. This ethnicity is also reflected in the manner in which an average Malayali selects the issues to react on social media.

Conclusion

Secularism is not only just a constitutional term, but is rather an approach of treating all people from different religions respectably. It also carries many socio-cultural aspects of the society and these aspects have emerged through various historical phases and incidents which are different from society to society and community to community. In this way, every society has its own identity, tradition, culture, and attitudes. This unique identity of a society is called their ethnicity. This identity becomes psychologically and socially important for the members of a community to decide how they act in different social practices including practicing secularism and reacting against intolerance in society

At last, without a few words about the disadvantages of social media, particularly on secular culture of our nation, this paper would be incomplete. Many people use the social media to spread their vested interests and polarize communities. They use their hatred against a particular community or any social group which can lead to communal tensions. Such use of social networking sites is a big challenge and it poses a serious risk to the secular fabric of our nation. We have to be guarded against not only the hate mongers but also photos and videos which can potentially disturb our secular fabric.

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ONAM - THE NATIONAL (SECULAR) FESTIVAL OF KERALA:

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Introduction

India being a huge sub continent is well-known for its charm and beauty having deep roots in its diversity. Culturally, the Indian nation's contribution is fairly rich not only in Asia, but all over the world. Festivals in India, like festivals in any part of the world, find expression for the people's zest for living delight in nature and love of pageantry. Secular India is home to Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and several other religious traditions. Because, religion is the way of life, religious festivals are the very mainstay of celebrations in India, and all major events are celebrated with in a religious context.

The concept of a 'secular' India defined by our constitution, and it is slightly different from rest of the world. Western dictionaries define secularism as absence of religion but Indian secularism does not mean irreligiousness. It means profusion of religions. The Indian concept of secularism is expressed in the following often quoted principles: *Sarva-Dharma-Samantra* or *Sarva-Dharma-Sambhava* equal regarded for all faiths and creed and *Ekam Brahma Vipra Bhuda Vadant* God is one, wise man call Him by different names.

Festivals play an important role in maintaining the secular character of India. Festivals are said to be secular, but they represent a particular ideology and beliefs of a religion or a group and celebrates in accordance with ideologies. Onam the national festival of Kerala has considered as a secular festival which is celebrated by the entire Malayalee community in Kerala. This paper attempts to trace out the development of Onam in to a national/secular festival of Kerala in 20th century and social and cultural conditions to lead in to it. It also reveals the anti secular elements of the festival Onam, which celebrate as a national one.

Onam- Myths and History

Onam has a wide mythical background. The popular myth of Onam is the Mahabali-Vamana myth. Apart from that, *Parasurama*, *Cheraman Perumal*, *Hindu Gods like Mahadevan*, *Vishnu*, *Seetha*, and *Bhagavathi* are the main mythical heroes/heroines of Onam. Onam is celebrated in various parts of Southern India since the *Sangam* period by worshipping *Mayon* the tribal God. It

is sure that Onam is a mixture of different cultures such as Buddhism, Ancestor Worship, Assyrian Culture, and *Brahminic Hindu Culture* etc.¹

Origin of Onam consists of different notions. Some scholars identified it as a *Harvesting Festival*, for some groups Onam was begin with *Kollam Era*, for some it was originated by the influence of *Budhist religion in Kerala*. However, the historical sources shed light up on the emergence of Onam are very limited.¹

For the historical enquiry of Onam historians used sources myths and legends, songs related to Onam, and some inscriptional and literary sources. The earliest record was a *Sangam* literature, *Madurai Kanchi*, which explores the celebration of Onam festival as worship of Mayon, the tribal god.¹ Listed inscriptions of Muduvallur stone inscription Trikkakara stone inscription,¹ Thirukkakarai inscription¹ and Talakkadu inscription are spread light to the practice of Onam. *Vanjeri Granthavari*¹ *Unnuneeli Sandesham*, and several Travelogues of wayfarers from 16th C, also considered important source material of Onam. Most of the information includes some donations and tax or contribution to temples or Janmi.

Janmi system of Kerala had given a new face to Onam, which was closely connected to the Janmi-Kudiyan relationship at that time. Several rituals emerged in connection with the Onam celebration at the feudal society. *Onakkazhcha*, *Onavilakku*, *Kazhcha Sadya*, *Ammayi Onam*, *Onamootu*, *Onamparayuka* etc.¹ were some practices in the occasion of Onam. There were various feces of celebrations of Onam in that time. When Onam was a period of joy and celebration for the upper caste, it was a period of description for the tenants and untouchables. They had borrowed money in order to present *Onakazhcha*. The labor and effort in producing the *Kazhcha* was used to provide for the celebrations of a minority elite group.¹

Onam was the only time for the people of lower castes could having full stomach meal. Panar and Parayar went to each and every house singing *Onapattus*, and welcomed Onam. *Ashari* and *Mushari* were presented the products before the Janmi; had *Sadya* and returned with *Onakkodi*. It may be during this period that the customs related to Onam started in temples and also the worship of Vamana. The disintegration of Janmi system greatly affected these customs and they gradually got extinct.¹

Colonial records deal with Onam celebrations and evidences are there for granting leave in Onam season. Gazetteers and Manuals are speaks about Onam celebrations in contemporary Kerala.¹

Onam in Twentieth Century

The concept of secularism developed along with the national movement in twentieth century. National movement takes over or cultural elements to coordinate a huge diversified community. As a festival, Onam came to be an important theme in the contemporary literature. Many of the writers were search for the history of the festival and connected its beginning from the Sangam period on wards. Most of the articles published in weeklies glorified the festival as one and only common festival of Malayalies who celebrated it as memory of good old days.

Onam treated as a secular festival shrank only in the literary works like poems, novels, autobiographies, and essays. Most of them were described the occasion of Onam as the time of joy and prosperity. But some works are revealed the conditions of the low caste people of the society and their struggles for the celebration of Onam.¹

The analysis of the various literary works, the migrated communities influenced the celebrations of the festival in many ways. The reports of the celebrations of Onam in India and abroad introduced a new mode of celebrations in the occasion of Onam. Advertisements show that the symbols of *Mahabali*, *Sadya* and *Pookkalam* came to be common only after 1950s. Media like radio and television were popularized this occasion as the time of celebration of all Malayalies. The above mentioned elements such as literary works, media, advertisements, and migrated Malayalies helped to create the secular nature to the festival.¹

We can assume that, the nationalization process of Onam is a need of the hour, when a new state was formed and controlled by the upper cast people. The declaration of Onam as our national festival with a secular characteristics is a result of propaganda ideas mainly through literature which was supported by the development print culture, from the beginning of 20th C. After the declaration of Onam as the national festival of Kerala in 1961, the state itself propagated the celebrations. A renovated form of *Athachamayam* held in 1962 was sponsored by the state. The secularization of Onam festival thrown importance of the other festivities and wearing a veil of secularism which was basically an un secularist attitudes towards the lower caste people of Kerala. The end of the twentieth century witnessed a makeover of a festival Onam from the celebration of the elite people in society to a secular and national festival only by the influence of the elite community who enjoyed the political and social dominance in the twentieth

End Notes

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Dedicated to our Visionary
Korambayil Ahamed Haji



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