

REFORM AND REVIVAL AMONG THE MUSLIMS
OF KERALA – A STUDY OF KERALA MUSLIM
AIKYA SANGHAM, 1922-34

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled **REFORM AND REVIVAL AMONG THE MUSLIMS OF KERALA – A STUDY OF KERALA MUSLIM AIKYA SANGHAM, 1922-34** submitted by **ASHRAF KOYILOTHAN KANDIYIL**, in part-fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University. To the best of our knowledge this is an original work.

We recommend that this dissertation should be placed before the examiners for their consideration for the award of the above mentioned degree.


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Ashraf Koyilothan Kandiyil

Chapter I

Introduction

There were two streams of reform among Muslims - pre-modern and modern. Both drew inspiration from the traditional Islamic past, and attempted to reinterpret Islam to meet the requirements that situations necessitated. They were against the superstitious beliefs in the life of Muslims and initiated a revitalisation movement with an intention to bring the Muslims to the scriptures, the Quran and the Hadiths. The major difference between the pre-modern and modern reforms lay in their attitude towards western modernism based on rationalism, secularism and liberalism. Pre-modern reformers argued for a total negation of modernity represented by the West, whereas, modern Muslim reformers were ready to engage with modernity and western sciences, yet well rooted in tradition. This study is an attempt to analyse historically the 'Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham' (1922-34) the first organised all Kerala socio-religious reform movement among Kerala Muslims.

It will be pertinent to point out that the Muslim society in Kerala has been subjected to remarkable changes in various aspects of the socio-religious and political life by the turn of this century. Almost all the studies related to Kerala Muslims in one way or other revolve round the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. Quite a few studies reflect a general description of the history of Muslims in Kerala from its very inception to the present. No serious study of an academic nature has been undertaken on the socio-religious reform movements and the process of transformation of Muslim in Kerala after 1921 till date. This study is an attempt in this direction and hence, the significance of the study.

Survey of literature

The earliest work on the history of Kerala Muslims was Shykh Zynuddin the Junior's Arabic work, Thuhfath-ul-Mujahidin.¹ It was also the earliest historical treatise compiled in Kerala by a native scholar.

Shykh Zynuddin was a Muslim scholar of Ponnani in the 16th century. He was well versed in Arabic and Persian and also in Islamic theology. The purpose of Thuhfath-ul-Mujahidin is to expose the brutality of the Portuguese on the civic life of Kerala, particularly on the Muslim community, to which he belonged. This work deals upon the different aspects of Kerala's social order and calls for a *Jihad* against the 'unbelievers', the Portuguese.

Zynuddin's work deals with the advent of Islam in Kerala, and the social customs of the Hindus and Muslims, such as *marumakkathayam*, untouchability, Nair polyandry and caste systems etc. Dealing with the coming of Muslims to Kerala, the author rejects the Cheraman Perumal Legend, claiming that Islam had reached Kerala shores during the life time of Prophet Muhammad himself. According to the author, the advent of Islam in Kerala, "most probably, must have been two hundred years after the *Hijra* of the Prophet".² About the spread of Islam, he writes, 'Allah has been gracious to the people of Malibar in Hind in making them accept the faith of Islam spontaneously and willingly, and not out of fear or compulsion'.³ The rulers and natives treated Muslims cordially, because "the economic prosperity of the country was mainly due to the Arab merchants before the Portuguese advent"⁴ The rest of the discussion concentrates mainly on the series of fight between the Portuguese and

¹ Shykh Zynuddin, Thuhfath-ul-Mujahidin translated to English by S.M.H. Nainar Madras, 1942.

² Ibid., p.39.

³ Ibid., p.12.

⁴ Ibid., p.51.

Muslims mainly for supremacy over trade. He found the Portuguese as arrogant, and hostile towards Muslims and urged a *Jihad* against the 'worshippers of the cross'. But for his personal tone on certain issues, the work *Thuhfat-ul-Mujahidin*, stands out as one of the most valuable works among the primary sources for the study of the 16th century Kerala in general, and Muslims of that time in particular.

The monumental work of William Logan's 'Malabar'⁵ Sketches the traditional history of Malabar district. In spite of the limitations of an official work, Logan makes an excellent use of official records to describe the different aspects of Malabar district, including its geography, history, religions, castes, customs, languages, literature and education standards in detail. The manual often goes beyond the limitations of official records. For example, it analyses the Mappila appraisal of the 19th century and cites its connection with the existing land relations. Logan's work still stands as the main historical source to those who are dealing with Malabar history.

P.A. Syed Mohammed's Kerala Muslim Charithram (Mal)⁶ deals with the general history of Muslims in Kerala from their arrival to the modern period. He starts with a brief history of early Kerala in which special emphasis is given to the ancient trade relations with the Romans and the Arabs. A brief description of the spread of various religions in the land of Kerala is made in the succeeding chapter. He agrees with the Cheraman Perumal legend on the point that the spread of Islam took place during the life time of the Prophet.⁷ He cites Arakkal Records, and coins of the year *Hijra* -35 as proof. More over, the Arakkal Records hints about the journey of Cheraman Perumal to Mecca during the Prophet's

⁵ William Logan, *Malabar*, 2 volumes, Madras, 1951.

⁶ P.A. Syed Mohammed, Kerala Muslim Charithram, Kozhikode, 1951.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.48.

lifetime”.⁸ Syed Mohammed also agrees with the superior position enjoyed by the Muslims before the coming of the Portuguese in 1498 A.D. He describes the period between the advent of Muslims and the Portuguese arrival, as a “golden period” in Kerala history, as it witnessed the economic prosperity due to Arab trade, the social amity of different communities, and the political stability under the Zamorin. This social balance got affected when the Portuguese tried to monopolize the trade over the Arabs, the Muslim resistance being mainly led by Kunhali Marakkars, the admirals of the Zamorin. The Portuguese advent, followed by the Dutch and the English, the Muslims were forced to retire from the coastal town to interior places, where they engaged themselves in agriculture.⁹ Mappilas rose up in arms during the 19th century against the British administrative policies and injustices. The discussion then goes to the attempts made in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar for the social advancement of Muslims. He praises ‘Maunathul - Uloom Sabha’, Ponnani, for excellently imparting traditional Islamic education to the Muslims. Syed Mohammed acknowledges the great reformatist works of Vakkom Abdul Qadir Moulavi in Travancore, Shykh Hamadani Thangal and Seethi Muhammad Sahib in Cochin and Ponnani Maqdoom Thangal in Malabar. Though Syed Mohammad mentions the Aikya Sangham’s role in Muslim reformation after the 1921 rebellion, he sheds no light on its ideas and programmes, which the present study attempts to deal elaborately.

The recent study of the European Scholar, Roland E. Miller, Mappila Muslims of Kerala,¹⁰ is one of the major and valuable works about the socio-religious structure of Mappila community. The first part dealing with ‘The Heritage of the Past’ covers the tradition of Mappilas as a

⁸ Ibid., p.40

⁹ Ibid., p.125.

¹⁰ Roland E. Miller, Mappila Muslims of Kerala, Madras, 1976.

community and their growth and development over the years. Before the 1921 revolt, the main goal of the community is combined with distinct characteristic of “survival, defence and the glory of Islam”¹¹. The leadership was dedicated to achieve this goal. Their attitude to western culture, therefore, was “a steady, unyielding opposition”.¹² The second part, the ‘Encounter with the Present’, analyses the Mappilas’ encounter with the present-day reality and their desire for change. It also discusses the religious and social changes that took place in the community in the 20th century. Miller points out that, one of the major developments after the rebellion of 1921 was the changing attitude towards modern secular education among Mappilas, either to the encouragement of the government or due to the efforts of social reform organizations like ‘Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham’. About Aikya Sangham he writes, “the call for change issued first from the more favourable surroundings of Cochin State, where the “Aikya Sankhum” society was formed to promote the united uplift of the community and to bring about reforms, especially the advance of modern education”¹³ Admitting the limited treatment of the movement in his work he says, “the origin of this ‘Kodungallur movement’ the work of its leading participants, and its effect on the Mappila community require more intensive treatment than is possible here’.¹⁴ He further discusses the Mappila theological reforms as conservative reforms.¹⁵ Miller’s argument cannot be altogether correct as many of these movements carried elements of accommodation with modernity, contrary to the orthodox theologians’ approach, particularly in the field of modern education, rights of women and social customs and beliefs. Moreover, he does not observe in detail,

¹¹ Ibid., p.125.

¹² Ibid., p.123.

¹³ Ibid., p.206.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.206.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.274.

the Kerala Muslim reforms in comparison with the reform attempts of other Muslim societies .

Dr. S.M. Mohammed Koya's monograph, Mappilas of Malabar¹⁶ analyses the rich legacy of Mappilas in the socio- historical spheres of Kerala . The distinct character of Mappilas and their peculiar social customs like *Mu'ta** marriage and *Marumakkathayamis* also looked into. Even though the Mappila Marumakkathayam are Act (1939) has removed the legal base for the necessary continuation of the system, as a system it remains, but transformed. The author attributes the social change among Mappilas in the recent years to the involvement of Mappila leaders in politics, interaction with other communities, positive attitude towards modern education, socio-religious reforms initiated by Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham, changes in the existing superstitious believes and customs, and finally to the impact of social legislations like the Muslim Personal Law (*Shariat*) Application Act, 1937. He writes, 'it should be said to the credits of the Aikya Sangham that this Muslim socio-religious organization of Kerala succeeded in creating a lasting revolution in the field of Muslim's education and religious reforms.¹⁷ This kind of narration, infact, fails to understand the complexities and contradictions involved in the movement. The author has failed to go into the social background of the movement, their ideas and activities and the impact of this movement in detail, within its specific historical context. This study is attempting to bring these issues into the limelight, thereby helping to understand the process of social transformation among Muslims in the 20th century.

¹⁶ S.M. Mohammed Koya, Mappilas of Malabar, Calicut, 1983.

* *Mu'ta* marriage was a marriage of a temporary nature in which the contracting parties agree to live together in the house of the woman (wife) for a stipulated period of time, and for which the man has to pay an amount mutually agreed upon, that is *Mahr* bride price, *ibid.*, pp.17-18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.81.

The rebellion of 1921 is an area of interest for the modern historians who are interested in Mappilas and Malabar. Historians differ each other on the nature, ideology and complexity of the rebellion. While some consider it as a by-product of Islamic fanaticism, others take it for a part of the National Movement or a peasant appraisal against the exploitation of the *Janmis*.

Stephen Frederic Dale's Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922¹⁸ develops 'the frontier theory', that the Mapila community had developed religious militancy, as a confrontation with the European powers on the one hand, and the Hindu society on the other. The defence of the Islamic frontiers in Kerala is argued to be the motive behind the struggle for spice trade, the Mappila out breaks and the Mappila Rebellion.¹⁹ He considers Mappilas a militant society, who uses the Islamic concept of *Jihad* against the rest of the society, with an intention to form an Islamic Kingdom (*Darul Islam*). He analyses Sayed Fazl's protest against the British, in the light of two contending trends, those of Syed Ahmad Khan and Syed Jamal-ud-din Al-Afghani, in North India, in the second half of the nineteenth century. "Sayed Fazl was very much in Afghani's mould in his hatred of the British".²⁰ The author fails to look into the causes of the transformation of the Muslim community, amiable to its counter parts, into a hostile community. Moreover, he fully relies on official records which makes a biased depiction of the animosities of the warring communities, without making use of the available native sources. As a consequence, the book has been reduced to the standard of an official report on the political

¹⁸ Stephen Frederic Dale, Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922, Oxford, 1980.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.5.

²⁰ Ibid., p.7

developments in Malabar in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Prof. K.N. Panikkar's Against Lord and State- Religion and Peasant Uprising in Malabar, 1836-1921²¹ appears to be a new approach in realizing the complexities of 1921 rebellion. He uses a Marxian way of analysis. And, contrary to the much discussed religious dimension, he sees "rebels activities unambiguously demonstrated antagonism to the propertied class and the colonial state which was perceived as the protector of the interest of the former, the influences of religion which informed the beliefs and outlooks of the peasantry was equally evident. It was in the interplay of these two factors, and not just in any one or both of them that the uprisings were rooted".²² He also analyses the impact of the new revenue administrative policy of the British on the existing land relations of Malabar. He extensively uses official as well as native sources in order to substantiate his arguments. It is highly useful to understand the changed patterns of the inter-community relations in Malabar under the colonial rule. The socio-economic and educational backwardness of Mappilas according to him "had significant ideological and social consequences- firstly, the early socialization of Mappilas was dominantly within a religious framework and secondly a professional middle class hardly emerged among them. Consequently, they tended to remain within the parameters of religious ideology and to submit to the guidance and leadership of traditional intellectuals".²³ Prof. Panikkar does not go into the details of the contradictions within the activities of the certain traditional reformers like Makti Thangal. On the one hand, Makti Thangal acted as a defender of Islam by countering the Christian arguments, and opposed the

²¹ K.N. Panikkar, Against Lord and State-Religion and Peasant Uprising in Malabar, 1836-1921, Delhi, 1989.

²² Ibid., p.193.

²³ Ibid., pp.54-55.

evangelical process. On the other hand just like many reformers of the 19th century, he tried to reform the community by utilizing the colonial opportunities and facilities. In his attempt of cultural regeneration, deliberately or not, the Thangal ignored the exploiting side of the British colonialism.

Dr. A.P. Ibrahim Kunju's Mappila Muslims of Kerala,²⁴ is a well documented study of the history and culture of the Muslim community in Kerala. The work is designed on the same lines as is the other Mappila studies, ranging from the spread of Islam to the various vicissitudes of the community. He follows the traditional style of analysing Muslim resurgence taking individuals' and associations' contributions. The role played by the Kerala Muslim Aikhya Sangham in reforming the Muslim community, after the tragic set back of 1921 is also referred to. But does not spare much space to discuss the activities and the relevance of Aikya Sangham.

Kerala Muslims: A Historical Perspective,²⁵ edited by Asghar Ali Engineer has made an attempt to familiarize some of the salient features of Kerala Muslims' history and culture. E.K. Ahmed Kutty's article, 'the Mujahid Movement and its role in the Islamic revival in Kerala', gives all the credit to the Islahi movement for the revival in the religious social and cultural life of the Muslim community. The Mujahid movement, he claims, inherits the legacy of the early reform activities, including the Kerala Muslims Akiya Sangham. He defines the Mujahid movement as an attempt to invite the people to Islam, as understood and practiced by the Prophet, and the first generation of pious and righteous Muslims, '*Salafu Salih*', thereby denouncing all the later innovations and fabrications in the

²⁴ A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, Mappila Muslims of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1989.

²⁵ Asghar Ali Engineer, Kerala Muslims: A Historical Perspective, Delhi, 1995.

religion.²⁶ The author's appraisal sounds euphemistic rather than being critical. V.V. Kunhikrishnan's article, 'Matriliney among the Mappilas of Malabar', and Gangadhara Menon's 'Nercca: Saint Martyr worship among the Muslims of Kerala' help to understand the development of peculiar Mappila customs, and its impact on the society. Both matriliney and *nercca* are reminiscent of Hindu customs, but with an Islamic touch, adopted after their conversion to Islam.²⁷ M.Gangadhara Menon's 'Emergence of the Muslim League in Kerala: A Historical Enquiry', points out the post-rebellion developments, especially, the Congress' treatment to the Mappilas and the shift of a significant number of influential Mappilas to the League as the main reasons for its mass base. Besides, the new identity created by the Aikya Sangham, according to him, helped creating the social base of the League. Since the Aikya Sangham was not a mass movement, the above argument fails to corroborate the mass base of the Muslim League in Malabar.

Dr. M. Abdul Samad's recently published work Islam in Kerala: Groups and Movements in the 20th Century,²⁸ give us a description of the Muslim renaissance in Kerala. While discussing various religious movements undertaken among the Muslims of Kerala, he mentions the history of Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham also. Instead of analysing the Sangham in its specific historical context, he narrates its history from the origin to its dissolution.²⁹ The materials he uses were also inadequate.

The present study attempts to analyse historically, the origin, nature, ideology and principal activities of the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham and its effects on the Muslim community in Kerala within its specific historical

²⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁷ Ibid., p.61,175.

²⁸ M. Abdul Samad, Islam in Kerala: Groups and Movements in the 20th Century, Kollam, 1998.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.75-99.

context. The existing literature mentioned above, does not go into the details of the ideas and programmes of the Aikya Sangham. The study also tries to compare the activities of the Sangham with the reform efforts of Muslims in other parts of the world on the one hand, and the similarities and the differences between them on the other. This Muslim reform endeavours are seen as a continuation of the reform activities undertaken among various communities in Kerala. And finally, developments after the dissolution of the Aikya Sangham movement is also looked into.

The main limitation of the study is the non availability of the original source materials which is either lost or scattered in various parts of Kerala. A proper theoretical frame work of the social and religious reform movements like Aikya Sangham has to be developed and incorporated into similar studies of such movements among other communities in Kerala to have a better understanding of the social and political changes in Kerala in the colonial and post-colonial period.

Source Materials

In the wake of these hardships and adversities, a hectic search has been carried out through the personal collections of certain scholars and Muslim leaders in different parts of Kerala, to collect a number of pamphlets, annual meeting proceedings, annual reports, presidential addresses to the annual meetings and journals related to Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham. The books written by the leaders of the movement like K.M. Moulavi, E. Moidu Moulavi and Vakkom Moulavi were highly useful in conducting this study. In addition to these original source materials, a number of modern literature available on Muslims in Kerala were also made use of. Moreover, personal interviews with renowned persons, biographies, and auto -biographies of certain Muslim leaders,

religious books, and periodicals, journals, and souvenirs of various religious groups and religious institutions also have been used. The materials are mainly in Malayalam, Arabi-Malayalam (A regional language developed by Muslims in Kerala as Malayalam written in Arabic Script), English and Arabic.

Chapterization

There are four other chapters, apart from the introductory chapter. The second chapter is on 'Reform Movements among Muslims' This chapter includes a brief account of the nature of the reform movements undertaken in various parts of the Muslim world. For the sake of a better analysis, these movements are divided into pre-modern and modern. Modern revivalist thoughts in Islam had its roots in the teachings of Imam Ghazzali A.H. (405-515) and Imam Ibn Thaimiya (A.H. 661-728), Wahabi movement of Arabia, Pan-Islamic movement of Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Salafi movements of Mohammed Ibn Abduh,-Rashed Rida Sanusi movement in North Africa, Wahabi movements and Alighar movement in North India were in one way or the other inspired by these two reforms.

In Islam, religion and society are identical and cannot be separated from each other. Therefore social reformation could be achieved only through religious reforms. Many of the movements mentioned earlier were, either internal revitalisation movements based on the Quran and the Hadiths, or movements which attempted to accommodate Islam with modern western culture and civilisation.

The third chapter, 'Reform Efforts in Kerala Before Aikya Sangham', deals with the advent of Muslims in Kerala, their socialisation, individual reform efforts and the limitation of their efforts before Aikya Sangham.

The fourth chapter, 'Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham Formation and Subsequent Developments' throws light on the circumstances leading to the formation of an association called Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham in 1922, its leaders and social base, ideas and programmes, principal activities and its limitations.

The fifth chapter, 'An Analytical Appraisal of Aikya Sangham Activities' attempts to analyse the movement in the context of various socio-religious movements undertaken among various Islamic and Hindu societies. It also discusses the Muslim intellectual perceptions on the socio-religious, political and economic realities of the time and their vision of future. A comparative analysis of the Aikya Sangham movement with other socio religious movements undertaken among Muslim societies, both in India and abroad, is also attempted. Finally, the subsequent development after the dissolution of Aikya Sangham movement.

Through its multi-faceted activities, Aikya Sangham stirred up the Muslim community from its pessimistic and negative attitude towards the new challenges and urged an era of enlightenment in the socio-religious economic and political fields, despite of the stiff opposition from the orthodox quarters. The relevance of this study springs from the lesser justice rendered by the existing studies to such a significant movement.

Chapter II

Reform Movements among the Muslims

Islam which originated in Arabia spread all over the world within a short period. A comprehensive set of guidelines regulates the way the believer leads his/her worldly and spiritual life, with the Quran and the Hadith being sources of basic religious knowledge.

In the process of the popularisation of Islam, some of the ~~traits~~ indigenous to other societies and cultures infiltrated into the pristine form of Islam, carrying the popular version of Islam away from its scriptural roots. Subsequently, superstitions, irrational practices and customs crept in. Very often, these trends were left unchecked as the Sufis, Ulema and the rulers opted for a compromise with these aberrations, instead of correcting them. It is in this context that a host of reformers and movements come into the picture. "Throughout Muslim history, religious reform movements have transformed not only belief but also the political and social life."¹

Therefore, the division between pre-modern and modern reform movements are mainly intended for a better analysis, despite a number of similarities as well as contrasts hampering such a watertight compartmentalization.

