

**SOCIAL STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN KERALA  
IN THE LIGHT OF QUR'AN AND HADITH**

**with special reference to the works of Vaikom Mohammed Basheer:  
An Analytical Study**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that material in this dissertation entitled “ *Social Status of Muslim Women in Kerala in The Light of Qur’an and Hadith with special reference to the works of Vaikom Mohammed Basheer : An Analytical Study*” submitted by me is an original research work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University/ Institution .

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*Dedicated*

*To*

MERCIFUL ALMIGHTY

*And*

*Caring parents*

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## INTRODUCTION

The social status of women in general is neither a new issue nor a fully settled one. The social role of Muslim women is rapidly evolving in *Kerala*<sup>1</sup>. Muslim girls were not allowed to go out of the house when they grew up. They were assigned kitchen and groomed to be a wife and a 'model woman' at their in-laws' house. So, they were denied the education and social participation.

Islam has given a dignified position to women. She is one of the two wheels of the society which has equal importance. But she has been negated all the allowances and respects to her. Certain social circumstances kept her behind the walls. It considered women only a medium for breeding and a machine for serving. .

While emerging from the rigid orthodoxy of the past, the Muslim community in Kerala still draws guidance from the *Qur'an*<sup>2</sup> and the *Hadith*<sup>3</sup>. It has witnessed drastic reform in the situation. Now *Muslim*<sup>4</sup> girls getting higher, professional education, occupy good career, actively involved in the social life.

The status of Muslim women in Kerala is changing. Social reformist movements in Kerala among Muslims, from the late nineteenth century onwards, have played a key role in bridging the sharp dualism between the orthodoxy and the 'modern'-educated class, in promoting 'modern' as well as religious education, including women's education. The revolutionary contribution of literary men through novels, short stories, essays, plays etc were key in this voyage.

The words of Vaikom Mohammed Basheer (1908-1994), the emperor of the world of words, enlighten the society again and again. He was the revolutionary of the age who brought out the Muslim women from the darkness which was rampant inside and outside.

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<sup>1</sup> Kerala: A state in southern part of India

<sup>2</sup> Qur'an: the sacred book of Islam, regarded by Muslims as the word of Allah that was revealed to Muhammad.

<sup>3</sup> Hadith: the sayings of prophet Muhammed

<sup>4</sup> Muslim: those who believe in Islam

Yes, his novels are born out of feverish furnace of experience. His characters were realistic as well as representative. *Kunjutachumma*<sup>5</sup>, stepping upon her *methiyadi*<sup>6</sup> proclaims and propagates the then existing superstitious and meaningless social custom. She also insist *Kunjupattumma*<sup>7</sup> to observe all the decorum of behaviour because she is the dear granddaughter of Anamakkar. The helpless man *Vattanadima*<sup>8</sup> who had come to marry the daughter of Anamakkar on an elephant. The innocent Kunjupattumma who is imprisoned in the darkness of ignorance and superstitions speaks to us the whole story of human transformation when one is nourished by love and light.

Basheer draws the pathetic condition of Muslim society with all its hue and humour. The Holy Qur'an is repeatedly recited out without knowing or bothering about the meaning of it. Yes, Basheer has a good role in transforming ignorant Muslim community to learners and researchers of Quran and other disciplines.

A Muslim is not one who wears a particular dress. A Muslim is not one who hates non Muslims. But a Muslim is a learned man, kind and compassionate to others and above all he must know what Qur'an and *Sunna*<sup>9</sup>. The novel "Me Granddad had an elephant" is a typical one in this aspect. Similarly other works of Basheer also try to enlighten the society. Most stories and characters are in this background.

The present study focuses on the current status of Muslim women in Kerala in the light of Basheer's writings in an Islamic perspective. It finds out what is the stand and status of women in Islam. It critically observes what role was assigned by the Kerala society to Muslim women with a historical perspective. It analyses the interventions, interpretation and reformation of Basheer in the social arena of Muslim women in Kerala. Finally it reviews the current status of Muslim women and compares the teachings of Qur'an and projection of Basheer.

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<sup>5</sup> Kunjutachumma: a female character in Basheer Novel 'me granddad 'ad an Elephant!'

<sup>6</sup> Methiyadi: old model slippers being used in Kerala before independence.

<sup>7</sup> Kunjupattumma: a female character in Basheer Novel 'me granddad 'ad an elephant!'

<sup>8</sup> Vattanadima: a male character in Basheer Novel 'me granddad 'ad an Elephant!'

<sup>9</sup> Sunna: an Arabic term for sayings and doings of prophet Muhammed.



### **Relevance of my study**

Basheer, being the emperor of Malayalam literary world, is discussed and reviewed in various aspects. The analysis of the social transformation of Muslim women in Kerala, their conformity with Islamic teachings with Basheer's apparition is seldom done. The present study tries to fill this gap.

The study has socio-cultural and literal dimensions as it deals with the transformation of social status of women as depicted in some literature. The scope of the study again increases as it discusses the social upliftment of the half of the society, i.e. the women.

Woman has an important role in society. She is the backbone of the coming generation. Her role in the family is very important. Society needs her assistance, presence and contribution on various service sectors. Simply life can't move without woman.

But Muslim women in Kerala still do face many social and morale restrictions which prevent her from leading a good social life.

There are many aspects for this social restrictions , such as:

1. Religious Orthodoxy.
2. Negative impact of religious education.
3. Social bias and prejudices towards women in Muslim society.

### **Objectives of my study**

The major objectives of the present study are the following:-

1. To understand the social status of women in Islam and in Islamic countries.
2. To make a historical review of the transformation of the social status of Muslim women in Kerala,
3. To make a brief review of the works of Vaikam Muhammed Basheer with reference to the status of Muslim women.

To study three novels of Basheer and analyse how Muslim women characters have been projected in this Novels. What are the issues and problems of Muslim women he highlighted through his Novels. For that purpose, I selected three Novels of Basheer.

a. Me grandad 'd an elephant!

b. Childhood friend.

c. Pathumma's Goat.

4. To assess the current social status of Muslim women in Kerala.

5. To review the current social status of Muslim women in Kerala, Islamic teaching and Basheer's words altogether..

#### **Methodology- Secondary data analysis.**

The study is analytical in nature. It reviews three selected novels of Vaikom Mohammed Basheer. The selection of novels are purposive as the story, characters and theme are more close to the subject. To understand the social status of Muslim women secondary sources are used, mainly the Holy Qur'an, Hadith and works of Muslim scholars. The data regarding the current status of Muslim women is taken from various publications and reports. A primary observatory method and interview are also used for the purpose.

'Status' has been defined as the position an individual has in society by virtue of having to perform certain roles. Her social position includes position in the family, occupational hierarchy, politics and religion.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Scheme of the study**

This study is presented in four chapters. The introduction introduces the research problem. The first chapter analyses the social status of women in Islam, the status of Muslim women in Kerala with a historical perspective is discussed in the second chapter.

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<sup>10</sup> Indu Menon.M, 'Status of Muslim women in India', 1976, P. 30

In the third chapter a detailed description of the works of Basheer, features of characters and their social significance are given. The current status of Muslim women in Kerala is analysed in the fourth chapter. And last the summary and conclusion.

#### **Limitations of my study**

1. This study required wide knowledge in social sciences, sociology, statistics and Islam. My limitations in these areas affected on the study.
2. My personal limits have a negative impact on this study. This work is not a perfect one.

## Chapter-1

# The Status of Woman in Islam

The status of women who are the centre of the human society is neither a new issue nor a fully settled one. While she is serving the society in its perfection, the door to the mainstream is half closed in front of her. Since in the Western culture and in cultures influenced by it there exists a disparity between men and women, there is more need for stating *Islam's*<sup>11</sup> position on important issues in a clear way. Family, society and ultimately the whole of mankind is treated by Islam on an ethical basis. Differentiation in sex is neither a credit nor a drawback for the sexes. What makes one valuable and respectable in the eyes of *Allah*<sup>12</sup>, the Creator of mankind and the universe, is neither one's prosperity, position, intelligence, physical strength nor beauty, but only one's piety<sup>13</sup>.

The attitude of the Qur'an and the early Muslims bear witness to the fact that woman is, at least, as vital to life as man himself, and that she is not inferior to him nor is she one of the lower species. The status of woman was taken for granted to be equal to that of man. It was a matter of course, a matter of fact, and no one, then, considered it as a problem at all. Islam has given woman rights and privileges.

The holy Quran gives right perception about the humanity. It says

"O Mankind, keep your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate (of same kind) and from them twain has spread a multitude of men and women" (Qur'an 4: 1).

Stressing this noble and natural conception, Qur'an states:

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<sup>11</sup> Islam: the religion being followed by Muslims all over the world.

<sup>12</sup> Allah: the God being worshiped by Muslims.

<sup>13</sup> Qur'an 49:13

“He (God) it is who did create you from a single soul and there from did create his mate, that he might dwell with her (in love)...” (Qur'an 7:189)

“The Creator of heavens and earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves ...” Qur'an (42: 11)

“And Allah has given you mates of your own nature, and has given you from your mates, children and grandchildren, and has made provision of good things for you. Is it then in vanity that they believe and in the grace of God that they disbelieve?” Qur'an 16:72

The Qur'an provides clear-cut evidence that woman is completely equated with man in the sight of God in terms of her rights and responsibilities.

In terms of religious obligations, such as the Daily Prayers, Fasting and Pilgrimage, woman is no different from man. In some cases indeed, woman has certain advantages over man.

Despite the social acceptance of female infanticide among some Arabian tribes, the Qur'an forbade this custom, and considered it a crime like any other murder<sup>14</sup>. Far from saving the girl's life so that she may later suffer injustice and inequality, Islam requires kind and just treatment to her.

The Qur'an clearly indicates that marriage is sharing between the two halves of the society, and that its objectives, besides perpetuating human life, are emotional well-being and spiritual harmony. Its bases are love and mercy.

Among the most impressive verses in the Qur'an about marriage is the following.

"And among His signs is this: That He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest, peace of mind in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are signs for people who reflect." (*Qur'an* 30:21).

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid 81:8, 9, 16:58, 59, 6:140.

According to Islamic Law, a woman cannot be forced to marry anyone without her consent.

*Ibn Abbas*<sup>15</sup> reported that a girl came to the Messenger of God, Muhammad (P.), and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice . . . (between accepting the marriage or invalidating it)<sup>16</sup>. In another version, the girl said: "Actually I accept this marriage but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right (to force a husband on them)".<sup>17</sup>

Besides all other provisions for her protection at the time of marriage, it was specifically decreed that woman has the full right to her *Mahr*<sup>18</sup>, a marriage gift, which is presented to her by her husband and is included in the nuptial contract, and that such ownership does not transfer to her father or husband<sup>19</sup>. The concept of Mahr in Islam is neither an actual or symbolic price for the woman, as was the case in certain cultures, but rather it is a gift symbolizing love and affection.

The rules for married life in Islam are clear and in harmony with upright human nature. In consideration of the physiological and psychological make-up of man and woman, both have equal rights and claims on one another,

Over and above her basic rights as a wife come the right which is emphasized by the Qur'an and is strongly recommended by the Prophet (P); kind treatment and companionship.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibn Abbas: a companion of Prophet Mohammed.

<sup>16</sup> Musnad Ibn Hanbal no. 2469.

Musnad Ibn Hanbal: is a Hadith collection, is one of the important Hadith book.

<sup>17</sup> Sunanu Ibn maja, no. 1873.

Sunanu Ibn Maja: is a famous Hadith Collection book.

<sup>18</sup> Mahr: bridal Money, it is being given by bridegroom to the bride.

<sup>19</sup> Qur'an 4:4

The Qur'an states:

"...But consort with them in kindness, for if you hate them it may happen that you hate a thing wherein God has placed much good." (Qur'an 4: 19).

Prophet Muhammad. (P) Said:

The best of you is the best to his family and I am the best among you to my family.

The most perfect believers are the best in conduct and best of you are those who are best to their wives<sup>20</sup>.

Behold, many women came to Muhammad's wives complaining against their husbands (because they beat them) - - those (husbands) are not the best of you.<sup>21</sup>

As the woman's right to decide about her marriage is recognized, so also her right to seek an end for an unsuccessful marriage is recognized. To provide for the stability of the family, however, and in order to protect it from hasty decisions under temporary emotional stress, certain steps and waiting periods should be observed by men and women seeking divorce. Considering the relatively more emotional nature of women, a good reason for asking for divorce should be brought before the judge. Like the man, however, the woman can divorce her husband without resorting to the court, if the nuptial contract allows that.

Islam decreed a right of which woman was deprived both before Islam and after it (even as late as this century), the right of independent ownership. According to Islamic Law, woman's right to her money, real estate, or other properties is fully acknowledged. This right undergoes no change whether she is single or married. She retains her full rights to buy, sell, mortgage or lease any or all her properties. It is nowhere suggested in the Law that a woman is a minor simply because she is a female. It is also noteworthy that such

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<sup>20</sup> Ibn-Hanbal, No. 7396

<sup>21</sup> Sahih Sunan Abu Dawood.

right applies to her properties before marriage as well as to whatever she acquires thereafter.

With regard to the woman's right to seek employment it should be stated first that Islam regards her role in society as a mother and a wife as the most sacred and essential one. Neither maids nor baby-sitters can possibly take the mother's place as the educator of an upright, complex free, and carefully-reared children. Such a noble and vital role, which largely shapes the future of nations, cannot be regarded as "idleness".

However, there is no decree in Islam which forbids woman from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, especially in positions which fit her nature and in which society needs her most. Examples of these professions are nursing, teaching (especially for children), and medicine. Moreover, there is no restriction on benefiting from woman's exceptional talent in any field. Even for the position of a judge, where there may be a tendency to doubt the woman's fitness for the post due to her more emotional nature, we find early Muslim scholars such as *Abu-Hanifa*<sup>22</sup> and *Al-Tabary*<sup>23</sup> holding that there is nothing wrong with it. In addition, Islam restored to woman the right of inheritance, after she herself was an object of inheritance in some cultures. Her share is completely hers and no one can make any claim on it, including her father and her husband.

"Unto men (of the family) belongs a share of that which Parents and near kindred leave, and unto women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be a little or much - a determinate share." ((Qur'an 4:7).

Her share in most cases is one-half the man's share, with no implication that she is worth half a man! It would seem grossly inconsistent after the overwhelming evidence of woman's equitable treatment in Islam, to make such an inference. This variation in inheritance rights is only consistent with the variations in financial responsibilities of man and woman according to the Islamic Law. Man in Islam is fully responsible for the

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<sup>22</sup> Abu-Hanifa: Famous Islamic Scholar of 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D

<sup>23</sup> Al-Tabary: Famous Islamic scholar b.838 A.D



maintenance of his wife, his children, and in some cases of his needy relatives, especially the females. This responsibility is neither waived nor reduced because of his wife's wealth or because of her access to any personal income gained from work, rent, profit, or any other legal means.

Woman, on the other hand, is far more secure financially and is far less burdened with any claims on her possessions. Her possessions before marriage do not transfer to her husband and she even keeps her maiden name. She has no obligation to spend on her family out of such properties or out of her income after marriage. She is entitled to the "Mahr" which she takes from her husband at the time of marriage. If she is divorced, she may get alimony from her ex-husband.

An examination of the inheritance law within the overall framework of the Islamic Law reveals not only justice but also an abundance of compassion for woman.

During the Caliphate of *Omar Ibn al-Khattab*<sup>24</sup>, a woman argued with him in the mosque, proved her point, and caused him to declare in the presence of people: "A woman is right and Omar is wrong."

The attitude of Islam to women can be summarised as follows:

Woman is recognized by Islam as a full and equal partner of man in the procreation of humankind. He is the father; she is the mother, and both are essential for life. Her role is not less vital than his. By this partnership she has an equal share in every aspect; she is entitled to equal rights; she undertakes equal responsibilities, and in her there are as many qualities and as much humanity as there are in her partner. To this equal partnership in the reproduction of human kind.

She is equal to man in bearing personal and common responsibilities and in receiving rewards for her deeds. She is acknowledged as an independent personality, in possession

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<sup>24</sup> Omar Ibn-Al Kattab: a companion of Prophet Mohammed and second ruler of Muslim World after the death of Prophet Mohammed.

of human qualities and worthy of spiritual aspirations. Her human nature is neither inferior to nor deviant from that of man. Both are members of one another.

She is equal to man in the pursuit of education and knowledge. When Islam enjoins the seeking of knowledge upon Muslims, it makes no distinction between man and woman. Almost fourteen centuries ago, Prophet Muhammad declared that the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male and female. This declaration was very clear and was implemented by Muslims throughout history.

She is entitled to freedom of expression as much as man is. Her sound opinions are taken into consideration and cannot be disregarded just because she happens to belong to the female sex. Besides there were occasions when Muslim women expressed their views on legislative matters of public interest, and stood in opposition to the *Caliph*<sup>25</sup>, who then accepted the sound arguments of these women.

Historical records show that women participated in public life with the early Muslims, especially in times of emergencies. Women used to accompany the Muslim armies engaged in battles to nurse the wounded, prepare supplies, and serve the warriors, and so on. They were not shut behind iron bars or considered worthless creatures and deprived of souls.

