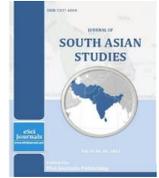




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MATRILINEAL PRACTICES AMONG KOYAS OF KOZHIKODE

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ABSTRACT

The present study is critical about the view that 'textually defined Islamic practices' are in confrontation with 'un-Islamic' matrilineal practices. Engaging with an idea of lived Islam while attempting to understand everyday life of the Muslims enables one to be sensitive to various ways in which Islam and local customs co-exist in Muslim societies. An exploration of matrilineal practices among Koyas of Kozhikode enable one to see how custom and religion co-exist in everyday life in muslim societies which entail dimensions of accommodation, negotiation and contestation. Koyas who constitute a minority Muslim group among Kerala Muslims embrace matriliney as part of their everyday engagement through diverse ways which is related to the specificity of nature of Islamization in Kerala, diverse colonial legacies and socio-economic transformations in post-colonial period. The study therefore tries to argue that Islam is diverse in practice and modifications in matrilineal practices among Koyas of Kozhikode are not due to the impact of Islam alone but through the interplay of multitude of interacting factors such as colonialism, post-Independence developments and neo-liberal trends.

Keywords: Matriliney, Muslims, lived Islam, Koyas, Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the origin of Islam as a new faith in Arabia in the seventh century A.D, Arabs had established their trading contact with coastal regions of Kerala. Later trade became a means for this new faith to arrive in Kerala, a society which was diverse with regional specificities and caste organization. Grafting Islam onto this diverse culture paved way for the formation of a heterogeneous Mappila community in Kerala.

Trading engagement of Arabs with Kerala extended to the realm of marriage alliances with native women. Their children were converted to Islam. The pre-Islamic cultural traditions of the native people were never completely replaced by Islam. Instead, local customary practices and Islamic practices coexisted entailing historically specific dimensions of accommodation, negotiation and contestation. Matrilineal practices among Koyas of Kozhikode are one such dimension. Kozhikode is one of the fourteen districts of Kerala State. The pre-colonial Kerala was consisted of three political divisions such as Malabar, Travancore and Cochin. Malabar was

under the rule of Zamorin of Calicut prior to the British conquest. North Malabar was separated from South Malabar by Kora River. Situated on the Southwest Coast of Malabar, Kozhikode embellishes the colonial name Calicut. One cannot neglect the historical importance of Calicut as one of the major ports in pre-colonial and colonial period for trading in Indian Ocean by Egyptians, Chinese and Arabs.

Koyas as one among the Mappila communities are believed to be emerged through the conversion from upper caste Hindus such a Brahmins and also from matrilineal Nayars. Koyas also emerged as a community through the marriage alliance between Arab men and native women.

Koyas were engaged in trans-oceanic trade in the nineteenth century. They were given trading rights by the native rulers of Kerala. They controlled the nearby bazaars in Kozhikode in the nineteenth century. Apart from the trading engagements, Koyas were also settled cultivators in the nineteenth century. They emerged as a dominant business class in Kozhikode in the late twentieth century. The everyday life of Koyas brings into light how patrilineal form of inheritance assumed in the reading of textual Islam co-exists with matrilineal

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customary practices entailing dimensions of accommodation, negotiation and contestation. Koyas resided in matrilineal joint households called Tharavad in pre-colonial Kerala. They traced their descent through female line and followed *Marumakkathayam* or matrilineal system of inheritance. The co-existence of matrilineal practices and Islamic practices were questioned by Islamic reformers since nineteenth century. Changes came to be observed in the nature of inheritance, residence pattern, conjugal relation and Tharavad system in the twentieth century. It is important to note here that modifications to matrilineal practices among Koyas were also fuelled through market reforms, legislative measures, urbanization, and modern education, emergence of nuclear families, salaried jobs and migration to cities.

An exploration of matrilineal practices of Koyas necessitates adequate attention to the specificity of the legacy of Islam in Kerala and the diverse social organization among Kerala Muslims.

HISTORICAL LEGACY OF ISLAM IN KERALA

Soon after the origin of Islam in Arabia, it was brought to the coastal regions of Kerala by the Arabian travelers and religious functionaries. Arabia had established its trading contact with the coastal regions of Kerala even before the origin of Islam in Arabia. Arabs were warmly welcomed and were given lands for settlements by the native rulers like Kolattiri kings (Gough, 1961). As trade brought revenues from the ports, friendly relations existed between Arab traders and native rulers. Arabs entered into marriages with native women and their children were converted to Islam. Arabs also married Konkans on the Konkan coast, Tamils on the Coromandel Coast, and Chinese in the Indonesian Archipelago and Bantu women in East Africa (Laxmi, 2012). Arabs entered into *mut'a* marriages (Koya, 1983) or temporary marriages with local women in Kerala. The contracting parties live together at the house of woman for a stipulated period of time. Man pays an amount which will be considered as *mahr* or bride price. The bride price is chosen out of mutual agreement. The community which resulted from the marriage of Arab Muslims and local women, as well as converts from the local population was called the Mappila. Local converts included even chieftains and rulers. It is assumed that even the non-Muslim foreign population engaged in trade with Kerala used to be called as Mappila. Muslim Mappilas were generally called as Jonaka Mappilas and

Christian Mappilas as Nasrani Mappilas. The title 'Mappila' was also considered as a sign of respect given by the native rulers to Muslim foreign visitors who were engaged in trade. These foreign visitors were later settled in the ports of Central and North Kerala. In addition to these debates over the meaning of the term Mappila, the term also refers to the offspring of foreign husbands and and indigenous wives (Miller, 1992).

Mappila community began to grow numerically in the coastal regions by late 8th century A.D. But the community started developing in the interior parts only by 16th century A.D. Trade advanced as a chief economic activity in Kerala with the arrival of Arabs. Trading engagement of Mappilas was either internal trading or trans-oceanic trading. The economic position of Mappila groups defined the boundaries of trade. Engaged in trade, Mappilas found matriliney as a suitable option where married women continued to stay in their natal Tharavad.

Trading expeditions of Arabs were limited in the 15th century with the arrival of Portuguese in the coastal regions of Kerala. The period witnessed the curbing of trading engagement of Mappilas by the Portuguese. The turmoil forced many Arab traders to leave their expeditions and commercial activities in the ports of Kerala. Yet, some of the indigenous Muslim population including Koyas continued to engage in trade. But they had increasingly engaged in internal trading due to unfair trading policies designed by Portuguese and later by British in the 18th century.

The treatment of Mappilas by the Portuguese is explicitly documented in various Portuguese writings. One among them is The Book of Duarte Barbosa which was written in the 16th century. According to Barbosa, Mappilas spoke the language of native population and dressed like them. Barbosa narrates, Mappilas showed their differentiability by growing their beards and wearing a round cap on their head. Mappilas were referred as 'Moors' by the Portuguese (Gangadharan, 2007).

Malabar came under the British rule in the 18th century from Tipu Sultan (Mysore ruler) after his defeat in the third Anglo-Mysore war (Panikkar, 1992). After succeeding in extending the influence over native rulers, British took control over timber trade, tobacco trade and spice trade. Many of the economic policies of British adversely affected majority of the Mappilas who were peasants. Land owning class among Mappilas constituted a minority group. British misunderstood the

customary land relations in Kerala (Kurien, 1994). The security of tenure to the tenants was overlooked by the British and granted complete control of the land to landlords. This adversely affected the economic condition of lower caste Hindus and Mappila peasantry. Series of revolts took place against British. Repressive measures were taken by the British to subjugate opposition (Wood, 1977; Tharakan, 1990). Thangals who supported opposition to British were deported. Thangals trace their descent to the Prophet's family and consider themselves to be higher in status compared to other Muslims in Kerala. Repressive measures included fining of wealthy Mappilas in whose villages revolts took place. Religious leaders played a crucial role in the mobilization of Muslim peasantry. The agrarian problems of Mappila peasantry were overlooked by colonial officials as fanaticism.