A comparative study of the various Muslim religious movements reveals a similarity of purpose and pattern. Pre-modern as well as modern reformers agree on the need for *ijthiahd* (independent research based on the Quran and the Hadith) and the denouncement of *Taqlid* (Blind acceptance

¹ Barbara Daly Metcalf, Islamic revival in British India: Dacoband, 1800-1900, Princeton, 1982, p.3.

of the four Imams in matters of Jurisprudence). Both the parties accepted *Ijthhad* while they rejected *Taqlid*. Similarly, both were highly critical of all kinds of superstitious beliefs and irrational customs that corrupt Islam. Replacement of the alien rule with the reinstatement of the Caliphate was a common item on the agenda of both the parties. Returning to the excellence of the Prophet's period was a dream long cherished by them on the basis of the Quran and the Hadith. The primary concern of all these movements was the socio-moral reconstruction and reform of the society. The attitude of these reformers towards Sufism ranged from an outright rejection to a more or less modified acceptance. The purely word negating attitude of medieval Sufism was combated by them.

Pre-modern Reformers

Since the first two centuries and a half was the formative period of Islam, one cannot strictly speak either of revival or reform in Islam, for both can logically occur only after an orthodoxy has been established at a later stage. Sunni-Shia schism and Sufi sectarianism developed in the course of time. Shiism and Sufism developed as a protest against the Sunni orthodoxy, both by making the individual the centre of its attention and by its doctrine of esotericism.²

Imam Ghazzali (A.H. 405-505) and Imam Ibn Thaimiya (A..H. 661-728) were the two early reformers in the history of Islam who wielded profound influence on later reformers.³

Imam Ghazzali lived in a period when people started living luxuriously, and when doctrinal differences were rampant. The doors of *ijthihad* were closed and any one of the four Imams was accepted without any alteration. Ghazzali studied Greek philosophy and interpreted it in

² Holt, P.M., and others (ed.s) Cambridge History of Islam, vol. II, Cambridge, 1970, p.633.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

accordance with Islamic philosophy. It was an attempt to reopen the spirit of *ijthihad*, and more over, to revitalise the mode of education. Modern Arabic and Islamic curriculum is highly indebted to Imam Ghazzali.

Imam Ghazzali forged a synthesis of Sufism and Orthodoxy, which has exercised one of the most durable influences on the subsequent development of the community.⁴ His magnum opus was 'Ihya-uloom-addin' (Revival of the Religious Sciences) which goes beyond the traditional cadres of the religious sciences and concerns them all.⁵

Ibn Thaimiyya (A.D. 1262-1327)

The earlier Islamic revivalist movements combatted the corrupt practices of Sufism and the declining prestige and authority of the ruling Muslim dynasties. Ibn Thaimiyya's period marked the political instability after the collapse of Abbasid empire, and the subsequent Tartar invasion, in the Muslim empire. As a result of this, the political instability and insecurity, fit into the false Sufi Tariqa. The moral standards had degenerated and people were far from Islamic *Sharia*. In these days, the Muslim masses were in the habit of looking upon their religious scholars, saints and martyrs as intercessors with God. Muslims invoked their saints, rather than God, built tombs for these saints in large numbers, to celebrate the anniversaries of their death, performed ceremonies implying reliance on them and perambulated around their shrines.⁶

Just as the people of the tradition had played a decisive role in the early struggle against the *Mutazila*, the *Shia* and *Kharijites*, and had helped to crystalize and formulate Sunny orthodoxy. So, once again the same

⁴ Ibid., p.635.

⁵ Ibid., p.600.

⁶ Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, Saviours of Islamic Spirit, vol.II Trans. By Muhiudin Ahmed, Lucknow, 1977, p.73.

revivalist and reformist zeal appeared with Ibn Thaimiyya in the seventh-eighth/thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. Ibn Thaimiyya was a professed follower of Ahmmed Ibn Hambali and a typical representative of the right wing orthodoxy.⁷ The impression that Ibn Thaimiyya was rigid, conservative and uncompromising with either rationalism or Sufism is not altogether correct. Even he fought with a large measure of success, to start afresh from the Quran and the Sunnah, and to assign their due places to the subsequent developments in Islam, both orthodox and heterodox..

Rigid conformity became the order of the day, *ijthihad* was regarded sinful and non-sensical and innovations were willingly accepted as a part of the *Shariat*. As a man who was well-versed in the Quran, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, logic, philosophy and scholasticism, he could easily surpass and outwit the contemporary experts. This wide range of knowledge helped him to reopen the Islamic concept of *ijhihad*.

He studied various schools of thought with a critical eye and deduced and established great many injunctions. He put up a tough fight against traditional innovations in religion, polytheistic customs, moral and social abuses of his day. He cleansed Islam of all impurities, purged it system of all evil and presented it afresh, before the world in it's original pure form.⁸

The concepts of *Tawassul* and *Istihaza* (Intercession and seeking intermediary with God) have always been points of contention between the conservative ulema and the reformers. Ibn Thaimiyya considered seeking the help of others, other than that of Allah, as against the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid* and a kind of *shirk* (Polytheism)

⁷ Holt, P., op.cit. 634.

⁸ Maududi, A Short History of Revivalist Movement in Islam, Delhi, 1973, p.61.

“Based on the tradition of the Prophet saying that force can be used to stop an evil, Ibn Thaimiyya had forcibly ended several heathen practices which was contrary to Islam.”⁹ Ibn Thaimiyya’s revival attempt was essentially an attempt to bring back Islam from the heterodox character represented by Sufis to the orthodox Sunni line with the Quran and *sunnah* as the sources of inspiration. The major limitation of his teachings was the fact that rationalism is condemned as a principle, and insistence is almost entirely laid on the tradition, in understanding Islam.¹⁰

Ibn Thaimiyya had acted as a liberalising force against the authority of the medieval scholars, and this was the reason for the unrelenting opposition of the contemporary orthodox *Ulema* who wanted to maintain the medieval structure of beliefs and practices of Islam.

His political vision is purely theo-centric in nature, that the Muslim society must set up a state in which *Sharia*, the will of God, to be implemented as the basic constitution. It emphasises not merely the individual, but also the collective being of the community, and therefore, lays greater stress on social virtues and justice than on mere individual virtues.¹¹

Even though he was opposed by his contemporaries, his teachings have not only had historical consequences in certain major reform movements in the recent centuries, and his spirit of free and fresh thinking and inquiry may be said to be alive in modern Islam.

Wahabi Movement

One of the earliest and most major, still reverberatingly influential, was the Wahabiyah in the 18th century Arabia. It is basically a protest

⁹ Nadwi, op.cit.p.35.

¹⁰ Holt, P., op.cit, p.636.

¹¹ Holt, P. op.cit, p.637.

against the internal deterioration. The Wahabis would call a halt to this decadence, summoning the Muslim society back to its first purity and order. It rejected the alien intellectualism, not only in philosophy but also in theology. It rejected all the dissensions, even the now well established Shia, and insisted solely on the law. The classical law, said the Wahabi's, is the sum and substance of the faith and that is its straitest and most rigid Hambali version, stripped of all innovations developed through the intervening centuries.¹²

As they shift from the existent to the essential, from the actual to the real, the Muslims had made of Islam to what they ought to make of it, and was and has remained cogent and vitalizing, and even liberating.¹³ He became very unpopular when he started his revitalisation process, but fortunately for him, got the support of Muhammed Ibn Saud, the chief of Daria. Ibn Saud was attracted by Wahab's line of thinking and offered him all support in spreading it. This merging of religion with politics opened a new era in the history of Islam and in the history of modern Arabia. Within a few years the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina, came under the sway of Ibn Saud.

Following are the important doctrines of Muhammed Ibn Abdul Wahab.

1. All objects of worship other than Allah are false and all who worship such deserve death.
2. The bulk of mankind are not monotheists, since they endeavour to win God's favour by visiting the tombs of saints. Their practice therefore, resembles what is recorded in the *Quran* of the Meccan *mushrikin*.

¹² W.C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, New Jersey, 1957, p.42.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.44.

3. It is polytheistic (*shirk*) to invoke the name of a prophet, saint or angel in prayers.
4. It is *shirk* to seek intercession from any but Allah.
5. It is *shirk* to make vows to any, other than Allah
6. It involves unbelief (*Kufr*) to profess knowledge not based on the *Quran*, the *Sunnah*, or the necessary inferences of the reason.
7. It involves unbelief and heresy to deny *Qadr* in all acts.¹⁴

Merging of religious ideas of Wahab with the politics of Ibn Saud, and subsequently, their suzerainty over Arabia enabled them to enforce their puritanical view in an aggressive way. It often led to confrontation between masses who were the adherents of popular Islam and the puritanism of Ibn Abdul Wahab. He ordered the destruction of many tombs venerated by masses. So, Wahabi movement was not only a religious revivalist movement, it had political content also. Its potentially nationalistic aspirations were directed against the Ottoman foreign rule.¹⁵ The result of this first Wahabi movement was, and still is, far reaching in its original face, as it shocked the conscience of Muslim community by the violence and intolerance which it displayed, not only towards saint worship but also toward the accepted orthodox rites and schools.¹⁶

Sanusi Movement

One of the most vigorous and widespread movements inspired by the neo-sufi-tradition was the *Sanusiyah Tariqa* established by Muhammed Ibn Ali-As-Sanusi (1787-1855), a North African Scholar, who was a

¹⁴ H.A. R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1974, p.618.

¹⁵ Tibi, Bassam, Islam and the Cultural Accomodation of Social Change, Oxford, 1990, p. 20.

¹⁶ H.A.R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, Chicago 1945, p.26.

student of Ahmed Ibn Idris and a major thinker in his own right.¹⁷ In Lybia he was committed not only to the reform of local religious practices, but also to the missionary expansion of Islam.¹⁸

Sanusi movement was basically a missionary movement originated in Algeria and later spread into other parts of North Africa, such as Tunisia, Morocco, Lybia etc. The founder of the movement, the Grand Sanusi, drew inspiration from Al-Ghazzali and found the latter's work "as a remedy for one wounded through the desire of the flesh."¹⁹ He was a man who believed in *Ijthihad*, and he favoured it only when the basic tenets of the Quran and the Hadith were not contradicted. According to him, *Taqlid* was not in the spirit of the scriptures. A reunification of the Islamic orders, fighting the colonialists and the degenerated monarchic hegemony of the Ottoman's, was the basic intention that led Sanusi. This movement often criticised it's adamant stand on western culture and their confrontation with Christians and Jews. "The attitude of the Sanusiya may best be described as avoiding any direct contact with the western world while the cause was being propagated."²⁰

Sanusi leaders aimed at unifying the heterogeneous group of followers of Islam into one large spiritual and possibly political activity. Dissemination of ideas was done through a mechanism named Zawiyah which maintained strict adherence to the code of conduct enshrined in the scriptures. High morality and respect for brothern were the characteristics of this group.

¹⁷ John Obert, Voll., Islam Continuity and Change in the Modern World, Boulder, 1982. p.135.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.137.

¹⁹ Nicola A. Ziadeh, Sanusiyah: A Study of a Revivalist Movement in Islam, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1968, p.87.

²⁰ Ibid, p.93.

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Born out of a political chaos prevailed in the 19th century North Africa the Sanusi movement laboured for the spread of Islam in places where its seeds were sowed recently. Their political aspiration finally came to a fruitful end when Syed idris, the son of Al-Mahdi, became the head of the United Kingdom of Lybia in 1951.

Some of the modern scholars argue that Sanusiya was a copy of Washbasim but similarity of purpose rather than direct borrowing is to be discerned in the two movements.²¹ Unlike Wahabism, the Sanusi movement was not hesitant to adopt some of the ways of Sufis in functioning. But the revivalist nature which both movements shared could be cited as a common factor in Wahabism and Sanusi movement.

Sanusi movement was a revivalist movement within Islam alone. There was no place for modern rationalist school of thought in it. Ijthihad endeavour was allowed but was limited within the Quran and the Hadiths. Being traditional and conventional, this movement was in one way an escapist movement since it was oblivious of a world which was growing at a high pace and they refused to open their eyes to the world and absorb its scientific temper in order to be compatible with the times.²² In terms of socio-political dynamics Al-Sunusi and his successors were brilliant adoptationists, creating a structure that could integrate tribal communities without destroying the underlying foundation of the social order. In intellectual terms, however, Al-Sanusi must be viewed as a culmination of neo-sufism, rather than a precursor of Islamic modernism.²³

Although it had the organised form of a Sufi *tariqa*, and included some sufi practices as well, its objectives were radically different. It was basically a socio-religious reform movement aiming at the purification of

²¹ Ibid, p.93.

²² Ibid, p.134.

²³ John Obert Voll, Ibid., p.137.

society from degenerated beliefs, and particularly, from mal-practices. Above all, it sought to promote a sense of moral solidarity based on honesty, egalitarianism and economic justice.²⁴

In north India, Islam reached through rulers and dynasties. Sufism also played a major role in spreading the Islamic faith. The conflict between the *Sharia* and Sufism had a long history in India. Sheikh Ahammed Sir- Hindi, who died in 1624, was the one who renewed and strengthened the *Sharia* from being corrupted by innovations and by the apostasy of the extremist Sufis. In India, 18th century Muslim socio-religious thought began with the teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi (1702-1763). He was a contemporary of Muhammed Ibn Abdul Wahab.

The Waliyullahi movement of purification of Islam from associationism is parallel to Wahabism, though it avoid the latter's extremism. Waliyullah grew up watching the Mughal empire crumble. Unlike Ibn Abdul Wahab, therefore, he thought and worked from within one of the passing medieval empires. He would refashion and revive rather than reject.

In contrast with the Arab lands Islam in India had to settle down amidst the vast Hindu majority. Majority of the Hindu converts, by and large, adopted not Islamic *Sharia* as such, but the manners and customs, and to some extent even their beliefs that became the *Sharia* of Indian Islam.²⁵ Therefore, one field of reform, most inviting for the religious enthusiasts, has been to complete the process of conversion, to make the Indian Muslim into a proper Muslim in the religious sense, by making him abandon the customs and practices forbidden in the *Sharia* directly or by implications.²⁶ Shah Waliyullah interpreted the religion in its simplest and

²⁴ Holt P.M., and others (eds.) op.cit., p.637.

²⁵ N. Hanif. *Islam and Modernity*, New Delhi, 1997, p.,126.

²⁶ Ibid., p.126.

in its ideal way. His thoughts were not confined to any single field or discipline but ranged from theology to materialism, with all its originality and creativity.

The modernisation of a society, he believed, involves the modernisation of its religious life. His treatise on Quran, introduction of an academy to study *Hadith* (Daru-1-Hadith), interpretation of Islamic *Sharia* according to the requirement of the existing situation, and his campaign against blind imitation of other cultures, innovations and superstitions, were aimed at fulfilling the above said notion.²⁷

In the political sphere he aroused the feeling of people to wage a protest against the existing Mughal rule, and thereby re-establish a new Muslim rule in all its purity.

“All the socio-religious activities of Indian Muslims that followed at a later period centred around the thoughts of Shah Waliyullah who contributed essential elements to the growth of progressive thoughts in Islam.”²⁸ The main contribution of Shah Waliyullah was his insistence on speculative thinking among Muslims in India with his renewed emphasis in *ijthihad*. His use of reason and argument perhaps a more fundamentalist significance but, they inspired the formula of *neo-mutazilite*, modernism of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who had received his early education in the seminary of Waliyullah’s successors in Delhi, of Shibli’s scholasticism and of religious reconstruction in the thought of Iqbal. The more classical influences of Waliyullah’s concept of *ijthihad* are reflected in the workshop of the *ulema* of Deoband, whose religious ideology was directly shaped by his school.²⁹

²⁷ J.N. Jalbani, Teachings of Shah Waliyullah.

²⁸ K.A. Nizami, “Socio-Religious Movements in Indian Islam” in Lokhandwalla S.T., (ed.) India and Contemporary Islam, Simla, 1967, p.99.

²⁹ Aziz Ahmed, Studies in Islamic Culture in Indian Environment, London, 1969, p.205.

Ahmed Shah Barelvi

Ahmed Barelvi's movement had two distinct objectives. On the one hand, it was intended to purify the Islamic religion into its pristine form, on the other hand, it was marked by a fight against the alien rulers of India thereby aiming at a reinstatement of an Islamic State.

Barelvi's puritanical attempts were more similar to Ibn Abdul Wahab's movements. In his country-wide tour, he propagated the ideas like renewed emphasis on *tawhid* (The unity of God), adherence to the principle of *ijthihad*, rejection of *taqlid*, rejection of the belief in the theory of intercession (on someone's behalf) by some intermediaries who might be persons of saintly eminence and hence supposed to be nearer to God. He condemned and opposed many of the then existed religious and social practices for which there is no precedent or justification in the *Sharia*. Prominent among these were tomb worship, exaggerated veneration of pirs, excessive dowry in marriages and general show offs on festive occasions such as circumcision and *Milad* (celebration of Prophets Birthday) and prohibition of widow remarriage. Barelvi not only preached to his disciples, but also practically showed his enthusiasm in materialising his ideas. He himself had married a widow. "This act was first of its kind among the higher classes of Muslims in India and it was an act of courage born out of conviction".³⁰

Shah Waliyullah's and Shah Abdul Aziz's political thought developed into its practical culmination through Ahmed Shah Barelvi and his Wahabi movement. The political career of Ahmed Shahid was revolutionary, and waged war against the British. But he was killed in the Battle of Balakkot on 6th May, 1831.

³⁰ Queyamuddin Ahmed, *The Wahabi Movement*, Calcutta, 1966, p.29.

The Wahabi movement in India started as a socio-religious impulse and gained political orientation very soon. It was basically against the political, cultural and economic domination of the Britishers in India. The Wahabi sect as such seems to be slowly dying out but its chief doctrines of reform still live in what is known as *Ahl-e-Hadith* sect which has served in the later times as the organisation into which most of the reforming tendencies of the early Wahabi reformers of India have been absorbed.³¹

Characteristic Features of Premodern Movements

The Pre-modern movements were mainly against the *sufis* excessiveness and distortion, but not an outright rejection. The movement like those in India and North Africa integrated *sufism* into their system to develop a blend of both. They endeavoured to eradicate the socio-moral evils that came in the wake of the spread of *sufism*. And, unlike the *sufis* their sole aim was not to ratify or straighten the believes about the other world alone, but to reform the socio-moral failures of the Muslim community as well. All these movements emphasised a return to the pristine form of Islam in terms of the Quran and the Sunnah. This fact again aligns them more directly with the pristine Islam rather than with the historic Islam. Politically active they were, most of them resorted to the *Jihad*, to realise their ideals.

The nature of *ijthihad* and its concept which they promulgated was not based upon reason, but on a literal adoption of the Quran and the *Hadith*. Therefore, the leaders of the movement issued the call 'back to the Quran and Sunnah'. This utterly revivalist attitude has undergone considerable modifications under the impact of modernist movements in Islam.

³¹ Murray T. Titus, Islam in India and Pakistan, Calcutta, 1959, p.188.

Modern Reforms

Seventeenth century onwards, western intervention and presence increased, culminating in a most serious challenge encountered by the Islamic World. Gradually, economic control gave way to political and military dominance in the nineteenth century. "Christian missionaries often claimed that their success was due to the superiority of western Christian civilisation. This challenge raised profound questions of identity of Muslims".³² The modern Islamic reformers had to face two basic challenges- internal degeneration of Muslims and external cultural and political threat from westerners:

Islamic modernism was a revitalising movement of a different tendency from that of the traditional Wahabi like. Although both movements aimed at a revival should take were radically different. Islamic modernism in its initial stages, was a primarily intellectual movement for which civilisations was not so much a target for attack as an element of the postulated renaissance. Islamic modernists, therefore did not try instead to adopt it to the modern age, by enriching it with those findings of the rational European sciences that did not open its substance to question.³³

It was Al-Afghani and Abduh who initiated an effective synthesis of the modern Islamic concepts, western thought, and the more conservative, traditional views. The alternative they developed has come to be called Islamic modernism.³⁴

All modern reforms, by and large, come closer, either to Al-Afghani's Islamic/alternative/rejectionist model or to Abduh's Islamic synthesis/ assimilationist model which emerged in the 19th century against the western cultural and political pressure.

³² John L. Dinohue and John L. Esposito (ed.s), Islam in transition, New York, 1982, pp.5-6.

³³ Bassam Tibi, Islam and Cultural Acomodation of Social Change, Oxford, 1990, p.21.

³⁴ Martin E. Marty and R. Scoot Appleby, (eds.) Fundamentalisms Observed, Chicago, 1991, p.335.