Apart from recognition of woman as an independent human being acknowledged as equally essential for the survival of humanity, Islam has given her a share of inheritance. Before Islam, she was not only deprived of that share but was herself considered as property to be inherited by man. Out of that transferable property Islam made an heir, acknowledging the inherent human qualities in woman. Whether she is a wife or mother, a sister or daughter, she receives a certain share of the deceased kin's property, a share which depends on her degree of relationship to the deceased and the number of heirs. This share is hers, and no one can take it away or disinherit her. Even if the deceased

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<sup>25</sup> Caliph: is the term in Arabic for Ruler. After the death of the Prophet Muhammed four rulers came, they known as Caliph.

wishes to deprive her by making a will to other relations or in favours of any other cause, the Law will not allow him to do so. Any proprietor is permitted to make his will within the limit of one-third of his property, so he may not affect the rights of his heirs, men and women. In the case of inheritance, the question of quality and sameness is fully applicable. In principle, both man and woman are equally entitled to inherit the property of the deceased relations but the portions they get may vary. In some instances man receives two shares whereas woman gets one only.

Religious scholars explain on this discrimination towards women to inherit the property of deceased relations:

1. Islam entitled man the responsibility to find livelihood for his family.
2. Women are entitled to 'Mahr' (bridal money). She need not spent that money.

## WOMEN IN ISLAMIC COUNTRIES

The increasing political involvement and representation of Muslim women in West Asian and other Islamic countries is a welcome development. Islamic countries like Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia have had woman heads of state –Tansu Ciller, Benazir Bhutto, Khalida Zia and Sheikh Haseena and Meghawati Sukarnoputri respectively. Arab nations like Kuwait have elected women as members of legislative bodies.

Increasing representation of Muslim women in the fields of education and social work is another equally important development. Saudi Arabia has for instance envisaged world class universities to be set up, which are co-educational and where female students will be given opportunities to develop their educational qualifications and skills. Nations like Iran have promoted the role of women in the field of social work. The spread of literacy among women in conventional Muslim societies has resulted in the crumbling of orthodoxy in nations like Turkey.

In Saudi Arabia. 55% of the graduates are women, their share in the workforce is barely 5%.they maybe permitted to study abroad if their husbands or close relatives accompany them. Currently women are permitted to work in strictly segregated work facilities. They are mainly employed in education and healthcare, with lesser opportunities in business, philanthropy, banking and the media. They are barred from fields like engineering and pharmacy.<sup>26</sup>

In Arab countries, the growing drive to indigenize the workforce has resulted in increased employment opportunities for women. Educated women fill the vacancies formerly occupied by migrant workers from elsewhere.

The advent of oil wealth has improved the financial status of women though their roles in business and commerce is limited. Their representation though limited is increasing in the

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<sup>26</sup> Gulshan Dietl, 'Sausi Arabia', page:12

financial and commercial spheres. Along with political representation, financial status has improved the standard of life of Muslim women.

In 2005, women were allowed to vote for seats on the board of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The results were stunning: Lama Suleiman and Nasha Taher were elected on a twelve member board. Since then, Naida Bakhurji has won a seat on the ten-member board of the Saudi Engineer's Council in its first-ever election. They have now staked their claims to contest for elections to seats on the board of the Saudi journalist's society. There are reports that they might be inducted into the judiciary and rule on cases involving women.<sup>27</sup>

Increasing opportunities for education, financial security and political representation have boosted the social mobility of women in Islamic countries.

Another relevant change in recent times is the growth of new healthcare facilities and increased access for women to such facilities for their personal well being and reproductive health. This has resulted in greater awareness and confidence in terms of health and especially reproductive health.

Similarly, access, to new technologies of communication, information and entertainment, like the internet, mobile telephony and the television have provided new vistas for Muslim women and Muslim society in general to widen their horizons. The emergence of news and entertainment channels like Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabia and Saudia have radically altered the self-image by bringing to their living rooms images from around the globe. They also provide opportunities for entertainment, like television serials and even commercial advertisements that are otherwise forbidden in societies like Saudi Arabia.

Iran:

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<sup>27</sup> Gulshan Dietl, 'Sausi Arabia', page:12

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, women have equal opportunity in education. They occupy more than 60% per cent of the seats in the higher education level and University level.

Employment opportunities for women are limited to some areas like teaching, healthcare, and military.

Constitutionally also there are limits for women. In politics their representation is less.

Women have maintained their place in the public sphere despite coming under increasing threat and violence. Film makers like Jafar Panahi have been jailed. The nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi has been under constant threat. As a human rights campaigner, Shirin Ebadi has come under constant criticism of the ruling regime. Ebadi has criticized the lack of involvement of women in the public sphere. The Ahmedinejad government has one female minister, a first in the history of the Islamic Republic. As a result of constant campaigning at home and abroad, Iranian women have gained a certain space for themselves. Film-makers like Sameera Makhmalbaf have won worldwide renown and acclaim.

Similarly the status of Muslim women is pitiable in lesser developed Muslim states like Afghanistan where female legislators and candidates have been killed in what is considered a modern democracy. So is the case with conflict ridden zones such as Iraq.

Muslim women in Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and North Africa are generally well-off. They enjoy state benefits and right to education and maternity leave and right to inherit property.

Non-Arab Islamic societies have different ways of dealing with their women. For instance:

The Indonesian women have never known the restrictive social customs of veiling and segregation prevalent in Islam. The Dutch influence is predominantly marked here. After independence there was marked improvement in education. The constitution provided women with equality of educational rights. Co-education

was established from the primary to the “University level. Girls are admitted to all levels of education and the status of male and female students is the same.<sup>28</sup>

From such readings it can be seen that much of the misogynistic tendencies within Islam are located in geographic and social contexts and not central to the religion per se. The same can be said about the women of Turkey that they are more liberated and well educated than their counterparts elsewhere. After the Europeanisation of Turkey under Mustapha Kemal Pasha `Ataturk,' women were discouraged from wearing of the veil as well as from practicing the purdah system of seclusion. Another major step in post-World War Turkey was the conversion of the Turkish language script from the Arabic script into the more amenable Roman script followed by English, French and most European languages. As a result of the conversion of script, the nature of the demography in terms of literacy was radically altered. Whereas illiteracy before was as close to 70% after the conversion of the script from Arabic into Roman, the literacy rate was boosted to nearly 90%. The ideal circumstances provided by the progressive and modernist government under Mutapha Kemal Pasha `Ataturk' and subsequent westward leaning politicians have helped shape Turkish polity and society. In the light of these arguments it can be seen that Islam as a religion and Muslims as a people are not averse to the idea of modernisation and modern education systems. Even in present-day Turkey a number of women, especially rural women practice the wearing of the veil. Such circumstances have to be taken into consideration while juxtaposing the traditional with the modern.

Turkey as a nation has been a beacon of modernisation for the rest of the Muslim world and its stature has increased with its bid for a place in the European Union. Turkey has had female leaders and premiers like Tansu Ciller who came into power with the support of the Islamic Welfare party.

Nigeria with a large Muslim as well as Christian population was the site of religious riots after the decision was taken to adopt sharia law. The sharia has been a serious bone of

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<sup>28</sup> Indu Menon.M, 'Status of Muslim Women in India', page:15.

contention in multi-religious societies with muslims insisting on their right to remarry and divorce according to their own interpretation of the sharia.

In war-torn Iraq, the plight of women has fallen to pitifully low standards after the fall of the Saddam regime. Kidnappings and molestations by Iraqi malcontents and house-to-house raids conducted by the invading troops have sapped the morale of the populace in general and its women in particular. After a long hiatus the Nur-al-Maliki regime has a woman as its speaker. Yet the condition of the Iraqi nation and its women is precarious under the invading forces. Incidents like the one in Haditha where the entire members of a family were shot by US armed forces and then the surviving minor girl was violated serve as reminders that the possibility of feminine emancipation under invasion remains a mirage.

In other regions of strife such as the Palestinian territory and Chechnya, women have little political or public involvement, but are often used as fighter and suicide bombers and as valorized martyrs. In the light of the video broadcasts of suicide bombers by organisations like the Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the use of women for cynical ends has touched a new low.

In conflict zones, the role of the woman is limited to:

1. Woman as the nurturer, who provides food and sustenance not only to her own children but to the struggling populace as a whole.
2. Woman as the symbol of defiance and glory. Women are valorized as heroines in the path of the 'cause' who have to be emulated and who serve as a source of inspiration to both men and women alike.
3. Woman as the producer of the next generation. Here women are seen as the locus of production and survival without which the entire 'race' and 'nation' will die out.
4. Women as the transmitters of the values and knowledge particular to the society in conflict to the next generation. This role is seen as crucial because without it the 'cause' would die out in a generation's time.



All of these roles take women simply as objects and do not give respect or importance to her existence as a human being.

In Egypt, the former UAR which was the home of the legendary Cleopatra, the status of Muslim women, despite extremist impositions is slightly better compared to other regions in the Arab World. Women in Egypt have a role in the public sphere and they are part of the cultural intelligentsia.

In Afghanistan one of the most backward Muslim states in the world, the status and social role of Muslim women are pitiable. The veil was imposed in 1959. Especially during the rule of the Taliban, women were subjected to inhuman indignities. Working women were proscribed from their employment. Some were promised salaries at home but even this did not materialise. Draconian punishments were meted out to women who were seen in public without male escort or who fell outside religious regulations in terms of dress code. During the subsequent US invasion and the war on terror the situation of women has not drastically improved.

The violence and bloodshed and general mayhem have forced many women indoors. Female illiteracy is over 90%. Ethnic minorities like the Hazaraas were persecuted under the Taliban regime and their status has not been radically improved under the present Karzai dispensation. The women from ethnic minorities have been subjected to further humiliations such as public beatings and stonings. Much has not altered under the newly imposed democratic regime after the US-led invasion. Female emancipation has been mostly in the realm of media led tokenism as in the participation in the miss universe contest of the US-based Afghan woman Vida Samazdai.

The situation of women in Pakistan is comparatively better off. In terms of primary education of girls, Pakistan lags far behind the indices of developed countries. But in the case of higher education there have been many elite women who have actively sought their careers in the fields of medicine and science and research. Pakistani women from the upper elite classes have access to university education and can be said to be equal to their male compatriots who can even call their husbands by their first names in conjugal

relationships, since Islam has placed no such prohibition. The Principal of the elite Kinnaird College says that the remarkable growth in the higher education of women is the most important change in Pakistan.<sup>29</sup>

Another notable facet is that Pakistani women are granted full political rights. They are given adult suffrage and freedom to contest in election. Pakistan even had a female Prime Minister in the late Benazir Bhutto, though the tragic circumstances of her death hardly stand that nation in good stead. The bestowal of equal rights in the political arena has been a major factor in the emancipation of Pakistani women. Political empowerment of women and its social impact have been huge in terms of the improvement in the social status of women in Pakistan. In other ways also the Muslim women of that country have emerged from behind the veil to take up their rightful place in the field of literature and culture.

In urban communities the wife is not thought of as a chattel and has equal rights as the husband and often even calls him by name<sup>30</sup>. Unfortunately such egalitarian husband wife relationships are confined to the urban elite. An account of an egalitarian marriage between a western educated Muslim man and his conventional Muslim wife is recounted by Moni Mohsin in her newspaper column 'Diary of a social butterfly.' In the rural and hinterland areas of Pakistan, the situation is pitiable as tribal and patriarchal norms still rule the roost. Honour killings and foeticides makes the lives of the womenfolk among the rural and the urban poor in Pakistan hardly enviable. Even non-resident Pakistanis in the "UK and elsewhere are adamant on 'arranging' the marriages of their daughters with spouses of the parents' choice and not of her own. Most often these spouse are 'imported' from backward rural areas of Pakistan. They tend to be incompatible in terms of ideas and sensibilities and education with the western educated girls.

While studying the evolution of contemporary Muslim societies their emerging dynamism has to be held in focus. Woodsmall's 1961 account of Pakistani women may

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<sup>29</sup> Ruth Frances Woodsmall, 'Women and the New East' 1960, page: 111

<sup>30</sup> Barbara E. Ward, 'Women in the New Asia', 1963.

be outdated today as that nation has gone through much turmoil and tumult over the past decade and as a result we have a profusion of writers and artists both male and female emerging from Pakistan including Moni Mohsin and Fatima Bhutto. The ideal invocation of a Pakistani Muslim milieu where the women can be situated is not feasible. In the middle of political and social turmoil in present day Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Middle East and much of the Islamic world including Iran, it is difficult to identify the indices of female empowerment as the very existence and liberty of women are at stake owing to religious extremism, terrorism and foreign invasions.

The evolving dynamism of much of the Muslim world has much to do with the implication that education and social upliftment have for women in general and Muslim women in particular. The emergence of radical Islam in Pakistan and elsewhere has negative implications for the future of the women in the Islamic world. These aberrations have to be rectified after their identification and analysis. The electoral processes in the new democracies in the Middle East have left limited effect on the improvement of the plight of the women in those countries. Across the Islamic world from the erstwhile Yugoslavia to the Indonesia and the countries were the present-day war on terror is raging, women have been the major victims of violence and torture. Often the family structures that protect women have been ripped apart. More disturbing are the tendencies in such areas gripped by violence to hegemonise the women by barbaric practices like kidnapping women for ransom. In the Muslim republics of the erstwhile Soviet Union also, the status of women have not improved much.

### Summary:

The status of Muslim women in Arab, Islamic and Muslim majority countries needs improvement.

Actually, Islam has stood for the upliftment and empowerment of women. The social status of women in Arabia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD was very poor. When Islam emerged in Arabia during that period, women were denied their basic rights, social mobility, dignity etc. Islam contributed much to the empowerment of women.

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But now, in the modern age, it is very pitiable to see that Muslim societies are using Islam to prevent Muslim women from leading a social life of desirable quality.

What Islam in fact meant in implementing a certain dress code for women was, to help her to lead a well-balanced social life, including her social mobility, participation in employment, opportunities etc. But surprisingly, the very same dress code and religious texts have been used to prevent her from almost all of these.

It is a serious issue which requires attention. The practice of misinterpretation of Islam to target Muslim women's rights has to be questioned and changed. Muslim women must come forward to assert her dignity and make her contribution by taking up their rightful roles in society.

## Chapter-2

### SOCIAL STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN KERALA IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### Muslims in Kerala:

Kerala has one of the oldest Muslim communities in India. Muslims constitute almost a quarter of the population of the state and the community has representation in the political sphere as well. The multi-religious demography of the state has made it a curious mixture of religious pluralism and also of arcane orthodoxy.

The oldest historical account written by a Keralite is the 'Thuhfathul Mujahidin' written by Sheikh Zainuddin Makkhdoom written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to praise the valour of Indian seamen confronted with the Portuguese invaders who were harassing the western coast of India after the landing of Vasco da Gama in Calicut in 1492.

The traditional account of the introduction of Islam to the Malabar coast is recorded by Zayn-ud-din, an historian of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He states that the conversion of the king "*Cheraman Perumal*"<sup>31</sup> occurred during the lifetime of the prophet. A company of pilgrims from Arabia were making a journey to visit Adam's footprint in Ceylon and on their arrival at the *Cranganore*<sup>32</sup> port in Kerala they paid a visit to the raja and told him that a miracle occurred with the prophet splitting the moon. Perumal was captivated by the report of the exhibition of such supernatural power. He was converted and when the pilgrims returned from their journey to Arabia, he secretly joined them after

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<sup>31</sup> King Cheraman Perumal ruled Kerala on 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D

<sup>32</sup> Cranganore: Kodungalloor sea port.

abdicated his throne and went with them to Arabia to live with the prophet who had not yet fled to Medina.

The king remained in Arabia for some time and then he was on the point of returning to his country for the purpose of erecting mosques, he fell sick and died. On his death-bed he requested his companions not to abandon the proposed missionary visit to Kerala".<sup>33</sup>

As a result the introduction of Islam in Kerala was by peaceful means and it could not be equated with the stereotypes of Islam as a religion. In Malabar the influence of Islam became so entrenched that Arab merchants who started trade relations with the Western coast often married local women and settled here and came to be known as *'mappilas'*<sup>34</sup>, ('husband' in local parlance).

One interesting feature of the spread of Islam on the Malabar Coast was the part played by the Zamorin of Calicut in the coming of the Muslims. He is said to have deliberately encouraged the lower castes to convert to Islam in order to have sufficient sailors to man his war ships. And to this reason, he ordered, 'that in every family of fishermen in his dominion, one or more male members should be brought up as Mohemmadans.'...So rapidly was the process of conversion that had the Portugese not arrived on the scene when they did, it is claimed, the whole of Malabar Coast would have become solidly Mohemmadans.<sup>35</sup>

Ibn-Batuta (1307-1377) the legendary traveller and chronicler of Indian history and life, also came upon the Malabar Coast. He has written about the vast riches of the merchants of Malabar and the trade relations that they had established with various parts of the

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<sup>33</sup> Titus Murray.T, 'Islam in India and Pakistan: A religious history of Islam in India and Pakistan', page:38.

<sup>34</sup> Mappila: is a term being used for Muslims in Kerala.

<sup>35</sup> Titus Murray.T, 'Islam in India and Pakistan: A religious history of Islam in India and Pakistan', page:39

world. He also mentions the five mosques in the town of *Quilon*<sup>36</sup> in the Western Coast of India. Although the veracity of many of these reported facts are suspicious, there is no doubt that there was a certain mercenary dynamism in the *Malabar*<sup>37</sup> coast which induced people to accept and embrace other religions and replace their older faiths with new ones. Such was the power of the trade relations that shaped the economy of India during the medieval period.

The Muslims of Kerala have not retained their caste structures with any degree of faithfulness that hark back their previous faith.

The very openness of the possibilities before the Muslims of south Asia is of the very essence of their situation and of their destiny.<sup>38</sup>

While dealing with the gender disparity that prevails among the Muslim community in Kerala, it is necessary to take into account the political participation and the extent of democratic involvement of the people in the state:

When the era of the *Congress*<sup>39</sup>-party dominance in politics began to end, Muslims found to their dismay that their identification with one party for so long meant that they were taken for granted and ignored and even distrusted by the others. *The Indian Union Muslim League*<sup>40</sup>, which survived in Kerala because of a communal balance peculiar to that state, pioneered the strategy of bargaining between two closely matched coalitions, centering on the Congress party and the Communists. So successful was this method that the Muslim League was eventually able to place its leader the late CH.Mohammed Koya in the Chief Ministership for some time.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Quilon: is a District in Kerala.

