

EVOLUTION OF MUSLIM POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN KERALA - A HISTORICAL SURVEY

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Muslims of Kerala were not an organized group socially or politically till 1922. The Rebellion of 1921 and the human and economic loss it brought about agonized the minds of Muslim leaders who had decided to do something to save the community from such hardships and to do something to avoid such situations arising again in future.¹ At that time Kodungally, where the Muslim reformist leaders had gone hiding in order to escape from the police atrocities on account of the Rebellion, became the centre of Muslim reformation in Kerala. There, the Muslim leaders formed an association called the *Kerala Muslim Aikya Sanghom* in 1922. Though the *Sanghom* concentrated shown

interest in political affairs too. Several Muslim political leaders, of that period like Seethi Sahib, Muhammad Schamnad, T.M. Moidu, Uppi Sahib and Pokker Sahib were mainly on the social reformation and educational advancement of the community, it had connected with the activities of the movement.

The *Sanghom* held twelve annual meetings at different centres in Kerala from 1922 to 1934. Finally in 1934 at The Twelfth Annual Conference held at Cannanore, it was decided to merge the *Sanghom* with The Kerala Muslim Majlis as the aims and objectives of both the organizations were similar and the leadership of the movements was also the same.²

The Kerala Muslim Majlis

The Kerala Muslim Majlis, the first Muslim political organization of Kerala was formed on 22 August 1931 at an 'All Kerala Muslim Conference' held at Tellichery.³ The Conference was convened with the aim of having a common platform for the Muslims of Malabar and the neighboring regions like South Canara, Cochin and Travancore to discuss the problems and to get their grievances redressed. The annual conferences of the Majlis were held at different places. It passed resolutions and submitted memorandums to the Government ventilating the grievances of Muslims. Meanwhile election to the Central Legislative Assembly was held on 10th November 1934. From the West Coast Muslim Reserved Constituency, Muhammad Abdurahiman and Abdul Sathar Sait contested as independent candidates. When the election results were declared, the Nationalist Muslim leader Muhammad Abdurahiman was defeated by Sathar Sait who later became the founder of The Muslim League in Malabar. This victory of Sathar Sait was a clear indicator of how the Muslim politics was going to develop in Malabar. At the third annual conference of the Majlis, the leaders decided to merge the party with the Muslim League.

Formation of Muslim League in Malabar

Owing to differences of opinion among the leaders of the Majlis on political grounds, that is, whether to remain in the Congress or to have a separate organization for the Muslims, the activities of The Majlis came to a standstill. At the same time Abdul Sathar Sait, who was elected to The Central Legislature came in touch with the leaders of the All India Muslim League. He was later nominated to the Working Council of the

party. At the same time prominent leaders from other parties like K.M. Seethi Sahib and K.M. Maulavi from the Congress and T.M. Moidu from the Justice Party joined the Muslim League. In short the background for the formation of a unit of the League was slowly and steadily developing at that time in Malabar.

As per the Government of India Act of 1935, elections to the State Assemblies were held in 1937. As far as the Muslim politics of Malabar was concerned it was a turning point as it provided the first opportunity for the Muslim League to show its strength in Malabar. There were six Muslim reserved Constituencies in Malabar and the All India Muslim League had fielded three candidates. Among them A.K.Khadar Kutty and Abdurahiman Ali Raja came out successful.

In the same year, the first committee of the Malabar District Muslim League was formed with Abdurahiman Ali Raja as President.⁴ By the close of nineteen thirties and at the beginning of nineteen forties, several national leaders of the League like Maulana Shaukath Ali, Fazlul Haq, Chaudhari Khaliq Zaman, Nawab Liaqat Ali Khan and others visited Malabar addressing huge crowds at many Muslim centres. Their tour and their oratory had created a tremendous impact on the Mappilas of Malabar. The District League Conferences of 1940 (Calicut) and 1941 (Palaghat) also turned out to be milestones in the growth of the party in Malabar. The nation wide agitation of the party demanding the creation of Pakistan generated great enthusiasm among the Mappilas. It was during this period that P.K.Moideen Kutty, a former President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee left

the party and joined the Muslim League. The Mappila leaders went a step further and demanded a separate state for the Mappilas called the 'Mappilastan'⁵.

