



Journal of Contemporary Politics

Research Article

Jinnah-type Neta: Yearning for Elite and Cosmopolitan Political Leadership among the Muslims in Kerala

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18.10.2022

Revised 21.11.2022

Accepted 16.12.2022

Published 28.12.2022

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[https://doi.org/](https://doi.org/10.53989/jcp.v1i2.11)

10.53989/jcp.v1i2.11



ABSTRACT

This work presents debates on leadership in Muslim community in Kerala analysing the experience of Indian National Muslim League in the state. There are four varieties of leadership, namely, Jinnah-type, ulama, pradesika and pragmatic in Muslim League emerged within the specific political and religious context of Kerala. Of the types of leadership, Jinnah-type and pradesika are in constant conflict right from the beginning and this conflict has shaped contemporary history Muslim League in the state. This work also examines the transformation in nature of League leadership and persistence of Kerala Muslim community's yearning for an elite cosmopolitan leadership while at the same time always critiquing it. Such an examination explores the construction and stabilization of certain 'models' through the discourse set around the Muslim leadership in general and League leadership in particular.

Keywords: Political leadership; Cosmopolitan; Kerala; Muslim community

INTRODUCTION

C.H. (C. H. Muhammad Koya, known popularly as 'C. H.' is former Chief Minister of Kerala and the leader of Indian Union Muslim League) with his profound knowledge and proficiency in English language could stand out in the discussions in the Indian Parliament. His trademark sense of humour and use of satirical expressions in Malayalam remained intact in his speeches in English at the Parliament. Treasury benches, in fact, found a dangerous enemy in this young revolutionary... Koya studied different aspects of subject of his speech before making any intervention in the House. He read hundreds of books for preparing every speech. His style of reading also was surprising; he was able to read a book in half an hour while others taking hours to finish reading it.¹

These generous descriptions about Koya, especially about his knowledge, sharp intellect, English language proficiency and habit of wide and extensive reading as some of the adjectives of his leadership qualities, may seem unusual to the readers outside Kerala, but when viewed from a local perspective, they come from a peculiar tradition of political leadership shaped by Islam in the region. It does not address specific conceptions about leadership in the larger Islamic world with the intent to provide universally accepted models about what a Muslim leader should be. Islam, of course, provides the basis for both leadership and its actual universal form and practice. But the tradition of Muslim leadership in Kerala often stays linked to a multiplicity of models of leadership emerged time to time in the history of Muslim community in the region, not necessarily the models that Khulafa al-rashidun, the first four successors of the Prophet



set, which the Muslim communities world over consider ideal.

So, there is an innate and perennial tension between entrenched local practices and what Islam has instructed about leadership in the Muslim community in Kerala. This tension resurfaces whenever there is a serious allegation about the leadership in the Muslim community, especially in the Indian Union Muslim League, a community-based political party that occupies an all-important position in the Muslim politics of Kerala. Islam becomes a major reference point for normative debates on such occasions and people invoke the traditions of the first four caliphs in Sunni Islam for setting a comparison. Though Islamic ideals of leadership seldom makes any influence on the formation of Muslims leadership in the context of Kerala, while discussing various forms of it, some aspects of its relationship to the religious history must be analysed.

Khalifa Umar's leadership, for that matter, holds a special position in the Islamic tradition. Though the leadership in Islam is defined generally in terms of *taqwa* or personal character and the ability to motivate *Mu'mins* or those who believe in the Truth towards the realisation of specific religious objectives, Umar's life has been set as a benchmark for how or what an ideal Islamic rule should be. To underline the importance of it, people frequently refer to tales from the life of Umar, most of which revolve around the 'austere life' of him. His daily routine of patrolling around the city of Medina in the night to monitor the quality of life of the subjects in person is a favourite theme recurrently appears in the Friday sermons on occasions, when people want to criticize the leadership in the community. As is the case in every Muslim community, the leadership of Umar carries a metaphoric value or offers a model to be emulated, but mostly in an imaginative setting. However, it is interesting to note that when people in the Muslim community of Kerala often imagine an Umar-type leadership as the ideal one, they never insist to have such a model in practical politics. They instead desire for a pragmatic leader with modern secular outlook, who they believe, will be or pretend to be at their disposal in needs.

Such attributes rather may have particular political purposes to serve due to a long history of neglect, prejudice and outright denigration of political and intellectual capacities of Muslim leaders by branding them as fanatic, uncivilized, illiterate during the colonial period.² The fear of 'fanatical' anti-colonial Muslim leaders of Malabar has historically been deep-seated in the social imaginary in Kerala and was often popularized by the British accounts on them. The postcolonial leadership among the Muslims of Kerala, therefore, was compelled to defend the community against colonialist stereotypes. They insisted on the need to rely on modern education because of the power political potential of it.

This study presents an account of how discourse on leadership in Islam in Kerala can be thematised, described and discussed taking cues from the Muslim League in the state. In this work, I deal with specific individual leaders and, concurrently, with different perspectives on life and leadership which developed out of their different life histories. For some of the leaders of this study, their life histories will be sketched out and their attributes of leadership will be discussed about through the description given in their biographies.

