Chapter : I
INTRODUCTION

Malabar Muslims have been generally practising patrilocal system. However matrilocality is followed in certain pockets of Kozhikode and Kannur districts and Mahe of Union Territory, Pondichery. One of the communities which practices matrilocality, an attendentship of matrilineal kinship system in these locations is Mappila Muslims.

1.1. MAPPILA MUSLIMS

The Mappila Muslims are followers of Sunni faith and it is believed to have it’s origin in 8\textsuperscript{th} Century. They settled down mainly in the port towns of North and Central Kerala such as Kodungallur, Kozhikode, Kannur, Panthalayani Kollam and Ponnani. It is almost certain that Islam in India, was originated in Kerala and the Mappila Muslims are the descendants of the original group. There were close commercial relations between the Arab coastal states such as Yemen and the Malabar Coast even at the time of Prophet Mohammed. The legend relating to the embracing of Islam by Cheraman Perumal, the then ruler of the Malabar area, and descriptions given by various travellers on the Malabar Coast give credibility to this relationship. Miller says, ‘It is as the part of an ongoing process of peaceful communication and
economic relationship between Arabia and Kerala that Islam came into existence in the area’ (Miller, 1976 : 55).

Despite their same origin and common characteristics, there are variations among the Mappilas. ‘Originally formed through inter-marriage between maritime Arab traders and local women, the Moplahs are today a heterogeneous community characterized by ethnic, regional and social diversities’ (D’ Souza, 1976 : 141). Theoretically they are divided into two endogamous groups. ‘The higher ranking caste is believed to comprise of the descendants of converts from Brahmins and Nayars’ (Schneider, 1962 : 224). The lower status group members which constitute the larger chunk of the community are converts from fisherman and other lower caste groups. ‘Thus among Moplahs we find both descendants of Arabs through local women and converts from among the local people’ (D’ Souza, 1978 : 42).

1.2. THE MATRILINY AND MATRILOCALITY OF MAPPILA MUSLIMS

In Kerala, matrilineals and patrilineals of muslim communities are found. The patrilineals are stronger than the matrilineals in numerical strength. In north Kerala, the Mappilas follow both the lineages. Puthenkalam points out that the most conspicuous examples of the dual descendency are the Payyannur Namboodiris (Brahmins) and the Mappila Muslims (Puthenkalam, 1977 :V). However, in coastal townships of Kozhikode, Vadakara, Mahe, Koyilandi, Thalassery and Kannur
matrilineals dominate the other group. It is in the districts of Kannur and Kozhikode, and few localities in Malappuram district, that Mappila Muslims cluster and they constitute approximately one third of the total Muslim population. They, like certain North Indian, Karnataka and Telangana Muslim communities, do not speak Urdu. They speak only Malayalam with variations in the dialect from region to region. When considering together Kerala Mappilas the patrilineals are the majority group.

The matrineal aristocratic Mappila Muslims of the coastal line in general are socially and economically superior to those in the interior of South Malabar.

1.3. THE EMERGENCE OF MAPPILA MATRILINE

The Mappila muslim matriliney is generally considered as an adoption from the Nayars. But this may not be true. It is not only seen among the Mappila Muslims, but also among such muslims as the Labbais of Tamilnadu, the coastal pocket of Gujarat, the Navayats of Kanara and Islanders of Lakshadweep. All of these groups were not converts from Hindu matrilineal groups. Most of these groups were connected with Arab traders. It has been pointed out that the system of visiting husband was prevalent among Arab sailor communities of South Arabia, especially Yemen. ‘It would seem to have been a general custom in ancient Arabia for the husband to live among his wife’s kinsfolk’ (Wake, 1974 : 30). However, it were these regions from where large numbers of sailors and traders spread to the West and East coasts of India, Ceylon and Sumatra. This system of marriage was very much suited
to the peculiar mode of life of the Arabs, who lived in those ports for short periods usually, during trade seasons. These Arabs introduced the system among those families who had associated with them in the locality. Gough associates matriliny of Mappila Muslims with their occupation. ‘Mappila men’s work had always tended to take them away from house. Traditionally merchants of the ports sailed up and down the coast and sometimes to the Middle East. On land, traders and carriers also travelled, perhaps thirty to forty miles from house, sleeping often in the rest houses or warehouses’ (Gough, 1962: 423). With the men often away from house, it was natural that woman should live in their natal houses protected by the uncle, the head of their own kins group. Thus matriliny and matrilocality are probably, closely tied up with a number of factors, social and cultural. The most salient feature of Mappila Muslim community is its persistence of matrilocal residential pattern even though among many other communities which practiced the system earlier and abandoned it later. Matriliny and matrilocality of Hindu community are studied in depth by scholars. However, the prevalence of matriliny and matrilocality in the muslim community itself is not known to many scholars. This study is, therefore, attempting to reveal the different profiles of the system in the community with special emphasis on the continuity of the system and factors contributing to the phenomenon.
1.4. THE FAMILIAL BOND

