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## **MUSLIM LEAGUE IN THE ELECTORAL POLITICS OF KERALA AND THE CHANGING TRENDS**

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After the declaration of Independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Muslim League in India had faced a deep crisis over the issue of how to survive in the context of the great Partition accompanied by the bloody communal riots and mass migration. The crisis was further deepened since a significant proportion of the eminent leaders of the Muslim League had left to Pakistan abandoning the League to the remaining few members in India. Those who survived were mostly from the Madras Provincial Muslim League (MPML) (Wright, 1966: 580). Accused of being the sole instigator of Partition and the catastrophic incidents followed, a resurrection was nearly not possible for the Muslim League. However, the League sustained, at least in the south of India which had been growing relatively an amicable Hindu-Muslim relations and where the bloody communal riots followed by the Partition had little effects. Theodore Wright (1966) had found five basic strategies the members of the Muslim League had persuaded as the reasons for the survival of the Muslim League in India and these reasons were being greatly convinced to the Muslim population in south India at least. The first strategy the Muslim League used was, an attempt to retain separate representation through various electoral devices; secondly, the policy of an alliance with the Congress on the basis of recognizing the Muslim League as the exclusive representative of the Muslim interests; thirdly, coalition with opposition parties against Congress; fourthly, joining the dominant party individually and work from within it; and lastly, rely on “non-political” organizations either alone or in conjunction with other minorities (Wright, 1966: 581).

Partition followed by the traumatic incidents of communal riots shook north India almost completely and this had restricted the Muslim League from a continuing situation. Many of the leaders expressed that Pakistan was the ultimate aim of the Muslim League and accomplishment of that goal will automatically restrict it from continuing. To add to the difficulty, a convention was called on in June 1947 in Delhi

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and decided the formal suspension of the League (Ibrahim, 2007: 134). After the Convention, many Provincial units of the Muslim League were dissolved completely and a very few continued its service by changing its name.<sup>2</sup> The defection of Choudhary Khaliqzaman, who was Jinnah's first choice to succeed him as the leader of the Muslim League in India, to Pakistan in October, 1947 had further deepened the crisis in North India and the future prospect of the Muslim League. Following the footsteps of Khaliqzaman, migration of Abdus Sattar Sait, the lone Muslim Legislature from Madras (Malabar), had weakened the position of the Muslim League in South India in general and Malabar in particular. He was later appointed as the Ambassador to Egypt (Ibrahim, 2007). By the end of 1947, most of the founding members and prominent leaders of the Muslim League in India had migrated to Pakistan leaving the future of a large chunk of the Muslim population into jeopardy. Meanwhile, to decide the future of the Muslim League in India, a Convention was called by H.S. Suhrawardy in Calcutta on 9 November 1947. The Convention was represented by the remaining prominent leaders of all the Provincial League. The Madras Province had sent Mohammed Ismail and Seethi Sahib to attend the convention and decide the future of the League. A resolution was tabled in the convention for disbanding the League and directing to form a new organization for the service of the Muslims in India. The Muslim League leaders from Madras, Muhammed Ismail and Seethi Sahib, had objected to the resolution and convinced the committee the imperative necessity of continuing the League in the aftermath of Partition since there was no organization to foster the Muslim interests. However, soon after the convention, H S Suhrawardy and Z.H. Larri, and other remaining prominent leaders of the League from Uttar Pradesh and Bengal left to Pakistan.

As decided in the Calcutta convention, a meeting of the Muslim League Council was held at Karachi on 14 December 1947 to serve the Indian and Pakistani segment of the party. The meeting decided that the members from each country should meet by themselves to ponder their respective future (Wright, 1966: 582). Since the choice was left to the remaining leaders from India and no one was ready to take the responsibility on their shoulder fearing to be labeled as 'communal' in their respective cities affected by communal riots, Muhammed Ismail from Madras took the risk and was designated as the Convener (Wright, 1966: 583). Since Madras remained almost free from the communal frenzy situations, it was not as difficult for the leaders from the Madras

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<sup>2</sup> "Fourth Party" in Bombay was one of them which disliked continuing as Muslim League, thus, changed its name. The rationale for this shift was that Bombay one of the prone hit areas of communal violence.

Province as for the leaders from the north of India to hold the responsibility and promote themselves into the new designations.

The first challenge the Muslim League had to face after the convention was in Madras province where elections were announced to Malabar District Board in 1948. As per the strategy, the Muslim League fielded candidates in alliance with the Socialist Party. However, the League could not win any of the 42 seats it had contested. This was a pointer towards the declining popularity of Muslim League in the face of Partition and the communal rage. It was also an eye-opener and an indication to the point that the Muslim League had to be rebuilt and need to be convinced if they want to continue (Aziz, 1992).

Muhammed Ismail summoned a meeting of all the Indian delegates of the Muslim League in Madras on 10 March 1948. However, only 30 of 147 Councilors attended the meeting and most of them were from the South (Wright, 1966). This clearly showed that the centre of the activities of the League had reduced to the halfway across the subcontinent. The main agenda of the discussion was about the idea of continuing League as a political party. The responses of the meeting were mixed. The resolution moved by P.P Hassan Koya of Malabar backed by M.S.A Majid (also from Madras) to dissolve the party's political activity got rejected. Muhammed Ismail emphatically stressed the need for continuing the League on the ground that if it were wound up, there would be no organization to champion the cause of the Muslims in India (Aziz, 1992). As heated debates were going on, P.K Moideen Kutty from Malabar moved a resolution as a compromising formula for both the contesting parties. According to this formula, it is decided that the "Muslim League shall now devote its attention *principally* to the promotion of the religious, cultural, educational and economic interests of the Muslims of the Union." (Wright, 1966) The committee also decided that the League's legislative members had to be retained and a subcommittee consisting of 15 members (Ibrahim, 2007: 142-143)<sup>3</sup> shall be appointed to frame a new constitution for what was later named as the "Indian Union Muslim League". As a result, Muhammed Ismail was elected as the President and Mahbub Baig as the General Secretary of Indian Union Muslim League (Aziz, 1992:36). The committee had empowered the League for "joining with *any* other political party that can deliver the goods for the people" (Wright, 1966: 583). Meanwhile, a Malabar District committee, in which Syed Bafaqi

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<sup>3</sup> The members were Muhammed Ismail, A.A Khan, Haji Hismanal P.Ibrahim, Hafiska (Bombay) Sayyid Abdul Rahoof Sha (M.P), Ismail Tabis (Bangalore) Abdu Khader (Bombay) Sattar Sait, B.Pokker, K.M. Seethi, Muhammed Raza Khan, P.K. Moideen Kutty, Mahbub Ali Baig, K.T.M Ahmed Ibrahim (Madras). See Ibrahim

Tangal as President and Seethi Sahib as Secretary, and a Calicut Town Committee were also formed in 1949 (Mammadkoya, 1994: 157). Even though the committee clearly anticipated for an electoral coalition, the Constitution drafted in 1951 contained no mention of an electoral coalition. However, the constitution do empowers the League's Council "to ally itself or cooperate with any other organization in the country whose aims, objects and program of work are identical with or approximately identical with those of the Muslim League" (Wright, 1966: 583). In protest against the decision to rejuvenate the Muslim League, several leaders resigned from the League and formed an independent party in Madras (Aziz, 1992: 38). P.P Hassan Koya, M.L.A and the office-bearers of the Calicut Town Muslim League were there among the prominent member who resigned from the party.

Meanwhile, a Constituent Assembly was created to draft a Constitution for independent India. Among other heated debates, the question of representation became an issue. After prolonged discussions and debates, the Assembly voted to retain reserved seats for Muslims as well as for the Scheduled Castes for a period of ten years and abolish separate electorates.<sup>4</sup> It was clear that Muslim candidates had little chance of getting elected in proportion to the numerical strength of the community. Against this, B. Pokker (Malabar) and K.T.M. Ahmed Ibrahim (Madras) moved an amendment to retain the separate communal vote, however, got little support and thus defeated (Wright, 1966: 582). The League members in the Constituent Assembly and in the Advisory Committee firmly argued for maximum safeguards and constitutional provisions for the protection of the Muslims. However, all the attempts of the League were failed as an amendment was introduced in the Assembly in May 1949 by Patel cancelling reservation of seats for the Muslim (Jeffrelot, 2011: 9) which had been enjoyed by the Muslims from 1909. The League members did not stop there in its attempt to getting the maximum protection and safeguards for the Muslim minorities in India. When the Assembly cancelled reservation of seats for the Muslims, the League members in the Assembly made demand for proportional representation with a single transferable vote (Jeffrelot, 2011). However, this demand was also firmly rejected on the ground that it was the same demand the old League was asking for which eventually led to Partition. Many argued that, though this will definitely increase few more Muslim numbers in Parliament, however, risking the cost of solidifying Hindu self-consciousness and polarizing the two faiths again like earlier.