Since its inception, the debate over modern education, liberal orientation and secularism in the Muslim League had led to the development of two antagonistic camps—modernists and traditionalists—though not clearly demarcated. Modernists focused mainly on the social and political development in the community that would help integrating it with the 'mainstream'. The traditionalists, in contrast, were portrayed as those who sought to maintain Islamic/moral orientation of the Party by preserving values and traditions of the community with a strong sense that they are still be of use for the present. This schism has been apparent throughout the history of the Party, but one can see that this difference never takes an antagonistic form without reconciliation, but a matter of personal orientation and belief.

Different conceptualizations of leadership in the League have different ethical, pragmatic, religious, political and metaphorical implications. Therefore, to understand the particularities of each type, one needs to have a prior knowledge of the context in which each one emerged. Each individual we discuss here is, to a considerable extent, situated in different social and economic sphere, but connected through Muslim League, the politically binding unit. The difference is because of their belongingness to different schools that influence, determine and shape their thought processes, political outlooks, personalities etc. This also relates to a variety of attributes such as education, outlook, class, and family (sometimes even clan in the case of leaders of Arab origin) and masculinity function as mediating channels through which the quality of leadership is determined. To be precise, these attributes, in their collective form, define the quality of an 'ideal' leader.

Leadership in the League since its inception has been represented largely by two opposite traditions, namely, Jinnah-type neta and Pradesikaneta or local leader. Elite leadership in the early period of the Muslim League can be seen as a quality developing to address common need for building an intellectual base for the Party. It was, therefore, developed to a considerable extent around the image of a 'modern', elite, 'educated' and 'English speaking' 'male' Muslim which Jinnah's persona created or influenced all over the sub-continent. From this perspective, leadership is always seen as linked to a broader political imagination, thus, can be contextualized within the specific social and religious



experience of Kerala Muslims, no matter how universal its imagined qualities were.

This work also maps the transformation in nature of League leadership and examines the persistence of Kerala Muslim community's yearning for an elite cosmopolitan leadership while at the same time always critiquing it. A detailed investigation into the leadership of Muslim League provides us with insights and information about the specific local traditions of leadership in Kerala Muslim community. The intension is to explore the construction and stabilization of certain 'models' through the discourse set around the Muslim leadership in general and League leadership in particular. The discussion is not concerned with whether one type is 'good' and another 'bad' or one 'progressive' and another 'traditional', but rather, with the tendencies and efforts that come to gather in support of one type and attribute to it the characteristic of 'ideal'. The topic is explored further through analysing leadership models narrated in the biographies and autobiographies of the leaders of Muslim League in Kerala published primarily in Malayalam language.

PULL OF PIETY AND PRAGMATISM

The post-independence Muslim political leadership elsewhere in India had/has two levels to act; local and universal. In the universal mode, it holds unity and singularity of the religion at the global level as prime concern. The leaders belonging to the category of 'universal' could assist to attain a wider understanding of 'community' and 'self' placing them in the larger context of global Muslim community. In the local, the leadership, however, reckons with and respects the social and cultural specificities of the locality. In the second case, leaders find it essential to maintain a particularistic outlook in order to make them more appealing to the people of other faiths also. But taking cues from the experience of Kerala, one can say that such a generalization does not jell with the development of Muslim leadership in the region. Kerala rather had some region-specific motivations that shaped the Muslim leadership in the state. This part of the work explores a series of Kerala-specific unshared historical moments that set political movements and institutions, and shaped leadership among the Muslims with a focus on Muslim League. Providing a brief history of Muslim League, I hope, would help understand how each of these historical moments contributed to the making and transforming the leadership in the League.

Malabar district committee of Muslim League, formed in 1937 with Abdul Sathar Sait, K.M. Seethi, K.M. Maulawi, Kottal Uppi and B. Pokker as its founding members, was the first unit of the Party in Kerala in the pre-independence period.³ Malabar district committee functioned under the Madras State Committee which was established almost a year before at the direct intervention of Muhammadali Jinnah. League's presence, initially, had made no resonance

in the Malabar politics. Pokker, one of the most popular faces of the League in its heydays suffered defeat in the elections to Madras Legislative Assembly in 1937. But the activities of the League became intense with the Muslim League conference of 1941 held at Madras in the presence of Jinnah. Many leaders from Malabar had participated in the conference actively. The demand for the creation of Pakistan as a separate country for Muslims gave a new life to it in the first half of the 1940s. The demand became intense throughout the region and managed to gain many takers in Eranad Taluk of pre-independent Kerala which had been an epicentre of Mappila Rebellion of 1921.⁴ Slogans such as Pakistan Allenkil Qabarstan (Pakistan or Graveyard), Pathinju Kathi Kondu Kuthi Vangum Pakistan (We know how to get Pakistan using ten-inch long knife) etc. echoed in the streets throughout the Muslim-dominated pockets.⁵ The visit of Nawabzada Liyaqat Ali Khan, the then General Secretary of All India Muslim League in 1945 offered further boost to the growth of League in Malabar.⁶