Jamaluddin Al-Afghani and Pan Islamism

Perhaps no one has exercised a greater influence upon the contemporary history of the Muslim world than Jamaluddin Al-Afghani:

He was a versatile scholar, philosopher, orator, journalist, and political activist, travelled widely, from India and Afghanistan to Isthambul, Cairo, Paris, and London, stirring in Muslim consciousness, of the political strength in the face of colonialism. He is the father of modern Muslims nationalism, proponent of Pan-Islamism, and the main inspirations for the reform movement in Islam. He express almost all the attitudes and themes that are common places in Muslim apologetics from 1900 the present.³⁵

Western imperialism and their culture based on industrial development and scientific progress intruded into the newly conquered Islamic world. Christian missionaries, as everywhere in the world came along with the colonial power seeking a bright future of their religion. Traditional Muslim societies were in anyway not in a position to accept either the modern science or the culture they propagated. This hesitation made them a static society. Afghani was the first reformer who realised this challenge and responded positively. Al-Afghani's travel from India to Egypt marked the turning point, arousing Muslims, depending on his audience, to resist the incursions of imperialism by galvanising their forces as individual nations or as the Muslim nations, to regain the lost power and glory. He was an occasional critic of religions, an unhesitating advocate of science and philosophy, and also a proponent of a return to Islam, which touched traditional sensibilities.³⁶

A tireless traveller in almost all Muslim world, he extended conversations with students and teachers on how the revival of Islam could be achieved through an application of philosophy to religion. Modern

³⁵ John, L. Esposito and Donohue - J. John, eds. Op.cit., p.16.

³⁶ Ibid., p.9.

education, especially in the physical sciences, was taken to prove that there was no conflict between contemporary knowledge and the teaching of Holy Quran, and above all, unity under a strong leadership in order to preserve the political freedom of the Muslim world against the menace of European imperialism³⁷

It was at Al-Azhar, where he met his chief disciple and collaborator, Sheikh Muhammed Abduh, and their relation strengthened to the extent of publishing an Arabic weekly, 'Al-Urwa Al-Wutqa' in 1884, through which they propagated their idea of Pan-Islamism through out the Islamic world.

His political ideas were based mainly on Islamic universalism. He propagated the slogan 'no nationalism (*wataniyya*) in Islam'. His objective was to bring harmony among the different sects of Islam to change the despotic government of Turkey and Iran into constitutional monarchies and to reconstitute the Khilafat with the Turkish Sultan as the Khalifa and the leader of all independent Islamic countries.³⁸ He presented Islam not as a religion in its narrow meaning but as a broad outlook enveloping the whole civilisation.

Afghani also believed in the superiority of the early period of Islam, when it flourished as a mighty civilisation and advised the Muslim society to go back to the early days of Islam. But, though pan-Islamism was, on the political side, aimed against European penetration, it had an internal reforming aspect also. Jamal-uddin attacked with the same vigour the abuses which he saw within Islam and the evils of the Muslim governments. It was this essential element in his thought, that Muslim scholars should be abreast of modern currents of thoughts, and that the Muslim state should stand out as the political expression and vehicle of

³⁷ Ibid, p.156-157.

³⁸ M.A. Shushtery, Outlines of Islamic Culture, Mysore, 1938, p.28.

sound Koranic orthodoxy.³⁹ He also opposed all kinds of *bidah* (innovations) and argued that it was one of the reasons for the decadence of Muslims. He was strong in criticising the *ulema* of the period for not guiding Muslims towards unity, their engagement on *Bidah* and their being blind towards changes.

He seems to have been the first Muslim revivalist to use the concept 'Islam and the west' as connoting, correlative - and of course antagonistic - historical phenomena.⁴⁰ He saw the west as something primarily to be resisted, because it threatened Islam and the community, but secondly, in part to be imitated. He was vigorous in inciting his Muslim hearers to develop reason and technology as the West was doing in order to be strong.⁴¹ He was the first who pointed out a solution to the problems brought in by modernism through a purely Islamic outlook.

Afghani was more a political agitator, and believed that Islamic unity is the only solution for a Muslim revivalism. Afghani himself had no clear, no ordered philosophy. But he did have the abounding energy and the knack of inspiring others into busy enthusiasm. It was his vision and determination, as it had become the aspiration providing the clue to most subsequent Muslim modernism, that Islamic history shall once again march forward in full truth and full splendour.⁴²

Muhammad Abduh (A.D. 1849-1905)

In the latter half of the 19th century, the Islamic reformers realised the need for extending the nature of Islamic reforms and cope with the

³⁹ H.A.R. Gibb. *op.cit.*, p.28.

⁴⁰ W.C. Smith, *op.cit.*, p.49.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.50

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.51.

requirements of modern period. Muhammad Abduh was the champion of this cause.

He received a traditional religious education but was transformed by his contact with Jamal-ad-din Al-Afghani. Exiled by the British, he spent time in Beirut and Trippoli then in Paris where he edited a review with Afghani (Al-urwa-al-wutqa) for a brief time. He returned to hold high religious posts, including that of Muff of Egypt. His desire to reform Islam and put it in harmony with modern times by return to primitive purity pushed him to theological reflection and writing which make him the founder of the modern school of Islam.⁴³

His purpose was to show that Islam contained in itself the potentialities of a rational religion, a social science and a moral code which form the basis of modern life.⁴⁴ His efforts was a reinstatement of what Islam really was and then its application to modern society.

Abduh rejected the idealism of Jamal-ad-din al-Afghani, and made it one of his main objectives to broaden the basis of education, above all, in the Muslim University of Al-Azhar.⁴⁵ His efforts to reform the curriculum of Al-Azhar can be seen in this background.

Devotion to saints, blind imitations of practices customs, political autocracy, corrupted ulema, absence of social peace and unity, in compatibility of Islam with the modern times, were the main causes for the backwardness of Muslims according to Abduh.⁴⁶

In the matter of doctrine, he had made a stand against the uncritical acceptance of authority, or *taqlid* as it is called in Islam. He was a revolutionary for the cause of individual freedom in matters of belief, and

⁴³ John L. Esposito and Donohue, J. John (eds), op. cit., p.24.

⁴⁴ Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, London, 1962, p.140.

⁴⁵ H.A.R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, op.cit, P.39.

⁴⁶ Bahawnddin K.M. Kerala Muslims: The Long Struggle, Trivandrum, 1992, p. 157

in the interpretation of religion, and he further declared that the privilege of a laymen and a non-expert to interpret Islam, according to his own understanding, must not be suppressed.

He vehemently criticised the false *sufis* who were encouraging *tawassul*, saint worship, tomb worship, and other un-Islamic customs. Abduh himself maintained that Muslims are not required to believe in the miracles attributed to saints or in their powers of intercession.⁴⁷

He further insisted that there can be no conflict between religion and physical science, as the Quran commands man to engage in scientific studies. He finds no contradictions between nature and Islam. "God has sent two books, one is revealed in nature, and the other in the Quran".⁴⁸

In fact, neither Afghani nor Abduh had closed minds as far as Europe was concerned. They were, nevertheless, only prepared to adopt elements of bourgeois civilisation and culture. In so far as these would be able to strengthen Islam against Europe.⁴⁹

Abduh's reform ideas can be broadly summed up under four main heads:

- 1) The purification of Islam from corrupting influences and practices.
- 2) The reformation of Muslim higher education.
- 3) The reformulation of Islamic doctrine in the light of modern thought and
- 4) The defense of Islam against European influences and Christian attacks.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ H.A.R., Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, op.cit., p.34.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.44.

⁴⁹ Bassam Tibi, op.cit. p.21.

⁵⁰ H.A.R. Gibb., Modern Trends in Islam, op.cit., p.33.

Abduh became a more systematic thinker than his master and had a more lasting influence on Muslim mind, not only in Egypt but far beyond.⁵¹

Rashid Rida (1865-1935) and Salafi Movement

Rashid Rida was the most reputed and intelligent disciple of Abduh.⁵² He is the last among the reformers after Afghani and Abduh. He studied at the Ottoman government school and at Shykh Husian Jasir's school both in Tripoli, Lebanon. Here he made his first contact with Mohammed Abduh and later in 1897, when he took refuge in Egypt, he became Abduh's faithful disciple and guardian of his ideas. In 1898 Rida founded the periodical '*Al-Manar*', which was the most important voice of Islamic reform in the Arab world.

Being influenced by the writings of Al-Ghazzali's 'Ihya-ulum-uddin' and Abduh's revolutionary weekly, 'Al-urwa-al-wutqa', Rida embarked on reform activities. Unlike Abduh, he was a less fervent admirer of western sciences and opposed the implementation of western rationalism in interpreting Islamic doctrines.

Rashid Rida's ideas are reflected in the Arabic monthly 'Al-Manar'* edited and published by him from Egypt. It had been a vehicle conveying his reforms to various places in the world. Contrary to Afghani and Abduh, he was more traditionalistic and became increasingly attracted to the school of Imam Ahamed Ibn Hambal which was further interpreted by Ibn Thaimiyya and Abdul Wahab. Rida's salafi movement was a fusion of both traditionalist and modern reforms. In the doctrinal aspect, as in its social programme, the *salafiya* took on increasingly the character of a

⁵¹ Albert Hourani, *Arabic thought in liberal age*, op.cit, p.130.

⁵² M. Abdul Samad, *Islam in Kerala: Groups and Movements in the 20th Century*, Kollam, 1998, p.38.

* His 'Al-Manar' conveyed Islamic ideals to Kerala too, and Vakkom Moulavi was attracted to the teachings of above mentioned reformers through this magazine.

rationalizing puritan movement, while politically it assumed the mantle of Jamal-ad-din-al-Afghani.⁵³

Politically, he was a strong supporter of a khilafat regime based on Islamic *Sharia*. But the growing nationalism in the Arab world, especially in Egypt, appeared to be a strong hurdle in materialising Rashid Rida's political ambition. He was a strong critic of western imperialism and Christian missionary activities.

In India, Muslim liberalism dates back to the early 19th century with the establishment of the Delhi College in 1825. There began a new era in the life of Muslims. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was not the pioneer of western education and liberalism, but he was the consolidator of Muslim liberalism.⁵⁴

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the Aligarh Movement

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was born at a transitional period when the Mughal political authority was subjugated to the British. The 1857 revolt virtually ended the Mughal dynastic rule. In this new circumstances, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan realised that the progress of Muslims lies in acquiring modern education. With this aim in mind, he started a college at Aligarh, where scholars would receive Islamic education along with a grounding in western sciences. This was the basic principle of Aligarh education which brought influential elements in the Indian Muslim societies into the current of modernism.⁵⁵

He was criticised by many for his religious views. He was famous for his comparative religious study and rational interpretation of the Quran

⁵³ H.A.R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, op. cit., p.35.

⁵⁴ Majeed Ashraf, Muslim Attitude Towards, British rule and Western Culture, Delhi, 1982, p.232.

⁵⁵ N. Hanif, op.cit., pp.200-201.

and Hadith. "He was not a worldly man who tried to exploit religion, he was rather a deeply religious man who felt with other reformers that Muslims, as recipients of the final revelation, would prosper in this world as well as the next, if they were faithful to that revelation".⁵⁶ He knew his Islamic history well, but he knew his Islam better. He could thus comprehend the scale and depth of reformist ideas and currents, identify elements of change and continuity, and discover a sound theoretical basis for a constructive dialogue with the west.

Through his journals 'Thahzeebul Ahlag' and 'Aligarh Institute Gazette' he conveyed his message to his fellow men. He had organised the 'All India Mohammedan Educational Conferences' (1886) in various parts of India for the propagation of the Aligarh College, and for developing an aptitude among Muslims for modern education.⁵⁷

He found just as his contemporary Mohammed Abduh did in Egypt, that if the Quranic principles were adopted, there would remain no incompatibility between modern science and Islam. He tried to resolve the difficulties inherent in the four traditional sources of Muslim law by a dialectical, rationalist exegesis of the Quran, by scrutinising the classical data of the 'Hadith', by an almost unlimited emphasis on *ijtihad* as the inalienable right of every individual Muslim, and finally by rejecting the principle of *ijma* (consensus) in the classical sense which confined it to the Muslim theologians.⁵⁸ Similarly, as Abduh, Sir Syed also believed the work of God (Nature and its fixed laws) is identical with the word of God.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Barbare Daly Metcalf, op.cit., p.322.

⁵⁷ Shan Mohammed, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: A Political Biography*, Meerut, 1969, p.83.

⁵⁸ Mushirul Hassan, "Aligarh's 'Notre eminent contemporain'" Assessing Syed Ahmad Khan's Reformist Agenda", *EPW*, May 9, 1998, vol.xxxiii, No.19, p.1077.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.1077.

Sir Syed was the only prominent Muslim who rejected the pan-Islamist ideology propounded by Jamal ud-din Al-Afghani. This disagreement between Afghani and Syed Ahmed Khan consists of three cardinal points.

1. Al-Afghani did not agree with the extremist rationalism of at least some of Syed Ahmed Khan's views and regarded his new '*ilm-ul-kalam*' as a heresy in so far as it seemed to falsify the words of the Quran.
2. He regarded Syed Ahmed Khan's religious views and his educational programme as ancillaries to his political servitude to the British interest in India, where as, Al-Afghani himself was bitterly anti-British.
3. As a logical consequence of the second point, he saw Syed Ahmed Khan as his main adversary in India, opposed to pan-Islamism.⁶⁰

There is at least one point as common between the views of Al-Afghani and Syed Ahmed Khan. Both believed Islam to be capable of an evolutionary process within the present and future history of mankind. Their approach to the necessity of modernism is much the same. They had the view that the freedom of expression, which had come in the wake of western influences, should be used for revolutionising the ideas and minds of Muslim people.⁶¹

In a career, spanning more than three decades, there was much ambiguity and inconsistency in many of Syed Ahmed's public positions. He became an uncritical admirer of western culture and civilization, especially after his visit to England in 1869-70, and was insensitive to the disruptive role of British colonialism. In this respect, he was naïve and ill-informed. Given his feudal background, his overall concerns were elitist.

⁶⁰ Aziz Ahmed, op.cit., p.55.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.57.

Though education remained his prime interest, he showed no familiarity with socio-economic issues and the plight of the common man.⁶²

It is tempting to judge Syed Ahmed by our standards, and to enumerate his limitations and inadequacies. Such a temptation needs to be resisted if we wish to locate the history of ideas in their proper context. After all, the Aligarh reformer was neither a revolutionary nor did he live in revolutionary times. Therefore, he should be remembered for what he accomplished under difficult circumstances and not for what we did not set out to do. Doubtless, his agenda relating to social reforms, education and gender empowerment was limited, but it is also true that he was confronted with the combined opposition of the theologians and the Muslim elites.

Characteristics of Modern Muslim Reforms

So far as the fact and the form of the reformist zeal were concerned, the pre-modern movements ante-date modern Islam. Modern Islam is a simple continuation of the pre-reform movements.⁶³

The pre-modern movements laid emphasis on fresh thinking, but they were unable to give a larger and new content to their thinking, because their actual intention was focused on pristine Islam. What the modernists have essentially achieved is the maintenance of pristine Islam as a source of inspiration and motive energy, and to this energy was sought to attach a modernist content.⁶⁴

The modern reforms, like the pre-modern movement, were politically active. It was Al-Afghani who initiated the concepts of nationalism and pan-Islamism in Muslim society. In India, Sir Syed was not in favour of this pan-Islamic propaganda, because their intellectual

⁶² EPW, op. cit., p.1081.

⁶³ Holt P.M., op.cit, pp.641-642.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.642.

perception of the right way of reforming their communities differed from country to country, depending upon the nature of political system, the level of socio-economic evolution, the degree of external penetration, the historical role of Islam, the demographic structure, and the nature of challenges .

Modern reformist trends shows the tendency of reconciliation towards western sciences and education rather than an extremist rejection. Modern reformers also kept the faith in Islam as an alternative system in modern life. Use of reason in analysing the Islamic concepts was the other character of modern reforms.

Modern reforms also got inspiration from the Quran and the Sunnah, and kept an explicit nostalgia for the departed early glory of pristine Islam. In this respect they also followed the path of pre-modern reformist agenda of bringing Muslims back to the *Sharia* in which the Quran and Sunnah being the spiritual and material guideline.

Thus, it is not incorrect to say that looking from the evolutionary perspective, the present phenomena of Islamic resurgence seems to be a continuation of the historical chain of reform, renewal or revival within Islam.

Chapter III

Reform Efforts In Kerala Before Aikya Sangham

Islam in India, in all probability, began in Kerala, even though there is no unanimous opinion about it. But there are enough historical evidences which show that Muslims as a community has been living in Kerala since ninth century A.D. Tharisappally copper plate grant (849 A.D.) it was made for a Christian group, and was attested by a group of Muslim merchants of the area. It was a deed by which some land was given to the Tharisappally (church) of Quilon by Ayyanadikal, a vassal of Sthanu Ravi (844-885), the second Chera Emperor.¹ This signifies the presence of a Muslim community there, though some of the historians, relying on the Cheraman Perumal legend, that Islam spread in Kerala during its very inception in Arabia.*

Arabs were mainly traders who had a long tradition of trade relations with Kerala coast. Periplus of the Erythrean sea (C. 50 A.D.) recorded:

The whole place is crowded with Arab Ship-masters, and common sailors and is absorbed in the pursuit of commerce, for with ships of its own fitting out, it trades with the parts beyond straits on the opposite coast (Erythrea and Somalia) and also with Barugoza (Broach).²

¹ Syed, Mohiyideen Shah, Islam in Kerala, Trissur, 1975, pp.12-13).

* William Logan, writes, There is good reason for thinking that the account in the Cheraman Perumal legend, of the introduction of Islam is reliable, Logan William, Malabar, vol.1, Madras, 1951, p.195.

² J.W. McCrindle, The Commerce and Navigation of the Erythrean Sea, p.79, quoted from A.P. Ibrahim Kunj, Mappla Muslims of Kerala, Tvm 1989, p.15.

The first eight centuries of Mappila growth was marked by mutual economic interests and religious tolerance.³ The number of Arabs in the trading ports, as well as the number who married and settled in those places, increased steadily over the centuries.⁴

The Muslims and their trade prospered because of the regard shown to them by the rulers—notwithstanding that these rulers and their troops were all unbelievers—their respect for the ancient customs of the Muslims and the absence of enmity except on rare occasions, the rulers have respect and regard for the Muslims because the increase in the numbers of cities was due to them.⁵

The eleventh to the sixteenth century of Mappiala history is intimately linked with the rise of the Zamorin of Calicut, who gained ascendancy among the contending rajas of northern Kerala.⁶ It was the military and economic benefit ^{provide} rendered by the Mappilas that enabled the Zamorin to become such a strong ruler.

By the advent of the Portuguese power in Kerala in 1498, economic, cultural, religious and personal motivations united to produce a powerful sense of purpose undiluted by self doubt among the Muslims. The ardent ^{passionate} desire of the Portuguese and their great ambition at all times were to make the Muslims ^{give up fore make} renounce the faith of Islam and accept Christianity.⁷

Since then, the successive history of Kerala Muslims was that of hard struggle against the later foreign conquerors, and also with a brief break during the time of Tippu's rule in Malabar.

³ Shykh Zaynuddin, Thuhfathul Mujahidin, English Translation by S.M.H. Ninar, Madras, p.51

⁴ Miller, Mappla Muslim of Kerala, Madras, 1976, p.52

⁵ Shykh Zainuddin, op.cit., p.51.

⁶ Miller, op.cit., pp.53,54

⁷ Ibid., p.61.

Mappila Socialisation

The religious life of the Muslims has been centred round the mosques as it is elsewhere in the world. It is believed that Malik Ibn Dinar and his associates arrived in Kerala as missionaries and established ten mosques in different parts of Kerala. [viz. Kulam (Quilon) Muzris (Kodungallur), Shaliyat (Chaliyam), Fandarina (Panthalayini Kollam), Darmfattam (Dharmadam), Jurfattan (Srikanthapuram), Hayli Marawi (Madai), Kanjar Kut (Kasarakode), Manjalur (Mangalore) and Fakkanur (Barkur)].⁸

Qazis (religious scholars who lead mosque services) commanded much popularity and respectability in the community. His word was deemed as the last in the particular *mahall* (locality), which did not have much connections with the neighbouring *mahall*.

Many of the Muslim customs and practices were similar to those of their Hindu compatriots. *Nercca*, *Marumakkaathayam* system and the dowry system were primarily not Islamic, but came into being as a cultural assimilation and accommodation. Apart from these innovative practices, many other ceremonies were adopted during birth, marriage and death occasions. In the area of social customs the Mappilas have absorbed elements of Kerala culture ranging from dress habits to marriage practices, including such customs as 'Talikettu', paying dowry to the bridegroom and purification ablutions after birth.⁹ It is probable that the most important example of Muslims social adaptation, the *Marumakkathayam* system,

⁸ Shykh Zaynudin, *Thu hafat*, pp.38-39, quoted in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.). Kerala Muslims. op.cit., p.24.

⁹ Miller, op.cit., p.251.

stems from the earlier period. 'They copied this custom from the people of Hind.'¹⁰

Intensity of religious devotion is a characteristic of the people of Kerala which Mappilas shared, and Islam accounts for their strong religious commitment, but there is no evidence of excessiveness in this regard prior to the European period.¹¹ But as time went on, due to various historical developments, the relationship between Muslims and other communities strained. The agrarian policy adopted by the British in Malabar played a major role to strain the social relations between the Muslims and Hindus. Likewise, Muslims were forced to fight against the European powers, as they destroyed their economic balance. It is a fact that from the 16th century onwards Muslim social life was linked with their defensiveness, against the Europeans. They lived in confusion and insecurity during this long period. Upto the beginning of the twentieth century, the same condition prevailed.

what about Paragon?

