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**MAPPILA MUSLIMS IN THALASSERI, KASARAGOD AND LAKSHADWEEP  
A HISTORICAL STUDY**

**LRS LAKSHMI**

### **Acknowledgements**

This manuscript would not have seen this day without the support and encouragement of many people. I would like to thank the Indian Council of Historical Research for providing me a study grant in 2012. My gratitude to Prof. Narayani Gupta and Dr. Karuna Kaushik for their inspiration to take up this research. The staff at the National Archives of India, the Kozhikode Regional Archives and NMML were always willing to provide assistance. Parveen Babbar, the Deputy Librarian of the JNU Central Library was also very cooperative in providing me access to some recent articles. Prof. Ravi Raman helped me with some research material from the India Office Library, London. Dr. Mujeebu Rehman from the Department of History, University of Calicut, was very resourceful. I would also like to extend my thanks to the people of Kasaragod, Thalasseri and the Lakshadweep Islands for their valuable inputs during my field study. Alippy Keyi and Prof. A.N.P. Ummerkutty provided useful insights for my work and I am very grateful to them. I must also appreciate my dearest mother who travelled with me to all the places despite her age and health.

## **Contents**

*List of Maps*

*List of Tables*

*Acknowledgements*

*List of Abbreviations*

*Introduction*

1. The Mappilas of Thalasseri

2. The *Arakkal* Royal Family and the Lakshadweep Muslims

3. The Kasaragod *Byaris*: A Symbol of Tradition

4. A Comparative Study of the Three Regions

*Epilogue*

*Glossary*

*References*

*List of Maps*

**Map 1.** Map of Madras Presidency showing the Malabar and South Kanara Districts, 1908.

**Map 2.** Map of Madras Presidency showing the Lakshadweep Islands, 1907.

*List of Tables*

**Table 1.1** Population of Amindivi Islands in 1921.

**Table 1.2** Population of Lakshadweep Islands in 1921.

**Table 1.3** Population of Lakshadweep Islands by Religion in 1941.

**Table 1.4** Population of Hindus and Muslims in Kasaragod in 1921.

**Table 1.5** Population of Hindus and Muslims in Kasaragod in 1941.

**Table 1.6** Education of Muslims in Kasaragod *Taluk* in 1891.

**Table 1.7** Human Development Index of Lakshadweep and Kerala 1981 and 1991

**Table 1.8** Area and Population of Inhabited Islands of Lakshadweep 2001

**Table 1.9** Gender Ratio in Lakshadweep and Kerala

**Table 1.10** Literacy Rates in Lakshadweep and Kerala

**Table 1.11** Island-wise Literacy Rates 2001

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*List of Abbreviations*

G.O.	Government Order
IOR	India Office Library and Records
Judl.	Judicial
KRA	Kozhikode Regional Archives
LT	Lakshadweep Times
Misc.	Miscellaneous
MNNR	Madras Native Newspaper Reports
MSS.	Manuscripts
NAI	National Archives of India

## Introduction

During the most critical times that the world is facing in the form of bombings, human exodus and refugee crisis in the name of religion, it is definitely more than relevant to study the world of Islam and rewrite its history in the present context. Islam has always been respected for being an egalitarian religion, for its tolerance and its religious tenets. Some of its strict observances and practices such as the five times prayers or *namaaz*, rigid fasting during *Ramzan*, the notion of sacrifice during *Bakr-Id*, interest-free trade, alms-giving or *zakat*, the prohibition of wearing gold among men only add to its tolerant religious traditions.

The Malabar coast, which is the northern part of present day Kerala, has witnessed the presence of Arab traders and their intermingling with the local people since the eighth century. As Richard Eaton, in his study of fifteenth century Calicut has observed, 'With Mecca located only a few weeks' voyage across the western Indian Ocean, many were pilgrims even while they were merchants, peddling goods around the Ocean en route to Islam's holiest shrine. The Islamic religion lent to the Indian Ocean in the fifteenth century a cultural coherence.'<sup>1</sup> The Muslims of Malabar were called Mappilas who are *Shafi* Muslims and have been historically well-known for

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<sup>1</sup> Eaton, Richard. 2000. *Essays on Islam and Indian History*. New York: OUP. pp.79-80



their valour and their numerous revolts against the British colonial administrators in Malabar in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The British, on their part, branded them as 'fanatics' and the 'mad Moplah bogey' stuck to them even after they left India. Despite such colonial oppression, today, they are the most literate Muslims in the country. Historically, in northern Malabar, the densely populated Mappila Muslims, belonged to a higher social and economic status compared to those in south Malabar. But today, the Malappuram district in south Malabar, once a bastion of resistance and revolts, leads in education and development. The Mappilas of Malabar and Lakshadweep have shown tremendous progress in the social, economic and educational fields.

The global connectedness of these Muslims can be traced to the seventies when they began to migrate to the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf in search of employment. These expatriates have contributed immensely to the development of their community. The religious culture of the Gulf region are reflected in their mosque architecture and the dress codes of the Mappila women in some parts of the State. The plurality, the changeability and the global connectedness of these Muslims are very much noticeable in the recent years.

The historical literature of the Mappila community in the three specific regions of Thalasseri, Kasaragod and the Lakshadweep Islands are very few and far. A general history of Thalasseri is covered in two Malayalam books, namely, K.M.Govi's edited book, *Thalassery Arivugal* and

Scaria Zachariah's *Thalassery Rekhagal*.<sup>2</sup> These books have not dealt particularly with the Mappila community. On the history of the Kasaragod Muslims, a Malayalam book written by Moyin Malayamma Hudawi, *Kasaragod Muslimgalude Charithram*, is noteworthy.<sup>3</sup> The author has discussed the general history, society and religious practices of the Muslims of the region.

The earliest reference to the study of the Lakshadweep Islands is seen in R.H. Ellis's *A Short Account of Laccadives and Minicoy* published in 1924.<sup>4</sup> A.J. Platt, who was the Inspecting Officer in the islands has also given a brief account of the island Muslims and their social practices.<sup>5</sup> Malayalam books on the history of the Lakshadweep Islands include that of P.I. Pookoya's *Dweepolpathi*, in which he has written specifically about Kalpeni and N. Muthukoya's *Lakshadweep Noottandukaliloode*, in which he has looked at the history of Andrott and the colonial ventures in the island.<sup>6</sup> There are quite a few anthropological studies on the Lakshadweep Muslims. Leela Dube's book, *Matriliny and Islam*, talks about family and kinship ties among the island Muslims and how two contradictory systems, matriliney and Islam, were found among them.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, she published several articles on the marriage, family and kinship patterns of the islanders. In the seventies, her students, K.P. Ittaman and A.R.Kutty also wrote on the island Muslims. While Ittaman's work was on the Amini islanders, Kutty's work dealt with marriage and kinship in Lakshadweep.<sup>8</sup> Theodore Gabriel has written briefly about the

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<sup>2</sup> Govi, K.M.. 2011. *Thalassery Arivukal*. Thalassery: Sanjayan Samskarika Samiti; Zacharia, Scaria (ed.). 1996. *Thalassery Rekhagal*. Kottayam: DC Books

<sup>3</sup> Hudawi, Moyin Malayamma. 2008. *Kasaragod Muslimgalude Charithram*. Kasaragod: Darul Irshad Academy.

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, R.H.. 1924. *A Short Account of Laccadive Islands and Minicoy*. Madras: Govt. Press.

<sup>5</sup> A.J. Platt Papers. 1929-44. IOR/MSS EUR.D832/I Vol.1.

<sup>6</sup> Pookoya, P.I.. 1960. *Dweepolpathi*. Calicut: Sarawathi; Muthukoya, N.. 1986. *Lakshadweep Noottandukaliloode*. Published by K.P. Kadeeja, K. Puthiyannal, Andrott Island, Lakshadweep.

<sup>7</sup> Dube, Leela. 1969. *Matriliny and Islam*. Delhi: National Publishing House.

<sup>8</sup> Ittaman, K.P.. 1976. *Amini Islanders*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications; Kutty, A.R.. 1972. *Marriage and Kinship in an Island Society*. New Delhi: National Publishing House.

early history of the islanders and has dealt in detail about their religious practices, rituals and social practices. He has argued that anthropologically it is correct to classify the island Muslims as a tribal community as they have all the characteristics of a tribe.<sup>9</sup> However, this is unjustifiable because the island Mappilas have much similarities with those in Malabar who are not classified as Scheduled Tribes. In that case, why the Central government categorized them as Scheduled Tribes, remains an unanswered question. Is it because they were isolated in an island as a different social group or are they in any way similar to other tribal communities like the Gonds, the Bhils or the Nagas? Similarly, those Mappilas who were transported from Malabar to the Andaman Islands by the British government after the Mappila rebellion of 1921, as a punishment or a banishment, have also been categorized as Scheduled Tribes which is again very unfortunate.

General studies on Lakshadweep include the books of M.Ramunni, *Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands*, T.K. Mukundan, *Lakshadweep. A Hundred Thousand Islands*, George Abraham, *Lakshadweep. Economy and Society*, Lotika Varadarajan, *Sewn Boats of Lakshadweep* and S.A. Rahman edited, *The Beautiful India. Lakshadweep*.<sup>10</sup> Some of the authors on Lakshadweep have even endorsed the British rhetoric that the islanders were unhappy with the administration of the *arakkal* ruling family and hence the British government had to intervene. That was however only an excuse to get their control over the islands. K.K.N. Kurup, in his book

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<sup>9</sup> Gabriel, Theodore P.C.. 1989. *Lakshadweep. History, Religion and Society*. New Delhi. Books and Books. See Conclusion.

<sup>10</sup> Ramunni, M.. 1972. *Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands*. Delhi: Publications Division; Mukundan, T.K..1979. *Lakshadweep. A Hundred Thousand Islands*. Haryana: The Academic Press; Abraham, George. 1987. *Lakshadweep. Economy and Society*. Delhi: Inter-India Publications; Varadarajan, Lotika .1998. *Sewn Boats of Lakshadweep*. Panaji: National Institute of Oceanography; and Rahman S.A. (ed.) 2006. *The Beautiful India. Lakshadweep*.New Delhi: Reference Press.

on *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore*, has clearly contended that the interests of the ruling family were suppressed by the imperial policy of expansion and exploitation.<sup>11</sup> I agree with him because the islands were a major target of British territorial expansion and the alleged ill-treatment of the islanders by the *arakkal* family was only a lame excuse.

This manuscript attempts to write a history of the Muslims of the three regions of Thalasseri, Kasaragod and Lakshadweep in the colonial period and compare them with each other. This project is a micro-level study of the three regions and the basic premise of this project is to draw parallels between these Mappilas and yet show that there were differences between them on various aspects. Each region saw its own pace of development under the colonial regime and the Muslim community, in particular, although similar in their basic traits, showed variations. The present study is focussed on the social history of the Mappilas of Thalasseri, Kasaragod and the Lakshadweep Islands in the colonial period. The main argument of the research is that the progress and development of the community was largely determined by the colonial structures and policies. I have also argued that the Lakshadweep Muslims do not ideally fit into the category of tribes, as juxtaposed by various anthropologists. The purpose of the work is to show that despite the commonalities within the community, they showed inter and intra-regional variations in their social, economic and developmental aspects. It has also proved that overall, their human development index is much higher than other Muslims in the Indian subcontinent.

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<sup>11</sup> Kurup, K.K.N.. 1975. *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore*. Trivandrum: College Book House. p.6

I have used various sources for my study, which includes, archival sources such as manuscripts, government records, census reports and Indian Newspaper reports. Malayalam sources include letters and records, printed pamphlets, souvenirs and books. Field visits and interviews with people in all the three regions have provided valuable insights on many aspects that were not covered by the archival and printed sources.

## Chapter 1

### The Mappilas of Thalasseri

Nestled on the serene shores of the quiet Arabian Sea, the town of Tellicherry, known as Thalasseri in Malayalam, is situated in the Kottayam *taluk* which earlier belonged to the kingdom of the Kottayam *Rajas*. In 1683, this native kingdom granted trading privileges to the English East India Company which established its factory there with the object of commanding the pepper trade of North Malabar. In 1708, the Kolattiri *Raja* was induced to build the Thalasseri fort, which he handed over to the Company for the protection of their factory. So rapid was the extension of their power and influence that during the first half of the eighteenth century, the Company obtained small grants of lands from various *Rajas* with administrative privileges. The factors also secured the exclusive privilege of purchasing pepper, cardamoms and sandalwood in Kolattanad, Kadattanad and Kottayam. The Thalasseri factory thus became the principal British trading station on the West Coast.<sup>12</sup>

In 1801, Francis Buchanan, the European traveller, observed:

“The richest natives on the coast reside here, and the inhabitants here are by far more civilized than in any other part of the province. They enjoy some particular privileges, especially that of being moderately taxed than their neighbours.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India*. 1908. Vol.23. Oxford :Clarendon Press. p.276

<sup>13</sup> Buchanan, Francis. 1807. *A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*. Vol.II. London: Cadell and Davies. p.517

During Tipu's invasion of Malabar in 1790, he was defeated by the British and by the Treaty of Seringapatnam, the region was ceded to the Company in 1792. The British government took over the administration of Malabar in 1800 and divided the district into six subdivisions, out of which the Thalasseri subdivision consisted of the Kottayam, Chirakkal and the Kurumbranad taluks.<sup>14</sup> For administrative convenience, the Malabar District was divided into North Malabar and South Malabar. North Malabar comprised of Kannur and Thalasseri. In 1802, a *Zilla* (District) Court was established at Thalasseri for North Malabar. For South Malabar, a *Zilla* Court was established in Angadipuram in 1806 and later shifted to Kozhikode. The designation of the *Zilla* Judges changed in 1845 to Civil and Sessions Judges and in 1875 to District and Sessions Judges.<sup>15</sup>

Thalasseri became a municipality in 1869 and ranked as the third important port in Malabar after Kozhikode and Kannur respectively. The value of the imports in 1903-4 was forty lakhs rupees and of the exports, one hundred and three lakhs. It was the chief outlet for the pepper and coffee grown in the Western Ghats and the trade in sandalwood and coconut products. The imports consisted chiefly of rice from Bengal and Burma, and coffee and pepper from neighbouring ports.<sup>16</sup> However, between 1923 and 1927, the Thalasseri port ranked second after Kozhikode but its total foreign and coastal trade fell from Rupees 118.62 lakhs in 1923-24 to 115.83 lakhs in 1926-27.<sup>17</sup> The sea-borne trade in this port was largely in the hands of the Europeans.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.17. p.67

<sup>15</sup> Pradeepnath, K.M.. 2012. 'Judicial System of Administration at Tellicherry (Thalassery) – A Historical Perspective from 1793', *Bakers Association Kerala, Smaranika*, 2012. p.112

<sup>16</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.23. p.277

<sup>17</sup> *Report on the Sea-Borne Trade of the Madras Presidency, 1926-27*. Madras: Govt. Press. 1927. p.57

<sup>18</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.17. p.65

## Social Composition of the Town

Thalasseri had a mixed composition of communities, some of whom migrated to the town around the seventeenth century. The Hindu population largely consisted of *thiyyas*, who were toddy tappers by occupation. Along with the Europeans, the sea-borne trade was also in the hands of the Mappilas, who were the chief traders in the town.<sup>19</sup> In the latter half of the seventeenth century, the *keyis*, a prominent trading and landed status group within the Mappila community, settled at Thalasseri. The *Konkani brahmins* had begun to migrate in the late medieval period because of political pressures and the harsh treatment of the Cochin rulers and they continued to move in even in the seventeenth century. Around the end of the eighteenth century, the Muslims of Kanara (Karnataka), known as the *Navayats*, migrated from Bhatkal to Thalasseri in search of trading opportunities.<sup>20</sup> Logan mentions the presence of *Cutchi Memons* who were traders in the town and they had their own mosque built by a rich merchant named Haji Ali Seth.<sup>21</sup> Apart from the big landed aristocrats such as the *keyis*, the *Maliayakal* and the Hashim families, the Mappila fishing community or the *pusalars* were also found on the coastal parts of Thalasseri. Along with the *pusalars*, the fishermen also included *mukkuvans*, who were Hindus and some of them were Christian converts. They are all mostly found in the *Kadavath* (seashore) area of the town. The population of the town in 1901 consisted of 15,252 Hindus, 10,958 Musalmans and 1,671 Christians.<sup>22</sup> By 1921, there were 15,450 Hindus, 10,584 Musalmans and 1,539 Christians.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Ismail, E.. 2012 . 'Heritage of Tellicherry: An Overview in Colonial Situations', *Brennenites 1960-70. Family Meet*, Tellicherry. p.91

<sup>21</sup> Logan, William. 1951. *Malabar Manual*. Vol.II. Madras: Govt.Press. Appendix xxi. p.cccvii

<sup>22</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.23. p.277

<sup>23</sup> *Census of India. 1921*. 'Village Statement, Kottayam Taluk' in Village Statistics Malabar District, Madras Presidency. Madras: Govt. Press. 1922



## Mosques in the Town

The oldest mosque in Thalasseri is the *Pazhaya Jamaatpalli*, built in the ninth century by Malik bin Dinar, followed by the *Chalilpalli*. The *Odathilpalli* was built by Aluppikaka, one of the earliest ancestors of the *keyi* family. It is said that when Aluppikaka and his family migrated from Chovva (near Kannur) to Thalasseri, they were not allowed to attend prayers at the *Chalilpalli*. He therefore bought a land from the Kottayam Raja and his brother's son, Moosakaka, built the *Odathilpalli*. Moosakaka's tomb is laid in the mosque premises and the burial ground in this mosque is meant only for the members of the *keyi* families.<sup>24</sup> Moosakaka's nephew, Kunhipakki, built the *Mugalarpalli* in Holloway Road, which is again a family mosque.<sup>25</sup> Separate family mosques and burial grounds are signs of social hierarchy which continue to exist even today. The only *Hanafi* mosque is the stadium *Jamaatpalli* that was built by Haji Ali Seth for the Cutchi Memon community.<sup>26</sup> Logan also mentions the *Thaazhe angadipalli* or the lower *bazaar* mosque and the *Seydarpalli*.<sup>27</sup>

## Education and the Role of Missionaries

The town of Thalasseri had been a witness to various missionary enterprises from the early nineteenth century. William Logan, in his *Malabar Manual*, has mentioned the following edifices in Thalasseri town:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with C.P. Moosa, Thalasseri, 19.12.2011

<sup>25</sup> Sankarankutty, P.. 2011. 'Aradhanaalayangal-Charitram', in Govi,K.M.. *Thalassery Arivukal*. Thalassery: Sanjayan Samskarika Samiti. 163-4 (Mal.)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p.164

<sup>27</sup> Logan. 1951. *Malabar Manual*. p.cccviii

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p.cccvii

1. A Protestant Church (foundation laid by Napier in 1869), raised with funds left by the late Master Attendant, Edward Brennen
2. A Church of the German Mission
3. A Roman Catholic Church over a century old
4. A High School built with funds left by Mr. Brennen – known as Brennen High School
5. Another school in charge of German Missionaries built with money provided by a Parsee by name Kasroo- a grandson of Darashoo Cursetjee, an old Parsee merchant of this place

Thalasseri therefore became the cradle for the Basel Mission School, the Brennen High School and the Sacred Heart Convent School. The Basel Mission was established in 1817 and was the first English school in the town. A Parsee philanthropist, Kasroo, generously donated funds for the development of the school and as an acknowledgement, the school was renamed as the Tellicherry German Mission Parsi High School.<sup>29</sup> Herman Gundert, a German missionary, arrived in this town in 1839 and resided at Illikunnu. He and his wife, Julie, took over the supervision of the school and Gundert also taught there. In the same year, he established an English Free School for all children, irrespective of caste or religion. He learnt Sanskrit and Malayalam and started the first printing press in Malabar in 1844. He compiled a Malayalam-English dictionary in 1872 and also translated the Bible into Malayalam. When Germany was defeated in the First World War, the British authorities in Thalasseri changed the name of the Basel German Mission to the Basel Evangelical Mission Parsee (BEMP) School.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Education Report for 1883-84*. NAI/Education/Part A/July 1885/No.20

<sup>30</sup> Zubair, A.P.. 2007. 'Basel Missionum Gundertum Thalasseriyl', *Guru Smaranika, BEMP School, Thalassery, 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*. (Mal.)