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<sup>4</sup> Government of India Debate, "Constituent Assembly Debates", Archived from the Government of India website

The real test for the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) came in the first General Election held in January 1952. As the constitution of the Muslim League empowers the members to contest in elections, Ismail Sahib negotiated firstly with the state Congress leadership. The Congress set conditions for its alliance with the League which if acceptable locally were not approved by the Congress High Command in New Delhi. When the Congress High Command rejected the Muslims League's willingness for an electoral coalition, the League Council resolved to oppose the Congress, the Communist and the Socialist alike. However, this was not applicable to all areas and certainly had a different plan for different areas. For instance, Ismail allowed the Bombay branch, the Fourth Party, to support the Congress. During this period, the members of the Muslim League in the Central Assembly met under the chairmanship of Nawab Muhammed Ismail and dissolved the party in the Central Legislative Council (Ibrahim, 2007: 150).

Before the General Assembly election, the Malabar Muslim League had faced a by-election to the Malappuram constituency of the Madras Assembly which was held on 28 October 1950. During this time, the Congress party in Kerala was facing serious difficulties on account of the defection of a large number of senior leaders due to group rivalry within the party. The two groups, one under the K.P.C.C president Govindan Nayar and the other under K. Kelappan, decided to field candidates in the upcoming by-election. Meanwhile, K. Kelappan along with some other senior leaders had joined the *Kisan Mazdoor Party* (KMP). In opposition, Muslim League put up M.P.M. Assankutty Kurikkal as their candidate. When the group rivalry in Congress in Kerala had intensified, the A.I.C.C intruded to the matter and directed to withdraw the candidature of both groups. However, both of them decided to contest with the unofficial support. When the result was declared on 31st October, the Muslim League candidate emerged as victorious bagging 775 votes against 290 of the independent candidate supported by the Congress.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, in an election to the Vandoor District Board, the Muslim League candidate had registered another victory.<sup>6</sup>

In the first General Election 1951-52, Malabar witnessed an unusual contest. Since the Muslim League in India had decided to oppose Congress, the Malabar Muslim League also followed the party policy. For the Congress, since some of the senior members of the party had joined the *Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party*, the contest became very tough. However, they decided to contest the election alone. The K.M.P.P, like in the

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<sup>5</sup> Vote secured by each party: Muslim League: 775, K.M.P: 214, Congress Independent: 290

<sup>6</sup> Ibrahim, *op.cit.*, p. 154

Malappuram by-election, had made an alliance with the Communist party. The Socialist was also in the election forefront. For the Muslim League, it was an election of survival. The League leadership was in great confusion because of the atmosphere of communal disharmony and the general anti-League feeling prevalent in the country. Since the Congress was not ready to accept the demand to recognize the Muslim League as the sole representative of the Muslim community, an alliance with them was nearly not possible. An alliance with the Communist was also rejected on the ground of religion. Finally, the League decided to face the election single-handedly and put up its own candidates.

The election result was a serious setback to the Congress in the Madras province. Although the Congress emerged as victorious in most of the seats they had contested in the north Indian states, in the south, most of the Congress members lost the election including the Chief Minister P.S Kumaraswami Raja (Ibrahim, 2007: 171). In Malabar, Congress could win only 4 out of the 30 seats they had contested while K.M.P.P and the Communist got 7 seats each. However, the big gainer was the Muslim League as they secured 5 out of 13 seats they had contested.<sup>7</sup> They had also won the Malappuram Parliamentary seat contested by B. Pokker. In addition to this, the Muslim League candidates who had lost in Kozhikode and Ponnani constituency had bagged more than ten thousand votes. It meant that not only the Muslim League became victorious in many seats in Malabar but also eaten most of the votes which otherwise had gone to the Congress ballots. This can be well illustrated from the words of Kamaraj, the President of the Tamil Nadu Pradesh Congress, admitted that it was the Muslim voters at the instigation of the League that tilted the balance against the Congress (Khan, 1969: 445). The election result convinced that the Muslim League was still a political force to reckon if not in Madras as a whole, but at least in Malabar. This was the moment the party was waiting for long after independence. Throughout the year between 1947 -52, the League had been accused of as a communal party deeply rooted in Pakistan. It had been underestimated as a 'dead-horse' by Jawaharlal Nehru in an election rally held at Kozhikode (Kumar, 1986: 52). To the Muslim League, it was more than just an election victory. For them, the result was a perfect reply to those who had devalued the importance of the League. It was a clear message against those who had been accusing the League as a communal party. As Theodore Wright (1966) rightly put it, for the Muslim League, "the initial elections were a test case of how Muslims relate politically

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<sup>7</sup> Details of the winning candidates: K. Uppi Sahib from Tirur, Chakkeeri Ahammed Kutty from Kottakkal, K.K. Muhammed Shafi from Perinthalmanna, K.M. Seethi Sahib from Malappuram (Gen.), M. Chadayan from Malappuram (Res.).

to a non-Muslim majority in a professed secular state than the North with its exacerbating historical experiences and propinquity to Pakistan.”

After the election, a serious discussion was held between all the political parties since no party got the majority to form the government.<sup>8</sup> There was an attempt to form a Communist-K.M.P.P coalition and invited other small parties including the Muslim League to join the alliance. However, Muslim League decided to support the Congress without joining the ministry (Aziz, 1992: 41). It was argued that the efforts of the Communist Party for a coalition to form the government did not succeed on account of the League leaders’ refusal to have any alliance with the Communist on religious grounds (Khan, 1969: 440-442). Though, the Congress had invited the Muslim League to take part in the ministry, the top leaders of the League rejected the offer and decided to support from outside. It was reported that the Congress had demanded the Muslim League members to resign the party membership if they wanted to join the ministry (Siddiq, 1966: 87). On the other side of this, the Congress had the fear of losing its support in north-India if they share the ministry with the Muslim League. However, for the first time, the Congress had invited the Muslim League M.L.As to attend the Congress legislature party meetings along with *Karshak Lok Party* and *Common Weal Party*. The leader of Congress in Assembly C. Rajagopal Achari had called upon to form the new government and he took office on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1952 with eleven ministers.

Later in the same year, Madras was approaching elections to Municipalities. This time the Congress leaders wanted a formal alliance with the Muslim League to support the Congress candidates. As a result, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee approached the League and agreed to allow seats in towns where there have a considerable population of Muslims (Wright, 1966: 583). Though the Central Committee of Congress had repudiated the pact, the Provincial Congress Committee continued with it. Consequently, League contested in 8 Municipalities in Madras. In Malabar, the League contested in both Kozhikode and Thalassery Municipality in alliance with Congress. By then, the K.M.P.P and the Socialist had merged together and formed the Socialist Party on 26 September 1952. In Kozhikode Municipality, Muslim League contested in 8 seats and bagged 5 seats. In the Thalassery Municipality, Muslim League emerged as the single largest party, bagging 10 out of 28 seats. It was argued that the League support was very decisive in securing the Chairmanship in all the five Municipalities in Malabar (Aziz, 1992: 41).

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<sup>8</sup> Seat –share in the Assembly: Congress, 152; CPI, 59; K.M.P.P, 35, Socialist, 13; KLP, 15; Independent, 60; Muslim League, 5; Justice Party, 1; Forward Bloc, 3; SC Federation, 2; Common Wheel Party, 6; Tamil Nadu Toilers Party, 19 (Election Commission of India, Vol 1, 1951)

This formal alliance between the Muslim League and the Congress continued during the Malabar District Board elections and to in the election to the constituency of Gudiyattam, near Vellur where the newly appointed Chief Minister Kamaraj Nadar was facing a by-election. Since Gudiyattam had a considerable population of the Muslims, Kamaraj wanted the support of the Muslim League. He approached the League and the League agreed an unconditional support. During the election campaign, for the first time after independence, Congress and League flags were flown together (Seethi, 1959: 7-30).

Meanwhile, the processes of reorganizing the Indian state boundaries on linguistic lines were under way. Processions and agitations were being held in different parts of the country which finally led to the detachment of Andhra from Madras in 1953. After the formation of the Andhra state, the government had decided to redraw the state boundaries on linguistic line and appointed a Commission to examine and make a report on the matter.<sup>9</sup> On the basis of the Commission report, a new state of Kerala was created out of the Madras Province by integrating the district of Malabar and the former princely states of Travancore and Cochin on 1st November 1956 having a population of 18 percent of Muslim (Census of India, 1963). Before the state was created, there was an *Aikya Kerala Movement* for the formation of a separate state for the Malayalam speaking population. The Muslim League was in the forefront for demanding the formation of the Kerala state. In April 1954, the Malabar District Muslim League had passed a resolution in favour of this demand. However, the Praja Socialist Party and a large section of the Congressmen in Malabar were against the demand and its merger with the Travancore-Cochin states (Aziz, 1992:44). Formation of new states out of Madras had completely changed the political context and atmosphere of all the parties operating in Kerala. As Theodore Wright (1966: 584) would argue, “the drastic truncation of Madras completely changed the context within which the Muslim League had to operate. The removal of the areas in which the Communist Party had its strongholds reduced Congress dependence upon the marginal votes of the League.”