Another feature of Muslim social life in Kerala was the influence of *sufism*. Many of the folk songs, *malas*, written mainly in the Arabi-Malayalam dialect, reflect the miraculous powers of certain *sufis* in Kerala. The *Qadiri tariqa* was the most popular *tariqa* and the *Muhyuddin Mala*, the *Moulid* of Abdul Qadir Jilani, (with whom the *Qadiri Tariqa* is associated) composed by Qazi Mohmmad of Calicut in 1607 A.D. became widely popular in the region.¹²

The Mamburam *Thangals* of the *sufi* tradition, were great scholars and issued several *fatwas*. They gave their spiritual benediction to several outbreaks of the Mappilas against the oppression of the Hindu *janmies* and

¹⁰ Zynuddin, op.cit., p.44.

¹¹ Miller, op.cit. p.227.

¹² A.P. Ibrahim Kunj "Origin and Spread of Islam in Kerala" Kerala Muslims: A Historical Perspective, New Delhi, 1995, p.26.

the British government.¹³ Syed Fazl, said to be the spirit behind several of the Mappila outbreaks was exiled by the government in 1852 and he spent his last years as a courtier of the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, at Constantinople.¹⁴ People of all castes and creeds make offerings to the shrine and visit *Jarams*. A second important *thangal* family was founded by Muhammed Sha Thangal of Kondotti, an eighteenth century *sufi*. *Rifai Tariqa*, *Nurishah Tariqa* and *Naqshabandi Tariqa* had strong footholds in Kerala.

One cannot negate the role played by the *sufi* saints in popularising Islam in Kerala. But the other side of this *sufi* influence was the increasing of superstitious beliefs like invoking saints instead of Allah, which affected the Islamic spirit of *Thouhid*, and led to a sort of exploitation.

Many of these *sufis*, as they enjoyed much popularity, were able to channelize the popular discontent against the colonial powers.¹⁵ The *sufis* were considered as saviours and people tended to attribute supernatural powers to them posthumously.

The Muslim society in Kerala was not a homogenous group. Social distinctions based on family status, wealth and descent were apparent in the Muslim society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though not as prevalent as it was in the Hindu society.

Though widespread reform attempts could not be cited in the pre-Aikya Sangham period, one cannot negate the roles played by individual reformers and local movements. There was enough evidence to show that the reformist ideas of Ibn Thaimiyya, Ibn Abdul Wahab, Shahwaliyullah,

¹³ K.K. Muhammed Abdul Kareem and Ahmad, Moulavi C.N., Mahathaya Mappila Sahitya Parambaryam, Calicut, 1978, p.181.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.184-85.

¹⁵ K.K. Mohd. Abdul Kareem and C.N. Ahmad Moulvi, Mahathaya Mappila Sahithya Parambaryam, Calicut, 1978, pp.177, 181, 199.

Syed Ahmed Barelvi had influenced at least some of the enlightened religious leaders.

Allama Abdul Kareem Moulana, the Qazi of Cochin was an Arabic scholar and was a follower of Ibn Thaimiyya. He wrote Arabic commentaries on Thaimiyya's *Al-Furkam*, *Al-Akheedhathul Waswithiya*, *Kitab-al-Vaseela*.¹⁶

Syed Fazl Pukkoya Thangal of Mamburam was a renovator and a hard fighter against the British. He released a *fatwa* against the ongoing *Nercca* of that time. The British representative of Edan has described him as a follower of Muhammed Ibn Abdul Wahab of Arabia in a letter to the Madras Governor.¹⁷

It is said that, during the late 18th century Syed Shykh Ahmed Barelvi and Maulana Mohmmad Ismail Dahlavi reached Alappuzha, where he was received warmly.¹⁸

On 5th May, 1911, a deputation for seeking co-operation for raising the Aligarh M.A.O. college to a University came to Kochi. The deputation committee consisted of Moulana Shoukath Ali, Yakoob Hassan Sait and Khan Sahib Moideen Pasha. The committee toured different part of Malabar, Kochi and Thiruvithankur. They received a warm welcome and substantial helps from the areas they visited. Their visit gave a boost to the educational efforts of these regions also.¹⁹

The enlightened Muslim leaders of the 19th and early part of 20th centuries, like Makti Thangal, Chalilakath Kunhammed Hajee, Hamadani

¹⁶ K.K. Mohd. Abdul Kareem, "Navothana Pravarthanangal Aikya Sanghathinu Mump" (Reform Efforts Before Aikya Sangham) in *Shabab Seminar* Edition, 1997, Calicut, p.108.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.109-110.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.108.

¹⁹ K.T. Mohammad Ali, *Education among the Mappilas of Malabar*, New Delhi, 1990, p.132.

Shykh and Vakkom Abdul Qadir Moulavi assumed that the degeneration of Muslims in Kerala was mainly due to their superstitious beliefs and their deviation from the basic tenets of Islam. Apart from this internal degeneration, an external cultural threat from the Christian missionaries was also there in the scene.

Sanaulla Makti Thangal (1847-1912)

Sanaulla Makti Thangal was an outstanding religious reformer of Kerala during the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century. He was born at Velliyamkode in Ponnani Taluk in 1847. After receiving elementary education from his father, he moved to Chavakkad Higher Elementary School and did his higher studies at Velliyamkode, Ponnani. By that time, he was proficient in Arabic, Malayalam, Hindi, Persian, Tamil and English. He was then appointed as an excise inspector under the British government.²⁰

Nineteenth century cultural defence in India had manifested itself in two ways. Firstly to create an alternative to the colonial cultural practices and secondly the revitalisation of traditional institutions. While the concern about education and language underlined the former, inquiry into traditional knowledge and an effort to translate it into contemporary practice formed a part of the latter'.²¹

Makti Thangal undertook his activities on similar lines. He placed Islam against Christianity as an ideology and was engaged in the revitalisation of traditional Islamic institutions. He was the man who pioneered Muslim writings and made commendable journalistic outputs

²⁰ K.K. Mohd. Abdul Karam, Makti Thangalalude Jeeva Charithram (Biography of Makti Thangal), Calicut, 1997, p.10.

²¹ K.N. Panikkar, Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Conscionshess in Colonial India, New Delhi, 1995, p.105.

through which he exchanged his reform ideas among them. His path of reform was never smooth, owing to various internal and external pressures.

The reform ideas of Makti Thangal can be traced from his writings. His polemical writings include 'Kadora Kudaram', 'Parkalitha Porkalam', 'Makti Samvada Vijayam' etc. His other writings mainly focus on the need for a total revival as the Muslim society of Kerala which was a static one, because of their apathy towards modern education, superstitious believes and customs like 'marumakkathayam'.²²

Even though Makti Thangal had an intellectual debate with the Christian missionaries on the question of cultural dominance, he trusted the British government and their rule of law. He did consider the British state as a welfare State, where all were treated as equals, and he denounced any nexus between the Christian missionaries and the British colonial State.²³

So, Makti Thangal's fight was not essentially against the crown. He asked the Muslims "to have respect for the crown which is a part of their devotion to God himself, as far as the orders of the king does not contradicts the divine order."²⁴ Makti Thangal acknowledged, the privileges rendered to the community by the British government and appealed to the Muslims to utilize those opportunities and remain loyal to the British government.²⁵ He found no religious taboo in studying English and Malayalam, and joining government services.²⁶

²² Makti Thangalude Sampoorana Krithikal, Tirur, 1981, p.722,731.

²³ Makti Thangal, Kadorakudaram, in Ahmed Kutty Ainthoor, (eds), *ibid.*, p.20.

²⁴ *Ibid* p.722.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.728.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.722

As a result of the outbreaks directed both against land lords and government during the latter half of the 19th century, the law and order as well as the economic stability crumbled down in Malabar. To put a check on the anti-British outbreaks, the British government sought the help of Makti Thangal, who had believed that the communities killing each other or fighting foolishly against the insurmountable British armed forces will not serve the purpose. He wrote, “the foundation for the Mappila outbreaks that were going on in Malabar stems from the belief that getting killed in an attempt to sue his enemy leads to salvation. These outbreaks have resulted in severe losses for the government and the public.”²⁷ During 1896 outbreaks, the government brought him over to the places like Malappuram, in order to make the people aware of the gravity of the situation and to make them relent. He recollects “through extensive travel in the affected areas and through debates and speeches, the people were convinced that there is no virtue in fighting, but only sin”

Taking into cognizance the then pathetic plight of the Muslim community, one can notice a striking resemblance between the reformist ideas of Makti Thangal and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, inspite of the disparities in their views on western culture and Christianity.

Another area where Makti Thangal concentrated was the improvement of religious education and he exhorted Muslims to study it in their mother tongue, Malayalam. He encouraged the translation of the Quran into Malayalam²⁸ His writings mainly concentrated on the unnecessary expenditure in many customs including marriages, and at the

²⁷ Makti Thangal “Raja Bhaktiyum Deshbhimanarum” in Ahamed Kutti Ainthur (eds.), *ibid.*, p.722.

²⁸ K.K. Mohd Abdul Kareem, Makti Thangalude Jeeva Charithram, *op.cit.*, p.32.

same time spending very little on educational purposes. He points out this paradox in his 'Raja Bhaktiyum Desha Bhaktiyum'.

His opposition against the traditional *ulema* was expressed in 'Thuhfatul-Akhyar wa-hidayat-ul- Asrar' in which he describes the nature of the *ulema* as

He hasn't left the hearth or home
Nor has he met any learned
He hasn't learnt any of lores
But Lo! Fatwas are not in dearth.²⁹

His opposition to false *sufis* can be traced from his article 'La-Maujudin-la-Point'. His contributions to the improvement of Arabi-Malayalam script, modernising *Dars* system and women education are worth mentioning.

In order to organise the youth and carry out reforms, he set up a cultural organisation called 'Muhammadiya Sabha' in 1889 at Kannur.³⁰

Since Makti Thangal had maintained a good rapport with many persons, he succeeded in injecting his reformist ideas into them, who later became great reformers among Muslims in Kerala.

Chalilakath Kunhammad Hajee:(d-1919)

Chalilakath Kunhammad Hajee was one of the early educational reformers among Muslims in Kerala during the late 19th century. After his higher education from Latheefiya Arabic college, Vellore, he had decided to revamp the educational system and the method of imparting religious instructions in *Dars* and *Madrassas*. He had been appointed head master of

²⁹ E.Moidu Moulavi, Preface to the Makti Thangalude Sampoorana Krithikal (complete works of Makti Thangal), op.cit., p.4.

³⁰ Samad, op.cit. p.48.

the Darul-uloom-Arabic college, a prominent institution of higher learning at Vazhakkad - in 1909.³¹

In Darul-uloom, apart from the traditional learning, he introduced teachings of modern subjects like logic, astronomy, geography, natural science, mathematics, and Malayalam. The Quranic exegesis (*Tafsir*), prophetic traditions (*Hadith*) jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), grammar and rhetoric continued. For teaching these new subjects he secured globes, maps atlas, charts, photos, models and the latest dictionaries³². Though a section of traditional *ulema* of the period were embarrassed to see these reforms, the college became one of the leading higher religious educational centres in Kerala. It produced many leaders, like K.M. Moulavi, E.K. Moulavi, P.K. Moossa Moulavi etc. Moulana Chalilakath himself prepared text books according to the new syllabus. Any how, Darul Uloom set a model for the Arabic colleges sprang up in Kerala in the years followed.

Modernisation of Arabi-Malayalam dialect was another important reform of Moulana. His work 'Taswir-ul-Huruf' consists of certain pragmatic suggestions in this regard. Moulana's reform were not confined to higher education only, but extended to the primary *madrassas* too. He had started a new *madrassa* at Vazhakkad, using a new scheme and syllabi. In this *madrassa*, he introduced the use of black boards, chinks, benches, desks and other educational equipments, which were not used in those days. Considering Moulana's efforts in revamping religious education, he was given the title 'Kerala Sir Syed'.³³ At a time when

³¹ C.A. Mohd. Moulavi, "Moulans Chalilakath Kunhammed Hajee" in Thirurangadi Yatheen Khana Silver Jubilee Sovenior, Thirurangadi, 1970, p.46.

³² K.T. Mohammed Ali, op.cit. p.42.

³³ C.N. Ahammed Moulavi, K.K. Mohd. Abdul Kareem, Mahathaya Mappila Sahithya Paramparyam, Calicut, 1978, P. 483.

education of girls were discouraged, he set an example to others by sending his own daughters to school.³⁴

Sheikh Mahin Hamadani Thangal: (d.1922)

In the then Kochi state, it was Sheikh Mahin Hamadani Thangal who carried forward the mantle of reform. He completed his higher education from Latheefiya College, Vellore, where he became proficient in Tamil, Parsi, Urdu and Arabic. As an enlightened person he engaged in revitalising the Muslims of Kerala from their backwardness, for which their unity, he found was the first parameter. He wrote one book 'Ilfath-ul-Islam' in which he exhorted his brethren to desist from quarrelling each other like the pre-Islamic Arabs.³⁵ 'Ilfath-ul-Islam' made a profound influence on many reformers including E.K. Moulavi, who describes it "as a guide for all his later activities."³⁶

His socio-educational attempts also included, establishing societies (co-operatives) for the economic growth of the country, forming of welfare committees to extend assistance and advice to the weaker sections etc.³⁷

For the educational improvement of Thiruvithankoor Muslims he formed an association called 'Muslim Conference' on the lines of the Muslim educational conferences of Sir Syed. He wanted to introduce an integrated system of education combining the religious and secular subjects as sponsored by the Delhi School.³⁸

³⁴ Ibrahim, Kunj, Mappila Muslims of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1989, p.231.

³⁵ E.K. Moulavi, "Islahi Prasthanam" - in Al-Ithihad, vol.III, no.3, April, 1954.

³⁶ Al-Murshid (Mal) Thirurangadi, September 1966, p.6.

³⁷ Samad, M.A. op. cit, p.54.

³⁸ Syed Mohideen shah, Islam in Kerala, Trichur, 1974, p.53.

Lajnat-ul-Mohammadiya at Alappuzha, which inaugurated a new era in the cultural resurgence of the Muslims of Thiruvithankoor was an organisation born and grown out of his spiritual guidance.

In Kodungallur, 'Lajnat-ul-Hamadaniya' (Azheekode) and 'Lajnatul Islam Sangham' (Eriyad) were formed under his guidance. It was Hamadani Shaikh, who presided over the meeting of formation of the 'Nishpaksha Sangham' in Azheekode (1922) which was later renamed as 'Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham'.³⁹

Vakkom Abdul Qadir Moulavi [1873-1932]

Muhammed Abdul Qadir Moulavi, popularly known as Vakkom Moulavi, was the father of Muslim renaissance in Kerala. He had a broad, vast range of ideas and programmes to revitalise the Muslim community and brought them to the limelight. According to him, "revitalisation of Islam meant bringing back it to the pristine purity and wiping out the mistakes crept into it".⁴⁰ It is through Rashid Rida's 'Al-Manar' that Vakkom Maulavi got his reformist ideas.⁴¹

It is through Rashid Rida's 'Al-Manar' that Kerala Muslims were awakened. Abduh's attack on *taqlid*, his criticisms of legalistic divisiveness and his attempt to establish a modern rational approach to the revealed theology, influenced Vakkom Moulavi, and through him all of Kerala Islam.⁴² Influence of Islahi ideas like the centrality of *tawhid*, and its vigorous attack on *shirk* and criticism of all superstitious beliefs, were

³⁹ Al-Murshid, (Mal.) Thirurangadi, September, 1966, p.6.

⁴⁰ Mohd. Abda, (ed.). Vakkom Maulaviyude Therenjedutha Krithickal, Vakkom, 1976, p.158.

⁴¹ M. Mohd. Kannu, Vakkom Moulaviyum Navothana Nayakarum, Trivandrum, 1982, p.3.

⁴² Roland E. Milar, op.cit., pp.270-271.

propagated by Vakkom Moulavi in Kerala. Because of this stand, the conservative *ulema* called him 'Wahabi'.

The period in which Vakkom Moulavi had born was a period of social resurgence in Kerala. Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal, Ayyankali were in the forefront to redeeming their communities from the clutches of the caste rigidity. Moulavi's association with Sree Narayana Guru was catalytic in the dissemination of reformistic ideas through mutual exchange. Sree Narayana Guru visited Moulavi's house very often, and discussed various socio-religious issues including the integrity among religions',⁴³

Vakkom Moulavi was famous for his journalistic excellence. He continued the relentless fight against social evils, injustice, and inequality till his end. He translated and published many religious classics into Malayalam, in which Al-Ghazali's 'Kimya-al-Saada' stands out prominent. His Arabi-Malayalam journal 'Al-Islam'(1919) brought out a wave of social reforms among Muslims. "There is no doubt that Vakkom Moulavi's five issues of 'Al-Islam' sowed the seeds of Islamic reforms in Kerala. They created a storm from one end of Kerala to the other. It is not wrong to say that this effect is continuing after forty years"⁴⁴ Towards the end of his life, Moulvi undertook the publication of a monthly journal entitled 'Deepika' to attract the attention of the Muslims to the need for cultural advancement, and at the same time, to educate the non-Muslims on the greatness of Islamic teaching. The most distinctive features of 'Deepika' were the Malayalam translation of the Quran and its wide range coverage of issues related to religion, society and literature. This shows the

⁴³ Trivandram Gazatteer, 1962, pp.278-280.

⁴⁴ Roland E. Miller, op.cit., p.271.

intellectual quest and the open mindedness of the reformer⁴⁵. Through the columns of the 'Muslim', Moulavi exhorted the community to educate Muslim women. He wrote and encouraged others to write about Women's education.⁴⁶

He started a press known as Swadeshabhimani in order to convey his ideas and for the protection of popular rights. Through Swadeshabhimani, he fearlessly raised his voice against the discrimination in appointments to the Thiruvithankoor government services. In those days, Muslims, Christians and Ezhavas were denied entry into government services. Swadeshabhimani urged the government to bifurcate the dewaswam and revenue departments in order to appoint non-Hindus.

In Thiruvithankoor, Moulavi initiated the educational services among Muslims and appealed to the Muslim men and women to adhere modern education. He is responsible for the beginning of Arabic in primary schools. He was a member in the text book committee of Thiruvithankoor government. The government sought his advice in all issues related to Muslim education.⁴⁷

The contribution of Vakkom Moulavi, through his valuable advices to Sreemoolam Popular Assembly, in appointing more Arabi *munshis* in the special schools for Muslims was commendable. Moulavi was empowered to select Arabic teachers in consultation with the local Moulavis. "scholarship and fee concessions were allowed literally in vernacular schools, English schools, and college. Later Vakkom Moulavi was empowered to issue certificates to qualify applicants for appointment as

⁴⁵ Vakkom Moulaviyude Deepika Ottavalyathil, *Vakkom Moulavi Trust, TVM, 1992.*

⁴⁶ Ibrahim, Kunj, op.cit., p.243.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.244.

Arabi *munshies*. Within a short period, seventy five schools were found in different parts of Thiruvithankoor to satisfy this urge”.⁴⁸

He was the moving spirit behind the formation of different Muslim socio-religious associations, such as ‘Islam Dharma Palana Sangham’ which was formed in 1918 at Nilakkamukku in the model of the S.N.D.P, Lajnatul Muhammadiya’ (Alapuzha), ‘Travancore Muslim Samajam’ etc.⁴⁹

The Service rendered by Vakkom Moulavi in the socio-religious upliftment of the Muslim community is equitable to that rendered by Sree Narayana Guru for the Ezhava community. It is he who introduced the *salafi* ideas of Afghani, Abduh and Rashid Rida to the Muslims in Kerala. He had discussed many social and religious issues through his writings. His influence was not confined to Thiruvithankoor. The contacts he maintained with the intelligentsia, including religious leaders and newly educated middle classes helped him in spreading the quintessence of Aikya Sangham movement across Kerala.

One of the major reasons for the absence of an extensive reform movement before the Aikya Sangham was the declining interaction of Kerala Muslims with the north Indian and Arab Muslims especially during the colonial period. The Mappilas were almost cut off from the other Indian Muslims by the barriers of language and culture as well as by geography. The fact that the Arab settlers and teachers in Kerala hailed largely from southern Arabia and the slowing down of interaction as a result of foreign domination may partially explain why the Mappilas do not seem to have been directly influenced by the puritan forms of Muhammed Ibn Abdul

⁴⁸ Samad, op.cit., p.65.

⁴⁹ Ibrahim Kunju. op. cit., pp.241-43..

Wahab. However, the conservatism of Arab Sunni orthodoxy was the major external influence on Mappilas theology.