In 1862, Edward Brennen, a Master Attendant of Tellicherry Port, founded the Brennen English School which became a High School in 1871 under the administration of the Basel Mission. In 1872, its administration was taken over by the Madras Government and it was also recognised as the District school.<sup>31</sup> In 1880, Brennen introduced a Junior College which would grant an FA (First Assistant) Degree to its students. P.P.Derozario was its first Principal, who served for ten years and upgraded it to a Second Grade College. The College was affiliated to the Madras University. Between 1883 and 1919, the college was under the administration of the Thalasseri Municipality but it had financial difficulties in governing the college and had begun to appoint local natives to the post of the Principal. For example, in 1900, there were objections to its appointment of one Vythianatha Aiyer as Principal instead of Srinivasa Aiyer, who was the First Assistant of the College.<sup>32</sup> There was also a disapproval of the appointment of a native as the Principal to the College on the grounds that its position as a Second Grade College could only be maintained by a European.<sup>33</sup> After 1919, the college was handed over to the Madras Government.

In 1911, the officers of the Educational Department even decided to reduce the status of the Brennen College to that of a model school. There were protests against this move by the vernacular papers who contended that it was the only Second Grade college and the oldest institution in coastal North Malabar. It had been doing good work from its inception and so, the decision would only deprive the people of this region of a good collegiate education.<sup>34</sup> A model school was however started and attached to the Second Grade college. The estimated fee income

<sup>31</sup> Ummerkutty, A.N.P.. 2011. 'Vidyabhyasa Paarampariyam', in Govi. *Thalassery Arivukal*. pp.138-9

<sup>32</sup> *Kerala Patrika*, Calicut, 24.3.1900. *MNNR*. 6. p.80

<sup>33</sup> *Kerala Chandrika*, Calicut, 7.8.1901. *Ibid*. 32. p.325

<sup>34</sup> *West Coast Spectator*, Calicut, 7.6.1911; *Cochin Argus*, Cochin, 10.6.1911. *MNNR*. 24. p.824

of the College in 1913-14 was Rs.21,670 and the pay of its Principal was Rs.350. The Principal had to supervise the combined institutions.<sup>35</sup> No wonder that owing to its financial constraints, the Municipality could not maintain the standard of a Second Grade college, and therefore, the Madras Government had to take over its administration.

The Brennen College could boast of an excellent faculty such as, I.Narayana Menon, the son of Raja Rama Varma, who had previously been the Raja of Cochin. Menon graduated from the Maharaja's College, Cochin, then pursued his Masters from Presidency College, Madras, with a First Class and a B.Litt in Political Philosophy from Balliol College, Oxford. He was a Senior Lecturer in Brennen College in 1926.<sup>36</sup> He even applied for an appointment in the Political Department of the British Government but was denied the job as the recruitment was restricted to the members of the ICS, the Indian Army and the Provincial Civil Services.<sup>37</sup> There were eminent Principals such as Krishnan Nayar, T.M. Kelu Nedungadi, Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Barrister K.P.G. Menon and Muhammad Khani. The Brennen College became a First Grade College in 1947 and at that time, only degrees in subjects such as Mathematics and Economics were granted to its students.<sup>38</sup> In 1958, The college was shifted to Dharmadam, a village, which is five kilometres from the town and is affiliated to the Kannur University. The original school building became the Government Training College in 1957 for the training of teachers and it was renamed as the Government Brennen College of Teacher Education in 2008. Affiliated to the Kannur University, today, it conducts both B.Ed and M.Ed courses with hundred percent results.

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<sup>35</sup> NAI/Education/Proceedings/Jan.1917/Nos.21-23

<sup>36</sup> NAI/Foreign and Political Dept./Establishment/File No.261-E/Nos.1-2/1926

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Government Brennen College Calendar. 2010-11. p.1; Ummerkutty, A.N.P.. 2011. 'Vidyabhyasa Paaramparyam'. p.139*

The B.Ed. courses are available to the students in four languages, namely, Arabic, English, Hindi and Malayalam.

The Sacred Heart Convent and School for Girls was founded in 1886 because of the zeal of Fr. J. Michael Monterio, the Parish Priest of the Holy Rosary Church, Thalasseri. It started with fifty-two students in the Infant Preparatory, First, Second and Third classes. In 1891, the school was recognised as an Upper Secondary School by the Director of Public Instruction and salary grants were sanctioned. The school served as a centre for Women's Examination in December 1891. By 1909, it was a complete High School.<sup>39</sup> The school excelled in extra-curricular activities - for example, in 1913, pupils were presented for the Trinity College Examination in Piano. In 1916, a new school building was constructed with a Government grant of Rupees 18,480 and in 1918, a school was opened for dropouts. The number of students grew from 597 in 1942 to 731 in 1945 and in 1947, the numbers rose to 836. It was only after Independence that the school had to take up Malayalam as a medium of instruction.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the missionary schools and higher institutions, the Educational Department also constructed Mappila schools in Thalasseri under the 'separate' schools' scheme.<sup>41</sup> According to the Education Report for 1883-84, the Tellicherry High School, which was under the Madras Government, had a strength of eleven Muhammadan boys. Aided schools under private management were the Tellicherry German Mission Parsi High School which had nine

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<sup>39</sup> *Sacred Heart Girls High School Centenary Souvenir 1886-1986, Tellicherry*. 1986. pp.35-6

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* pp.37-40

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed study of Mappila Education, see Lakshmi, L.R.S.. 2012. *The Malabar Muslims. A Different Perspective*. Delhi: CUP. Chapter V.

Muhammadan boys and the Tellicherry Roman Catholic Result School which had thirteen of them. The point to be noted here is that some Mappila families were liberal in sending their wards to missionary schools. The number of Mappila boys studying in the Result School for Mappilas, Tellicherry, were thirty and the Combined Schools for Mappilas had one hundred and fifty-seven boys.<sup>42</sup> There were three Mappila schools in the town. One was the Town Mappila School in Tiruvengad, the other was the *Thalayi Kadapurath* Mappila School and the third one was a *Zenana* School. The Town Mappila School was the first to be founded in the late nineteenth century. The *Thalayi* school was originally a *madrassa* which was converted into a Mappila school in 1906. In 1936, it's administration was taken over by the Thalasseri Municipality.<sup>43</sup> The *Zenana* school for Mappila girls was founded under the initiative of C.P. Mammu Keyi which conducted classes upto the Fifth Standard.<sup>44</sup> In Mappila schools, the Mappila boys did not have to pay any fees whereas in Hindu schools, they were not admitted as free scholars.<sup>45</sup> There were complaints about the incompetency of some teachers in the Mappila Primary School that they did not know how to read and write Malayalam correctly.<sup>46</sup> In 1939, there was a proposal to close down two Mappila schools in Thalasseri which included the *Zenana* school.<sup>47</sup> Today, only the *Thalayi* school survives, which has been renamed as the Government L.P. (Lower Primary) School. The Town Mappila School and the *Zenana* School were closed down after 1947.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Education Report for 1883-84.*

<sup>43</sup> 'School Viganasana Rooparekha', in *Report of Government Lower Primary School Thalasseri*, 2014-15

<sup>44</sup> The exact date of its establishment is not known as there are no records available. *Interview with Prof. A.N.P. Ummerkutty*, Thalasseri, August, 2015

<sup>45</sup> *Kerala Sanchari*, Calicut, 2.7.1902. *MNNR*. No.27. p.239

<sup>46</sup> *Kerala Patrika*, 13.7.1901. *Ibid.* No.29. p.288

<sup>47</sup> See Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. p.148

<sup>48</sup> *Interview with Prof. A.N.P. Ummerkutty*

### The *Keyi* Families of Thalasseri

The *keyis* flourished as wealthy merchants and traders who owned extensive landed properties in Thalasseri, some of which were leased from the Raja of Kottayam and also in Travancore, granted by the Travancore Maharaja at the end of the seventeenth century. The genealogy of the family can be traced back to Aluppi, the maternal uncle of Moosa, belonging to Chovva in the Chirakkal *taluk* (Kannur), who started his career as a retail hill produce merchant. Realizing the scope for direct trade with the Europeans, Aluppi moved towards Thalasseri along with his family consisting of two nephews - Bappan and Moosa. He purchased some land on the coast of Thalasseri from the Kottayam Raja, and gradually his trade prospects grew. The Thalasseri trade made Aluppi a flourishing merchant who was respectfully called as *kaka* and his warehouse as *kakante Pandikasala* (*Kaka's* warehouse). Aluppikaka then encouraged Moosa, who had been assisting him for several years, to start a business of his own and extended him financial support.<sup>49</sup>

After a brief trading experience in Travancore, Moosa returned to Thalasseri where he took over his uncle Aluppi's business following his death. He became the owner of several country boats and his reputation as an honest merchant enabled him to get a contract of supplying rice and many other commodities to the Company. The Chovvakkaran family of Moosa was prominent among the Mappila merchants who took advantage of the British trade in Malabar. Thalasseri, then, had already been transformed into a prosperous trade centre, with even a branch of the Madras Bank and the branches of three European firms. Moosa's name was first mentioned by

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<sup>49</sup> Rehman, Mujeebu M. P.. 2007. 'Merchants, Colonialism and Indigenous Capital: Chovvakkaran Moosa and the English East India Company', *Advances in Arts & Ideas*, 3 (1): pp.129-139

the Tellicherry Board in 1779, about eight years after the death of Ezekiel Rahabi, the Jewish merchant of Kozhikode. For that year, he agreed to supply 20 *kanties* [one *kanti* = 290 kg] of cardamom to the Tellicherry factory. The Company declared Moosa as its faithful merchant. It was the British experiment of monopolizing pepper, coupled with stringent measures against smuggling and establishment of military outposts that helped the rise of Chovvakaran Moosa. The accounts from the year 1783 to 1793 produced by Moosa showed the quantity, value and price of the pepper supplied by him to the Company. The long and fruitful partnership of Chovvakaran family with the British in the 18th century proved to be mutually beneficial and of course more so for the Mappila merchants. It is believed that Moosa had even lent money to the the Company during its financial crisis.<sup>50</sup>

Murdoch Brown, the British private merchant, posed a challenge against Moosa, at a time when he had attained a position of an unrivalled merchant of Malabar. The latter owned a large cinnamon plantation in Anjarakandy in Thalasseri. Both of them competed with each other for reaping the profits by selling spices to the Company. The Company was well informed that any action against Moosa would endanger the procurement of pepper from the high ranges, primarily because he was the only link between the Company and pepper producers in those hill tracts. More importantly, the Company had to prevent smuggling of pepper to the French Mahe through Moosa and his agents, which offered a comparatively higher price.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



After Moosa's death in 1807, his successors carried on his commercial enterprises. There were ten branches of the *keyi* family. Moosakaka's family came to be known by four genealogical lines namely, *Keloth*, *Valiyapura*, *Puthiyapura* and *Orkatteri*. It is said that Murdoch Brown's son, Carvey Brown, had borrowed money from T.M. Moosa, who was Chovvakkaran Moosa's sister's daughter's husband, in the matrilineal line. When Carvey Brown could not repay the loans, he was forced to write off Murdoch Brown's bungalow to T.M. Moosa. That bungalow was named *Ayisha Manzil*, after T.M. Moosa's wife, Ayisha. His grandson, C.P. Moosa, is now the owner of the bungalow.<sup>52</sup> Moosakaka had two sisters – C.P. Moosa belonged to one sister's genealogical line and Alippy Keyi belonged to the other sister's family. *Orkatteri* was Aluppikaka's house built more than four hundred years ago and had been demolished about twenty years back. It is now a shopping complex in the town.<sup>53</sup>

There were many lettered individuals in the *keyi tharavads* (Malayalam: matrilineal joint families). For example, C.P. Moosa is a graduate from Madras Christian College and C.P. Alippy Keyi is a graduate in Islamic History and Urdu from Brennen College. C.P. Abdulla Keyi (b.1922) of the *Puthiyapura tharavadu*, was the second graduate in the *keyi* family. A graduate from Loyola College, Madras, he joined the Police service in 1943. Later, he studied Law and practised as a Lawyer.<sup>54</sup> There were other *keyi tharavadu* members who joined the political fray, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Interview with C.P. Alippy Keyi, Thalasseri, August, 2015

<sup>54</sup> Govi. 2011. *Thalassery Arivugal*. p.33

### **The Maliyakal Family**

The *maliyakal* family of Thalasseri has a long history of education and women empowerment. Vayyapurath Kunnath Kunhi Mayin Sahib, originally from Thalasseri, was an administrator in the *arakkal* royal family. Greatly influenced by the European lifestyle, he used to be dressed in the western attire and was an avid reader of English literature. Mayin Sahib sent his three daughters, Amina, Ayisha and Alima to study at the Sacred Heart Convent where they were the only Muslim girls to be enrolled. However, the orthodox Mappila society did not approve of Muslim girls being sent to an English school and hence labelled him as 'Kafir Mayin' (*Kafir* means unbeliever). When Mayin Sahib became the President of the Thalasseri unit of the Indian National Congress, his daughters were fortunate to meet Mohammad Ali, Shaukat Ali and Gandhiji in 1920.<sup>55</sup> The sisters went for higher studies to Queen Mary's College, Madras. Amina acquired a Medical degree from Panjab University and after that she got married to Hashim Sahib, who was the Deputy Collector of the Malabar *Zilla*. Amina became the leader of the Women's wing of the Socialist Party in Malabar. After finishing her studies in Madras, Ayisha returned to Malabar where she was appointed as the Inspector of the Manjeri Muslim School. After her marriage in 1943, she moved with her husband, M.S.M. Rauf, to Ceylon.<sup>56</sup> There were quite a few Mappila business migrants from Thalasseri and Mahe to Ceylon during that time.<sup>57</sup> In 1949, Ayisha contested the Colombo Municipal Corporation Elections and won the post of the first Muslim woman Councillor. In the same year, she was appointed as the Deputy Mayor in Colombo, which was a great achievement for a Mappila woman. In 1961, she left politics and

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<sup>55</sup> Koya, Mammad P.P., 'Ayishayude Vijayagatha', *Malayala Manorama*, 29.8.1999 (Mal.); *Interview with Amina Maliyakal*, Maliyakal House, Thalasseri, 18.12.2011

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> See Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*.

left for Zambia, where she became the Principal of its first Women's College. Ayisha died in 1991 in Ceylon. Alima was married to T.C.Abutty, who was the Vice-Chairman of the Thalasseri Municipal council. She was solely a social worker.<sup>58</sup>

Another living legend in the *maliyakal* family, in her late eighties, is P.M. Mariyumma Mayanali, the maternal aunt of Amina Maliyakal, who belongs to *Maliyakal* House. Mariyumma's father, O.V. Abdulla, broke all social taboos and sent his daughter to study at Sacred Heart Convent. Umma, went to school wearing a scarf, in a curtained rickshaw and studied upto Fifth form.<sup>59</sup> She was a very bright student and always stood first in her class. Even today, this octagenarian, reads the *Hindu* newspaper regularly and converses in fluent English. Her niece, Amina Maliyakal, was the daughter of Nafisa, who was a Communist Party member. Amina studied in Malayalam medium in the Government Girls High School, Thalasseri. She later became a social worker and in 2011, was appointed as the Chairman of the Thalasseri Municipal Corporation.<sup>60</sup>

The *maliyakal* family of Thalasseri had not only educated its girls in missionary schools and colleges, but had also placed them in enviable positions in various important offices. Apart from the *keyis* and the *maliyakals*, there were other reputed matrilineal families in Thalasseri such as that of A.N.P.Ummerkutty, who were highly educated and progressive. Ummerkutty was awarded the M.Sc and PhD degrees from Aligarh Muslim University and has served as the Vice Chancellor of Calicut University. His father's cousin, Kunhahmad Kutty Sahib served as the

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Amina Maliyakal.

<sup>59</sup> For a detailed study of Mariyumma Mayanali, See Lakshmi, L.R.S.. 2013. 'P.M. Mariyumma Mayanali: The Custodian of Matriarchy in Kerala,' *History Today*, 14: pp.140-2

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Amina Maliyakal.

District Judge at the Ottapalam Division of Palakkad in the forties and later became the first Mappila Judge of the Madras High Court. There were many Mappilas who were the alumni of the Basel Mission School and the Brennen College such as Alippy Keyi, A.N.P. Ummerkutty, Abdulla Keyi, Abdur Sattar Sait, O.Abu, K.Uppi Sahib, A.K. Kaderkutty and many others. The reason being that Basel Mission was the only English medium school for boys in Thalasseri and Brennen College was the only Second Grade college in North Malabar. The first Mappila from Brennen College who qualified the Bachelor of Arts degree from Madras University in 1894 was Kunhahmad Koya.<sup>61</sup> The *Kerala Patrika*, in appreciation, hoped that the government would give him a good appointment considering the fact that he was the first Mappila graduate.<sup>62</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, it was noted that there were only two Mappila graduates in Malabar and it was expected that the government would give them some high post so that others would realise the benefit of higher education.<sup>63</sup>

Other than the rich Mappila *tharavads*, there were poorer sections among them such as the fishermen, who were largely clustered around the *kadavath* area of the town. Today, these fishermen families send their children to English medium schools and they have progressed considerably.

### **Politics and the Mappila Community in Thalasseri**

Apart from witnessing an educational renaissance, Thalasseri was an epicentre of Mappila politics. As early as 1895, some Mappilas of Thalasseri had held an anti-Congress meeting.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. p.113

<sup>62</sup> *Kerala Patrika, Calicut*, 3.3.1894. *MNNR*. No.5. 1894. p.72

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.3.1899. *MNNR*. No.6, 1899. p.88

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.1.1895. *MNNR*. No.2. 1895. p.36

The Mappila community was active since the 1920s when the Ali brothers and Gandhiji visited the town to rally for the *Khilafat* cause. K.Uppi Sahib, O.V. Abdulla, Kunhi Mayin Sahib and B.Pokker Sahib were some of the *Khilafat* members. When the Malabar Muslim League was formed in Thalasseri in 1937, many Mappilas from the town joined the League. Uppi Sahib (b.1892) was a prominent leader of the League and was nominated twice as the Member of the Madras Legislative Council. Abdul Sattar Sait was one of the founders of the Muslim League in Malabar. He was the Municipal Councillor of Thalasseri and in 1935, he became the Member of the Central Legislative Assembly. After partition, in 1947, he left for Pakistan.<sup>65</sup> B.Pokker Sahib was another prominent League leader who became a Member of the Madras Legislative Council in the thirties and in 1946, a Member of the Madras Legislative Assembly.<sup>66</sup> From the *keyi tharavadu*, C.K.Mammukeyi was a liberal Muslim leader in Thalasseri in the early twentieth century. C.P.Mammukeyi was a Municipal Chairman, League leader and heralded the publication of the League paper, the *Chandrika*, from Thalasseri. He was also a Member of the Madras Legislative Assembly.<sup>67</sup> A.K. Kaderkutty (b.1910) was a Mechanical Engineer who started the first Saw Mill in Malabar. He represented the Malabar Muslim League in the Madras Legislative Assembly between 1946 and 1952.<sup>68</sup>

When the Communist Party was formed in Pinarayi in Kannur in 1939, some of its dedicated leaders such as, Muhammad Ishaq, E.K. Imbichi Bava, Sadhu P.Ahammad Kutty and K. Kunhali were Mappilas.<sup>69</sup> Mujeebu Rehman argues that the poorer Mappilas were attracted to the

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<sup>65</sup> For a detailed study of Muslim League politics in Malabar, see Lakshmi, *Malabar Muslims*. Chapter VI

<sup>66</sup> Govi. *Thalassery Arivukal*. p.57

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p.60

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p.38

<sup>69</sup> Rehman, Mujeebu M.P., 'Mappilas and the Political Engagements: Myth and Reality', *Indian Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol.5-8, 2014-15, p.231.

Communist Party because of its ideological and organizational appeal. The *beedi* workers of Thalasseri, Ponnani and Kondotty and the plantation labourers of Nilambur also formed the base of the party.<sup>70</sup> Thalasseri therefore had a substantial Mappila representation in the *Khilafat*, Muslim League and the Communist parties.