In the meantime, another all India organization of Muslims called 'The All India Muslim Majlis' was formed to counter the growing influence of the League. This Pro-Congress Organization was opposed to the League demand for Pakistan. A unit of the Majlis was constituted in May 1945 at a meeting presided over by its National General Secretary, Maulana Abdulla Mistry.⁶

Muslim League after Partition

After the partition of India, the Muslim League was facing the question whether to disband it or not. Prominent national leaders of the party had shifted to Pakistan. Some of them resigned from the party and joined other political parties. Some of them even left active politics. In many states the league units had either ceased functioning or changed its name. For instance, in Bombay they adopted the name the 'Fourth Party'. In Travancore-Cochin they decided to disband itself in 1949 and did not resume political activities until 1959.⁷ Some people thought that there was no need for having a separate organization to protect the rights of Muslims as there was no objection to worship or to pursuit of religious activities. Some others argued that since the League had achieved its goal of creating a Muslim majority state of Pakistan, there was no need to continue that organization in India.

Meanwhile, a Consultative Meeting of the All India Muslim League was held at Karachi in December 1947 to discuss the future of the organization. At the meeting it was decided to separate the party into

two, viz., the Indian Union Muslim League for India and the Pakistan Muslim League for that country. As per the decision of the Karachi convention, a meeting of the Muslim League was convened at Madras on 10th March 1948 to chalk out the future programmes of the party.

Muslim League in the Elections

Since India became a Republic in 1950, on the basis of the new constitution, general elections were held throughout the country in 1952. It was the first election after the Partition of the Country and after the abolition of the system of separate electorates for Muslims and other communities. Moreover, for the first time in the history of India, an election was conducted on the basis of universal adult franchise. In the election to the Madras Assembly, Muslim League fielded twelve candidates and won five seats, whereas the Congress had contested for thirty two seats in Malabar area, but could win only four seats. In the Parliament election also the League candidate won the election from the Malappuram constituency defeating his rival Congress candidate by a margin of about seventeen thousand votes.

In the Assembly election, no party got the required seats to form a ministry. The Communist Party approached the leaders of the League to support them to form a Non-Congress Ministry. But the League leaders categorically declared that they would not support a ministry led by the Communists. Instead they decided to extend support to the Congress to form a ministry headed by Rajagopalachari. This friendship continued during the period of Kamaraj also.⁸

In the first election to the Kerala

Assembly in 1957, the League proposed an alliance with the Praja Socialist Party in order to prevent the Communists from coming to power. But when the issue came up for discussion at the Indore session of the A.I.C.C, the majority of the delegates opposed that move. At the same time leaders of P.S.P. were ready to have an alliance with the League. In that election Muslim League fielded 14 candidates to the Assembly and 3 candidates to the Parliament, and won 8 seats in the Assembly and one seat in the Parliament. After election, the Communists came to power with the support of the independents. With this election, the Election Commission recognized the League as a State Party.⁹

The Progressive Muslim League

The participation of the League in the 'Liberation Struggle' resulted in the emergence of a new Muslim political organization called the Progressive Muslim League.¹ Most of its leaders and followers were actually Communist Sympathizers. In the Assembly election that followed the fall of the Communist Ministry, they fielded their own candidates, but were defeated and they slowly disappeared from the scene.

In the interim election of 1960, the Congress formed an alliance with the P.S.P. and the Muslim League. They came out in the election with a thumping majority. The League contested in 12 seats and won 11 seats. The Congress itself secured the required seats for an absolute majority. Hence, they decided to form the Government without the League. At the same time the P.S.P. declared that they would not join the Government if the League had no part in it. Mannath

Padmanabhan, the leader of the Nair Community also strongly demanded for the inclusion of the League in the ministry. At last a suggestion was mooted to give the League nominee the Speaker's post in the Assembly. K.M. Seethi Sahib was thus unanimously elected Speaker. It was the first time after independence that a Muslim League member got elected to this esteemed post.¹¹

With the sudden death of Seethi Sahib problems again cropped up in the front. The Congress High Command was not in favor of giving the Speakership to another League candidate. At the same time the leadership of the League proposed the name of C.H.Muhammad Koya for that post, Koya should resign from the party. The Congress decision was only the consequence of the Durgapur A.I.C.C. Resolution which demanded that the party should keep away from making alliances with communal forces. After prolonged discussion the League leaders conceded the demand put forth by the Congress.

Samastha Kerala Muslim League

In the 1967 election the League by changing its policy of anti-Communism, made an alliance with Marxist Party. In the election, the League fielded 15 candidates and won 14 seats. It is to be noted that the Congress which contested in 133 seats could win only nine seats. In the Parliament election, which was held simultaneously, the League won two seats for which it contested.

As a protest against League's alliance with the Communists, a small section of the Muslim Leaguers left the party and formed the Samastha Kerala Muslim League. In the election they fielded six

candidates. All of them were not only defeated but even lost their deposits. As per the previous understanding between the parties of the coalition, the League was given seats in the Cabinet besides the Deputy Speaker's post. After partition it was for the first time that the League was participating in the Government of a State.