Kerala Muslims, 1498 onwards, were engaged in a series of struggles against the increasing colonial power, the root cause of all their miseries. The need to fighting the immediate enemy stole their attention, limiting the possibility of an organised reform effort.

Another aspect which crippled the pre-Aikya Sangham reform attempts was the stagnant state of Muslim education which turned a blind eye towards the modern syllabii. The state of Muslims education in the 1880s was thus described by Williams Logan, the collector of Malabar district and author of the celebrated Malabar Manual as:

They (Muslims of Malabar) are, more over, as a class, nearly almost if not altogether illiterate. The only education received is a parrot like recitation of the koran, which being in Arabic, none of them understand. The scruple of the parents prevents them from permitting their children to attend the vernacular school of the Hindus. A fairly successful attempt has, however been made to reach them by grants to their own teachers, being as illiterate as their pupils, except in knowledge of koran recitation, usually employ Hindu youths to teach the pupils and so earn the result grants. And some of the pupils are now being taught teaching as a profession in special normal schools. The number of Mappilas who have advanced so far as to learn in read and write English in the schools, could very probably be counted on the fingers of two hands.⁵⁰

Therefore the Muslims in Kerala failed to understand the ongoing changes in Kerala society during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The distinct social structure of the Mappilas could be cited as another aspect which held them back from united reform initiatives. The interaction and mobility between the Muslims of a particular locality to

⁵⁰ Williams Logan, Malabar Manual, Madras, 1951, p.198.

their counterparts in other localities were minimal. Thus the movements and attempts of a particular area remains localized without much effect in other areas. The *ulema* especially the *Qazis* acted as the leaders of the society but with little knowledge about the complex problems confronting it in the new world order. This peculiar socialization also detained them from launching a systematized effort in social reform.

Thus, one can easily reach the assumption that, despite the occasional efforts on renovation brought in by the waves of other movements and individual reformers, impediments set by the Mappilas' own historical, social and educational predicaments put any possibility of organised reform endeavours in check for a long period before the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham.

Chapter IV

Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham: Formation and Subsequent Developments

The preceding chapter discussed the way in which cultural consciousness developed among Muslim intellectuals in Kerala during the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter deals with the development of the above consciousness into a movement through an association called 'Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham' (Organisation for 'Muslim Unity').

The cultural and ideological struggles in colonial India was expressed through a variety of socio-cultural movements and individual initiatives.¹ Under colonial rule, Kerala also experienced many socio-cultural movements within castes and communities, Muslims not being an exception, though it came late.

Nineteenth century Kerala Muslims are always referred to as a conservative and closed community. This conservatism was rather an attitude reflecting four centuries of defensiveness.² More specifically it was a socio-cultural and economic defensiveness against the colonial domination. This defensiveness virtually culminated in the revolt of 1921 against the British colonial state on the one hand, and the *janmies*, on the other. The revolt only helped in hastening their backwardness and strengthening their conservatism. The community however "appeared to be in a relatively hopeless position, politically beaten, economically

¹ K.N. Pannikar, Culture, Ideology, Hegemony Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India, New Delhi, 1995, p.vii.

² Roland E. Miller, op.cit., p.157.

backward, intellectually moribund, and religiously medieval, there seemed to be no adequate base for contending with the modern forces it could encounter”³

This precarious condition led to a rethinking and self-assessment amongst the Muslim intellectuals and elite middle class, and they came forward with an intention to revitalize the community or to arouse the community from its long slumber. In other words, “the political, communal, economic and intellectual pressures met a community of Muslims who had evolved a settled faith and piety, who had developed a firm frame of custom, and who had demonstrated regular patterns of attitude and behaviour”.⁴

The Formation of Aikya Sangham: Background

The individual reform attempts among Muslims in Kerala during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have already been discussed. Under their inspiration and guidance many associations and Sabhas came into existence, but their activities were limited to certain localities. Kodungallur, a part of the erstwhile Kochi state, being one of the old Islamic centres and the place where an educated elite middle class found the necessity of an organisation in order to bring changes in the Muslim society and to give vent to their grievances, for which a drastic change in socio-religious as well as educational and economic realms was needed.

At this time, when there was only sporadic individual efforts of reform at social and religious levels, it was ‘Muslim Aikya Sangham’ that

³ Ibid., p.157.

⁴ Miller, *ibid.*, p.223.

started concentrating efforts towards that end.⁵ “Taking Kerala as a whole the main role in the resurgence was played by this socio-religious organisation called the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham. The task of ushering in an era of enlightenment in the social, religious and cultural life of Kerala Muslims fell on this organisation”.⁶

In all respects Kodungallur was the proper place to take an initiative in this regard, as it was blessed with the presence of the wealthy elites as well as modern educated intelligentsia. Moreover Kodungallur was the home of many influential Muslim leaders like Manappat P. Kunhi Muhammad Haj. Manappat Kochu Moideen, Seethi Muhammad, modern educated leaders like K.M. Seethi, Mohammed Abdurahaman etc. It had a tradition of accepting the reformist calls of Syed Sanualla Makti Thangal and Hamadani Sheikh.

Under the auspices of Hamadani Sheikh there started two organisations for social service, one at Azheekode, with the name ‘Lajnatul Hamadaniyya’ another at Eriyad namely ‘Lajnatal Islam’ Seethi Muhamad was the president of the former whereas Manappat P. Kunhammad Haji was the president of the latter. It was in the building donated by the Seethi Muhamad that the first primary school of Azheekod was started in 1084 M.E. The Cochin Muslims Educational Conference was organised by his initiative and he was its secretary till the end of his life.

Even though, Kodungallur had a better placement in the intellectual awakening than any other Muslim dominant area, internal squabbles, and intermittent quarrels between the prominent wealthy families often

⁵ Dr. Abdul Azeez, Rise of Muslims in Kerala Politics, Trivandrum, 1992, p.20.

⁶ S.M. Mohd. Koya, op.cit., p.80.

disrupted their progress. Its repercussions often reached the common masses, and as a result, day to day life became difficult for them. It was in the same period that the famous 1921 revolt had occurred. But it had only a slight influence over the quarreling families of Kodungallur.

At this juncture “if not all entrepreneurs, at least an elite amongst them, must have the capacity to be an organizer of society in general”.⁷ The learned *ulema*, and the reformist leaders like K.M.Moulavi and Hamadani Sheikh, along with the cooperation of the elite Muslims of Kodungallur such as Manappat P. Kunhammed Haji and Seethi Muhamad formed an association called, ‘Nishpaksha Sangham’ at Eriyad in 1922. Presiding over the formation meeting of the Nishpaksha Sangham Hamadani Sheikh said:

It is obligatory, on every Muslim by the command of Allah to support and help each other to form an organisation to preach the good and check the evil. The early scholars opined that when an organisation was formed with this purpose by a group, the society as a whole would be deemed to have fulfilled its obligatory mission. This missionary work was a sacred duty carried out by all the prophets. If such an attempt is not made the Islamic rituals will become meaningless and then the evil will overpower the virtues.⁸

The initial objective of ‘Nishpaksha Sangham’ (impartial group) was to settle the disputes among the Muslims of Kodungallur, and to strengthen the Sangham through membership campaigns. “The Sangham brought out certain success by settling some disputes among Muslims and thereby establishing more and more units of the Sangham in other areas”.⁹

⁷ Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Madras, 1996, pp.5-6.

⁸ Hamadani Sheikh, Khutbatul Hamadaniyya, (Presidential Address, Formation meeting of Nishpaksha Sangham-1922).

⁹ E.K. Montari, ‘Islahi Prasthanam’, in Al-Murshid, op.cit., p.7.

“In 1922 itself, a meeting of ‘Nishpaksha Sangham’ was convened at Eriyad, and it was decided to expand its activities and rename it as ‘Muslim Aikya Sangham’. A twelve member committee of the Aikya Sangham also was formed”.¹⁰

Leaders and Social Base

The Aikya Sangham movement was not essentially a mass movement. Its social base was mostly among the educated middle class, social elites and enlightened religious leaders.* Those who were attracted by the motives of the Sangham also were middle class people equipped with modern education.* The Aikya Sangham leaders also belonged to the above mentioned categories. And, many of them were actively involved in the National Movement. Most of these leaders had some how witnessed or participated or had to bear the miseries of the rebellion of 1921. A glance into the lives of some of the main leaders would make the picture clearer.

The prominent leaders of the Aikya Sangham were Abdurahman Sahib, E. Moidu Moulavi, K.M. Seethi Sahib, Kottappurath Seethi Mohammed, Manappat P. Kunhammed Haji, K.M. Moulavi and E.K. Moulavi.

Abdurahman Sahib was born in a rich and aristocratic family of Azheekode. He completed his primary education in Azheekode Primary School. After his higher studies in Malabar Christian College and Madras

¹⁰ E.K.Moulavi, “Kerala Muslim Aikya Sanghavam Navothanavum” in Syed Mohammad (ed.) Kerala Muslim Directory, Cochin, 1960, p.470.

* The annual reports and literature of the Aikya Sangham has made descriptions of professionals, teachers, social elites and religious scholars participating the meetings. This is an indication to the kind of audience addressed by the Sangham. For details refer, E.K. Maulavi “Kerala Muslim Aikya Sanghavam Navothaanavum” in Kerala Muslim Directory, 1960, p.475.

* The entry fee of Aikya Sangham Annūla Meetings ranged up to Rs. 20 which was a handsome amount, those days, and it was unaffordable for the layman. Al Irshad A.H., 1342, p.28.

Presidency College, he joined the Aligarh Jamia Millia National University, where he came in touch with the leaders of the National Movement, like M.A.Ansari, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Mohmmed Ali and Hakim Ajmal Khan. These contacts strengthened the already existing nationalistic feelings in him and decided to join the mainstream of the National Movement. He returned to Malabar with an intention to strengthen the Congress Khilafat Movement. He formed the 'Cochin Muslim Educational Society'. And his ardent fervour for social service led him to work in cooperation with the movements like Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham. He was in jail when the Aikya Sangham was formed in 1922. He became an active participant in the Sangham activities after his release. 'Al-Ameen' the periodical started by Adurahman in 1924 was to encourage a spirit of nationalism and community upliftment.¹¹ His fame and progressive views gave a new impetus to the Mappila community.*

E. Moidu Moulavi was born in a middle class family in Marancheri in Ponnani Taluk. He got a traditional education from *makthbs* and *dars* and higher education in Darul-Uloom at Vazhakkad. Being attracted to the Khilafat agitation, he joined active Congress politics. During the 1921 rebellion, with Abdurahman, he also tried to conscientise the Muslims to restrian from aggression. The British government jailed him many times. His efforts attracted many Muslims to the mainstream of the National Movement. He was able to channelise his deep religious understanding against the conservatives' attack on the Aikya Sangham movement.*

¹¹ Miller, op.cit., p.160.

* For a detailed biographical Skitch of Mohd. Abdurahman Sahib see M. Rashid, *Mohd. Abdurahman Sahib*, IPH, Calicut, 1994, S.K.Pottakkad and others, (eds), Mohd. Abdurahman, Calicut 1978.

* For a biographical sketch of E. Moidu Moulavi, see E. Moidu Maoulavi, *Maulaviyude Athmakada*, National Bookstall, 1981).

The individual closest to the position of being the single most important Mappila leader was K.M. Seethi. He was born in a wealthy family of Azheekode as the son of Kottappurath Seethi Muhammed, a leading social worker at that time. Like Muhammed Abdurahman Sahib, he also got his primary education in Azheekode Primary School which was started by his own father. His higher education was in Thiuvananthapuram Maharajas College. He finished his B.L. and practiced in Ernakulam High Court under C.S.Ananta Krishna Iyyar. He was a member in Kochi Legislative Assembly, Madras Assembly and later the Speaker of the present Kerala State Assembly. He was a founding member of the Muslim League in Malabar. And, he was active in almost all socio-political and religious movements including Aikya Sangham of the Muslim community in Kerala. It was this combination of the traditional and progressive in the context of his aim to revive and renew the community that made him the true *mujaddid* of his age.¹²

Kottappurath Seethi Muhammed and Manappat P. Kunhammed Hajee were the other two important Aikya Sangham leaders. Both were landed aristocrats, who made valuable social services to the Muslim community. They were the first president and general secretary of the Aikya Sangham, respectively. Seethi Muhammed got his traditional education from his father and developed a critical and open minded approach to the problem confronting the community. He started a branch of 'Maunathul Islam Sabha', the famous Islamic learning centre in Kerala, at Kodungallur, and became its secretary. He was the President of the 'Lajnthul-Hamadaniyya', formed in Azheekode for social service. Manappat Kunhammed Hajee was also a social worker who spent his wealth for various social activities and social institutions in and around

¹² Miller, op.cit, p.297.

Kodungallur. He was very active in Aikya Sangham and acted as the manager of the 'Al-Irshad' printing press.

K.M. Moulavi and E.K. Moulavi were the two important active Aikya Sangham leaders, who gave the spiritual guidance to the reformist and revivalist ideas of Aikya Sangham. Both were impressed by the teachings of Ibn Thaimiyya, Abdul Wahab, Afghani and Abduh. E.K. Moulavi had a long and distinguished participation in the Muslim reform movement in Kerala. An Arabic lecturer in Maharajas College, Ernakulam, he supported the Aikya Sangham's emphasis on *tawhid* and vigorously participated in the debates against superstition. He authored many important works on a variety of subjects ranging from Islam to Communism. He wrote scholarly articles in almost all the Aikya Sangham literatures.

If Vakkom Moulavi initiated theological and social reforms in Thiruvithamkoor, the credit for the same in Malabar goes to K.M.Moulavi (1886-1964). He got his traditional education from the scholars of his period. Just like other leaders of his age he too participated in the Khilafat agitation of 1921. He became the secretary of the Ernad Taluk Khilafat Congress in 1920. He, among many others, was accused of instigating Mappilas for a violent revolt against the British. He fled to Kodungallur, where he became a recognised teacher and zealous reform activist, before becoming the spiritual leader of Aikya Sangham. He played an important role in its popularisation. He issued *fatwas* on the issues related to Islam through the Aikya Sanhgam publications.

Ideas and Programmes

Social resurgence in the Muslim community was intimately connected with religious reforms, as religion was the inspirational force behind the reform movement.¹³ The aims and objectives of the Aikya Sangham were as following:

1. To unite the Muslims by removing their internal differences, for the general welfare of the community.
2. To educate people through tracts, pamphlets and public lectures.
3. To establish a forum consisting of selected members from the Sangham, to settle the disputes among Muslims and to take all round efforts to dissuade them from such disputes.
4. To alter the religious, moral and economic conditions of Muslims by removing un-Islamic practices.

Religiously, their reform attempts had much relation with the puritanical reforms of *Salafi* reforms of Egypt. The leaders of Aikya Sangham had a perception that it will be possible to make changes in Muslim societies only if they abandon certain illogical and irrational practices like *Kodikuth Nercca*, *Chandanakudam Nercca*, *Kathukuth* ceremony, matrilineal system etc. They were against all kinds of polytheism, and strictly adhered to the Islamic concept of *tawhid*. They believed that the deviation from the teachings of the basic scriptures resulted in the decline of Muslims and exhorted them to go back to the Quran and the Sunnah. In religious matters they were against the blind

¹³ Dr. K.T. Mohammed Ali, *The Development of Education Among the Mappilas of Malabar, 1800-1965*, New Delhi, 1990, p.136.

acceptance of the interpretation of any specific Imam, and allowed fresh research on the basis of the Quran and the Sunnah.¹⁴ In order to impart a proper religious guidance, they started an *ulema* association called 'Kerala Jamiat-al-Ulema' during the 2nd Annual Conference of the Sangham at Aluva on 10 to 12th May, 1924.¹⁵

They claimed that they were against the individual, self-centered *sufi* line of religious preaching and the dissident Shia sects.¹⁶ In order to resist the activities of the Christian Missionaries and Arya Samajists who propagandised against Islam, branches of 'Ishahat Committee' were founded, and they delivered many speeches on Islam which would help the other community members to understand the spirit of Islam.¹⁷ Another committee was founded for restricting the conversion of Muslims into other religions.¹⁸

(a) Educational Upliftment

The main agenda of Aikya Sangham was the educational upliftment, both religious and modern, of the Muslims. Many primary and high schools were established under its inspiration and guidance. The establishment of a college in Kerala, on the lines of the old M.A.O. College, had been the aim and ambition of its leaders.¹⁹ Moreover, during the 3rd Annual Conference of the Aikya Sangham, it offered necessary assistance to the establishment of a Muslim College at Kozhikode under the 'Himayathul Islam Sangham' or 'Madrassathul Muhammadiya'. The

¹⁴ Al-Irshad, A.H., 1343, J-Awwal, pp.252-253.

¹⁵ Mathrubhumi, May, 17, 1924, p.7.

¹⁶ Al-Irshad, op.cit., p.253.

¹⁷ Third Annual Meeting, Report, Muslim Aikya Sangham p.1-6.

¹⁸ M. Abdussamad, op.cit, p.89.

¹⁹ K.T. Mohd. Ali, op.cit., p.156.

annual sessions of the Aikya Sangham often reminded the Muslims of the importance of women's education. For making them aware of the importance of education, educational conferences also were held along with the annual sessions. The leaders of Aikya Sangham accepted modern English education but not at the cost of religious education. They worked for a combined education system that helped the beginning of government Mappila schools in many Mappila centres. They popularised Malayalam, when they understood the limitations of Arabi- Malayalam as a language.

(b) Economic Improvement

The leaders of Aikya Sangham had a vision of economic advancement of the Muslim society through the establishment of an Islamic bank, starting *chitties* and creating an awareness of agriculture through agricultural exhibitions along with its annual meetings .

(c) Social Service

Just like any other reform movement in Kerala, Aikya Sangham Movement also was critical about the social inequality of the Kerala society and its implications for the Muslims. With an intention to spread the Islamic concept of brotherhood and equality, the leaders of Aikya Sangham delivered many speeches regarding how to behave towards fellow men. They also exhorted Muslims to treat other religions and its followers with due respect and asked them to desist from doing harm to them.²⁰ They were against the matrilineal system of inheritance and other unnecessary customs which they considered as un-Islamic and which they had borrowed from other communities. Their attempt was to save the

²⁰ Al-Irshad, AH 1343, R. Ahir, p.179.

community from the priesthood and develop a self awareness among them, thereby getting them prepared for social change and progress.

Aikya Sangham leaders had initially decided to refrain from any kind of political activity and remain as a pure socio-religious movement. Later on, political aspirations crept into the Sangham.*

These ideas and programmes were disseminated by means of publications and annual sessions. The discussions about the Sangham and its activities appeared in the publications, 'Al-Irshad', 'Al-Islah', 'Aikyam', 'Muslim Aikyam' etc. helped creating an atmosphere of awareness.

Activities

The response of the Muslim community towards the Sangham was not favourable, as it criticised some of the age old customs that Muslims in Kerala practised. The first annual report admitted their inability to enhance the Sangham as the common *sabha* of the Muslims of Kerala, spreading to Kochi, Malabar and Thiruvithamkoor, although they aimed for that.

It was through the annual meetings in various parts of Kerala that the Aikya Sangham mainly exchanged their reform ideas to the masses. These meetings were, in all sense, highly beneficial in creating an awareness about the then sad position of the Muslim community compared to other communities, and their urgent necessity of getting modern education. Many resolutions passed in these annual meetings were highly critical of the superstitious beliefs and customs prevailing among Muslims and presented the spirit of Islam in a new fashion. The proceedings of the Aikya Sangham meetings and its presidential addresses, in one sense,

* A detailed analysis of the ideas and programmes of Aikya Sangham is given in Chapter 5.

reflect the Muslim intellectuals' realization of the changing world and their desire for change.

Muslim Aikya Sangham's first Annual Conference was held at Eriyad in 1923 May 27-28. This meeting was remarkable for it was in this meeting the Sangham leaders charted out programmes and plans systematically and decided to expand its activities through out Kerala.

The meeting was presided over by the well known reformist of the period, Vakkom Abdul Qadir Moulavi of Travancore. As a man who had a new vision about the Muslim renaissance, his valuable suggestions in this meeting had a profound influence on the Sangham activities later. Two major resolutions were passed in this meeting. One was on the construction of an Arabic college at Aluva and the other was on the urgency of avoiding some of the practices which they believed un-Islamic and superstitious such as *chandanakudam*, *kodikuthu* etc. Their criticism of these practices are not only on the basis of their anti-Islamic character but also on the basis of the moral degeneration and economic deterioration of Muslims.²¹

The traditional section of the community vehemently opposed the activities of the Sangham and attributed the name, 'Wahabi Sangham'. This labeling was intended to equate the Aikya Sangham leaders to the Wahabi leaders of Arabia who had launched an aggressive criticism against the popular beliefs like veneration of saints and tombs. In order to counter the traditional *ulema's* arguments the Sangham leaders published certain tracts like 'Al-Hidaya-ila-Mahiqil-Bidai wal Makhi', written by K.M. Moulavi, in which he shows the hollowness of the practices like *chandanakudam*, *Kodikuth* etc. and its un-Islamic nature.