<sup>37</sup> Malabar: this area include Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur Districts.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Hardy, 'The crescent in the East: Islam in Asia Major', page:61.

<sup>39</sup> Congress: a Major political party in India.

<sup>40</sup> Indian Union Muslim League: is a political party mainly by Muslims.

<sup>41</sup> Syed Shahabuddin and Wright Jr, 'Muslim Minority Politics and Society', page:161.

## Educational and social status of Muslims in Kerala:

From the outset of the British colonial rule, there was a conflict between the traditional *Madrasa*<sup>42</sup> based education of the Muslims and the modern western education that was to be imparted under the Macauley programme.

For modern research *fiqh*<sup>43</sup> literature can be very informative. But for the *ulema*<sup>44</sup>, *fiqh* is the only authority for deciding the ills affecting modern life.<sup>45</sup> This was the prevailing attitude in Kerala at the threshold of the modern period in India.

The Muslims of Kerala suffered from the absence of modernizing reformers of calibre like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. But still, there have been organisations and movements like the Muslim Educational Society (*M.E.S*<sup>46</sup>) established by Dr. Gaffoor which today runs Medical and Engineering Colleges under its administration.

The Mappila rebellion of 1921, in which the Mappila Muslim Peasants of Malabar, rose up against their landlords and the British colonial rulers served as a watershed even in the history of the state. The Mappila rebellion came in the aftermath of the Khilafat agitation organized by Mahatma Gandhi and this agitation soon got coalesced with the peasant agitation in Kerala. It became a rebellion against the local landlords as well as the British.

Despite the ameliorating presence of Gandhian leaders like Muhammed Abdul Rahman Sahib, the rebellion took an ugly turn and became violent and communal in tone and characters. But historian like Dr.KN. Panikkar have called it a rebellion against the 'lord and state' meaning the feudal landlords and the British Colonial Government. The British colonial government took brutal measures to suppress the rebellion and its leader

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<sup>42</sup> Madrasa = School, Arabic word, Being used for Muslim Religious school in Kerala.

<sup>43</sup> Fiqh: jurisprudence in Islam.

<sup>44</sup> Ulema = Muslim Religious Scholars, is an Arabic word.

<sup>45</sup> Mushir- Ul- Haq, 'Islam in Secular India'.

<sup>46</sup> M.E.S: is a social movement in Kerala for educational development in the society especially for Muslims.



Variankunnathu Kunjahammad Haji was executed and another patriotic leader which gave it spiritual direction, Ali Musalliyar was exiled. This event further accentuated the alienation of the Muslim peasantry from the mainstream of the society and their access to education and social reform. Muslim women suffered the worst.

As a result of the rebellion and the brutal measures by which it was put down, the Muslims in the state became averse to learn the 'whiteman's language, ie English and even called learning English '*Haram*<sup>47</sup>', and proscribed it. The mother tongue of most people in Kerala, Malayalam was not learned by many Muslims for it was against their belief and Vaikom Mohammed Basheer ridicules the attitude of the early Muslims who called their mother tongue 'ariyanezhuthu' (script of the Aryans). This resulted in rampant illiteracy among the Muslims of the state. The situation finally started to improve after India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

The Muslim women of the state were denied their proper role in the civic sphere and this led to the establishment of a male hierarchy in the political structure in the state with regard to the Muslim community, even though there were early exceptions like Nabeesathu Beevi who was a member of the legislative assembly and deputy speaker of the Kerala state legislature.

The historian and writer V.Geetha in her introduction to 'Her Self' edited by J.Devika, cites the early writings and speeches of a Muslim woman, Haleema Beevi:

Muslim women desired a different transformation of the civic: in her call to Muslim women to participate in national life, Haleema Beevi pointed out that the Qur'an enjoined equality and that the prophet was himself, a harbinger of this radical parity between the sexes. Therefore, it behove Muslim women to step out of their homes and set their seal on national politics, by becoming a part of it. This neat manner of reconciling secular responsibilities with religious faith serve as a useful counter position to the emerging Hindu right's rhetoric of the nation and faith, which among other things led to the

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<sup>47</sup> Haram: Arabic word means forbidden.

partitioning of the subcontinent. Haleema Beevi's speech also points to the unfinished task of working through the texts and histories which encapsulate Muslim experiences of the modern, especially modern gender.<sup>48</sup>

A few Muslim women who were emancipated and educated like Haleema Beevi and Ayesha Mayan inspired others to enter into the national mainstream. Even today, the women's wing of the opposition Congress party, the *Mahila Congress*<sup>49</sup>, has a Muslim lady (Shanimol Usman) at its helm.

### Social status of Muslim Women in Kerala according to Qur'an and Hadith

In 1891, literate women constituted a mere 1.65 percent of all Muslim women in Travancore (Report on the census of Travancore 1891, Part 2:493). In 1931, it has gone up to just 3.1 (Report on the census of Travancore 1931:290). Travancore was the southernmost and most important colonial princely state in Kerala during the colonial British rule. Malabar to the north was a province under *Tippu Sultan's*<sup>50</sup> rule and became part of directly administered British territory after the fall of *Tippu Sultan* at the battle of Srirangapatnam. Malabar region therefore became educationally even more backward in comparison to Travancore, as the British Government took repressive measures against the local Muslims as revenge and persecuted them. Moreover, reformers like *Sree Narayana Guru*<sup>51</sup> were active among the lower caste Hindus in Travancore and he inspired Muslim leaders like *Vakkom Abdul Khadir Maulavi*<sup>52</sup> who raised his voice for the emancipation of women.

But today, Kerala has achieved 100% literacy and the Muslim womenfolk also have attained high literacy levels. This points out that the reform movements that occurred in pre-independence period and the post-1947 era had some degree of success.

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<sup>48</sup> Devika.j, 'Herself: Gender and early writings of Malayalee women'.

<sup>49</sup> Mahila Congress: female wing of Indian National Congress.

<sup>50</sup> Tippu Sultan: Mysore King, who fought against British Colonization.

<sup>51</sup> Sree Narayana Guru: a famous social reformer in Kerala.

<sup>52</sup> Vakkam Abdul Khadar Moulavi: is a famous Muslim reformist scholar in Kerala.

Due to the aversion to Modern western learning and the use of the *Arabi-Malayalam*<sup>53</sup> script, the Muslim women of Kerala were generally illiterate and educationally backward, even though they were rich repositories of folk tales and songs such as the *Mappila Pattu*<sup>54</sup>. They often had a wealth of information regarding the local flora and fauna, and traditional medicine and local history and local knowledge and information. But in the absence of proper systematic education, these talents were wasted and they received little or no encouragement to develop their innate qualities and abilities. The talented Muslim woman was traditionally confined to the interior of the house. There were early exceptions like Ayesha Mayan and Haleema Beevi. In her welcome speech to the Muslim Women's Conference of Travancore, Haleema beevi quotes the Hadith: 'Remember the prophet's words about the duties of a father: teach the child to write; give it a good name; conduct its marriage at the right age'.<sup>55</sup>

Ayesha Mayan (1914- ) was born in Tellichery<sup>56</sup>, in north Malabar. Her father was Vayaprath Kunnan Mayan Sahib, well know during the Khilafat agitaion in Malabar. She studied at the Queen Mary's College, Chennai and in St.Joseph's College Bangalore and was known as a brilliant student, a good public speaker and an accomplished tennis player. She was one of the earliest Muslim women to earn a university degree in Malabar, securing the highest mark among the women students from Malabar. She worked in Malabar as an instructor in the women's teacher's training school, as an assistant school inspectress and as the Mappila Educational Officer for Malabar and South Canara. She was active as a

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<sup>53</sup> Arabi Malayalam: a Malayalam script written in Arabic fonts and this was widely used by Muslims in Kerala.

<sup>54</sup> Mappila Pattu: a type Malayalm songs developed by Muslims in Kerala and is well known in Kerala.

<sup>55</sup> Muslim vanitha: 1938:105. Muslim Vanitha is a Malayalam Magazine was published in Kerala on 1938.

<sup>56</sup> Tellicherry = A famous City in Kannur District in North Kerala.

propagator of women's education, and headed the Kottayam Mahila Samajam in Malabar. In 1944, after her marriage, she emigrated to Sri Lanka.<sup>57</sup>

A magazine called 'Muslim Vanitha' (Muslim Woman) was published in 1938 by M.Haleema Beevi, whose husband was a compatriot of the reformist cleric Vakkom Abdul Khader Maulavi. This magazine called *Muslim Vanitha* which was later renamed as the more secular *Vanitha*, provided educated Muslim women like Ayesha Mayan a forum to voice their beliefs through its pages. These women often tended to take up employment in the educational arena as well, thus giving an impetus to learning among Muslim women. These women sought inspiration from the Qur'an and Hadith and tried to inspire their compatriots into accepting the realities of modern life and to come out. But their numbers were few and far between.

The Qur'an says that women have rights just as men have. Islam dictates that they are not the instruments of male whim; it even says that they are equals as twins are. Men have to toil ceaselessly under the pressures and burdens of life because women do not do enough. How hard a man must work each day, to maintain and satisfy a wife who constantly demands fancy clothes and ornaments! This must surely change. We know that women are capable of undertaking all activities performed by men. If until now, we were used to employing our hands to caress man's feet, we must now apply them to cool his brain and to wipe his sweat. In future, we are not slaves, circumscribed or frail. We must prove ourselves co-workers ready to help man in any field, anywhere. This is the message of freedom of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However there are few women and men in our land who have imbibed such consciousness. The wheel of time will not pause for us. I have a request to make to my sisters.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Devika.j, 'herself: Gender and early writings of Malayalee women'. Page:165.

<sup>58</sup> From 'Nammude Kartavyam'(our duty), *Muslim Vanitha*, July-August 1938:133-134.

Over the years, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, caste and religion have played a crucial role in the evolution of modern western education in Kerala. The first educational institutions in the modern tradition were established by the Basel German Evangelical Mission, the Church Mission Society and the London Mission Society. Therefore the evangelical and colonizing aspect of Western Education became a matter of concern for both Muslims and Hindus alike. The Nair Service Society (NSS), an organization of the upper caste Nair community set up colleges and professional institutes, starting the first ever private engineering college in *Palghat*<sup>59</sup>. The Maharaja of Travancore, Shri Chithira Thirunal set up the His Highness Maharaja's college for women in Thiruvananthapuram and the University College in Thiruvananthapuram, which was based on the model of the University College London.

The Muslim community of the state also responded to the demands of the situation. Thangal Kunju Musaliar, a rich cashew merchant based in *Quilon*<sup>60</sup> set up the TKM Arts and Science College and the TKM Engineering College in Quilon, which even today serve as institutions of excellence. Soon MES and other educational societies and private individuals and religious organisations started establishing schools and colleges in Kerala. In 1938, Dr.Habsha Marikkar, was the first Muslim woman from this state to earn an MBBS degree.

Muslim women's groups formed by educated elite women, organized meeting where their emancipation and equal opportunity and parity with men were discussed. Ayesha Mayan in her essay stresses that it is imperative of women to attend such meetings and actively participate in them, shedding any sort of reluctance due to shyness:

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<sup>59</sup> Palghat: a district in Kerala

<sup>60</sup> Quilon: is a District in Kerala near by Trivandrum.

You must organize and work to uplift the womenfolk of your land. It is the duty of every woman to attend women's meetings and be active as much as she can. Women are often shy when it comes to attending meetings. Yet they do not find it difficult to throng crowded bazaars and shops, or wriggle into crammed vehicles. Though women are provided with separate seating space in meetings, they are reluctant to attend them. The evil customs prevalent among us today, which spring from ignorance, are causing us great vexation and ruin. Therefore we must shed our languor at least now, and strive as far as possible for our common welfare. Therefore I pray that women must awake and act.<sup>61</sup>

In these respects, atleast the elite women of Kerala were emancipated to a certain degree, but the same cannot be said about the working class women and women of the lower middle class. In the same vein it can be said that there were many ideal circumstances for the growth of nationalist spirit among the women in Kerala due to the fervour created by the national movement of which many women were part of.

The particular matrilineal tradition followed by the Muslims of the North Malabar may also have contributed to the early success of women like Ayesha Mayan who hailed from Tellichery. In these respects the matrilineal Muslim community in Kerala were similar to the other major matrilineal group in the state-the Hindu Nairs. The emancipation of women and their status in the family and society were lesser issues in the matrilineal household rather than in the patrilocal and patriarchal households. The matrilineal nature of the household often meant that the women didn't have to be uprooted from their native villages and replanted, so to speak, in alien environments and where she would be at the mercy of the in-laws.

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<sup>61</sup> From 'Nammude Kartavyam'(our duty), *Muslim Vanitha*, July-August 1938:133-134.

The lowest female migration rates were found in Kerala and parts of *Tamil Nadu*<sup>62</sup>. Although the data was not disaggregated by rural or urban destination, Premi nonetheless attributes the low rates of migration in Kerala to two reasons: (1) large village size, which may reduce the pressure for village exogamy (2) the tradition of natal residence among matrilineal groups in some parts of Kerala.

Though the matrilineal tradition among the relatively affluent landed class might have improved the states of some of the women, the same could not be said of all the women since the migration of women from village to village and their mistreatment in the in-laws house is a constant feature of harassment cases including dowry demands, especially among the Muslims of Kerala.

The Muslim legal system, in which the *Qazi*<sup>63</sup> was the paramount authority on interpreting the *sharia*<sup>64</sup> laws, the rights of women were given a short shrift as the religious tradition didn't approve of or recognise the matrilineal tradition, despite there being evidence that prophet Muhammed himself had married a rich widow whose employee he was. Such a matrilineal tradition in Islam was neglected in the Kerala context. Muslim women from matrilineal households who were educated were the exceptions rather than the rule. The number of educated muslim women in Kerala before 1947 was very few.

The advantage that the matrilineal women enjoyed was that they remained in their own households after their marriage. In this manner they could do away with the customary migration to the husband's village and their education could be continued even after marriage at the local school, most girls being married off at early school-going age.

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<sup>62</sup> Tamil Nadu: the neighbouring state of Kerala

<sup>63</sup> Qazi: is an Arabic word means Judge.

<sup>64</sup> Sharia: Islamic law

Our duty in the matter of education does not cease with arranging for the schooling of young girls. Sisters who wish to serve society who desire the well being of the nation must work to educate the older women. As long as the mother who bring forth the citizens of the future remain steeped in ignorance and superstition, other reformist efforts are bound to prove unproductive. A woman bereft of good sense and education will not be of help to man: she will turn out to be a burden.<sup>65</sup>

The invocation of the role of the mother is a feature to be noted here, since the role of the mother is paramount in matrilineal and matrilocal societies. The education of the girl child impinges in many ways on the education of her mother. As a result, the early reformers recognized the need to educate the mothers and thus the need for adult education and such groupings.

The education and the literacy of the mother have a direct bearing upon the educational qualification and achievement of the girl child. This fact has been corroborated by studies. In her 'Status of Muslim Women in India: A case study of Kerala', Indu Menon finds the following statistic:

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<sup>65</sup> From 'Nammude Kartavyam'(our duty), *Muslim Vanitha*, July-August 1938:133-134.



Respondent's Education	mother's education			total
	Illiterate	Primary	Middle and high	
<b>Illiterate</b>	<b>151</b> (41.48%)	<b>6</b> (10.91%)	<b>1</b> (3.2%)	<b>158</b>
<b>Primary</b>	<b>107</b> (29.40%)	<b>15</b> (27.27%)	<b>2</b> (6.45%)	<b>124</b>
<b>middle</b>	<b>77</b> (21.15%)	<b>16</b> (29.09%)	<b>9</b> (29.02%)	<b>102</b>
<b>High school and college</b>	<b>29</b> (7.97%)	<b>18</b> (32.73%)	<b>19</b> (61.30%)	<b>66</b>
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>364</u></b> <b><u>(100.00%)</u></b>	<b><u>55</u></b> <b><u>(100.00%)</u></b>	<b><u>31</u></b> <b><u>(100.00%)</u></b>	<b><u>450</u></b>

Source: Menon Indu.m, Status of Muslim Women in India: A case study of Kerala, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981. Page No. 44. Table: 3.

Note that 61.30% of the mothers of high school and college educated girls also have middle or high school education. Only 7.97% of mother's were illiterate in the case of these well-educated girls. This shows that there is a direct correlation between the education of the mothers and their daughters.

Another early reformer among the Muslim women in Kerala was M.Haleema Beevi.

M.Haleema Beevi(1920-2000) was born in Adoor in *Travancore*<sup>66</sup>. She and her sister were sent to school, against the normal practice for Muslim girls, and she studied upto the fifth class, braving stone throwing hooligans and other such deterrents. Married at the age of sixteen, she was encouraged in her public activities by her husband, who was close to the prominent Muslim reformers of the time like Vakkom Abdul Khader Maulavi. She ran a magazine for women, *The Muslim Vanitha* in the late 1930s which later appeared under the name *Vanitha*. In the 1940s she started another publication, the *Bharatachandrika* which was quite successful as a weekly, but ran into serious financial difficulties when it was converted into a daily. She left journalism in 1947 and made a brief attempt again in 1970 with a magazine titled *Adhunika Vanitha*, which however proved unsuccessful. She ran a press at *Tiruvalla*<sup>67</sup> and during the late 1930s, the period of persecution under the Diwan Sir CP. Ramaswamy Iyer's dictatorial regime in Travancore, she learnt composing, printing and binding, to print leaflets and other material for the protestors. She was a member of the municipal Board of Tiruvalla, the first Muslim woman to become a Municipal councillor, the president of the Tiruvalla Muslim Women's Association, and an active member of the *Muslim Majilis*<sup>68, 69</sup>.