Mappila peasantry discussed their local issues at weekly markets and Friday congregations. The occasional religious ceremonies such as nerchas or anniversaries of saints also played an important role in building solidarity among Mappila peasantry by sharing experiences. The rebellions maintained a class character on the surface with the upper class Mappilas keeping aloof from the outbreaks (Dhanagare, 1977).

The involvement of Mappilas in the non-cooperation movement and civil disobedience movement needs to be seen in the light of growing agrarian discontent (Dhanagare, 1977). The background of Khilafat movement also enabled mobilization of Mappilas (Houtart and Lemercinier, 1978). But the actions were soon diverted with religion playing a mediator role in the Mappila rebellion of 1921. The rebellion began as an outrage towards the British policies that favoured the landlords. Landlords continued the inhuman treatment of the economically disadvantaged section including Muslims. The continued social discrimination and economic instability irrespective of conversion to Islam forced the economically poor Muslims to come forward to question the British agrarian policies. Though the rebellion raised agrarian questions in terms of policies which was entrenched in the struggle against British rule in India, it later came to embrace communal elements. Religion began to play a mediating role at a later stage in the struggle. One cannot discount the role played by the Wagon Tragedy of 1921 in this context. The incident happened on November 20, 1921. The tragedy can be considered as an aftermath of Mappila

rebellion of 1921. British imprisoned hundreds of Mappilas in the wagon which had no air circulation and were sent to Coimbatore from Tirur railway station. Many of the prisoners were found dead after they finally opened the wagon at Pothannur station which was one eighty kilometers away from Tirur railway station (Panikkar, 2011).

The changing marketing conditions and the unfair economic policies set by the British with colonial vested interest adversely affected natives especially the Mappilas who were engaged in trade. The subsequent deterioration of bazaar economy unfavorably affected the economic condition of Mappilas especially Koyas who controlled nearby bazaars in Kozhikode. The gulf oil boom of 1970s and related gulf migration has enabled Mappila community to come up once again in the ladder of economic prosperity. The neo-liberal trends of 1990s have remoulded the social and cultural life of Mappilas along with educational advancement, economic mobility and with the emergence of nuclear families.

DIVERSE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AMONG KERALA MUSLIMS

Trade opened avenues for economic prosperity and cultural interaction in the coastal regions of Malabar. In Islam, the indigenous population found windows to economic prosperity and egalitarianism from a caste ridden society. The entrenched social and economic disabilities of a caste ridden society would possibly be the reason for the conversion of economically poor low castes to Islam (Gangadharan, 2007). Conversion to Islam took place from upper caste Hindus such as Brahmins and Nayars as well. Koyas who are one among the Mappila Muslims of Kerala are believed to be the converts largely from Brahmins and matrilineal Nayars. The upper caste Brahmins and Nayars were traditionally land owning castes and continued to be so after conversion.

The caste organization among Hindus in Kerala constituted several groups. Nambudiri Brahmins held highest status. The group included temple priests, religious scholars and traditional land owners. Next to Brahmins, the second higher caste was Nayars. They were landed aristocrats. Tiyyar or Ezhavas were considered as low caste and carried out the occupation as toddy tappers. Cherumars were a category of untouchables. They were largely peasants. Mukkuvans were low caste fishermen (Lakshmi, 2012).

Conversion from Hindu fold to Islam did not uproot native population from their indigenous cultural values such as matrilineal practices, *nerchas* or anniversaries of saints. Similar instances of lived Islam can be found among Khojas, Punjabi muslims, Kutchi Memons, Sunni Bohras of Gujarat, Molesalam Girisias of Broach and Halai Memons of Porbunder. These communities are consisted of converts from Hinduism and have retained many Hindu usages. They also follow an order of succession distinct from that prescribed in the Muslim religious law (Koya, 1983).

Principle of egalitarianism embedded in the religious philosophy of Islam confronted a dimension of perceived social distance at the empirical level among different groups of Mappilas. Demarcations were made considering social position, wealth and blood lines. The hierarchy was symbolized by having private mosques, burial grounds, residential segregation and marriage alliances. Among matrilineal Mappilas, Tharavad or joint household symbolized the social and economic status of Koyas, Keyis, Baramis and Themims (Lakshmi, 2012).

Some of the major social groups among Mappilas include Thangals, Arabis who were common to Malabar region, Keyis of Talashherri, Koyas of Kozhikode, Pusalars and Ossans. Pusalars and Ossans were common to Malabar region and lived as service community. Ossans worked as ritual barbers and conducted circumcision ceremony. Their women were hired as singers of social functions like wedding. Pusalars were the fishing communities who were formerly called Mukkuvans. Thangals traced their descent to the Prophet's family and considered themselves as higher in status compared to other Muslims in Kerala. Arabis were descended from Arab marriages with Malayali women. Baramis and Themims included the Hadhrami groups who were exclusive to Kozhikode. Baramis claimed higher status compared to Themims based on the superiority of lineage. Keyis and Koyas included the land owners and were the dominant trading communities in Talashherri and Kozhikode respectively. Nainar Muslims were converts from the Nayanar caste (considered as low in Hindu caste hierarchy) who retained their caste name (Miller, 1992). The social organization among Mappilas of Kerala reveals that Thangals were considered to be spiritually superior to other Mappilas on the basis of nature of origin. Keyis, Koyas and Baramis were economically superior. Pusalars and Ossans occupied inferior status on the basis of their occupation (Kutty, 1972). One can

find similar instances of demarcation in relation to socio-economic status among social groups of Lakshadweep Muslims. Dube (1969) in her work titled, *Matriliney and Islam: Religion and Society in the Laccadives* explores the dimension of lived Islam by looking at the matrilineal practices among Muslims of Lakshadweep. Dube examines how accommodation is attained between 'elements of social organization derived from one social system and a pervasive religious tradition associated with a very different pattern of social organization' (Papanek, 1971). The inhabitants of island are descendants of Kerala Hindus and one could find caste like social organization among people of Lakshadweep irrespective of conversion to Islam. They follow matrilineal form of inheritance and the institution of Tharavad, with certain amount of authority attached to the Karanavar who is the eldest male in the matrilineal Tharavad (Dube, 1994). Dube contends that the social groups in the Lakhadweep are consisted of Koyas who are land owners and boat owners, Malmi who are navigators, Melacheri who are mainly coconut pluckers and toddy tappers. They are believed to be descendants of Nayar, Nambutiri, Mukkuvan and Tiya castes of Kerala. Melacheri rendered services to Koyas such as plucking coconuts. Majority of the land in the island including coconut fields were controlled by Koyas. They also outnumbered other groups in the Island council. Matrilineal elements were found in all the groups among Island inhabitants. The diversity among Mappilas is also embedded in their kinship organization (D'Souza, 1976). D'Souza outlines three types of kinship system among Mappilas such as kinship system of the Arabis, kinship system of the father-right Mappilas and the kinship system of mother-right Mappilas.

Arabis followed kinship pattern similar to Arabic type with a nuclear model of household. Father is the head of the family and wife moved to husband's house after marriage. Lineage is traced through male line. The clan group functions as a non-exogamous group while hypergamous marriages take place between Arabis and other Mappilas. The inheritance of property is based on Muslim law where daughters received only half the share of sons. Though distribution of property is based on Muslim law of inheritance, marriage ceremonies of the Arabis reflected adaptation of local practices such *kalyanam* (local term for marriage) along with *nikah*.