After the partition of India in 1947, the All India Muslim League was succeeded by Indian Union Muslim League in the post-independent Kerala. However, the Partition and creation of Pakistan as an independent Muslim state couldn't mobilize Muslims of Malabar much in its favour. The Muslim leaders of Kerala, except a few, had been not supportive of the reality of Pakistan as an independent country. Less in number of takers for Pakistan may be partly because of the cultural and logistic dangers it had in the context of Malabar. In its place, the leaders of the Muslim League were in favour of creating a separate independent province called Moplastan. They argued that only such a move would help improve the situation of Mappila community on educational, political and social fronts. Seethi mooted this demand in the Madras Legislative Assembly. However, Jinnah turned down it in a discussion with the leaders of Muslim League from Malabar held in 1947 in New Delhi alongside the National Council Meeting of the League just before the Partition.⁷

Only a few voluntarily left for Pakistan from Malabar; of the people who opted to be the citizens of Pakistan, most were 'undocumented' workers and petty traders held up in Lahore, Karachi and other major cities of today's Pakistan.⁸ Those who were stuck up in Pakistan faced discriminations of different sorts, being the ethnic one more intense. The Muslim leadership in Kerala initially did not try to resist or accept the two-nation theory of Jinnah and the self-determination thesis of the Communists.⁹ Muslim Leaders associated with the National Movement, especially Muhammad Abdulrahiman, saw it neither as a national issue nor a Pan-Indian Muslim issue. He rather addressed the question of Pakistan as a cultural issue—an issue of two regions, "North" and "South", hence opposed.¹⁰ Abdulrahiman asked:

Pakistan would be carved out of Muslim dominated north-west and north-east states of India, even if they win in



gaining legitimacy for their demand, what we, the Muslims of Madras state, who are minority constituting only 7% of the total population, are going to gain out of that. Are we willing to move down abandoning this place [Malabar]? Is it right for us to raise the demand for Pakistan by inviting the displeasure of majority Hindus here [Malabar]?¹¹

There was a moment soon after Independence that appears to be something like a point of transformation in the history of Muslim politics in Kerala. An urgent and deep concern in the Muslim leadership circles on what should be done to overcome the stigma of partition, though the aftereffects of it was far less in Kerala, emerged. A section of Muslim leaders of the Congress was against the post-independence re-organization of the Muslim League. The leaders like E. Moidhu Maulawi and M. Abdulla Maulawi launched scathing campaigns against the League and presented a resolution in a joint meeting of Muslim clergies and notables in the community in Malabar immediately after the Partition that the League should be dispersed.¹² The leaders like K.M. Maulawi and K.M. Seethi, on the other side, opposed the resolution arguing that the survival of Muslim League was a political necessity.¹³

The early pre-independence leadership in Muslim League in Kerala had allegedly maintained a tilt towards the big merchants and landlords from the community.¹⁴ The economic and religious elites constituted the social constituency of the League leadership in the early phase of its growth. The same group continued to influence the policy making of the Party even in the post-Independence period. T. J. Nossiter describes the post-Independent League leadership as the practitioners of Bazaripolitics.¹⁵

The traders who remained affluent throughout the colonial period became powerful through their intimate relations with the senior leadership of the Party. The Keyis of Thalasserry, a family which maintained strong commercial and political ties with the British East India Company, for instance, had donated many prominent early leaders to the League.¹⁶

Apart from the rich merchants and landlords, there was a quasi-independent class of ulama who maintained close relations with the elite classes.¹⁷ This class was active in politics through their leadership role in a series of anti-colonial uprisings during the British rule. The ulama leadership had given spiritual benediction to several outbreaks of the Mappilas against the oppression of colonial power since the Portuguese period, especially in Southern parts of Malabar.¹⁸ Some scholars of Islamic history seem nostalgic about a time when the line between the religious leadership and the community leadership was blurred.¹⁹ However, the composition remained slightly different in the case of the rank and file of the Party. Among the followers of the League, upper strata consisted of rich landlords with roots in the trade towns such as Kannur, Kozhikode etc. and trans-regional traders based in Koilandi and Thalasserry.

The lower strata comprised of peasants and agricultural labourers of Eranad Taluk. Rich and middle class Gulf migrants were the later entrants to the class base of the League, but now the affluent class of rich Gulf-based business persons play a significant role in the policy making of the Party.²⁰

There has been an internal conflict in the Party between the social and economic background of the followers and the class interests of the leadership. The communist parties—both Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) have always taken advantage of such conflicts, which are basically of class in nature. The Communist parties tried to allure the people of lower stratum by targeting the elite leadership of the League. The League considered the Communist Party as the major rival in Malabar as the political bases of both the parties in Malabar were same; poor peasants, agricultural workers, porters and petty traders.²¹

The Party right from the beginning took out a pragmatic strategy of anti-communism in order to escape from the causalities of this conflict. It was the ulama leadership that helped the Party reconcile the class-based squabbles appeared occasionally in the Party. The Party overcame this challenge mainly by bringing Sayyids and ulama into the leadership and thereby nursing the feeling of the followers, majority whom were from the conservative sections of Muslim population. Coincidentally, Abdul Rahiman Bafakhi Thangal, the first President of Indian Union Muslim League in Kerala, P. S. M. A. Pookoya Thangal who took over the position of president after him and his son Pannakkad Muhammad Ali Shihab Thangal, who succeeded Pookoya Thangal—all the presidents of the League since independence belonged to the Sayyid families, claiming their descent to Ahlul Baithor the family of the Prophet.