During this time, serious discussions were going on in the Muslim League camp to widen its base throughout Kerala i.e., Travancore and Cochin. Indian Union Muslim League had no units in the Travancore-Cochin state until then. As a result, the Malabar

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<sup>9</sup> The State Reorganization Commission (SRO) was appointed by Nehru in August, 1953 with Justice Fazl Ali, K.M Panikkar and H.N Kunzru as members of the Commission.

Muslim League leaders met on 7 October 1953 to discuss about widening the League's base to Travancore-Cochin states and constituted a committee to do the necessary steps. There was a Muslim organization called the 'State Muslim League' affiliated to the All-India Muslim League actively working for the Muslim community in both Travancore and Cochin states. However, when Pakistan was created and All-India Muslim League ceased functioning, the 'State Muslim League' was also decided to disband its political activity. Accordingly, the two State Muslim League leaders called a Conference at Thrissur on 22 November 1953 and decided, after prolonged discussions, that the League should conclude its political activity and function as a social organization (Ibrahim, 2007: 206-208).

To add to the situation, in the election held in February 1954 to the Travancore-Cochin legislative assemblies, no party could win the majority. Formal alliances were made between the CPI, RSP and KSP before the election. The Congress and the PSP had decided to contest alone. Political reconfiguration underwent seriously after the election which finally led the formation of the government under the Chief Ministership of the PSP leader Pattom A Thanu Pillai on 16 March 1954 with the support of the Congress (Ibrahim, 2007: 216-26).

In this scenario, the Malabar Muslim League leaders felt the need to extend the Muslim League's activities to the erstwhile princely states. Formation of the Kerala state and the greater popularity the League had received in Malabar facilitated the extension of work to the former princely states. Accordingly, a delegate conference of the Indian Union Muslim League was held at Ernakulam on 18 November 1956 under the presidency of Muhammed Ismail. It was in this conference the Kerala State Muslim League was formed with Bafaqi Tangal as President and K.M Seethi Sahib as Secretary.

With the formation of Kerala state, elections were also declared to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1957. With the growing popularity of the CPI and increasing factionalism within the Congress party in Kerala, the A.I.C sent S.K Patil to Kerala to study about the political situation and talk with a possible coalition. S.K. Patil along with some other Congress leaders met Muslim League leaders on 20 December to discuss a possible alliance. Although the state Congress had agreed to make an alliance with the Muslim League, the Congress Central Committee rejected the proposal. The same 'communal' face of the Muslim League and the possible loss of votes in the north Indian states had restricted the Congress to make an alliance with the League. Meantime, a talk with PSP was also going on for an alliance. Finally, Muslim League joined with the PSP in an electoral alliance and fought the election together. In Malabar,

Muslim League decided the contest in 14 Assembly seats and 3 Lok Sabha seats while PSP had allotted 23 seats. Important leaders of both Congress and PSP came to state for campaigning. It was during this election campaign Nehru described Muslim League as a 'dead horse' which subsequently led to heated political debates.

The election was a landmark in the history of the State Muslim League. The alliance with a national party like the PSP naturally boosted the morale of the League workers. In turn, the alliance with the League brought real benefit to the PSP. Throughout India, especially in the North Indian States, it secured Muslim votes in large measures. It was argued that it was with the support of the Muslim League that the PSP rose to be the largest opposition party in Uttar Pradesh. The election result came in March with the Communist Party bagging 60 out of 127 seats. Congress was victorious in only 43 seats while Muslim League had won 8 seats and PSP in 9 seats.<sup>10</sup> With the support of 5 Independent candidates, for the first time in the Communist history, E.M.S Nambhootheripad was sworn in as the first Chief Minister of Kerala on 8 April 1957.

Though the League could not make it into the government, it was the time not only the League leaders but also the Congress admitted that the League has a decisive role to play in the state. It was argued that the Communist victory frightened the Congress leadership sufficiently and made it condone their earlier stance while forming a coalition with the Muslim League (Wright, 1966: 586). Meanwhile, the Muslim League had established being a strong contestant in the Malabar District Board and Municipalities. Any formation of Board committees or Municipal committees was not possible for the Congress without making an electoral alliance with the League.

The Kerala State Muslim League, having found a ground in the state politics, now decided to push the community demands on the ground of Muslim backwardness to the government and ask for constitutional measure to safeguard the interest of the Muslim community. To this direction, the Muslim League party leader in the Assembly, C.H Muhammad Koya pleaded for redressal of the grievances of the Muslim community. He pointed out that there was not a single Muslim Judge in the High Court; nor was there a Muslim among the sessions Judges. Moreover, there was then not even a Government pleader among the Muslims. Even though there was a Service Commission in the State, there was no member from the Muslim community in it (Aziz, 1996: 53). He demanded

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<sup>10</sup> Election Commission of India, *Statistical Report on Kerala Assembly Election-1957*, Government of India, New Delhi, 1957

that Muslims should get adequate representation in the Government Services, professional colleges, and in the public departments. C.H Muhammed Koya submitted a detailed report on the backwardness of Mappilas and pleaded urgent attention to the matter. He further illustrated that, though there was a reservation of 35 percent in employment to all minority communities, it does not mention about separate reservation. This gives an opportunity for the most forward community within the backward community to take all the advantages out of the general reservation. Thus, he demanded, there should be quotas within the existing reservation system in which each community should get reservation according to the population proportion (Ibrahim, 2007: 283). A resolution was also passed in 6 December, 1958 by K. Hasan Gani in the Assembly seeking 20 percent reservation for Muslims in the Public Service Commission. Muslim League also raised issues in the newly appointed Administrative Reform commission in which community representation was lopsided (Ibrahim, 2007: 283).

Building Rules of the State required the Muslims to obtain a license for the construction of buildings meant for Madrasas and Mosques (Aziz, 1996: 53). Imposition of this rule seems to be very hard to an already backward society like Mappilas. Philanthropic leaders of the community faced difficulty with this role in their way to educate the Mappilas. With this growing difficulty, a resolution was submitted to the Government by Mohammed Koya seeking immediate intervention to the matter. As a result of this resolution, the Government issued orders removing the requirement for obtaining a prior license for the mosques, madras, etc. Apart from this, resolutions were also submitted for the formation of separate taluks and districts which were backward. When the Administrative Reform commission recommended adoption of economic the base for reservation, Muslim League objected to this recommendation and insisted that reservation should continue on the basis of social and economic backwardness (Aziz, 1996: 54). Muslim League also demanded extension of reservation to the appointment to Public Service Commission, High Court, subordinate Judicial Service and Government and Government aided industries.

While the Communist Ministry was in power, agitations were going on in different parts of the state accusing the Government for its anti-minority policies. Private school managers also came forward with mass protests and agitations against the Educational Bill introduced by the Government. The state had witnessed political turbulence as political strife and murder became order of the day. To add to the midst of the law and order situation, the Budget proposal for the year 1958-59 leaked before presented to the Assembly. Law and order situation was at its worst situation as Police firing at two

districts multiplied the intensity of the agitation. It was the Christian minority, which affected the most with the introduction of the Education Bill, within the Congress who became even more desperate to remove the Communists from power because of the party's infiltration of the police and civil service (Wright, 1966: 586). The League found itself in a happy position of being courted by both sides.

As the situation became worst day-by-day, the Nair Service Society leader Mannath Padmanabhan and the Socialist leader K. Kelappan under the auspices of the Indian National Congress launched a 'Liberation Struggle' against the Government on 12 June 1959. The Muslim League which organized the second Annual Conference at Kozhikode on 12 February, 1959 had expressed its animosity towards the Communist Government. However when the agitation was growing immensely and a 'Liberation Struggle' had launched and almost all communities had joined the movement, League was in no hurry. The alliances in the 'Liberation Struggle' approached the League leaders and insisted to joining against the common foe. However, Ismail Sahib and Bafaqi Tangal held a meeting and announced that each issue would be considered on its merit. Eventually, fear of isolation of the desire for recognition by the Congress and distaste for the "atheist party", the League decided to join in the 'Liberation Struggle' on 22 June 1959. Mass arrests, police firing, mutation of offices, closing up of colleges and mass students protests were followed which eventually led to the imposition of Presidents Rule on 31 July 1959 in the State. According to Communist Party, the liberation struggle was a struggle organized by vested interests and reactionaries. It was alleged that it was on account of the Education Bill that the Christians and on account of the Land Reforms Bill that the Nairs turned against the Government (Namboothiripad, 1986).