In this manner, an educated Muslim woman could stand up against the might of the British empire and its local loyalists like the Diwan.

Dr.Habsha Marikkar, was the first Muslim woman from this state to earn an MBBS degree.

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<sup>66</sup> Travancore: this area Includes Trivandrum, Kollam, Alappuza, Kottayam and some parts of Ernakulam district in Kerala.

<sup>67</sup> Tiruvalla: a place in Pathanamthitta District in Kerala.

<sup>68</sup> Majlis: Arabic word means a local body of Muslims.

<sup>69</sup> Devika.j, 'herself: Gender and early writings of Malayalee women'. Page:169

The first Muslim Woman from Travancore to pass the prestigious *Rashtrabhasha Visharad*<sup>70</sup> examination in Hindi in the pre-Independence period was Mrs. Maiteen Beevi.

In May 1938, Mrs. Maiteen Beevi presided over the Muslim Women's Conference of Travancore. She spoke on the 'Muslim Woman and Modern Life', which was a strong plea for Muslim women's education and employment (Muslim Vanitha, 1938). Some two hundred women attended the conference, and resolutions passed requested concessions for the education of Muslim girls and demand for government employment. There were also resolutions demanding the government to absorb into the Travancore Government Service Mrs. Maiteen Beevi and Dr. Habsha Marikkar, the first Muslim Woman Doctor from Travancore. M. Haleema Beevi made a welcome speech at the Conference which was published in her magazine called *Muslim Vanitha*.

In her welcome speech Haleema Beevi extensively quotes from the prophet's hadith to validate her arguments in favour of girls' education:

The major path in education is to learn to read and write. Remember the prophet's words about the duties of a father: teach the child to write; give it a good name; conduct its marriage at the right age.' It is clear from all this that religion has not barred education. Our association is not merely for education alone. Familiarising our girls with hygiene, how to take care of children, domestic management and literary pursuits for spiritual pleasure and self refinement, petitioning the government about our depressed condition in education and employment and other such things figure among our goals. It is true that only the infant who cries aloud is put to breast.<sup>71</sup>

She quotes the prophet's Hadith to validate her point. In the early stages of Muslim reform movements in Kerala, the role of religion and tradition in modernizing the society

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<sup>70</sup> Rashtra Basha Visharad: a course in Hindi Language.

<sup>71</sup> Muslim Vanitha: 1938, 105.

were crucial and could be no more underestimated than the impact of modernity itself. Secular education meant western education and this was different from the orthodox religious education that was provided in the religious seminaries in the numerous *Masjids*<sup>72</sup> in the state. This somehow resulted in the bifurcation of education into modern and traditional education. Girls were enrolled in schools at a later age among Muslims, when compared with other societies. This can be verified from statistics. The age of entry into school is higher in the case of Muslim girls.

It is noteworthy that the age at which the Muslim girls first enter the school is 2 to 3 years older than the minimum age prescribed by the Government for admission to school. The minimum age prescribed for admission to school when the oldest of our respondents were at school was 5. But in our case it was found that only 14.38 per cent of them entered the school at the age of 6 to 7, 38.36 per cent at the age of 7 to 8 and 16.16 per cent at the age of 8 or above. So a larger portion joined the school at the age of 7 to 8. The main reason for late entrance to school was the emphasis on completing a course in religious education.<sup>73</sup>

The emphasis laid on *Madrasa*<sup>74</sup> education points to the fact that the traditional system still has its hold on the Kerala Muslim consciousness and that is the reason it is averse to modern western education, especially in the case of girls. This is because of the widespread superstition that western education is immoral and will turn girls into arrogant women etc. Such fallacies have been dispelled time and again by the various educated working women in Kerala and it is these people who are the flag bearers of the future.

Honourable sisters, as the major event in the formation of this association, I request you never to show reluctance in sending our little girls, who are the

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<sup>72</sup> Masjid: Arabic word for Muslim Mosque.

<sup>73</sup> Indu Menon.M, 'Status of Muslim women in India', page:47.

<sup>74</sup> Madrasa: is an Arabic word means school, Now widely being used for Muslim religious School.

crowning jewels of our family, to schools. Our truthful religion and our blessed *Rasool Karim*<sup>75</sup> (may his name be honoured) have never regarded women as a lower race. The first divine message received by our prophet bears witness to this. Do not contemplate on the mystery of the injunction in the sacred Qur'an 'to read in the name of your God, who has taught you to write with a pen'.<sup>76</sup>

In this excerpt from the welcome speech made by M.Haleema Beevi at the Muslim Women's Conference of Travancore, of extreme relevance is the invocation of the first revealed lines in the Qur'an *sura*<sup>77</sup> 'Al Alaq'<sup>78</sup>, and the way in which it has been used to consolidate a secular position in order to further the educational status of women. She has taken it upon her as patriotic duty to awaken the women in the cause of nationhood and patriotism.

Since there is not even a glimmer of general awakening amongst Muslim women in this country, the onus of generating patriotism and loyalty is upon enlightened sisters. We are in urgent need of an association, the activities of which will be so vital that the community will be glow in the radiance and compassion that teems in each of us and of the bonds of or sisterhood. You have assembled here today in full recognition of this fact, shattering the strong walls of orthodoxy, walking fearlessly through the avenues of convention and wearing the crown of thorns of sacrifice. This sister of yours is powerless to express the gratitude that rises up for you from the very bottom of her heart.....<sup>79</sup>

This rhetoric is an early expression of equal opportunity and the demand for gender parity with men that became even more relevant after the independence in 1947. The

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<sup>75</sup> Rasool Karim: is a Malayalam word means merciful and respected prophet.

<sup>76</sup> Muslim Vanitha: 1938, 104.

<sup>77</sup> Sura: is an Arabic word means 'a chapter in Qur'an'.

<sup>78</sup> Al-Alaq: is 96<sup>th</sup> chapter in Qur'an.

<sup>79</sup> Muslim Vanitha: 1938, 107.

importance of such a sisterhood of women is that it cuts across all barriers of religion, caste, colour and race. Madhu Kishwar, once India's foremost feminist says that the allegiances are multiple and diverse:

Perhaps the most fortunate feature of our political and social life is that we, as Indians, have many allegiances and our vote are not normally determined by any single allegiance. Thus for example, a Hindu or a Muslim also has an allegiance to a particular regional group, local devotional community, linguistic group, caste, clan, village or town and these loyalties are often as strong as or stronger than the so-called Hindu or Muslim identity.<sup>80</sup>

The importance of a grouping such as the Muslim Women's Conference of Travancore in 1938 is thus especially relevant given the context of cultural and religious affiliation. It is more a gender based sisterhood rather than a religious gathering or grouping. In her welcome address in 1938, Haleema Beevi says:

Sacred Islam doesn't bar our freedom, refinement or education. Born in a time when the world had acquiesced to opinions such as 'women do not have souls; no freedom, no hope for salvation; no rights in the family', and so on, in a country in which the birth of the female infant was such ignominy to the family that it was buried alive, what did Rasool Karim (may his name be honoured) do?

How did the blessed one save mankind, which had been treated worse than domestic animals? Women are men's sisters. The fruit of goodness and badness in both are the same. They too have souls. How marvelous were the changes wrought in the world by such worldly teachings! Today there are few communities that have esteemed woman as much as sacred Islam. Rasool Kareem's declaration that heaven lies at the feet of one's mother does us proud. When this is the reality, how pathetic is our present condition! In a community in

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<sup>80</sup> Kishwar Madhu, 'off the track: rethinking gender justice for Indian women', page:119.

which women languish behind the bars of restriction, men can never enjoy the beautiful fruits of their labours. If the world, which ought to become ever more resplendent with the radiance of the intellects of future citizens, must remain in obeisance of young people and infants fit only to be burdens upon the face of the earth, it will naturally become wan and dull.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Muslim Vanitha: 1938, 105.

## Chapter-3

### Social status of Muslim Women in Kerala as depicted by Vaikom Mohammed Basheer

#### Vaikom Mohammed Basheer:

Vaikom Mohammed Basheer was born in Kerala in the year 1908. His village is *Vaikom*<sup>82</sup> in South Kerala. He belongs to a traditional Muslim family. His parents sent him to school, He says on that “My parents sent me to school to study both *Malayalam*<sup>83</sup> and English. It was a surprise to those orthodox Muslims of my community who held all sorts of superstitious beliefs”<sup>84</sup>.

He was a person with a difference. His childhood experiences were not at all good; he says on that “My father punished me for everything that happened at home. He didn’t consider my innocence. One day my father told me to go to the field to collect the harvest, but after coming back from school in the evening I went to play Badminton, instead of going to the field. When I came back after sun set, my father punished me, I cried a lot. In the evening I went to the kitchen and had a cup of water and without informing anybody I went to the railway station and boarded a train to Calicut. I stayed in the Congress party office in *Calicut*<sup>85</sup> and participated in the freedom struggle. ....”.

He was a person with thought and feeling, he found it difficult to live at home. He left home and travelled through many parts of India for years. He did many type of jobs. He was not settled at a place. He shifted from one place to another and from one job to another. He came to know many cultures, language and people. He travelled a lot and

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<sup>82</sup> Vaikom: is a place in present Kottayam district in Kerala.

<sup>83</sup> Malayalam: is the language and mother tongue of Kerala people. It is a Dravidian language. Vaikom Mohammed Basheer’s novels are written originally in Malayalam language.

<sup>84</sup> M.A Rahman, Indian Literature: 245, page 71.

<sup>85</sup> Calicut: is a District in north Kerala, nearby to Malappuram and Kannur Districts.



lived in various places in different roles. He lived with Muslim Sufis as a *Sufi*<sup>86</sup>, with Hindu *Sanyasis*<sup>87</sup> in Himalayas as a Sanyasi, he worked for his livings as a Hotel boy and a book seller.

This type of experience made Basheer a humanist. He lived for the well being of humanity. He has written many stories and novels. Through his writings he wanted to change his community, which was superstitious, orthodox and marginalized. He wanted social development in Muslim community.

## HIS WRITINGS:

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer is a great narrator of stories, with his charming and sarcastic notes. His book “my grand father had an elephant” won *the Central Sahitya Akadami Award*<sup>88</sup>, and was selected for translation into fourteen Indian languages.

He produced only a hundred short stories and about a dozen novelettes or long tales. He was the first major writer to emerge from the large Muslim community in Kerala. The muslim community of which Basheer is a part concerns him a great deal. He focuses on their short comings and lack of education, the way their women bring up their children and are themselves treated by men folk.

Basheer developed his short stories and novelettes from his personal experiences.

## WHY I SELECTED HIS STORIES:

As a writer his peculiarity is that he developed a philosophy of his own and lived according to that. His writings and life complimented each other. His approach towards social reform was real and broad. He stood for the good of our country, humanity, secular society and ultimately he directed his community to a well balanced social life.

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<sup>86</sup> Sufi: Islamic mystic.

<sup>87</sup> Sanyasi: Hindu mystic.

<sup>88</sup> Central Sahitya Akadami Award: an Indian award for literature.

He fought for the improvement of social status of Muslim women in Kerala through his writings. He thought that modern education would uplift them. He worked against social crimes and injustice toward women.

## MUSLIM WOMEN IN SELECTED STORIES OF VAIKOM MUHAMMAD BASHEER:

### (1) Me grandad 'ad an Elephant!

This novel was first published in the year 1951.

#### Summary of the novel.

It is a realistic novel based on the life of the Muslims. The story deals with the life of a Muslim family which is poor now, but was very rich in early days. The heroine Kunjippattumma is a beautiful virtuous, young woman. Her parents are very poor now. But her mother who belonged to a very rich family with elephants still lives in that dream land. She is always trying to keep up appearances. She never mixes with the poor people among whom she now lives. She is proud of her traditions. She always repeats 'Ntuppa ppaku oranendarnu, Valiyoru Kompanana' (meaning her father had a great tusker).she was proud of this still wore the wooden shoes with ivory knobs, claimed to be the tusk of that elephant. Her father was called Ana makkar ie Makkar the owner of an elephant. She repeats now and then 'Ana Makkarute punnar mol anu Kunjupathumma'( meaning Kunjupattumma is the dearest daughter of Anamakkar), she prohibits her daughter to have any contact with other young women. The hero *Nisar Ahmad*<sup>89</sup> is the grandson of a poor cart owner. Though poor he had been educated up to M.A. Nisar Ahmad and Kunjupattumma meet, fall in love and the story gradually develops in to a beautiful love story. The story ends with their wedding.

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<sup>89</sup> Nisar Ahmed: is a young male character in the novel 'Me granddad 'ad an elephant!'.

Basheer depicts the life of the Muslims in middle Kerala. They are ignorant and uneducated. They remain proud of their old traditions. He has pointed out the hollow pride, meaningless customs and superstitions which cause the downfall of the Muslims. Through the example of the hero, he calls for social reform. He stresses the need for education, removal of old customs, freedom from superstitions, Etc, in his hero's words. The hero often voices the novelist's ideas. The language is the dialect of the Muslims. He uses wit and sarcasm in describing the superstitions and old customs.

### MUSLIM WOMEN CHARACTERS IN 'ME GRANDDAD 'AD AN ELEPHANT!

There are three women characters in this story:

1. Kunjupattumma's Mother Kunjutachumma.
2. Kunjupattumma.
3. Aisha beegum.

When the first two characters belong to traditional Muslim family, the third one Aisha Begum belongs to a progressive and modern educated Muslim family.

(1) Kunjupattumma's appearance at the end of the story:

Kunjupattumma who was brought up in a traditional and superstitious house appears at the end of the story as a modern woman. She had a *sari*<sup>90</sup>, half sleeve blouse and she covered her head with tail of her sari.<sup>91</sup>

(2) Better educated Aisha Begum teaches Kunjupattumma, she tries to improve Kunjupattummas pronunciation.

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<sup>90</sup> Sari: Indian women's garment consisting of a long length of cloth; not traditionally the dress of Muslim women.

<sup>91</sup> "Me granddad 'ad and elephant!". Basheer, Translated by R.E Asher and Achamma Ciolparambil Chandrasekaran. Penguin Books. Page: 117.

Here we can also note the approach of Muslims towards other communities. They call them *Kafir*<sup>92</sup>. Here the appearance of Aisha Begum – Kunjupattumma’s new neighbor- was modern, sari and blouse. So she thought that her neighbor was Kafir. Because she knew Kafir Mistresses who come from town wearing sari and blouse.

“one day at noon Kunjupattumma saw her neighbour, the Kafir woman who was something of a show-off, by the lily pond taking off her sari and blouse.

That young woman was standing in her bodice and slip, ‘Oh, a tight bodice under the *kuppayam*<sup>93</sup>...And under her *mundu*<sup>94</sup>...,’ Kunjupattumma thought to herself. Then suddenly she remembered.

‘Oh my god! That small kafir woman’s going to bath! The leeches’ll bite her to death!’

Kunjupattumma ran out. Her hair comes down. Yet she kept running. ‘Don’t bath! Don’t bath!’ she called out. Panting she came up to the young woman.

Without showing any excitement, the young kafir woman said to Kunjupattumma, ‘Booby!...You should say, ‘Don’t bathe, Don’t bathe’.’

Kunjupattumma said nothing. Right! Then let the leeches bite her to death! Hm...So I should say, ‘Don’t bathe, don’t bathe’! What if I say ‘Don’t bath, don’t bath? See the way she shows off!-Kunjupattumma thought. All kafir women must be like this! But then she thought of the old days; she pictured *bapa*<sup>95</sup> taking her to the river all dressed up. During those days, all those kafir school mistresses were really kind and friendly to her. Although like them this girl wore a sari...she was more of a swank than them. Kunjupattumma moved towards the edge of the lily pond to look at the *mural*.

‘Oh...what fine hair!’ the swank was saying. ‘And a black mole! Beautiful!’ And with this she put on her blouse and wrapped her sari and went up to Kunjupattumma.

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<sup>92</sup> Kafir: Arabic word means irreligious and ungrateful.

<sup>93</sup> Kuppayam: Long –sleeved, long- waisted blouse worn by Muslim women in Kerala.

<sup>94</sup> Mundu = women’s lower garment, consisting of a length of cloth.

<sup>95</sup> Bapa = father; a term used exclusively by Muslims in Kerala.

Then, very seriously, she asked, '*sundari*<sup>96</sup>! Anyone so beautiful must be called sundari. Is there any law against the public bathing in this lily pond?'

'My name is not Tunnari!'

'Tunnari you say!' the show-off laughed. 'Booby, you must say Sundari. Very well what is your name?'

'Kunjupattumma.'

'Oh, beautiful name! Fine. What happens if one bathes in this lily pond?'

'The leeches will bite you!'

'Male leech or female leech?'

'there were both husband and wife. One of them bite me and drank all my blood!'Kunjupattumma continued, 'then a *murrat*<sup>97</sup> swallowed it whole. There are water-snakes and turtles too.' After that Kunjupattumma described with great excitement how the leech had bitten her. When she came to it hung from her thigh, the show-off shivered and stared. She made a noise like the trumpeting of a small elephant. 'if it had been me,' the show-off said, 'I would have called out and got all and sundry to come. In the end I would have passed out!'

Kunjupattumma had not called out! Neither had she fainted. She was proud about that. She walked to the foot of the tamarind tree. Picking up a ripe tamarind, she shelled it and put some in her mouth.