### ***Arakkal Keyi Alliances***

The Ali Rajas or the *arakkals* of Kannur were the only Muslim ruling family in Malabar since the sixteenth century. It was a custom in the royal family for the eldest member, whether male or female to succeed to the royal throne. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, they were at loggerheads with the British East India Company. The Muslim rulers helped Tipu against the British during the Anglo-Mysore wars during which the British army ravaged Kannur and occupied their fortress by force. After Tipu's defeat, according to a treaty, the Company agreed to return Kannur to Junumabi Adiraja, the then ruling *arakkal beebi*, on a payment of a heavy compensation amount but since the *beebi* was in a financial crisis, she was unable to make the payment.<sup>71</sup> During the war with Tipu, Moosakaka had supported the Company financially and when the *beebi* was defeated, he advised her to strike a compromise with them. He also assisted her with the compensation amount that the Company required. Impressed by Moosakaka's kindness, the *beebi* suggested that the two families, namely the *arakkals* and the *keyis*, should bond in marriage alliances. However, Moosakaka did not show much interest in forming marriage alliances because of the peculiar customs of the *arakkal* family. Whoever married an

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p.232

<sup>71</sup> Mayankutty, A.P.M., 'Arakkal-Keyi Bandhangaal', *Bakers Association Kerala*, p.79; *Interview with C.P. Alippy Keyi*.

*arakkal* princess had to live in the royal household where he would be addressed as 'Ilaya' (Malayalam: meaning groom) and would be given pocket money.<sup>72</sup>

Despite some hesitation, Moosakaka agreed to the marriage alliance between his family member Ussankutty with an *arakkal* princess. Another *keyi* member, Aluppy also married into the same royal family. Aluppy's daughter, *arakkal* Muthubeebi, was given in marriage to another *keyi* from his family who was famously known as Mayankutty *Ilaya*. Known to be a religious man, he built mosques in and around Kannur and invited scholars to the royal palace to translate the *Koran* into *Arabi-Malayalam*. The translated copies were circulated among many Mappila *tharavads*. In 1848, Mayankutty went for a *Hajj* pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia where he found that the *Nizam* of Hyderabad had built an inn for the Hyderabad Muslims, the *Nawab* of Arcot had built one for the Tamil Muslims and the *Nawab* of Tonk for the North Indian Muslims. Mayankutty therefore decided to build an inn for the *Hajj* pilgrims of Malabar, which was called the *Keyi Rubath*.<sup>73</sup>

As part of the *Haram* extension, the Saudi Government demolished the *Keyi Rubath* in 1971 and a compensation amount of 1.4 million Saudi Riyals was fixed. This amount has been deposited in the Saudi *Waqaf* Board till the real heirs of Mayankutty Keyi were found. There has been a virtual row between the *keyis* and the *arakkals* on the issue of successors to the compensation amount of Rupees five thousand crores.<sup>74</sup> The *keyi* family argued that Mayankutty Keyi had no relation with the *arakkal* family when he purchased the property in Saudi Arabia and that they were the real inheritors. The *arakkal* family on the other hand claimed that after Mayankutty's

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p.80; *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Interview with C.P. Alippy Keyi*

<sup>74</sup> Nijish, T.P., 'Malabar Royals to claim Rs 5,000 crore from Saudi govt', *Times News Network*, 23.4.2013

marriage with *arakkal* Muthubeebi, he accepted the title 'Ilaya', hence they were the legal heirs. Both the families had been claimants but later the *keyi* family withdrew their claim.<sup>75</sup> Since these families are matrilineal, the Saudi *Waqaf* Board did not accept the system on the grounds that the *Shariat* does not accept the matrilineal form of succession.<sup>76</sup>

Both the *arakkals* and the *keyis* have now come together and formed the *Keyi Rubath* Action Committee whose Chairman is C.P. Alippy Keyi. There are seventy members in the Committee representing both the *arakkal* and the *keyi* families. The *arakkals* are trying to claim the compensation separately whereas the *keyis* are seeking to claim it jointly. This Committee is working out a compromise on how to claim the compensation and to form a Trust that will utilise the amount for the welfare of the community.<sup>77</sup>

### Analysis

Thalasseri thus provided the atmosphere, as K.K.N. Kurup has rightly said, for the beginning of an 'educational renaissance' in North Malabar. The advent of the German missionaries, the founding of the Basel Mission School, the contributions of Hermann Gundert and Edward Brennen for higher education, the opening of the Sacred Heart Convent for Girls, inspired some sections if not all of the Mappila community to take advantage of English education. The alumni of the Basel Mission Parsi High School and the Brennen College included Mappilas who either held high positions in government bodies or took up active politics as members of the *Khilafat* Committee and the Malabar Muslim League. Compared to the Mappilas of Kasaragod, those in

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Interview with C.P. Alippy Keyi*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*



Thalasseri were definitely several steps ahead in almost all fields. The upward mobility of the community however depended on several factors such as the family background, economic viability, colonial structures, educational benefits and the social milieu of the region.

## Chapter 2

### The *Arakkal* Royal Family and the Lakshadweep Muslims

#### Origins

The *arakkal Ali Rajas* of Kannur, the only Muslim royal family in Malabar, were originally Hindu *nayars*. The ancestor of the family was one Ariyan Kulangara Nayar the hereditary minister of the Kolattiri Raja. Ariyan embraced Islam at the end of the eleventh century or the beginning of the twelfth century. Ali Musa, fifth in the family line, conquered the Maldives for the Kolattiri king and in the sixteenth century, the king granted him the Lakshadweep (corruptly named Laccadives by the British) islands as an estate in return for a payment of 18,000 *panams* (Malayalam: cash). He was also granted Kannur and two small *desams* on the mainland.<sup>78</sup> Thus the possessions of the *arakkal* family consisted of the territory on the Malabar coast and the Lakshadweep islands. They owned large ships that carried shipments of pepper, cardamom, coir and other spices to Surat and to distant Arab lands.<sup>79</sup> Owing to its *nayar* descent, the family and its successors followed the *marumakkathiyam* law of succession. The seniormost member of the family, whether a male or a female, succeeded as the royal head of the family. They called themselves as the '*Arakkal Adirajas*' and their women were addressed as *beebis*. The royal family maintained cordial relations with the Ottoman empire and the *Khalifa* in return acknowledged its traditional custom of matrilineal succession.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India*. 1908. Vol.16. p.87; NAI/Proceedings/Foreign Department/Nos.80-83/September 1907

<sup>79</sup> *Records of Fort St. George*. Letters from Tellicherry 1736-7. Vol.5. Madras: Govt. Press. 1934

<sup>80</sup> Kurup, K.K.N.. 1975. *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore*. p.94

The northern group of the Lakshadweep islands, known as the Amindivi islands, also formed part of the territory of the ruling family for more than two centuries. There are five islands in this group, namely, Amindivi, Chetlat, Kadmat, Kiltan and Bitra, the last one was uninhabited as late as the twenties. (See Table 1.1) The sole cultivation in the islands was coconut palm and coir was the chief industry. The people supplied coir to the mainland and carried back the annual supplies of rice, salt and other commodities.<sup>81</sup> During Tipu's conquest of Malabar, these islands were attached to Mysore in 1786. After Tipu's defeat in the hands of the British in 1799, South Kanara became British territory and the islands were attached to the district. Shyam Bhatt has argued that the flourishing coconut plantation and coir industry in these islands prompted the Company to covet them.<sup>82</sup> A compensation of Rs.5,250 was conceded to the *arakkal beebi* in return for the islands. In 1891, the total number of houses and buildings in the four inhabited islands were only 981<sup>83</sup> and their population was 3,722 which fell to 3,608 in 1901. Cholera epidemics were largely responsible for the decline.<sup>84</sup> By 1921, the population had slightly risen to 4,165<sup>85</sup> (See Table 1.1) and in 1941 to 6177<sup>86</sup>.

In 1792, by the Treaty of Seringapatnam with Tipu, Kannur was besieged by the English East India Company and became their military headquarters on the west coast till 1887. In 1796, a settlement was made with the *arakkal beebi* who agreed to pay fifteen thousand Rupees per

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<sup>81</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.5. pp.304-5

<sup>82</sup> Bhatt, Shyam. 1998. *South Kanara (1799-1860). A Study in Colonial Administration and Regional Response*. Delhi: Mittal Publications. p.4

<sup>83</sup> *Census Report*. 1891. Vol.13. p.486

<sup>84</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.5. p.304

<sup>85</sup> *Census of India*. 1921. Village Statistics, South Kanara District. Madras: Government Press. 1922. p.2

<sup>86</sup> *Census*. 1941. Madras Tables. Vol.2. Madras: Govt. Press. 1942. p.74

annum as the revenue assessment on her houses, *parambas* (Malayalam: garden lands), in and near Kannur and on her trade and *janmam* property in the Lakshadweep islands.<sup>87</sup> A letter to the Government of Madras reads as follows:

‘Our right over Cannanore was therefore full and complete - firstly, by conquest and secondly, by cession...As regards the possessions on the mainland, the family are ordinary British subjects and their lands are British territory.’<sup>88</sup>

**Table 1.1: Population of Amindivi Islands in 1921**

Villages	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Others	Males	Females
Amin Divi	05	2,149	–	–	1,069	1,085
Bitra	Uninhabited					
Chetlat Divi	02	759	–	–	374	387
Kadmat Divi	06	570	–	–	293	283
Kiltan Divi	–	674	–	–	316	358

Source: *Census*. 1921. Village Statistics. South Kanara District. p.2

The Lakshadweep group of islands consisted of Agatti, Andrott, Kalpeni, Kavaratti and Minicoy. The whole of the Minicoy island, which was the largest of the islands, was claimed by the *arakkal Raja* as his own *janmam* property. The people in this island were probably of Singhalese origin<sup>89</sup> and were mostly fishermen and sailors. They spoke a language called *Mahl*, which was the language of the Maldive islands attached to the Ceylon government.<sup>90</sup> Minicoy came into the

<sup>87</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.9. p.299

<sup>88</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Political A/No. 259/70/April 1876.

<sup>89</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.9. p.360

<sup>90</sup> *Census Report*. 1921. p.137

possession of the Ali Raja of Kannur later than the other islands, probably not until the mid-fifteenth century, as a gift from the Sultan of Maldives.<sup>91</sup> The women in Minicoy appeared in public and also took part in public affairs. It is said that they were generally more educated than the ordinary Mappila males of the mainland. The plurality of wives and divorce in these islands were rare.<sup>92</sup>

In the other four islands of Agatti, Andrott, Kalpeni and Kavaratti, there was a scarcity of rice and therefore it had to be brought from the mainland. In Andrott, sweet potatoes, yams, pumpkins and plantains were cultivated and in Kavaratti, coconuts were grown. Kavaratti and Agatti islanders had nothing to live upon except the produce of the palm tree with a scanty supply of fish and poultry.<sup>93</sup> The sources of revenue for the royal family were the monopolies of coir, tortoise shells, coconuts, salt and tobacco. Export duties on coir and import duties on rice were also levied in kind.<sup>94</sup> Trade under the *arakkals* was carried on in the form of barter system. Rice was exchanged for other island products and its exchange rate was fixed annually by the royal family. For example, one *moota* (sack) of rice was exchanged for four cartloads of coir. Later, in the nineteenth century, the island commodities were bought for money in the mainland. The *arakkal* rulers administered the islands with the help of the *karyakars* (agents) appointed by them. The rulings of the *karnavans* (Mal: In this context, the word means elders) who assisted the *karyakars* were final.<sup>95</sup> In 1873, the population of Agatti was 1030, that of Andrott, 3000, of Kavaratti, 1,996 and of Kalpeni, 1,126. The Acting Collector of Malabar who visited the islands in 1891, reported that there was only the smallest rate of increase in the population of the islands.

<sup>91</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.9. p.361

<sup>92</sup> *Census Report*. 1891. Vol.13. p.278

<sup>93</sup> NAI/Proceedings/Foreign dept./Nos.80-83/September 1907.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Gabriel, Theodore P.C.. 1989. *Lakshadweep. History, Religion and Society*. p.21

One of the reasons attributed was the high rates of mortality among children who died even before they were one year old.<sup>96</sup>

According to the provisional agreement of 1796 between the *arakkal* ruling family and the English East India Company, the family had to bear the administrative responsibility of the islands and carry on its trading monopoly for nearly sixty years for a fixed payment of tribute. But once the tribute fell in arrears, the colonial rulers followed a policy of sequestration.

#### **Sequestration of the Lakshadweep Islands**

The Madras government contemplated a permanent transfer of the Lakshadweep Islands to the British rulers from 1876 as the *arakkal* rulers had not cleared the due arrears of tribute. It decided to place the islands under sequestration with the view of recovering the large arrears of *peshkush* (tribute).<sup>97</sup> In return for the resumption of the islands, the government proposed a grant of a compensatory stipend of twenty percent of the normal revenue to the family. This would amount to about three thousand to four thousand rupees per annum in addition to the compensation paid to the Sultan Ali Raja for the loss of the Amindivi Islands to the East India Company.<sup>98</sup> The coir monopoly of the Raja would continue and civil and criminal justice would be administered in communication with the British government. The Ali Raja argued in his reply that the sequestration must be in accordance with the statements of the *beebe* in the treaty of 1793 and partly borne out of the subsequent negotiations with her and her successors, only intended to be

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<sup>96</sup> *Census Report*. 1891. Vol.13. p.489

<sup>97</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Political A/Nos.152-153/July 1876.

<sup>98</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Political A/No.279/70/April 1876.

temporary.<sup>99</sup> There were continuous tensions between the Ali Rajas and the British government when the former refused to return the islands to the latter according to the conditions of the original agreement. Malayalam newspapers such as the *Kerala Patrika* observed that in their anxiety to possess a piece of territory, the British government should not forget justice, equity, fair play and dignity and should allow the Rajas to continue their authority in the islands.<sup>100</sup> In 1895, through the untiring efforts of the Ali Raja's *Diwan*, Kunhi Kannan, these islands were ordered to be restored to the Raja who had fallen in arrears.<sup>101</sup> The *Shamsul-Akbar*, an urdu newspaper published from Madras, also rejoiced about the order of the restoration of the islands.<sup>102</sup> However, the order was not officially carried out and it was argued that the retention of the islands would only be a source of expense to the British government. It spent about twenty thousand to thirty thousand rupees annually for the administration of the islands. It was noted that the periodical visit of a government official to the islands cost a large sum which in a few years would amount to the proprietary value of the islands and the Raja would lose them. Therefore, an early restoration would be consistent with justice.<sup>103</sup>

In a subsequent negotiation with Muhammad Ali Raja in 1904, the Government of Madras wrote to the Government of India whether it would consider the proposal that the Raja be allowed to hold the *karar* (deed) property free of *peshkush* or assessment, provided he accepts a *malikhana* (compensation) of twenty thousand Rupees instead of twenty-five thousand.<sup>104</sup> Muhammad Ali

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Kerala Patrika*, Calicut, 16.2.1895. *MNNR*. No.4. 1895. p.67

<sup>101</sup> *Kerala Sanchari*, Calicut, 31.7.1895. *Ibid.* No.15. 1895. p.247

<sup>102</sup> *Shamsul-Akbar*, Madras, 2.9.1895. *Ibid.* No.17. 1895. p.275

<sup>103</sup> *Manorama*, Calicut, 16.1.1899. *Ibid.* No.2. 1899. p.25.; *Kerala Sanchari*, Calicut, 1.2.1899. *Ibid.* No.3. 1899.

p.39

<sup>104</sup> NAI/Land Revenue dept./File No.247/Part B/ No.9/July 1904.

Raja agreed to the alternative terms offered to him by the British government but also made certain requests that should be granted to him. Firstly, he wanted the compensation amount to be paid in monthly instalments, that one half should be paid to him personally for the maintenance of his position and dignity and the other half to be paid to him as the head of the family. Secondly, he requested that the title of the 'Sultan of Kannur' should be conferred hereditarily upon him and his successors. Thirdly, the salute of seven guns accorded to the head of his ruling family, which had been withdrawn by the government, should be restored to him and his successors.<sup>105</sup> Following his correspondence, the Government of India noted that the assessment of the *karar* property of *arakkal* Rajas would be much less than seven thousand Rupees. The *karar* property consisted of lands claimed by the government or private persons as well as unassessed lands, besides that, the portion to which Muhammad Ali Raja had a valid title as *janmi*. Out of the 3,070 acres of the total tract, the Raja had a clear title to only 1,409 acres of land, assessable at Rupees 4,042. However, the government decided to raise his *malikhana* to Rupees twenty three thousand and also made it clear that if he does not accept the said terms, he would not be given any compensation.<sup>106</sup>

Although Muhammad Ali Raja gave his assent to cede the Lakshadweep Islands, members of his family, namely, Adiraja Imbichi Beebi and Adiraja Ahmad Ali Raja, filed a petition in 1907 protesting against the cession. They argued that the Lakshadweep islands had been given to the family as a valuable heritage and that the *karnavar* (Mal: the seniormost male in a joint family) of their family governed by the *marumakkathayam* law of succession, is only a manager of their

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<sup>105</sup> NAI/Land Revenue dept./File No.133/No.14/Part B/March 1905.

<sup>106</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Proceedings No.6-9/July 1905. p.19



property. Further, he did not have any higher claim than any other members of the family and had no power to negotiate any matter without their consent.<sup>107</sup> In response to their contentions, the Acting Advocate General of the Government of Madras, V.Bhashyam Aiyangar, argued that it was perfectly competent for Muhammad Ali Raja to cede to the British government his sovereign rights over the Lakshadweep Islands without the consent of all or any of the junior members of his family. This was, he further argued, despite the fact that the family, governed by the *marumakkathayam* law of inheritance, are as a corporate body, joint owners of the family property.<sup>108</sup> The Government of Madras wrote back that the claim of the members of the Ali Raja's family cannot be admitted and that the cession was a sovereign act of the State on the part of the ruling chief of the islands.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the cession of the islands was officially complete in 1905. After Muhammad Ali Raja's death, his sister, Imbichi Beebi, who was suffering from ill-health, became his successor. The Government of Madras negotiated an agreement with her according to which, she would be offered payment of arrears of *malikhana* from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1905 if she would agree that the cession by Muhammad Ali Raja from that date would be binding on her and her heirs.<sup>110</sup> The agreement relating to the Lakshadweep Islands surrendered the *beebe's* sovereignty in favour of the Company.

Just as K.K.N. Kurup has rightly pointed out, the *arakkal* ruling House crumbled because of the selfish motives of the British government which converted the ruling chieftain into a mere

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<sup>107</sup> *Memorial from Adi Raja Imbichi Beebi and Adi Raja Ahmad Ali Raja of Cananore*, dt. 10.1.1906, in NAI/Foreign dept./Proceedings/Nos.80-83/September 1907. p.160

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* p.160

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* p.162

<sup>110</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Proceedings/Nos.109-110/September 1908.

landholder or *janmi*.<sup>111</sup> The British policy of treating Princely States as tributaries was also implemented among small native rulers like the *arakkals*. Leaving the *beebis* to shoulder the financial burden of administering the islands and taking tributes from them, the British imperialist policy was more of an exploitative one. A careful study of the correspondence between the Madras government and the Foreign department in Shimla, reveals that the British wanted to cede the islands on the pretext of maladministration by the ruling family. There are frequent references to the islanders being unhappy under the *arakkal* administration. This was just a ploy of the British to get a strong foothold in the islands. The *Ali Rajas* were not only financially burdened but when they were unable to pay the stipulated *peshkush*, the islands were sequestrated and finally ceded to the British government. Kurup argues that the power and prestige of the *arakkal* family mainly depended on its possession of the islands and when they were taken away, the principality merely remained a powerless landed aristocracy with the title of Sultan.<sup>112</sup>

### **Muslim Community in the Islands**

The stone images of a Buddha head in Andrott belonging to the eighth and ninth centuries provides sufficient evidence of the presence of Buddhism in the islands.<sup>113</sup> Whether Buddhism travelled from Ceylon or from Kerala to the islands is not however clear. According to tradition, the Hindus of Malabar, went in search of the last Chera king, Cheruman Perumal, when he left for Mecca in the ninth century, but were shipwrecked on these islands. They remained Hindus

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* p.56

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p.80

<sup>113</sup> The stone images of the Buddha head is preserved in the Government Golden Jubilee Museum, Agatti, which was established in the year 2000. I had made a personal visit to the museum in November 2016.

for a long time till the arrival of Ubaidulla, the disciple of the first Khalifa, Abu Bakr, from Arabia, around the thirteenth century.<sup>114</sup> They adopted the religion of Islam under his influence and came to be known as the Mappilas. Similarity of the language and customs of the islands with the mainland show that these islands, except Minicoy, were originally colonized by the Hindus of Malabar.<sup>115</sup> In habits and customs, they resemble the Mappilas of North Malabar, except that the women hold a more important position and are not veiled or secluded. They mostly followed the *marumakkathyam* system of inheritance although some also followed the *makkathayam* (patrilineal) law. They speak a dialect called *jazari*, which is a mix of Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi and Arabic words.<sup>116</sup> The script used by them is Arabi-Malayalam which is Malayalam written in Arabic characters.