²¹ E.K. Moulavi, op.cit., pp.471-472.

In order to collect funds for the Aluva college a three member committee consisting of Manappat P. Kunhammad Haji, K.M. Seethi, and A.M. Abdul Qadir was formed. Mathrubhumi, the then leading newspaper of Kerala, congratulated the Aikya Sangham's attempt with regard to the Muslim educational upliftment, and urged all Muslims and Hindus to give all necessary assistance in this regard.²² In the same year, a constitution was accepted for the execution of the Sangham activities.

Another noteworthy development was the publication of a number of journals, all of which were short-lived, under the umbrella of the Sangham. 'Muslim Aikyam' in Malayalam, 'Al-Irshad' and 'Al-Islah' in Arabi-Malayalam are examples.

Al-Irshad, in its first issue, dealt with the sad plight of Muslims, especially in education and socio-economic fields. According to its editorial, the main reason for this situation was nothing but their disunity. 'Al-Irshad' hoped that they will try their best to overcome their shortcomings and expected cooperation from all Muslims. They also assured its readers that it would not publish anything which was directly against the 'Ahl-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat'.²³ It also urged the Muslims of Kerala to rise to the occasion and asked them to pick up lessons from the progress and prosperity of other communities.²⁴ This is a clear indication of the fact that the Muslim reformers of the time drew the spirit for reforming their community from a clear understanding of the comparative inferiority of Muslims to other communities.

²² Mathrubhumi, June 14, 1923, p.4.

²³ Al-Irshad, A.H. 1342, Ramzan, pp.4-5.

²⁴ Al-Irshad, *ibid.*, p.1.

The second annual conference of Aikya Sangham was held on 10 to 12 May, 1924, under the presidentship of the learned *ulema* of south India, Abdul Jabbar Hazrat, Principal, Bakiyath-Salihath college, Vellore. In his three hour long presidential address he criticised all kinds of superstitious beliefs propounded by some *ulema* and reminded them of their duties. He made an attempt to compare the position held by the early Muslim community in the society and its deterioration during subsequent years. The speech was highly helpful and thought provoking, supported by Quran verses and Hadith.²⁵

Aikya Sangham leaders found their activities futile without the strong support of an *ulema* sangham. It would enable them to attract the common masses and also would help to guide them. Since the Muslims in Kerala were looking to the *ulema* for guidance, both in religious and material activities, the formation of an *ulema* sangham, was expected to help the Sangham leaders to disseminate the ideas of Aikya Sangham in a wider circle. An All Kerala *Uelma* Conference was held along with the second annual conference of the Sangham. In the *ulema* conference, C.K. Mohiyudin Moulavi brought out a resolution which reads: "It is a social obligation of the Muslims to form an *ulema* organisation to keep the temporal and spiritual well-being of the Muslims. It is decided to form an organisation, unifying the *ulema* all over the state".²⁶

Another decision was taken to form a four-member committee to enquire into the allegations and charges levelled against the Aikya Sangham.²⁷ Important decisions taken during the second annual conference were:

²⁵ Mathrubhumi, May, 17, 1924, p.7.

²⁶ Mathrabhumi May 17, 1924, p.7.

²⁷ Mathrubhumi, *ibid.*, p.7.

1. Appealed to all Muslims to render all possible help for the establishment of the Arabic college at Aluva.
2. Requested the *Ulema* Sangham to make efforts to put an end to the unnecessary practices such as *chandanakudam*, *Kodikuth*, *Muharram* etc.
3. Requested the *Ulema* Association to point out anything that is anti-Islamic in the functioning of Aikya Sangham and its members were asked to abide by these suggestions.
4. Decided to set up a team of efficient scholars to impart training to them to resist false propaganda of the Arya Samajists and the Christian missionaries and to spread the ideals of Islam especially among the non-Muslims. A committee consisting of Manappat Kunhammed Haji, Moulavi Abdul Rahim Sahib. Janab Noor Hussain Chandani was formed to execute those activities.
5. Muslim brotheren were requested to desist from the anti-Islamic practices of treating certain class of Muslims in certain parts of Kerala as backward and denying them their due rights.
6. To establish more schools for the encouragement of women's education.
7. To extend maximum relief to those who were suffering from Malabar Rebellion.²⁸

Alongwith the conference, the second Annual Conference of Cochin Muslims Students Association was also held under the presidentship of Mohammad Abdu Rahman Sahib. The conference decided to expand its

²⁸ M. Abdul Samad, op.cit., p.86.

activities all over Kerala. A committee was formed to prepare the modalities to transform it into Kerala Muslim Students Association. It was also agreed that all the members of the students association should become members of the volunteer corps of the Aluva college.²⁹

The resolutions and decisions that came out during the second Annual Conference of the Sangham clearly indicated the wide range of plans enveloping almost all the areas related to Muslims' political social, religious and educational spheres in Kerala.

It is during 1924-25 that the Sangham succeeded in inculcating a sense of awareness about the socio-religious reforms among Kerala Muslims. In order to resist the activities of the missionaries and Arya Samajist against their propaganda on Islam, branches of *Ishahat* committee (committee for religious campaign), were formed and many speeches were delivered on Islam. Another development during this period was the completion of the construction of the Eriyad Madrassa. In order to materialise the long cherished need of a college at Aluva, they were able to dissuade the government from confiscating the land allotted to the college.³⁰

Politically, they were able to win two seats in Kochi Legislative Council amidst strong opposition. These victories however reveal the Muslim elites' support to the Sangham.

The Sangham's demand for a post office in Eriyad was approved by Kochi government. Likewise, their services were noticeable during the flood that affected Ernad and Valluvanadu during these period.

²⁹ M. Abdus samad, *Ibid.*, p.87.

³⁰ Third Annual Report, Muslim Aikya Sangham, p.1-6.

For economic stability they started a *kury*, thereby mobilising a normal fund out of its profit.

To expand its activities in Malabar, it was decided to call the next annual meeting to be held at Kozhikode. At this juncture, the traditional *ulema* exhorted the Muslims to refrain from attending the Aikya Sangham meetings and from reading their publications. They criticised the Sangham as 'Wahabis' and a perverted gang. They, for the first time, challenged the Sangham leaders to counter their arguments and criticism. The traditional opposition was basically turned against some of the articles published in 'Al-Irshad' which vehemently criticised some of the age old customs like *tawasul*, *Isthighaza*, *ijma*, and other theological issues.

"K. Abulla kuty Musaliar asked P.M. Attakoya Thangal, the reception committee chairman of the conference, to desist from involving in the Sangham activities, through a letter written to him".³¹ However Attakoya Thangal convened a meeting inviting both the sides but the dissident group failed to prove that Aikya Sangham is propagating anti-Islamic ideas. Accordingly, the chairman of the reception committee appealed all Muslims to participate and make the conference a grand success.³²

As decided earlier, the Third Annual Conference was held at Kozhikode under the presidentship of Muhammad Shammad on June 1-2, 1925 and passed the following resolutions:

1. The conference believes that the reason for the deplorable condition of Mappila schools is the non-availability of facilities for the learning

³¹ Letter written by K. Abdulla Kuty Musaliar, on May 25, 1925 to P.M. Attakoya Thangal, President Reception Committee, Third Annual Conference of the Aikya Sangham.

³² Notice published by Attakoya Thayal, President, reception committee Third annual conference of the Aikya Sangham held on May 28, 1925.

of religion. So the Sangham requests the government to appoint Arabic *Munshies* in each school.

2. A committee was formed to propagate Islam and to check the conversion of Muslims into other religions.
3. For the establishment of a Muslim college at Kozhikode the conference decides to extend assistance to the 'Himayatul-Islam Sangham' and 'Madrassathul Mahammadiya'.
4. The conference deplores and expresses its deep anguish and grief over the decision to deport Mappila detainees to Andaman Island giving false information to their relatives. Therefore the conference requests the government to put an end to such practices.
5. Muslims must be given special electoral power to elect Muslim members in Taluk boards and Municipalities, as is done in the Provincial Assemblies and Central Legislative.
6. Declares solidarity with Reef Mujahids and prayed for their victory.
7. The conference expresses its profound thanks to the government for setting free some of the 1921-prisoners.³³

Mathrubhumi commented on the meeting,

The relevance of organisations like the Muslim Aikya Sangham in correcting the misconceptions, about the community and leading it to further progress is indisputable. This statement is more applicable in the case of places such as Eranadu and valuvanadu. In this context the efforts of the Sangham's proponents to further their activities in Malabar is a happy turn out. The Calicut meet could be seen as an opening up ceremony of this process. Hearty congratulations are hereby extended to the organizers of the

³³ M. Abdussamad, op.cit., pp.89-90.

Sangham as well as to the Mappila community on their success in checking the deliberate efforts of various groups of conservatives to spread misunderstandings about the Sangham.³⁴

After the Calicut meet Aikya Sangham's popularity increased and it engaged in some creative activities.³⁵ The Sangham was able to put a check on the flow of Muslim prisoners to Andamans by making them aware of the dangers in stock for them there, as many of the early goers had moved over voluntarily. Ishahat committee for the propagation of Islam and the *kuris* started for maintaining economic stability got prime attention during 1925-26. Sangham was able to manage a property worth Rs. 2000/- from the *kuris*. Teaching has started in Madrasiat-ul-Ithihadiya, Eriyad. They failed to do much on starting a college at Aluva, even though they collected Rs. 7000/- for this purpose.³⁶

The Fourth Annual Meeting of the Aikya Sangham was held in Thalassery on 15-16 May, 1926 . Then onwards, the organisers used the term, 'Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham', instead of 'Muslim Aikya Sangham'.

Chairing the conference, Moulana Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthal, a well known Arabic scholar and a Britisher, delivered a thought provoking address. He reminded the audience of the concept of the brotherhood in Islam and what it meant. He criticized the leading *ulema* for their failure in checking some of the superstitious beliefs and customs prevailed among Muslims especially during marriage functions and in the laws of inheritance. He asserted that there is no disparity between modern education and Islamic education. Both are complementary and not

³⁴ Mathurabhumi, 6h June 1925, p.4.

³⁵ E.K.Moulavi, op.cit., pp.473-474.

³⁶ Annual report which was read during Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham 4th Annual meeting 1926.

contradictory. The conservative *ulema*'s opposition to modern education, according to him, was mainly because of their ignorance and misconceptions. According to him, the western scientific knowledge was developed on the foundation of Islamic learning tradition. "The modern scientific education of the day, is the offspring of the ancient civilized Islamic period".³⁷ Regaining this commitment to education, he deemed, was a religious responsibility. Education for Muslims, in his opinion, should not be limited to men alone, the females of the community too has a just right to it. He was against limiting the boundaries of women education as he believed that Islam never curtailed the freedom of women.³⁸ Along with the vernacular, Malayalam, he argued, Arabic and English also should be studied for a better understanding. He further exhorted Muslims to spend money only for creative purposes instead of spending it in various unnecessary ceremonies.

After the Fourth Annual Meeting, the Sangham activities gathered momentum as it put forward many demands concerning Muslims to the authorities. As a result of this, they succeeded in restoring the 8 rupee stipend for Muslim girls in anglo-vernacular schools in Kochi state.³⁹ The Aikya Sangham leaders also fought against the teachings of the Bible as a compulsory subject in certain schools. Likewise, they also fought for restoring a Islamic dress code to women in schools.⁴⁰

With an intention to spread Islamic concept of 'brotherhood' and 'equality', the leaders of the Sangham delivered many speeches regarding

³⁷ Muhammad Marmaduke pickthal presidential address, Keralal Muslim Aikya Sangham, Foruth annual conference Thalassay, May 15, 1926, p.14.

³⁸ Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthal, *ibid.*, p.29.

³⁹ Annual Report, submitted to the 5th Annual conference of Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham, pp.4-5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.6.

how to behave to the neo-Muslims (new converts). In many places they were called as *Puyyislamingal* and were often kept at a distance. Aikya Sangham's 5th Annual Report advised the Muslims to keep away from such activities. The report expressed concern over the lack of mass support to Aikya Sangham. Because of this, they believed, many of the resolutions and decisions passed during the annual conferences remained unfulfilled.⁴¹

The Fifth Annual Conference was slated to be held at Kannur. Muhammad Ali.M.A., a leading member of J.D.T. Islam Pune was invited as the president of this meeting.

In his presidential address, Mohammed Ali suggested the reasons for pathetic position of Muslims in Kerala, despite the prominence the community enjoyed in the early days, as due to their disunity, negation of *tawhid*, and blind acceptance of *Madhab*.⁴²

As a solution to this precarious condition he suggested to go back to the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, and adhere to modern education, to abandon their superstitious believes.⁴³ He exhorted the Muslim intellectuals and the learned *ulema* to come forward and lead the community in the right direction.⁴⁴ In order to reduce the economic impoverishment, he suggested the proper distribution of *zakat* to the needy. For managing this, a '*Baithul Mal*' should be started. He also appealed the Muslims to translate the holy Quran into malayalam thereby the teachings and principles would reach the common masses.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ibid., p.10.

⁴²Muhammed Ali, M.A. Presidential Address, Fifth Annual Meetings of Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham, p.45..

⁴³ Ibid., p.9.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.29.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.41.

The Sixth Annual Conference was held amidst the strong opposition from conservative *ulema* at Tirur in 1928 under the presidentship of Dr. Abdul Haq, a member of the public service commission, Madras.⁴⁶ Dr. Abdul Haq also expressed concern about the sad condition of Muslims in Kerala and criticised their wrong practices.

The dissident *ulema* organisation, Samasta Kerala Jamiyyatul Ulema, published several tracts and books depicting the Aikya Sangham leaders and the *ulema* as 'Wahabis' and alleged that they were away from true Islamic spirit. 'Raddul Wahabiyyah' written by Karimpanakkal Chundangayil Moideen Kutty Musaliar in Arabi-Malayalam can be cited as expressing such view points.⁴⁷

The seventh Annual Conference was held at Ernakulam in 1929 without much opposition from its opponents, presided over by Khan Bahadur P.M. Moidu, the President of Malabar District Board. To convene this meeting, the government rendered all cooperation and support. A conference of the Kerala Muslims Youth organisation (*Yuvajana Sangham*) was also held along with the conference.⁴⁸

The year 1929 was a crucial year for the Sangham, as K.M. Moulavi brought out a tract suggesting some of the remedial measures for the pathetic economic condition of the Muslims in Kerala. The tract, entitled 'Risalat-fil-Bank' suggesting an interest free bank for Muslims in order to escape from usuries. He wrote in his *risals*:

Education and wealth are the essential elements for the prosperity of any community. It is a fact that majority of the Muslim peasants and merchants are trapped in the financial borrowings from

⁴⁶ K.K. Mohd. Abdul Korcan, *K.M. Moulavi Sahib*, Thirurangadi, 1985, p.150.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.150-151.

⁴⁸ E.K. Moulavi, *op.cit.*, p.475.

Christians and other non-Muslims communities, for which they pay large amounts as interest. It is in this context that there is a clamour for separate banks and cooperative societies for the Muslim community. But it is difficult to maintain such a financial institution without opting for interest. And, interest by any means, is `haraam' (forbidden). So the intellectuals and religious scholars should take initiatives to look into the matter and take necessary steps.⁴⁹

He also discussed the rule of the Quran, Hadiths and the four Imams regarding the paying and receiving of interest and forwarded a few suggestions for establishing an Islamic Bank by collecting shares. Each borrower was to pay a fixed amount to the bank. This amount will not be considered as usuary. It is considered as a virtual contribution for the welfare of the community as envisaged by *Shafi Imam* and Abu Hanifa. K.M. Moulavi named his idea as *Hilat-ur-riba*.

K.M. Moulavi's *Risalat-fil-Bank* caused much uproar in the society. The traditional *ulema* was waiting for a chance to criticise Aikya Sangham activities and to prove them as anti-Islamic. Strong criticism came out within the rank and file of Aikya Sangham also. Mohammed Abduraham Sahib's 'Al-Ameen' also strongly opposed this idea and maintained that it would help promote the interest system prohibited by Islam. The leaders of Aikya, Sangham were ultimately forced to abandon the idea.⁵⁰

For getting wider support from the south the Eighth Annual Conference of the Sangham was held at Thiruvananthapuram in 1930. As a region, where the reformist spirit set by the leaders like Vakkom Abdul Qadir Moulvi still prevailed, Aikya Sangham didn't face much opposition from dissident groups. The meeting was presided over by Lt. col. Abdul Hamid (Joint-Director, Madras). Many leaders and *ulema* from Malabar ,

⁴⁹ K.M. Moulavi, *Risalat-fil-Bank* April 13, 1929, p.5-6.

⁵⁰ E.Moidu Moulavi, *Moulaviyude Athmakatha*, Kottayam, 1981, p.125.

Kochi and Thiruvithamkoor participated in the meeting.

Malappuram was the venue for the 9th annual meeting of the Sangham which was convened on 18-19 October, 1931. Khan Bahadur Mir Zainuddin, the Sessions Judge of the North Malabar district presided over the conference.⁵¹

In the inaugural address he opined that unless a community is fully advanced in education and has gained sufficient experiences in the intricacies of political contest, there would be no advancement. He suggested the formation of social service leagues, all over Kerala, working under the auspicious of the Sangham, with a sound policy and uniform programme of work. His guidelines in this regard had three aspects, viz. religious purification, social reformation and educational amelioration. For the educational progress of the community, especially female education, several measures were suggested by him'.⁵²

The Tenth Annual Conference was convened at Kasaragode on 5-6 May, 1932 and it was presided over by Syed Abdul Wahab Bukiari, Principal, Jamalia Arabic college. Alongwith this meeting the annual meeting of Kerala Jami-at- al-ulema was also convened.^{53*}

⁵¹ M.A. Samad, op.cit, pp.95-96.

⁵² M.A. Samad, op.cit., pp.95-96.

⁵³ E.K. Moulavi, op.cit., (Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham and Kerala Muslim Renaissance) p.476. in Kerala Muslim Directory edited by P.A. Syed Mohd.

• As Contradictory to E.K. Moulavi' Report Mathrubhumi daily dated , 2 May, 1934, page 2, 13 May, 1934, p.2, reported the date of the Kasaragode meeting as 5-6 May, 1934, and the daily calls it the 11th Annual Conference.

As had been routinely done in the previous conferences, this meeting also called upon the Muslims to unite, show more enthusiasm in education, keep away from superstitions and avoid largesse at any cost. The major resolution passed in this meeting were:

1. The meeting urged the government to implement its order allowing public funds for religious education, as the teaching of religion was deemed inevitable for the progress of Muslim education.
2. The meeting stressed on the importance of Muslim educational institutions from *Champion scheme* recommendations, and to reopen the schools shut down as recommended by the scheme.
3. It requested the government to do away with the 'Mappila outrageous Act' as it is violative of the peaceful living as well as the self esteem of Muslims.
4. The Sangham congratulated the government on its releasing a number of Malabar Rebellion convicts, and appealed to release the rest of them.
5. Other resolutions passed in the meeting comprised an appeal to the Muslim representatives for the legislation of laws controlling the *waqf* properties and another law putting into practice patrilineal system, instead of the matrilineal, and appealed to the government for the establishment of a higher elementary training school which would be useful for northern Malabar as well as southern Karnataka.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Mathrubhumi, 1934, May 13, p.2.

The striking feature of these resolutions is the fact that by then Aikya Sangham's demands had become more of a political nature than being religious.

The Eleventh Annual Meeting was convened at the Sangham's birth place, Eriyrd in 1933, B.Pocker Sahib, advocate of Madras High Court, being the President.

"With an intention to create an awareness on scientific farming among Muslims, an agricultural exhibition was also organised along with the conference".⁵⁵ It was during this meeting, K.M. Moulavi decided to return to Malabar to spread Aikya Sangham activities there, as he was free from the charges related to Malabar Rebellion.⁵⁶

The twelfth and last Annual Conference was held at Arakkal palace Kannur on 1934 under the presidentship of Abdul Hamid Khan Sahib, Madras. Due to internal strife within the Sangham, over the beginning of an Interest free bank for Muslims and over their political participation, the Sangham by this time had been weakened considerably. Leaders like E. Moidu Moulavi and Abdurahman Sahib saw no necessity of a political platform for the Muslims in Kerala, other than Indian National Congress. While Seethi Sahib and his group contented that a separate organisation was necessary for Muslims.⁵⁷

The annual meeting of the Kerala Muslim Majlis, formed in 1931, was also held at the same venue. Hussain Imam, a member of the Council of State, presided over the Majlis conference.

⁵⁵ E.K. Moulavi, op.cit., p.476.

⁵⁶ E.K. Moulavi, 'Islahi prasthanagal' in Al-Murshid, Dec. 1967, p.18.

⁵⁷ Abul Azeez, op.cit., p.24.