The show-off went up and to her and asked, 'are you eating tamarind?'

'yes.' Would all woman like tamarind? Kunjupattumma was doubtful. Still she asked, 'do you want some?'

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<sup>96</sup> Sundari = Malayalam for 'beautiful women'; used also as a proper name.

<sup>97</sup> Murrat = a predatory freshwater fish (*Ophicephalus striatus*) of the family of Ophicephalidae (Snake-heads).

‘Give me a small piece!’ When she said this, her mouth was watering, kunjupattumma thought! She gave her a big piece. The show-off took it and ate it. Not the way ordinary woman will eat. She didn’t squint or show any reaction on her face! The swanky kafir woman swallowed it seed and all!

Kunjupattumma, wonderstruck, said, ‘Shouldn’t swallow!’

‘What if I do?’

‘It will sprout in the stomach and become a big tree!’

‘I can digest even granite!’ said the show-off. ‘people say it is because of my age!’ kunjupattumma gave her a big piece and asked, ‘how old are you?’

‘Seventeen.’

‘*umma*<sup>98</sup> says I am twenty- two,’ said Kunjupattumma.

‘and what does bapa say?’

Kunjupattumma did not reply.

‘you booby, why don’t you say something?’

‘why d’you ca’ me booby?’

‘not like that , booby. You must ask, “why do you call me booby?” are you asking why I call you booby? I don’t know. My *ikkaka*<sup>99</sup> calls me “silly booby”.’

Ikkaka! Why is this kafir calling her brother ‘ikkaka’-a term used only by Muslims?

‘I had the impression that “silly booby” was a synonym for “girl”. My *ikkaka* calls me luttapy too. He likes making up names.’

‘what’s your *ikkaka*’s name?’

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<sup>98</sup> Umma = Mother; a term used exclusively by Muslims in Kerala.

<sup>99</sup> Ikkaka = elder brother; a term used exclusively by Muslims in Kerala.

‘Nisar Ahmad!’

‘Nisar Ahmad...And what’s your name?’

‘Aisha ,’said the show-off.

‘What’s your religion?’

That sari- wearing toff said, ‘Muslim.’

Good God! ‘Are you like us?’ Kunjupattumma asked.

‘No: we are genuine Muslims!’

Genuine Muslims...! She has not had her ears pierced for *halqats*<sup>100</sup>. In the lobes of her ears there are two gold earrings. What she is wearing is a sari. She has a blouse instead of a kuppayam. Underneath that she has tight bodice.

‘What did you say your name was?’

‘Aisha. If you want, you can call me Aisha Bibi. At home my bapa and umma call me Aisha. I told that my ikkaka calls me “luttapy”- except when he calls me “Silly booby”.’

‘Aisha it is the prophet Muhammad’s wife’s name!’

Kunjupattumma looked at her with disbelief. What kind of Muslims are they?

‘Who’s that man with no beard and an unshaven head?’

Kunjupattumma asked.

Aisha said, mimicking kunjupattumma a little to make fun of her, ‘Me bapa...and that woman in the sari’s me umma.’

Then Aisha asked, ‘Is that tall man your bapa?’

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<sup>100</sup> Halqats = earring of the sort worn in the upper part of the ear by Muslim women and girls in northern Kerala.

‘Yes.’

‘and the woman who talks day and night?’

‘Umma.’

‘Why does she talk so loud?’ Aisha asked. “The neighbours won’t be able to sleep for the noise. Is it good for Muslim women to be like this, lacking all restraint and moderation?’

Kunjupattumma did not say anything.

‘Why does your umma come to the stream in front of our house to relieve herself?’ Aisha asked.

‘if it’s noight we use the road out side the house. It’s because it was daytime that she went to the stream!’

‘That’s great!... Is it nice to use the public road for that!

Do all the people here use the public road...?’

‘Yes,’ said Kunjupattumma.

‘Why don’t you make latrines in the house?’

When kunjupattumma did not reply, Aisha said, ‘Another thing-you mustn’t say “noight”. Say “night”.’

‘Neight,’ said Kunjupattumma.

‘Not like that. “I” as in “white”. Say it. Night.’

Kunjupattumma said, ‘night,’ and then asked, ‘Where’s yer’ouse?’

‘You must ask, “Where is your home?” Let’s suppose you asked in that way. What shall I say? I must speak the truth, We don’t own a home. But we have a house in the town. We



hold the mortgage on it. We cultivate the land. There are mango trees, guavas, *jambus*<sup>101</sup>, jasmine, roses-and many other trees from which you can get fruits and flowers.

Then she described the house. 'It's a tiled house with two floors. There is a yellow wall around it. The gate is blue, there is electric light in every room. We also have a radio.'

'What's that?' Kunjupattumma asked. All the rest she understood. She had seen 'lectric light' that shines when you press a button. But she did not understand what radio was.

'It's like a box,' said Aisha. 'From that you can hear the news and songs.'

'Can you hear anything from Mecca?'

'Arabia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Russia, Africa, Madras, Germany, America, Singapore, Delhi, Karachi, Lahore, Mysore, England, Australia, Calcutta, Ceylon-you can hear from almost all the places in the world,' said Aisha.

Kunjupattumma did not really understand what it was.

Whatever it is, this girl showing off too much.

'Do you have a tamarind tree at your house?' Kunjupattumma asked.

'No!'

So-isn't tamarind tree more important! Kunjupattumma asked another question.

'Silly booby....Did you've an elephant?'

'No!'

With great pride Kunjupattumma said, 'me *uppupa*<sup>102</sup> 'ad an elephant!-an 'uge tusker!'

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<sup>101</sup> Jambu = a tall tree (*Eugenia jambolana*), common in Kerala, that bears a dark crimson fruit.

<sup>102</sup> Uppupa = grandfather; term used exclusively by Muslims.

‘My uppupa had a bullock cart,’ said Aisha. ‘He used to carry things in it and make money. With that he educated my bapa up to M.A... And what about your big tusker? Where is it?’

‘It died-I mean, passed away!’ Because it is a Muslim’s elephant, one has to say ‘passed away’ or ‘breathed its last’. One should use ‘passed away’ for a Muslim and ‘died’ for a kafir.

‘Oh, is it dead?’ Aisha asked.

‘Yes!’ said Kunjupattumma. ‘It passed away. It killed four kafirs!’

‘Only four? How many Muslims did it kill?’

‘None. It was a fine elephant!’

‘If that is the truth,’ said Aisha laughing, ‘in heaven that tusker will get four mansions made of gems and precious stones, pearls and rubies.’

This is because those who do good in this world will get many pleasures and comforts in the next. According to tradition, it is a good deed to kill a kafir.

‘We were very well-off!’ said Kunjupattumma.

‘Then what happened?’

All she knows is that ‘It’s gone’.

‘What does your bapa do?’ Aisha asked.

‘Business.’

‘In what?’

‘Oh, this and that.’

‘What’s your bapa’s name?’

‘Vattan Adima.’

‘And your umma’s?’

‘Kunjutachumma.’

‘My bapa is a college professor.’ Said Aisha. ‘His name is Zainul Abidin. Umma’s name is Hajara *Bibi*<sup>103</sup>. Ikkaka is Nisar Ahmad. He is a poet. He writes poetry on the earth. His poems becomes trees, flowers, fruits and vegetables.’ Aisha has a lot of things like this to say about Nisar Ahmad. She continued, ‘He loves this earth with everything that is and could be on it. He’s very clean and tidy; he’s a...terrible man.’

Kunjupattumma was not interested in any of this. Especially those names. Zainul Abidin Nisar Ahmad...She has never heard such names. Makkar, Adima, Antu, Kochuparo, Kutti, Maidin, Kutti Ali, Bava, Kunjalu, Pakkaru, Kunju, Avaran, Biran, Kunjikochu, Addilu-all these she has heard. But Nisar Ahmad...Big red eyes, long, curled up moustache, a chest covered in black hair, a thick neck, a tall frame-this is how she pictured him. She asked, ‘when will your ikkaka come?’

‘Tomorrow or the day after-anyway, tells your umma right away not to come so close to us to relieve herself.

When ikkaka comes, there will be trouble !’

Kinjupattumma was shocked. How could she tell umma?

How could she not tell her? She prayed silently, ‘Oh God, don’t let Tuttapy’s ikkaka come! If he comes,there’ll be trouble!’

That terrible man!

‘Are you married?’ Aisha asked.

‘No,’ said Kunjupattumma, ‘I’m not married. Are you married, Tuttapy?’

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<sup>103</sup> Bibi = lady; used as a term of respectful address.

‘You silly booby... It’s Luttapy. No.I’ll get married after I’ve completed my B.A. Even then it will be only after ikkaka’s wedding. We have not so far been able to find a suitable girl for that great guy. Many proposals came. I told you, didn’t I, that he was very clean and tidy? Not only the girl, but the house also should be tidy. Once he went to the house of a university –educated girl from where there was a proposal. The glass in which he was given water to drink smelt of fish. Because the proposal was turned down.’

‘Doesn’t your ikkaka eat fish?’ Kunjupattumma asked.

‘In general he’s a vegetarian. Just once in a while he eats meat and fish. But then he washes with soap. He has ordered that the house must never stink of this! Not only that: the girl he marries should have certain qualities. She must know how to shave. She should be skilled in washing, painting,dancing and music,and should be well read. Her skill in cooking should include *biriyani*, *pattiri* and meat, *sambar*, curry, *aviyal*, *kalan*<sup>104</sup>, dry vegetable dishes, and all imaginable things to eat and drink. In addition to this, she should know how to till the ground, carry soil, prepare manure for plants and trees. Umma and bapa have told him to find a girl with all this qualities and marry her.’

When Kunjupattumma heard so much, Nisar Ahmad become more terrible in her imagination. She felt angry with him. She felt angry with Aisha also. Ikkaka said this, ikkaka said that... Oh, blow her ikkaka!

Aisha continued, ‘A man like my ikkaka... would you like to hear? One night ikkaka was lying on the easy chair, reading. His hand was one end of the drawer. I hadn,t noticed this and I pushed the drawer in with great force. I heard something crack. When I saw what it was I almost fainted: the small finger on ikkaka’s left hand was crushed!’

Kunjupattumma was flabbergasted. More than that, she grew pale!

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<sup>104</sup> Biriyani = a rice dish, coloured and flavoured with saffron and turmeric and consisting of alternate layers of rice and rich meat or vegetable curry.

Pattiri = a type of unleavened bread made from wheat flour.

Sambar = a mixed vegetable curry flavoured with tamarind and asafetida.

Aviyal = a kind of vegetable curry.

Kalan = a vegetable curry, prepared from pumpkin cooked with curd.

‘And then?’ she asked.

‘Oh,’ said Aisha, ‘ikkaka didn’t move. He asked me to go and get the scissors. I brought them. Ikkaka cut off the smashed finger!’ after giving this description of what happened, Aisha then said, ‘I’m going. Would you like to come to our place?’

Kunjupattumma did not hear. She stood there numb.

Aisha asked again, ‘are you coming?’

‘Where?’

‘To my house, silly booby!’

‘I’ll ask umma and come.’

She went home said to umma, ‘Umma, those people next door are Muslims. Can I go there?’

‘Don’t give me that, you bitch!’ umma said. ‘Muslims!

They’re kafirs.’

‘No, umma,’ she said. ‘They’re Muslims. Look: their Aisha is standing under our tamarind tree.’

Umma looked. Umma saw! A woman dressed in a sari!

No halqats in her ears! Umma said, ‘Oh *mayyadin*<sup>105</sup>, oh you saints! Is she a Muslim?’

‘Yes, umma. Talk quietly. Can I go to her house?’

‘If you step outside our yard, you are no longer my daughter. Don’t come back!’

Kunjupattumma went and told Aisha, ‘I’ll come tomorrow.’

‘Why not today?’

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<sup>105</sup> Mayyadin = Muhyi ad- Din (1165- 1240), a renowned Muslim mystic and philosopher.

‘I have a few things to do,’ said Kunjupattumma. ‘I must draw water. When I come tomorrow, I’ll bring some ripe Tamarind.’

Aisha went off.

That night for a long time Kunjupattumma could not get to sleep. Earlier she had prayed to God not to let Aisha’s ikkaka come. How could she ask for the opposite now?

In the end she prayed, ‘Oh God, let Tuttapy’s ikkaka...’ ”<sup>106</sup>

The story not autobiographical in the same sense, but not only imagination, it has personal touch with the author.

Vattanatima- Basheer’s maternal uncle

Nizar Ahmad- he himself

We can see many aspects of Basheer in Nisar Ahmad. He is very educated, modern, clean and healthy.

(3) Kunjupattumma has become seriously ill at the thought of marrying a man she has neither seen nor chosen.

This was the custom among old muslim families. The girl was not given any choice on her marriage. What the family chose for her, that was final.

“Kunjupattumma did not say anything. The very same day she got another piece of news. Her wedding will take place soon. Bapa is looking for a boy!

She was shocked. Her mouth was dry. She stood there pale-faced.

‘Without my permission you will not step out of this yard!’ said umma.

Her sight and hearing became blurred. ‘*Oh Rabb al –Alamin*<sup>107</sup>!’ she said and fell senseless.

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<sup>106</sup> “Me granddad ‘ad and elephant!”, Basheer, Translated by R.E Asher and Achamma Ciolparambil Chandarsekeran. Penguin Books. Page: 88-96.

‘Mayyadin! Nabi! What has happened to my darling daughter?’ Umma jumped up. Bapa came in. He sprinkled water on her! He fanned her! A real commotion!

Kunju pattamma opened her eyes and sat up. She stared at umma and bapa: they are going to get her a husband without asking her and without finding out her opinion about it.

‘My dear Kunju pattamma! Bapa called out.

She did not say anything.

‘What has happened to my darling daughter?’ umma asked.

Kunju pattamma did not say anything.

‘Mayyadin, is she possessed some devil?’ said umma.

Kunju pattamma burst out laughing; she laughed without stopping. Then she wept; with aching heart she wept. It was far in to the night, and the whole was sleeping.

Still she did not stop crying.

As she lay there, she looked through the window.

The stars looked like glittering dots caught in a huge, black, spider’s web.

#### A time of dreams

Day comes, followed by night. Kunju pattamma is not clearly aware of anything. She neither eats nor sleeps. It is all a dream. People come. They ask her questions. Is she awake, or asleep? Perhaps it was Aisha who asked her something. The question was repeated again and again. She was answering it. But again the same question came. With aching heart she replied loudly, ‘Tuttapy, they are going to marry me off!’

Again tears. An ocean tears. She is afloat in them. From one end of the dark world a red globe is rising. It is the dawn of a new day. But the crows do not caw. The birds do not

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<sup>107</sup> Rabb = God, the nourisher to perfection.

Rabb al- Alamin=God the fosterer and *Nourisher* of all creation.

chirp. Some people are talking. It is umma and bapa. Then someone else is there. It is not dawn! In a pit in the yard there live coals. Around it burn small candles on earthenware dishes. Kunjupattumma is made to sit on a board close by. Nearby is a man with a cane in his hand.

It is the elder exorcising Satan!

For the first time in her life Kunjupattumma was angry; she was really angry. She wanted to trumpet like an elephant, roar like a tiger, jump up and tear everyone to pieces.

But she just sat there. It was a pleasant smell; over her head the elder was putting various things into the fire. Among them were incense and sandalwood. The elder was murmuring various incantations: *suh, fala, hala*<sup>108</sup>. Exorcism of Satan! It is the famous cane that drives away *ifirit, jinn, ruhani*<sup>109</sup> and many such evil spirits.

He will beat her with it. Holding her by the hair, he will beat her on the back, the thighs and all over. That is how evil spirits are exorcised. If they still do not go, they will put ground chilli in the eyes. They will put fire in the palms of the hands. Then the skin will burn. It will hurt from the top of the head to the soles of the feet. Let it hurt, then. Umma and bapa have given the permission for her to be hurt.

‘bapa, tell him not to beat me!’

The elder did not say anything. Nor did bapa say anything, nor did umma.

‘Tuttapy, tell him they are going to beat me!’ she said to herself. Who is she asking Aisha to tell?

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<sup>108</sup> Suh = a syllable used in incantation; no semantic content.

Fala = a sequence of syllables used in incantation; no semantic content.

Hala = a sequence of syllables used in incantation; no semantic content.

<sup>109</sup> Ifrit = a class of powerful and cunning evil spirits, a subset of the jinn.

Jinni = one of a class of spirits in Muslim demonology; lower than the angels, they are said to inhabit the earth and to have the power to assume different forms; generally malevolent, they are held to be responsible for accidents and diseases.

Jinn = the plural form of *jinni*.

Ruhani = a spiritual being; sometimes used as a cover term for both angels and jinn, but more commonly to mean evil spirit.



‘Say who it is!’ the elder demanded. ‘Say who you are possessed by!’

If she is possessed by, she can say who it is! Is she really possessed by!’

The elder asked again. The third time it was the cane that spoke. After that she does not remember very well. The elder beat her ten or twelve times. She cried, she cried aloud. She snatched the cane from his hand, broke it and put it into the fire. She wanted to run away somewhere. But she did not run. Nisar Ahmad was standing near the circle of fire!

Did Nisar Ahmad pick her up? Or did she run towards Nisar Ahmad?

It was Nisar Ahmad who took her through the verandah in to the house and laid her on the mat. When she opened her eyes, it was broad daylight. Aisha was sitting by the mat. Aisha’s umma was there too.

Kunjupattumma’s umma brought a sort of paste that she had made and put it on her forehead. It was nice and cooling. The air that was coming out of her nostrils was as hot as a fire.

Her bapa came in to the room. Aisha and her umma had got up and moved away. Bapa asked, ‘My dear, do you want some kanji?’