The Amini island was the first to witness the advent of Islam when Ubaidulla and his wife anchored here. Later, they moved to Andrott and preached Islam there where Ubaidulla's tomb has been built.<sup>117</sup> The Mappila community in this island had three main classes, namely, the *karnavars*, the *malumis* and the *melacheris*. The *karnavars* comprised of the rich *odam* (Mal: sailing vessel) owners and *panchayatkars* (Mal: arbitrators). The male members of this class were also distinguished by the title of *koya* – the religious dignity. The island *karnavars*, the *amin* and the *kazi*, all belonged to this class. Within this class, there was a sub-group called the *thanakapirantha kudiyan*s who were less wealthy and were cultivators. Inter-marriage between the two classes of *karnavars* was not allowed. The *malumis* were *patta kudiyan*s, who were

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<sup>114</sup> *Census Report*. 1891. Vol.13. p.278

<sup>115</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.16. p.87

<sup>116</sup> An observation made during my field visit to the islands of Agatti and Kavaratti in November 2016.

<sup>117</sup> *Census Report*. 1891. p.278

partly independent and partly dependent on the higher classes. The *melacheris* were generally *adima kudiyaans* or servants of the *karnavars* but were at liberty to change their employers.<sup>118</sup>

A.J. Platt, the Inspecting Officer of these islands, observed that the island Muslims preserved class distinctions traceable to their original Hindu castes.<sup>119</sup> Their customs were found to be peculiar and they were socially divided into the *koyas*, the *malumis*, the *urukkarans*, the *talerus*, the *milikhans* and the *melacheris*. The *koyas* were the land and boat owners and were superior to the others, the other classes were sailors and where they were cultivators, they cultivated under the *koyas*. The *melacheris* were the slaves of the *koyas*, who cultivated their lands, took the produce of those lands in boats to the mainland and paid twenty percent of their sales proceeds to their owners.<sup>120</sup>

As in Malabar, the Muslims of the islands followed the *Shafi* school of Islamic jurisprudence. The islanders generally dressed like the Mappilas except the *melacheris* who used only a coarser kind of cloth. They were not allowed to intermarry with the other social groups. The *koyas* were believed to be the descendants of the *nambudiri* brahmins, the others of the *nayars* and the *melacheris* of the *thiyyas* (originally toddy tappers) and the *mukkuvans* (fishermen). In 1891, there were 2,623 *koya* inhabitants in the islands.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Logan. 1951. *Malabar*. p.ccxci

<sup>119</sup> 'The Laccadives and Minicoy, 1935', *A.J. Platt Papers*. 1922-44. IOR/MSS, p.13. As an Inspecting Officer, he had to hear all civil and criminal appeals, all serious criminal cases and could impose a death penalty. He also had to examine school children, dispensaries and appoint *amins* and *karnavans*. All matters relating to the islands were examined by him. p.18

<sup>120</sup> *Census Report*. 1891. p.278

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*. p.279

The area of the Agatti island is 2.71 square kilometres and that of the Kavaratti island is 3.63 square kilometres. (See Table 1.8) The population of the islands had been fairly stationary – in 1845, it was estimated at 7,700 for the four northern islands and in 1901, it was 7,180. In a disastrous cyclone of 1847, three hundred people were killed in Andrott and five hundred in Kalpeni. Nearly one thousand people had died of the cholera epidemic in Andrott in 1894.<sup>122</sup> By 1921, the Mappila population of the Lakshadweep islands including Minicoy, was 9,454<sup>123</sup> (See Table 1.2) and by 1941, it had risen to 12,100<sup>124</sup> (See Table 1.3).

William Logan, the author of the *Malabar Manual*, has described the Agatti island as a *melacheri* or a low-caste island.<sup>125</sup> The number of mosques in this island was thirty-five in 1848 and twenty-seven in 1880.<sup>126</sup> The reason for this decline in the number of mosques is however not clear. It could be that the cyclone that hit the islands in 1847 damaged some of their buildings. The Agatti people found a strange livelihood in Malabar for their surplus male population. Every year, nearly hundred to two hundred men arrived in Kozhikode and lodged together in or around the *valiangadi* or the big *bazaar*. On Mondays and Fridays, each of them visited one or two Muhammadan houses and chanted portions of the *Koran* for the dead souls. In return for their services, they were given food throughout the week. During their leisure times, they would embroider silk *topis* (caps) like those worn by the Singalese Muslims. Before the onset of the monsoon season in the mainland, they would return to the islands with their

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<sup>122</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.16. pp.87-8

<sup>123</sup> *Census Tables*. 1921. p.160

<sup>124</sup> *Census Tables*. 1941. Vol.2. Madras: Govt.Press. 1942. pp.72-3

<sup>125</sup> Logan. 1951. *Malabar*. Appendix xxi. p.cclxxxxi

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*. p.cclxxvii

savings.<sup>127</sup> In the Amini island, goldsmiths from Malabar came over to make gold jewellery for the islanders.<sup>128</sup>

In Kavaratti, the same division of inhabitants, as in Andrott, into different social groups, existed but all the groups claimed to be *janmis*. A few who migrated from other islands during the disastrous cyclone in 1847, were dependants of the *koyas*. Some of the lower social groups were *topi* makers like those at Agatti. The *melacheris* were called *thandels* at Kavaratti. The *malumis* were more influential in this island than in the other islands.<sup>129</sup>

Like in Malabar, the religious authorities in these islands, particularly, in Andrott, Agatti and Kavaratti, were the *thangals*, who claimed their ancestry from the *sayyids* of Arabia.<sup>130</sup> However, unlike those in Malabar, whose heirs descended in the matrilineal line, in Andrott and Kavaratti, they were patrilineal and served as the *kazis* at various mosques. They also provided patronage to mosques like the *ujjrapalli* and were responsible for their maintenance and upkeep.

The British appointed *amins* in the islands who were supposed to exercise the powers of a village magistrate. In the exercise of his judicial functions, the *amin* was assisted by a body of thirteen to eighteen elders or *karnavans* of whom any four at a time would sit as assessors in his court.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Proceedings/Nos.80-83/September 1907. p.56

<sup>128</sup> *Madras Fisheries Bureau Bulletin*, No.4. Madras: Government Press, 1910. p.116

<sup>129</sup> Logan.1951. *Malabar*. p.cclxxxix

<sup>130</sup> For a detailed description of the *thangals*, see Lakshmi, *Malabar Muslims*.

<sup>131</sup> *Platt Papers*. p.13

These *amins* were not authorised to fine anyone and could only sentence a man to twelve hours of imprisonment.<sup>132</sup>

### Family System

There were many old renowned families in Andrott, Agatti and Kavaratti like the *Kuttilamada*, *Pondinoda*, *Keelapura*, *Muthankkakarta*, *Ullikannapura* and *Vadakallapura tharavads*. The *Kuttilamada* family of Cheriakoya Musaliar of Andrott dates back to the late nineteenth century.<sup>133</sup> Except for Andrott, the other two islands followed a matrilineal and matrilineal family system. In this, they resemble some of the Mappila families in north Malabar. The women stay together in their joint family house under a female head, who is the seniormost member in the house. After marriage, a woman's husband resides in her *tharavad* house and he is addressed as the '*pudiyapilla*' (Mal: new groom). The *Pondinoda*, *Keelapura* and *Muthankkakarta* are all old matrilineal *tharavads* in Agatti. Today some of these *tharavads* have partitioned their properties and have built separate houses for their various branches. The *Ullikannapura* and *Vadakallapura tharavads* are some of the oldest matrilineal *tharavads* in Kavaratti. The *Vadakallapura tharavad* today comprises of a total of twenty-two members.<sup>134</sup>

Logan has noted that the islanders were quiet in their disposition, but the complexities of the Muhammadan rules of inheritance and marriage, and the simultaneous existence of the

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<sup>132</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Proceedings/Nos.80-83/September 1907. p.58

<sup>133</sup> A *Meezankallu* or a tombstone with Arabic calligraphy dating back to Hijra 139/756 A.D. has been donated by the family to the Government Golden Jubilee Museum at Agatti. Personal observation, November 2016.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with the family members of the various *tharavads* mentioned above. November, 2016.

*makkathayam* and the *marumakkathayam* rules gave rise to frequent litigation.<sup>135</sup> Platt has also echoed similar views on this dual system and had himself settled many such cases. When there was no evidence to show to which category a certain property belonged, he followed a method in which one party would challenge the other to swear to its rights in the mosque and whoever did swear, received the property.<sup>136</sup> In 1873, there were eight disputes in Andrott, twenty-six in Agatti and in Kavaratti, there were thirty-eight cases to be heard and settled. Some of the disputes were settled by the *kazis* of Kozhikode and Ponnani from the mainland.<sup>137</sup> In the islands, ancestral or *tharavadu* property was known as the *velliashcha sothu* or Friday property. Self-acquired or personal property was called *thingalashcha sothu* (Monday property) or *vyazhazhcha sothu* (Thursday property). Ancestral property descended through the female line and was governed by the *marumakkathayam* law whereas the personal property was governed by the Muhammadan law of succession. There were however inter-island variations in the division of property.<sup>138</sup> The customary laws were codified and implemented in 1912 according to the Laccadive Islands and Minicoy Regulation.<sup>139</sup>

Women in Kavaratti found employment in preparing fibre and twisting coir but some women of the upper social groups did not engage in this occupation. Girls were married at an early age but dowry was not given. The *kazis* were instructed to maintain a register of marriages and divorces,

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<sup>135</sup> Logan. 1951. *Malabar*. p.ccxci

<sup>136</sup> *Platt Papers*. p.14

<sup>137</sup> NAI/Foreign/Political A/Nos. 259/70/April 1876

<sup>138</sup> George, Abraham. 1987. *Lakshadweep: Economy and Society*. p.78

<sup>139</sup> NAI/Proceedings/Home Dept./Judicial/Nos.103-111/February 1912



**Table 1.2: Population of the Lakshadweep Islands in 1921**

Islands	Occupied Houses	Persons	Males	Females	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Others
Agatti	234	1,051	540	511	01	1,050	—	—
Andrott	472	2,492	1,300	1,192	06	2,486	—	—
Kalpeni	252	1,375	697	678	07	1,368	—	—
Kavaratti	344	1,461	729	732	—	1,461	—	—
Minicoy	582	3,093	1,409	1,684	—	3,089	02	02
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,884</b>	<b>9,472</b>	<b>4,675</b>	<b>4,797</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9,454</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>02</b>

*Source: Census Tables. 1921. Village Statement. Laccadive Islands*

**Table 1.3: Population of Lakshadweep Islands by Religion in 1941**

Laccadive Islands	Hindus		Muslims		Indian Christians		Buddhists	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
	70	02	5,895	6,205	—	01	05	01

*Source: Census Tables. 1941. Vol.2. Madras: Govt. Press. 1942. pp.72-3*

showing the amount of payment settled on the women and the payments which were actually made.<sup>140</sup> Platt observes that divorce in these islands was easy and frequent. If the husband wanted the divorce, he had to repay the wife's dowry and if the wife wanted it, she had to lose the dowry. There were very few people who had not been married and divorced atleast twice.<sup>141</sup>

Each of the four inhabited islands had their peculiarities. In Andrott, the *karnavars* were persons of wealth and influence which was reflected in their embroidered waistcoats and long silk robes in bright colours. Kavaratti was known for its mosques whose pillars and porticos were made from wood brought from the mainland and carved in floral designs. In Agatti, it was the travel in the boats called *odams*, against the strong winds and Kalpeni was famous for its rowing songs interspersed with Arabic words.<sup>142</sup>

### **Old Mosques in the Islands**

Some of the old mosques in the islands are more than three centuries old. Andrott has some of the oldest mosques built by saint Ubaidulla. His tomb is also laid and revered as a *dargapalli* and an annual *urs* (meaning: birth anniversary) is celebrated there. The *Pazhayepalli*, the *Ujrapalli*, and the *Jumapalli* in Agatti are some examples. Most of these resemble the Kerala mosques with sloping tiled roofs particularly built to suit the heavy monsoon conditions. Some of them, such as the *Jumapalli* has been renovated in the Indo-Saracenic style.<sup>143</sup> There are a total of

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<sup>140</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Proceedings/Nos.80-83/September 1907. p.58

<sup>141</sup> *Platt Papers*. p.14

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 14-16

<sup>143</sup> Personal observation in Agatti, November 2016.

approximately forty-five mosques in this island. In Kavaratti, the *Marakkarpalli*, the *Porathepalli*, the *Jumapalli* and the *Ujrapalli* were the oldest mosques. Among these, the *Ujrapalli* is very famous for its wooden pillars and carvings that were brought from the mainland. It was built by a *sufi* saint named Sheikh Mohammad Kasim belonging to the *Qadiri silsila* (meaning: order) and his tomb is buried here. An annual *urs* of the saint is celebrated with high reverence. There are about forty mosques in this island also.<sup>144</sup>

Some of these mosques were built by the *arakkal* family and some received the contributions from different families settled in the islands. The royal family maintained the mosques in the islands and made payments in kind such as coconuts and coir, for their upkeep. They appointed the *kazis* and paid them in kind. They donated coconuts to extract oil to light the traditional brass lamp or the *nilavilakku* in the mosques. The *nilavilakku* is lighted in some of the old mosques even today. Separate prayer rooms, called *namaskarakuda* have been constructed for the women of the islands.<sup>145</sup> Separate mosques for the Mujahids have also been built. The gravestones were made of grained coral sandstone sculptured with inscriptions in Arabic.<sup>146</sup>

### **Traditional and Colonial Systems of Education**

Education in the islands had taken a back seat for many centuries. Traditional mosque schools founded by the *arakkal* rulers however existed, where boys and girls were taught the *Koran*. There were mosque schools in Agatti where sixty boys and girls of the higher status groups

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<sup>144</sup> Personal observation in Kavaratti, November 2016

<sup>145</sup> Personal observation in Agatti and Kavaratti, November 2016

<sup>146</sup> *Madras Fisheries Bureau Bulletin*, No.4. p.117

learnt the *Koran*. It was only in the late nineteenth century that the British government began to experiment with the idea of opening schools in the islands. In 1878, the then Inspecting Officer, Winterbotham, brought three teachers from Madras and started one school each in Kavaratti, Andrott and Agatti. In the school in Agatti, thirty Muslim boys were enrolled, out of which only eleven appeared for the examinations in 1880.<sup>147</sup> The school at Kavaratti was closed down in 1880 due to lack of students and instead, a school was opened in Kalpeni.<sup>148</sup> Again in 1884, the schools in Agatti and Andrott were shut down because of the slim attendance of students.<sup>149</sup> Five years later, in 1889, the schools in Andrott, Kavaratti and Agatti were reopened and trained teachers from the mainland were appointed. In Kavaratti and Kalpeni *gumasthas* took up the role of teachers.<sup>150</sup>

The progress in education was very slow. Out of 10,274 persons, only 461 were literate in 1901 and of these fifty-one were females.<sup>151</sup> Of the five islands attached to the Malabar district including Minicoy, only two, namely, Andrott and Kalpeni maintained a State school each. A school was also opened in Kavaratti in 1904 but in the other two islands, any attempts to start schools were unsuccessful. The schools at Andrott and Kalpeni were each under a trained Muhammadan teacher, and both of them were inspected and examined for grants. The grants amounted to rupees sixty in Andrott and rupees eighty-six in Kalpeni. The entire cost of education in these islands were met from the island funds.<sup>152</sup> The subjects taught in these schools

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<sup>147</sup> Logan. 1951. *Malabar*. p.cclxxvii; 'Lakshadweepu Vidyabhyasa Charithram – Pradhana Sambhavangal', in *Billam. Kavaratti Senior Basic School Smaranika*, 2001-2. p.84 (Malayalam)

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* p.cclxxxix; *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Lakshadweepu Vidyabhyasa Charithram*. p. 84

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. 1908. Vol.16. p.88

<sup>152</sup> *Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency, 1904-5*. Madras: Govt. Press. 1905. p.106

were Malayalam and Arithmetic. However the attendance in the Kalpeni school was only six. In Kavaratti, steps were taken to establish a school by appointing the island schoolmaster. The idea behind the appointment was that as his uncle was a *mukri* (*Koran* instructor) of one of the principal mosques, there was some prospect of getting some students from the mosque schools to join the State school. In Agatti, the new *amin* had been directed to persuade the Muslim boys to join the State school while in Andrott, there was a proposal to combine the mosque schools with the secular schools and to pay the schoolmaster a small monthly sum. Efforts were also made to hire a Muslim Malayalam teacher on a salary of fifteen or twenty rupees.<sup>153</sup> A school was founded in Amini in 1904 and a Muhammadan teacher from Kasaragod was appointed.<sup>154</sup> In Kalpeni, a bright Mappila student named Pudiya Illam Koyakidavu Koya, was given a monthly scholarship of five rupees and sent to study in the Basel German Mission Primary School in Thalasseri in 1905.<sup>155</sup> By the twenties, government schools in the islands of Kiltan, Kadmat and Chetlat were also established.

In 1945, Sixth Standard was introduced in the schools of Kalpeni, Andrott and Agatti but they were all discontinued in 1951 due to lack of funds. A total of three hundred and fifty-three pupils went to school in all these islands in 1951.<sup>156</sup> In 1956, when these Islands became a Union Territory, thirty-eight percent of school-going children attended nine primary schools and the teaching staff were untrained.<sup>157</sup> An Assistant Educational Officer was appointed in 1958 at Kavaratti and by 1961, four primary schools were opened for girls with 1,299 pupils. The first

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<sup>153</sup> NAI/Foreign dept./Proceedings/Nos.80-83/September 1907. p.80

<sup>154</sup> *Lakshadweepu Vidyabhyasam*. p.84

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Ramunni, M.. 1972. *Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands*. p.48

<sup>157</sup> Mukundan, T.K.. 1979. *Lakshadweep. A Hundred Thousand Islands*. p.162

High School was started in Amini in 1961 and nursery schools were opened in Kavaratti, Kalpeni, Andrott, Agatti, Amini and Minicoy by 1965.<sup>158</sup>

In Agatti, the *Thanveerul Islam madrassa* was the first religious school for the Mappila students which held classes upto the Fifth Standard. On its premises, the Government Junior Basic School (North) was constructed on rent in 1962 for classes upto Eighth Standard and for High School, the students had to sail to the Amini island.<sup>159</sup> It was only in 1985-86 that a High School was established in Agatti. It is a mixed school for girls and boys and the medium of instruction is Malayalam. All the government schools in the islands are closed on Fridays for the *juma* prayers and are open for half a day on Sundays. The students however are exempted from wearing their regular school uniforms on Sundays.<sup>160</sup>

In Kavaratti, the Government School was founded in 1878 and was upgraded to an Upper Primary School only in 1958.<sup>161</sup> This school later became the Government Senior Basic School with classes upto the Eighth Standard. It is now called the Government Girls High School, the only Girls school in the island. About five hundred girls are presently studying in this school. The Government Senior Secondary School was established in 1962 in Kavaratti. The classes taught are from Eighth to Twelfth Standard and the medium of instruction is both English and Malayalam. The languages taught are Malayalam, English, Arabic and Hindi. The number of boys and girls presently enrolled are 433 and 146 respectively. There are a total of nineteen

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<sup>158</sup> *Lakshadweepu Vidyabhyasam*. p.84

<sup>159</sup> Interview with the Principal, Government Junior Basic School (North), Agatti. November 2016

<sup>160</sup> I visited the schools in Agatti on a Sunday where I was informed by the teachers about the system.

<sup>161</sup> *Lakshadweepu Vidyabhyasam*. p.1

teachers appointed in this school on both permanent and contract basis.<sup>162</sup> The schools in the islands except for the *Kendriya Vidyalayas*, follow the Kerala pattern of textbooks.<sup>163</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru College was the first Junior College that was founded in Kavaratti in 1972 which offered Pre-Degree courses for the students. Ten years later, a second Junior College named Mahatma Gandhi College, was started in Andrott.<sup>164</sup> There were 5,200 pupils, 232 teachers and twenty-four scholarship holders, that is, eleven for Medicine, two each for Agriculture and Engineering and others for post matriculate courses.<sup>165</sup> In 1994, the Jawaharlal Nehru College was shifted from Kavaratti to Kadmat. The Eleventh Standard under the Kerala State Board was introduced in both the Colleges in the year 2000.<sup>166</sup> The District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) was established in Kavaratti in 2005 which provides a two-year B.Ed programme for aspiring students. There are more women candidates who enrol for this course.