Indigenous patrilineal kinship organization is found in the interior parts of South Malabar. The clan of these

Mappilas is traced through male line and is referred as Tharavad. They also follow nuclear model of the household where father is considered as the head of the family. The ceremonial functions are conducted under the direction of Karanavar who is the eldest male in the Tharavad. But marriages often take place between children of two sisters or children of a brother and a sister. Married women live with their husbands in latter's natal house. Property is distributed based on Muslim law of inheritance.

Similar to matrilineal Nayers who lived in a number of matrilineal joint families, some of the groups among the Mappilas such as Keyis of Talasherry, Koyas of Kozhikode (land owning class which received trading rights from native rulers), Arakkal royal family of Kannur, Baramis and Themims are matrilineal. Elements of matrilineality can be found among Malabaris (native converts of Malabar) such as Puyislans. The joint household among matrilineal Mappilas is called Tharavad. Inheritance of Tharavad is through female line. The residence pattern is matrilocal. Women continue to stay in their maternal Tharavads along with their husbands.

Co-existence of patrilineal and matrilineal elements can be found among Thangals of South Malabar. They practiced double descent. Descent is traced through male line. They followed patrilineal form of inheritance with the exception of succession of their religious offices through female line.

Practice of matrilineality among Mappilas reveals the diversity embedded in relation to regional specificities and status considerations. It is expressed through residence pattern, ceremonial practices and trading engagement.

It is important to note here that there were similarity to a larger extent in the matrilineal practices of Nayers and Mappilas. One can assume that such similarities were found because Mappilas included converted indigenous Nayar population as well. Matrilineal Nayers lived in matrilineal joint household called Tharavad. They followed matrilineal form of inheritance. People who traced their descent from a common ancestress lived in Tharavad. Husbands of the female members of Tharavad were excluded from membership. Similarly, wives and children of male members were also excluded from membership. The affairs of Tharavad were managed by the eldest male in the Tharavad called Karanavar. He

managed Tharavad properties and conducted ceremonial functions.

Splitting of Tharavad into Tavazhis or branch Tharavads were allowed when Tharavad could no longer accommodate all members. Tavazhis were formed on the principle of matrilineality. Members of Tharavad were not allowed to intermarry as they traced their descent from a common ancestress. They followed matrilocal form of residence. Married women continued to stay in their matrilineal Tharavads where they received their husbands at night.

Apart from the aforementioned similarities, there were differences among Nayers and Mappilas in their matrilineal practices. Polyandry was practiced among matrilineal Nayers which is forbidden according to Muslim law (Panikkar, 1918). Muslim law permits polygyny and forbids polyandry strictly. Among matrilineal Nayers, *talikettukalyanam* or *tali*-tying ceremony was practiced. It had to be performed before a girl attains puberty. A suitable youth would tie a gold ornament or *tali* around girl's neck. Married couple was then secluded in a room of ancestral house for three days and nights where sexual relations might take place. The bridegroom departed on the fourth day and he had no obligation to his bride. He never visited the girl unless he wished. *Tali* rite was given a prominent place as the ceremony symbolically meant that the woman is ready to bear children to continue her lineage. After the *tali*-tying ceremony, women entered into sexual liaisons with one or more men of appropriate caste without religious rites. Gough argues that it is one such instances of polyandry. Nayar men were also allowed to enter into relationships with any number of women from an appropriate lower Nayar caste.

MATRILINEAL PRACTICES AMONG KOYAS OF KOZHIKODE IN PRE-COLONIAL KERALA

Koyas were involved in trans-oceanic trade in the nineteenth century and emerged as a dominant class in Kozhikode in the late twentieth century. The socio-economic and political life of Koyas revolved around with the fluctuations in trade which included competitive trading engagement with Portuguese, Dutch and British. Koyas were given trading rights by the native rulers of Kerala and they controlled the nearby bazaars in the nineteenth century. The fluctuations that were brought in the competitive trade later gave way to economic advancement of Koyas in the 1970s with Gulf

oil boom and related migration to Gulf countries (Osella, 2007).

Social Organization among Koyas: Koyas trace their roots from Arab merchants who were settled in the coastal regions of Kozhikode and married local women. Koyas comprised of indigenous converts from matrilineal Nayar families and Brahmins (Lakshmi, 2012). Lakshmi gives a typical example of a family called *Karuthedathu Illam* which was formerly the name of a *Nambutiri Illam* or Brahmin household (Lakshmi, 2012). Irrespective of the conversion to Islam, the local communities were able to sustain some of their customary practices such as matriliney. Koyas of Kozhikode followed matrilineal practices while adhering to Islamic practices in pre-colonial Kerala. The matrilineal practices among Koyas have undergone several changes in recent times such as disintegration of Tharavad, increased recognition of individual property over communal property, father as the legal guardian of children replacing the position held by Karanavar and the strengthening of conjugal ties between husband and wife. Various factors contributed to the perceived changes in the matrilineal practices include decline of bazaar economy, Gulf migration since late 1970s, legislative measures, emergence of neoliberal capitalism and Islamic reformism (Osella, 2012).

The social organization among Koyas will be explored in detail by looking at their kinship pattern, institution of Tharavad, residence pattern, principles of inheritance, nature of authority in the production and distribution of resources, marriage, divorce and ceremonial practices.

Kinship Organization: Koyas traced their descent through female line in pre-colonial Kerala. They followed *Marumakkathayam* or matrilineal system of inheritance. Koyas resided in matrilineal joint households called Tharavad. Children were given the surname of their mother and were raised in mother's Tharavad. When Tharavad could no longer accommodate all members, Tavazhis were formed. Tavazhis consisted of a female ancestress, her children and descendants in the female line (Lakshmi, 2012). Tavazhis were also managed by Karanavar. The same can be argued in the case of Koyas of Lakshadweep Island as well. Tharavad is the structural unit of the island society and Karanavar act as the legal guardian of children (Dube, 1994).

D'Souza in his article entitled *Kinship Organization and Marriage Customs among the Moplahs on the South-West Coast of India* (1976) argues that every individual

acquired their right in Tharavad and matrilineal joint properties by birth. As the descent was traced through common ancestress, members of the same Tharavad or inter related Tharavad were forbidden to marry each other (D'Souza, 1976). Immovable common property of Tharavad which included coconut groves, paddy fields and buildings were not divided but were enjoyed communally (D'Souza, 1976). Individual properties were divided on the basis of Muslim law of inheritance. Individual properties included land and house which were acquired independent of Tharavad funds through individual efforts. The joint household was maintained on the basis of produce derived from matrilineal estate (Gough, 1961). Karanavar occupied a prominent role in the distribution of resources and conducted ceremonial rituals.

Matrilocal residence pattern was found among Koya women in pre-colonial period (Koya, 1983). Women did not change their residence after marriage. The post marital residence of Koya men was generally uxorilocal where men moved to wife's natal house after marriage (Gough, 1961). Koya men also followed duolocal pattern of residence where they equally divided the time between their own natal Tharavad and wives' Tharavad. Gough points out how matrilineally related men began to come together to initiate business in modern marketing conditions. Sometimes Tharavad funds were also used for starting a business. It was then necessary to sign the documents by all adult members of both sexes stating that they would accept the responsibility of losses together (Gough, 1961). Koyas were given trading rights and control over land by the native rulers. One could observe high level of co-operation and strong authority structure among this landed Tharavads compared to Tharavads of landless poor (Gough, 1961). Mappila women were free to avoid purdah when they were in front of their matrilineal kinsmen (Gough, 1961). They talked freely giving adequate respect in relation to age. They wore head scarf while non-matrilineal men were in the Tharavad. The practice of purdah and polygyny were absent among Koya women of Lakshadweep (Papanek, 1971).