No doubt that Bhafakhi Thangal's physical structure, personal charisma, his noble decadence—all have helped his emergence to the position of supreme leader of the community. Tall body with fair complexion, pleasant face, impressive attire along with his elegant behaviour, aristocratic family background, and soft speech—all merge in him to form the attributes of a great leader.²²

The presence of people enjoying special religious status provided legitimacy and ensured the support of the ordinary people to the Party.²³ It turned out to be an un-written convention in the Party to have an affluent figure with Sayyid lineage to lead the organization. N. P. Chekutty points out that the cycles of exchanges between a Sayyid leader and the follower take place outside the sphere of politics as there is a something spiritual about it.²⁴ Ulama and leader became nearly synonymous in the new discursive practices and it conferred vast powers on the Sayyid families. Their powers operated both in the realm of religion as well as in the secular politics.



Panakkad Thangals, a family of Sayyids based in Southern Malabar, were the prominent group that could effectively combine both spiritual and political leadership. They enjoyed the distinction being the Kazi of about thousands of mahals in the state simultaneous to being the leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF), a broader alliance of a set of political parties. Thangals were widely hailed as leaders with utmost piety, spirituality and compassion. Muslims in Malabar turn to them seeking solutions for their problems in daily life. Prominent members from this family often fulfil the role of mediators and peacemakers in politics and their influence, thus, cuts across the boundaries of parties and religions.

The tradition of placing a Sayyid at the helm of the Party was justified, and rationalized in the modern Kerala politics. The reformist thinkers within the party, however, accepted it grudgingly; they stressed on the necessity of a reformed leadership instead. The idea of pious leadership does not neatly fit into the reformist political imagination. In the eyes of critics, such a leadership pulls the community backwards. At some point of time, the influence of Salafi ideology was apparent in shaping the politics of some of the early leaders of the League such as K.M. Maulawi and K.M. Seethi. However, realizing the Sunni dislike over the Salafi orientation of the leaders, Seethi took out the strategy of making the Party appealing to them by bringing Bhafakhi Thangal the most popular Sunni leader into the leadership. Till the 1970s leaders with Salafi orientation dominated the leadership, though the followers belonged mainly to the Sunni faction. Being actively a part of Salafi movement Seethi and Maulawi were the target of criticism from the Sunni leadership for their reformist initiatives such as redefining the concept of interest in the modern context and establishment of faith-based interest-free bank. Maulawi's fatwa favouring modern banking system and substantiating it using the canonical texts of Shāfi jurisprudence especially had attracted the wrath of Sunni orthodoxy.²⁵ While leaders like Maulawi, Seethi, Koya etc. showed an inclination towards Salafi ideology, Bafakhi Thangal, Pookkoya Thangal, Cheriya Mammukkeyi etc. were adhered to the Sunni orthodoxy.

Parallel to this, in neighbouring Tamil Nadu in the post-independence period, Muslim League under the leadership of Khaide. Millat Muhammad Ismail²⁶ had built strong political ties with the Dravidian movement of Anna Durai and the independent party floated by C. Rajagopalchari²⁷ as a counter-alliance to the Indian National Congress in the late 1950s. He led the Party in South India initially, and of late, the whole country for the next two decades after the independence amidst serious political crises. Few South Indian Muslim leaders have been the subject of a more robust and voluminous corpus of writing than Ismail. His popularity hinges not only on his interventions in Indian Parliament and Madras Legislative Assembly but also on

the images of him as a leader emerged from a humble background and lived an austere life projected much by his followers after his death through hundreds of biographical works on him.

Ismail emerged to the leadership in the early 1920s through the Khilafat and civil disobedience movements launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. He dropped his studies in response to a call for boycotting western education by the national movement. From that period onwards, he put on Khadi clothes unto his death. He participated in the Thirunelveli session of All India Congress Committee in 1920 as a volunteer. Through the personality of Ismail, Gandhi's austere life formed an effective model fostering and fomenting the discursive influence of Gandhi among the Muslim Leaders in Kerala.

The anti-colonial posture among the early leaders in the League with Salafi orientation was instilled partly by their Egyptian mentors who had maintained an open admiration towards the anti-British ideology of Mahatma Gandhi in the early twentieth century.²⁸ Gandhi's leadership role in khilafat movement placing the ideology of non-violence at the centre had captured the imagination of many in the Salafi movement in Egypt despite their strong ideological dislike towards the Ottoman caliphate.²⁹ Al-Manar,³⁰ one of the most important media platforms of Islamic modernism in Egypt became the major outlet for these debates to take place.³¹ As al-Manar had a cross-regional influence among the modernist Islamic intellectual circles in South and Southeast Asia, these debates in turn made some profound resonance in the pre-partition India animating a range of potent discourses over colonialism and colonial modernity.