### **Occupations of the Island Muslims**

The primary occupation of the island Muslims is fishing which provides them a profitable source of living. Boat-building seems to have had no equivalent in the fishing world because of the skill, workmanship and the intricate geometrical patterns in black and white that adorn their boats.<sup>167</sup>

Some men work as the crew in vessels and ships and some earn a living as boatmen. Tourism as

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<sup>162</sup> Interview with the Principal, Government Senior Secondary School, Kavaratti, November 2016.

<sup>163</sup> 'DRG training on revised textbooks of Kerala', *The Lakshadweep Times*, 11.5.2015, p.2

<sup>164</sup> *Lakshadweepu Vidyabhyasam*. p.84

<sup>165</sup> Mukundan. 1979. *Lakshadweep*. p.163

<sup>166</sup> *Lakshadweepu Vidyabhyasam*. p.84

<sup>167</sup> *Madras Fisheries Bureau Bulletin*, No.4. p.117

an industry is also picking up for which there are taxi drivers who show tourists around the islands. Some businessmen own shops and sell groceries, clothes, vegetables, fruits and other essential commodities. In Agatti, some men and women are employed as the airport security personnel and some in the State Guest House. There are a few professionals such as doctors, lawyers and educationists in the various islands.

### Recent Developments

In 2006, Sultan *Arakkal* Adiraja Zainaba Ayesha Beebi was throned as the royal head by the *arakkal* family at a coronation ceremony in Kannur, which was attended by the Chirakkal Raja family, who are still in friendly relations with them.<sup>168</sup> Even today, the *beebe* has the sole right to announce the *perunal* or the Big day when *Eid* would be celebrated unlike other Muslim majority regions like Kozhikode or Thalasseri where the *kazis* would declare the appearance of the moon on *Eid*.<sup>169</sup> The royal family had made a bizarre demand to the Central government in 2013 for a higher compensation or the return of the Lakshadweep Islands. Adiraja Muhammad Rafi, the son of the present royal head, Zainaba Ayesha Beebi, argues that there are one hundred and fifty members in the family and it is struggling to finance its royal rituals and maintain its four mosques. A royal trust has been formed to raise the demand for a higher *malikhana* with the government. This demand from the *arakkals* was made at a time when in June, 2013, the Kerala government decided to give a monthly pension of rupees 2,500 each to the eight hundred and twenty-six members of the *Samuthiri* royal family of Kozhikode.<sup>170</sup> The Durbar Hall of the

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<sup>168</sup> Mustafah, K.K.. 'A Palace without a Queen,' in *The Hindu*, 9.6.2012.

<sup>169</sup> *Interview with Muthu Beebi*, Thalasseri, August 2015

<sup>170</sup> Sudhakaran, P.. 'Pay more or return Lakshadweep; Arakkal Family', *Times News Network*, 25.7.2013.



*Arakkal* Royal House, which was once a meeting place for the royal head and his nobles, has been renovated by the Kannur *Arakkal* Royal Family Trust and converted into a Museum.<sup>171</sup>

To conclude, the lives of the Mappilas of the Lakshadweep Islands were made difficult by the harsh conditions of nature. The sea is the heartbeat of their everyday life. Rice, which is the staple food of the islanders, is still scarce and is supplied from Kerala and sold at subsidised rates in ration shops. They have no cattle to provide milk and so, they survive on milk powder which is again supplied by the mainland. The natives live mainly on black tea. Goods are generally supplied to Agatti in cargo ships from Kochi and Mangalore and to Kavaratti from Kozhikode. Speed boats ferry people from one island to the other but during the heavy monsoon season, which resembles Kerala, the sea levels rise and therefore, commuting by vessels and boats is not permitted. Even today, Agatti looks more like a village with simple seaside houses with sloping roofs whereas Kavaratti is comparatively richer with many big residential bungalows, government offices and buildings. Plenty of coconut trees are lined up in both the islands which add to their beautiful landscapes. Caste hierarchy that was so predominant in both the pre-colonial and colonial periods has considerably diluted now and the islanders have accepted both intercaste and inter-island marriages. However, the *koyas* or the *thangals* would still prefer marriage alliances within their own status groups.

The pace of overall progress among the island Mappilas had been very slow during the colonial period. Till the sixties, even for a High School education, the islanders had to sail to the Amini

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<sup>171</sup> Mustafah. 'A Palace'.

island and for pursuing any degree course, they had to travel to the mainland. Despite all the hardships, in the twenty-first century, after Kerala, Lakshadweep has the second highest literacy rate in the country which is commendable. They are now entitled to a subsidised higher education in government colleges and universities in Kerala. They also have reservations in government jobs in the islands. Some have migrated to towns like Kozhikode and even to the Gulf countries to avail of better educational and job opportunities.

The islands became a Union Territory in 1956 when the Amindivi islands were amalgamated with the Lakshadweep Islands, and in 1981, ninety-four percent of these Muslims were categorized as Scheduled Tribes. I would argue that this is an anomaly because they do not show any characteristics of a tribe and they can in no way be compared to any of the tribal communities in India. Any tribe has its own peculiar religious practices such as worshipping nature, fire, mountains and so on. The Muslims of Lakshadweep socially resemble the Malabar Muslims, who are not Scheduled Tribes. The islanders are very peaceful, cordial and honest in their everyday life and they welcome tourists with utmost respect and warmth.

## Chapter 3

### The Kasargod *Byaris*: A Symbol of Tradition

#### Geographical Setting

The South Kanara district was bounded on the north by the Bombay Presidency, on the east by Mysore and Coorg, on the south by Malabar and on the west by the Arabian Sea. The Chandragiri river, the longest river (105 kms) forms the southernmost border of Karnataka. Also known as the Dakshina Kannada region, the entire length from the Kalyanapur river (near Udupi) upto the Chandragiri river was called 'Tulunadu'. At Kasaragod, the Chandragiri (Payaswani) flows into the sea past an old fort.

#### Historical Setting

The Kasaragod district was the southernmost region of ancient Karnataka. This region has been ruled by many dynasties such as the Kadambas, the Rashtrakutas, the Aloopas, the Vijayanagara kings and the Ikkeri Nayakas. As a tradition, the Malayalis during ancient times were prohibited from crossing the Chandragiri river. Hence the influence of the Malayali culture on the people to the north of the river was almost minimal or negligible.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Rao, B. Narasinga. 2009. 'Kasaragod - God's Own District', in *Nada Deepa - Centenary Celebration Sovenir of B.E.M. High School*. p.55

British connection in the region began in 1737, when the factories at Thalasseri, taking advantage of a hostile move by the Bednur Raja, obtained commercial advantages including all the pepper and the cardamom monopoly in certain tracts.<sup>173</sup> In 1782, Tipu Sultan conquered the region and in 1799, the British defeated him and took over the 'Tulunadu'. For administrative convenience, the British rulers divided the region into the North Kanara and the South Kanara districts, the former under the Madras Presidency and the latter under the Bombay Presidency. South Kanara was divided into the five *taluks* of Coondapoor, Kasaragod, Mangalore, Udupi and Uppinangadi, and also included the Amindivi Islands in the Indian Ocean.<sup>174</sup> For administrative purposes, South Kanara was divided into three subdivisions, namely, Coondapoor, comprising the Coondapoor and Udupi *taluks*, the Mangalore *taluk* and Puttur, comprising of Uppinangadi and Kasaragod *taluks*. Civil justice in these *taluks* was administered by the District *Munsifs*.

The South Kanara region was predominantly agricultural where the best rice lands and areca gardens were found. The finest coconut gardens were found adjoining the coast and to the north of the Chandragiri river, the land grew excellent rice crops. In the south of the Kasaragod *taluk*, *kumari*, or shifting cultivation was carried on in the jungles.<sup>175</sup> Under the British revenue administration, the South Kanara District was brought under the *ryotwari* system. But the settlement only proved to be detrimental to the lives of the cultivators. In the Kasaragod *taluk*, complaints were raised that full particulars of lands were not given in the draft *pattas* (agreement) issued to the landlords and proper care had not been taken in the classification of

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<sup>173</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India*. 1908. Vol. 14. p.356

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p.358

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p.362

soils. Consequently, second and third class lands had been entered as first class lands and assessed accordingly. The assessment was found to be proportionately too high in the *taluk* and the people found it quite impossible to pay the increased assessment.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, complaints were raised that the assessment imposed upon the new settlement on *kumari* cultivation in the Kasaragod *taluk* was very excessive. This cultivation took place only once in ten years and the cultivators faced hardship and loss because the assessment levied on such precarious crops was heavy and permanent.<sup>177</sup>

### The Language Question

In the South Kanara district, the vernaculars largely spoken were Tulu, Malayalam, Kannada and Konkani. Tulu was the spoken language in Mangalore, Udupi and Uppinangadi *taluks*, Konkani was also spoken by a fifth of the people in Mangalore while a fourth of the people in Udupi spoke Kannada. In the Amindivi Islands and in Kasaragod (which adjoins Malabar), Malayalam was the prevailing vernacular.<sup>178</sup> The *Imperial Gazetteer* of 1908 mentions 82,000 members of the Malayalam castes, most of whom were found in the Kasaragod *taluk*.<sup>179</sup> Owing to its large Malayalam speaking population, Kasaragod became a bone of contention between the Malabar and the South Kanara districts. The language question came to light when inconveniences were caused to the Malayali population of Kasaragod in matters of land tenures, registration and court litigations. For example, similarities in the customs and usages in the Malabar district and the Kasaragod *taluk* were cited in order to extend the benefit of the Malabar Tenants Improvements

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<sup>176</sup> *Kerala Sanchari*, Calicut, 29.4.1903. *MNNR*. No.18. p.180

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.5.1903. *MNNR*. No.21. p.204

<sup>178</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. No.14. p.60

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

Bill introduced in the Council in 1899.<sup>180</sup> It was argued by a vernacular paper, *Kerala Chandrika*, that the registrar's office of the southern division of the Kasaragod *taluk* was in Hodsdurga and a sub-registrar's office at Payyanur, a part of Malabar. All the documents to be registered were brought to the Payyanur office. It also stressed on the point that it would be beneficial to the people if the two southern divisions of Thazhakat and Nileswaram were incorporated into Malabar and a registrar's office opened there. This would solve the inconvenience which the Malayalis of the southern parts of the Kasaragod *taluk* were put to as the official language was Kannada.<sup>181</sup>

In 1901, there was a proposal to abolish the District *Munsif's* Court at Kasaragod and to establish an additional District *Munsif's* Court in North Malabar. A correspondent of the *Kerala Patrika* observed that in case the Court was abolished, then the whole tract of land lying south as far as Chandragiri should be added to Malabar. It was argued that the language, the customs and the land tenures in the Kasaragod *taluk* were very similar to that of Malabar. The people would have to bear the inconvenience of travelling to Mangalore or Puttur to conduct their civil suits. To add to this inconvenience, the court language at those places was Kannada and not Malayalam.<sup>182</sup>

Subsequently, there was a rumour in 1902 that a separate district named North Malabar would be formed comprising the three *taluks* of North Malabar, Kasaragod and Coorg. It was also expected that the extension of the railways from Kannur to Mangalore and from Thalasseri to Mysore would afford the litigants of Coorg and Kasaragod, easy access to the headquarters.<sup>183</sup>

On the other hand, the proposal also had other reactions such as that the people of South Kanara

<sup>180</sup> *Kerala Chandrika*, Calicut, 1.2.1899. *MNNR*. No.3. p.42

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.11.1900. *Ibid.* No.22. p.364

<sup>182</sup> *Kerala Patrika*, Calicut, 14.9.1901. *MNNR*. No.38. p.389

<sup>183</sup> *Kerala Sanchari*, Calicut, 26.11.1902. *Ibid.* No.48. p.424

would have to travel a long distance if an additional District *Munsif's* Court was established in North Malabar.<sup>184</sup> There was also an opinion that a sub-registry office should be opened at Chandragiri in order to facilitate the Malayali population living in the Kasaragod *taluk*.<sup>185</sup>

The language issue further escalated when in 1908, the Madras government called upon the District Judges of both North Malabar and South Kanara to submit reports in consultation with each other for the establishment of a subordinate court somewhere between Thalasseri and Mangalore. The Mangalore District Court had been agitating for such a court to be established in Mangalore whereas the Thalasseri District Court wanted one in Thalasseri. The argument however centred around the people of the Kasaragod *taluk* and North Malabar whose language was Malayalam. There were big landed *janmis* (hereditary proprietors of land) in Kasaragod such as, the *Thazhakat Mana*, *Keloth*, *Echikanath*, *Venga* and also the Rajas of Nileswaram and Mayipadi who were all Malayalis. All these *janmis* paid thousands of rupees as assessment and the great bulk of their tenants were Malayalis who were compelled to conduct their litigations in the Kanara courts in a language unknown to them.<sup>186</sup> Amidst suggestions of a Sub-Registry office in Thrikarippur in southern Kasaragod<sup>187</sup>, simultaneous objections and agitations were also noticed. The *Hindu* commented that substituting Malayalam for Kannada in the District *Munsif's* Court in Kasaragod would be a hasty decision as it would change a practice that had worked

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<sup>184</sup> *Swadesamitran*, Madras, 16.10.1901. *MNNR*. No.42. p.432

<sup>185</sup> *Kerala Sanchari*, 13.6.1904. *Ibid.* No.3. p.30

<sup>186</sup> *The West Coast Spectator*, Calicut, 25.11.1908. *Ibid.* No.48. p.833

<sup>187</sup> *Kerala Sanchari*, 3.2.1909. *Ibid.* No.7. p.102

smoothly for nearly hundred years.<sup>188</sup> Agitations began in South Kanara on the grounds that the emoluments of the Kannada *vakils*, clerks and petition writers would be affected.<sup>189</sup>

Soon the subject of the language question translated itself into demands for the redistribution of the South Kanara district and the creation of a North Malabar district comprising the places south of the Chandragiri river in the Kasaragod *taluk*, Chirakkal, Kottayam and Kurumbranad *taluks*, the northern half of Wyanad, and the Malayalam-speaking province of Coorg with Kannur as its headquarters.<sup>190</sup> A memorial had also been sent by the Malayalis of Kasaragod to the government requesting the amalgamation of their *taluk* with the Malabar district.<sup>191</sup> Although Kannada was the official language of South Kanara, it was spoken only by eighteen percent of the population whereas Tulu and Malayalam were spoken by larger numbers.<sup>192</sup> Though Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar moved a resolution in 1913 on the floor of Madras Governor's Council demanding the merger of Kasaragod *taluk* with the Malabar district, it had to be withdrawn because of the stiff opposition of the members from Karnataka. In 1927, a political convention held at Kozhikode, passed a resolution stressing the above demand.<sup>193</sup> In the same year, an organisation titled *Malayalee Seva Sangham* was formed. However, it was not until after independence that the issue was resolved.

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<sup>188</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, 3.3.1909. *MNNR*. No.10. p.136

<sup>189</sup> *Kerala Patrika*, 13.3.1909. *Ibid*. No.12. p.178

<sup>190</sup> *Kerala Sanchari*, 28.7.1909. *Ibid*. No.32. p.594

<sup>191</sup> *Kerala Patrika*, 13.3.1909. *Ibid*. No.12. p.178

<sup>192</sup> *Census of India*. 1921. p.135

<sup>193</sup> *District Handbooks of Kerala, Kasaragod*, Department of Information and Public Relations March 2003, p.8



## The Mappilas of Kasaragod

Like the Muslims of Malabar, those in Kasaragod were also called the Mappilas. The early history of the Muslims of Kasaragod dates back to Malik bin Dinar's visit to the region in the ninth century. Apart from his visit to the Malabar coast, he also landed on the banks of the Chandragiri river in Kasaragod, where he built the first mosque, known as Malik bin Dinar *Palli*. It is located in *Thalangara*, the first Muslim settlement in the region. It contains the grave of Malik Ibn Mohammed, one of the descendants of Malik Ibn Dinar and the place is sacred to Muslims. Another notable mosque in Kasaragod was the Theruvath Mosque which is in the centre of the town. An important celebration called *urs* takes place every year in commemoration of the arrival of Malik Ibn Dinar. The *urs* celebrated in Nellikkunnu mosque, attracts people in thousands. The *nercha* celebration, during the second half of November, lasts for one week.

The people of Dakshina Kannada called the Mappilas as '*Byaris*', which could be the corrupt form of '*Vyaparis*' (traders).<sup>194</sup> According to the census of 1871, there were 38,320 Mappilas in the Kasaragod *taluk*.<sup>195</sup> The number of Mussalmans in South Kanara in 1881 were 93,652.<sup>196</sup> Of the total population of the district in 1901, the Mussalmans constituted 1,26,853 or eleven percent and were proportionately more numerous than in any districts except Malabar, Madras city and Kurnool and most of them were Mappilas.<sup>197</sup> A largely agricultural region, Kasaragod produced rich crops such as arecanut, cashewnut, coconut and tobacco. To the south of the

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<sup>194</sup> Hudawi, Moyin Malayamma. 2008. *Kasaragod Muslimgalude Charithram*. p.160 (Malayalam)

<sup>195</sup> *Census Statement of Population*. 1871. Madras: Scottish Press. 1874. p.83

<sup>196</sup> *Census Table*. 1881. South Kanara.

<sup>197</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer*. p.359

Chandragiri river, tobacco and vegetables were grown in considerable quantities by Mappilas.<sup>198</sup> The products of South Kanara such as pepper, cardamom, coir, copra, cashewnuts and arecanut were exported to foreign countries like Arabia and the French ports. One of the important local industries is cloth cap making, which was the main means of livelihood of a large number of Muslim women. The caps manufactured at Kasaragod were exported to Zanzibar and other African countries.<sup>199</sup> The most important trading classes were the Mappilas and the Konkans. Although the Mappilas were mostly businessmen, some of them cultivated lands either as owners or as tenants. Those in the coast were also engaged in the manufacture of coir.<sup>200</sup> It was noted that in the West Coast, the Mappilas formed the largest Islamic community and in South Kanara, the same sect predominated.<sup>201</sup> The Malayalam speakers were almost all Mappilas of Malabar and South Kanara.<sup>202</sup> By 1921, the total number of Mappilas in the Kasaragod *taluk* were 66,252 and by 1931, they formed over a fourth of the population.<sup>203</sup> Their population had increased to 95,542 by 1941.<sup>204</sup> (See Table 1.5)

There were one hundred and fourteen villages in the Kasaragod *taluk*, out of which the strength of Mappilas in the Kasaragod town, *Thalangara* and *Chemanad* was relatively higher. The two oldest Muslim settlements of the region were *Thalangara* and *Chemanad* along the banks of the Chandragiri river where the number of Mappilas in 1921 were 1,149 and 1,135 respectively.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* 361

<sup>199</sup> *District Handbooks of Kerala, Kasaragod.* p.5

<sup>200</sup> Bhatt. 1998. *South Kanara.* pp.206-14

<sup>201</sup> *Census of India.* 1911. Madras. Report . XII (I): 53. Madras: Govt. Press. 1912.

<sup>202</sup> *Census of India.* 1921. Madras: Govt. Press. 1922. p.137

<sup>203</sup> *Census of India.* 1921. Village Statement, Kasaragod *taluk*; *Census of India.* 1931. Report. XIV (I): 317  
Madras: Govt. Press. 1932

<sup>204</sup> *Census Tables.* 1941. Vol.2. p.74

<sup>205</sup> *Census.* 1921. Village Statement, Kasaragod *Taluk.*

(See Table 1.4) *Thalangara* consisted of areas like *Padinhar* (West), *Kunnil* (mount), *Kadavath* (ferry stand) *Khazilane* (probably the lane where the *kazis* lived), *Nuppadamail*, *Bangod*, *Theruvath* (street). The areas of *Thalangara* consisted of smaller *theruvus* (localities) and each *theruvu* had its own mosque and *madrassa*. Most of the people were conservative and gave importance to religious education. These Muslim settlements consisted of predominantly landlord families. For example, the first Muslim family of *Kadavath* Haji Ali of *Thalangara* was a *janmi* family.<sup>206</sup> The earliest ancestor of Haji Ali came from Thalasseri in the seventeenth century. His descendants and their extended families are now spread out in *Thalangara*. There are no other families living there.<sup>207</sup>

Similarly, *Chemanad*, another well-known Muslim settlement also had many rich landlords. The main difference between the *Thalangara* Mappilas and those of *Chemanad* was the law of succession that they followed. While the *Thalangara* Mappilas followed the Muhammadan law<sup>208</sup>, those in *Chemanad* followed the *marumakkathayam* law.<sup>209</sup> Haji Ali's family also maintained a family mosque, called the *Kadavath Mohiyideenpalli*, adjacent to his ancestral house. This mosque was meant only for his family members and was a private property till 1973, when it was converted into a *waqaf* property.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Document no. 369/1935, Partition Deed dated 26.02.1935. (trans. from Kannada to Malayalam) shown to me by Haji Ali's family, *Kadavath House*, Interview dated 30.06.2015

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> Document No. 369/1935.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Hameed Ali Schannad and Advocate Fouzia, 35, 'Sea View', Kasaragod, dated 28.06.2015.

