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On analysing and examining the process of modernization and social change among Muslim women of Malabar, the present study irrefutably establishes the fact that during the 50 years after Independence, the status of Muslim women has risen considerably from social and cultural points of view. It has been said that to measure the progress of a nation the status of women in the social, political, cultural, and religious fields is to be studied properly.

It is noted that socio-economic influences that have brought about many changes in the Indian social fabric did not filter down to the lower strata of the society. The conflict between the forces of modernity and tradition got upper hand. This was true with reference to Muslim society of Malabar also.

The call for higher education was the result of modernity and the tradition of being homebound was prevented. Consequently, new avenues have been opened up to enter into social, economic and political aspects of their lives.

To examine the process of change, a study on Muslim society explaining origin of Islam and its impact is relevant in this context. The origin of Islam is a controversial theme among scholars due to the confused nature of evidence and lack of contemporary evidence. Conventional scholars
believe that Ceraman Perumal's conversion is to be placed in the 9th century A.D. and the recent findings of scholars would place it in the 12th century A.D.

The views of the conventional historians are based on the traditions contained in Keralolpati, Grandhavaris of Calicut and Cochin and Tuhfat-al-Mujahideen. Likewise, histories sometimes highlight invasions while peaceful movements are forgotten. Arab settlers and traders had been visiting India and settling on the coast of Kerala long back. Hence, the first Muslims in India were the newly converted Arab traders of Muscat and Ormuz who came and settled on the Malabar coast.

The view finds support in K.M. Panikkar's History of Kerala where he says that when Islam swept over Arabia its influence was felt immediately over Kerala also. In fact, according to fairly ancient tradition the last Perumal himself became a convert to Islam. Thus, Islam began to spread in Malabar early enough both by conversion and by the settlement of Arab traders and this is clear from a Muslim inscription in Pantalayini Kollam dated Hijira 166.

Keralolpati tradition refers to the conversion of last ruler in, Perumal line into Islam. Ceraman Perumal, the last ruler of Makotai (Mahodayapuram) partitioned his kingdom among his kith and kins and arranged the administration of the Kingdom and went on a pilgrimage to Mecca in the Company of Muslim Faqirs and a Sheik. On the return journey
to Malabar, the ruler fell dangerously ill and so he handed over a letter to the missionaries to be submitted to the existing ruler of Kodungallur to do all facilities for the propagation of the new religion.

Accordingly, they proceeded to accomplish their missionary activities. With the permission of the Kodungallur ruler they constructed a mosque there. Subsequently, many mosques were constructed in different parts of Malabar. Zeinuddin in his work entitled *Tuhfat-al-Mujahideen* supports the above story and concludes that it is difficult to give a precise date for it. Most probably it might have taken place 200 years after Hijra (i.e. about 825 A.D).

Logan ascertains that introduction of Islam might have taken place 200 years after Hijra. This date or later date may be correct. As far as he is concerned, Kodungallur and Pantalayini Kollam enjoyed the advantage of being trade centers. The Arabs had settled down in these places long previously for trade purposes. The Hindus reject the tradition and they believe that the Cera ruler died as a Siva devotee. Any way whoever might be converted whether Ceraman or Zamorin of Calicut, it is only legends and traditions uncorroborated by contemporary records.

Modern scholars like Prof. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai and Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan have provided new findings based on the inscriptionsal evidences. According to the former, Kerala was not partitioned till 11\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. The rulers of Mahodayapuram continued their rule till 1102 AD. The early
scholars did not have the privilege of studying the records of later Cera kingdom, which existed from 9th century A.D. to 12th century A.D. He also adds that the foreign travellers who visited in the 16th century A.D were the earliest to notice the Ceraman legend and record it in their literature. The first writer to put it in record was Duarte Barbosa (1510 AD). It is a well-known fact that legends have no time sense. They tend to grow and absorb new materials. They get distorted during the time of transmission from place to place and from person to person.