The Interim election was declared in the state on February 1960. To examine the political situation and seeking for a possible alliance against the ousted Communist party, Congress Central Committee members Lal Bahadur Shastri and Nehru came to Kerala. They urged to continue the alliance in the 'Liberation Struggle' and make a Congress-PSP-League alliance against the common foe (Ibrahim, 2007: 295). As a result, a front was formed called as the Democratic Front and decided to contest the election. Consequently, seats were distributed among the Democratic Front alliances in which 81 seats were allotted to the Congress, 33 seats for the PSP and 12 seats for the Muslim League. All the seats for the Muslim League were allotted in Malabar which indicates the strong hold of the party in that area.

The result came out with a thumping majority to the Democratic Front. Out of the 126 seats contested, the Democratic Front bagged 94 seats in which the Congress became victorious in 63 seats while PSP had won 20 seats. The Muslim League bagged all but one of its allotted seats. The Communist Party which had received more than fifty percent votes in 34 seats it contested in 1957 now got only 26 seats. Almost all the leaders of the Communist Party had lost the election including seven Ministers of the ousted Communist Ministry. Interestingly, there was an unusual unity shown in the election between the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians. Though the Democratic Front had fought the election together, problem aroused during the formation of Government. Since Congress had secured a majority to form the Government an alliance with the 'communal' party brought to the attention of the High Command by the Congress Left and the Nationalist Muslims. They argued that the Congress could not resist Hindu communalism of the Jan Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha if they tie with the Muslim League. It clearly shows that there were a considerable number of men within the Congress, both Hindus and Muslims, who still think that Muslim League was a communal organization and thus cannot be brought into the government. Negotiations were going on, however, the Congress High Command objected to any coalition with the Muslim League in Government. At the same time, the National Executive of the P.S.P decided not to join the Kerala Ministry if the Muslim League had no part in it. After prolonged discussion and debates between the three parties, a compromise was made. The Congress offered the Chief Ministership to P.S.P leader Pattom Thanu Pillai and settled the League with Speakership and a place in the Rajya Sabha. The Ministry took the oath on 22 February 1960 and Pattom Thanu Pillai became the Chief Minister. K.M Seethi Sahib of the League designated as the Speaker of the Assembly and Ebrahim Sulaiman Sait elected to the Rajya Sabha soon. It was for the first time since Independence a Muslim League member got elected to this esteemed post.

Two untoward incidents happened in 1961 which eventually led to problems in the Democratic Front: communal riots in Jabalpur in February and death of Seethi Sahib on 17<sup>th</sup> April. On the background of the Jabalpur communal riots, the A.I.C.C had passed a resolution in Durgapur Congress summit which directed the Congress state committees to keep away from communal parties. The meeting also discussed a ban of communal parties, clearly aimed at the League. The other incident was evolved around the speakership. After the death of Seethi Sahib, the Muslim League nominated C.H. Muhammed Sahib to the post. However, on the direction of Durgapur Resolution, the Congress denied support to League's candidate and even wanted to nominate the Congress member and Deputy Speaker Nafeesath Beevi to the post. After prolonged discussion, Congress decided to vote for Muhammed Koya if he resign his party

membership before submitting nomination. Swallowed with all humiliation, Muhammed Koya resigned his party membership and sought votes. Koya reveals that his party's leaders had a hard time convincing the younger members to swallow this humiliation for the sake of unity against the Communist (Koya, 1961). C.H Muhammed Koya elected as Speaker of the Assembly in June 1961.

Conflict continued between the two parties when a by-election was declared to Kuttipuram Assembly seat, the seat vacant with the death of Seethi Sahib. With the same logic drawn from the Durgapur Resolution, the K.P.C.C. decided not to support the League candidate Mohsin Bin Ahmed. Although there was an instruction from the A.I.C.C not to leave the seat unopposed, the K.P.C.C knew that it was not possible to win a seat in a Muslim constituency. Thus, the Congress told, on paper, its members to vote as they like. A young Congressman, K. Kunji Muhammed rebelled at this blatant evasion and stood as an Independent with the support of Communists. But when the election result was declared, the League candidate came out with a majority of 9204 votes.

The tussle between the Congress, the P.S.P and the League had continued for sometime. Meantime, the Congress, being the major partner in the Alliance, felt that the Chief Ministership should have gone to them. To accommodate the claims of the Congressman, a new post of Deputy Chief Minister was created and the Congress Party chief, R. Shankar, was installed in that post. Not satisfied with the newly created post, important political development took place as Pattom Thanu Pilla of P.S.P was appointed the Governor of Punjab. This increased the tussle between P.S.P and the Congress and within the Congress. Agitated with this 'political' appointment, the P.S.P walked out of the Government. Meanwhile the Christian lobby in the Congress claimed and favored P.T. Chacko for the Chief Ministership. It was in this situation, an opposition member P.K. Kunju moved a non-confidence motion against the Government. Without many votes in favour, the Shankar Ministry fell on 8 September 1964.

Meanwhile, another important political development also took place with the declaration of Parliament election in February 1962. Congress did not want an alliance with the Muslim League and thus decided to share the 18 Parliament seats between the Congress and the P.S.P. Felt with further humiliation, the Muslim League decided to withdraw support to the Congress-P.S.P ministry and C.H. Muhammed Koya resigned from his Speakership on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1962. However, this decision did not harm the Congress as long as P.S.P stayed with it. In the Parliament elections, Muslim League

put up 3 candidates, namely Muhammed Ismail Sahib in Manjeri, M. Alikunju in Ponnani and C.H Mohammed Koya in Calicut. Apart from this, the League also decided to support some of the Independent candidates in Malabar in which some of them had the support of Communist Party. It helped the League to shed its anti-Communist stance which led to the formation of Communist-League ministry in 1965. When the result came, for the first time, the League had won in two Parliament seats.

In the interim poll to the Kerala Assembly which was held on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1965, the Muslim League had made an alliance with the Kerala Congress, the broke away group from Congress. At the same time, the Communist Party had split into the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India. The P.S.P, on the other hand, merged with the India Socialist Party and formed the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). Though Samyukta Socialist Party was in the front of the Marxist Party, it had made some electoral adjustment with the League. The interesting thing about this election was that the opposition group did not have a direct alliance with each other; however, they did not put up candidates in such constituencies in which the other party had a chance to win (Aziz, 1996: 71). The Congress and the Communist Party contested election alone. When the election results were announced and since no Party could secure majority, the Assembly again was dissolved on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1965 and President Rule was imposed.

A new election to the state Assembly was held only along with the Fourth General Election in February 1967. By the time, important political development happened at the national level which put the Muslim League on the black list. Pakistan's aggression in October 1965 over Kashmir put the party suspicious by the National Government. Though, the party condemned the aggression through its mouth-piece, *Chandrika*<sup>11</sup>, and assured its whole-hearted co-operation to defend the country, large number of League workers in Kerala arrested and detained under the Defence of India Rule (DIR) (Aziz, 1996: 73).

When the Emergency was over, the State was seeking elections to both the Assembly and the Parliament. Meantime, a Working Committee of the Indian Union Muslim League had met at Madras on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1966 to assess the political situation of the country and resolved to call upon the people to vote for an alternate government and to

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<sup>11</sup>*Chandrika (newspaper)* condemned the act through the editorials and articles published in 12-09-1965 and 20-10-1965

co-operate with the opposition parties (Ibrahim, 2007: 352). To oppose an anti-Muslim incumbency against the Government at center, the Congress had introduced a rebel group to the Muslim League known as ‘Samastha Kerala Muslim League’ during the election. With the growing opposition to the Congress and its ‘step-motherly’ attitude against the Muslim League, the party now decided to co-operate with the opposition parties to form an alternate government to the Congress (Aziz, 1996: 73).

To form an electoral alliance against the Congress, a meeting of the opposition parties- the communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India, the Samyukta Socialist Party, Kerala Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, and the Karshaka Thozhilali Party- convened at Ernakulam on 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1966 and the Muslim League, on the basis of the resolution passed in Madras, participated in the conference and formed an electoral alliance with them. They also decided to fight the election jointly and from a Front government if victorious. As per the electoral understanding, they decided to distribute the seats among the electoral partners. Accordingly, the CPI (M) decided to contest in 59 seats, the CPI in 22 seats, the SSP in 21 seats, the Muslim League in 15 seats, the RSP in 6 seats, the KSP in 1 seat and the KTP in 3 seats. In opposition, the Congress contested 133 seats and the Kerala Congress in 62 seats.

The election result gave a resounding victory to the Seven Non-Congress Party alliance. The Alliance bagged 117 seats out of 132 seats and 18 out of 19 Parliament seats. The Muslim League secured 14 out of 15 Assembly seats it contested and two Parliament seats also. Among the 14 Assembly seats the League won, two were out of the usual Muslim pocket, one in Mattancheri (former Cochin state) and the other in Kazhakkootam (former Travancore state).<sup>12</sup> The election was a setback to the Congress as it could only secure 9 seats in all the 133 constituencies it had contested.