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Haji Ali, 30.06.2015

Table 1.4: Population of Hindus and Muslims in Kasaragod in 1921

Villages	Number of Hindus	Number of Muslims
Kasaragod Town	4,247	2,855
Talangara	905	1,149
Chemnad	1,471	1,135

Source: Census. 1921. Village Statement. Kasaragod Taluk.

Table 1.5: Population of Hindus and Muslims in Kasaragod in 1941

	Hindus		Muslims	
	No. of Males	No. of Females	No. of Females	No. of Females
Kasaragod	102,867	106,859	46,982	48,560

Source: Census Tables. 1941. Vol.2. Madras: Govt. Press. 1942. p.74

The principal landholders of the Kasaragod *taluk*, who were also known as *janmis* like their counterparts in Malabar, were members of the *Kerala Janmi Sabha*. As the land tenures and the customs of both the regions were similar, this *sabha* had the privilege of electing a member to the Madras Legislative Council to represent the interests of its landholders.<sup>211</sup> In the interior

<sup>211</sup> NAI/Legislative/No.25/December 1912

villages of the Kasaragod *taluk*, there were many Mappila cultivators. The Mappila fishermen, also known as *pusalars* were also found along the coastal areas of the *taluk*.<sup>212</sup>

*Chemamad* was reputed for the services of Mohammad Schamnad Sahib (b.1870), son of Abdul Khader Sahib. Despite social ostracism, he studied in St.Alosyius School, an English Medium School in Mangalore and was the first Muslim to matriculate from South Kanara. He continued his higher studies in Madras Christian College. He was a member of the South Kanara District Board for twenty years and a pioneer of Muslim education in the region. In 1907, he founded the South Kanara Educational Association and was the President of the South Kanara Educational Board. He was also the President of the Kasaragod *Taluk* Board. From 1921 to 1929, he was the Member of the Central Legislative Assembly, Delhi and from 1930 to 1941, a Member of the Madras Legislative Council.<sup>213</sup>

In 1927, Schamnad Sahib had filed a petition to seek previous sanction for the Malabar Wills (Amendment) Bill which he proposed to introduce in the Madras Legislative Council. The object of the Bill was to make the Muhammadan law applicable to wills executed by the Mappilas governed by the *marumakkathayam* law of inheritance. He suggested that the Malabar Wills Act, 1898, after amendment would be called the Mappila Wills Act, 1928. Schamnad Sahib argued that in the matter of inheritance, the Mappilas of North Malabar and the southern part of the Kasaragod *taluk* followed the *marumakkathayam* law, and this Bill would Islamize some of their

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<sup>212</sup> D'Souza, V., 'Status Groups among the Moplahs on the south-west coast of India', in Ahmed, Imtiaz.(ed.). 1978. *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India*. New Delhi: Manohar. p.46

<sup>213</sup> Photographs of Schamnad Sahib sitting along with Motilal Nehru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and other members in the Central Legislative Assembly, Delhi, were shown to me by his family. *Interview*, 28.06.2015.

customs. The Bill would provide that in the case of wills written by Mappilas, the principles of Muhammadan law would apply. The Collector of Malabar responded that individual Mappilas and Muhammadan associations were in favour of legislation and therefore the proposed amendment would be accepted.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, it was Schamnad Sahib who proposed the Mappila *Marumakkathayam* Bill in 1939, representing the Kasaragod matrilineal families. He was strongly opposed by the North Malabar Mappilas in this matter.<sup>215</sup> Although the Act which was passed subsequently, provided succession according to the Muhammadan law, the family mosque of Schamnad Sahib, known as the *Kannadipalli*, still follows the *marumakkathayam* system of succession under his maternal cousin, Ahmed Schamnad, which is a paradox.<sup>216</sup> This custom is similar to some parts of Malabar, such as Kozhikode, Thalasseri and Kannur where family mosques are inherited in the female line. In Malappuram, although the *thangals* (religious functionaries) followed the Muhammadan law of succession, the office of these religious authorities were held according to the matrilineal system of descent.<sup>217</sup>

### Muslim Education

Kasaragod was well known for its Islamic seminaries and after Ponnani in south Malabar, it was the second most important centre of Islamic learning. In 1941, the *Alia* Arabic College and the *Jamiya Sahadiyya* Arabic College were established.<sup>218</sup> The foundation of the *Alia* Arabic College was laid by the Arakkal Sultan Abdurahman Ali Raja. The *Darul Huda Islamic University* was founded in 1985 in Malappuram and under its affiliation, the *Malik Dinar Islamic Academy* was

<sup>214</sup> NAI/Home/Judicial/File No.837/27/1927

<sup>215</sup> See Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. Chapter II.

<sup>216</sup> Interview with Hameed Ali Schamnad. 28.06.2015

<sup>217</sup> See Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. Chapters II, III.

<sup>218</sup> *Chemanad Grama Panchayat*, Kasaragod. (Malayalam) p.3

started in *Thalangara* in 2011. The academy is under the management of the *Malik Dinar Juma Masjid* Committee, Kasaragod. It provides a twelve years free education programme annually to forty male applicants under the age of twelve. The minimum qualification required is the Fifth Standard from a *madrassa*. The course is classified into elementary, secondary, graduate and postgraduate classes. The students receive their degrees from the *Darul Huda Islamic University* and also earn the title of 'Hudawi'.<sup>219</sup> Mappila students from the Malabar region also enrol themselves in this Islamic institution. Today, there are ten Arabic colleges in Kasaragod.

As far as secular education was concerned, vernacular papers noted with despair that Mr. Pinhey, the Collector and the President of the District Board, South Kanara, did not pay proper attention to education in the district. Nearly fifty Board schools were abolished and the salary system under which the schools worked was replaced by the Results Grant System, thus reducing the grants from Rupees 4,750 to Rupees 1,830.<sup>220</sup> In the beginning of the twentieth century, there were no English schools except one at Payyanur. Students had to travel a long distance to reach the school and many poor boys (girls were hardly sent to school those days) were unable to attend the school because they had to pay ferry tolls at Ulyan ferry. Therefore the people of the district requested that the British government should take appropriate steps to solve the inconvenience of the school-going population.<sup>221</sup> The President of the Malabar District Board had exempted schoolboys from paying tolls at ferries, but that of South Kanara had not taken a

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<sup>219</sup> Hudawi, Anas. 2010. *Malik Deenar and Old Masjid of Kasaragod*. (trans. from Malayalam by Hashir Payyanur) Kasaragod: Malik Deenar Islamic Academy. p.85

<sup>220</sup> *Kerala Chandrika*. 12.5.1899. *MNNR*. No.9. p.144

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*. 3.3.1900. *MNNR*. No.5. p.80

similar step. This itself was one of the instances showing the latter's indifference in the matter of education.<sup>222</sup>

**Table 1.6: Education of Muslims in Kasaragod Taluk in 1891**

Age	Population		Literate		Illiterate		Literate in Malayalam		English		
	Persons	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
0-10	17,180	8,658	8,522	07	02	8,651	8,520	05	—	—	—

Source: *Census Tables*. Madras. Part III. 1891

The education of Muslims in the Kasaragod taluk was almost negligible, except for religious learning. As the census of 1891 showed, the number of literate persons in the taluk were only nine, which was just a handful of the Muslim population of 17,180.<sup>223</sup> (See Table 1.6) The Basel Mission was the first to establish a primary school in Kasaragod in 1906 but it had no Muslim students on its rolls. The school was upgraded to a Girls High School in 1943. Initially, only eighteen female students were enrolled and therefore, the school management decided to include boys as well. Ten of them were admitted and the first batch of twenty-eight students appeared for the matriculation examination. Compared to the education of Mappilas in North Malabar, that of Kasaragod was quite backward. For example, the number of Muslim students enrolled in the

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.* 12.5.1899. *MNNR*. No.9. p.145

<sup>223</sup> *Census Tables*. 1891. Madras. Table V. Part III.



Basel Mission School were minimal except for Hameed Ali Schamnad, grandson of Mohammad Schamnad, who was enrolled in the third standard in 1936. The only other Muslim student was Cherkalam Abdullah who later became an MLA from the Manjeshwaram Assembly Constituency.<sup>224</sup> After 1947, the schools under the management of the Basel Evangelical Mission was brought under the control of the Church of South India (CSI).

Mohammad Schamnad Sahib took much initiative in the field of education and in 1926, he presided over the first Muslim Educational Conference in South Kanara.<sup>225</sup> He was elected as a Member of the Madras University Senate in 1930.<sup>226</sup> Under his guidance, the Madonna Convent was founded in May, 1939 by Apostle Carmel.<sup>227</sup> Mariyambi Schamnad, the granddaughter of Schamnad Sahib, was the first student to be enrolled in the school. On demand from the Muslim community, Arabic as a subject, was also introduced and it was taught by two Christian male teachers. This was a rare example of the Arabic language being taught by members of the Christian community. The Madonna Convent today has eighty percent Muslim students on its rolls.<sup>228</sup>

In 1945, again under Schamnad Sahib's initiatives, *Thalangara* got its first Muslim school, called the Government Muslim High School. This school retains the same name unlike other Mappila schools in Malabar which have been renamed as Government schools. Another

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<sup>224</sup> *Centenary Celebration Souvenir*. p.30

<sup>225</sup> Hudawi. 2008. *Kasaragod*. p.369

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*. p.261

<sup>227</sup> *Interview with Advocate Fouzia*, daughter of Hameed Ali Schamnad. 28.06.2015. The school celebrated its Platinum Jubilee in December 2015.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*.

important point to be noted is that the Mappila schools in Malabar were founded much earlier in the late nineteenth century<sup>229</sup> whereas in Kasaragod, it was founded only in the mid-twentieth century, that too, because of individuals such as Schamnad Sahib's intervention.

Apart from the *Thalangara* Muslim High School, Schamnad Sahib was the brainchild behind the foundation of schools such as the Thrikkaripur Girls School, the Kanhangad Girls School, the Kasaragod *Thayalangadi* Girls School and the *Kalanad* Girls School.<sup>230</sup> In *Chemanad*, the *Jamaatpalli* which was built in 1800, was reconstructed in 1967. It founded its own primary school in 1982, which was later upgraded to a higher secondary school. Education is provided here for both Mappila girls and boys.

The first Mappila girl who matriculated from *Thalangara* was Sara Aboobacker. Born in 1936 in the Muslim settlement of *Thalangara*, she was married at the age of thirteen. She completed her matriculation after marriage and is now a prolific Kannada writer. She began to write only at the age of forty-six. Settled in Mangalore, her novels narrate stories of her early years in *Thalangara*. 'Chandragiriya Theeradhalli' (on the banks of the Chandragiri), her novel in Kannada is a classic example.<sup>231</sup> It talks about the life of Nadira, who gets caught in the orthodox interpretation of the *Koran* and who finally has to drown herself and her sorrows in the Chandragiri river. The novel deals with the system of triple *talaq* and how it ruined the life of a young Muslim girl. But this simple novel seems to have stirred a hornet's nest in the Muslim

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<sup>229</sup> For details, See Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. Chapter V.

<sup>230</sup> Hudawi, *Kasaragod*. p.370

<sup>231</sup> Abubacker, Sara. 1984. *Chandragiriya Theeradhalli*. Mangalore : Chandragiri Prakashana (Kannada)

community. Initially it was told that the author was a man masquerading as a woman. When it was proved that the author was a woman, the tone of the accusation changed. They said she did not know what she was writing about and then came the accusation that she was not an authentic Muslim followed by the comment that she lacked integrity and that she wrote for money. They even stooped to the level of pelting her house with stones and eggs.<sup>232</sup>

The English translation of her book has a note by her at the end titled "A Muslim Girl Goes to School". It is a touching note beginning with a description of her town Kasaragod and her family and she talks about her birth in these words:

'Into this illustrious family which had grown tired of praying for a girl, I was born at sunrise on the twelfth day of Rabbiyul Awwal, the day in the Muslim calendar on which the Prophet Mohammad was born. Only, I was no prophet... My grandfather had six sons. My father was the eldest. My father too had three sons in a row. It was only after my grandfather took a vow that the next child, if it was a girl, would be named Sara, after the name of Hazrat Ibrahim's dear wife, that I was born. When I was a small girl, I often wished my grandfather hadn't taken this vow, for I too could have been born a boy and as carefree as one...'

In the paragraphs which follow she explains why she felt that way. She says that those days no mother would agree to have her children inoculated. People worried that something may go wrong with the inoculation. When officials of the health department came, children were hidden. And yet it was customary in those days to pierce five or six holes in the ear lobes of a Muslim girl. The wounds took two months to heal. Sara describes those two months as living hell. Those who did not want a child inoculated said nothing about this, for how could a girl wear her gold earrings at her wedding if she did not have these several holes in her ear lobes? Sara observes painfully that for the sake of an unknown bridegroom who would demand gold a girl had to

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<sup>232</sup> Lakshmi, C.S.. 'Going to School,' in *The Hindu*, 16.9.2001.

undergo so much of pain even before her wedding. She goes on to say that when so many holes were pierced in the ear without even an antiseptic lotion the girls' screams would reach the sky.

Sara's father came to her rescue and saw to it that her ear lobes were not pierced in this fashion. Not only that he dared to send her to a Girls' school nearby and after seven years in that school, sent her to a mixed school where her brothers studied. She was the only Muslim girl there but she had no problems. But the people of her community could not accept a girl going to school without *purdah* or even a scarf on her head. Many snide remarks were passed in her hearing including comments that Islam will not thrive if girls went about like this. But her father and elder brother stood firmly behind her and saw to it that she completed her school studies. But even her father had to deny her certain things. Sara was the best player in the throwball team in her school and yet she could not go out of the town to play with the team in various matches. Once when she pleaded with her father to be allowed to go out of town to play a match, he told her firmly, "You are the first Muslim girl in our community to set foot in a school. When just the act of your attending school has raised so many eyebrows, what will people say if you went out of town to play? You must take care not to err in any way. If you do, then no other Muslim girl in this town will ever even have a glimpse of a school...." He also told her that if she became too adamant he may have to stop her schooling. Frustrated with all this discipline, Sara decided to give up her studies. But it was her elder brother who persuaded her to continue and not give in to frustration. Her family waited for her to finish her school studies and to write her final exams she had to wage another battle. And finally, when she got through with a first class, her elder brother

who knew that she would not be allowed to study any further asked her with tears in his eyes, "Why did you score so well?"

Sara noticed that even twenty-eight years after her schooling, things had not changed much in this town. Girls who pursued their studies did it outside Kasaragod. Girls were still married off at the age of fourteen or fifteen. She quotes the example of a Muslim girl who not only passed her high school exams but got the first rank. However, even before the results were out she was with her husband in Dubai.<sup>233</sup> Sara's story is a reflection of an orthodox Mappila community which did not encourage the education of girls.

The Government College, Kasaragod, established in 1957, is an important educational institution. Apart from education, there was also a demand for the representation of the community in Public Services. Inspired by the Malabar Muslim *Majlis*, the Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) and the *Himayathul Islam Sabha* of Malabar, which put pressure on the British Government to recruit Mappilas in the Public Services, there were associations that represented them in Kasaragod. These were the *Thanveerul Islam* Association, Kasaragod and the *Al-Azhariyya* Association, Mangalore, which sought the nomination of a Mappila to the Indian Civil Services.<sup>234</sup> These associations however do not exist anymore.

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<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> For details, see Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. p.129

## Muslim Politics

The participation of the Mappilas of Kasaragod in politics was first seen in the *Khilafat* movement. The leadership of the movement was in the hands of Mohammad Kunhi Musaliar who was supported by Karippodi Moideen Kunhi. On 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1920, Shaukat Ali and Gandhiji visited Mangalore to spread the *Khilafat* cause. Mappilas from Kasaragod, including *maulvis* and *musaliars*, joined in large numbers along with the Hindus at the venue. A strong sense of unity among both religious communities could be felt at the Mangalore conference.<sup>235</sup> For example, Mohammad Kunhi Musaliar, Karippodi Mohammad Kunhi and Karippodi Moideen Kunhi were active *Khilafatists* from Kasaragod.<sup>236</sup> Schamnad Sahib took special efforts to provide relief measures for the victims of the Mappila rebellion. When several Mappila prisoners were deported to the Andamans under the Andamans Colonization Scheme of 1925, he was appointed as a member of the Enquiry Commission and sent to the Islands to study their conditions.<sup>237</sup> During this time, in Malabar, Mohammad Abdurahiman moved several petitions against the Andamans Scheme.<sup>238</sup>

Moideen Kunhi led the Salt Satyagraha in Kasaragod in 1930. At that time Mohammed Sherul was the President of the Kasaragod Congress Unit.<sup>239</sup> The *Palayi* Harvest Agitation (1941), *Cheemeni* Estate Struggle(1942), *Kayyur* Agrarian Riot (1944), *Eleri* Estate Agitation (1946), *Karinthalam* Paddy Seizure Revolt (1948) and many other struggles waged by the peasant

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<sup>235</sup> Hudawi, *Kasaragod*. p.144

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.* p.145

<sup>237</sup> *Interview with Hameed Ali Schamnad*. 28.06.2015.

<sup>238</sup> See Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. Chapter VI.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

organisations accelerated the tempo of the freedom movement.<sup>240</sup> All these peasant movements were manifestations of the strong alliance of the Communists and the agriculturalists in Kasaragod. They were the riots of the cultivators against the *janmis*. The Kasaragod Mappilas also joined hands with the Communists in these peasant struggles.<sup>241</sup> Mujeebu Rehman has argued that the Mappila presence was significant in the Kayyur riot.<sup>242</sup> The emergence of a class organization of peasants known as the *All Malabar Karshaka Sangham* under their leadership added a new dimension to the anti-imperialist activities in these regions.<sup>243</sup>

At this juncture, it would be relevant to quote the words of the communist leader, E.M.S. Nambudiripad, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Mappila rebellion in Malabar. He wrote:

The Communist Party recalls wholeheartedly and respectfully the great bravery and revolutionary skill by the ten thousand of the Moplahs who came forward to battle against the 'satanic rule' at the call to arms of Congress and Khilafat Committees... The party admires the courage exhibited by the Moplah peasants who fought valiantly against the White Regiments and the Gurkha Regiments for nearly four months. It views with indignation and condemns the various atrocities committed by the British government in hanging several Moplahs, in transporting several thousands to the Andamans, in having rendered several Moplah families homeless and in having arranged 'Wagon tragedies' which are only comparable with Hitler's fascism. The party recalls its appreciation of the action of the KPCC President, the late Mr. Mohamad Abdurahman Sahib who argued that the Moplah rebellion should be known as the Malabar rebellion and not as Moplah rebellion, because the glories of 1921 were not the property of the Moplahs alone but of the district.<sup>244</sup>

Nambudiripad's quote is in itself self-explanatory and shows his empathy for the Mappila peasants and their affiliation to the party in the Kayyur riot followed by the various peasant movements in Kasaragod is nothing but a natural affinity towards the Communists.

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<sup>240</sup> *District Handbooks of Kerala, Kasaragod*. p.7

<sup>241</sup> Kurup, K.K.N.. 1988. *Modern Kerala. Studies in Social and Agrarian Relations*. Delhi: Mittal Publications. p.119

<sup>242</sup> Rehman, Mujeebu M.P., 'Mappilas and the Political Engagements: Myth and Reality', *Indian Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol.5-8, 2014-15, p.232.