Most of the leaders of the League were previously active in Indian National Congress, but departed when the community drifted away from the movement with the Mappila Rebellion of 1921, which the Congress opposed for its alleged use of violent means in anti-colonial agitation.³² Early leaders like Pokker Sahib represented Malabar in the Khilafat Conference held at Madras presided over by Maulana Shoukkathali³³ while Seethi attended two annual sessions of All India Congress Committee (AICC) as a representative of the State Congress Committee of Cochin held at Lahore in 1929.³⁴

However, as happened in any Muslim societies in the world, the importation of modern secular leadership into the Muslim society in Kerala occurred in the wake of colonialism and as a part of broader modernization of society. In the early twentieth century, the British administration conferred the title of Khan Bahadur, a formal title of respect and honour on the Mappila Muslim notables in Malabar and appointed modern educated Mappilas in certain key position with the intent of creating a new tradition of leadership moulded in the western system of education in the community. K. Muhammad, a native of Kunnankulam in South Malabar was one of many such officers assigned with the mission



of modernizing the community making them exposed to modern education. The British administration in Malabar in the late 1930s appointed him as the special education officer deployed with the job of modernizing Madrasa and designing new curriculum for them.³⁵

THE INVISIBLE JINNAH

As indicated earlier, this work is not about the conflict between “tradition” and “modernity” in Muslim leadership in Kerala, but inter alia, about a particularly constituted tradition about the leadership in which modernity and tradition converge. The history of the League right from the very beginning is characterized by this convergence. The League’s engagement with modernity and tradition is actually far more complex that can be explained here. The idea of modernity had gathered a different collaborative meaning while circulated in the Kerala Muslim context; modernity often compatible with tradition and needed to be protected against distortions and misuse by the ill-motivated. Modernity’s relation with tradition also led to the emergence of a sort of ‘apologetic modernity’, as Faisal Devji rightly termed it.³⁶ The pull of universalism or the closeness of the movement’s thinking to modern thought on one side and its inability to engage with and integrate intellectually due to the unavoidable pressure from local Muslim culture on the other, made any attempt to modernize the community inevitably ‘apologetic’. The formation of Muslim League leadership in Kerala provides an interesting clue to how this dichotomy shaped the politics of the community in Kerala.

Islamic traditions in general distinguish between religious (ulama) and secular leadership (umara). A significant part of this distinction is derived from two related sources, namely Naqly or sources of revealed religion—the Quran and teachings and the practices of the Prophet and Aaqly or sources rationally derived through the secular practices.³⁷ The leaders of the League in the initial stage maintained high regard for the secular leadership and rejected on overvaluation of ulama leadership. Stemming from the community’s attempt to reconceptualise the leadership in the post-1921 period, a line of thinking in the Party with an emphasis on modern education as the principal quality of leadership emerged. Reviving the Muslim community from humiliation and bitter experience of 1921 Rebellion became a commonly accepted agenda among the leadership that made them more liberal in orientation and outlook. The feeling of humiliation also created a political subjectivity and eventually led to the formation of a new consciousness of identity, which was first expressed politically through the activities of Muslim League.³⁸ Simultaneously they denounced the supposed rationality of Western-modelled leadership for its alleged association with liberal ideas. The point is, therefore, not that the early leaders of Muslim League were rational and modern and/whereas the followers intentionally embraced tradition and irrationality in life and

politics. In his work on the life history of K. Uppi Sahib, T.C. Muhammad identifies modern education and habit of reading as two commonly accepted traits of leadership in the early phase of evolution of Muslim League. ‘The collection in his (Sahib’s) library includes books published by Oxford and Macmillan from London.’³⁹ He had the habit of subscribing even English dailies published from outside the country.⁴⁰

Abdul Sathar Sait, the founding president of Muslim League in Malabar, who later left India for Pakistan responding positively to the personal invitation of Jinnah, was supposed to be the first leader belonging to the category of Jinnah-type neta in pre-independence period.⁴¹ There was a campaign against him in the 1934 Elections to the Malabar District Board in which he was a candidate from the Muslim constituency that he had no university degree, whereas the opponent from the Indian National Congress, Muhammad Abdul Rahiman holding a B A honours degree.⁴² The Congress published a leaflet titled ‘Comparative Study’ disclosed this information to defame the image of Sait. The League campaign, on its part, stressed on Sait’s proficiency in three languages including French, the official language of the French Malabar, where he hailed from, along with Kutchi, his mother tongue, and Malayalam, the language of Kerala.⁴³ This sketch of situation shows how the absorption of western education into the leadership qualities has been at the heart of the Muslim politics. This also implies that longing for an elite leadership is something that cannot be understood as a Pan-Indian practice, but as a fundamentally local one occurred within the specific local context of Kerala.

Despite his liberal attitude toward religion, Jinnah provided inspiration for many leaders of Muslim League who were highly religiously oriented. Ironically enough, Jinnah’s belongingness to Shiism did not seem unappealing to many of the Sunni Muslim leaders in Kerala. He has even been canonized in the autobiographies and biographies of them listed as one of the most influential leader. Vatakara, the biographer of Koya, for instance, writes, ‘[T]he role Jinnah’s persona in shaping the worldview of C.H. was instrumental. He was able to quote Jinna hgenerously for everything everywhere. He was of a firm belief that none is comparable to Jinnah who contributed formidably to Muslim politics.’⁴⁴

