

Origin and development of orphanages in Malappuram District

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ABSTRACT: This study analyses the various religious political and social factors and its contributions to the historic development of orphanages in Malappuram district. The study observed and analyzed factors like The Spread of Christianity and Islam, Social Reforms Movement, The Madrasa System of Religious Instruction, Malabar Rebellion and Khilafat Movement and, Political and Social Patronage and its impact have a greater on the historical development of orphanages in Malappuram District. The study is qualitative in nature and hence the researcher used narration as the method to describe historical events in relation with origin and development of orphanages in Malappuram district. The data sources for the study were article with historical importance Newspaper reports and online Web sources. The collected facts was triangulated using in depth interviews with old age people located in the geographical area of the study who were interested in the subjects. The same process was done among teachers, politicians, religious leaders, authorities of orphanages and Educational institutions.

KEYWORDS: *Orphanages, Madrasa System, Education*

In the year 2014 at Palakkad Junction railway station in which the Railway Police detained 579 children who arrived there in two batches, and arrested eight persons travelling along with them on charges of trafficking minors, have put the spotlight on the increasing flow of children from poor families in the northern and eastern States to orphanages in Kerala. The first lot, 226 boys and 230 girls, aged between five and 13, was

from Bihar and Jharkhand and had arrived at Palakkad by the Patna-Ernakulam Express at around 2.30 p.m. on May 24. The second group -- children aged five to 15, from “other States”—reached Palakkad at around 9 p.m. the next day in the Guwahati-Thiruvananthapuram Express. The children had travelled under extremely vulnerable circumstances, crammed in a few compartments in the two trains, except relatively poor protection by few adults who accompanied them, throughout their 2,700-kilometre journey. Railway police units in the many States and railway zones through which the trains passed had failed to intervene to identify them. The eight men arrested initially by the Railway police at Palakkad hailed from Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Cases were filed against them under Section 370(5) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which deals with trafficking in minors, and they were subsequently transferred to the Crime Branch for further inquiry. The majority of the children had travelled without tickets. Children from other States only be admitted in orphanages in Kerala with the permission of the State Orphanage Control Board. The potential orphanages should submit an application along with the recommendations of the respective State government who wish to admit children from other States. Destitute certificate from the respective village officer and identity documents of the child and permission from the Orphanage Control Board are the essential document for the Children coming from other state particularly from Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Manipur and Delhi.

According to official estimates, more than 2,000 recognised orphanages in Kerala that admit orphan children, destitute women and the aged and About 1,100 of them are meant only for children. An unknown number of unrecognised orphanages also running here by the same objective. Over a 1000 recognised institutions are running by Christian charitable organisations and nearly 300 are running under Muslim managements. A large majority of them are well-established institutions with an impeccable record of charity and humanitarian work and many of their residents have made their mark in various walks of life (Kochuthresia, 2011).

The origin of orphanages and other charitable activities in malappuram district is linked with the social and economic history of Kerala in general

and the special social and religious conditions of Malabar in particular. Kerala has been called as the "Land of charity" by Samuel Mateer in 1870, Government expenditure on social services and informal arrangements for safeguarding the weaker sections have been present in the state from the early days of history. Malappuram was a part of the erstwhile Madras District of the British Empire, and a part of North Malabar. Malapuram district possess some unique characteristics when compared with the rest of Kerala. Though the social and political history of the district were not entirely different from that of other parts of Kerala, there were a variety of factors which contributes in the development of orphanages and other charitable activities in the district. These factors are identified as the following:

The spread of Christianity and Islam

The history of organised voluntary efforts in the state of Kerala begins only with the sixteenth century. But even before that, individual efforts in this regard were initiated by Christian Missionaries and Muslim leaders with the support of local Hindu rulers. The advent of Islam to Kerala was almost at the time of Prophet Mohammed (AD 570 -AD 632). Islam received acceptance in the Kerala community which was based on caste system and class divisions. Ponnani of Malappuram district, Kodungallore of Thrichur district and Kozhikode of Kozhikode district were the main centers Muslim culture. They were also the most important ports in Kerala. Islam spread through the Arab traders in these areas. The local rulers like the Zamorins of Kozhikode and Cheraman Perumals of Kodungallore extended all sorts of help to the Arab traders. The foreign travellers to Kerala like Sulaiman (AD 851), Al Baruni (AD 1051) Al Idrisi (AD 1153), Benjamin (AD 1165), Marco Polo (AD 1293) and IbnuBathutha (AD 1342) have praised the religious tolerance of the rulers of Kerala and the religious harmony in the region. It was recorded that the rich families of Muslim community organised regular, 'Kanhiparcha' (supply of free food for the poor) as a *Nercha* or offering for fulfilling their prayers related to marriage, property, diseases, natural calamities etc. and people from all religious groups were covered by it. But orphans and destitute were given special treatment and special priority. There

were several Quranic verses and Traditions of Prophet Mohammed which make the protection of orphans and destitute as a social obligation of Muslim brethren. It was a common practice among the Muslim women to invite 'Yatheem' (orphan) children to their homes and offer sumptuous food regularly. These individual efforts were the basis of the modern 'Yatheem Khana' (House of Orphans) in different parts of Malabar.