Dr. M.G.S Narayanan has concluded that there is no specific contemporary evidence regarding the advent of Islam in Kerala. Masudi of Bagdad (890-966 A.D) speaks of contacts between Malabar and Arabia. These early contacts would increase the possibility of Ceraman legend if it were being genuine. The plaque at Madayi mosque shows the year 1124 A.D. as the date of its foundation.

The evidence agrees with the date of last Ceraman Perumal who is known from epigraphic records to have ascended throne in 1102 A.D. The king's name is mentioned as Rama Tiruvati and Kulasekhara Chakra Vartikal. This year was the closing year of Rama Varma Kulasekhara Chakravartikals as opined by Prof. Elam Kulam Kunjan Pillai. This is refuted by Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan. He is of the opinion that an inscription from Tiruvalanjudi temple near Tanjore dated the 4th year of Vikrama Cola (1122 A.D) mentions
the offer of tumbamalai to the deity in the name of Ceramanar Rama. This Rama is identified with Rama Varma Kulasekhara. Hence, it is ascertained that his reign prolonged up to 1122 A.D. Finally he concludes that Ceraman Perumala's conversion has found a place in the Muslim chronicles and Brahmanical chronicles also. So it cannot be rejected as such.

In course of time, Kodungallur, Madayi, Dahfatan, and Fandarina developed into big centres of Muslims. Maravi may be Madayi, Dahhfatan may be Dharmapattom and Fandarina is the same as Pantalayini Kollam. Calicut, the greatest centre of Muslims in Malabar is left out of the list. This is a proof to show that the tradition itself was created before the rise of the principality of Calicut, an event after the disintegration of the Kingdom of Makotai. Thus the tradition of the propagation of Islam in Kerala towards the close of the Cera period with the blessings of Ceraman perumal is acceptable as has been opined by Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan.

The sailors, traders and missionary activities had accelerated the spread of Islam in Malabar coast. Their settlements gradually brought about the establishment of their faith among the inhabitants in this land. There was a willing acceptance of new faith by large numbers whom the existing social order influenced heavily. The lower castes welcomed Islam as a chance to obtain some degree of social freedom. By conversion, an untouchable got a distinct rise in the social scale.
The encouragement and support extended by the rulers of Malabar was also a factor to be reckoned with for promoting conversions to Islam. Zamorin of Calicut is a typical example for this kind of support of a ruler. He needed sufficient sailors to man his navies. He encouraged the fishermen families to bring one or two children as Muslims. To-day many of the fishermen along the Calicut coast are Muslims.

The Arabs respected all those who had embraced Islam, especially women. So, the growth of the population at first was confined to seashores which were once trading centres. Nevertheless, a study of the available records about Arakkal ruling dynasty will show that one of the most important rulers of Kerala in the early days had embraced Islam. For one thing the extensive missionary activity that was known elsewhere in the history of Indian Islam is not evident in South India. However, the services of first missionary and his assistants cannot be denied.

In course of time, Ponnani became an important Muslim centre. Kondotty Tangal, Tangals of Malappuram, Sayyid Jiffrey, Mamaram Sayyid Alavi Tangal, and Fazal Pookoya Tangal, played a dominant role in the propagation of Islam in Malappuram area. Some of them also spread anti imperialist trends among the Muslims.

Musims of Malabar are called Mappilas whose mother tongue is Malayalam and claim to be the descendants of Arab settlers. Their physical
appearances indicate their Arabic origin. It has been said that the Arabs had been carrying on trade with India since pre-Islamic times. The rise of Islam revitalized their intercourse which had previously been more commercial than cultural character.

The trading centres of Malabar had separate quarters for separate trading centres of Kerala and important among them were Kollam, Kodungallur, Ponnani, Tanur, Parappanangadi, Kannur, Ezhimala etc. Most of these merchants were from southern Arabia and Persian Gulf. This accounts for the Arabic Islamic culture in Kerala in contrast with the Turko-Persian Islamic culture in other parts of Kerala.