<sup>243</sup> *Chemanad Grama Panchayat Report*. p.4

<sup>244</sup> Translation of an article "Call of 1921 and the Warning" by E.M. Sankaran Nambudiripad, published in 'Deshabhimani' dated 20.8.1946. NAI/Home/Political/F.No.5/40/46/1946

Schamnad Sahib was awarded the title of 'Khan Bahadur' by the British Government. As he was a British loyalist throughout, several anti-British Mappila leaders of south Malabar opposed and criticised him.<sup>245</sup> He took up the leadership of the Kasaragod unit of the Muslim League in 1940. After his death in 1948, his grandson, Hameed Ali Schamnad (b.1929), carried on his legacy. A graduate from St.Alosyus College, Mangalore, he went on to study law at the Madras Law College. He entered politics and soon became the President of the Muslim League Committee. In 1960, he was elected as the only League member in the Nadapuram constituency, which was a Communist constituency. He was a Rajya Sabha member between the years 1970 and 1979. Today, at the age of eighty seven, he remembers every page of Kasaragod history and the achievements of his grandfather, Muhammad Schamnad Sahib.

### **Conclusion**

By 1951, the population of Mappilas in Kasaragod district was 2,50,425.<sup>246</sup> In 1956, due to the efforts made by eminent people like K.P.Kesava Menon, Kasaragod became part of Kerala following the reorganisation of states on linguistic basis and the formation of Kerala State on first November 1956. It was attached to the Kannur district. The Mappilas here speak a different Malayalam from those in Malabar as there are lots of Kannada words interspersed with Malayalam. Unlike places like Thalasseri where the missionaries played an important role in the dissemination of education among the Mappilas, in Kasaragod, it was more of an individual effort by men like Schamnad Sahib. Today, the Mappilas of Kasaragod are progressing but

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<sup>245</sup> Interview. Hameed Ali Schamnad. 28.06.2015

<sup>246</sup> Census. 1951. South Kanara.



compared to those in Malabar, they are still miles behind. Although historians, K.K.N. Kurup and E.Ismail have argued that the women in Kasaragod are educationally backward<sup>247</sup>, it would be relevant here to point out that Mappila girls do not find grooms in their community unless they are atleast graduates. Mappila men may not have studied beyond the tenth or the twelfth standards, still they prefer to marry educated girls.<sup>248</sup> However, compared to other regions in Malabar, the Mappila men and women of Kasaragod are yet to reach high educational and professional levels although there are a sprinkling of women doctors, teachers and lawyers. Women wear *burkhas* in public, although, Advocate Fouzia says that her mother never wore them, nor did she or her sisters. *Burkha* shops are spread out not only in Kasaragod but also in Kozhikode, Kannur, Malappuram and other Muslim majority areas of Malabar. This seems to be largely an influence of the dress code followed in the Gulf region because the traditional dress of a Mappila woman is the *mundu* (dhoti), a full-sleeved blouse and a scarf.

Today, 37.5 percent of the population in the Kasaragod district constitute the Mappila Muslims. From almost every Muslim household of *Thalangara* and *Chemanad*, atleast two or three members are Gulf expatriates. In the interior villages of Kasaragod, there are many Muslim families who are comparatively poor. As in these villages, Kannada is the medium of instruction in the government schools, the Mappilas studying there are categorized as 'Kannada Minority'. Although they have reservation in government institutions in Kasaragod, they are still struggling to get admissions in government colleges in other districts in Kerala as there is a hidden discrimination against them. In a nutshell, compared to the Mappilas of Malabar, those in

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<sup>247</sup> See Kurup, K.K.N. and Ismail, E.. 2014. *Muslim Women in Kerala*. Delhi: Shipra Publications. p.99

<sup>248</sup> Interview with Advocate Fouzia. 28.06.2015

Kasaragod did not witness much progress in the social, economic, educational and political spheres in the colonial period.

## Chapter 4

### A Comparative Study of the Three Regions

#### The Three Regions

The three regions of Thalasseri, Kasaragod and the Lakshadweep Islands have three different landscapes. While Thalasseri is situated in north Malabar, Kasaragod belonged to the South Kanara district. Thalasseri is a small town surrounded by the Arabian Sea which adds to the picturesque beauty of its landscape. Bungalows overlooking the sea are built upon a hillock, such as, Carvey Brown's bungalow, which is now called *Ayisha Manzil*. Kasaragod *taluk* is a mountainous terrain with lots of *kunnu* (Malayalam: hill) and *medu* (Malayalam: mound), forests and the Bekal Fort on the shores of the Arabian Sea. Kasaragod and north Malabar have similar physical features, particularly, the southern portion of the *taluk*, which was part of the territory of the Chirakkal Raja. The islands are a separate geographical entity.

Islamization in the three regions was not much different from each other. In Thalasseri, marriage alliances between Arab merchants and the local Malayali women played a major role whereas, in Kasaragod and the islands, Arab saints such as the preachings of Malik bin Dinar and Ubaidulla, were significant. In Thalasseri, the *dargah* cult was not very predominant as in Kasaragod or the islands. A small *dargah* named *Mattambarampalli* in *bazaar* road, about a hundred and fifty

years old, was worshipped mostly by the fishermen community, who prayed for their safety before going to the sea for fishing. On the contrary, Kasaragod was renowned for its annual *urs* and *andu* festivals at the various *dargahs*, including that of Malik bin Dinar. In the islands of Andrott, Kavaratti and Agatti, saint worship, particularly that of the *Qadiri* and the *Rifai sufi silsilas* (orders), was very predominant.<sup>249</sup> The Mambram *thangal*, Sayyad Alavi Thangal, is said to have visited Ubaidulla's tomb in Andrott and a memorial in his name was also erected. The Mappilas of Andrott equally venerated both the saint and the *thangal*.<sup>250</sup>

### **The Colonial Structures in the Regions**

All the three regions administratively belonged to the Madras Presidency, yet, the content and extent of administration were variable factors. The Malabar and the South Kanara districts were administered directly by the District Collectors while the Lakshadweep Islands were indirectly administered by the British government and were visited annually by a British Inspecting Officer. These islands, by tradition, were under the ruling *arakkal* family of Kannur till the time the British took over their indirect administration. Although Kannur remained with the family, since the British had a military base there, the cantonment area was a major colonial addition.

Of the three regions, Thalasseri and Kasaragod had a municipality each, which was responsible for the administration of the towns. Other colonial structures such as courts, hospitals and

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<sup>249</sup> Muthukoya, N.. 1986. *Lakshadweep Nootandukaliloode*. Published by K.P. Kadeeja, K.Puthiyannal. Andrott Island, Lakshadweep. p.58 (Malayalam)

<sup>250</sup> For a detailed study of the Mambram *thangals*, see Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. Chapters I, III

schools were found in the early nineteenth century in Thalasseri and Kasaragod whereas, in the islands, there were *amin* (village headman) *kutcheris* (courts) and one or two government schools which were constructed in the mid-nineteenth century. In the islands, under the *Ali Rajas*, only the customary law was followed and the rulings of the *karnavans* were treated as final. Under the British administration, the *amins* exercised the powers of a Village Magistrate and were the dispensers of justice.<sup>251</sup> As far as the judiciary is concerned, the colonial government had established courts at Thalasseri because it was the administrative headquarters of north Malabar. The divisional and *taluk* offices and the District Court of north Malabar were situated here. The District Court for north Malabar was established as early as 1802 in the town. In the Kasaragod *taluk*, there was no District Court and its people therefore had to depend on the District Court at Mangalore. Moreover, there was a prolonged battle for a separate District Court for the Malayalam-speaking population of Kasaragod throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While the Collector of Malabar paid attention to education and waived the ferry tolls for school children, the Collector of South Kanara did not take steps to provide free ferries for the school-going children who faced a lot of hardships.<sup>252</sup> In the islands, the *arakkal* ruling family made arrangements for traditional *Koran* learning for their Muslim population. English education did not arrive in these islands till the late-nineteenth century. Even in Kannur which was under the

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<sup>251</sup> *NAI/Proceedings/Foreign Dept./Nos. 80-3/September 1907*, p.58

<sup>252</sup> See chapter 3.

*Ali Rajas*, some *musaliars* forbade English education for the Mappila boys on the grounds that English was 'injurious'.<sup>253</sup>

Health care suffered a setback both in Thalasseri and in Kasaragod. Medicines were found insufficient in the Tellicherry Hospital which added to the miseries of the patients.<sup>254</sup> As far as the Kasaragod *taluk* was concerned, the *Kerala Chandrika* observed,

Mr. Pinhey, the Collector and the President of the District Board, South Canara, does not pay proper attention to education and medical relief in the district... There is a proposal to abolish hospitals in Kasaragod.<sup>255</sup>

In 1900, in Andrott, a medical attendant was appointed but this effort failed as the people were opposed to any modern medical system, resulting in the closure of the healthcare facility in 1905. However, the English Inspecting Officer had stocked medicines for a year in the *amin kutcheri* in the island.<sup>256</sup> In 1925, once again, a medical dispensary was started in Andrott and a doctor and a compounder were appointed. In the same year, dispensaries were also opened in Agatti, Kavaratti and Kalpeni.<sup>257</sup>

### **The Mappilas in the Three Regions**

The social and economic changes among the Mappilas in the three regions were shaped by the colonial structures which were available to them in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

The Mappila community in Thalasseri, Kasaragod and the Lakshadweep islands were quite

<sup>253</sup> *Kerala Patrika*, Calicut, 26.5.1894. *MNNR*. No.5. 1894. p.161

<sup>254</sup> *Kerala Sanchari*, Calicut, 9.5.1900. *Ibid.* No.9.1900.

<sup>255</sup> *Kerala Chandrika*, Calicut, 12.5.1899. *Ibid.* No.9. 1899. pp.144-5

<sup>256</sup> Muthukoya, *Lakshadweep*. p.81 (Malayalam)

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

different from each other. Apart from being Malayali Muslims, they showed variations in their language, social hierarchy, occupations, educational standards, politics and socio-economic development. Linguistic differences were noticeable as the Malayalam spoken by Mappilas in Thalasseri is different from that spoken in Kasaragod where a number of Kannada words are interspersed with Malayalam. This could be because of the influence of the Kannada language that was part of the South Kanara district. The *jazari* dialect spoken by the island Mappilas, is a mix of Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Arabic words. This could have been an impact of the maritime contacts of the Chozhas, the Pandyas and the Arabs.<sup>258</sup> Arabic was given prime importance in Kasaragod and in the islands, as it was the language of the *koran* and was taught in the traditional *madrassas*. *Arabi-Malayalam*, that is, Malayalam written in Arabic script was also predominant in the islands, particularly among the learned *thangals* and *kazis*. Kasaragod has become famous like Ponnani in the number of Arabic colleges that it has established.

Like the Mappilas of Malabar, the island Muslims also followed the *Shafi* school of religious jurisprudence.<sup>259</sup> Religious and social practices in all the three regions are common and more orthodoxly observed in the islands and in Kasaragod. Social hierarchy existed among them in all the three regions. In Thalasseri, the *keyis* were on the top of the social ladder, in the islands, the *koyas* were considered superior to the *malumis* and the *melacheris* and in the Kasaragod *taluk*, such social stratification did not exist except for the *pusalars* who were fishermen in the coastal areas. Although Islam is seen as an egalitarian religion, hierarchy among the Mappilas of

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<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.* For examples of Tamil words used, see p.129

<sup>259</sup> For a discussion on the *Shafi* law, see Lakshmi, *Malabar Muslims*. Chapters I, II.

Thalasseri was noticed in their socio-religious practices.<sup>260</sup> For example, the *keyis* and the *maliyakals* had their own family mosques and burial grounds where their deceased family members were buried. Similarly, in Kasaragod, although status groups were not so prominent, still, a few aristocratic families, such as that of Schamnad Saheb and Haji Ali maintained separate family mosques and burial grounds. The *Kannadipalli* and the *Kadavath Mohiyideenpalli* are such examples.

In the islands, educational and socio-economic progress was very slow in the colonial period. Party politics as found in the mainland was non-existent and the people were not aware of the ideological trends in the mainstream politics.<sup>261</sup> While the economy of the Thalasseri Mappilas was centred around sea-borne trade in coffee, pepper and other cash crops not only to other Indian ports but also to foreign ports like those in Arabia, the mainstay of the Kasaragod Mappilas was mainly an agricultural-based economy along with some local trade. The island Muslims were dependent on a livelihood based on fish-curing, boat-building and coir-making.<sup>262</sup>

Apart from being the British administrative headquarters of north Malabar, Thalasseri witnessed the early onset of missionaries and their influence on its people. The European influence was noticeable in the town in their colonial structures such as the house of the German missionary, Gundert, at *Illikunnu*, churches and schools. The town also became famous for circus, cakes and

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<sup>260</sup> For a detailed study of social stratification among the Malabar Muslims, see Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. Chapters I, III.

<sup>261</sup> Gabriel. 1989. *Lakshadweep*. p.20

<sup>262</sup> See *Madras Fisheries Bureau*. 1910. Bulletin No.4. Madras: Govt. Press. pp.108-126



cricket, the last two being a British contribution. Thalasseri had a dense population of rich Mappila merchants and matrilineal families, who accepted English education with genuine interest. Apart from Mappila schools which were established in the late nineteenth century, the *Zenana* School, the English Free School, the Basel Mission School, the Sacred Heart Convent and the Brennen College found many Mappila students on their rolls. Some of them even assimilated western ideas, attires and culinary tastes.

The Thalasseri Mappilas were quick to take the benefits of education that was introduced in the town in the early nineteenth century, much before its introduction in Kasaragod. Some of the wealthy families sent their children to the Mappila schools, some to the mixed schools and to the missionary schools as well. Exceptional families, such as that of Hashim and Mariyumma Mayanali, resisting orthodox dissent, sent their girls to study at the Sacted Heart Convent. Similarly, many Mappilas graduated from the Brennen College and either went for higher studies to Madras or engaged in some professions. Thalasseri saw the rise of political movements and the Mappilas here were very vocal. The Muslim League and the Communist Party were very active here and there were many well-known Mappilas who were leaders in both the parties. In fact, Muslim League politics was very strong in this town before the partition days.

On the contrary, Kasaragod was a region where the Mappilas were very traditional and conservative. Malik bin Dinar had left a deep religious influence on the community. His tomb is deeply revered and an annual *urs* is celebrated here. Kasaragod has to its credit many Arabic

colleges where Islamic theology is taught. British rule hardly had any impact on the community except for a few individuals like Schamnad Sahib and Sara Abubackar's father. Even the Basel Mission School which was founded in the early nineteenth century hardly had any Muslims on its rolls. It was only in the forties that a Government Muslim School was established in Thalagara by Schamnad Sahib. Compared to the Thalasseri Mappilas, the Kasaragod Mappilas were not very rich, but still, there were a few rich landlord families in Thalagara and Chemanad. Some of them owned lands in north Malabar and most of them were also related to families in Malabar.<sup>263</sup> In politics too, the Kasaragod Mappilas were not in the forefront compared to the Muslim League leaders in Thalasseri.

The island Muslims were comparatively backward in education and passive in politics as they were not closely linked to the political movements in the mainland. Traditional *koran* learning was the only form of education available in the islands. Although the British tried to establish one or two secular schools, there were hardly any Mappila students who attended them. Compared to the Thalasseri Mappilas who were quite highly educated and employed, those in Kasaragod were largely agriculturists, traders and merchants, who did not see any purpose in English education. Similarly, in the field of politics, there were very few Mappilas like Schamnad Sahib and some others in Kasaragod. The reason could be that the Kasaragod Mappilas were not exposed much to Western education, radical thinking and politics as much as those in Thalasseri. In the mid-nineties, Kasaragod was one among the districts in Malabar which was selected for the introduction of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) on the

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<sup>263</sup> See Lakshmi, *Malabar Muslims*.p.16

basis that it exhibited poor performance in education.<sup>264</sup> Moreover, the economic and social mobility of the Thalasseri Mappilas was much more than those in Kasaragod. In Kasaragod, except for Thalangara and Chemanad where the Mappilas were economically more prosperous, those in the rural areas were comparatively poorer. However, they were active in peasant movements against the British land tenures and had the support of the Communists as well. The *Palayi* Harvest agitation, the *Kayyur* riot and the other peasant movements of the forties are such examples.

In other words, Thalasseri was popularly known for its Communist and Muslim league politics whereas Kasaragod was known for its Communist-based agricultural movements. The islands, on the contrary, did not experience any political or peasant movements. There were Mappila men and women as members in the Communist Party in Thalasseri, which comprised both the elite and the *beedi* workers. In Kasaragod, because of its predominantly agricultural economy, the cultivators formed the base of the party and therefore the peasant movements were very volatile. Even today, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Indian Union Muslim League are equally strong in northern Kerala which includes Kasaragod, the northernmost tip.

The island Muslims were comparatively traditional and peaceful and each island had a different social stratification. For example, in Andrott, the *koyas* were dominant, in Agatti, the *melacheris* were the main status group and in Kavaratti, the *malumis* were more influential. They were

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<sup>264</sup> Kumar, Ratheesh. 2010. *Classrooms and Playgrounds: Mapping Educational Change, Kerala*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. p.33

neither educated in English schools, nor were they exposed to politics. They were more passive than any of the Mappilas of the mainland. Under the *arakkal* ruling family, they did not see any educational progress and under the British administration, although attempts were made to introduce secular schools, the community preferred to adhere to the *koran* schools. However, today there are many schools and two government junior colleges, the Jawaharlal Nehru College in Kadmat and the Mahatma Gandhi College in Andrott affiliated to the University of Calicut. The educational growth of Lakshadweep has been really phenomenal because of the government initiative to establish schools and junior colleges. However, for pursuing higher education, they still have to travel to the mainland states like Kerala.

Any study of a society is incomplete without a discussion on its women. Women in Thalasseri, mostly belonging to matrilineal *tharavads*, were generally empowered and were of a higher social status. They normally married within the same status group and with higher status groups such as the *arakkals* of Kannur or the *koyas* of Kozhikode. They were more modern and educated compared to those in Kasaragod and the islands. They did not rigidly follow the *pardah* system like those in Kasaragod. In Andrott, some women wear *burkhas*, which according to Theodore Gabriel, could have been borrowed from the mainland.<sup>265</sup> Women in the islands were similarly dominant, had property in their names and the practice of dowry and the plurality of wives was rare. While the island Muslims were mostly matrilineal except in Andrott, where the *thangals* followed a patrilineal system of inheritance<sup>266</sup>, those in Kasaragod were largely patrilineal except for a few *marumakkathayam* families in Chemanad.

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<sup>265</sup> Gabriel. *Lakshadweep*. p.13

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.* p.115

It is also significant that the island Muslims were not totally cut off from the mainland. Economic transactions, religious and cultural exchanges did take place. Many of the island religious authorities and teachers were trained at the Shaikh Makdoom College at Ponnani.<sup>267</sup> Cultural assimilations were made by the islanders in the form of Mappila poetry and songs from the mainland.

The Human Development Index of Lakshadweep is compared with Kerala, the immediate neighbour to the island as well as one of the well-developed states of the country. (See Table 1.7) Although Lakshadweep is the tiniest member among all the states and Union Territories in the country in terms of both population (60,650 in 2001) and geographical area (32 sq. Kms), it leads most other states and Union Territories in population density. Its population density at 1,895 in 2001 is more than double that of Kerala (819).<sup>268</sup> However, in the same year, the child population *vis-a-vis* the total population was only 14.99%, which indicates a shrink in the size of the family.<sup>269</sup> By 2011, its population had increased to 64,473, which is only a slight increase in a span of ten years.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.* For details on the Shaikh Zainuddin Makhdum and the Religious College at Ponnani, see Lakshmi, *Malabar Muslims*. Chapter I, VII.

<sup>268</sup> *Lakshadweep Development Report, Planning Commission, Government of India*. 2007. New Delhi: Academia Foundation. p.75

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Lakshadweep Population Data. Census of India*, 2011.

The islands have a tradition of a very high rate of literacy. According to the 1981 census, it ranked fourth among all the states and Union territories and by 1991, it overtook Chandigarh to gain the third rank after Kerala and Mizoram. It remained in the same position till 2001. Some of the island representatives claimed that most of the officially declared illiterates were in fact able to read and write Arabic or Mahl.<sup>271</sup> The gross enrolment ratio in schools was among the highest in the country and higher than the All India average. The literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes population of Lakshadweep at 80.58 percent, stands second after Mizoram according to the 1991 census.<sup>272</sup> The island Muslims are in a neck-to-neck race with Kerala in literacy as well as in their gender ratio. (See Tables 1.9 and 1.10) The literacy levels among the islands were the highest in Minicoy and Kavaratti. (See Table 1.11) According to the 2011 census, Kerala is the most literate state with 93.91 per cent, Lakshadweep ranking second at 92.28 per cent, and Mizoram holding the third place at 91.58 per cent.<sup>273</sup> It is significant that Lakshadweep has beaten Mizoram this time and taken the second position after Kerala in literacy.