She doesn’t want anything; she is neither hungry nor thirsty.

‘it’s many days since my daughter had anything to eat,’

Bapa said sadly. Oh... why should he be sad? She is about to die. The wind has started to blow! The wind has started to blow... will the leaf now fall? A real wind is blowing. Leaves are flying trees are swaying. It might be the wind of death. Is the world coming to an end? The angel *Israfil*<sup>110</sup> might have started blowing the trumpet Sur. The end of the world might be at hand! Trees uprooted; mountains shattered into pieces... Is the world going to be waste?

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<sup>110</sup> Israfil = is a name of an angel. Is an Arabic word.

It is raining. There is the smell of new earth. People are going about talking and laughing. It is day time. The cry of the hawk can be heard. It cannot be seen. Yet it is gliding in the sky without moving its wings. In the room, it is neither night nor day. She cannot move. It hurts all over, as if somebody is cutting her in pieces, into ten thousand small pieces. May be they are to be thrown to the birds. The birds will peck and swallow them and fly away in flocks. And then...?

‘Kunjupattumma!’ someone is calling. Who is it? She opened her eyes. Her inside was burning. Nisar Ahmad’s bapa! He was standing in the room.

‘Light and air must get into this room,’ he said. ‘Why are you closed that window?’

He opened the window. Light and air came in; how bright the light is!

‘Kunjupattumma!’ he called again. ‘Yes!’ she answered. Saying something to bapa. What is it? No; she cannot keep her eyes open. It is better to sleep than to be awake. Sleep is like a piece of black paper. She is melting in to it. But even that is impossible. Light! Some where there must be something to hold on to. It is not possible to live without a support. She is a tree standing up right in the ground. Her hair forms the roots. Her arms and legs are the tree’s branches. Two birds are going to build their nests in it. What birds are they?

‘Kunjupattumma!’ someone is trying to wake her up. Who is it? Somewhere she has heard that voice before. She opened her weary eyes. Who is it? Oh... Nisar Ahmad!

‘Kunjupattumma!’ Nisar Ahmad called to her. Then he said, ‘sit up and drink this. It is bitter. But imagine it is sweet. Never mind the taste.’

She wanted to say that she did not want the medicine. But before she could say it, Nisar Ahmad sat her up. He got her to drink some black liquid from a white bowl. While he was doing this, he was talking. When she was about to respond, Nisar Ahmad was no longer there. Umma was making her drink some kanji.

‘Do you want to do your hair like Aisha’s mothers?’

Umma asked.

'I'm going to snuff it,' said Kunjupattumma.

'My darling daughter,' said umma. 'Don't talk like that.

Your marriage is fixed.'

'I don't want to be Wed.' said Kunjupattumma. 'I'm going to snuff it!'

'You must say, "I'm going to die!" ' said Aisha, as she came in smiling Then she asked, 'was the medicine sweet?'

'Get off with you, Tuttapy!'

'The silly booby will take medicine from only one person!'

'Don't tease me, Tuttapy!'

She just lay there. Her heart was full. She had become all sweetness. Her appetite had returned. She was hungry and thirsty. She could sit up without anybody's help. She could also walk slowly.

One day in the course of her recovery Aisha asked, 'Silly booby, do you know who you will be married to?'

'Don't tease me, Tuttapy!'

'But do you know who it is to be?'

The new generation is talking

It was a night-time that Nisar Ahmad married Kunjupattumma. The same day at about four o'clock an amusing thing happened.

Bapa had gone to the mosque to ask the *khatib*<sup>111</sup> to officiate at the *Nikah*<sup>112</sup> or marriage service. Although they had informed most of the families in the area, they had not invited anybody. There was no feasting and no celebrations. Nisar Ahmad's bapa and umma wanted it this way. Specially cooked was prepared for seven or eight people. They themselves had bought the wedding garments for the bride. Kunjupattumma did not even know what they were. Aisha had asked her to go thereafter her bath. Aisha came and took her along when she had taken her bath.

It was not the Kunjupattumma who went in that came back. She had on a slip and a bodice. She wore a blouse and a green sari. Her hair was done beautifully and had flowers in it. Her head was covered with one end of the sari. In addition to all that she was wearing a pair of slippers. She was made to walk a hundred times back and forth in the room, so that she would know how to walk properly, before she went back.

'Don't stoop,' said said Nisar Ahmad. 'Stand straight and walk with dignity.'

When this was over, Kunjupattumma returned home.

She was radiant. The black mole sparkled. There were a lot of children on the road to see this wonderful sight.

Umma was standing in the front yard in her wooden sandals. Kunjupattumma saw the signs of a small commotion. Some words were being exchanged. She did not hear anything distinctly.

Umma was saying to some children, 'what' you vagabonds!'

The vagabond Kunjupattummas and Kunjutachummas, Adimas and Makkar said, 'Gulugulugulu!'

'What did you say, you vagabonds?' asked umma.

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<sup>111</sup> Khatib = preacher, the one who gives the *Khutba* or sermon at the beginning of the special Friday midday worship.

<sup>112</sup> Nikah = the Muslim marriage service.

‘Lullullu!’ said the children.

Umma started getting all worked up and said, ‘You’ll be bitten by a deadly snake!’

‘Memmemme!’

‘You pigs!’

‘Peppepe!’

‘I’ll knock you flat!’ said umma.

‘Umma,’ said kunjupattumma from some way off. ‘Leave them alone. You say something and their bapas will come and start a quarrel!’

‘Let them come!’ umma said, loud enough for the whole world to hear. ‘Let them all see you! Let them see Anamakkar’s darling daughter. Let them all see! Yer uppupa ‘d an elephant!- a ‘uge tusker.’

‘It was an elephant ant.’ Said an eighteen-inch tall, dark *Adima*<sup>113</sup> with a snotty nose and hands covered with scabs.

‘*Elephant ant*<sup>114</sup>! Elephant ant!’

Could Kunjutachumma ever live it down? The brave and valiant, authentic Anamakkar Sahib-his fine terrible huge tusker that killed four kafirs... to say that it was a little elephant and that digs in to the dust by the side of walls and lies buried in the tiny holes like black bedbugs!

‘Oh God!’ Kunjutachumma prayed, beating her chest, ‘Let a thunderbolt strike these vagabonds!’

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<sup>113</sup> Adima = Malayalam word for slave.

<sup>114</sup> Elephant ant = ant- lion, in Malayalam Kuziy-aana.

Marvelous to relate, no thunderbolt struck them and no lightning burnt them. Nothing happened. In one voice they called out, 'Anamakkar's huge tusker... was an elephant ant... an elephant ant!'

Kuntutachumma felt faint. She had difficulty in breathing. Her whole life passed before her in a flash. She sat down, both hands on her head.

Kunjupattumma came and stood by her Umma and asked the children, 'what is it, children?'

'Ngulu ngulu!' said the children.

'What?'

'Peppeppe!'

'What is it?'

'Elephant ant!' said the children. '*Elephant ant!*'

'What elephant ant?' Kunjupattumma could make neither head nor tail of it. She supposed that some kids must have put an elephant ant in umma's ear. She sat by umma and asked, 'What is it, umma?'

Umma did not say anything. What was there to say? Her world lay shattered! What had she left to live for?

Kunjupattumma asked again. In the end, tearful and stammering, said, 'They s-s-say your uppuppa's...huge elephant... was an elephant ant! ... an elephant ant!' »<sup>115</sup>

The Elephant is the symbol of the past greatness.<sup>116</sup>

Sentimental and touching love story, ordinary *Malayali*<sup>117</sup> Muslims idea on life , criticism of Muslims superstitions and social customs. Modern members of the community are the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid: page, 112- 119.

<sup>116</sup> 'The Novel in India its birth and development'. Edited and with introduction by T.W Clark, Published by: London. Page, 232- 233.

clearly ones that are admired. But Kunjupattumma's bigoted mother hold that their very way of dressing by itself makes it impossible to believe that they are really *Moslems*.<sup>118</sup>

The father of Nisar Ahmad was a college lecturer. He was a believer in God, but there was no place for superstitions, customs in his religion.<sup>119</sup>

(4) Since her childhood Kunjupattumma was given strict direction by her Mother. She prohibited for going out of her home, mingling with other children.

“At the time she was about seven years old. Or may be eight. Not more than that. At that time she was served with a strict injunction. It was not from her bapa, but from her umma.the thing is simply this. Even though they are muslims, she should not be friendly with the neighbours' children! In short, she should not have anything to do with them. What is the reason? Her mother told a world renowned secret.

‘My darling Kunjupattumma, you are the darling daughter of the darling daughter of Anamakkar. Yer grandad ‘d an elephant!- a huge tusker!!’ ”<sup>120</sup>

(5) Early marriage. The proposal for Kunjupattumma's marriage comes, since when she was fourteen years of age.

“Though she is fair, there is one dark feature. Although she has not mentioned it to anyone, this pains her. On her cheek there is a small, black mole.

It was when she was fourteen years of age that she realized it was a lucky mole. At that time she received proposals of marriage one after the other. She doesn't know who is coming to marry her. What difference does it make who it is? ”<sup>121</sup>

(6) The superstitious belief and custom among Muslims.

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<sup>117</sup> Malayali = is a *Malayalam* word which means a person belongs to Kerala State. Malayalam = is the language of Kerala people.

<sup>118</sup> Moslems=Muslims.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Basheer Sampooma krithikal’(Malayalam)- vol-1 page 35, D.C BOOKS.

<sup>120</sup> “Me granddad ‘ad an elephant!” By Basheer, translated by: R.E.Asher and Achamma Coilparambil Chandarsekeran. Publi: Penguin.Page, 53.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Page, 54.

“‘then I shall be able to chew betel-leaf,’ Kunjupattumma told herself. It is not proper for unmarried muslim girl to chew betel-leaf. Kunjupattumma is not sure whether Allah or *Nabi* <sup>122</sup>have said anything regarding this. But according to custom it is not permissible. Also muslim women should not go in to the presence of strange men. When she was very young, Kunjupattumma did go. But it did not really count as going; it is merely that she has seen other man. She does not remember anything about anybody. Even If she does remember, it is only about women.”<sup>123</sup>

(7) Kunjupattumma saw the beautiful dresses of non Muslims, and she liked them. She asked to her mother, and then her mother prevented and said that those dresses were not proper for a Muslim woman, if she wore that type of dresses she would be punished by God.

Kunjupattumma saw rich children from City wearing simple ornaments, but she had to wear a huge number of ornaments, that was the custom among traditional muslim families. A lot of money for ornaments.

“‘Those women are all kafirs!’ is all Kunjupattumma can say about them. In the world there are only two classes. Muslim and kafir. Whether they are men or women, after death all kafirs will go to hell. They are all fallen ones. If Muslims imitate them, they will too become lost soul worthy of hell. The kafirs Kunjupattumma saw were schoolmistresses. It was when her bapa took her to the river all dresses up that she has seen them. Kunjupattumma has also seen the children of the rich people who come from town on vacation. Hardly a single one of them has as much gold jewelry as Kunjupattumma has! She has seen many of them liking at her enviously. She has also heard them asking, ‘Who is that girl?’ pointing at her as they do so. On all those occasions someone would say with great awe, ‘It’s Vattan Adima’s daughter, Kunjupattumma; Anamakkar’s daughter’s daughter!’

Some would ask, ‘Isn’t she the daughter of our Kunjutachumma?’

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<sup>122</sup> Nabi = an Arabic word means the Prophet.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. Page, 54.



The school mistresses gather round her saying, 'Give us a smile, Kunjupattumma.' Kunjupattumma likes them. Although they are kafirs, they smell nice. They all wear blouses. Underneath the blouse they have a thin, tight bodice. What is more, they wear flowers on their head. Some will weave flowers into Kunjupattumma's hair. Some of them pretend they are pinching the mole off her cheek. She does not enjoy any of this. She wants to be able to wear the same sort of sari and blouse, with the thin, tight bodice underneath. She mentioned this to her bapa. Then those teachers laughed. One of them said, 'When you grow up!'

How she wants to grow up! So a desire was born in her. She must grow up!

'Umma, when am I going to grow up?' she asked her mother.

When her umma asked why. She openly told her the truth. Then her umma put fear in to her.

'We can't do anything like that, Kunjupattumma! That's the way the kafirs dress. We should distinguish ourselves from kafirs!'

'That's true, my dear,' her bapa said. 'We don't want that sort of thing!'<sup>124</sup>

(8) kunjupattumma, her mother Kunjutachumma who lives in past glory with a lot of ornaments and superstitions.

"So the matter of the marriage became pressing. In the house it is like a feast everyday. Five to eight bundles of betel leaves a day. Umm's work consists of chewing and talking. Decked out in all her jewelry, wearing gold-threaded head-shawl and silk kuppayam and dressed in a double lower cloth also made of silk, she sits by the betel-box on a finely woven mat. She will not go barefoot. Umma walks only on wooden sandals. Both the toe-grips of umma's wooden sandals are made from the tusk of uppupa's elephant. The sandals will always be close by her.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid. Page, 54- 55.

There will be lots of women to chew and listen to her talk. The topics are not many-either Kunjupattumma, or the seven aunts who are bapa's sisters. Mostly the subject is the black mole on kunjupattumma's cheek.

'This is a lucky mole!' umma will say . 'it's not mere chance. She's the darling daughter of Anamakkar!' that is not all: 'I gave birth to five,' umma will say, 'but God and the Prophet and the saints gave me only one.' Then she fondles Kunjupattumma's jewelry before going on with what she has to say. 'Tell me, my friend, don't you think this one at least should be well cared for?' what she says next is in a somewhat angry tone of voice: 'I tell you... even if her bapa's people don't take part in the wedding, kunjupattumma's wedding will take place. She's the darling daughter if the darling daughter of Anamakkar!' when she has thus said what she has to say on this topic, umma will ask one of the women to say something.

'Say something!'

The women will talk. Once, as they were talking like this, kunjupattumma heard from the women a piece of local news which disturbed her. It made her sad and angry.

The disturbing news that heard Kunjupattumma was this: In the neighbourhood and in almost all the houses of the area, there are children of four or five year's age. A new generation is coming up! Kunjupattumma has nothing against that. But their names! Mere coolies, fishermen, common beggars- in fact in most of the Muslim houses of the area, there are kunjupattumma, and makkars!

Oh creator of the worlds! What can be done? Do they not have any shame or humility... could they not give some other names to their children? For kunjupattumma had not understood one of the secrets of this world: the names of those who are rich and famous will be used by the poor, who are neither. This is a common thing. There is no law against the use of the names of people who have wealth and fame by those have neither. They might obtain prosperity and renown as a result. Yet somehow that did not seem right to Kunjupattumma-because she was the only true Kunjupattumma in the world, her

bapa was the only Vattan Adima, her umma the only Kunjutachumma and her uppupa the only Anamakkar!”<sup>125</sup>

(9) Prejudices of Muslim on other communities, superstitious belief and customs in Muslims.

The undemocratic dealing of women. They are compelled to do what was told to them, and accept what was given. Nobody knew what Alla says in Quran.

“While the negotiations for Kunjupattumma’s marriage were going on, Kunjupattumma heard a couple of things.

Uppapa’s huge tusker had killed six people! She felt unhappy about that, and she was angry with the elephant. She even went so far as to say, ‘Naughty elephant!’

But the anger did not last very long, because all the six people the elephant had killed were kafir mahouts. It had not killed a single Muslim. But then she was not sure that it had ever had a Muslim mahout.

‘It was a fine elephant!’ said umma.

For it used to take fruit and *jaggery*<sup>126</sup> from uppupa’s hand and eat them.

‘Your bapa came to marry me on that elephant!’ said umma.

Kunjupattumma wondered whether the boy who was coming to marry her... would come on an elephant.

To whom... why... is she being married? Kunjupattumma did not think of any such things. As soon as she is married, bapa will go to Mecca for the hajj. It was in this sacred place that Muhammed Nabi was born. There is holy shrine there called *Ka’ba*<sup>127</sup>. This is the world’s first mosque. It is very ancient. It was Ibrahim Nabi who renovated it.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. page, 56- 57.

<sup>126</sup> Jaggery = an unrefined brown sugar made in india from the sap of certain kinds of palm.

<sup>127</sup> Ka’ba = the small rectangular shrine near the centre of the great mosque at Mecca that is the most sacred spot on earth for Muslims. Circumambulation of the Ka’ba is an essential part of the hajj.

Kunjupattumma's bapa has not had any mosque built. After he comes back from the hajj, bapa will be called 'Haji Vattan adima' or 'Vattan Adima Haji'.

'Are you going, umma?' Kunjupattumma asked.

'Where?'

'For the *hajj*<sup>128</sup>.'

'Yes, I'm going!' said umma.

This is news.

'Then... you must take me too!' said Kunjupattumma.

Umma laughed and said, 'You must say that to your husband!'

She felt shy and did not say any more. Who is coming to marry her? Will he be young or old? Dark or fair? She has no idea. Some man is coming.

If you are born a girl, you will be given in marriage to a man. This custom that goes back to the time of Muhammad Nabi and his Companions, the *As-habus*<sup>129</sup>. Even before then, this must have been the custom. Long, long ago Adam married Eve. Adam and Eve had no bapa and umma. It was God, Rabb al-Alamin, who got them married. Adam and Eva are the first parents of those who are now living in this world and those who are dead. Before them there were no men on the earth. Kunjupattumma does not know how many millions of years ago Adam and Eve lived on this earth. After Adam the world has seen many prophets.... Noah, Abraham, David, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad.

Muhammad is the last prophet. There will be no more prophets. With the prophet Muhammad everything has been fulfilled.