Abdul Razack, Ma-Huan and others provide description of Calicut. They observe that a considerable number of Mussalmans had built two mosques there in which they met Friday to offer prayers and most of them had their shops there. The wealthy merchants could carry on trade without much difficulty, as there existed a sense of justice and security.

Later, the privileges and concessions enjoyed by the Arabs at Calicut especially in trade were threatened by the Portuguese with their arrival at Kappad in Calicut 1498 A.D. Kunjalis were the hereditary admirals of the Zamorin who fought against the Portuguese in the longer periods in the history of Calicut. But, the chapter of Kunjalis came to an end with the tragic
death of Kunjali IV who met his end at the hands of the Portugese with the support of Zamorin of Calicut.

Bitter criticism and baseless objections have been raised against Islam's unequal treatment of women in the matters of inheritance, permission to men of contracting marriage upto four wives and segregation of women or 'Purdha'. The scholars on Islam have clarified all the questions in the light of translation and interpretations on Quranic injunctions.

With regard to the distribution of property it is said that by giving the daughter half the share of a son, Islam has let down the position of women. But it should not be forgotten that a woman receiver 'dower' and property from her husband in which her inequality is more than compensated for.

Much harsh criticisms have been levelled against Islam for having permitted polygamy. The general interpretation is that limited polygamy is permitted. It must be borne in mind that the Arabs of pre Islamic days had very lax matrimonial laws. The rules regarding a maximum of four wives was a restraining piece of legislation. Polygamy is a provision and not a compulsion. It's intention was to provide help for the helpless women and save them from falling into destitution. There is another suggestion that prostitution can be controlled by it.

The Quranic verses say that women should stay at home and should not wander about displaying their beauty and finery. But this does not mean
that they should never go out and remain in perpetual confinement. The purdha system among Muslims has been a subject of controversy among the conservative school of thought and new enlightened section of Muslims under the influence of western education and culture.

The critics argue that the purdha system as it exists now has nothing Islamic about it. It is purely a non-religious social custom. Women in early Islam were not confined to their homes. They came out on occasions under the stress of economic, social and religious necessity. When they came out they dressed and moved in a particular way which did not make them objects of attraction, intermixture of the sexes was never approved of by Islam and runs counter to the whole spirit of its teachings.

The defenders of purdha system argue that Islam means to keep women closely and completely confined to their homes. This is a wrong interpretation. When the Quran says that women should stay in their houses and make no display of their charms, it is referring to the life of pre-Islamic Arabia. Despite the heavy social and legal disabilities from which they suffered, the women truly and frequently moved about to indulge in enormous talks with strangers or mixed with them freely. This is a kind of life which Islam wanted to take over by a life of decency and responsibility. If the Quran has intended totally to prohibit the movement of women outside the
home there was no necessity of laying down these restriction on dressing and movement.

It is finally summed up that 'hijab' is an obligation upon every Muslim woman. However, Islam does not prescribe a specific dress code. A woman has the right to select any outfit as long as it fulfills some of the above mentioned condition which underlines chastity and modesty.

The rights of women are granted by Islam and they cannot be altered or replaced. Woman have gained these rights without a feminist rebellion. These rights were conferred on her fourteen hundred years ago when the contemporary civilizations were not prepared to consider her as a human being.

The weak commitment to religion tends to cultivate unjust and hostile treatment of women. Uncultured men tend to oppress them in many ways. Unfortunately, the patriarchal hold was too severe after the prophet's death, and women started losing rights they had during the life time of the prophet. The Muslim women should acknowledge the rationale behind the interpretation of the Quranic injunctions for their betterment rather than falling into ignorance.

The conditions of Malabar Muslim women till the beginning of 20th century were not better off relatively with that of non Muslim women. Their life was centred around some traditional concepts. Hence, women were under
constraints and controls and remained within the four walls of their houses. Consequently, they were not dared to seek western education and not even Malayalam. Malayalam was considered as the language of non-believers and hence was a taboo. So, the sweet fruit of academic education was denied to them. The only education allowed both for men and women was the education in 'Dars' and Madrasa attached to the mosques. The forces of orthodoxy in the Muslim society of Malabar determined the socio religious and political factors of the society.