It was in this meeting that the Aikya Sangham was formally dissolved and was merged with the Kerala Muslim Majlis. About this development E.K. Moulavi, one of the prominent leaders of the Sangham was of the opinion: "as the prominent members as well as the aims and objectives of the Muslim Aikya Sangham and Muslim Majlis were the same, the conference felt that there was no need for two separate organisations and passed a resolution to cease the activities of the Sangham".⁵⁸ But it is difficult to take this statement for granted as it is hard to digest the fact that this is the only reason for the Sangham' dispersal.

Limitations

Organisational weaknesses as well as the differences among leaders on the issue of joining political parties were the two important reasons behind the dissolution of Aikya Sangham. Moreover, it was difficult to coordinate the heterogeneous interests of the leaders within the frame of an organisation like Akiya Sangham.

Many of the resolutions which could have been a break through in the history of the Muslims in Kerala, remained on paper. The best example was their inability to build an Arabic college at Aluva. This failure hampered the possible creation of a new intellectual generation, which would have carried on the reformist ideas of the Sangham, in the later years as happened in the case of Aligarh movement.

Their attitude towards the conservative *ulema* and their followers were highly provocative. As a preliminary step, instead of concentrating more on social service and the social upliftment of Muslims in Kerala, Aikya Sangham leaders engaged in theological disputes, they branded all

⁵⁸ E.K. Moulavi, op.cit., p.477.

conservatives as obscurantists and treated them as rivals. This kind of treatment and the elitist nature of the Sangham activities finally resulted in the masses deserting the Sangham. And organizationally, it lacked a cadre system. Because of the organizational weakness and lack of mass support, the organisation remained a group passing resolutions, rarely putting it into practice.

Its highly puritanical view earned them the name 'Wahabi'. Some sections of the Sunni *ulema* had issued *fatwas* against Wahab in Arabia as he was considered heretic and apostates. So the very term *Wahabi** stood as a hurdle in the smooth functioning of Aikya Sangham.

Hetrogenous interest worked out within the Sangham leaders was also a set back in the Sangham activities. Many time Mohammed Abdul Rahman Sahib criticised the Sangham, and accused that it had failed to brief the government of the problems of the community in time. He let loose even sharper criticism through 'Al-Ameen', the newspaper published from Kozhikode, when K.M. Moulavi published a tract concerning the construction of a Muslim bank.

The major reason for Abdurahiman's criticism against the Sangham was the political polarization among the leaders of the Sangham. Abdurahman Sahib along with E.Moidu Moulavi in later years argued for an amalgamation of Sangham with Indian National Congress, where as K.M. Seethi Sahib and his group wanted to remain separate from Indian National Congress. This sharp difference further developed into a cleavage and led to the dissolution of Aikya Sangham.

* A pamphlet was issued by two *ulema* of Ponnani in which they accused Aikya Sangham as a group propagating Wahabi ideals and thereby trying to estrange others from the spirit of Islam. *Al-Irshad*, J. Ahir 1343, p.250.

Major Contributions

Aikya Sangham was the first organized attempt to stir up the Muslims of Kerala from their slumber after the 1921 Rebellion. Under its platform, they discussed various issues related to Kerala Muslims viz., socio-religious, economic, educational, and political. It opened up a new era of debate and discussion for Muslim socio-religious reforms and sowed the seeds of all the major movements and developments in the days to come.

The movement was a stage of apprenticeship for many a leader who was to lead many a socio-religious, and political movement in the later years. Their contributions in the fields of education, religious revitalisations and journalism were also highly remarkable. Pointing out the contributions made by 'Al-Ameen' and Aikya Sangham, E.M.S. Namboothrippad observed that, If they had rendered their services a generation before, the 1921 rebellion would not have taken place, or even if the the rebellion had taken place, they could have resisted it from spreading so widely.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ E.M.S. Namboothirippad, 'Kerala the Homeland of Malayalis', 1969, p.237, as quoted in. Dr. Abdul Azeez, Rise of Muslims in Kerala Politics, Tvm., 1992, p.23.

Chapter V

An Analytical Appraisal of Aikya Sangham Activities

This chapter is an attempt to analyse the Aikya Sangham movement in the context of various socio-religious movements undertaken among Muslims and Hindus. It also discusses how the Kerala Muslim intellectuals developed a consciousness, picking up lessons from the experiences of the 1921 revolt, taking the socio-religious political and economic realities of their times for granted. And, what was the intellectual and ideological basis that helped them in constructing a vision of future. This chapter sheds light also on the distinctive character of the Aikya Sangham Movement, which made it different from other movements of Muslim reformation in India and abroad. And finally, it also discusses the political consciousness evolving from the movement.

Modern western cultures posed a serious challenge to the traditional Indian society during the 19th century. It began to question the validity of Indian tradition, and presented the western culture's superiority over Indian culture. The Christian missionaries, with the support of colonial state, began to spread their religion. Indian intellectuals, both traditional and modern, responded to this challenge with an open mind and tried to reinterpret the traditional beliefs and institutions. "The cultural-ideological struggle in colonial India had two mutually complementary facets. The first was directed against the backward elements of traditional culture and ideology and was expressed in the reformation and regeneration of socio-religious institutions. The second was an attempt to contend with the

colonial culture and ideology.”¹ The intellectuals felt the incapability of the Hindu religion to cope with the new situation created by colonial state. New modes of production, new employment opportunities and the British educational system made a profound influence on them. The alternative they suggested was different in its nature and content. Some of the radicals suggested a total negation of Indian tradition and acceptance of western cultural values, where as some other reformers of the period found the age old beliefs and customs that stood in the way of social advancement and urged for a rational reinterpretation of the existing traditional scriptures. These reformers accepted modernity but not at the cost of negating the validity of Indian tradition and culture. The third group of reformers placed Indian traditions as a vehicle to progress and reinterpret it in a new fashion.

The interesting feature of all these movements represented by Derozians, Ram Mohan Roy, and Dayananda Saraswati realised that it was the religious establishment which was to be reformed, and hence the centrality of religion in the movement. Many of the 19th century reformers, while criticising the evils of caste system, superstitious believes and practices, slavery and suppression of women were not ready to negate the essence of Indian religion and culture. It was a reform movement that rejected the religious components which obstructed progress and presented a more humanistic, and tolerant out look.

The wind of social reforms had reached Kerala a little later compared to the north. Ninteenth century Kerala society was known for its caste rigidity, social inequality and suppression of women. Many a socio-

¹ K.N. Panikkar, 'The Intellectual History of Colonial India's: Some Histogramical and Conceptual Questions', Romila Thapar and Sabya Sachi Bhattacharya (eds.) Situating Indian History, New Delhi, 1986, p.407.

religious movement in Kerala, thus channelised their attention against the caste cruelty finally leading to a caste assertion of different communities.

Inequality and injustice prevailed in the Hindu society of Kerala during the 19th and 20th centuries. Caste rigidity in all forms, slavery, untouchability, unapproachability, irrational social customs such as *talikettukalyanam*, *tirandukuli*, *marumakkathayam* etc. became the order of the day. "The work of the Christian missionaries and spread of western education helped to bring about a radical social change. A large number of conversion among the backward classes to Christianity, opening of factories in urban centres, the increasing migration of population from rural to urban areas and the rapid expansion of the means of communication also helped to usher in an era of social mobility, and to mitigate the evil in the traditional Kerala society."² The all India Hindu reform movements led by organisations such as Ramakrishna Mission, the Theosophical Society and Arya Samaj helped to create a keen awareness of the evil of the caste system in Kerala too. Apart from the lower caste movements, the members of the upper castes also felt the dire need of reform. Although movement for change began with the lower castes such as the Ezhavas, the Pulayas, and the Parayars, it was also developed among the caste Hindus like Nair, Namboothiry etc.³

The two reform movements which made the greatest impact on the public life of Kerala were of local origin, and were led by Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1924) and Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1924).

² Sreedhara Menon, *Survey of Kerala History*, Madras, 1991, p.323.

³ Francois Houtart, Genevieve Lemercinier, "Socio-religions movements in Kerala: A reaction to the capitalist mode of production", *Social Scientist*, Part I, vol.6, no.11, June 1978, p.27.

Chattampi Swamikal was a Nair reformer who revolted against the existing social order in which the Brahmins enjoyed a monopolistic position. He fought against the degeneration of the Nair society and appealed them to refrain from the irrational customs like *marumakkāthayam*, *tirantukuli*, *talikettu* etc.

Sree Narayana Guru was an Ezhava Saint who made solid contributions to the social changes in Kerala. Like Chattampi Swamikal he revolted against the Brahmin ascendancy and campaigned for the mitigation of the rigours of caste. He consecrated shrines in several parts of Kerala for the worship of the Ezhavas and permitted the entry to the pulayas and other lower castes, considered inferior to the Ezhavas in social scale.

The social reforms launched by Chattampi Swamikal, and Sreenarayana Guru further developed into the rise of community organisations like the Nair Service Society (N.S.S.) and Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam'. (S.N.D.P.). The social reform movements aimed at eradicating the rigidity of caste system was also linked with the National Movement of the period. Vaikkam Satyagraham (1924-25), Guruwayur Satyagraham (1931-32) are glaring examples of this. These were aimed at the entry of lower castes into temples and its approach roads. The political aspirations of the Ezhavas were clearly shown in the Malayali Memorial (1891-92) and the Ezhava memorial (1896), submitted to the Maharaja of Thiruvithamkoor against the denial of government jobs to the Ezhavas.

Ayyankali, born in Pulaya community, is remembered for his efforts to eradicate untouchability. On the lines of the S.N.D.P, he founded the 'Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam' for their emancipation. "whatever

progress Harijans have achieved in recent decades in Kerala is in no small measure, due to untiring and selfless efforts of Ayyankali”.⁴

Like that of the Nair's, the movements among the Namboothiris also showed itself first among the youngsters who demanded the right to English education, new marriage regulations, better means of subsistence and an end to the sufferings of women, whose status was most unenviable. Two associations, the 'Yogakshema Mahaśbha' under the direction of Kurur Unni Namboothiri in 1909, and the Youth League or the 'Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham' were formed for materialising the above said demands. The services rendered by V.T. Bhattathirippad, the author of the celebrated 'Adukkalayil Ninum Arangathekku', and those of E.M.S. Namboothirippad deserve special mention.

As elsewhere in India, in Kerala also socio-religious reform movements were not aimed at a total negation of the existing set-up, but an alternative engagement with religious textuality and a possible reordering of the existing practices. Perhaps the reformers' vision was to plug the gap between the decadent religious establishment they saw and the pristine religion they perceived.

Obviously, the socio-religious reform movements helped in breaking down some of the preceding symbolic systems, but they also offered the new middle classes a means of social advancement and of effective political action. The paradox of the whole process was a highly increased caste, community consciousness which later reflected in the caste based political affiliations in Kerala.

⁴ A. Sreedhara Menon, *op.cit.* p.329.

The reform movements among Muslim societies were unique and were distinct from those of the European renaissance and reformation, mainly because the historical experience of both were different. Western reformation was basically an attempt to bifurcate the domination of church in the state affairs. At the dawn of renaissance, the Pope had owned one third of the entire Europe. The nexus between the Pope and the King developed into an instrument through which the Church and the Pope regulated the freedom of expression and thought. The renaissance and reformation were outburst of this suppression. The leaders of the movement put forward new ideas of liberty, rationalism, humanism and secularism.

But in Muslim societies the *ulema* had only a supporting role, not a dominating role, in the affairs of the state. Muslim reform movements, whether traditional or modern, were focused mainly on the revitalisation of Islam from later aberrations and bringing it to its pristine form. They hoped for a better understanding between the ulema and the rulers. Many of the movements were either religious in form but political in content, or a movement for the reorientation of religious thought under the impact of western ideas. The reformers emphasised new educational programmes with an intention to uplift the Muslim community on moral and spiritual levels. They were highly critical about the superstitions like saint worship, and was ready to reinterpret the religious scripture to meet the requirements of the time. Therefore, it is difficult to analyse the Muslim reforms using the western reformist terms and idioms such as secularism and rationalism etc. It was within the fold of Islam. They were, in fact, an attempt to bring Islam back to the traditional scriptures.

The advent of Islam in Kerala was peaceful and through the trade relationship with Arabia. So the relationship between the native Hindus and

Muslim were so cordial and developed a mutual corporations between the two. Through years, Muslim community in Kerala, imbibed many characteristics indigenous to that soil. For example, the customs like *nerccas* “are ceremonials which combine nominally Islamic elements with certain features of indigenous folk festivals”.⁵ Unlike their North Indian counterparts, majority of the Muslims in Kerala lived under non-Muslim rulers. So the whole historical experience of the Muslims in Kerala was different.

The result of the Portuguese period for the Mappilas may be summarised as `economic retrogression, estrangement from Hindus, bitterness against Christians and a new militancy. Each of these was passed forward in some measure into modern times, shaping both Mappila history and present attitudes.⁶

The 1921 rebellion had a far reaching effect on Kerala Muslims. The post- rebellion period presented a Muslim society who were economically deteriorated, socially degenerated politically silent and religiously superstitious. In addition these, proselytisation process undertaken by the Christian missionaries and the Arya Samajists soon after the rebellion posed serious cultural threats to the Muslim community in Kerala. Within a year, devastating flood affected Eranad and Valluvanad *Taluks*. These were enough reason for a few intellectuals to realise the necessity of doing some remedial measures against these precarious conditions.

⁵ Stephen F. Dale and M. Gangadharas Menon. “Nercea, Saint Worship among the Muslims of Kerala in Asghar Ali (ed.) Kerala Muslims-A Historical Perspective, New Delhi, 1995, p.175.

⁶ Roland E. Miller, op.cit., p.175.

The intellectuals of the period realised it will be suicidal to continue the centuries long aggressive defensiveness, rather an alternative system is to be found out. The immediate requirement for the resurgence of Muslims, according to them was “eradication of poverty and popularisation of ideal education.”⁷ They were ready to evaluate the progress made by the other communities through their education, religious devotion, rightness of path, morality, unity, hard working mentality and industrious nature, and urged Muslims to follow the same path.⁸ Bringing unity, combined effort against superstitious believes, popularisation of ideal religious and modern education were the three major tasks ahead for them.

The origin of Aikya Sangham was related to this consciousness. Though the leaders of Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham aimed an all Kerala movement, its activities were mainly concentrated on Kochi and Malabar, not much in Thiruvithamkoor.

Unlike the Hindus, the Muslims’ immediate need was not the eradication of caste rigidity but the eradication of the community’s apathy to modern education and their inner weakness resulted from religious superstitions. For social emancipation, the Muslim intellectuals gave preference to a socio-religious movement rather than a mass revolt. Like any other caste movement in Kerala, Aikya Sangham movement also carries common characteristics of religious basis, cultural aspects and middle class leadership. Being an internal revitalisation movement, from the beginning, they persuaded people to give up customs and practices like *chandanakudam*, *kodikuthnercca*, *marumakkathayam* and *kathukuth* which they saw not only as unislamic but stood in the way of social advancement.

⁷ *Al-Irshad*, 1342, Dil Haj p.59.

⁸ *Al-Irshad*, 1343 Jamadul Awwal - p.195.

Aikya Sangham leaders came to have this kind of a consciousness as a result of their historical experience, modern education, interaction with other community movements, influence of the early reformers, and through their better understanding of the trends and movements that were taking place in various parts of Muslim world.

Aikya Sangham leaders like K.M. Seethi and Mohammed Abdurahiman were the products of the newly emerged middle class with a sound base of English education. Leaders like Vakkam Abdul Qadar Moulavi had a constant interaction with the famous Ezhawa reformer Sreenarayana Guru. Being the permanent readers of Rashid Rida's 'Al-Manar' Aikya Sangham leaders like Vakkom Moulavi and K.M. Moulavi had clear cut understanding of the modern Islamic trends, like Wahabism, Pam-Islamism, and *Salafi* movement. The influence of early reformers like Hamadani Shaik and Makti Thangal had set a guideline for their further activities. What they only needed to do was to strengthen the foundation laid by this earlier reformers. The educational efforts carried out by Aligarh M.A.O. College also made a profound influence on them. On 5th may 1911, a deputation for enlisting co-operation for raising the Aligarh M.A.O. College to a University came to Kochi, of which mention has been made in the third chapter of this study. This visit gave a boost to the educational efforts of the regions they visited.⁹

Therefore, what the leaders of the Aikya Sangham tried for, was a "reversal of existing common sense", to put in Gramscian terminology, and through that these intellectuals hoped to replace the hegemony of the "existing stagnant and retrogressive common sense" by a dynamic, pro-

⁹ K.T. Mohammed Ali, op.cit., p.132.

change, forward looking, yet well rooted in tradition with a well balanced approach.

Another striking feature of the Aikya Sangham movement was its early abstention from political affiliations. From its very inception some leaders led by Abdurahman Sahib had tried to club the Sangham activities with the ongoing National Movement. But majority of the leaders opted for a separate socio-religious revitalisation movement without any particular political affinity. The reason may be the tragic end of 1921 revolt and the attitude of the Indian National Congress (INC) towards the Mappilas during the post-rebellion period. A resolution passed in the congress' Ahammedabad session (December, 1921) regreted the violent incidents of the rebellion, and disassociating itself from the rebels created an atmosphere which in due course alienated the Mappilas from Congress movement.¹⁰ Therefore, leaders of the Sangham came to the conclusion that it is sensible to keep politics away from the agenda, and to concentrate on internal revitalisation, for the time being.

The Sangham leaders believed that only through a religious revitalisation or reform that a social renaissance could be possible in the Muslim society. The reason being, the religiously committed Kerala Muslims always looked up to the religious leadership for proper guidance.

Aikya Sangham and other Muslim Reform Movements

Theologically, Aikya Sangham in one way or other shared many of the views of the Muslim reformers like Ibn Abdual Wahab, Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Mohammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Shah Waliyullah and Ahmed

¹⁰ M.Gangadhara Manon, "Emergence of Muslim league Kerala - A Historical enquiry." in Asgharali (ed), op.cit., p.211.

Shah Barelvi with adaptations natural to Kerala. The Sangham leaders, like these reformers were against the blind acceptance of any Imam in jurisprudence (*taqlid*), agreed on the possibility of independent research (*Ijithihad*) based on the Quran and the Hadiths, in order to meet the requirement of the time, vehemently opposed the popular beliefs like saint worship, intercession and seeking intermediaries to god (*Tawassul*). Above all, it was an attempt to bring back Muslims to the teachings of basic scriptures, the Quran and Hadith.

In the Question of modernity, they accepted the superiority of modern western education and the incapability of traditional Muslim educational to meet the requirements of the time. So a healthy engagement with modernity, rather than a total negation whatever the westerners had.

Though the dissident conservative *ulema* called them 'Wahabis', Aikya Sangham desisted from aggressive puritanism which characterised the former. And, unlike the Wahabi movement in north India, Aikya Sangam movement did not have much confrontation with the British colonial rule. Instead the Aikya Sangham leaders exhorted the Muslims to utilise the opportunities created by the colonial state and refrain from suicidal mass revolt.¹¹ The relation between the colonial state and the Aikya Sangham movement was not aggressively antagonistic.¹² It was rather cordial. This argument is reflected in their annual meeting resolutions and the articles published in their journals. Many a time, it was the British authority who had guarded them from the conservatives'

Shah Barelvi
to Barelvi
?

¹¹ Al-Irshad, 1343, R. Ahir, p.178.

¹² For example, Al-Irshad, 1343, R. Ahir, p.178, Advices the Muslims to be in cordial relationship with the government as it would help in the path towards their ultimate aim.

attack.¹³ One can hardly see any statement or aggressive upheavals against the British rule for safeguarding their interest and demand. Their demands were put forward to the government in constitutional ways. In return, the British Government also tended to wooing the Mappilas in order to passify their outbreaks by winning their support. After the rebellion the British Government began to start many schools in Mappila dominant areas as it resolved to concentrate more on Mappilas' education. In July 1922, a committee was appointed to study the conditon of Muslim Education and to make recommendations. Following the recommendations of the committee compulsory elementary education was introduced in three municipalities of Kozhikode, Thalaseery and Kochi and in selected areas of the Ernad, Valluvanad and Ponnani *taluks*. To give further impetus to the educational development of the Mappials in Malabar, a special educational officer was appointed in 1926. The government sanctioned special scholarship for the higher education of the Mappilas. For enhancing adult educaton, the government opened special night schools for the Mappilas and there were 79 such schols during 1920-30. The above said measures of the government resulted in some satisfactory advancements, at least numerically, in Mappila educaton, as the tables for 1921-22 to 1931-32 indicate.¹⁴

¹³ The Sixth Annual Meeting held at Trirur and the 9th meeting at Malappuram were held under thick police servilence as conservative opposition was anticipated. *Al-Mushid*, 1967, July T

¹⁴ K.T. Mohmmmed Ali, *op.cit.*, pp.103-106.