Construction of "Tharavad": Tharavad is the matrilineal joint household among Koyas. Tharavad consisted of matrilineally related women, their unmarried sons, Karanavar and sometimes his wife and unmarried children (Gough, 1961). Husbands of matrilineally related women either stayed at Tharavad

permanently or visited them several times at regular intervals as men were often away for trade. Downstairs of Tharavad consisted of a single kitchen which is communal, a dining room, several living rooms and Karanavar's private room (Gough, 1961). Bedrooms were built aside for the junior men who reached in their tharavad occasionally. Both male and female members of the Tharavad lived downstairs during day time. Upstairs consisted of a large dining hall and a living room. Upstairs also consisted of bedrooms which were occupied by matrilocally resident husbands and their wives? Husbands mainly occupied upstairs and rarely came downstairs as men normally avoided frequent conversation with sisters of their wives who were residing downstairs. Members of Tharavad dined downstairs and husbands of matrilineal women dined upstairs. The husbands of younger generation were also served food by women of older generation (Gough, 1961). After dinner, husbands moved to their rooms where they received their wives at night and left to bazaars in the morning. Children were allowed to move freely everywhere in Tharavad (Gough, 1961).

Osella outlines a descriptive narration about tharavads in Thekkepuram which is situated on the Southwestern part of Kozhikode. According to Osella, Tharavads in Thekkepuram unfolds religious, commercial and cultural engagement of Koyas.

"Large two-storied tharavads, most of which are built in the late nineteenth-century colonial trading boom, already commonly have many sub-buildings, extensions, even semi-legal mini squatter settlements, in their grounds, behind their high walls, making further extension impossible. Restoration and renovation is costly – more costly than new built; and most Tharavads are by now enmeshed in complex webs of often disputed multiple ownership and rights. But it is only partly because of these pressures that many men are nowadays building homes outside of the neighbourhood. For new family forms are arising, which demand new ways of arranging domestic space" (Osella, 2012).

Nature of Authority in the Production and Distribution of Resources: Apart from the trading rights vested in the hands of Koyas by the native rulers, they were settled cultivators (Gough, 1961). It is important to note that they never worked in the field but hired laborers from economically poor groups among Hindus and Muslims. The prosperity followed by trading expeditions enabled them to acquire more land. It is also

important to note here that Koyas of Kozhikode were converts largely from Brahmins and Nayar families who were traditionally land owners. They continued to exercise control over land and labor even after their conversion to Islam (Koya, 1983). Large part of their maintenance was derived from produce of the land. The landed estates were controlled jointly by the members of Tharavad. It was found among Koyas and matrilineal Mappilas of South Malabar in general unlike North Malabar Mappilas that family property was permitted to be divided based on Muslim law. But Tharavad was considered as the common property of all the members with matrilineally related women having permanent interest in it (Koya, 1983).

Karanavar managed the property of Tharavad. He also exercised certain authority in the distribution of resources and kept an account of the expenditures. The membership in the descent procured by birth was necessary to have rights in the joint estates (Gough, 1961). A mere change in the residence was not enough to claim an individual right over jointly held property. It is important to stress here that the communal notion of property led to the localization of the matrilineal group in the same Tharavad or near to Tharavad.

The nature of authority in the distribution of resources can be explored by looking at the role of Karanavar and Karnoti in Tharavad. The general assumption of matrilineal society as female oriented society is challenged with a nuanced understanding of the power relation between Karanavar and Karnoti. One can observe an explicit division of labour in Koya Tharavad where Karanavar is mainly responsible for the management of the property and Karnoti's power limited to few domestic affairs. Though the common property is transferred in the female line, the affairs related to it are controlled by men. This gap between ownership and control of common property brings into forefront the patriarchal dimension of a matrilineal society.

- **Role of Karanavar in Tharavad:** Karanavar is the eldest male in the matrilineal joint household called Tharavad and managed the property of Tharavad. Along with the management of property, he was also in charge of the production and distribution of resources. He kept an account of the Tharavad expenditure and occupied a prominent role in ceremonial practices such as marriage and other life crisis rituals held in Tharavad. It was considered as the duty of Karanavar to represent the

bride's family and contribute a sum to the bridegroom's Karanavar as dowry at the time of marriage (D'Souza, 1976). The payment of dowry reveals the co-existence of customary and Islamic practices. According to textually defined Islamic practices, the only form of payment at the time of marriage is *mahr* or bride-price (D'Souza, 1976). All the first marriages in the Tharavad were arranged by Karanavar. He gave consent to the later ones. He sometimes enforced cross-cousin marriages too (Gough, 1961).

Karanavar was also expected to represent the members of his matrilineal household in the neighbourhood assembly where matters related to Mosque funds and other Muslim religious matters were discussed (Gough, 1961). The officials from Mosque, religious leaders of the community and elder male members from different Tharavads were also included in the neighbourhood assembly.

If the matrilineal joint household was too large to be managed by the Karanavar alone, he distributed the tasks to junior kinsmen who were subordinated to him in authority. Karanavar also sent them overseas for trading expeditions and sometimes commanded them to join him in managing Tharavad property (Gough, 1961). Junior men lived in their wife's natal house after returning from trade and visited their Karanavar to receive advice on their trading expeditions rather than working daily under his supervision. Karanavar had the authority to force members of Tharavad to divorce the spouse whom he found unpleasing. Karanavar openly showed his reluctance to give maintenance until they agreed to give a divorce (Gough, 1961). After the death of Karanavar, the management of the property was transferred to the next eldest male in the family. Seniority remained as the primary criteria for the selection of Karanavar and the position was occupied either by his brother or nephews. When Karanavar dies, rituals are performed by his sister's children. They also contribute a sum to Karanavar's wife for serving him.

Changes have come in the nature of authority attached to Karanavar in recent times (Koya, 1983). The increased recognition of individual property over communal property and Gulf migration since late 1970s have led to a shift in the residence pattern from matrilocal to neo-local where the neo-local residence pattern played a prominent role in strengthening conjugal ties. Legislative measures such as The Mappila Succession Act of 1918 ensured that 'the self-acquired

property of a man who died intestate should pass by Muslim law to his wife and children' (Gough, 1961). The economic and legal changes marked a shift in the legal guardianship of children from Karanavar to father. But, the changes have not completely taken away the respect and recognition given to Karanavar in Tharavad even today. The important decisions on matters related to marriage and occupation of the children are still consulted with Karanavar.

- **Role of Karnoti in Tharavad:** Co-operation among matrilineally related women was prioritized as they all resided in the same Tharavad. Among women of same Tharavad, the highest authority was vested in the hands of the eldest woman who is called Karnoti (Lakshmi, 2012). The domestic affairs of Tharavad were often consulted with Karnoti by younger women prior to the replacement of matrilineal joint household by nuclear families in the twentieth century. Karnoti managed the supplies and also organized women's tasks in Tharavad (Gough, 1961).

The junior women contributed a sum every month to Karnoti for the management of domestic affairs. Junior women received the sum for maintenance from their husbands (Gough, 1961). Karnoti exercised more control over children compared to other women. Husbands of younger generation were served food by women of elder generation and men in turn showed respect to senior women. Gough observes that a thoughtful husband of a younger wife never entered the Tharavad without bringing betel leaves, areca nuts and tobacco for the senior women (Gough, 1961). It seemed that junior men were constantly evaluated on the basis of small acts of respect and loyalties showed to senior women. Karnoti was respected by other younger women in Tharavad.

Lakshmi notes that senior women were 'proprietors of lands and owners of Mosque lands till mid 1930s' (Lakshmi, 2012). Arakkal beebis of Kannur reveals the authority vested upon Mappila women in Tharavads (Koya, 1983). In Arakkal royal house, the usual practice followed was that the eldest member in the maternal line, whether male or female, succeeded to the gadi and females adorned the royal throne with the title Beebi. Women of the aristocratic families did no productive work but largely derived their livelihood from the landed estates (Gough, 1961). Moreover Gough argues that as men were away for trade, women dependent on the matrilineal land for their maintenance. This could be one among the reasons for the emergence of matrilocal

residence among them.