The 1967 Assembly election was significant in Indian politics as far as the Muslim politics is concerned. The Muslim League, which had been described as a ‘dead horse’ by Nehru, emerged as a vital and decisive force in Kerala. For the first time since Independence, the Muslim League became a ruling partner of a State. In the negotiation for ministry-making, the League had given two Cabinet seats and a Deputy Speakership also. Education and Panchayat portfolios were allotted to the Muslim League in which

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<sup>12</sup> Election Commission of India, *Report of the Assembly and General Election: 1967*, New Delhi, Government of India, 1967.

C.H Muhammed Koya and M.P.M Ahamad Kutty became the nominees respectively of the League to the seat. Besides this, there were two other Muslim ministers in the Ministry, namely Imbichi Bava of the CPI (M) holding Transport and P.K. Kunju of the S.S.P holding Finance. The League was given representation in the Co-Ordination Committee, constituted for making policy decisions. During the discussion on ministry-making, the League National President Ismail Sahib had insisted on to demand Education portfolio. He was of opinion that in the context of the educational backwardness of the Muslim community, it would be proper that the Muslim League minister should handle the portfolio (Aziz, 1996: 78).

### **Achievement of the League during the Communist Ministry**

One of the important achievements of the League, while in office, was the establishment of a University in Malabar area called the Calicut University. The University was formed through an Ordinance issued by the Governor on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1968. Till the formation of this University, there was only one University existing in the state, i.e., the University of Kerala. The over-all development of the Malabar area which was very backward in all respect and particularly of education was the prime aim of establishing a University in Calicut. However, when the C.H Muhammed Koya, the educational Minister passed a resolution in favour of establishing a University at Calicut, opposition were came in all corners of the state accusing the very credibility of the Muslim League. Some even went to the extent calling it the 'Pakistan University' as the majority of the population in the area was Muslims. However, Muslim League and its Educational Minister survived from the criticism and established the foundation stone for the University building on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1968. The Kothari Commission Report was also stood in favour of establishing a University (Kothari Commission, 1966: 315).

Another achievement of the League Minister was the introduction of the Kerala University Bill 1967 which, along with the initiative for a University, aimed at providing service security for the private college teachers in the State and preventing mismanagement of private colleges and giving representation to the students in the Senate and Academic Council of the University (Ibrahim, 2007: 369-379).

In addition, the language teachers in school were treated only on a par with craft teachers in the matter of salary despite the number of working hours were equal. Considering this unequal treatment of the language teachers, the ministry removed all discriminatory rules against the language teachers (Arabic, Urdu, and Sanskrit) and appointed 12,000 new Arabic teachers during the tenure. The government also

introduced an order to issue direct payment of salaries to the private college teachers of Kerala. In addition, the Government also abolished examination and tuition fee in Secondary Education thus providing free education in principle, upto the class of twelfth. It was during this period, Muslims were appointed to Judiciary and other Public Services on an adequate basis.

### **Creation of Malappuram District**

One of the heated debates during the second Communist tenure was regarding the creation of a new District carved out of Kozhikode and Palakkad. In fact, the demand for a separate revenue district or Taluk had been made by the Muslim League M.L.A P. Abdul Majeed on the ground of backwardness of the particular region. However, this demand could not materialize during that because of lack of power to the Muslim League to pressurize the government. However, once Muslim League had come to power, the League Minister M.P Ahammad Kutty made the same demand in the Assembly in 1968. The demand was following the adoption of a resolution for Malappuram District in the 1968 state conference of the Muslim league held at Calicut (Shafeeq, 2014: 91). In the same year, a memorandum was submitted to the Chief Minister for district bifurcation. Due to the early demise of Ahammad Kutty, his successor from the Muslim League K. Avukkader Kutty Naha pressed this demand once again in the Assembly.

Once the demand was made, it created great concern and immediate reactions from several quarters. Jan Sangh started a nationwide campaign and brought out a pamphlet “Malappuram or Moplastan?” The Indian National Congress, who was in opposition, too started a campaign against the new district. An “Anti-District Bifurcation Committee” (Miller, 1992: 183) was also formed and accused Muslim League of being the same League of the Partition period. K. Kelappan, a Gandhian, led the anti-district committee and protested along with the national leaders of the Jan Sangh. He also inaugurated a *Satyagraha* and stated that the long shores of Malappuram and the majority Muslim fishermen community are already engaged in trade relation with Pakistan and that the Police are helpless and from now on there would even more be so; and that though the officials are for the time being Hindu, the post will soon be taken by the Mappilas (Ibrahim, 2007: 376-79).

In spite of the protests, the Government appointed N Kaliswaran as Special officer in connection with the formation of the new District who submitted his report on May 1969. A Cabinet sub-committee consisting of E.M.S Namboothiripad, K.R Gouri, and

C.H. Muhammed Koya held a discussion about the report and finally the District came into existence on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1969. Though the Communist Ministry had defended its decision to create Malappuram District on the floor of the Assembly and outside, they changed their opinion after the fall of the Ministry. E.M.S Namboothiripad accused that the formation of Malappuram District had helped the Muslim League in a bigger manner to increase the political and organizational base of the party. Not only that the whole authority of the new District went into the hands of the Muslim League and thereby helped the growth of 'Islamic communalism' in the State (Namboothiripad, 1987: 29).

Though the coalition continued for sometimes, the fate of the ministry was almost the same. Protests and, corruption and other malpractices were continually leveled against the Front ministers within a short period of time. To add to the situation, S.S.P and K.T.P, the two partners of the alliance, faced split in their parties. The opposition took maximum advantage of the situation as protests within the Assembly as well as outside the Assembly carried out. Students and trade unions joined the protest. The Ministry was losing its strength and trust in the coalition partners. When corruption charges were leveled against an S.S.P minister and a C.P.I (M) minister, the Chief Minister took enquiry on the S.S.P Minister only. This position was questioned not only by the League but other party members also. The 'Seven-Front' alliance further stood in two groups. One the one side, the CPI, Muslim League, I.S.P and R.S.P and on the other side CPM, KTP, and the K.S.P was in the group. As group rivalry was growing immensely, the Muslim League Central Council met at madras on 3 October 1969 and issued a press statement that "the Indian Union Muslim League had permitted its Kerala Unit to enter into an electoral alliance with the Marxist Party on the strict understanding that they would work on the basis of a minimum programme, however, failed. Thus, it will consider its withdrawal from the front"(Aziz, 1996: 87). The E.M.S. also alleged that the Kerala Congress had organized a secret meeting with several members of the front to sound out the possibility of forming a government without CPI (M) (Nossiter, 1982:215). As there was an anti-government protest growing within the front and corruption charges were leveled against other three ministers, by the time, taking advantage of the situation, the opposition M.L.A, T.A Majeed of the CPI moved a resolution seeking enquiry on the corruption charges leveled against the C.P.I (M) Ministers. When the resolution was tabled for voting, the government could not get the majority which led to the resignation of the E.M.S Ministry 24<sup>th</sup> October 1969.

Though the coalition government collapsed within a short period, as far as the Muslim League was concerned, it was for the first time the League was in power and it utilized

its maximum for the community enhancement. It was for the first time a Muslim was holding the ministry portfolio of Education. For the Mappilas, the community positioned far behind in education and which will determine the overall development of a community, such a position in the Cabinet was badly needed. It was with this election, the League emerged as a strong and decisive political force in Kerala, which for a time being, determined the future prospects of the governments (Mohamed, 2001). The later election proved that no one could win the majority in the state if they decide to face the election single-handedly. Coalition government became the necessity of the state in which not only the political parties but also community organizations have a greater role in deciding the future governments.

When E.M.S Ministry resigned from office, he did not insist the Governor to dissolve the Assembly. Meanwhile, the Kerala Congress had announced its support to any front out of CPM to form the government and avoid President's Rule. Consequently, the other parties in the Front, the Muslim League, CPI, ISP, and RSP along with Kerala Congress under the initiative of the Muslim League decided to form a new government. As a result of this Mini-Front coalition, C. Achutha Menon of CPI was chosen to be the Chief Minister of the new Government. The new ministry took the power on 1 November 1969. The new cabinet was formed consisting of eight ministers drawn from four parties: the CPI, the Muslim League, the ISP, and Kerala Congress (Nossiter, 1982: 219). The big gainer from the Mini-Front was Muslim League. Muslim League had two ministers. Since it was a small ministry, ministers had to hold several portfolios. Apart from Education portfolio, C.H. Muhammed Koya also took charge of Home, Civil and Criminal Justice, Vigilance, Election, etc. It was for the first time a Muslim took charge of the Home Ministry. To the Mappilas, it seemed to be a big achievement for the community as a whole because the Mappilas were deprived of entering to Police Force and even in Home Guards (Ibrahim, 2007: 393-394). Leaders from different corners objected this decision and even the Marxist leader E.M.S. Namboothiripad declared that "it was a mistake to have given a Muslim Leaguer the Home portfolio (Aziz, 1996: 92)." The other Minister of League, Avukkadar Kutty Naha, besides Community Development and Fisheries, was allotted additional charge of Public Works and Local Bodies. Meantime, anti-government protests and agitations, sponsored by the CPI (M), were taking place in different parts of the state. Police firing, political murders and teachers strikes had shaken the Government during this time. As protests were taking place in different corners of the state, there was a murder attempt against the Home Minister, C.H Muhammed Koya. It was during this period, the Kerala Land Reform Bill initiated by the first Communist Ministry got passed by the President. The Mini-Front Ministry passed it in the Assembly and gave orders to initiate the process according to

the Bill. The League was opposing the Bill on the ground that the *waqf* properties should be exempted from the operation of the land ceiling (Aziz, 1996: 94). However, the League could only partially succeed in it.

