

De-Persianaization of Islam: The Cultural Shifts after Hadhrami Migration in Malabar

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Abstract: Hadhrami migration to Malabar in the seventeenth century was a land mark issue in the history of Mappila Muslims and they influenced their socio-cultural life. They participated in the religious affairs of Mappila Muslims as well as the anti colonial struggle against the British. It is worth mentioning that their role in De-Persianaization of Islam in Malabar. In 17th century there was strong influence of the Kondotty Thangal in Malabar who propagated many Shia (Persian Islam) ideologies. Hadhrami Sayyids fought against this ideology using their nail and teeth. Sheikh Jifri of Hadhramaut wrote a book against the Kondotty faction and Persian Islam lashing out at their rituals. This paper will analyze the activities of Hadhrami Sayyids towards the De-Persianaization of Islam in Malabar.

1. Introduction

Hadhrami migration in Malabar paved way for many socio-cultural changes in eighteenth and nineteenth century. Though it was a gradual process there took place a sea change in Islamic practices which were followed by the Mappila Muslims before the advancement of Hadhramies. At the time of Hadhrami migration Muhammed Sha Thangal of Kondotty was the main Islamic propagator and preacher who disseminated Persian Islamⁱ among the Mappila Muslims of Malabarⁱⁱ who got many staunch supporters across Malabar and started to work from Kondotty in Malappuram.

After a short while Kondotty Thangal got a laudable position in Malabar and many Muslims from every walks of life started to visit the Thangal. Against this background Shiekh Jifri who was an ardent follower of *Shafi* school of Jurisprudence migrated to Malabar and he strongly condemned Persian Islamⁱⁱⁱ from his early childhood^{iv} for several reasons. The most important amongst them was that the attacks of Shia Muslims towards the descendants of Prophet at Basra when they were forced to flee from there to different parts of the world. Secondly, they always opposed tooth and nail the concept of *Sunnism* which Hadhrami Sayyids followed. In the same manner they objected to all the schools of jurisprudences.^v

These reasons were enough to Hadhrami Sayyids to oppose the Kondotty Thangals and their followers. Hadhrami Sayyids started the campaign in early years of their migration against the views of Kondotty Thangal. Sheikh Jifri issued many *Fatwas* against them. In later years there emerged a constant dispute between Kondotty and Ponnani sect which was commonly known as *Ponnani-Kondotty Kaitharam*. Ponnani sect was of the *Sunni* followers. Therefore Hadhrami Sayyids supported the *Ponnani sect*.

2. Influence of Persian Islam in Malabar

Muhammed Sha and his elder son and their followers started to propagate the Persian Islam in Malabar which was under Arabian influence for long years from days of its emergence its emergence in early medieval period. Contradictory to the advance of Islam in north India, Islam in Kerala was completely under the influence of Arabs who came here for the trade purposes. On this ground, Kerala Muslims imitate more or less Arabian culture and their religious practices. On the other hand, Islam in north India reached here through the influence of Persian scholars. Due to this there was the influence of *Persian Islam* from the beginning onwards.

In the case of Malabar, *Shia* influence touched the ground only after the settlement of Kondotty Thangal at Kondotty. Malappuram district gazteer mentions that “ in the eighteenth century a schism was created by the introduction of new forms worship by a foreign (Persian) Muhammedan, who settled at Kondotti in Eranad Taluk. His followers are called *Shias* by the orthodox party. But they themselves, when questioned, object to the use of the name and assert that they are as much Sunnis as the other party. This sect though still numerous, does not seem to be increasing in numbers”.^{vi} They preached the succession of Ali following the prophet Muhammed. Shia Muslims thinks that Ali was the real successor of the Prophet but that Aboobacker snatched it from him with the support of the majority. For this, Shia scholars cited a *hadeeth*

that was delivered in the last speech of prophet^{vii} that “Oh people! Reflect on the Quran and comprehend its verses. Look into its clear verses and do not follow its ambiguous parts, for by Allah, none shall be able to explain to you its warnings and its mysteries, nor shall anyone clarify its interpretation, other than the one that I have grasped his hand, brought up beside myself, the one about whom I inform you that whomever I am his master (*mawla*), then Ali is his master and he is Ali ibn abi Talib, my brother, the executor of your will (*wasiyyath*), whose appointment as your guardian and leader has been sent down to me from Allah, the mighty and majestic”.^{viii} Monique Bernads gives different meaning for the word ‘*mawla*’. He argues that the word ‘*mawla*’ refers to his succession, he writes “when *mawla* is glossed by *halif*, it is in fact a shortened form of *mawla bil halif*. One of the types of relationships between non- agnates is *wala bi halif* (a tie by oath by alliance) this term is recorded as one of the types of *wala* without explanation”.^{ix}