Principles of Inheritance: D'Souza argues that in North Malabar the ancestral property was inherited through female line (D'Souza, 1976). Whereas in South Malabar (including Koyas of Kozhikode), family property was inherited on male line in accordance with Muslim law of inheritance where daughters received only half the share of sons. The reasons pointed out for the inheritance of major share of property through male line is that daughters inherited jewelry as part of their wedding gifts. Moreover, they were maintained from Tharavad even after their marriage (Lakshmi, 2012).

Irrespective of the transmission of major share on male line, the social organization remained fundamentally mother right in South Malabar (D'Souza, 1976). Tharavad was often excluded from the divisions based on Muslim law and it was considered as the common property of the household (Koya, 1983). As the social organization was grounded on principles of matriliney, women resided at matrilineal Tharavad. Due to the same reason, Tharavad was handed over on female line. The children of male members lived in their maternal Tharavads. D'Souza contends that there were instances where the immovable common properties of the Tharavad such as coconut groves, paddy fields and buildings being communally enjoyed as in the case of North Malabar (D'Souza, 1976).

The payment of dowry by bride's Karanavar to bridegroom's Karanavar reveals the co-existence of customary and Islamic form inheritance. According to Islamic practices, the only payment at the time of marriage is *mahr* which is given to the bride by the bridegroom. The effect of Islamic mode of inheritance is to an extent is nullified by giving dowries to daughters in the form of *sthridhanam* - local term for dowry in Malayalam (D'Souza, 1976).

Lakshmi outlines court scenarios where at times conflict occurred between custom and religion on issues related to inheritance (Lakshmi, 2012). One can articulate the intricacies of such complex issues through legal pluralism. The nature of the co-existence of multiple laws within a single society is dynamic which entails dimensions of contestation, adaptation and negotiation. In the case of Mappilas while dealing with issues related to property inheritance, often court finds it difficult to deal with certain cases where Mappilas hold onto the practice of double descent. There are confusions arising through intermarriages between people belonging to

various pattern of descent. The difficult situations thus arose were tackled by the court on the basis of proofs available. Challenges have been posed in the case of matrilineal Mappilas including Koyas where matrilineal form of inheritance thrives as a local customary practice. In the religious domain, a patrilineal form of inheritance is promoted by reformists as 'textually defined Islamic practices'. These textually defined practices are considered 'authentic or purified' practices by reformists.

Residence Pattern: Koyas followed matrilineal form of residence in the nineteenth century. Married women continued to stay in their matrilineal Tharavad. Married men followed uxorilocal form of residence. They stayed with their wives in wife's Tharavad. Husband equally divided his time between his natal Tharavad and his wife's Tharavad if the two were built in the same neighborhood. This pattern of residence is called duolocal residence (Gough, 1961; Koya, 1983). He visited wife only at night and left his personal belongings at her natal house. He also contributed a sum for the maintenance of his wife and children. If he could afford, the husband built a house for his wife and children (D'Souza, 1976).

A man could not take his wife to his Tharavad to stay permanently. In Tharavad, Karanavar was considered as the legal guardian of children. Father contributed a sum for the maintenance of his children though Karanavar remained as their legal guardian (Koya, 1983). But father was free from giving maintenance to his children if he had divorced their mother (Gough, 1961). The economic changes followed by gulf migration in the 1980s, Islamic reformist trends and legislative measures have given way to the emergence of neolocal residence pattern strengthening conjugal ties between husband and wife.

The eldest man in Tharavad when succeeded to the position of Karanavar stayed in his matrilineal Tharavad managing Tharavad property. He sometimes brought his wife and children along to his Tharavad for a longer period of time. It was also possible that he could reside in a separate house near to Tharavad (Gough, 1961).

Koya Tharavads started to disintegrate by 1950s. Nuclear families emerged with neolocal residence pattern. Though partition of property was initiated in the 1950s, nuclear houses were constructed near to Tharavad. By 1970s, they started to move away from the

same locality but built houses in Kozhikode surroundings.

Marriage, Divorce and Polygyny: Along with the local matrilineal practices such as payment of dowry and the institution of *kalyanam*, Koyas adhered to certain marriage practices introduced by Sunni Muslim law (Lakshmi, 2012). Gough argues that modern trend seems to be in favor of the observance of Sunni Muslim law (Gough, 1961). A Mappila is permitted to have four wives by this law. They practiced non-sororal polygyny. The matrilineal residence of the married woman enabled husbands to visit each wife at regular intervals. Polygyny is not practiced in the modern times as men adhere to monogamous marriages. The matrilineal pattern of residence never permitted a man to bring his wife to his natal house to stay permanently. Sororal polygyny and polyandry are forbidden by Muslim law (Gough, 1961). Sororatic marriage or marriage to a dead wife's sister is a form of preferential marriage (Gough, 1961). This form of marriage is present among Minangkabau Muslims of West Sumatra as well. Sororatic marriages were preferred among trading communities as the payment of bride wealth or dowry at the time of marriage were absent in the later marriages. The matrilineal residence pattern followed by sororatic marriage reveals the understanding of fatherhood as 'a permanent and stable relationship carrying obligations till death' (Gough, 1961).

Widow inheritance was also practiced among North Kerala Mappilas including Koyas. It occurred when a widow married a man of her dead husband's descent group. It is considered as the duty of husband's descent group to continue maintaining his wife and children. Widow inheritance is permitted by the Muslim law (Gough, 1961). Levirate marriage was practiced when a man died leaving his property to his children and also when there was a brother to marry the wife of the deceased. The brother then on was supposed to manage the property of the deceased brother and bring up his brother's children as his own (Gough, 1961). This practice is also enjoined by Muslim law.

Divorce was rare among wealthy Mappilas such as Koyas. They gave immense care to join paternal ties and the obligations of matrilineal descent (Gough, 1961). They disfavored separation of father and children through divorce. Divorce denied the rights of father over his children in matrilineal Tharavad. Husband divorced his wife by pronouncing *talak* on three separate

occasions before the Khazi or the religious leader of his neighborhood assembly (Gough, 1961). Women were not encouraged to initiate divorce but they can approach her matrilineal kin requesting for a divorce from her husband. Koya men were allowed to enter into exogamous marriage alliances with Keyis and Arakkal beebis of Kannur. Arakkal royal family did not favour marriage alliances from Kannur as Kannur constituted their ruling subjects. Instead, they entered into marriage alliances with other groups outside Kannur who were similar in status such as Koyas and Keyis (Lakshmi, 2012).

Ceremonial Practices among Koyas: Dimensions of lived Islam

- **Marriage Ceremonies:** Among Koyas, the initiative for marriage comes from bride's family. It was considered as the duty of Karanavar to find the bridegroom for matrilineal unmarried women. The authority vested on Karanavar didn't discount the role of father. His opinions were welcomed in matters related to his children. Once the bridegroom was decided, a day was then fixed for the ceremonial function called *vakkukodukkal* which means 'word giving'. Sometimes the mosque official also had a role in the ceremony (D'Souza, 1976). It is considered as a male function and the close women relatives of the bridegroom are also invited. What is important to note here is that the important decisions were taken by Karanavars of both the sides (D'Souza, 1976). Often, financial settlements were done prior to seeing the girl by any relatives of bridegroom. The bridegroom mostly got the opportunity to see the bride only after *kalyanam*.

The Muslim marriage ceremony is called *nikah*. It takes place at bridegroom's house and the bride may not be physically present. Her consent was given through her Karanavar. Koyas and many other matrilineal Mappilas have adopted the local form of marriage which is called *kalyanam*. Marriage cannot be considered as consolidated only with *nikah*. The ceremony related to fixing the date for *kalyanam* (*nischayam*) take place in the house of bridegroom.