Soon, uncertainty as a plague continued in the front as horse-trading and sacking of M.L.A.s were also taking place in the background to pull down the Government. A rift in the ISP led to crisis in the Front. The opposition brought a non-confidence motion on 26 June 1970 seeking resignation of the ministry, however, survived. With the growing uncertainty in the front and as it became difficult to run the government, the Ministry advised the Governor to dissolve the Assembly on 26 June 1970. Though, the assembly was dissolved, the ministry continued as a care-taker government till August and later President's Rule imposed.

Meantime, significant changes happened in the national politics. By September, there emerged difference of opinion over the issue of election to the Presidency within the National Congress camp. The old camp of the Congress wanted to nominate Neelam Sanjiva Reddy to the post while Indira Gandhi wanted V.V. Giri to fill the post. The differences ultimately resulted in a split in Congress in September 1969. Later on, the old camp became known as Congress (Organization) and the new camp became known as Congress (Ruling). During the election campaign, Sanjiva Reddy came to meet the Muslim League President Muhammed Ismail Sahib and sought Muslim League's support to him. V.V. Giri however did not seek their support. To analyze the existing political situation in India, an Executive Committee meeting of the Indian Union Muslim League was called in Bangalore. An important decision was also taken in this meeting. Though V.V. Giri did not seek Muslim League's support, the League felt that it was necessary to join with democratic and secular forces in the background of growing reactionary and communal attitude of a section of the majority community. Muhammed Ismail used his whip and directed the League to vote for V.V. Giri in the President election and also seek a possible alliance with the Congress.

The election to the Kerala Assembly was also declared on 17 September 1970. The election sought significant attention not only in Kerala but also in the national level since, the political atmosphere in the national level had changed dramatically. To win the majority, there had to be a change in the existing political configuration. According to T.J. Nossiter (1982: 221),

“In view of the socialists' disarray and Kerala Congress's growing affinity with old Congress, it was imperative to reach an electoral understanding with the New Congress,

which because of CPI and RSP party sensitivities must fall short of an outright alliance. Such an arrangement met with opposition in the KPCC on three grounds: the party, and particularly its activist Youth Congress wing, was reluctant to campaign simply to put others in office; hostility to working with a communist party; and reluctance to accord power or even recognition to the Muslim League, despite Mrs. Gandhi's assertion that in Kerala it was non-communal in character."

As a result of this, an alliance was formed with CPI, Muslim League, RSP, PSP and the INC and named Mini-Front. The Left front also formed an alliance which included CPI (M), the SSP, the ISP, the KSP, and the KTP and came to known as People Democratic Front (PDF). The Congress (O) and the Kerala Congress were also in the contest and came to be known as the right-wing Democratic Front. In the election, 505 contestants were in the fray including nine women and about 75 percent of votes were polled (Nair and Kumari, 2013). Top leaders of the contesting national parties visited the state and extensively campaigned for the victory. The election was as much important for the national parties as for the state parties since the Congress split at the Centre. The essential question in the campaign was, which of the rival fronts was most likely to deliver the state from its chronic political instability and economic difficulties (Nossiter, 1982).

The result brought majority to the Democratic Front securing 79 seats out of 128 contested. In the election, the New Congress emerged as the single largest party winning 30 seats out of 52 contested. However, with regard to the vote share, the CPM registered 23.83 percent of total voted polled. The irony in coalition politics in which vote share did not ostensibly turn into seats was once again validated in this election. The Mini-Front under the Chief Ministership of C. Achutha Menon sworn in to power on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1970, consisting of four ministers from the CPI, two each from the Muslim League and the RSP, and one from the PSP. Though the front had 36 M.L.As, it was depended on the outside support of the New Congress and 3 Independents. The Leagues share in the front, however, was reduced to 12 out of 20 including one independent compared to 14 out of 15 in the 1967 Assembly election.

Though the Mini Front had no majority and decided to constitute a government with the support of Congress. The Congress, although invited, did not join the ministry initially for two reasons: firstly, its reluctance to join a Communist-led ministry: secondly, on the basis of the Central Committee directives to keep away from communal parties. The Mini-Front initially had four partners in the alliance in government, later the New

Congress also joined with them on 25 September, 1971 and the ministry was expanded accordingly.

### **Muslim Politics in Transition: The post-1970s**

The post-1970 was a period of difficulties for the Muslim League in Kerala. Incidents which followed the 1970 elections were becoming less favorable for the Muslim League. Communal riots in Tellicherry, the worst after 1921-22 followed by emergence of a dissident group within the Muslim League, Partition of Pakistan and emergence of a new nation based on secular democracy, growing influence of Indira Gandhi and her New Congress at the national level and the state level, the Emergency, group rivalries and split in Muslim League and the challenge it posed in the Malabar area all contributed to declining influence of the Muslim League in Kerala.

It was a period the Muslim League, after its great practical success in Kerala in its king-making role and its emotional success in holding allegiance of the Mappila majority, thought of an all India revival of the Indian Union Muslim League. However, after a promising spurt of new activity in some north Indian states, the dream was shattered by the electoral triumph of Mrs. Gandhi in 1969 and 1971 (Miller, 1991: 70). The growing popularity of Mrs. Gandhi and the New Congress party not only made an impact at the national level, but it also reflected in Kerala as well. In the election to the Parliament in 1971, Muslim League decided to contest in ninety-three constituencies at the national level, however, could only win four seats: two in Kerala and two in Bombay. At the state level, though Mrs. Gandhi had permitted to join the League in the ministry, accusation and protests were growing from Youth Congress against any accommodation with the communal forces (1991:70). Though the Kerala Congress had taken a position that the Kerala Muslim League was “not the same” as Muslim League branches in other Indian states, and Mrs Gandhi also stated that it was “not out and out communal”<sup>13</sup>, clashes were often took place between the Youth Wings of both party (Aziz, 1996: 99). This led to a tension between the Muslim League and the New Congress in Kerala also.

It was during this period the war broke out in East Pakistan (now, Bangladesh) with West Pakistan Army. Bangladesh pleaded India’s intervention into the matter. However, political differences were occurring questioning India’s intervention in the internal matters of Pakistan. Finally, India intervened in the matter to end the genocide in East

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<sup>13</sup> At the same time he also held the view that both Hindu communalism and Muslim League responsible for the partition. See, the *India Express*, December 3, 1970

Pakistan and bring peace. In Kerala, the Muslim was on tender hooks. Questions were raised asking the League leadership to express their loyalty. Again, the League was put on the trail and the loyalty was checked. By ending all the questions raised, the party welcomed the nation's decision by approving Bangladesh (Miller, 1991: 175). C.H. Muhammed in a discussion expressed solidarity with the fighting forces in the Liberation Struggle in East Pakistan and spoke, "At this hour of crisis to our nation, I would like to exhort the people of this State to stand united with the people of the rest of India to uphold the integrity and solidarity of defending our country from foreign aggression" (Miller, 1991: 175). Though he spoke on behalf of the Muslim League, the Youth Wing of the League was divided over the issue. The Youth Wing had divided into two on a regional basis: the Malappuram and Cannanore League. The south Malabar i.e., the Malappuram Youth League members criticized Indian government's decision to interfere in the internal matters of the Pakistan and the use of MISA against political opponents. The Cannanore Youth League stood with the National and State League and welcomed their decision. Though the party initiated disciplinary action against the youth groups that had taken contrary positions, these differences had a serious impact on the future prospects of the League.

Meanwhile, the communal riot which took place in Thalasserry between the Muslims and the Hindus in December 1971 had a negative impact on the 'communal' face of the party. It not only led to a rivalry between the Muslim League and the Congress but also within the Muslim League members. In two days, 24 mosques, 50 prayer halls, and some 400 Mappila-owned shops and houses were wholly or partially destroyed in and around the Malabar town of Tellicherry (Nossiter, 1982: 227). According to Nossiter (1982), "though Hindu hostility to Mappilas may have been fuelled by events in Bangladesh, a more immediate percipient appears to have been the League's determination to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mappila Rebellion, still regarded by the Hindu population as a communal outrage". The Enquiry Commission had the view that there was a perceived feeling in the minds of the Hindus that the Muslim League which was a partner in the United Front Government was taking advantage of its position.<sup>14</sup> Whatever the reason could be, this had put a question mark on the 'communal' face of the party since it was in power. The Muslim League accused the new Congress Home Minister K.Karunakaran and the Police for not taking stern action during the riot. It was the CPI (M) members who were providing some kind of security

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<sup>14</sup> Government of Kerala, *Report of Justice Joseph Vithayathil Commission of Enquiry 1972*, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1972.

to the Muslims in this area.<sup>15</sup> Within the Muslim League also there were people, mostly the Youth League members, who protested against the New Congress' communal attitude of not deploying enough Police force in the riot-hit area and also not acting accordingly. They insisted the Party to withdraw its support to the Mini-Front and make an alliance with the CPM since they were the people protecting the Muslims during the riot. Though the League members were divided into two camps over this issue, Abdurahman Bafaqi Tangal, the state Muslim League President, intervened in the matter and settled the internal conflict.