The system of education imparted through 'Madrasas and Dars' began to deteriorate on account of the ways and methods employed by untutored masters in teaching. The students were forced to learn the scripture by rote and memorise it. And they did it without understanding its meaning properly. This system did more harm than good in many cases. Students of tremendous potentials had their heart and brain stunted by rigid method of education. The pronouncements of the prophet were not understood properly and consequently there were many taboos, superstitions and un Islamic practices.

In Islam, religion and society are identical and cannot be segregated each other. So all reform movements organized among the Muslims for their reformation have been essentially religious and social reform movements.

In this context, the part played by various socio-religious reformers should not be forgotten. The Malabar society, under the influence of socio
religious reformers of the community underwent a great transformation in their outlook. Taking Kerala as a whole, the main role in the intellectual awakening was played by a socio-religious organization called 'Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham.' Wakkam Abdul Quadir Moulavi was a pioneer who continuously called upon his brethren to relinquish unIslamic practices and beliefs and encouraged them to take to modern secular education. He convinced the community, the need to educate Muslim women. His reform-oriented publications had their impact on the Muslims activity. Today, there are innumerable primary and high schools exclusively under the control of Muslims the impact of which still continues to be felt. Through his patriotic journal 'Swadeshabhimani' he became engaged in journalistic criticism of existing structures. The one welcome result of the movements was that, inspite of the opposition of the orthodox faction, these movement compelled people recognize the necessity of modern education. The far-reaching influences of other reformers like Sanaulla Makti Tangal (1847-1912) and Islahi movements have been felt in every nook and corner of Kerala.

A major impact of the Islahi movement was the decreasing interest in saints, superstitions evinced by conservatives. Finally, the substantial contribution of this movement is the encouragement given to female children to acquire modern education.
Side by side with these development the initiative for re-orienting Dars system was undertaken. Scientific system of religious education with proper curriculum, text books and tools was made necessary. A definitely progressive movement in education was started by Muslims of Malabar just before the 50's of 20th century preceded by the second phase of the resurgent educational activity. Today, there are innumerable primary and schools exclusively under the control of Muslims for uplifting their children educationally.

After the Mappila Rebellion of 1921, the Government resolved to concentrate more on education of the Mappilas. A Muslim training school was started in Malappuram, the head quarters of Mappila Malabar to train. Muslim teacher primary religious teachers called Mullakka masters. They were also given special training. Women instructors were also trained to impart religious education to women. Now there are Muslim women who are designated as Arabic teachers working in schools and colleges.

The British Government seriously thought about giving education to female children. The education of girls received a great boost as the encouragement was in the form of incentives. Vocational training schools and colleges would improve the quality to and skill of the students in Malappuram.
At private initiative, many schools sprang up in Calicut to impart religious and secular education. Also, there are many Arts and Science colleges in Mappila pockets. Female education has gone a step further. Girls are now going to schools and colleges in large numbers. Farook College at Feroke in Calicut district is one among them where many Muslim girls are receiving College education. At Malappuram, there is a polytechnic college which is exclusively for women. It functions well, maintaining a good record of Muslim women.

The services rendered by Muslim Educational Society led by Dr. Abdul Ghafoor and his associates in the field of education and social service and the ladies wing are commendable. Masterminds like Mrs. Fathima Gafoor and Mrs. Khamarunnisa Anwar are the prominent persons behind the uplift of Muslim women of Malabar. MES is giving scholarships and financial assistance to poor Muslim girls and enable them to receive educational benefits. MES has created a tremendous impact when it opened colleges in the erstwhile backward areas of Malabar.

By 1967, MES had laid the foundation of its first college at Mannarghat, Ponnani, Cranganore and Valancherry etc. To the credit of the community, many female graduates and post graduates are serving in different institutions as doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers and clerks. Subsequently, even the orthodox ulema who are vehemently opposed to
Muslim girls attending schools have dropped much of their opposition and started sending their children to schools and colleges without hesitation.