There were different kinds of dowries among matrilineal Mappilas in relation to the socio- economic position in pre-colonial period. Among Mappilas of low economic status a form of dowry called '*kadam vayippa*' was practiced. It was considered as a form of payment from the bride's family to the groom to initiate some business to maintain her. This form of dowry was not present

among economically rich Mappilas such as Koyas though other forms of dowry like *Sthridhanam* were present. According to Islamic practices, the only form of payment during marriage is *mahr* which would be given to the bride by bridegroom's family. A form of dowry called *kizhipanam* (*purse money*) was paid during matrilineal Mappila marriages before the groom left for bride's house for the *kalyanam* ceremony (D'Souza, 1976).

The expenditure related to *kalyanam* ceremony was taken from the bride's family (D'Souza, 1976). On the eve of *kalyanam* function, the bride is decorated with colorful dress and gold ornaments. The ceremony is called *ponnoppikkal* which means 'putting on gold ornaments' (D'Souza, 1976). Along with ceremony, another function called *oppana* is held where women would circle the bride with songs and dance. She would receive gifts from the guests at this occasion. *Henna* is applied on her palm and feet. The ceremony is called *mailanchi* (D'Souza, 1976). At this time in bridegroom's house another function called '*kanhikudi*' would take place. It means 'drinking of rice gruel' (D'Souza, 1976). One can find in the contemporary time that drinking of rice gruel is replaced by grand dinner offered to the guests. The dinner being offered also reflect the social status of each Tharavad. The same day bridegroom undergoes another ceremony called *monthala* where the groom undergoes through a ceremony of shave (D'Souza, 1976).

After the *kalyanam* ceremony, dinner is served at bride's family for all the members including the groom and his family. Once the dinner is done, the groom is taken to the decorated bridal chamber. The decoration of bridal chamber reflects the social status of Mappila Muslims. Most of the bridal chamber has a side room which is used for dining. It was for '*puthiya Mappila*', his wife and children. Bridegroom is called as '*puthiya Mappila*' by the members of the matrilineal tharavad of the bride. He will be refereed by this title for a considerable period of time. Attached to the bridal chamber, bathroom is built. According to their status and economic position, the bridal chamber is decorated. The bridegroom leaves back to his home after visiting the bridal chamber (D'Souza, 1976).

The next day he would be invited to bride's house. Bride's *Karanavar* and brothers go to his house and invite. In the evening he visits bride's house and spend the night with the bride in the bridal chamber. The bride is taken to the bridal chamber by a group of women who

push her into the chamber where the bridegroom is waiting for her. The ceremony is called *aravilakkal* (D'Souza, 1976). He spends the night with her and leaves in the early morning. Women from the bridegroom's family come to invite the bride to bridegroom's family and she is taken to his place. The ceremony is called *pudukkam*. Later she is taken back to her house followed by the ceremony called *marupudukkam* (D'Souza, 1976). The fortieth day after the *kalyanam* would lead to the conclusion of ceremonies.

- **Funeral Ceremonies:** The deceased matrilineal members were buried in the private lineage burial ground. The sons of the dead man performed the rites (Gough, 1961). They also financed the funeral. The dead man's sons paid for the expenditures related to the rituals to their sisters' husbands. If a man dies with no son, his sons-in-law takes up the responsibilities in the performance of funeral ceremonies. A widow was not restricted from visiting her husband's natal home (Gough, 1961). When *Karanavar* dies, the rituals are performed by his sister's children. They also contribute a sum to *Karanavar*'s wife for serving him.

- **Other Life Crisis Ceremonies:** The pregnant woman would spend the days at her mother's house and delivers the child at her maternal Tharavad. Both woman and the newborn go through a period of pollution. A day is fixed for her in-laws to visit her and the child with gifts.

There are several ceremonies after the birth of a child which includes *palladavekkal* (which is held when the newborn starts getting milk teeth), *kathukuthu* (ear-boring ceremony), Circumcision of boys (*chelakarmam*) was also celebrated ceremonially (Koya, 1983). Earlier it used to take place at home. In the contemporary time, circumcision is done at hospitals run by Muslim management.

Paternal kin play a significant role in the life-crisis ceremonies (Gough, 1961). The baby is named by his/her paternal grandmother. The first boy will be given paternal grandfather's name and the first girl is given paternal grandmother's name. When the child is six months old he/she will be presented to his/her paternal grandmother. The boy will receive gold waist band from the grandmother and other jewelry from father's sisters. A girl also receives jewelry. The paternal kin members are also given prominence at the time of the marriage where the grandmother and father's sisters

are feasted and in turn the bride/bridegroom will be receiving clothes and jewelry (Gough, 1961).

ELEMENTS OF CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

The matrilineal practices among Koyas have experienced several changes due to various factors. Modifications in the matrilineal practices of Koyas are not due to the impact of Islam alone. One also needs to look at the impact of historically specific multiple factors such as colonialism, decline of bazaar economy, emergence of new trading communities like Ezhavas and Christians, gulf migration of 1970s, legislative measures and neo-liberal trends.

Decline of bazaar economy and Gulf migration: The economic policies of British affected majority of the Mappilas who were peasants. Land owning class among Mappilas including Koyas constituted only a minority group. One can infer from the discussion in the earlier paragraphs on the historical legacy of Islam in Kerala that British misunderstood the customary land relations in Kerala. British granted complete control of the land to landlords who affected lower caste Hindus and Mappila peasantry. The security of tenure to the tenants was overlooked by the British. Mappilas shared their local issues at weekly markets and Friday congregations. One cannot neglect the role played the religious ceremonies such as *nerchas* in building solidarity among Mappila Peasantry. Dhanagare contends that the rebellions which arose from Mappila economic discontent maintained a class character on the surface as upper class Mappilas kept aloof from the outbreaks followed. Malabar came under the British rule in 1792. Kozhikode was included in the Malabar province. The monopoly over the timber trade by the British in the 19th century due to the increased demand of oak in England led to the decline of timber trade among native population including Koyas. Koyas who were landowning class exercised a considerable control over land and local markets. The new marketing conditions created by British with the commercialization of agriculture and implementation of biased trading policies unfavorably affected the economic condition of Koyas and Mappilas in general (Karat, 1973). The native population (especially the peasantry) continued to be exploited under the unequal exchange of commodities. The changing marketing led to the subsequent deterioration of the bazaar economy over which Koyas had complete control.

The trading engagement of Koyas continued to decline in post- British period with the emergence of new trading

communities like Ezhavas and Christians (Mohammad, 2013). Some of the previously land owning trading Koya families were reduced to lower middle and middle class categories (Osella and Osella, 2008). The landowning trading Koyas constituted a minority group among Kerala Muslims in pre-colonial Kerala. Some of the upper class Koyas was reduced to the middle class followed by the decline of trade and bazaar economy. This middle class among Koyas occupied few government jobs. The low income Koyas constituted the majority group to which many more Koyas were later added from the middle class group. This fall in the ladder of class position has its direct linkages with the impact of nationalist movement in India and various reform movements in this period.

The decline in the economic standing of Koyas came to be observed in their marriage ceremonies which were continued up to forty days before. In the 1950s, it was reduced to seven days. Upper class Koyas conducted marriage ceremonies up to seven days where as other low income Koyas reduced celebration up to three days. Oil boom in the Gulf countries by 1970s followed by the decline in bazaar economy enabled Mappilas to come up once again in the ladder of economic prosperity. Gulf oil boom became a prominent factor for the migration of Kerala Muslims to Gulf countries for better job opportunities. Gulf migration opened the avenues for Koyas whose timber trade was seriously affected after the nationalization of hardwood forest in late 1970s (Osella and Osella, 2011). Among the migrated Koyas, people from the low income group constituted the majority. One cannot discount the role played by gulf migration in the upward social mobility of Koyas who were low income groups before. As economic prosperity advanced, old ways returned to their everyday life. Even the previously low income groups who have enough money now, started conducting the marriage ceremonies up to seven days like the upper class Koyas. The upward social mobility increased women's activity as well. The *mailanchi* ceremony (putting *henna* on the palm and feet of the bride) which was a rare scene in the 1950s in their marriage ceremonies were brought back in 1970s (Mohammad, 2013). The existing literature fails to show Koyas as a heterogeneous community. It therefore is a challenging task to give a nuanced understanding of the gulf migration of Koyas with respect to their different class positions.