Though, Bafaqi Tangal settled the matter for the time being, differences of opinion and internal groupism had not faded away completely. When time occurred, it appeared on the face and the League was losing its base gradually. Meantime, the demise of Muhammed Ismail Sahib, the Indian Union Muslim League President, on 4 April 1972 was a shock to the Party and his death in this juncture was a big blow to the Party. To find the successor to Muhammad Ismail Sahib, the National Executive of the League met at Madras on 14 May 1972. The Executive committee unanimously elected Abdurahman Bafaqi Tangal as the President of Indian Union Muslim League (Aziz, 1996: 101). Soon, a by-election was declared to the Manjeri Parliament constituency which became vacant with the demise of Ismail Sahib. On 24 December 1972 Bafaqi Tangal called a press meet at Kozhikode and declared that C.H. Muhammed Koya, the Education Minister in the Mini-Front, will contest from the Manjeri Parliament seat. Since the decision was not unanimous, it had two implications: at first, on the background of the tension between Muslim League and the New Congress, the decision to withdraw C.H. Muhammed Koya from the ministry seemed to be threatening the Front, and secondly it also meant that this was the political game of the rebel members of the League to weaken the growing support and influence of C.H. Muhammed Koya in the state League (Philip, 2010: 221). Though not satisfied with the decision, C.H. Muhammed Koya accepted the party decision and decided to contest from Manjeri. Meantime, the news of the sudden demise of Bafaqi Tangal on 19 January 1973, just three days before the by-election, had a yet another big blow to the Muslims in general and Muslim League in particular. He was a highly esteemed and respected man by all community and political leaders. The by-election held on 22 January 1973 in the background of Bafaqi Tangal's demise. As expected, sympathetic actor might have worked as well, C.H. Muhammed Koya won the election by a margin of 95,860 votes.

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<sup>15</sup> *Report of Justice Joseph Vithayathil Commission, 1972*

Internal problems and the group rivalry become evident in the League soon after the death of Bafaqi Tangal. On 25 February 1973, the State Committee of Muslim League elected P.S.M.A Pookoya Tangal, another member of Sayyid/Tangal family, as the President of the State Muslim League and assigned him to nominate the new educational minister and also candidate in Kondotty constituency. During the meeting to decide the candidates, the splinter League members wanted M. Moideen Haji to be the Education minister and P.M. Aboobakker as the candidate for the Assembly by-election. However, the new President had gone for a majority vote and elected Chakeeri Ahamed Kutty as the Education Minister and M.O.M Abdulla Kutty Kurikkal as the candidate from Kondotty constituency.

During this time, there was another controversy flaring up regarding the holding of the Muslim League mouth-piece *Chandrika*. During this period, the *Chandrika* was under the Management of T.P Kutty Aamu, who had a difference with C.H. Muhammed Koya. When the group rivalry was increasing, the *Chandirka* did not report the news which gave popularity to the C.H. group. At the same time, he kept friendly relation with the splinter group members and covered their activities extensively. This cold war continued for sometimes which led the resignation of Kutty Aamu and finally C.H. Muhammed Koya took control of the newspaper.

The group rivalry did not last there and it got further intensified when the Dissident group decided to hold the Youth League Conference at Calicut. As there were sharp differences of opinion among the party leaders, the party President advised the organizers to put off the conference for some time. However, they decided to go on with the plan and decided to hold the Conference on 4<sup>th</sup> May. As a breach of the moral code of conduct, the Muslim League state committee decided to dissolve Youth League and suspend its President K.K. Muhammed and Secretary P.K Muhammed and initiate an enquiry. The committee also took action against Syed Umar Bafaqi Tangal, C.K.P. Cheriya Mamu Keyi and the T.P. Kutty Aamu (Philip, 2010: 223). But, the League could not stop them. They held the meeting as decided and vehemently criticized both Muslim League leadership and Congress. Later, on 9<sup>th</sup> May, the Dissident members held a meeting at Tirurangadi in M.K. Haji's house (who later became the President of Dissident League) and criticized the Government and alleged that the government policies are anti-minority. As the rebel activities of the dissident group were increasing, the League finally suspended six MLAs in the dissident camp from the Party. As a counter reaction to this, on 10 May 1974, the Dissidents met at Tirurangadi and decided to withdraw the suspended six MLAs support to the Government. Later, on 2 April 1975, the Dissidents met at Tellicherry and established a parallel Muslim League known

as All-India Muslim League (AIML). In a letter to the Chief Minister, Umar Bafaqi Tangal, the Vice president of the AIML made it clear that “their decision to break away from the United Front was consistent with the anti-Congress policy pursued by the League at the national level (Aziz, 1996: 112).” The next day they joined the Marxist Front. Both the League members did not waste their opportunity to criticize each other and most of the time if any Bill was initiated in the Assembly by the Muslim League, they certainly wanted changes in it and alleges it as against the minority. As the Muslim League was recovering from the split, it received another shock in the death of the President, P.M.S.A. Tangal on 6 July 1975. Muhammadali Shihab Tangal, son of Pookoya Tangal was elected as the President of the state League on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1975. The Political atmosphere of the nation was changing during this time. The Emergency was imposed and several Muslims were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). The AIML members staged a protest against this and vehemently criticized the Muslim League’s silence on the issue. The Emergency was lifted on 21 March 1977 and elections were declared to both the State Assembly and to the Parliament.

The 1977 election to both Assembly and Parliament hold grave importance as it was going to happen after Emergency and also on the background of the anti-Congress wave at the national level. The elections to the Kerala state Assembly held on 19 March 1977. The politics were lined under two fronts: the United Front and the Marxist Front. The United Front represented an alliance of six parties, the Congress, the CPI, the Muslim League, the RSP, the Kerala Congress and the PSP. By the time, a fresh delimitation of Assembly constituencies had increased the total assembly seat from 133 to 140. The Marxist Front decided to field 130 candidates and supports 10 independents. The Marxist front was consisting of CPM, BLD (Janata), Muslim League (O), Congress (Pillai), KSP and the RSP. The Marxist Front put up candidates in 126 seats and supported 14 Independents.

The result did not reflect the national trend where the Janata Party had secured the majority. The result gave a thumping majority to the United Front securing 111 seats including Independents and registered 51.96 percent votes. The Marxist Front secured only 29 seats, however, registered 41.84 percent vote share. The Congress became the largest party in the Assembly in terms of seats securing 38 seats. In terms of votes, the CPI (M) became the largest party securing 23.4 percent vote share, however, got only 17 seats. Both Muslim League and the rebel League had contested in 16 seats in which Muslim League bagged 13 seats while the rebels League got 3 seats. It was very clear from this result that though there was a split in League, the base and popularity of the

League did not alter much. The official League had an established base in the southern part of Malabar, thanks to the religious cults of the party. Out of the three seats of ML (O) two were in Kozhikode and one in Cannanore which clearly shows that the popularity of the ML (O) was restricted to the northern part of Malabar. In the Parliament election also, the result was antithetical to the national wave. While the INC secured all 11 seats it had contested, the CPM could not win any. The Muslim League had contested in 2 seats and secured both. The rebel League also contested in 2 seats but could not secure any.

The government formation seemed far more troublesome despite having a clear majority as everyone in the front demanded representation in the ministry. As a result, a token ministry was sworn in on 23 March 1977 with only two ministers- K. Karunakaran of INC and C.H. Muhammed Koya of Muslim League. Later when a consensus was reached, the ministry was expanded adding 13 new members to the ministry. Muslim League was allotted one cabinet seat and the Speakership. Though the ministry had a clear majority in the Assembly, K. Karunakaran could not run his ministry so long. Political opposition and protests were growing immensely seeking the resignation of Karunakaran over the supposed murder of an alleged Naxalite college student during the Emergency in which Karunakaran was the Home Minister. He was forced to resign just after one month in power. A.K. Antony, the President of the KPCC took charge of the ministry on 27 April. But the fate of the ministry was the same. In October 1978, Antony was himself to resign on the issue of principle that the official Congress party to which he belonged had compromised its integrity by declining to put up candidates in the Lok Sabha by-elections against Mrs Gandhi's supporters (Nossiter, 1982: 235).