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<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.* pp.77-78

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.* p.77

<sup>273</sup> 'International Literacy Day 2016: All you need to about India's literacy rate', *The Indian Express*, 8.9.2016.

Table 1.7

Human Development Index of Lakshadweep and Kerala 1981 and 1991

	1981		1991	
	Value	Rank	Value	Rank
<b>Lakshadweep</b>	0.434	7	0.532	10
<b>Kerala</b>	0.500	2	0.591	3

Source: Lakshadweep Development Report, Planning Commission, GOI. New Delhi:Academia Foundation, 2007. p.75

Table1.8

Area and Population of Inhabited Islands of Lakshadweep 2001

	Area(sq. kms)	Total Population	Share of Female %
<b>Kalpeni</b>	2.28	4,321	47.23%
<b>Andrott</b>	4.84	10,727	50.04%
<b>Agatti</b>	2.71	7,009	48.17%
<b>Kavaratti</b>	3.63	10,119	44.83%

Source: Lakshadweep Development Report, Planning Commission, GOI. New Delhi:Academia Foundation, 2007. p.76

**Table 1.9**

**Gender Ratio in Lakshadweep and Kerala**

	Females per 1000 Males		
	1981	1991	2001
<b>Lakshadweep</b>	975	943	948
<b>Kerala</b>	1032	1036	1058

*Source: Lakshadweep Development Report, Planning Commission, GOI. New Delhi: Academia Foundation, 2007. p.77*

**Table 1.10**

**Literacy Rates in Lakshadweep and Kerala**

	1981			1991			2001		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
<b>Lakshadweep</b>	81.24	55.32	68.42	90.18	72.89	81.78	93.15	81.56	87.52
<b>Kerala</b>	87.73	75.65	81.56	93.62	86.13	89.81	94.20	87.86	90.92

*Source: Lakshadweep Development Report, Planning Commission, GOI. New Delhi: Academia Foundation, 2007. p.77*



**Table 1.11**  
**Island-wise Literacy Rates 2001**

Percentage of Literates to Total Population	
<b>Kavaratti</b>	88.6
<b>Agatti</b>	86.8
<b>Andrott</b>	84.3
<b>Kalpeni</b>	84.4
<b>Minicoy</b>	93.0

*Source: Lakshadweep Development Report, Planning Commission, GOI. New Delhi: Academia Foundation, 2007. Annexure A-22, p.156.*

Unlike the Andaman islands, which remained a penal colony for the British administrators,<sup>274</sup> the Lakshadweep islands were more of an extra British territory on the Arabian Sea. The island Muslims have a noticeable affinity to the Kerala Muslims than to the Islamic world because of their proximity to and origins in the mainland. They compare with pride their climate, culinary tastes, customs, social and religious practices with Kerala. Although matriliney is considered un-Islamic by the *Shariat*, yet, most of the Mappilas of Thalasseri and excepting a few, almost the entire Lakshadweep islands are matrilineal and matrilocal. This means that the daughters live in the matrilineal house according to the customary law, but, as far as the devolution of property is concerned, the Muhammadan laws are followed.

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<sup>274</sup> See Vaidik, Aparna. 2010. *Imperial Andamans: Colonial Encounter and Island History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Compared to the Mappilas in Thalasseri and Lakshadweep, those in Kasaragod, particularly, the educated youth, are today facing unemployment problems owing to discrimination in the region and in other parts of Malabar. When one compares the three regions with other parts of Malabar such as Kozhikode, Malappuram and Ponnani, Kasaragod is similar to Ponnani in its spread of theological seminaries. Malappuram, at present, is leading Thalasseri and Kozhikode in educational progress.

While the Mappilas of Thalasseri and Kasaragod are categorized generally as Muslims and then as Other Backward Castes under government reservation, those in the islands have been categorized as Scheduled Tribes. This is just unacceptable because they do not resemble any of the Indian tribes, instead, are more similar to the Mappilas of Malabar. We can still draw parallels between the Mappilas of the three regions as they follow a common faith and similar customs. They are Malayali Muslims, wear the common dress, speak Malayalam and follow similar social practices and religious rituals. Nevertheless, those in Thalasseri are more liberal, while those in Kasaragod are very conservative and the island Mappilas are very progressive. A comparison of the three regions brings out the different socio-economic conditions of the Mappila community, the similarities and the contradictions within it and its relations *vis-a-vis* the larger Muslim community in India.

In the case of the Bengali Muslims, Prof. Amartya Sen, in his report titled, 'Living reality of Muslims in Bengal,' has argued that they constitute 27.01 per cent of the population of West

Bengal, but are poorer and more deprived in literacy, health, economic conditions and gender.<sup>275</sup>

So is the case in Telangana where the four-member Enquiry Commission headed by G.Sudhir, has argued that eighty-five percent of the Muslims in the state are backward and that effective measures should be taken to improve their lives.<sup>276</sup> In that sense, the Mappilas of the three regions are definitely much ahead of their counterparts in other regions of India.

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<sup>275</sup> Suvojit Bagchi & Shiv Sahay Singh, 'Muslims in West Bengal more deprived, disproportionately poorer: Amartya Sen', *The Hindu*, 15.2.2016, p.8

<sup>276</sup> 'Sudhir panel for 9-12 p.c. quota for Muslims', *The Hindu*, 11.12.2016.

## Epilogue

In the year 2016, radical changes have been taking place among the Indian Muslims. Shayara Bano, seeking a life of dignity, filed a petition in the Supreme Court to declare the practice of triple *talaq*, *nikah halala* and polygamy under Muslim Personal Laws as illegal, unconstitutional and violative of the rights of equality, dignity, life and freedom of religion under the constitution.<sup>277</sup> That was followed by a petition by NISA, a Muslim Women's Forum, run by V.P.Zuhara in Kozhikode, claiming that discrimination against Muslim women existed even now.<sup>278</sup> This shows that marriage and divorce issues still plague Muslim women surpassing geographical boundaries. Similarly, a group of Muslim women from Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh joined in a protest march on 29th February, 2016, seeking the implementation of the Justice Sachar Committee recommendations.<sup>279</sup> The convention was organised by Bebaak Collective, a forum of autonomous women's groups and individuals. Issues relating to Muslim women such as education, employment, discrimination and violence were discussed.<sup>280</sup> As a counter-offensive, Islamic organizations in Kerala such as the *Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulema*, *Jamaat-e-Islam-e-Hind* and *Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen* have condemned the remarks of Justice

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<sup>277</sup> Rajgopal, Krishnadas, 'SC issues notice to Centre on triple talaq,' *The Hindu*, 1.3.2016, p.9

<sup>278</sup> 'More Muslim women join cause with SC's PIL for gender parity,' *Ibid.*, 7.3.2016, p.13

<sup>279</sup> I have discussed the Justice Sachar Committee report in Lakshmi. 2012. *Malabar Muslims*. See conclusion.

<sup>280</sup> 'Muslim women march for equal rights', *The Hindu*, 29.2.2016, p.3

B.Kemal Pasha, a sitting Judge of the Kerala High Court, on the Muslim Personal Law. They have warned against any attempts to amend the laws of the *shariat*.<sup>281</sup>

The recent landmark statement of the Islamic seminary, *Darul-Uloom*, Deoband, empowering Muslim women to serve as *kazis* (priests) or *muftis* (scholars) shows that the Muslim community in India is definitely moving ahead with times.<sup>282</sup> The Mumbai High Court has sanctioned the entry of women into the *Haji Ali Dargah* sanctum, on the public interest petition filed by Dr.Noorjehan Safia Niaz and Zakia Soman, co-founders of the *Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan*, in 2014.<sup>283</sup> Again, for the first time, women were allowed to offer *namaaz* at the *Aishbagh Eidgah* in Lucknow on *Eid*, thus spreading the message that Islam gives equal rights to both men and women.<sup>284</sup> Tahir Mahmood has also raised the debate on the issue of a uniform civil code for the Muslim community.<sup>285</sup> Similarly, the Supreme Court, on a plea by a Bengali Muslim woman, Ishrat Jahan, to declare the practices of *talaq-i-bidat* (triple talaq), *nikah halala* and polygamy under Muslim personal laws as illegal and unconstitutional, has sought the views of the government.<sup>286</sup>

On the other hand, a report on the representation of Muslims in the Tamilnadu Police Force shows that the percentage of Muslims in Police had declined from 3.5 percent in 2009 to 1.82

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<sup>281</sup> Govind, Biju, 'Kerala High Court judge's remarks on Sharia draw ire', *The Hindu*, 10.3.2016, p.9

<sup>282</sup> Ali, Mohammad, 'Darul-Uloom Deoband backs appointment of women Qazis', *Ibid.*, 11.2.2016, p.9

<sup>283</sup> 'Women can enter Haji Ali Sanctum, rules HC,' in *Ibid.*, 27.8.2016, p.1

<sup>284</sup> 'ISIS is anti-Islamic: Lucknow Imam', *Ibid.*, 8.7.2016, p.7

<sup>285</sup> See Mahmood, Tahir, 'Consider it seriously', *Ibid.*, 12.7.16, p.11

<sup>286</sup> 'Centre's views sought on plea against triple talaq,' *Ibid.*, 27.8.2016, p.1, 12

percent in 2013. This is when Tamilnadu has 5.86 percent of Muslim population.<sup>287</sup> In Telangana, the Sudhir panel report on the socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslims has recommended a nine to twelve percent reservation for the community in social and educational sectors. It has recommended the introduction of Urdu as the second official language in the State, filling up the posts of Urdu language teachers, start-up funds for small traders among Muslims, scholarships for students, land distribution to landless Muslims in rural areas, new high schools and junior colleges for Muslim girls and increasing the share of government posts for Muslim women.<sup>288</sup>

Between the years 2015 and 2016, there has been tremendous progress in Thalasseri and the islands in education and employment. Comparatively, Kasaragod is yet to compete with them in both the fields. The Sacred Heart Convent has more number of Mappila girls on its rolls. Similarly, the Brennen College has overall a higher percentage of Mappila students, out of which the number of girls are even higher. The Mappila girls in this college outshine boys in the degree examinations.<sup>289</sup> Mappila students in Kasaragod, who wish to pursue postgraduate studies normally apply for courses in the Central University, Kannur.<sup>290</sup> Employment for these bright students is not as easy as those in Thalasseri or the islands.

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<sup>287</sup> Pon Vasanth & Arunachalam, 'BPRD report has no data on Muslims in police force,' in *The Hindu*, 15.2.2016, p.8

<sup>288</sup> 'Sudhir panel for 9-12 p.c. quota for Muslims', *Ibid.*, 11.12.2016.

<sup>289</sup> Interview with the Principal, Brennen College, July, 2015.

<sup>290</sup> Interview with P.Ibrahim, Kasaragod, June, 2015.

In the Lakshadweep islands, particularly, Agatti and Kavaratti, many of the islanders are employed in the government departments. A substantial number of educated Mappila women are also employed in the government offices at Kavaratti, which is the capital island. On enquiry, it was understood that they are migrants from different islands such as Kalpeni, Amini, Kadmat and Andrott. They are computer literate and are also very efficient in their work.<sup>291</sup> In Agatti, employment for women in the tailoring and pickle industry is provided by the Village Panchayat.<sup>292</sup> Similarly, a training programme in *purdah* stitching and designing was held in Kavaratti in order to provide opportunities for unemployed women. As *purdah* is a common attire among the women of the island and since there are not many tailors in the region, a reasonable profit margin was also identified.<sup>293</sup> It is an interesting fact that the importance of the girl child was celebrated on the National Girl Child Day by the Department of Women and Child Development in Kavaratti.<sup>294</sup>

Outstanding performance in science by the school students of the islands have been widely recognised. Five young scientists from the Government Senior Secondary School, Kavaratti, were selected from the Union Territory in the National Children's Science Congress held at Bengaluru in December 2014.<sup>295</sup> In the next year, the National Science Day was celebrated in Kalpeni with the participation of students from all the schools in the island.<sup>296</sup> It is therefore clear that the overall performance of the school students is commendable and it is also noteworthy that

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<sup>291</sup> This was an observation that I made during my visit to Kavaratti in November 2016.

<sup>292</sup> 'Member of Parliament Inaugurated Tailoring and Pickle Unit', *The Lakshadweep Times*, 19.2.2015, p.2

<sup>293</sup> 'Pardha Stitching and Designing Course Conducted by Synd RSETI', *Ibid.*, 16.9.2015, p.2

<sup>294</sup> 'National Girl Child Day Celebrated', *Ibid.*, 5.3.2015, p.2

<sup>295</sup> 'National Children's Science Progress. Young Scientist of Lakshadweep', *Ibid.*, 16.1.2015, p.1

<sup>296</sup> 'National Science Day Celebrated', *Ibid.*, 17.3.2015, p.3

most schools in the islands can boast of cent percent results in the Board examinations.<sup>297</sup> In the District Institute of Education and Training in Kavaratti, there were twenty-five students enrolled in 2015 and thirty-one in 2016. There are more female students than males registered for the course.<sup>298</sup>

As there are no higher educational institutions in the islands, seats in professional colleges in Kerala and other mainland states have been reserved for them. For example, they have reservation in State Engineering colleges, Regional Engineering colleges, Medical colleges and other degree colleges. Scholarships, the reimbursement of tuition and hostel fees and return journey fare once a year are provided to them. Kochi and Calicut, which are the immediate neighbours of the island, are the popular destinations for aspiring students.<sup>299</sup>

Lakshadweep also has to its credit many well-educated and talented professionals who have earned an excellent reputation in their professions. For example, B. Amanulla was the first District and Sessions Judge of Kavaratti District Court. A matriculate from Government High School, Amini, he was an alumnus of Malabar Christian College, Kozhikode, Victoria College, Palakkad and Law college, Thiruvananthapuram. He initially practised as a lawyer in Kerala before moving to Kavaratti.<sup>300</sup> Dr. K.K. Anwar Salih, Chief Medical Officer and Physician of

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<sup>297</sup> 'Excellent performances of Kendriya Vidyalayas in Class XII CBSE exams', *The Lakshadweep Times*, 27.5.2016, p.2

<sup>298</sup> Interview with Principal, DIET, Kavaratti, November 2016.

<sup>299</sup> *Lakshadweep Development Report*. p.79

<sup>300</sup> 'B. Amanulla, First District and Sessions Judge has passed away', *The Lakshadweep Times*, 27.4.2015, p.2



Government Indira Gandhi Hospital, Kavaratti, became the first islander to become the Member of the Royal College of Physicians in the United Kingdom. A native of Andrott, he received his MBBS degree from Kottayam Medical College.<sup>301</sup> In 2015, two teachers from Lakshadweep, Dr M.Mullakoya, Principal, Jawaharlal Nehru Senior Secondary School, Kadmat and V.Hussain, a primary school teacher in Minicoy, received the meritorious President's Award.<sup>302</sup> Shamina Begum, a native of Kadmat, recently received her doctorate from Pusa Indian Agricultural Institute, Delhi. A graduate from Kasaragod Agricultural College and a postgraduate in Agriculture from Thiruvananthapuram, she cleared the Government Agricultural Service Examinations and is currently a scientist in Kasaragod Agricultural Research Institute.<sup>303</sup>

The *arakkal* royal family also had some talented successors like Yusuf Arakkal, who was a versatile artist, painter and sculptor. His paintings showcased the secular aspects of humanity and has won many awards. He was awarded the Lorenzo il Magnifico Silver Medal at the Florence International Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2003. He had wanted to exhibit his paintings on the Jesus series some day at the Vatican but unfortunately, his dream remained unfulfilled due to his sudden demise on 4th October 2016.<sup>304</sup>

In the 2016 Legislative Assembly elections, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) or the Communist Party of India (Marxist) won in all the Muslim majority regions of north Malabar, including Kannur and Thalasseri whereas in Kasaragod, which is a League-dominated region, the United

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<sup>301</sup> 'Dr. K.K. Anwar Salih the first Islander bagging MRCP UK,' *The Lakshadweep Times*, 27.4.2015, p.2

<sup>302</sup> 'Two Teachers of Lakshadweep Received Meritorious National Award. *Ibid.*, 16.9.2015, p.1

<sup>303</sup> 'Shamina Begumthin Doctorate', *Ibid.*, 3.6.2016, p.4 (Malayalam)

<sup>304</sup> Doctor, Geeta, 'Versatile Artist and Sculptor Yusuf Arakkal dies at 71,' in *The Hindu*, dated 5.10.2016, p.20

Democratic Front (UDF) was victorious. What is interesting about this victory is that the Muslim League seems to have taken a back seat in Thalasseri and Kasaragod and instead, the Communists have won the hearts of the Mappilas in the latter and the Congress in the former. An important point to be noted is that the secular credentials of the parties have marked their victory in both the regions.

Lakshadweep, being a Union Territory, is a Lok Sabha constituency and is governed by the Governor and not by any political party. The dominant political parties in the islands are the Indian National Congress (INC) and the National Congress Party (NCP). The National Congress Party won the lone constituency of Lakshadweep. The Indian National Congress has a stronghold in the Union Territory. Lakshadweep is represented by a single constituency in the Parliament, which is reserved for the Scheduled Tribes. The 16th Lok Sabha elections which took place in the Union Territory were held in the month of April-May 2014. A Congress stronghold to date, Lakshadweep has had P.M. Sayeed, a Law Graduate from Andrott, as its most popular political leader, who was a Congress MP and has retained this seat from 1967 to 1999. The present Member of Parliament representing Lakshadweep is Mohammad Faizal from Andrott.

The Muslims of Malabar and Lakshadweep have always been ahead of other Muslims in India as has been clearly explained in the preceding chapters. The conclusions drawn out of this study are that the conflict of interests between the *arakkal* royal family and the British government remained a contentious issue for a long time. The fact that today, after Kerala, Lakshadweep, with a total Muslim majority, is the second most fully literate region in the subcontinent, speaks

for itself. As mentioned in chapter two, my argument is that they are not a tribal community as suggested by anthropologists and sociologists. Theodore Gabriel has argued that since the island Muslims had a common language, culture, religion and origin, they can be categorized as tribals. If that is the case, then all those communities who have these features in common would be classified as tribals, which cannot be true.

The Mappilas of each region had peculiarities, some were more orthodox than the others and some were more liberal than the others. In Kasaragod and the islands, western influence had been minimal during the colonial period and therefore, the stress was always on traditional learning and the establishment of many Islamic seminaries, particularly in Kasaragod. On the contrary, in Thalasseri, the German missionaries deeply influenced the Mappila community and that was reflected in their penchant for western education.

Having said that, similarities and differences within the community exist side by side. In all, their progressive attitude and overall development *per se* is just beyond words.

## Glossary

<i>Amin</i>	Village Magistrate.
<i>Andu</i>	Death anniversary of a saint.
<i>Janmam</i>	Birth right, hereditary proprietorship.
<i>Janmi</i>	Landlord with whom the <i>janmam</i> title vests.
<i>Kafir</i>	Unbeliever.
<i>Karar</i>	Deed.
<i>Karnavar</i>	The senior male in a <i>tharavaadu</i> .
<i>Karnoti</i>	A female head.
<i>Kazi</i>	Muslim Priest
<i>Makkathayam</i>	Inheritance from father to son.
<i>Marumakkathayam</i>	Inheritance through the female line.
<i>Mukkuvan</i>	Hindu fishermen.
<i>Mukri</i>	Custodian of mosque property.
<i>Mulla</i>	Reciter and teacher of the <i>Koran</i> .
<i>Nambudiri</i>	The Malabar Brahmin.
<i>Nercha</i>	Vow; Offering.
<i>Nikah</i>	A Muslim marriage.
<i>Odam</i>	Sailing vessel.
<i>Palli</i>	Mosque.
<i>Paramba</i>	Garden lands.
<i>Peshkush</i>	Tribute.
<i>Purdah</i>	Veil.
<i>Shafi'i</i>	School of Islamic law founded by Imam Shafi.
<i>Thangal</i>	Mappila priest.
<i>Tharavaadu</i>	A <i>marumakkathayam</i> family with descendants in the female line.
<i>Thaavazhi</i>	A branch of a <i>tharavaadu</i> .
<i>Thiyya</i>	Low caste Hindu, a toddy tapper.
<i>Urs</i>	Celebrations of the birth anniversary of a saint.
<i>Wakf</i>	A trust created under and governed by Islamic law.

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