All India Muslim League

In 1974, while the Muslim League was sharing power with the Congress, a major split occurred in the party. Though it started as personal rivalry among the leaders, it has turned out to be an orientation for an ideal. The dissidents who were dissatisfied with the style of functioning of the Achyutha Menon Government and the party later split away from the League and formed a new political party called the All India Muslim League. Six M.L.A.s had gone to that side.¹² They informed the Speaker of the Assembly that they are withdrawing support to the Government. When the National Emergency was declared in 1975, most of the leaders and M.L.As of that party along with other opposition leaders were detained. In the 1977 election to the State Assembly and to the Parliament both the Leagues fielded 16 candidates each. While the I.U.M.L. secured 13 seats, the A.I.M.L. could win only three seats. Thus, once again the I.U.M.L. came to the power in the state.

In 1979, when P.K. Vasudevan Nair Ministry resigned and the two parties of the Ruling Front, viz., the C.P.I. and the R.S.P. crossed over to the Left Front, it created a crisis in Kerala Politics. Split in the Congress and in the Kerala Congress Party further worsened the situation. In that condition there was only one

compromising formula to avert the impending President's rule in the state that was to form a Government led by C.H. Muhammad Koya, the leader of the I.U.M.L. Thus, with the support of 83 members, Koya became the Chief Minister of Kerala on 12 October 1979. Though he was in power for a few days only, his ministry was significant in many respects. He was the first Muslim Chief Minister of Kerala and the first Muslim League Chief Minister of Independent of India. With regard to the size and term of the Ministry also it was the shortest in Kerala. Any way it can be regarded as the climax of Muslim political ascendancy in Kerala.¹³

Muslim Democratic Party

In the early nineteen eighties, some orthodox ulamas formed a new Muslim political organization called the Muslim Democratic Party who claimed to be the protectors of the Sunni Muslims. Sensing the danger in it, the leadership of the Muslim League came forward by announcing a pension scheme for the *Mukris*. Fortunately for the League, by this time the dissident group after dissolving their party returned to their parent organization. Namboodiripad on the Islamic Shariat had actually provoked and hastened the process of their return. The merger of the A.I.M.L had actually strengthened the party. But with the demolition of Babari Masjid, again problems started within and outside the party. Many quarters began to question the relevance of the association of the League with the Congress. By raising the question of Babari Masjid issue and by putting The Congress Party on the defendant side in that matter, three Muslim political parties emerged. The first one was started by Abdul Nasar Ma'dani, called the

people's Democratic Party and the second one was founded by Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait, called The Indian National League. The third one was founded by a section of Muslim Youth, the majority of whom were former SIMI activities, to counter the threat of Hindu fascist forces, known as The National Development Front in 1993. Later in 2006 they merged with The Popular Front of India. In 2009, they resolved to form a new political movement called the Social Democratic Party of India.

In Kerala where the coalition politics has got relevance, nobody has hitherto come forward to accept the aforesaid parties in their political fronts. Hence, though they were also contesting the elections they could not come out successful or exhibit their decisive presence in the Kerala politics.

Findings

1. Since the majority of the Muslims of Kerala joined The League, the Muslim community of the state became politically a united group, compared to the Muslims of other states. 2. Through their partnership in the Government, they were able to achieve more benefits to the community. The educational and service sectors the Muslims of Kerala had moved ahead of their counterparts in other states. The social and educational organizations like the Muslim Service Society, The Muslim Educational society, the Educational Association etc., had joined their hands with the League to attain this position. 3. The participation in the Government and the contact the League had with the secular parties had helped the League to get transformed from a mere communal organization into a non-communal and responsible political party striving for the

welfare of the whole people and development of the nation. 4. The responsibility for making the League a political force to be reckoned with goes to the secular-national parties like the Congress and the Communist Party. While the major political parties sought the help of the League to capture power, the League by using their bargaining power tried to increase their mass base. 5. In Kerala the League gained strength at a time when in other parts of India they were losing their power or were witnessing a complete exit from the political scene. 6. The success of the League experiment gave rise to the birth of other political parties based on their castor community. 7. Among the Muslim Political Movements of Kerala, the Indian Union Muslim League, of course, was the most popular and successful organization. 8. The sense of insecurity and apprehensions in the Muslim Community created by the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the communal riots that followed resulted in the emergence of three or more new Muslim political parties in Kerala and there by making a heavy damage to the notion that, politically the Muslims of Kerala are a monolithic solid structure.

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