Muhammad Nabi's eldest daughter was called Fatima. Instead of Fatima some say Pattumma. Muhammad Nabi got Fatima married to Caliph Ali.

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<sup>128</sup> Hajj = the pilgrimage to Mecca prescribed as one of the religious duties of Muslims.

<sup>129</sup> As-habus = the companions of Prophet Muhammed- those of his followers who had personal contact with him.

Ali was very brave and valiant. Ali had a glittering sword called *Dhualfiqar*<sup>130</sup>. During his last days, in accordance with the commandments of God Almighty, Ali threw this sword in to the ocean. It cut the necks of all the fish. That is why a cut is seen on either side of the gullet of all fish. It is from that day that fish has become '*halal*<sup>131</sup>' to the Muslim and so can be lawfully eaten.

Kunjuhattamma wondered whether the man who was coming to marry her would be a great hero. She had no idea. Whom should she ask? There is one thing... do what you are told, accept what you are given-that is the duty of a Muslim girl. Kunjuhattamma has realized this. What have Almighty God and his Messenger Muhammad laid down regarding this? Although she could not understand the meaning, she has read the Koran. Her bapa and umma have read it. Her uppupa Anamakkar has also read the Koran. But nobody knows what it contains. If you make all the trees in the world onto pens and all the oceans into ink and try to write the meaning of the Koran, you will find that before you finish one chapter, all the trees will be used up and all the oceans will be dry. The Koran is a holy book. Everything is in it. It was not written by anyone. The Lord God Almighty through his angel Gabriel sent it down to Muhammad Nabi. Nabi did not know how to read or write. Yet the Koran is in his mother tongue, which is Arabic. Kunjuhattamma has heard that there is country called Arabia. There are two holy places there called Mecca and Medina. Muhammad Nabi was born in Mecca, and he was buried in Medina."<sup>132</sup>

(10) Muslim women were not allowed to enter Mosque and pray there.

"It was in the Mosque that Kunjuhattamma first heard about the scoundrel *Iblis*<sup>133</sup>. It was not to pray that she went to the Mosque. After all, a Muslim woman cannot go and pray in the Mosque along with the men! It was to hear the evening sermon or '*wa'z*<sup>134</sup>', that she

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<sup>130</sup> Dhualfiqar = a magical sword, said to have been originally the property of an unbeliever but to have come into the possession of prophet Muhammed after the battle of Badr in 624. Muhammed gave it to his son-in-law, Ali, with whom it is always associated in Islamic mythology.

<sup>131</sup> Halal = 'lawful' flesh of animals slaughtered according to ritual and so fit for consumption by Muslims.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. Page, 58- 60.

<sup>133</sup> Iblis =the Islamic name for the devil, the representative of the powers of evil.

<sup>134</sup> Wa'z = sermon, Arabic word.

went to the Mosque that day. An elder was giving the wa'z. In front of the Mosque, but to one side, a *pandal*<sup>135</sup> had been erected. It was for the women. If you sat there, you could not see anything. Kunjupattamma heard about the scoundrel Iblis (also known as Satan) while sitting in that *pandal*. The elder spoke about Iblis in a loud singing voice. Kunjupattamma remembers the whole thing very clearly.”<sup>136</sup>

(11) Muslims way of dress.

“This is what Kunjupattamma has heard from her bapa. Muslims have a special way of dress. If it is a man, he must wrap his dhoti to the left. His head must be clean shaven. His beard must be trimmed to a thin line, like a path going through a paddy field. If it is a woman, she must have her ears pierced for the special ornaments called *halqats*. They must wear a *kuppayam* and cover the head. They can comb the hair but cannot part it.

Once a muslim youth went against this rules. He let his hair grow and had it cut and groomed.

Bapa sent for this boy and had the barber shave his head! Then he said, ‘As long as I am alive, with the help of god Almighty and Nabi, I will not allow you to break the Muslim customs!’”<sup>137</sup>

(12) Ornaments of Kunjupattamma, it makes her uncomfortable, unable to move, wherever she move the world will know. She doesn't like that. So she sits at home, like a prisoner.

“They are not matters that she understands. Court house, lawyers, opposing witnesses- and other such things. Sometimes the question of her wedding comes up. Every atom in her tries to listen. But she cannot move. If Kunjupattamma moves, the world will know. She is shy about it. If she so much as breathes, the sound will reverberate. And if she were to walk! There would be such a clinking and clanking and clattering! Why does one

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<sup>135</sup> Pandal = a temporary pavilion with open sides, made of upright poles supporting a roof of plaited coconut leaves or bamboo matting. (is a Malayalam word).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. Page, 61.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. page, 62.

need so many ornaments? May be she could take a few off. But then nobody knows when some women will come to see the future bride.

All the women who came were covered with gold. All were very grand. What questions they ask! No end of doubts... some has looked in to her mouth. Does she have a full set of teeth? Are any of them decayed?

None of her teeth has any defect. She has a full set of beautiful teeth.

Some others wanted to know if she was deaf; or weather she was well informed. To find out they would ask various questions.

'Who made us?' one woman asked.

'Allah,' said Kunjupattumma.

'What are the signs of *qiyamat*?<sup>138</sup>,

That means, 'What are the signs of the end of the world?'

One day this world will be destroyed. There are some signs by which one can know about it in advance. Kunjupattumma will go in to this in detail... those of low estate will rise. Those of high estate will go down. Evil will prevail. Faith in God will fade. Religions will disappear. Parents will not be obeyed. Teachers will not be respected. Old people will be mocked. Women will lose modesty and shame. Nobody will have respect for anyone. Nobody will believe anyone. Love will disappear. Jealousy will increase. Hardheartedness will be more prevalent. Kings and rulers will become very cruel. The desire to rule the whole world increase. There will be terrible wars.... Even then the world will not be destroyed. Only Allah can destroy it. Very many years before *qiyamat*, men will fall in to the confused state of forgetfulness... then one day, as soon the sun is up, while men are in the midst of getting ready for their daily work, the people of the world will suddenly hear a long, protracted sound.

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<sup>138</sup> *Qiyamat* =the rising of men at the resurrection on the last Day.

‘Oh... what sound is this?’ they will wonder...it is the trumpet called Sur!

It is the angel Israfil who makes this sound. It comes from a pipe. That pipe has holes according to the number of all the living beings on the earth... people who hear these sounds will come from different parts and gather in groups asking confusedly, ‘where is it coming from?’

These sounds will slowly increase until they become terrible as thunder. Living beings will wander around in a confused state of mind. The sounds will become more and more frightful. Men and other living creatures will start falling down dead singly and in groups. The earth will tremble and burst asunder. All the oceans will storm and foam and go over the land. Hills and mountains will burst into millions of pieces. Tempests will rage. Fire will be put out completely in the world. The sun, moon and stars will cool down and become dark. Everything will perish. Not a trace of the heavens or the earth will remain. In the end...in the end there will be only be Lord Rabb al-Alamin. Then he will say, ‘Where are the kings and others who boastfully said, “I....I”?’

Like this millions of ages will pass during which God alone will be... Again he will create the world. There will be sun, moon, and stars. He will raise all souls to life again. Then punishment, salvation... Kunjupattumma will recite all this in detail. She knows all of it by heart.

Asking questions like this, examining her, coming to see her... on behalf of a sun; or on behalf of a brother.

If only she had a brother...! She too could go to some houses, ask questions and be a grand lady. She knows all that a Muslim lady should know. She can read the Koran in a singing tone. If one wants to touch the Koran, the body should be made clean. For that, either you should bathe; or you should do ‘wuzu’<sup>139</sup>. This is done by saying some Arabic words and washing the hands, mouth, nose, face, ears, the crown of the head; and the feet- three times each in pure water. Then she also knows how to pray; *Subh, Zuhr, Asr*,

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<sup>139</sup> Wuzu = (partial) ritual ablution. (is an Arabic word).



*Magrib, Isha*<sup>140</sup>, -prayers for the five different parts of the day. Moreover, she knows all about 'Islam' (submission) and '*Iman*<sup>141</sup>' (faith). Nobody can excel her.

One of those fine ladies who came to see her asked, 'who was Aisha Bibi?'

'Nabi's consort!' said Kunjupattumma.

Aisha Bibi was one of Muhammad's wives.

'Were *Aisha*<sup>142</sup> Bibi's ears pierced?'

'Yes.'

'How many halqats did she have?'

Kunjupattumma replied, 'the angel Gabriel (peace be upon him) brought a bunch of pearls from Heavens and gave it to the Messenger of Allah. Nabi put them in Aisha Bibi's ears!' <sup>143</sup>.

(13) The coconut plantation and paddy fields that Kunjupattumma's bapa controlled and enjoyed were not his alone. That big house and all the rest belonged to bapa and his seven sisters.

"What else could she do? This is what that scoundrel did. The coconut plantation and paddy fields that Kunjupattumma's bapa controlled and enjoyed were not his alone. That big house and all the rest belonged to bapa and his seven sisters.

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<sup>140</sup> Subh = dawn, the first of the five daily congregational prayers in Islam.

Zuhr = Midday, the second of the five daily congregational prayers in Islam.

Asr = afternoon, the third of the five daily congregational prayers in Islam.

Maghrib = the period immediately after sunset, the fourth of the five daily congregational prayers in Islam.

Isha = late evening, the fifth of the five daily congregational prayers in Islam.

<sup>141</sup> Iman = 'faith', the theoretical part of the religion of Islam, its doctrines, as opposed to the practical course that a believer must conform in his life.

<sup>142</sup> Aisha = wife of Prophet Muhammed.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. Page, 64- 67.

The seven sisters together filed a case against bapa saying, 'Unknown to anyone, our brother Vattan Adima took our Umma in a bullock cart to the court house and got her to will to his alone what was rightfully ours also!'

'Our dear umma willed it to me!' Kunjupattumma'a bapa argued. The case, which dragged on for many years, cost both sides a lot of money. Competent lawyers argued the case. To ensure victory, both sides promised offerings to all the mosques. In the mosques flags were raised; sandalwood paste was presented. Moreover both parties had many worthy people as false witnesses. Slowly the case was developing in Vattan Adima's favour. Then it took an unexpected turn.

Vattan Adima's mother was insane! She was not on her right mind when she wrote the will. Is it possible to bring to the court someone who is dead and gone so that a matter can be cleared up? Witnesses came to testify that Vattan Adima's umma was insane! Moreover, it was argued, whether she was insane or not, weren't Vattan Adima's sisters entitled to his mother's property?

.....In the end, what was left to bapa was that small piece of land on the side of the road."<sup>144</sup>

(14) According to custom Muslim girl were not allowed to wear flowers on their head. They were also not expected to walk along the public road.

"She is not sure whether Muslim girl are allowed to rear flowers. But she likes jasmine flowers and so sits there and makes garlands with them. Just to sit there is a pleasure too. Nothing moves. There is no-one. In front, on a lower level, is the road. Beyond the road are paddy fields. Somewhere beyond the fields is the river. To go there and bathe, one has to go along the public road. How can a Muslim girl of marriageable age go along the public road? Yet if she were to bathe by the well where they live, there is nothing to screen her from the public eye."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. page, 70- 71.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. page, 71- 72.

(15) After a certain age, husband and wife cannot stand the sight of each other? The gap increases, some time they behave like strangers. It was the condition of Kunjupattumma's parents.

"Why do people become like this? Kunjupattumma thought hard, but she could not understand how is it that, after a certain age, husband and wife cannot stand the sight of each other? Are all ummas and bapas like this? They are ready to bite and tear each other apart."<sup>146</sup>

(16) Muslim girl were not expected to talk to a man. When kunjupattumma fall down to a ditch Nisar Ahmad came to help her.

"Was it proper to talk like this? What would people say? A Muslim girl of marriageable age talking to a man she has never seen or heard about! When she thought of that, Kunjupattumma got all worked up. As she was standing there, she saw pieces of earth falling down from the other side. He is coming down! ... A young man dressed in a white shirt and a white dhoti. On his left wrist is a gold watch. His hair is well groomed.

She could see only so much. He was coming down slowly, holding on to the uvaria tree. May he not fall the way she did! Lord Take care of him... she stood there filled with anxiety."<sup>147</sup>

### Summary:

In this Novel 'Me grandad 'ad an elephant!' the dominant character is Kunjupattuma's mother who gloats over the glory that was, and the central theme is the conflict between the values she upholds and those of the educated, forward- looking Nissar Ahmed. The message of the need for modernization is embodied in this story<sup>148</sup>.

In this Novel Basheer project the glory of the bygone days of Islam and at the same time to point out the failure of present-day Muslims to adjust to the modern life. He indirectly

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid. Page, 75.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. Page, 83.

<sup>148</sup> 'Poovan Banana and other stories', Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, TRanslated by V.Abdulla, Published by: Orient Longman 1994.

emphasizes a need for social change. There is a criticism of out dated Muslim customs that have no basis in Islam and an appeal to live in the present<sup>149</sup>.

## (2) CHILDHOOD FRIEND<sup>150</sup>:

This was first published in the year 1944. It is the love story of *Majid and Suhra*<sup>151</sup>. The book is not pure fiction. Indeed he has put the autobiographical element at '90 per cent'.

In their childhood the boy Majid and the girl Suhra were good friends. That is to say, they met and fought regularly. Slowly as they go through school, a tender affection develops and each becomes indispensable to the others well-being. But one day Majid forgets to do an errand for his father and is soundly beaten on returning home late. He is thrown violently from the house and decides to leave home.

When he returned home after seven years it was to find that Suhra had against her will been given as second wife to a man who regularly ill treated her. At the time of Majid's return she is no longer living in her husband's house. Majid's mother agrees that he should marry Suhra. But they must have money as dowry for his two unmarried sisters. So again he leaves home.

Childhood friend has faint suggestions of disapproval of certain Muslim customs- among them circumcision, the piercing of girls' ears (twenty one holes per person) - and more especially customs relating to Marriage.<sup>152</sup>

The social issues Basheer questions in his story are:<sup>153</sup>

(1) Polygamy- the practice of having more than one wife, and second wife were ill treated.

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<sup>149</sup> 'Me granddad 'ad an elephant!' Basheer, translated by R.E Asher and Achamma Coilparambil Chandarsekaran. Penguin Books.

<sup>150</sup> 'Childhood friend' is a Novel written By Vaikom Muhammed Basheer in Malayalam.

<sup>151</sup> Majid and Suhra are two characters in this Novel. Majid is boy and Suhra is girl.

<sup>152</sup> 'The Novel in India its birth and Development', T.W.Clark, Published: by London. Page 228-231.

<sup>153</sup> "Me granddad 'ad an elephant!", Basheer, Translated by: R.E.Asher and Achama Ciolparambil Chandarsekeran. Pub: Penguin.

- (2) Dowry system- for marriage of girl.
- (3) Circumcisions.
- (4) The piercing of girls' ears. (Twenty one holes per person)
- (5) Custom relating to marriage.

### (3) PATHUMMA'S GOAT<sup>154</sup>:

This novel was first published in the year 1959. A spell in the life of Basheer following his return home after being away almost continuously for some ten or fifteen years. Story of life in a joint family. Its alternative title is 'wisdom of women'. Sacrifices women make on behalf of the family.<sup>155</sup>

Here Basheer writes how women make great sacrifices in middle class home. There is rice for the men and children only. Women in the house adjust with tapioca and kanji-water.

“‘you listen’, said umma. ‘After eating tapioca, one must drink a little kanji-water. We drank only a little. The whole lot went to your goat!’

Did she say that after eating tapioca one must drink kanji-water? When do they eat tapioca? It was when I enquired, that I came to know a pitiful secret. *Umma*<sup>156</sup>, *Anumma*, *Aishimma* and *Kunjanumma*<sup>157</sup> - none of them eats rice regularly. That is to say that they do not get any. There is rice for the men and the children only. The others live on tapioca. In the morning at eleven o'clock they pound the dried tapioca into a powder and make *puttu*<sup>158</sup> with this instead of the usual rice- flour. They put a pinch of tea leaves (generally this is given by Sulaiman<sup>159</sup>) into some hot water and drink it without sugar or milk. After that they work. They all have as much work as they can manage. Then men come only

<sup>154</sup> 'Pathumma's Goat' is a Novel written by Vaikom Muhammed Basheer in Malayalam Language.

<sup>155</sup> The novel in India, Page 231-232.

<sup>156</sup> Umma = mother, a term used exclusively by Muslims in Kerala.

<sup>157</sup> Anumma, Aishimma and Kunjanumma = they are the women members of Basheer Family.

<sup>158</sup> Puttu = a food made from rice-flour and ground coconut.

<sup>159</sup> Sulaiman= Basheer's brother and a family member.

when it is time to eat; it is the women who endure privation. This is not the case in my house alone. This is how things are in almost all middleclass homes. The women make great sacrifices; why are men unaware of this?"<sup>160</sup>.

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<sup>160</sup> "Me granddad 'ad an elephant!'", Basheer, Translated by: R.E.Asher and Achama Ciolparambil Chandrasekaran. Pub: Penguin. Page 162.

## **Chapter-4**

### **CHANGING SOCIAL STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN KERALA UNDER THE IMPACT OF MODERNIZATION AND WESTERN EDUCATION:**

The status of Muslim women in Kerala changed drastically over a time of period. The social condition of Muslim women in Kerala improved gradually, compare with pre-independence period and aftermath of India's independence.

Social conditions of Muslim women in Kerala after independence Muslim girls were not allowed to go out of their house when they grew up. They were assigned kitchen and groomed to be a wife and a 'model woman' at their in-laws' house. So, they would not study beyond 5th or 6th class. Girls who learned up to 10th were rare at that time. But then, before independence, no girl was sent to school at all. They were given some religious lessons at home and there ended their journey of education. But that was then. Today parents are spending, with pleasure, lots of money on higher education of their daughters.