Mappila Muslim matriliney as the case of other similar groups is closely associated with large families, joint or extended. Mappila Muslim matrilineal family is considered to be a multi functional group of three or more generations, with all its members living under one roof, sharing food cooked in the same hearth, holding property in common, raising and spending common fund, participating in common family rituals, and working under the authority of the senior most members, eldest females and males of the same kin group.

Mappila Muslims of North Kerala are a social group who even at this age of post modernity, uphold their traditional family system. Most studies indicate that the system of matriliny, and the customs and conventions attached to it have vanished among many matrilineal groups. Progressive social reforms and changes in the family laws had in the first five decades of last century, affected family structure of Nayars and Namboodiris. It was noted that, such a change from matriliny to patriliny has occurred generally in all over the world, with very few exceptions. It is found that the Mappila Muslims of North Malabar region, mainly concentrated in coastal areas, still strongly retain some of the fundamental characteristics of matriliny except the practice of inheritance.
1.5. THE RESIDENTIAL BOND

In olden days, trade and business were very important for Mappila Muslims, and it was linked with family. Those who go out for a long period in connection with their vocation may find it convenient to keep their wives and children with their parents. For reasons to be explored, the group in general takes wives from near by locality. For a trader who was born and brought up in the same locality of his wife, the practice of visiting husband system was rather easy and comfortable. Generally, the men take supper in their own family with their consanguine relatives and after that they visit their wives and children. Immediately after breakfast they leave the house. Today, the notable feature of Mappila Muslims is their participation in different occupations other than traditional trade and business, but still following matrilocality. Now the individual is permitted to procure property in their own or wife’s or children’s name. Shariat laws are applied in the matters of personal property. Irrespective of the changes that may have occurred in occupation and holding of property, matrilineal Mappila Muslims tie up themselves with matrilocality.

1.6. THE MARITAL BOND

Ethnographic accounts tell us that it is common for matrilineal societies to have loose marital ties. High incidence of divorce and re-marriage among matrilineal communities have been pointed out by various social scientists (Fortes, 1950 : 252-
The strength of the matrilineal kinship bond and the relative weakness of the conjugal paternal bonds, are given as reasons for the high rate of divorce among matrilineal communities. Easy procedures of divorce available and possibilities of re-marriage are considered factors that contribute to the high divorce rate among muslim matrilineal groups. Astonishingly, the divorce rate among matrilineal Mappila Muslims especially among aristocrats, is strikingly low. Polygamy is rarely followed. Matrilineal Mappila Muslims give a better status to visiting husband (Pathiyappilas). The two families maintain firm intimacy with mutual respect. Even after death of one of the partners the ties continue without any dilution.

1.7. MIGRATION

Mappila Muslims in the coastal belt of North Kerala are born to aristocratic traders. They have been keeping their reputation for several centuries. They also maintained good relationship with Middle East. Later, because of the development of new commercial and industrial centers in Kochi, Thrissur and Mangalore the monopoly in trade of Malabar with the Middle East declined in the beginning of the 20th century. Mappila Muslims were least involved in agriculture. Hence, when their status as traders was affected severely Mappila Muslims started gulf migration right
from late 1970s. Oil boom in the Arab countries, with whom they had centuries-long relationship, brought good fortune. Now it is found that gulf migration is much higher among Mappila Muslims than that of the other groups. There are job seekers who go abroad from every family.