Through this what vatakara does is not just exposing Koya’s fondness towards Jinnah but raising Jinnah from his narrow political context and universalizing him so as to posit him as the best source of Indian Muslim’s political imagination. The leaders of Muslim League were actually motivated by Jinnah’s modern outlook, not of course his political ideology, that allowed them to imagine and present themselves as Jinnah-like cosmopolitan figures. Biographical works too have contributed much to emerge Jinnah-type leadership as a model for the League leaders to emulate, though they keep a safe distance from him politically. Jinnah



remained politically acceptable only to a miniscule few, while his leadership traits travelled into numerous followers of the League by way of biographical stuff written on him. Autobiographies of the early leaders of the League in which Jinnah's 'liberal' persona has been presented as inspiration in the political formation also played an important role in disseminating the image at a mass level. What is interesting is the way in which Jinnah's personality traits created a resonance in Kerala, farthest corner of India, with a strong dislike for his politics in the post-independence period. What they draw from Jinnah was a form of elitism that promotes a 'liberal' ethos of religion.

The leaders of the League belonging to the category of 'liberal Muslims', however, found it impossible to completely divorce themselves as leaders of the community from religious life and practice. They instead of rejecting religion as a whole, subscribed to a liberal version of Islam in which religion was a private matter of belief. They left a space for religious belief but sealed them off from their political life. Religion was increasingly seen not as a matter of 'private' or 'personal' faith, but remained steeped in public life, thus, a matter of public display. The liberals nursed an unflinching desire to see 'secular' at the heart of their scheme of thinking and of political activities as well. This position considered westernized knowledge as an essential quality for leadership. The 'liberal Muslim' in the context of the League, was an ideological catchphrase, not the one discussed in true sense of the term but the one who envisaged secularism's definitive role in the Muslim politics.

The significance of Jinnah's extraordinary impact on the League leadership in Kerala is suggested by almost a dozen biographies of him published in Malayalam language including the Malayalam translation of his sister Fathima Jinnah's biographical work on him, *My Brother*.⁴⁵ Vatakara confirms that the influence of Jinnah in Kerala was much bigger in the post-independence period than it is now. The genre of biography of Jinnah has a long history and the first biography was authored by Seethi in 1940.⁴⁶ The goal of Seethi's writing was not to endorse the political positions of Jinnah but to make his readers familiar with the specific leadership traits of him. While Seethi presents Jinnah's position revolutionary to have universal validity, he describes its content as culturally specific. Seethi, as per the account of Vatakara, did not have an alternative, equally valid model of leadership to offer. The partition, Indo-Pak Wars in 1965 and 1971 and the resultant anti-Pak feeling, of late, contributed to the waning image of Jinnah among the Muslims of South India. Despite their continued admiration for Jinnah's leadership and liberal attitude, the leaders of League were painfully aware of the political consequences such an admiration creates.

Seethi was the one, who attempted in modernizing the Muslim leadership first. He was one among the first generation modern educated leaders of the community.

He studied law and started his career as a lawyer before entering into politics. Seethi's entry into the larger arena of national politics was through Indian National Congress. He represented the Congress Party twice (1928 and 1931) in the Cochin Legislative Council. But broke ranks with the Party when Congress decided to disassociate with the League and started organizing the League in Malabar District in the mid-1930s. Vatakara remembers him as an intelligent and charismatic leader who was completely a Jinnah-type neta. The followers of him praised for having brought the element of modernity to the Muslim politics and occasionally referred to him as the Sir Sayyid of Kerala. Vatakara notes:

Seethi Sahib belongs to a rare species of leaders which includes Sir Sayyid Ahamad Khan, Maulana Muhammadali, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammadali Jinnah and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad... Sahib was so pious and had a deep understanding of Islamic knowledge on par with any religious scholar. He absorbed the best of qualities of Muslim leaders of the sub-continent; an interesting merger of compassion of Muhammadali, intellect of Jinnah and oratory skills of Azad, all in one person. Well educated, his proficiency in both English and Malayalam was well known... Being a cosmopolitan in outlook, Sahib throughout his political life remained instrumental in preserving the secular fabric of Kerala by making broader alliance of Hindus, Christians and Muslims in politics possible.⁴⁷

Vatakara presents Western education that Seethi acquired at a very young age in life as something that shaped his political life later.⁴⁸ Similar kinds of narratives are commonplace in the biographies of the early leaders. Kunjimoosa, the biographer of B. Pokker, for instance, generously praises the Western-modelled education of him and makes it clear that such schooling has contributed to his political and intellectual life.

Pokker Sahib mastered English at a time when people in the Mappila community maintained an approach of extreme dislike and prejudice over the British education. A widely-held belief that the English education would land up Muslims in hell had existed. Young Pokker excelled others in studies and scored highest marks in the class and this was taken by surprise not only by his colleagues, but also his teachers.⁴⁹

The leaders of the League with reformist-orientation shared the urge to use the life histories of the contemporary leaders of global Muslim community as case studies to legitimate the necessity of having cosmopolitan leadership subscribing to a modernist version of Islam. With the publication of biographies of Islamic modernists like Jamal Din-Afghani and Muhammad Abdu, they hoped to invest in and popularise a brand of leadership modelled on such leaders.