Trade has played an important role in refashioning the

everyday life of Koyas. Rather than as a route to economic prosperity, trade symbolized the web of kinship and friendship among Koyas and seemed as a cultural reference. One can find that prosperous Koya Tharavads had its own family business and the kinsmen initiated business together. They traded in timber and spices for the overseas market which were later challenged with the arrival of Portuguese and British (Lakshmi, 2012). The Gulf oil boom of 1970s later opened the door to prosperity through migration. It is possible to assume that the decline of bazaar economy and the gulf migration might have led to the distribution of Koyas across various class groups. Modifications in the matrilineal practices of Koyas might have also followed a diverse pattern in terms of their class position. One can observe this dimension only with the aid of an in-depth ethnographic study which is yet to be well developed in the case of Koya matriliney.

The changing economic conditions have molded the matrilineal practices in Koya Tharavads. Increased recognition of individual property over communal property came to be observed. Migration has led to the disintegration of Tharavad and the notion of jointly held landed estates. Migration induced the notion of private property. Migrated Koya men started maintaining their wives and children primarily from their own earnings. There observed a shift in the residence pattern from uxorial form of residence to neolocal. This led to the strengthening of the conjugal ties. Thus the matrilineal extended Tharavads has experienced disintegration to a greater extent by splitting into elementary units. These elementary units consider father as the legal guardian of children. In Tharavads of matrilineal Koyas, Karanavar was given the right to be the legal guardian of children. The marriage of all Tharavad members was previously consulted with Karanavar. Moreover, it was the duty of Karanavar to pay the bride wealth. Now, one can find a shift in the role from Karanavar to father. But the change cannot be taken as complete. Karanavar continued to be invited and his decisions are also considered with regard to the life crisis ceremonies of younger generations. Karnoti who is the eldest female in the Tharavad is also given respect irrespective of the changes that have come in the matrilineal practices. Formerly, Karnoti managed the supplies at domestic level. Women of younger generation handed over a sum to Karnoti every month for the maintenance. Due to the disintegration of Tharavad into nuclear families with father as the head,

Karnoti no longer receive this sum every month. But, it is important to stress the respect she continues to receive irrespective of the changes.

Legislative Measures: There have been few attempts to modify the matrilineal organization though legislative measures (Gough, 1961; Miller, 1992; Lakshmi, 2012). The legislative measures include several acts such as Mappila Succession Act of 1918, Mappila *Marumakkathayam* Act of 1939 and *Shariat* Application Act of 1937 (at all India level). *Shariat* Application Act of 1937 was a demand from the men who wished to distribute property to their women based on *shariat* law. Lakshmi argues that Mappilas didn't ask for it as their women were already enjoying inheritance right according to *marumakkathayam* rules or matrilineal rules. Mappila Succession Act of 1918 enabled the self-acquired property of a man who died intestate should pass by Muslim law to his wife and children. The Mappila *Marumakkathayam* Act of 1939 allowed equal sharing of matrilineal property among its male and female members (Lakshmi, 2012).

Similar acts were passed in the case of matrilineal Nayers as well. Aiyar (Gough, 1961) notes that the codification of matrilineal law which came under the British rule limited the authority of Karanavar in Nayar Tharavads. British law permitted appeal to the court by junior members for the removal of a Karanavar who could be shown guilty of gross mismanagement (Gough, 1961). Since 1933 in Malabar District and 1938 in Cochin, all Karanavars were asked by the court to keep an account of the expenditures in Tharavad and to make it available to junior men for inspection. Similar demand was put forward by the Cochin Nayar Act of 1938 and Madras *Marumakkattayam* (Matriliney) Act of 1933.

Local Roots of Islamic Reformism: One needs to be sensitive to the contestations revolving around the term, 'Islamic reformism'. It is important to locate Islamic reformism and discourses related to it in multiple shifting contexts. It is important to look critically at the assumption that all reformism are Wahhabi influenced (Osella and Osella, 2008). Islamic reformism needs to be approached with sensitivity to diverse historical orientation and geographical expressions it entail (Osella and Osella, 2007).

One needs to look critically at the popular understanding that there are "Islamic" institutions and practices following from a reading of formal, textual Islam and these may be forced upon various muslim communities

by the reformists to “purify” them of any “un-Islamic” institutions and practices (Sebastian, 2012). In relation to multiple shifting contexts and varying socio-political climate of the society, reformists take different standpoints at different periods in history.

While attempting to understand Islamic reformism in the modern world, discourses on reformism need to be placed within the context of rise of colonialism, loss of Muslim political power and emergence of global capitalism. Efforts to purify Islam, elimination of accretions which were perceived as harmful to Islam, a restrictive reading of Qur’an and *Sunna* rejecting a context specific reading of *Sunna* and Qur’an, safeguarding of traditions and formulation of a new understanding of modernity embedded in scientific thinking by placing modernity within the framework of Islam came to be observed at different periods in history (Robinson, 2008).

In the 19th century, attempts were made by the Ottoman sultans to reorganize their empire based on the western models of governance, law and education. The attempt is referred to as Tanzimat movement which was taken forward by the Ottoman empires to sustain in the international environment where European power held the supreme position (Commins, 2009). Tanzimat movement reduced the role of religion in education and law in order to secularize their institutions. This attempt was criticized in the 1860s and the arguments followed from those opposed Tanzimat movement was that Islam is compatible with modernity. They blamed Muslims for their estrangement from the practices of Islam which they perceived as the reason for the dominance of the West over them. The glorious past of early Islam was praised and they claimed that the worldly success of Muslims in the early period of Islam was due to their profound faith in Islam. Hence, they believed that it is important to get back to the earlier form of Islamic practices to regain the power.

19th century witnessed the reinterpretation of Qur’an and Sunna. The re-interpretations were made projecting Islam as compatible to modern values. One can find the emergence of ‘indigenized modernity’ which form the basis to progress and a subsequent detachment from the western model of modernity. Reformist trends surfaced in the Arabian Peninsula in the 1880s. Mamdani argues that the efforts to purify Islam initiated by Ibn Wahhab in Arabian peninsula need to be located amidst the prevailing animosity to ‘Sunni Muslim Ottoman

colonizers and Shi’a heretics’ in the eighteenth century (Mamdani, 2005). Similarly Commins observes that the Wahhabi religious reform movement need to be understood locating it in the oasis settlements, in the context of Najdi society and Najdi’s place in the wider Muslim world. A context specific reading to Wahhabism can be observed here.

Placing himself amidst an anti-imperialist stand Afghani (reformist from Iran and later travelled to Egypt) argued that Islam is compatible to science. There was an attempt to merge reason and spirituality together. Afghani takes an anti-imperialist stand arguing that the key challenge for contemporary Muslims is colonialism.

Rashid Rida (Syrian reformist) attempted a far reaching influence on Muslims around the world through his journal *al-Manar* which was started in the year 1898. One can infer from the descriptions outlined by Commins that Rida later left Syria and joined Muhammad Abduh, an Egyptian reformer. Rida and Abduh carried forward *al-Manar*, the first Muslim periodical. The journal entailed the political events of Hashemite-Saudi conflict and through the journal Rida expressed his anger towards Hashemites for selling Arabs to the West to sustain their own political power.