The Kondotty Thangal tried to spread this ideology to the common people, but this was not happen apparently, however it was done very systematically and strategically by them, because they were aware of *Sunni* influence of Malabar and understood that it could not change the belief at a stretch. At the first instance of Persian Islam in Malabar many *Sunni* scholars strongly opposed their views and ideology. Many books were being written by the regional scholars. In the same manner they tried to spread the concept of Imamates of Shia. They believe that their ten *imamas* are the path finder to them and it is very essential to follow them in all aspects of their life. The tenth one will come only in the time of to doomsday.

However there are many apparent influences of Persian Islam in Malabar. Mainly the celebration of *nercha* in the memory of a respected person or a scholar which would be amalgamated with regional art forms.^x It had become very popular and got common attention only after the coming of Kondotty Thangal. Though it was Persian culture Mappila Muslims started to celebrate the *nercha* with due importance. One can see the beginnings of many *nerchas* in the second half of eighteenth and the beginning of nineteenth century. The Mamburam and Veiyankode *nerchas* are best examples for it.^{xi}

System of *uruk* (amulet) tying also introduced by the Persians. Even though the Hadhrami Sayyids tried to wash out the Persian culture they could not remove many practices which were deep rooted in the society. *Uruk* system

was one amongst them. In later years the Hadhrami Sayyids themselves started to practice the *uruk* for the medicinal purposes. Nowadays, the system of *uruk* is very common in Malabar. Majority of people who used to go to the religious scholars to get their blessing and *uruk* on which they chanted some *dikr* (praising of gods). Besides this there were many other practices which was imbibed from Persian Islam, and these practices still exist in Malabar. However Hadhrami Sayyids tried to fight against soe practices which is very similar to the *shia* culture using their nail and teeth. As a result there emerged constant fight between two sects in the name of *Ponnani Kondotti Kai issue*.

3.Ponnani-Kondotty Conflict (*Kaitharkkam*)

After the death of Muhammad Sha, his sons and grandsons started to propagate Persian Islam in Malabar in a systematic manner which attracted many Muslims to the view of ‘sha’ of Kondotty. This became the bone of contention between Ponaani and Kondotty sect. C.A. Innes writes “in south Malabar they are divided into two divisions, preferring allegiance to the Valiya Jarathingal Tungal of Ponnani and Kondotty Tngal respectively. The followers of the latter are said by those of the former to be *Shias*, but they themselves claim to be Sunnis. The difference between the two parties sometimes become acute and lead to disturbances”.^{xii} In the same manner William Logan also says that the advance of Muhammed sha caused for the separation of Muslims into two groups.^{xiii} Many scholars started to criticize each other. When Tipu invaded Malabar elite people took the issue to his court. As Tipu was pro Persian islamist he gave the verdict in favor of the Kondotty sect. The invasion of Tipu was a golden opportunity to the Kondotty sect. When Tipu established a fort at Farookabad, he invited all scholars to his court. However he gave due importance to the Kondotty Faqir^{xiv} and gave the title of Inamdar to the Kondotty Thangal and allotted many lands for the need of propagation and to build mosques at Kondotty.

Veneration was continued even after the coming of British in Malabar. The British respected Kondotty Faqir and recognized their *Inamdar* title and extended all help which they wanted. Kondotty Faqirs also supported British activities in Malabar this caused very strong opposition from the *ulema* of Malabar. Conrad Wood writes, “in the period of 1836- 1919 the Kondotty Tangals were generally successful in ensuring that none of their adherents were implicated in the periodic Mopilah Outbreaks in the suppression of which the Kondotty faction indeed sometimes participated”.^{xv} Therefore british

also helped them by avoiding the land revenue as reported in Malabar Manual “just before the joint commission was dissolved, the company made a grant exempting the lands of the Kundotti Thangal (a high priest of one section of Mappilas) from payment of the revenue as had been the custom in Tipu’s time on condition that our Thangal and his people would prove loyal to Honourable Company- a promise which they have ever since very faithfully fulfilled”.^{xvi} But the Scholars of Ponaani opposed the Kondotty Thangal using by all means. This opposition caused the flowerers to the Thangal to lessen.