Although became unpopular for a short while because of the political consequences it created in the post-Indo-Pak wars, the popularity of Jinnah-type neta built on elite



conception of leadership made a comeback in the late 1970s. The style of political activism of leaders of the League like C. H. Muhammad Koya, E. Ahamed invested Jinnah's legacy with ideals of possibilities and potentialities. As Chekutty observes, 'Koya succeeded in creating a liberal public sphere in favour of the League. This he could do with his relentless interventions in the fields of literature, media and education.'⁵⁰ Personally, from a political leader, Koya ascended to the status of public orator, author, journalist, editor, social thinker etc., acknowledged duly not just by the people in the community, but also by other communities (2020:136).

Koya rose to the Party leadership from a humble background, but maintained, a liberal outlook, sharp intellect, political sensibility and above all, enormous sense of humour. He was thus a highly respected leader cutting across the communities for his exceptional wit and skills in the use of language. In Koya the traditional and the modern interacted and intertwined in a forward looking Muslim leadership that respects both local sentiments and cosmopolitan aspirations. Koya recognized the strengths of Jinnah and believed personally that Muslim societies should model on his leadership without endorsing his political ideology.⁵¹ Throughout his political life, Koya's concern was to develop the community based on the principles of modernity which, he was of the opinion, would be possible only through modern education.⁵²

Nevertheless, Koya's leadership met stringent opposition from a section of League leaders, especially from those who represented the affluent traders of northern Kerala. As Chekutti writes, 'Koya became a dust in the eyes of the rich and economically elite leaders of the Party. Cheriya Mammukeyi and Ummar Bafakhi, two leaders belonging to the coterie of the then President, Bafakhi Thangal, with their elite lineage held the decision-making power in the Party.'⁵³ The ascendance of Koya to the leadership upset the power equations prevailed in the Party as he was hailing from an ordinary family, which by tradition engaged in teaching in Madrasa (2020). Koya was also branded as a 'Wahhabi'⁵⁴ not respecting the senior clergies belonging to the Sunni faction associated closely with the Party. Taking advantage of the situation, the critics of him warned the Party that such an affiliation could incite the wrath of tradition-oriented Muslims.

After the death of Bafakhi Thangal in 1972, Koya could liberate the League leadership from trading elites of north Malabar and bring it down to the Panakkad Kudumbam, a family settled in the hinterland of Malappuram and engaged mainly in agriculture. Accommodating Pookkoya Thangal, the head of Panakkad family and the spiritual leader of majority Sunnis of Malabar as president was with an intention to tackle the charges of Salafi orientation of the leadership levelled by the clergies of Sunni community. Thangal introduced a new line of leadership completely

independent of merchant and trading elites and created a new mixed social constituency of clergies, landlords, farmers and Gulf migrants. The trading elites who were dissatisfied with the policies of new regime even floated a new organization called All India Muslim League by splitting IUML in 1975. M. K. Haji, Ummar Bafakhi Thangal, CKP Cheriya Mammukeyi etc. led the new party.

E Ahamed is another leader, who could successfully reconcile modernity and elitism, a quality typical of Jinnah-type neta and the tradition that the Muslim League in Kerala politically stands for, in a delicate balancing. As Jayant Jacob describes, 'Ahmed battled for progressive Muslim politics rooted in religious ethos.'⁵⁵ Ahamed was the most prominent leader of the League at national level of all time. He served as the Minister of State for External Affairs two times and represented India in the United Nations six times between 1991 and 2009. He maintained intimate personal relations with the rulers of most of the Arab countries and was sent to the countries in the region many times as political envoy of Prime Minister. Because of his wider transnational political connections, Ahamed had always been branded as Viswapouranor global citizen by the media and political circles alike. Mathrubhumi one of the most prominent dailies in Malayalam language wrote on the occasion of his death, 'Ahmed will be remembered as a cosmopolitan politician and skilled crisis negotiator even in international disputes.'⁵⁶ This viswapouran image has helped him gain popularity among the voters and contributing to his electoral victory many times.⁵⁷

PRADESIKANETA TROPE

Just opposite to the Jinnah-type neta, there was another category of leaders who can conveniently be put in the group of Pradesikaneta. The leaders belonging to this category emerge locally with the image of 'unsophisticated' and 'rustic' leadership. This image remains a secular trope that has never fully disappeared from the popular imagination even in the twenty-first century. They have often been discounted in the popular discourse for lack of education and absence of 'tradition.' This branding of leaders was more visible with Seethi Haji, the most popular leader of the League in South Malabar in the 1970s and 1980s, known for his witty political speeches. He was caricatured in political and media circle alike for his rustic appearance, Southern Malabar slang, witty expressions and lack of formal education. His political speeches were heavily laden with the language of the masses and the uneducated Muslims of Malabar, therefore, were the target of crude caricaturing.