The year 1928 witnessed the emergence of *Muslim Brothers* under the leadership of Hasan al-Banna. Banna condemned the alliance between foreign powers and corrupt local rulers. His ideas entailed an urge to revive Islamic morality and resistance to western dominance. Banna and Wahhabis took similar stand in their opposition to European dominance. Irrespective of such similarities, Banna’s ideas differed from Wahhabism in many respects. Though Banna perceived accretions in sufi practices like Wahhabis perceived, he did not oppose the visit to the saints’ tombs. Banna favoured constitutional government and believed that modern state can act as a provider of fair distribution of wealth, health care and employment to people. Wahhabis rejected this idea of constitutional government and supported Saudi monarchy. According to Commins, Banna denied the legitimacy of hereditary monarchy. The different positions taken by Banna and Wahhabis in their attempt to reform cement the argument put forward by Osella and Osella that all reformism are not Wahhabi influenced and one needs to analyze reformist trends contextually.

An attempt to understand reformist trends in India

needs to be located within the context of colonialism and nationalist struggles. It is important to note here that reformists have taken various standpoints though all of them are placed under the same banner 'reformists'. There perceived an attempt to re-interpret Islam as compatible to modernity in colonial India. There was also an attempt to purify religious practices through education campaign. One can locate the Deobandi movement in this context.

Although very significant, 'the globally influential Islamic reformism' (Commins, 2009) cannot explain all changes and therefore one needs to shift attention to the local roots of Islamic reformism. Contrary to the widespread belief, Islam did not challenge all aspects of matriliney. Modifications in the matrilineal practices are not due to the impact of Islamic reformism alone but through the interplay of multitude of historically specific factors.

Mappila theological development in Kerala took shape in relation to its orientation to Arabia and subsequent isolation from developments in Indian Islam. Miller points out that Kerala never experienced a direct influence of the puritan reformism put forward by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The Arab settlers and teachers who came to the coastal regions of Kerala were largely from Southern Arabia. The direct influence of puritan reforms of Arabia was curbed by colonial legacy in Kerala. Miller contends that apart from such limitations, Arab Sunni orthodoxy remained as a major external influence on the theological development of Mappila community.

Islamic reformist trends were observed in Kerala since the 19th century. The political events of 1920s including Mappila rebellion of 1921 cannot be ignored while exploring local roots of Islamic reformism (Dale, 1975). Since the 19th century, many of the economic policies of British government implicitly favored native Hindu landlords and spread economic distress among low caste Hindus and Mappila peasantry. The continued economic distress led to recurrent revolts from the lower sections of Mappila peasantry against the British and Hindu landlords. These struggles were misperceived by colonial authorities as Muslim fanaticism discounting the roots of rebellion which were growing economic distress. The revolts maintained a class character with the economically superior Mappila communities, including the Koyas remaining aloof from such revolts. The mediating role played by religion in the Mappila rebellion of 1921, later led to the demand of a

'Moplastan', a separate Muslim majority province in South Malabar in 1947.

One cannot discount the role played by Muslim Aikya Sangham in the 1920s in creating a lasting revolution in the field of Muslim education and religious reform. Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham was formed in the year 1922 at Kodungallur. It was formed under the leadership of Hamadani Thangal, Vakkom Abdul Kader Moulavi, K.M. Moulavi, Manappad Kunahammed Haji and K. M. Seethi Sahib. Muslim Mahajana Sabha founded in 1920s by Vakkom Moulavi also contributed towards a progressive attitude and English education. Vakkom Moulavi stood in opposition to the practices which he perceived as un-Islamic such as the matrilineal practices among Muslims.

There have been several initiatives from Mappila community for theological reform and modern education. Vakkom Maulavi played an important role for theological reform in South Malabar. He was influenced by an Egyptian reformer, Muhammad Abduh and his attack on taqlid, his initiation to integrate Islam and modern culture and, primacy given to Qur'an and Hadith. Vakkom Maulavi was also influenced by Abduh's 'moderately rational approach to revealed theology'.

Textual Islam supposes patrilineal inheritance. The tension between the textually defined Islamic practices and matrilineal practices are only 'partially resolved by a combination of matrilineal practices and *Shari'a*'. Reformists oppose matrilineal practices among Muslims, engraving of Tharavad on female names, transfer of Tharavad over generations through female line and the limited role of father in matrilineal Tharavads.

Now majority of Kerala Muslims are Sunnis of *Shafi* School. Mujahids who are the reformists constitute only 10% of the Kerala Muslim population. Osella describes them as follows.

"While all Kerala muslims are Sunnis of the Shafi School, these days the term 'Sunnī' means 'orthodox' or 'traditionalist' muslims who stand opposed to organized reformists. In Kerala, the two biggest sectarian groupings and the most culturally salient distinction is that between the Sunnis and Mujahids" (Osella, 2012).

Islamic reformist movements became prominent in the 1970s in Kerala. Reformists looked critically at the limited responsibility vested in the hands of father in Koya Tharavads. Reformists also questioned the continuation of Tharavads in women's name and the transfer of Tharavad through generations on female line.

Reformists perceived the marginality of men in Koya Tharavads where men remained as nightly visitors at wives' Tharavad. To reformists, an understanding of who is a good Muslim is beyond the formal observance of five times prayers, Ramzan feasts, giving Zakat etc.

One can observe a common trend in Kerala reformism that the urban educated middle class waving the stick of reformism at rural lower class Muslims (Osella and Osella, 2008). The latter is accused by the former for holding onto un-Islamic practices which take them away from 'true Islam'. One needs to be aware of the local roots of Islamic reformism in addition to the influence from Arabia. The consequences of Mappila rebellion of 1921 and Wagon Tragedy of 1921 (Panikkar, 2011) cannot be discounted in analyzing the local roots to reformism. There was also an effort to 'purify' and create 'authentic Islam' by the reformists (Osella and Osella, 2008).

The reformists among Muslims of Kerala looked critically at the inheritance pattern of Tharavad on female line, Karanavar as the legal guardian of children instead of father, matrilineal residence pattern of women and the uxorial residence pattern of married men. The matrilineal practices were looked at as un-Islamic by the reformists. According to Osella, majority of the Kerala Muslims are Sunnis of Shafi School. Mujahids who are the reformists constitute only 10% of the Kerala Muslim population (Osella, 2012).

Irrespective of the changes that have come in the matrilineal practices among Koyas, the elements of continuity invokes curiosity among scholars. Certain aspects of matrilineality are still practiced including the role of Karanavar and Karnoti. Though there is a shift from uxorial to neolocal pattern of residence among married men, some of them continue to follow uxorial pattern of residence. Like in the past, Tharavad men come together to start business. Annual meetings are held among the Tharavad members who are settled abroad. It gives an opportunity for the Tharavad members to come together and strengthen the kin relations.

Years of immense trading engagement have enabled Koyas to progress as a business class in Kozhikode. Today, as per the ethnographic accounts of Osella, every Koya family would have at least one member in one of the Gulf countries (Osella, 2012). They have also extended the business to different arena such as building schools, hospitals and so on.

CONCLUSION

Intermingling of matrilineal and Islamic practices among Koyas of Kozhikode entail dimensions of negotiation, accommodation, and contestation. While exploring the relation between custom and Islam, it is important to note that modification to matrilineal practices are not due to the impact of Islamic reformism alone. But the modifications are created through a multitude of interacting factors such as colonialism, market reforms, urbanization, modern education, salaried jobs and migration to cities. One needs to look critically at the general assumption which views local customary practices in confrontation with Islamic practices. Taking similar standpoints with such general assumptions would be a flawed step in the exploration of matrilineal practices among Koyas. The dimension of lived Islam embedded in the matrilineal practices of Koyas is understood with a context specific reading of the nature of kinship organization, inheritance pattern, residence pattern, the nature of authority over the production and distribution of resources, nature of marriage and related ceremonies.

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