The key issue in the case of Kondotty Thangal was the *sijida* of *murids* in front of the *Sheik*. This was strongly condemned by the *Sunni* scholars and argued that the *sijida* in front of a creature is prohibited by Allah and all those who bow their head in front of creatures is out of Islam. The scholars like Umar Kazhi wrote a poetry against the *sijida*. In the same manner Bava Musliyar wrote book against the *sijida* by analyzing all aspects of it and proved that the *sijida* practice in front of creature is not part of Islam. Kondotty faction also gave befitting replies. Faqir wrote a letter to Maqdhoom Bava Musliyar. In this letter he claimed that the *sijida* are in two types, *sijida sharaee* and *sijida lavi*. The first one is allowed only in front of the God but the latter is permissible in Islam.^{xvii} Husain K. writes “in safar 1301/ December 188, Puli Thodikayil Ali Musliyar, the Qazi of Takiyya issued a Fatwa Justifying the prostration. He explained there are two types of prostration, the first being *sijida- al Haqiqi* or *sijida al- shar* that which is performed by placing seven parts of the body on the floor and the second being *sijida majazi* that which is the bowing one’s head and body. The former is allowed only to God and the latter which is also called *sijidathu Thahiyyat* (prostration of greeting) is recommended to Sufis and holy persons. To support his verdict Ali Musliyar quoted statements from different law books. For eg, it had been stated in Jamul Sageer that the prostration is of two types. The prostration of worship and that of greeting. The latter is performed as a mark of respect to those other than God.”^{xviii}

4. Hadhrami Sayyids’ Interventions in the Issue

The beginning of *Kai* issue was really just after the visit of Sayyid Jifri to the *Kanqah* of Muhammed Sha and strongly condemned the *Tariqath* of the Kondotty Thangals. He advised the Muslims that the Kondotty Thangals were against the practices of prayer and *Hajj* and they tried their best to demolish Islam in Malabar. He wrote in his

book *Kanzul Baraheen* that the Kondotty Thangals were the addicts of Hashish and drugs and propagated that the nudity helps to reach to Allah very easily.^{xix} Again he “criticizes both the Qazis (Qazi of Kondotty Taqiyya) for neglecting the book of God and the tradition of prophet Muhemmed and blames them for following the heretic Sheikh and leading the people astray. He cautioned them with great prediction if they did not repent for their wrongs”.^{xx} However the Qadi of Taqiya, Abdul Asees Musliyar at Kondotty defended all the criticism against the Kondotty Thangal. He argued that the *Sharia* scholars has no right to intervene in the life of Sufi because ,their life is beyond the *Sharia*. But Sayyid Jifri was not ready to succumb, he claimed that all those who is acting against the Islamic Sharia is not a real Muslim. Again he quoted the *Adkiya* of Zaindheen that all the sufi should follow the sharia rules only through the following the sharia can bag both haqiqa and tariqa (two stages in the sufi orders).^{xxi}

Even though the followers of Kondotty turned down the claims of *Sunni* people that they practiced the worship of *Shia* Muslims in certain days. Hadhrami Sayyids considered them as the descendants of Bora family who migrated to Calicut from Mumbai. On some occasions they called the followers of Kondotty Thangal as *Rawafil*. On the other hand Ishtihyaq Sha of Kondotty wrote a long letter to the Muslims of Kerala about their tariqa which was followed by them and their dedication to the Islam. Moreover he refuted all the criticism of Hadhrami Sayyids as a story they cooked up to under estimate his *Murids*. At the end of this letter he claimed that he is the authority of the Qadhiri Silsila in Malabar.^{xxii}

After the hectic intervention of Hadhrami Sayyids, there created a clear division in the society. The Kondotty faction was not allowed to enter in the mosques of the *Sunnis* and it was prohibited to bury in the *Sunni* mosque after their death too. It was considered as taboo to eat the meat which is slaughtered by the Kondoty faction. The marital relation would be broken by joining either the bride or groom to the Kondotty faction .These conditions were put forth with the loyal support of Hadhrami Sayyids. In the same manner Hadhrami Sayyids refused to make the Kondotty faction *imams* in any mosque and taking part in celebration in their homes. They even refused eating food which was prepared by them and withdrew from eating along with them.

The war of words lasted till the death of Sayyid Jifri in the dawn of nineteenth century. There was tranquility after his death but it was resumed in 1835 when a marriage issue took place

in Malabar. The issue was that one woman took a *sijida* in front of the Kondotty faqir. The Ponnani faction claimed that the marriage ties with her husband was broken by her *sijida* to the Faqir.^{xxiii} However Kondotti faction argued that the separation will not happen by the *sijida*. Any way the scholars from Arabian countries also intervened in this issue and issued fatwa in favour of Ponnani faction. This was a setback to the Kondotty faction.