Sad part of the story is that no girl or woman would ever complain on this. They were happy with the life they lived, because they never knew about the sweetness of education. They kept on believing that the role of the women is only to take care of the family and nothing else. She is not meant to acquire knowledge of the world.

But gradually the thinking process in Muslim society began adopt the changes. Basically, women got to understand that they should not be deprived of education. They realized that they also have the right to learn and acquire on things as high as sky. So, with this idea they began to move forward in the field of education.

Over 50% of Muslim women in India are illiterate today -- literacy being officially defined rather generously to include just about anyone who can read and write a sentence or two. The situation in the northern states, especially in rural areas, is said to be particularly dismal. About 85% of rural north Indian Muslim women are unable to read or write. On the other hand, the situation in

the south, especially in urban areas, was found to be considerably better, with 88% urban south Indian women said to be literate.

In Kerala, according to government census 2001, the literacy rate of Muslims was 89.4%, much higher than the national average of 64.8%. The Muslim male literacy rate in Kerala is 93.7% while female literacy rate is 85.5%.

The revolution in Kerala did not come in one day. Islamic reformist movements in Kerala, from the late nineteenth century onwards, have played a key role in promoting 'modern' as well as religious education, including women's education. They have set up thousands of institutions that cater to the community—not just madrasas and mosques, but also schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, industrial centres, banks, newspapers and so on. In this way, the social reformation in Kerala have played a more socially engaged role, says Yoginder Sikand<sup>161</sup> analyzing difference of development in Kerala and north India.

But the change is also attributed to the change of perception of women about themselves. The girls understood the real value of education. The parents, most of them illiterate, began to think that their daughter should get the advantage they were deprived of. Girls also began to be aware on the importance of education. And this led to the modern situation where girls today fill more than half of the allotted seats in many of the reputed colleges. Like men, women also have an idea about their future life. They also have planned for their life.

“Unlike the earlier ages, now girls take education seriously. They also are in the run to make a well planned and well set life as that of the men folk,” says Wajeeha, a student of BDS at a private college in Malappuram district.

“At our time parents would start searching for a suitable groom for the girl by the time she was 15. But nowadays, girls decide their lives themselves. This freedom will give them the ability to face life boldly,” Jameela, a homemaker, says.

Not only this, the aspiration of educated women folk has also changed as far as career is concerned. Earlier they would think of only teaching job after getting higher education. They would think there was no other job which suits a girl. This sort of thinking has also been kept aside by the modern generation.

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<sup>161</sup> Yoginder Sikand is an Academician and Journalist based on Delhi.



“In our college everyone has different aims in life. One wants to become doctor, another a call centre executive, one another a journalist and so on goes the list. I myself aim at being a speech therapist,” Jaleesa, an engineering student, says.

Not only the aim of education, the modern girl has really got a clear cut idea of her life, the way she should live it<sup>162</sup>.

In my interview with Mr.V.M. Ussan Kutty,Principal M.A.M.O College, Mukkam,Calicut, I noted down the following data<sup>163</sup>:

1. ~~4~~. Enrolement of Muslim girls for college education is more than Muslim boys.

2. ~~5~~. Muslim girls prefer Science subjects than Arts in Degree level education.

In Admission list 2010 for B.Sc Microbiology, In general category merit lists, all are girls, and 50% of them are Muslim girls.

3. ~~6~~. In B.Sc Microbiology students, 75% of them are girls, and 80% of them are Muslim girls.

There was the opposition for female education in all communities in Kerala especially among Muslims in last generation. In some Muslim areas (eg. Thalassery, Kozhikode city, Kodungalloor, Arookutty, Pathanamthitta) and some families the opposition was comparatively less.

Now Muslim women themselves understood that the education is a necessity and their elder men encourage for it. There is even a competitive spirit between Muslim families to make their sons and girls attain higher education. Financially analysing lower middle class Muslims also try to give good education for their girls in order to compensate social prestige for their family's economic backwardness.

It is also to be noted that some Muslim girls slip a little away from Islamic culture in campus. Some girls and boys lean to anyway and forget the circumstance in which they were grown up. Some women adopt modern personal appearance. These happen by the influence of their friends from other communities.

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<sup>162</sup> [www.twocircles.net/2010apr05/muslim\\_women\\_education\\_kerala\\_my\\_mom\\_and\\_i](http://www.twocircles.net/2010apr05/muslim_women_education_kerala_my_mom_and_i), By Aaliya Rushdie.

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Mr.Ussankutty,Principal M.A.M.O College Mukkam on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

However, among the Malayalee community when compared to Catholics, Syrian Christians, Nair and Ezhava Hindus, Muslims are back in case of education of women.

Muslim Educational Society (M.E.S), Kerala Nadwathul Mujahideen(Wahabi-Salafi), Jama'ate Islami , such organisations helped Kerala women becoming educated. Liberal and progressive atmosphere created by Sree Narayana Guru, Communist Movement and various other progressive movements also helped Kerala women achieving this. Christian missionary works also have some role in making Kerala soil educated and literate. Even before independence, Kerala was famous for achievements in health and women education. Travancor Raja rule was progressive to an extent which caused progress in Raja ruled south Kerala. British-ruled north Kerala got no much care. But many Muslim families of North Kerala were rich and educated, so they slowly became successful in educating their women. Movements like Samastha Jamiatul Ulema and Muslim League also helped.

Jama'ate islami established their first women's Islamiya College in Calicut in 1950's. They promote women education in their Institutes.

In Kerala, considered a role model for other parts of the country, almost all Muslim children up to the tenth standard are in school, numbers that compare well to that of other communities. Yet, the story is very different when one looks at higher education, writes Deepa A<sup>164</sup>.

02 August 2007 - As the principal of Farook College at Kozhikode, the first Muslim-run institute of higher education in Kerala, Professor K A Jaleel has witnessed several landmark moments in the history of Muslim education in the coastal state. On a rainy evening in June, at his house near the college that he nurtured and cherishes, he recalls one of those moments that he knew even then would later be described as a 'turning point': the admission of girl students to the college.

Jaleel, who went on to become the vice-chancellor of Calicut University, remembers, "I had been the principal of Farook College from 1957 onwards, and girls were admitted for the first time in 1959. There was much hesitation and anxiety, and there was considerable fear as to what the reaction from the community would be." There were only a handful of girls in the college those days, pioneers who braved traditional norms and societal pressure to seek a foothold in the education field. But today, the situation is different, as even a casual visitor to the college will

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<sup>164</sup> [www.Indiatogether.org](http://www.Indiatogether.org)

acknowledge at first glance. "Now there are as many girls in Farook College as there are boys," says Jaleel.

Lest this be seen as the gist of a progress card that the community can proudly flaunt, N P Hafiz Mohamad, a writer who's the head of the sociology department at Farook College, is quick to point out that Muslim girls have to battle many odds even in the 21st century. Through the story of one of his "best students", Mohamad traces what's still an uphill battle for education for many girls. "My student was the first Muslim girl chosen to participate in the Republic Day parade, from Farook College. She was not only excellent in extra-curricular activities, but also scored high marks in exams," he says. Yet, the student's parents forced her to get married against her wishes, ignoring her desire to pursue her studies and chart out a career path for herself.

While there was some opposition to girls joining educational institutions after India's independence, the Kerala Muslim Ikya Sangha - a consortium of various Muslim organisations - kicked off a renaissance movement that helped in changing many of those initial perceptions, says Jaleel. He explains that the reform movement performed two important functions: one, it helped in ridding false beliefs from the community, and two, it promoted modern education. "This new movement encouraged Muslims to establish more primary and secondary schools, which helped in the community's upliftment and awakening," Jaleel adds<sup>165</sup>.

### EARLY MARRIAGE:

The early marriage in Muslim community is a challenge for their women education and empowerment. In Malappuram district this is serious social issue, the number of early marriage in there is more in comparing to other districts. In Calicut district there are many cases of early marriage which is a threat to Muslim women education and career. Now, since Intermediate level education the marriage proposal will start, and number or drop out students in degree level is too high due to Marriage.

In my interview with Mrs. Rijina A.K (Principal, Ansari Women's College, Dayapuram, Calicut), I have noted down the following things<sup>166</sup>:

1. In her college at Degree level many Muslim girl students are being married and only

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<sup>165</sup> [www.Indiatogether.org](http://www.Indiatogether.org)

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Mrs. Rijina A.K Principal Ansari Womens College, Dayapuram, Calicut on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

5% of them continue study after marriage.

It means after marriage they leave the course without completing , and it will not help them in future career.

2. When Hindus and Christians community giving priority to their girl child to complete their higher study and career, Muslim community, if she is 22<sup>nd</sup> years old or more they think it as an age over. So what parents do they let their married before the age of 22<sup>nd</sup>.

And after marriage her continue education are being decided by her husband and his family. If they let her, then only she can continue study.

3. The rich Muslim families they do not give priority for their girl child higher education or Career. They let their get married just after intermediate level course.

And further study and career is depends upon her husband and his family decision.

Their attitude on job is just a source of income, so if they have enough money they think why then she goes for a job. They do not see the other positive aspects which she can get from a job like personal satisfaction, self realization, financial self reliance, social respect etc.

In my interview with Mr. Abdu (Principal V.H.S.C for Girls, Mukkam, Calicut), he said<sup>167</sup>.

1. In final year batch (2009-10) there was 54 students and 10 of them get married and dropped out. This will affect other students study in class, there the discussion come.
2. Muslim girl education not helpful them to find out a job and career. They need proper guidance on higher education and career also good social support.

In my interview with Dr. A. Mohammed Ali M.B.B.S (Retd. Medical practitioner) he said<sup>168</sup>:

1. good changes are being seen in Muslim society, now girl marriage age is 18 or 17.
2. now the number of child in a family is 3 or 4, earlier it was 12.
3. family planning: we need family planning, the child need 2 years of breast feeding. If the mother give birth to a second wife before 2 years she can't give proper care to her first child.

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Mr. Abdu, Principal V.H.S.C For girls, Mukkam, Calicut, on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Dr.A..Mohammed Ali M.B.B.S (Retd. Medical practitioner, Mukkam, Calicut) on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

Now each child need a single room in a family, and education is too expensive, so we need family planning.

4. Religious education: need modification and changes, must be scientific and need based.

8.

## **EARLY MARRIAGE IN MALAPPURAM DISTRICT**

Malappuram: Is a district in Kerala near to Calicut. There majority of population are Muslims. They are politically and socially strengthened.

*KT Shahana's*<sup>169</sup> center<sup>170</sup> has over 100 girl students learning computer skills. The center is a labor of love that now bearing fruit and what makes Shahana's achievement special is that she herself is plus two drop out.

"I was married off while I was studying in the Class 10 and I had to discontinue while in plus two. My husband had left for the Gulf and I was left alone at home with my children," says she.

Across Mallapuram, there are hundreds and perhaps thousands of Shahanas waiting in the wings. Unlike the older generation that looked towards Gulf economy for a career, the new generation of Muslims wants to build their dreams here, in their own state in Kerala.

Principal *Farook College*<sup>171</sup>, Professor U Mohammed says, "There was a time when they would just go out make some money and come back. But when they realised that without proper education they would get only some menial work even outside, they understood it was important to teach their children. Even here at Farook College, it took 12 years to get the first women students, because the Muslim clergy was against modern education then. Now, we have more girl students in our college than boys."

It's beyond doubt that Muslims of Mallapuram have now started believing in the power of modern education. But to make a radical change in the lives of the people here, you need more than just belief.

A mother of a six-year-old, Shakeela was married off at the tender age of 13 while she was studying in Class 8 in a local school. Soon her husband left her and married again. Today she is struggling to make ends meet.

"It was never my choice to become a mother so early in life. I couldn't understand all this at that time but now I know that I have lost my chance to even complete my studies and

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<sup>169</sup> KT Shahana is a women enterpreneur in Malappuram District in Kerala.

<sup>170</sup> [www.ibnlive.in.com.>com/news/kerala\\_town\\_prefers\\_early\\_marriage\\_CNN\\_IBN](http://www.ibnlive.in.com.>com/news/kerala_town_prefers_early_marriage_CNN_IBN).

<sup>171</sup> Farook College, Calicut, is one of the first Educational Institute In Malabar, Kerala run by Muslim Management.

with that my future has also died off. I only hope that no other girl in Malapuram gets a life like mine," says Shakeela.

Many feel that Shakeela is an example of the draconian marriage market that prevails in Mallapuram where young, uneducated girls are preferred over educated ones.

Social Activist, *Aryadan Shoukat*<sup>172</sup> says, "In this locality there are many 30-year-old grandmothers. A girl who is married at 13 or 14 has a child at 15 and will marry her child off also at the age of 15. So what change are we talking about? Even if you get a distinction in your Class 10 exam, mothers here are happy to send their daughters to their husband's bedrooms than to a class room."

Sadly in Malappuram, for every Shahana who has successfully become an entrepreneur, there is a Shakeela who is still struggling to cope. Modern education may be an attractive option, but early marriage is still the destiny of most young Muslim women in this sleepy town.<sup>173</sup>

#### Summary:

1. The Muslim society in Kerala is moving forward towards the empowerment of their women.
2. The educational status of Muslim women in Kerala is in a good condition, and it is progressive. They have access to higher education and professional education.
3. Early marriage is threat to higher education of Muslim women in Kerala.
4. Under the impact of Modernization and western education, Muslim women in Kerala have a good and equal opportunity in all aspects including higher education, career, social mobility, and social life.

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<sup>172</sup> Aryadan Shoukath is a Politician and a Social Activist in Kerala.

<sup>173</sup> [www.ibnlive.in.com.>India/news/kerala\\_town\\_prefers\\_early\\_marriage\\_CNN\\_IBN](http://www.ibnlive.in.com.>India/news/kerala_town_prefers_early_marriage_CNN_IBN).

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the present research, I have reached the following conclusion.

Social status of Kerala Muslim women is progressive. Even though there are cases of injustice and unhealthy social customs that make Muslim women's life in the society a pitiable one. I think these are rare cases. The mainstream of Kerala Muslim women is moving forward with Education and Modernization.

In the case of early marriage among Muslim women in Kerala especially in Malappuram District, in my study it has been made it clear that the situation is evolving progressively and the spreading of information and education will be a positive factor in this social reform.

Religion has an important role in Kerala Muslim society. From my observation I find that, that is same in all parts of Kerala. The socio religious institutions and positions like *Madrassa*<sup>174</sup> (religious education school), Mosque, *Arabic colleges*<sup>175</sup>, other social education system (*Khutba*<sup>176</sup>, wa'z), religious positions (*khatib*<sup>177</sup>, *qadin*<sup>178</sup>), they have an important role in education of Muslim society. And this socio religious institutions and positions are active in teaching and creating awareness. Their role in institutions like Marriage and family is influensive.

According to my study, Muslim society needs a change in religious education system and religious preaching. Now the teaching and religious preaching are not completely

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<sup>174</sup> Madrasa= Arabic word, means 'school'. Now being used for Muslim Religious School, a system for teaching Muslim students Religious subjects in Kerala.

<sup>175</sup> Arabic Colleges = Colleges where Arabic and Islamic subjects being taught in Kerala. There are Govt. Aided and non Aided Arabic Colleges in Kerala.

<sup>176</sup> Khutba = the sermon of the beginning of the special Friday midday worship.

<sup>177</sup> Khatib = preacher. The one who gives the 'khutba' or sermon at the beginning of the special Friday midday worship.

<sup>178</sup> Qadin = judge. Is an Arabic word.

satisfactory or healthy. Kerala Muslim society needs a change in their religious education system. Instead of just teaching what has written in religious texts and other references, further modification, Research and reformation are required before to be delivered in front of public or students.

Along with this socio religious Institutions and Positions there are many movements and organizations actively working in Kerala Muslim society. Like Samastha Kerala Jmiyyathul Ulama (two groups), Kerala Nadwathul Mujahideen (two groups), Jama-ate Islami Hind, Tableeg Jama-ate, Muslim Educational Society (M.E.S), Muslim Service Society (M.S.S).

These are some Organizations and Movements working in Kerala Muslim society. They have well established and good furnished infrastructure facilities (including Offices, Centers, educational institutions, Orphanages and Mosques) in all over Kerala. I mean their economic condition is not bad. Each of them is running Madrasas all over Kerala through a centralized system and board of education.

Their social networking is amazing. They involve in social, Religious and political activities.

The thought and social mind set-up of Kerala Muslim society is mainly being formed through this Socio Religious and political Organizations, Movements, Institutions and Positions. And the idea that they spread is lagging the influence of modern educated members of the society. I mean people who have different idea and thought are not involving in the process of idea formation of the society. This must be changed. The society needs contribution of modern educated class in the formation of social mind set-up of the society. The Madrasa Curriculum and Syllabi required Reformation and Modification. It should be scientific, Modern and must be suitable for the requirements of modern life situations.

Representation of modern educated class in all aspects of the society is the demand of the time. Their intellectual contribution and suggestions can make the Curriculum of the Religious education system reformed, need based, Modern and fruitful.



## Summary

1. Kerala Muslim society is moving forwards with Modern education and Science.
2. Social status of Muslim women in Kerala is good and progressive.
3. The three Novels of Vaikom Mohammed Basheer (Childhood friend, 'Me grandad 'ad an Elephant!', Pathumma's Goat) have a positive influence in Kerala Muslim society in changing progressively the social status of Muslim women in Kerala since they have dealt with the problems that faced by Kerala Muslim women in the society.
4. Kerala Muslim society needs the intellectual contribution and involvement of the Modern educated Muslims in all aspects of social life and especially in Religious education system (including its Curriculum development).

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