Today 60% of the readers of magazines and weeklies in Malayalam are Muslim literate women in Malabar. They are anxious to know women's issues published in it. There are many Muslim women journalists also. One among them is working on the Gulf edition of Chandrika daily. One or two examples would also show the empowerment of Muslim women in the political field.

When a study was conducted among some Muslim women of Malappuram it is understood that 27% of them became literate for communicating with their husbands at Gulf. In the absence of their husbands, they carry on bank transactions and also act as the deciding authorities at home.

As regards the dress pattern, they wear modern dresses like churidhar and salvar kameez, and sari instead of their traditional dresses. Even though 'purdha' wearers have diminished in number but for the influence Gulf migrants, wearing of purdha as an indispensable part of the dress of Muslim women, has become a fashion among teenage girls.

The enhanced importance of the bride is indicated through the change in the value of 'Mahr' or gift of the bride. It depends upon the financial capacity of the families. The dowry in the matrimonial market is increasing.
The poor suffer on account of this. But those who have become rich due to Gulf impact help the poor some times. Not only changes have been felt in political, social, cultural income and educational spheres, but also in religious life. Now-a-days women are allowed to attend prayers in the mosques though the orthodox segments like sunnis object to it.

There is no doubt that these women have established an identity by challenging some old values of conservatism. The courage and confidence instilled in them an urge to empowerment. It is in fact the impact of secular education, the economic independence, socio-religious reform movement, expansion of trade and commerce, contact with outside world-all these factors made a tremendous improvement affecting the social and cultural status of Muslim women.

Inspite of the changes Muslim women have some specific issues. But women of other communities are also not free from social issues. The present global scene reflects ever increasing incidents of divorce, the birth of illegitimate children, breaking up of families and suicidal cases. The specific issues of Muslim women are triple Talaq. Maintenance rights, purdha system and polygamy. Socio reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others fought against the social evils. Still, it continues to haunt women in the form of female in fanticide and female foeticide.
Under Muslim personal Law, divorce is an easy matter for the husbands as he can divorce his wife at his own will by the sheer pronunciation of the verbal formula of divorce (talaq). The Quran does not sanction this kind of privilege to any Muslim. The right of obtaining a separation should be on rational grounds. In spite of these restrictions, Muslim men still enjoy much freedom, not enjoyed by women at any time.

Theoretically, Muslim women have more legal rights than high caste Hindu women but in practice they suffer many disabilities. As per Islamic Law, a wife is expected to get maintenance from her husband till the period of 'Iddat. Under the provisions of criminal procedure code 1898, she can claim it from her husband till the period of 'Iddat'. If he fails to provide the same she can sue even in a court.

When a bill was moved in 1973 for the revision of criminal procedure code in order to provide maintenance for divorcees, it was opposed severely by orthodox Muslims on the basis that the husband has to provide for maintenance only till the period of 'Iddat' and not beyond that time.

But the liberal minded section pleaded for social legislation. Its implications were felt in Kerala also. The year 1985 is a land mark in the history of Muslim women of India. Shah Bano, a divorcee of Madhya Pradesh field a case against her husband in the court for maintenance till she remarried. She was awarded maintenance by the court in accordance with
provisions of the Criminal procedure code Sec. 125. On the contrary to the Judgement, her husband with the support of Personal Law Board filed an appeal against it in the Supreme Court. But the Supreme Court Judgement came out in support of the judgement of court of Madhyapradesh and said that in the case it was given in kindness. It led to an acrimonious debate throughout between supporters and opponents supported by many political parties. There was made a hue and cry in Malabar area also. Shah Bano's case has set a precedent warming up the minds of thousands of unfortunate Muslim women.

The supreme court in a recent judgement wanted the government to clarify all Personal Laws and to introduce a uniform civil code. But, a section of Muslim community objected to it. A few people welcome changes in the Personal Law provided the fundamental aspects of Shariat are retained. It could be hoped that Muslim women would welcome change in the statutes concerning marriage and divorce.