In 1843, Ahemmed Musliyar Padur proclaimed in his speech at Edvanna in Malappuram that the *sijida* and the Muharram celebration just like *shiate* is prohibited in Islam. This caused much hue and cry in the society, meanwhile Kondotty faction challenged to prove it by evidence. Against this background Ponnani faction agreed to prove it in a public space with the presence of scholars from both factions. But Kondotty faction evaded from this program. However months later, again Kondotty faction challenged the Ponnani factions. So Shujaee moudu Musliyar from Ponnani faction and Ahemmed Kutti Musliyar from Kondotty sect participated. In this challenge Ahmed Musliyar was gagged with the questions of Moudu Musliyar. This event was caused the flow of hundreds of people from Kondotty to Ponnani faction.

Few years later there was an issue pertaining to establishment of new Jumath mosque at Kondotty because *Sunni* scholars were reluctant to participate in the Juma of Kondotty faction. Nevertheless this caused an argument within the *Sunni* sect itself. Some scholars supported to establish a new mosque while some others strongly opposed it. This problem was solved after assumption of office of Qazi by Payakath Ahammed Musliyar who tried to make a reconciliation between the two groups by his sincere interventions but the conflict between the faction still remained.

On the other hand there was relentless effort from the part of Hadhrami Sayyids to propagate Shafi school of jurisprudence and its practices. It could gain its aim through their system of *Dars*^{xxiv} and other Islamic educational system. By the twentieth century there was a strong influence of *Shafi* School of jurisprudence in Malabar.

5.De-Personalization and Propagation of *Shafi* School of Jurisprudence

By the advance of Hadhramies in Malabar there was a socio cultural revival in the life of

Mappilas. They influenced the local people using their lineage and other things to invite the people to their ideology as they had done wherever they migrated. Anne K.Bang writes “for large proportion of the educated elite, the books read were the same as in Hadramawt, the Sufi orientation was that of Hadhrami Alawis, the Alawi *moulid* ritual was that of Hadramawt- and so forth.”^{xxv}

As Hadhramies were the followers of *Shafi* School of jurisprudence, they propagated *shafi* ideology in all the localities where they migrated. On this ground one can see that the spread of *Shafi* school in Malay Archipelago, Indonesia, East Africa, etc. Anne K.Bang writes, “what we know about the Zanzibari *Shafi* Ulema derives from the retrospective accounts begin where the *tarjamas* of Hadhrami Alawis end; focusing on Zanzibar, they depict a tight woven network of *shafi* scholars, some of whom were part of the Alawi tradition, others who looked elsewhere for their orientation.”^{xxvi} *Shafi* School of law was the main feature of Hadramaut that is why they attempted to introduce *Shafi* School at the first stage as Peter G. Riddell writes “an important feature of Islam in Hadramaut was the preponderance of the *shafi* school of law. Indeed so complete was its dominance that alternative schools of law were largely absent”.^{xxvii}

However in the case of Malabar *Shafi* School of jurisprudence was already exist through the Maqdhoom family of Ponnani who propagated the *Shafi* School. It is worth mentioning that Zainuddeen Maqdhoom wrote a book in *Shafi* school of Jurisprudence which became world famous which is using till this date across the globe. But the advance of Hadhrami gave only a revival to this school. Hadhrami Sayyids gave *fatwa* and arbitration using the *Shafi* school of law.

By introducing *Shafi* School of law Hadhrami Sayyids challenged the Kondotty Faqirs in all its aspects. The *Shafi* school responded against *sijida* and their celebration of *muharram* in the *shiate*^{xxviii} style. It is promulgated by the Hadhrami Sayyids that a person can follow any silsila of tariqa while the following the one of the four school of jurisprudence is very necessary to all Muslims. But Kondotty Faqirs were denied this fact by saying that they are the followers of the Qadiri Tariqah.

Erection of numerous masjid at every corner of the Malabar was the major changes after the Hadhrami migration.^{xxix} In those masjids Hadhrami sayyids initiated to start the *palli dars* in Yemeni model. In the nineteenth and twentieth century *palli dars* system was an important way of

Islamic knowledge accumulation. In this *palli dars* Hadhrami Sayyids announced the negative aspects of the Kondotty faqir and the *anti shriath* factors of Kondotty faction. Moreover all the students in this mosques were molded in the *Shafi* jurisprudent ideology and send for Islamic propagation at village areas of Malabar.