1.8. ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW FAMILY UNIT

Establishment of new household in nearby areas started in the 80s. New family units accommodate themselves in the existing structures by making suitable modifications to them if they are found convenient. Now shifting to new premises has become common. However, even after the shifting the new units keep their contacts with the original localities without fail. Migration (Shifting) to distant and unfamiliar areas are rare. Further, the shifting usually takes place from the urban core to the periphery and to places where the same status groups are settled. Workplace is also a determinant of the place of relocation; easy access to the work place is given prime consideration when a new locality for shifting is selected. The tendency to stick on to the same status groups and strengthening the matrilocality is seen among Mappilas.

1.9. RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Religion is promoting matriliny and matrilocality and the cultural identity of the group. To the Mappila Muslims, it is a matter of prestige for the members and religion appreciates the unchanging attribute of matrilocality.
1.10. THE MODIFICATIONS AND PERSISTANCE

It is generally believed that the joint family and matrilocality are incompatible with modern life in urban society and there in no relevance for them today. Mappila Muslims live in pretty large families, in which they identify and provide splendidous space for their girls at the time of marriage. New developments, modern education, newer economic opportunities, or migration have not affected their family structure, or made any considerable changes in it. Even in the midst of the pressures and problems of modern life pattern, Mappila Muslims generally consider large family as a source of comfort, joy and celebration, a base for social well beingness. When many others have given up matrilineal bond already, they modified some of the notable features of the system. This study is primarily aimed at finding out the relationship between the socio-cultural variables and persistence of matrilocality among Mappila Muslims of North Kerala. The peculiar conditions of matrilocal muslims prompt to probe into the factors of continuity, the factors that strengthens matrilocal bond, in detail. This study is specially interested in identifying such factors as religious sanctions, customary bond, sub-cultural identity, socialization of children, security for women, migration etc. that relate to the continuity of matrilocality. Further, the process of adjustments and adaptation of the community to the familial organization by facing all threatening forces is another objective of the study. This study is also interested in enquiring into the gender relations of matrilocal Mappila Muslims.
Briefly the areas that this study attempts to analyze are:

1. The familial ties of the community: The size of the family which practice matrilocality, the familial bond between the members of the family, the status the husbands enjoyed in the family.

2. Economic independency of the units: The self sufficiency that emerged out of the trade of the constituent groups of the family, trade that makes the bond between family members, the existence of individual property and businesses, entry into new occupational avenues.

3. Migrating tendency of the males: The possibilities for prospering of the family units out of male’s migration to the gulf countries, the number of gulf husbands in the family, that developed in taking others to gulf countries, the space that available in houses when husbands are not there.

4. Religious affiliation of members: The attachment to the religious rituals for maintaining identity, the strong sub cultural identity developed, the customs and practices related to visiting husband system, the non-involvement of religious organization in opposing matrilocality, the affiliation of influential community members in religious organizations.

5. The sub cultural identity that kept alive: The negative attitude towards patrilocality, discouraging mentality in practicing patrilocality, alienation of
members practice patrilocality produced out of the negative attitude of community members.

6. The marital bond that made without any problems: Easy identification of life partners from the community, agreement shown to the proposals emerge, the understanding of the familial conditions, the low rate of divorce and desertion.

7. The status of women in the community: The influence of senior women members in decision making, the close relation between women in the kins, the high respect and status given to wife in husband’s family.

8. The educational status of male and female members in the community: The relationship of education and practice of matrilocality. The affirmation to the matrilocal system among the educated.

9. The habit of shifting of households: The tendency to shift households to areas where matrilocals are clustered.

The structure of the thesis may be summarized as given below:

The first Chapter introduces the problem of the research. The second Chapter analyses the literature related to the topic of the research. The third Chapter describes the methodology of the study. The fourth Chapter gives an account of the localities inhabited by muslims, their community in Malabar area and the different profiles of the community. The fifth Chapter analyses the conviction of Mappila Muslims in the
practice of matrilocality to assess the strength of matrilocal sub-culture. The sixth Chapter focuses on the social environment of matrilocal system, by analyzing the familial structure and the status of the women and children in matrilocal family. The seventh Chapter deals with the factors related to occupation, economic activities and migration. The eighth Chapter deals with the religious bond of members that contribute to keep a distinct identity in the family and their interaction that ensuring the continuance of the matriliny. The ninth Chapter depicts three case studies to analyze the process of survival of matrilocality. The tenth concluding Chapter gives a summary of the findings and their interpretations.

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