Table: Progress of Mappila Education during 1921-22 to 1931-32

| Year | Public Mappila Schools for boys | Total Strength (Boys and Girls) |
|---------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1921-22 | 557 | 39096 |
| 1922-23 | 583 | 43394 |
| 1923-24 | 661 | 51292 |
| 1924-25 | 865 | 62642 |
| 1925-26 | - | - |
| 1926-27 | 1239 | 86315 |
| 1927-28 | 1365 | 96794 |
| 1928-29 | 1382 | 99934 |
| 1929-30 | 1423 | 101069 |
| 1930-31 | 1457 | 97969 |
| 1931-32 | 1598 | 114604 |

Source: KT Mohammed Ali, The Development of Education Among the Mappilas of Malabar 1800-1965, New Delhi, 1990. p.106

Compared to the rationalist movement of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the Aikya Sangham movement was a traditional reform movement with a minimum point of rationalism. Roland E. Miller is correct when he says, "There never was an Aligarh movement in Mappila theology, which then

produced a conservative reaction: the history is rather one of a steady and passive acceptance of tradition.”¹⁵

‘Muslim Aikya Isha`a`tul-Islam’ committee was setup in order to preach the ideals of Islam to other communities in various parts of Kerala and to resist the conversion of Muslims to other religions like Christianity and Hinduism. After the 1921 rebellion Christian missionaries and ‘Arya Samaj’ activists began to engage in proselytization process. Al-Irshad warned about the seriousness of the situation and invited the attention of *ulema* and leaders.¹⁶ It was a cultural resistance against the intrusion of other cultures. And was a continuation of Makti Thanghl’s polemical debates against the Christian missionaries.

Another area which Aikya Sangham concentrated on was the improvement of educational system both for male and female. “The source of all ill that had beset Indian society, including religious superstitions, and social obscurantism was traced by the intellectuals to the general ignorance of the people. The dissemination of knowledge therefore occupied a central place in their programme”.¹⁷ This is true of all the reform movements undertaken during the 19th and 20th centuries. Aikya Sangham leaders had a well planned educational programme in which modern education also included the reformed religious education. They asked the government to start Mappila schools in Mappila dominant areas. Almost all the annual meetings of the Aikya Sangham were very particular on the matter of education and the leaders exhorted the Muslims to adhere both to religious and modern education. Along with the second annual conference of the Sangham, the second annual conference of Cochins Muslims Students

¹⁵ Roland E. Millar, op.cit., p.266.

¹⁶ *Al-Irshad*, 1342 Dil Haj, p.60.

¹⁷ K.N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony*, op.cit., pp.8-9.

Association was also held under the presidentship of Mohammad Abdurahman. And in the fourth annual meeting of the Aikya Sangham, "it was decided to form an all Kerala Muslim Educational Association, comprising of eminent personalities of the period. During the first meeting of the `All Kerala Muslims Educational Association in May 16, 1926 at Thalassery they had decided to concentrate on three issues.

1. Elementary education to all Muslims.
2. Improving the quality and standards of traditional *dars* in the lines of Bakiya-tu-salihath, Vellore.
3. Collect a community fund for implementing their plans.¹⁸

Many primary schools and high schools were established under Aikya Sanghams' guidance and inspiration.¹⁹

Traditional Muslim education in Kerala was confined to the *dars* in the mosques and small *maktabs* or *othupallis*. These were mainly used for imparting religious instructions to Muslim students. Muslims as a part of their conflict with European powers, strongly opposed English education. The wrong understanding of religion combined with the superstitious beliefs of the Mappila and the opposition of the orthodox Ulema to things western, stood in the way of modern secular education. Their chief objection to English education was that "it would weaken the religious faith among younger generation and will also open the way for the propagation of Christianity among them."²⁰

¹⁸ *Al-Irshad*, A.H.1344, vol.II, Dil Hajj - p.26.

¹⁹ K.T. Mohammad Ali, op.cit .p.156.

²⁰ K.T. Mohammed Ali. Ibid, p.76-77.

Aikya Sangham leaders had to tackle these issues. They wanted to show the public that there is no contradiction between Islamic learning tradition and modern educations'. Marmaduke Pickthal, in his presidential address of the fourth annual meeting of the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham had exhorted the Muslims that "the modern scientific education of today is the off spring of the ancient civilised Islamic period. Therefore regaining this commitment to education, he deemed ,a religious responsibility.²¹ For countering the second argument put forward by the orthodox section, Aikya Sangham leaders demanded the government to restrain from teaching Bible as a compulsory subject in public schools.²²

In order to attract Muslim students to school, Aikya Sangham leaders appealed to the government to allow public funds for religious education in Muslim centres.²³

It was Aikya Sangham which consistently strove for women's education. Conservative *ulema* issued *fatwas* which forbidden Muslim women from learning to read and write.²⁴ The main agenda of the Muslim Aikya Sangham annual meetings was to remind Muslims that Islam never drew any boundaries for women's education. Aikya Sangham leaders pressurised the government and succeeded in restoring eight rupees stipend for Muslim girls in Anglo- vernacular schools in Cochin state, and in restoring an Islamic dress code in public schools.²⁵

²¹ Marmaduke Pickthal, Presidential address, fourth annual meeting of the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham, p.14.

²² Annual Report, submitted to the fifth annual conference of the Aikya Sangham, p.6.

²³ Mathrubhumi, 1934, May 13, p.2

²⁴ Al-Bayan 1930, March, p.28.

²⁵ Annual Report, submitted to the 5th annual conference of Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham, pp.4-6.

Aikya Sangham leaders realised the incapability of Arabi-Malayalam as a language and urged the Muslims that there is no religious taboo in studying the mother-tongue, Malayalam and the official language, English. Newly emerged Madrassas under the guidance of Aikya Sangham opted Malayalam as the medium of instruction and Malayalam text books were prepared for the popularisation of the language. The educational system propounded by Aikya Sangham leaders had two aims:

1. moral and spiritual well-being of the pupil.
2. popularisation of modern scientific education.

As religious education was given along with secular education it attracted large number of students to schools. Arrangements were made by the government to popularise the study of Malayalam (reading and writing) and arithmetic among the Mappilas. This was done with the help of *mullas* who were given special instructions to teach the children elementary lessons in the regional language (Malayalam) along with religious training.²⁶ A committee was appointed in 1931 with R.G.Grieve as the chairman for studying the condition of the Mappila education. As a result of the recommendations of the committee, the government approved the proposal for the provision of religious instruction to the Mohammdan pupils. Accordingly, religious instruction for Muslim boys was provided within school hours in Muslim schools and instructors were appointed for the purpose. The Malappuram training school established in 1931 continued to provide instruction to *mullas* in secular and religious subjects on modern lines so that they might qualify for imparting both secular and religious instruction in public elementary schools after undergoing lower

²⁶ K.T. Mohd. Ali, op.cit, p.79..

elementary grade training.²⁷ This is the basic difference between the North Indian and Kerala Muslim educational setup. Aikya Sangham leaders always worked for a better understanding and cordial relationship between the *ulema* and modern educated youth.²⁸

The establishment of a college in Kerala, on the lines of the old M.A.O. College, had been the aim and ambition of its leaders. But their attempt to establish a Muslim college at Aluva had failed for lack of resources. In spite of the stiff opposition from the orthodox quarters, it succeeded in bringing about a lasting revolution in the field of Muslim Education.

Economically, the leaders of the movement represented a group of growing middle class with their accommodation with capitalist mode of production initiated by the British Government. They were much concerned about the way in which Muslims spend their wealth unproductively. As an alternative to the growing debt of the peasants and merchants with high interest, a section of the Aikya Sangham leaders suggested the formation of an Islamic Bank or a co-operative society with minimum interest. K.M. Moulavi's *Risalat-Fil-Bank* was written based on this argument. Aikya Sangham did not have a sound monetary system or funding system. In order to arise fund for the its social activities, they had started a *kury*, out of which a nominal fund was collected. 'All the Aikya Sangham related funds were later donated to Farook College, the first, first grade Muslim college in Kerala.²⁹ The agricultural exhibition conducted during the 11th meeting of the Aikya Sangham meeting held at Eriyad in 1933, mainly concentrated

²⁷ K.T. Mohd. Ali., op.cit, pp.113-115.

²⁸ Al-Irshad, p.

²⁹ E.K. Moulavi, 'Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham and Renaissance in P.A. Syed Mohd. Edited Kerala Muslim Directory, Cochin, 1960, p.477.

on their economic activity. It was organised with an intention to develop an awareness on scientific farming among the Muslims in Kerala.³⁰

Aikya Sangham also made efforts in the domain of publishing. Under the directed control of Aikya Sangham three major journal were published: 'Muslim Aikyam' in Malayalam, 'Al-Irshad' and 'Al-Islah' in Arabi Malayalam. The language they used in these journals were not the Mappila dialects but the original Malayalam. 'Al-Irshad', in its first issue, reported that "It is decided to start Al-Irshad in Arabi Malayalam, the language that most Muslims know, and will be more particular on the literary standards of the articles getting published. This is mainly aimed at refining and improving the Muslims' language."³¹

Aikya Sangham popularised its reform ideas mainly through these journals even though the orthodox section gave a ban call for these journals. It opened up an era of intellectual discussion on community matters. The articles were highly critical on the functioning of many Islamic organisations of the period. In these journals, issues like theological debates, *fatwas*, social problems, and economic issues were dealt with. The conservatives also felt the need of journals. To disseminate their views they also started journals. Thus an era of popularisation of press among Muslims was in the making, there by contributing to the Muslim intellectual development.

Mappila Consolidation

Aikya Sangham's main objective was to bring about unity in the Muslim community. It became a platform for discussing the

³⁰ Ibid, p.476.

³¹ Al-Irshad, 1342 Ramzan, p.4.

socio-religious, educational and economic issues of Muslims. It opened an era of an organised religious and political leadership among Muslims. Therefore, these emancipation movement led to create a new community consciousness* with an urge to change or develop along with the other communities. They put forward a new vision which was pragmatic.

Aikya Sangham, was started as a revitalisation movement with minimum political content. But politics was not totally absent in the Sangham's agenda. During 1924-25 they were able to win two seats in the Kochi Legislative Council amidst strong opposition. Their annual conference resolutions, demanding separate electoral power to elect Muslim members in *taluk* boards, and municipalities just like the provisional assemblies, and central legislative, the release of the prisoners charged during Malabar Rebellion, special schools for Muslims, withdrawal of the Mappila Outrageous Act, etc. were clear indications of the sangham's political content. As Aikya Sangham grew, the concentration shifted from religious revtilization to political aspirations.

The varied political interests cherished by its leaders was a problem for Aikya Sangham's smooth functioning. In its second annual conference at Aluva in 1924, Mohammed Abdurahman Sahib brought in a resolution condemning the British Empire for its breach of the promise given to Muslims regarding the Khilafat issue.³² Many of the leaders in the Sangham were against this mixing up of politics and reforms and opined that the Sangham should remain as a social reform movement. E. Moidu

*It was not a communal consciousness, Al-Irshad continuously warned the Muslims against the Injsutice and atrocities towards non-Muslims by quoting Quranic versus which reads. 'Islam never allows its adherence to do harms and injustice to other religions', *Al-Irshad*, p.179 R.Ahir 1343, p.179, Ja. Awwal, 1343, p.223.

³² M. Rashid, Mohammed Abdurahman Sahib, Calicut, 1994, p.70.

Moulavi, the Congress leader, also was a supporter of this view. Any how, the resolution was defeated with a slight margin.

Mohammed Abdurahman Sahib wanted to transform Aikya Sangham into an anti-colonial Sangham and thereby injecting the nationalist spirit into Muslim minds. Leaders like K.M. Seethi Sahib and K.M. Moulavi did not want to remain politically neutral, and concentrated on the social upliftment of the Muslims. This group considered it suicidal for the Muslims at this stage if they again plunged into the aggressive anti-colonial struggle. They had the bitter experiences of 1921 Malabar Rebellion in mind, and how it badly affected the community.

This polarisation within the Sangham often created problems in Sangham activities. Abdurahman Sahib in his Newspaper 'Al-Ameen' often criticised the Sangham's failure in safeguarding the Muslim interest. This cleavage finally developed into a rift when K.M. Moulavi wrote a treatise in 1929 on establishing a Muslim Bank at Ernakulam. 'Al-Ameen' vehemently criticised this idea and wrote extensively against this. This criticism resulted in creating an anti-Sangham feelings in the minds of the public and finally led to its dissolution.³³

The winning of seats to the Kochi Legislative Assembly from the Muslim majority constituencies bear proof to the fact that they enjoyed the support of the newly educated middle classes of Muslims and the wealthy aristocrats as the right to vote in those days was limited to these classes. Finally, the group which stood for a separate political conglomeration led by K.M. Seethi Sahib for the Muslims, succeeded in merging the Aikya Sangha with the Kerala Muslim Majlis in 1934. E. Moidu Moulavi, who was closely associated with the Muslim

³³ Ibid., p.71.

movements of those days, observed that the Majlis was formed by some moderates and pro-British who could not agree with the policies of the Congress.³⁴

There was an attempt by people of different political leanings to drag the Majlis to their side. Muhammad Abdurrahman and his friends, who were Congressmen, argued that Muslims needed no political organisation other than the Congress, while K.M. Seethi Sahib and his groups contended that a separate organisation was necessary for Muslims. As the proposal of Seethi Sahib was adopted by the Majlis, Congress Muslims left the organisation.³⁵

The annual conferences of the Majlis were held at different places. It passed resolutions and submitted memorials to the government, relating to the the grievances of Muslims. The Majlis showed its leaning to the Muslim League from the beginning. In the annual conference held on 25th May, 1936, the Majlis resolved to accept the leadership of the All India Muslim League.³⁶ Therefore the socio-cultural movement initiated by Aikya Sangham helped in developing a community consciousness, atleast among the aristocratic middle class and this consciousness was utilised by the leaders like Seethi Sahib and his group for the building up of the Muslim League base in Malabar.

Aikya Sangham movement, initially acted as a socio-religious renaissance among the Muslims in Kerala and finally merged with an organisation which was not towing the line drawn by the Indian National

³⁴ E.Molidu Moulvi, Ente Koottukaran, Mohammed Abdurrahman Shahib (Mal) Calicut, 1964, p.190.

³⁵ Dr. Abdul Azecz, op.cit., p.24.

³⁶ Mathrubhumi. Calicut, dated 27-6, 1936.

Congress. This kind of dichotomy was common in India during the colonial period, as Prof. Panikkar observed:

The cultural intellectual renaissance did not necessarily merge with nationalism, nor was the latter a logical outcome of the former.³⁷

Aikya Sangham movement was a Muslim middle class, aristocratic exercise with minimum popular support. It was an effort to get accustomed themselves to the colonial modernity, for which religious reform was a primary necessity. It was an association of heterogeneous interest groups gathered together. Their concern was not a total negation of the colonial state. And, the movement, to certain extent, failed to address the existential needs of the community after 1921. In addition to this, they were busy engaged in theological disputes with the orthodox Sunni sects. Many of their idealistic plans were not materialised because of organisational weaknesses as well as its meagre mass support.

These short-comings were not lessening its importance. As a pioneering front runner, Aikya Sangham left deep imprints, subsequently leading to the establishment of various educational institutions and social undertakings though it could be argued that their tangible results were minimal. Subsequent developments among Muslims prove this. A series of educational institutions including a first grade college like Farook College became possible because of the movement. The main leaders of the Aikya Sangham continued their activities in many social, political and religious undertakings. Aikya Sangham was the predecessor of the all later religious organisation sprang up in Kerala. Awareness in Social Services, importance of modern education and female education developed later as a result of this movement. One cannot disagree with E.K. Moulavi, a great scholar and

³⁷ K.N. Panikkar, Culture, Ideology, Hegemony Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India, New Delhi, 1995, p.vii.

reformer, who participated in the founding of the Aikya Sangham, when he says, "It is an indisputable fact that all the enlightenment and encouragement that is visible in Kerala in these days is the product of the twelve years of activities of the Aikya Sangham".³⁸

³⁸ E.K. Moulavi, *op.cit* p.477.

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Glossary

| | | |
|---------------|-------------|---|
| Aikyam | (Malayalam) | Unity |
| Amir | (Arabic) | Leader |
| Baithulmal | (Arabic) | Treassury |
| Bid'ah | (Arabic) | innovation in religious matters |
| Chandanakudam | (Malayalam) | An annual festival conducted at tombs of saints |
| Da'wa | (Arabic) | Preaching of religious ideals |
| Dars | (Arabic) | Mosque based centre for Islamic higher learning. |
| Fatwa | (Arabic) | Decision on a question of Islamic law. |
| Fiqh | (Arabic) | Islami Law and Jurisprudence |
| Hadith | (Arabic) | The authoritative tradition of the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad |
| Haji | (Arabic) | One who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca |
| Ijma | (Arabic) | the Unanimous Consent or consensus of the men of learning and of piety over any juristic issue. |
| ijthihad | (Arabic) | Efforts of the learned men to find out rules of Islamic rites and the tradition of the Prophet |
| Imam | (Arabic) | Leader of Congregational prayer, a rightly gaided leader. |
| Islah | (Arabic) | Reform |
| Istihaza | (Arabic) | Seeking the blessings of the dead saints |

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|---|
| Jam'iyyat | (Arabic) | Organisation |
| Janmies | (Malayalam) | Landlord |
| Jaram | (Arabi Malayalam) | Tomb |
| Jihad | (Arabic) | Holy war |
| Kafir | (Arabic) | unbeliever |
| Kathukuthu kalyanam | (Malayalam) | The Ceremony associated with girls ear-piercing. |
| Kodikuth | (Malayalam) | Flag hoisting at the beginning of Uruz festival |
| Kuris | (Malayalam) | Chit fund |
| Lajnat | (Arabic) | Association |
| Madhab | (Arabic) | One of the four recognized Islamic Schools in Jurisprudence |
| Madrassa` | (Arabic) | School in which Children are taught religion. |
| Mahall | (Arabic) | A Unit of Muslim families centred on a local mosque |
| Majlis | (Arabic) | Assembly |
| Maktab | (Arabic) | Islamic Primary School |
| Mala | (Malayalam) | Poetical literature of Mappilas in Arabi Malayalam. |
| Marumakkathayam | (Malayalam) | Matrilinear System of inheritance |
| Moulana | (Persian) | Our leader |
| Moulavi | (Persian) | A Title of respect for a muslim religious leader. |
| Mouldid | (Arabic) | Celebration of the birthdays of saints, especially of the Prophet Muhammad. |
| Muharram | (Arabic) | The first month of Hijra year. |

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|---|
| Mujaddid | (Arabic) | Renovator |
| Mujahid | (Arabic) | One who strives in the way of God, one who stands for reform in religious matter. |
| Munshi | (Persian) | Pandit, Translator |
| Musaliar | (Arabi-Malayalam) | Religious scholar |
| Mushrik | (Arabic) | One who worships any object other than Allah (Polythest) |
| Mutazila | (Arabic) | A rationalistic movement and sect in the second century of Islam. |
| Nercca | (Malayalam) | Festival in honour of a saint |
| Nishpaksha | (Malayalam) | non-partisan |
| Othapallis | (Malayalam) | Primary School for Religious and Arabic Education for Muslims |
| Pattu | (Malayalam) | Song |
| Puzhislamingal | (Malayalam) | Neo-Muslims (New Converts) |
| Qazi | (Arabic) | Religious Judge |
| Riba | (Arabic) | Usury |
| Risala | (Arabic) | Treatise |
| Salaf | (Arabic) | Predecessor |
| Samasta | (Malayalam) | Whole, entire |
| Sangham | (Malayalam) | Association |
| Sayyid, Syed | (Arabic) | Decendant of the Prophet |
| Sharia | (Arabic) | Islamic Code of Law |
| Shirk | (Arabic) | Polytheism |
| Sufi | (Arabic) | One who holds the doctrine in practices a form of Islamic mysticism, 'Tassawuf' |

| | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| Sunnah | (Arabic) | Words and deeds of Prophet (Tradition) |
| Tafsir | (Arabic) | Interpretation |
| Tuhfat | (Arabic) | Presentation |
| Talikettu Kalyanam | (Malayalam) | The ceremony of tying the <i>tali</i> (the neckles that symbolises marriage) |
| Taluk | (Malayalam) | Subdivision of a district |
| Tanzim | (Arabic) | Reform |
| Taqlid | (Arabic) | Unquestioning obedience to religious tradition |
| Tariqa | (Arabic) | The mystic path of a <i>sufi</i> . |
| Tawassul | (Arabic) | Invoking the intercesions of Saints. |
| Tawhid | (Arabic) | The Unity of Allah |
| Thangal | (Malayalam) | An honorific applied to a descendant of the prophet Muhammad. |
| Thirantukuli | (Malayalam) | The Ceremony performed when a girl attains puberty. |
| Ulema | (Arabic) | Learned in the Islamic religion. |
| Ummat | (Arabic) | Muslim community |
| Waqf | (Arabic) | Property given as an endowment, whose income is available for religous purpose in Islam. |
| Yatheemkhana | (Arabi-Persian) | Orphanage |
| Zakat | (Arabic) | Legal alms in Islam |