The arrival of Vasco De Gama as the special envoy of King Manuel of Portugal, in 1498 marked a turning point in the economic and political history of Kerala. But the popular notion that Christianity spread in the different part of the region with subsequent foreign invasion is historically untenable. Christianity came to Kerala through St. Thomas in AD 52. St. Thomas started his missionary work in Maliankara near *Musris* and established seven churches in places like Maliankara, Palayur, Kottakkav, Kokkamangalam, Kollam, Niranam and Nilakkal. It shows that even before the spread of Christianity in Europe and the setting up of Roman Church, Christianity was easily accepted by the people of Kerala. The mass conversion of Namboodiri and Nair families to the fold of Christianity took place in spontaneous and natural way in the central and southern parts of Kerala. They come to be known as Suriyani Christians as they conducted masses in Suriyani Language. With the advent of Vasco De Gama, the Latin Catholic missionaries started their work in Kerala. They began to use Latin as the language for masses. Their followers were come to be known on Latin Christians. Later the works of St. Xavier and *UdayamPerur Sunnahadose*(1599) resulted in a gradual transformation of Kerala church to Latin church.

One unique feature of the spread of Christianity in Kerala is its deeply rooted penetration in to local customs and caste traditions. The Nairs converted to Christianity not only continued in their profession but retained many of their social customs. The Philanthropic activities under the leadership of the church became a common feature in Christian dominated areas. The local rulers of Kochi, Vadakkumkoor, Thekkumkoor and Ambalappuzha extended all sorts of help in this regard. This created a conducive climate for the work by Roman Catholic Missionaries in the 18th centuries. With this, charitable institutions began to be set up in different parts of the state.

But social and educational backwardness and the lack of proper leadership emerged as deterrents to the success of these individualised efforts by the Muslim and Christian communities. The situation began to change with the social reform movements among Hindus, Christians and Muslims.

Social Reforms Movement

The initiative for social reforms in Kerala was taken by the Christian Missionaries in the beginning of 19th century. The London Missionary Society, Church Mission Society, Malabar Basel Mission, Salvation Army etc. tried to spread education and abolish slavery and forced labour and fought for granting low caste women the privilege of covering their breasts. They can be treated as the forerunners of social reform movement in the state of Kerala. The work of missionaries quickly penetrated into lower caste groups by dispelling to an extent superstition among their members and by engendering in them a feeling of self respect and equality.

By the beginning of twentieth century, caste based associations superseded religious and social reform movements in Kerala. Both the upper caste and the lower castes of Hindus and non-Hindus like Christians and Muslims organised themselves to fight against social, religious, economic and legal disabilities. While the upper caste Hindus like the Nambutiris tried to mitigate the contradictions within their community, the Nairs and backward communities like the *Ilavas*, *Pulayans*, *Parayans*, Christians and Muslims organised themselves to fight not only against the internal contradictions but also to break the undemocratic and feudal values of tradition. Reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali and Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi propelled the reform process in secular channels. Organisations like SNDP, NSS, *Yoga Kshema Sabha*, *Sadhu Paripalana Sabha*, *Nasrani Jathiya Sangham*, Cochin Christian Association, Travancore Muslim Association, Malabar Muslim Association and *Muslim Elkya Sangham* came up during the period. The *Sahodara* Movement of Kochi and *Atma Vidya Sangham* of Malabar stood for secular and democratic values. By the beginning of the twentieth century all castes and communities of Kerala seemed to have organised themselves along caste lines. These organizations focused

attention on social prestige and economic welfare of their members. This resulted in setting up of social welfare and charitable institution and educational institutions for the welfare of their members in different parts of the state.

The *Madrasa* System of religious instruction

A unique feature of the social life of the Muslims of Kerala, especially of Malabar is the *Madrasa* system of religious education. In fact the Muslim leaders always gave precedence to the setting up of these institutions than any other institution imparting education. All orphanages in the region started with *Madrasas*. *Madrasas* and 'Palli Dars' (regular religious classes at the mosques) functioned without any government support. They are the classic examples of voluntary efforts for education and social transformation by the community. In the beginning many *Madrasas* were either attached to schools, or functioned in the same building with different timing. With the enforcement of Kerala Educational Rules (KER), they were separated from schools. *Madrasas* began to be set up separately in independent buildings. Reformers like Sayyid Sanaullah Makti Thangal and Moulana Chalilakath Kunhamed Haji gave leadership for reforming the *Madrasa* education.