'Triple Talaq is also a major issue among Muslims as one concerning women. By pronouncing 'Talaq' three times the husband divorces his wife. It is hoped that to solve these kinds of problems, the Muslim Personal Law could be re-examined to the benefit of the Muslim women. This does not mean that it should be amended entirely or in its essential aspects. The plea is
that Muslim women should not be made to suffer on account of the special nature of Muslim Law.

If the women's issues are studied in theoretical perspectives, it can be understood that these arise due to many factors. One major factor is the psychological factor. Firstly, if a woman enters into the word of men she is bound to lose herself in the overwhelming crowd unless she has an iron will to keep moving forward. Secondly, an inferiority feeling is sown into her mind by the society. Thirdly, men like to see women suffering because he would be a good father than be a good husband. Therefore the problem is basically a psychological one that lies deep in the minds and hearts of men.

The man who tortures his wife feel pained if the same happens to his daughter after her marriage. That is why women's problems cannot be solved by law alone. Here, the conscience has to change which governs one's mind. In Shah Bano's case she was mocked by the religious fundamentalists. The Government should have safeguarded the Muslim women's right. It did not come to rescue her.

It is always the poor women who have to put up with such injustice because they are uneducated and unaware of the provisions of law. So she is cheated and finally they have no moral and financial support. Apart from that, upper-class women do not suffer degradation. She can walk down upon her husband if she is ill-treated. Sometimes marriage is not a necessity for
The middle class woman suffers because she is educated but yet she is pinned down by convention. She has to obey him unquestionably. She has a psychological trauma.

Finally, the lower class woman is exploited but does not face psychological trauma. Due to lack of education and awareness women are struck with 'before marriage syndrome' and 'after marriage syndrome'. Some of them marry after compulsion. Unmarried women are looked down by our society.

Both men and women have to realize that marriage means commitment and it calls for efforts from both of them to keep the marriage going. If either of them shows a reluctance to get into life-long commitment, it is better to stay single rather than applying for divorce on flimsy ground. A balance of attitude is necessary to achieve equilibrium among themselves.

The educational data of religious groups across the country provided by the census of India 2001 gives a detailed account. If it is taken in the all India level, the findings are disheartening because average Muslim women are far less educationally accomplished than their non-Muslim counterparts. It is certain, that Kerala may have highest literacy rates. The dropouts of Muslim women at the level of higher education is staggering. The tragedy is that the state has not succeeded significantly in reducing the drop out rates compared to others. Gender discrimination is another factor. Families
encourage male education and discourage female education in some parts of India. Unfortunately, here too, Muslim women are more discriminated and discouraged by their families, whereas Muslim men are given more accessibility to education. The Census Report also finds this to be a reason for their poor show in education.

There may have been failures at all levels. For a country that professes school education for all unfortunately, parents pull out their children from schools without any fear. Still, there are households that consider religious education at madrassas as a substitute for higher education.

Following inferences are made here. Muslim women should come to the fore. They should not miss any opportunity to be educated. Education is the remedy for most of the ills of the society. The educated husband should help in the education of his wife and educated parents should provide facilities for the education of their children. Education of the daughters should be made compulsory. Teenager's marriage should be discouraged. It gives not only financial stability and security but will widen the horizon of their knowledge. They will march forward with a view to creating happy world for themselves and others.

Apart from these specific social issues, the Muslim women of Malabar no doubt have achieved great strides in different spheres of their lives. They are no longer in the shells, as they were in the past for many centuries.
Education to the extent possible has freed their minds from sticking to the traditions and orthodoxy. It has brought social and cultural changes in their thoughts and deeds.

The condition of Muslim women has improved a lot during the last fifty years. The community has gone through a wave of social change. Muslim women reflect an image of educated and modernised woman. Definitely, the Muslim women have gone forward. And this forward march is going to continue in the coming years as the trends among Muslim women would show.