Those who belonged to the category of Pradesikaneta, however, were proud of their traditional background as it had given them some privileges among the majority Sunni Muslims. Lack of formal education was something which did not have to hide for Haji. Whenever getting an opportunity, Haji used to reveal his educational qualification



which did go not beyond fourth standard. The intention of this 'fourth standard' usage was to motivate the people of his community who were relatively less or not educated. SayyidHyderaliShihabThangal in a tribute to Haji writes:

"None has to mourn about it, see I am also a lower school dropout"-Haji intentionally conveys as a message of comfort to the ordinary people around him. He also warned the young generation not to grope in the darkness with lack of education... [H]e learnt the psyche of public not from any universities. Bitter circumstances of own past and experience of dealing with issues in everyday life of people rather acted as his university.⁵⁸

In writing this, Thangal wants to narrate the acceptance that Haji enjoyed thanks to his specific kind of political activism which had already been branded as 'popular' during that period. More than his praise of Haji, Thangal's stress on the essential leadership qualities of Haji is of key importance in understanding how the qualities of leadership in the Muslim League was re-imagined in the 1980s. This period marked a new era in the League politics, wherein the Jinnah-type leadership underwent severe criticism. Ibrahim SulaimanSait, G. Banatwala and E. Ahmed, three top leaders and members of Parliament from Kerala stationed most of their time in Delhi were critiqued by the followers for their urban elite style of living and lack of mass base in Kerala. The Pradesika-netaconception of leadership, thus, at some point of time became the basis of advancing a new critique of elite leadership.

However, in the eyes of critics inside and outside the community, pradesika-netatype leaders were considered to be an aberration not fitting neatly into elite, modern conception of leadership which the League nurtured in previous decades. Alleging a total break from the leadership tradition, the critics even used to go to the extent of 'othering' them for their lower educational status. Narratives providing information about their lack of education and unpolished mannerisms would often spring up, whenever their names would be considered for positions in the government. The identity of such leaders and the public sphere in which they were negotiated were mediated chiefly by such stereotypes. Popular jokes about Haji caricaturing him crudely as illiterate and ignorant provide channels for knowing best how the self of a pradesika-netatype leader is created in popular imagination. This image construction has always been a direct rendition of the community's wish for having elite cosmopolitan leadership.

It is also important to note that there was a drastic social change in the community and the League in the 1980s with the massive migration of Muslims to the Gulf countries from Malabar. In the post-migration period, one can see that the role of visionary leaders was overshadowed by that of leaders with high amount of pragmatism. At times of crisis in the Party or in the politics of Kerala, they appear with a more active political role. The League became increasingly

dependent on such leaders, who with their intimate relations with the Gulf-based Malayali business persons, could use their power of collective bargaining in Kerala politics. Kerala politics in the post-globalization period witnessed the emergence of such leaders cutting across the party lines gaining enormous amount of popularity and influence either through their capacity of mobilizing fund for the Party or through a wide range of welfare packages implemented on their own initiative and financing. P. K. Kunjalikutti, who carries the image of 'Chanakya' for his specific skills of crisis management in politics, represents this category.

Kunjalikutt's ascendance to the leadership happened at a very difficult time for the Party. In the post-Babri Masjid politics, the issues related to identity, citizenry rights, and reservation in government employment spawned serious debates in the community, which in turn, forced the community to develop certain strategies for the survival. The League initially could not recognize that political dynamics and, therefore, faced serious setback in the elections. Later, the Party was compelled to re-assert its moderate and secularist credentials in order to face the challenges of resisting majoritarian communalism and countering mobilizations of new sorts within the community based on radical Islamic identity⁵⁹, a phenomenon which became more apparent by 2000 in response to the global religious-political developments such as War on Terror and resultant Islamophobia, though began little early in the 1990s. Kunjalikutti's political strategy was more pragmatic and he emerged as a mediator in political disputes and his image as 'spin doctor' within the Party and outside grew further to the extent that the UDF often depended on him to mediate dispute among the constituent parties of the Front.

CONCLUSION

As discussed earlier, the leadership qualities in the Muslim community in Kerala are often discussed in diverse terms, not just in terms of qualities such as the capacity of administering the mass by which the leadership has been conventionally assessed. The Islamic conceptions of ideal leadership or universally accepted models of Muslim leadership also do not make much resonance in the context of Kerala. Instead of that, there are some region-specific conceptions and imaginations developed over the qualities and attributes of ideal Muslim leadership which has been deftly transferred to the Muslim League.

Based on education, elitism, nobility, descendance to a particular family, four kinds of leadership in Muslim League- Jinnah-type, ulama, pradesika and pragmatic- have been discussed in this work. Initially, the League leadership comprised of traditional landlords, economically affluent traders and influential ulama and some miniscule few middle class professionals. Most of these groups, except the ulama had shown an apparent British leaning. Ulama leadership symbolized both political and moral power and



played a significant role in setting a religious base for the Party and leadership. Different conceptualizations of leadership in the League were/are also reflective of various ethical, pragmatic, religious and political considerations emerged in the community time to time.

The first generation leaders of the League advised their followers to promote modern education as a means to gain visibility for the community and to mobilize the mass towards achieving certain goals. They foregrounded a specific form of Muslim leadership with modern education and cosmopolitan outlook as its two essential attributes. For them education and leadership were necessary allies. Their educational status and language skills aided in gaining high stature for them both inside and outside the Party. A major impulse of the liking for elite leadership is the popularity of Jinnah-type neta which entered the League politics through its first generation leaders who nurtured a strong fondness towards Jinnah's liberal persona and cosmopolitan outlook, despite keeping a political distance from him. Invoking the memory of Jinnah, thus, became a standardized practice, his model being so pervasive that he has been cited even in the most mundane situation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution of P.M. Sadiqali in developing the theme of this article.

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