The setting up of 'Samastha Kerala Jameeathul-Ulama' in 1925 and "Samastha Kerala Islam Mata Vidhyabhyas-Board" with headquarters at Chelari, Malappuram in 1951 gave a modern dimension to the *Madrasa* education. There are more than 8070 *Madrasas* affiliated to the Board at this time. A large number of them are attached to orphanages. The development of *Madrasa* system of education and the progress of orphanage movement were mutually reinforcing and complementing

Malabar Rebellion and Khilafat Movement

The immediate impetus for the setting up of orphanages in the present institutionalised form was the aftermath of Malabar Rebellion in the form of thousands of orphans and widows. The Malabar Rebellion out burst in Eranad and Valluvanad Taluks in 1921, as a part of the *Khilafath* movement. The rebellion took a violent turn with the British administration taking highly oppressive measures. Section 144 of Indian Penal Code(1PC) was

implemented in these taluks. There were a large number of fights between the police and British army on the one side and Mappilas on the other side. The rebellion was widespread in 200 villages for nearly nearly about nine months. It was estimated that more than 10,000 Mappilas lost their lives in this uprising. More than 20,000 were exiled, more than 50,000 were jailed, and more than 10,000 were found missing. The economic effects of rebellion were far reaching in nature. 73% of the participators of the rebellion were ordinary agricultural workers, landless tenant farmers, petty traders and head load workers. They lost their livelihood in the rebellion. Widespread eviction of tenants from agricultural land with the support of court deprived the poor of their livelihood also. Up to 1926 more than 24000 eviction cases were implemented in the region. The approach of the members of the Madras Legislative Council was hostile to the interest of Mappila tenant farmers of Malabar.

The absolute impoverishment after the rebellion was an eye opener for the leaders of Muslim community. The J.D.T. Islam Orphanage of Kozhikode was set up in 1922 to provide institutional care to the orphans and destitute who had lost their parents and close relatives during the rebellion. It was the first orphanage of Muslim community in the entire nation. Gradually in different parts of Malabar, similar institutions came up for providing food, shelter health care and education. Thousands of people lost lives in the cholera of 1943 also. Cholera was very rampant in the Eranadu taluk where hundreds of children lost their parents. This pointed towards the need for sustainable mechanism for the protection of poor, destitute and orphans. The Pokker Sahib Memorial Orphanage of Thirurangadi was set up in 1943 for their rehabilitation. The success of J.D.T and Thirurangadi models prompted the community leaders of other parts of the state to start similar organisations in their regions also. These efforts were unanimously backed by all members of the community, irrespective of economic inequalities and difference of opinion on Islamic practices. The religious and political leadership of the Muslim community wholeheartedly fostered these initiatives.

Political and social patronage

The Orphanage movement in Malabar especially in Malappuram

district was unique in terms of the extent of political and social patronage it enjoyed from the Muslim community. Most of these organisations came up as a result of the efforts of social and religious leaders who were political leaders as well. The leaders of Kerala fraction of Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) linked their political activities with social work related to orphanages and similar organisations. There are more than two dozens of orphanages founded after their name. Some of the major orphanages were set up under the personal initiative of Muslim League leaders like K.M. Seethi Sahib , P.M.S.A. Pookkoya Thangal Panakkad , Sayid Abdul Rahiman Bafakhi Thangal, M.K. Haji, Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait, C.H. Mohamed Koya , and Panakkad Sayid Mohamed Ali Shihab Thangal. A large section of the Sunni Muslims of Malabar recognise Panakkad Sayid Mohamed Ali Shihab Thangal as their spiritual leader. He was the patron and chairman of number of orphanages, educational institutions, charitable trusts and Muslim organisations. His spiritual and political leadership gave acceptance to institutions among the community members and ensure their sustainability by way of community support.

Non Muslim League leaders also have set up number of institutions in the region. Muslim Educational Society (M.E.S), Muslim Service Society (M.S .S), *Kerala Nadathul Mujahidheen* (K.N .M), Jarna-at-Islamic Hind(J.I.H) etc, are some the major organisations which have set up orphanages and other educational institutions in different parts of Kerala. Their leaders were either sympathisers and fellow travelers of Indian Union Muslim League or close to the Muslim League leadership and this ensure political patronage for their institutions .

The religious beliefs and convictions coupled with the spiritual leadership of religious leaders is the most important determinant of social patronage for the orphanages of Malappuram district. As already mentioned, the Madrasa system of religious instructions and the orphanages are biologically related with each other. These institutions were supported by the "Pidiyari System" (handful of rice) in the early days, widely prevalent in the region. Each Muslim family set apart a small portion (one 'pidi' or handful) of its provision of rice each day, as donation towards the mosque, Madrasa or orphanage under this system. This was collected

weekly on Fridays from these houses by authorised people and pooled together. The so collected rice s was auctioned publicly after the Jumah prayer and the revenue raised was used for the day today functioning of these institutions. Even now, the system is prevalent in different parts of the district. This unique system of social support or community funding enabled even the poorest of the poor to take part in charitable activities as donors. It was the religious convictions and social consciousness which made even the half fed poor man to be a part of this system. They continue to support these organisations when their economic status improves. Flow of regular donations and other forms of support for the orphanages from the gulf migrants of the region was also evident. The religious beliefs, convictions, social consciousness and social commitment are the base for sustainability of orphanages in this regions.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Madrasa system of religious instructions and the orphanages are biologically related with each other. The factors like The Spread of Christianity and Islam, Social Reforms Movement ,The Madrasa System of Religious Instruction, Malabar Rebellion and Khilafat Movement and, Political and Social Patronage have a greater influence on the historical development of orphanages in Malappuram District.

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