6. Conclusion

One can understand that the role of Muhammed Sha of Kondotty and his followers were helped in jetting access in Malabar but the advance of Hadhramies created a big impediments in front of them. Hadhramies were major opponents of the Kondooty faction in terms of their Islamic perspectives. Moreover Hadhramies' opposition towards the *Shia* community was not only in Malabar but was very obvious across the globe. This enmity was started from the beginning of tenth century onwards as the *Shia* community were the major reasons for the migration of Hadhramies.

After long years of fight between the *Shiaism* and *Sunnism* there took place big change in the culture of Malabar through the Hadhrami Sayyids who propagated shafi school and its laws. This change influenced many Muslims to the *Shafi* school of jurisprudence meanwhile Kondotty faction lost its followers in a large amount. But still there are some followers in the suburban areas of Kondotty. However there conduct a big *nerchas* in every year and believe that the participation in the *nercha* itself cause to recuperate many ailments. This practices still remain though the followers are very limited. On the other hand *shafi* school got a mass support around ninety percents of Malabar Muslims and to oppose the practices of Kondotty sect.

In the case of Malabar, the conflict between Kondotty and Ponnani faction was a severe issue in the history of Malabar history. Only the religious issue became the matter for discussion around for two centuries. It even created obstacles in fighting against the British in nineteenth and twentieth century. When one faction fought against the British the other faction supported the British. However this conflict was terminated only after the over interventions of British in Malabar and its exploitation of common people. On this occasion, many leaders were created other than the religious leaders. People stood behind these leaders to fight against the British in 1921 and later.

ⁱ Persian Islam is the *shia* Islam

- ⁱⁱ Randathani, Hussain, *Mappila Malabar* (mal.), Islamic Publishing Burro, Calicut, 2005, p. 133
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Shia* belief is its main ideolgy
- ^{iv} Dale, Stephen, "The Hadhrami Diaspora in South-Western India: The role of the Sayyids of the Malabar Coast", in Ulrike Freitag and William G. Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s*, Brill, Leiden, 1997, p. 176
- ^v There are four school of jurisprudence in islam
- ^{vi} Kareem C.K., *Malappuram District Gazetteer*, Government Press, Ernakulam, 1986, p. 199.
- ^{vii} It is commonly known as *Hajjathul wida*
- ^{viii} Imam Bukhari, *Saheehul Bukhari*, vol 5 p. 280
- ^{ix} Monique Bernads, *Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam*, Brill, Lieden, 2005, p.24
- ^x Gangadaran M. , *Mappila Padanangal* (mal.), Vachanam Books, Calicut, 2007, p. 146
- ^{xi} *Ibid.* p. 147
- ^{xii} Innes C.A., *Malabar Gazetteer*, Kerala Gazetteers Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, p. 188
- ^{xiii} Krishnan T.V., *Malabar Manual* (trans.), Mathrubhoomi Books, Calicut, 2014, p. 154
- ^{xiv} Kondotty Thangal family commonly known as Kondotty Faqir
- ^{xv} Wood, Conrad, *Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis*, South Asia Books, New Delhi, 1987, p.50
- ^{xvi} William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Government PreSS, Madras, p. 494.
- ^{xvii} *Ibid.* p. 51
- ^{xviii} Husain K., *Mappila Muslim Society of 19th Century*, Unpublishe P.h.D. Thesis, Calicut University, 2013, p.236.
- ^{xix} Sayyid Jifri, *Kanzul Baraheen*, Manuscript, Jifri House, p. 463
- ^{xx} Husain K., *Mappila Muslim Society of 19th Century*, Unpublishe P.h.D. Thesis, Calicut University, 2013, p.236.
- ^{xxi} Sheik Zainudheen, *Hidaythul Adkiya ila Tarikul Awliya* (Arabic), Ihsan Publishers, Melmuri, 1993, p. 36
- ^{xxii} Letter written by Ishtihyaq sha to the Muslims of Malabar, Manuscript, 1860.
- ^{xxiii} By offering sijida she was considered as out of Islam. By becoming one of the person out of isalm the marriage tie will broken.
- ^{xxiv} It is just like seminary to give the Islamic knowledge.
- ^{xxv} Bang, K. Anne, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860-1925*, Routledge, Newyork, 2003, p. 153
- ^{xxvi} *Ibid.* p. 93
- ^{xxvii} Peter G. Riddel, 'Religious Links Between Hadhramaut and the Malay-Indonesian World. C. 1850 to C. 1950', in Ulrike Freitag and William G. Clarence-Smith (eds.), op.cit, p. 219.
- ^{xxviii} It is celebration of muharram with extreme happiness and perform many acrobatics using the weapons and etc.
- ^{xxix} Husain Randathani, op.cit., p. 122