Now, the Front unanimously decided P.K. Vasudevan Nair of the CPI as the next Chief Minister. His ministry took the oath on 29 October 1978. Meanwhile two important incidents had taken place: firstly, between the growing political tension and uncertainty, the rebel League (AIML) had filed a case in the Kerala High Court seeking the cancellation of candidature of C.H. Muhammed Sahib and Sulaiman Saïtt complaining malpractices during the election. Hearing the petition, the Kerala High Court declared both candidatures voids. Though both candidates went on to Supreme Court for appeal, Muhammed Koya resigned his ministership on the same day the High Court Judgment came out. Later the Supreme Court acquitted both of them from the charges and Muhammed Koya took back the ministership on 4 October 1978 from U. Beeran, who was holding the portfolio during the period. The second incident was a split in the National Congress. By the time, the National Congress had become two groups: one was

supporting Mrs Indira Gandhi and the other was opposing her. A conference of the Indira Congress supporters was held on 1 January 1978 and removed Brahmamda Reddy from the post of Congress Presidentship and elected Mrs Gandhi to the post. The split also saw in Kerala as those who support Mrs. Gandhi became known as Congress (I) and those who support Reddy became known as Congress(R). While Antony and the KPCC President Varada Rajan supported Reddy Congress, Karunakaran stood with Indira Gandhi. The KPCC became two splinter groups and the Congress (I) was not welcomed by the United Front. It was in this situation, Vasudevan Nair was sworn in as Chief Minister. However, his ministry was also short-lived and his Ministry resigned on 7 October 1979 over the issue of a clause in the Kerala Land Reform Bill. It was argued that talks were going on at the national level for the left unity which was also contributed to the resignation of the ministry.

It was in this grave political situation C.H. Muhammed Koya took charge of the ministry. While the tension was going on and all groups were for reviving the Front Ministry, no party was willing to co-operate with its own splinter group. As political calculation were going on, all agreed to join in a ministry headed by Muhammed Koya. As a result, Muhammed Koya met the Governor on 10 October 1979 and requested the Governor to call him to form the government since he had the support of 83 members in the Assembly. On the same day, Muhammed Koya was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Kerala. Once in office, he initiated the passing of the Gift's Ordinance, which caused the resignation of the Vasudevan Nair, into law. Later, his ministry also resigned on 30 November 1979 due to further division and unusual political configuration within the United Front and outside the Front. Ahead of the Parliament election, the two splinter groups of Congress- Congress (R) and Congress (I) decided to cooperate in the coming election which also caused the fall of the ministry. President Rule was imposed in the state till the next election. As ideology became second to power, parties found no difficulty in joining any group if their interests were adequately represented.

### **The Changing Politics of the Muslims: The Post-1990s**

Before taking a departure from any ongoing debate to a new level, we must analyze the reason and the background of the situation. People often talk about a new level of politics only if there must have something dramatically happen, something which changed the existing society and system. In the case of Mappilas, like in the case of most Muslims in India, the departing line in the field politics was the demolition of Babri Masjid and the subsequent communal riots. If the case and its impact was almost same in India then the question shall be raised in particularity of Kerala. It is in this

background the paper will try to analyze the Muslim politics in Kerala in the post-1990s.

The term communalism has different meaning in India. In India, unlike in the west, communalism has defined in terms of religion. According to Bipan Chandra (1998), “communalism is the belief that, because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and economic interest.” According to this view, and the views in similar, Communism in India has its origin in religion and it had eventuated with the factors of colonialism and mass-based politics. The democracy based on mass based

One of the significant factors which contribute to the Mappila development during the post-1980s was the Mappila rush to Gulf countries. Historically, Mappilas had been engaged in trade relations with the Arabs. The Arab Muslims sailed their faith to the western coast and it spread in the region through trade, marital relation, patronage and conversion. This long history of the Mappila trade relation together with its strategical location of openness to the sea had contributed to stage a base for their large-scale migration to Gulf countries. Though employment migration from Kerala to the foreign countries had started in the late 1950s, it had eventuated in the late 1970s. The emergence of an oil-related economy and the subsequent labour related migration to the Gulf began to attract a massive scale of immigrant workers both skilled and semi-skilled from different parts of the world. There has been a socio-economic pattern to the migration process. Initially, it was the professional like engineers, doctors, accountants, and skilled-labourers who had migrated to different parts of the world including Gulf seeking jobs. However, in the later period, especially in the post oil-boom period, there was a high-demand for skilled and semi-skilled labourers mainly in the construction area as a part of infrastructural development triggered by rapid industrialization. According to the Government of India estimates, the number of emigrant workers from India has increased from about 0.5 million in 1979 to 1.2 million in 1990 and to about 2.8 million in 1996 (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan, 2003: 128). The number of Kerala emigrants living abroad in 2011 is estimated to be 2.28 million, up from 2.19 million in 2008, 1.84 million in 2003 and 1.36 million in 1998. With respect to Kerala, the Arab countries of Middle East were the destination of nearly 95 percent of the emigrants from Kerala. Migration to the Gulf countries had shown some pronounced impact on consumption, saving, poverty alleviation, landholding pattern, health, education and income distribution of Kerala. While people of all faith took advantage of the Gulf migration, its impact on Mappilas were immense. Geographically, it was estimated that more than half of the emigrants from Kerala belongs to the four districts of the Malabar,

Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargode.<sup>16</sup> There was a demographic consequence to it also. According to Zachariah and Rajan (2001), population growth has become much higher in the northern states of Kerala than in the southern states. There is a religious aspect to the migration. Among the migrants from the state in the Arab countries, the Muslim dominates with a share of 44.3 percent which is much higher than their share in the population (2001). Though the Hindu share (64.6) also surpasses their population (56.8), the Muslim share is placed relatively high. The total remittance received by the state in 2011 was estimated approximately 49,695 crores which is 15 percent high compared to 2008 and almost four times higher than the emigrant's population increase (Zachariah and Rajan, 2001: 6). Out of the total remittance the state had received, the share of Muslims amounts to 46.5 percent while the Hindu and Christian share amounts to 36.4 and 17.1 percentages respectively.

There was a religious aspect and a sense of Islamic affinity playing the foreground role in the pattern of Muslim migration from the state. However, it is not to underline other factors. With the introduction of rapid Industrialization initiated by the oil-boom in the Arab countries, the countries were largely in need of labourers both skilled and semi-skilled. Once the Arab countries were opened with a range of employment opportunities at different levels, the Mappila, cause by poverty and unemployment saw it as an opportunity to overcome the miseries migrated to Arab countries. The Mappilas, having a historical background of trade relation with the Arabs and also the advantage of Arabic language and the Islamic affinity, could not find much difficulty in migrating. There is also another advantage to this. The range of employment opportunities in the Arab countries, especially in the field of semi-skilled works, did not demand any special education in the initial stages. The educational level of the migrant Mappilas remained below secondary education until the government set strict education criteria for migration. Though the demand for no special education had a positive impact on the economical aspects of Mappila life, it had a negative impact in the overall development. The impact of Mappila Gulf migration proved considerably as it played a significant role in the socio, economic and political aspects of the Mappilas. It reduced the wide disparities of classes and brought economic equality in the society to some extent. It reduced the disparity between rich and poor. According to Miller (1992: 323), the gulf money worked the magic. It literally changed the face of Kerala. It enhanced the consumption capacity of the Muslims. The construction area had improved significantly as people were largely investing in the construction field. The real estate market had

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<sup>16</sup> CDS Working paper, Trivandrum, 2011

fuelled and the land values had increased tremendously. Mappilas spent their remittances mainly in the area of construction and real estate. As part of the remittance flow, the socio, religious and educational activities had developed rapidly. The Gulf Mappilas also made investments in the religious and educational institutions. Though the material life had improved considerably, the religiosity of the Mappilas remained largely unaffected. Contribution to the political activities and Muslim politicians were made in regular visits of the members.

Overall, the Gulf boom had significant positive notes to the Muslims. It helped to give the Mappilas a sense of self-confidence and, via the new intensity of contact with co-religionist outside Kerala, a consciousness of the breadth and horizons of their faith (Chiriyankandath, 2004). However, at the same time, their life as a migrant labour in the Gulf countries had shaped and reshaped their view on religion and the influence and solidarity of the wider Islamic world had essentially shaped their sense of a distinct identity. The Gulf migration provided the Muslims a chance to contact and expose the distinctiveness in the larger Islamic world. The growing Islamic militant movements taking place in the larger Muslim world might have an influence in the cognitive senses of the Muslim emigrants. However, any change in the Mappila politics, particularly in the late 1990s, cannot be completely related with the Islamic movements taking place in the Arab world. Since the Mappilas identify themselves with the Indian identity and more particularly with the Kerala identity, changes in the local and national environment remained more significant in shaping political attitudes of the Mappilas (Chiriyankandathil, 2004).

The material advancement from the Gulf had brought significant changes on the societal level. It was the Mappila religious leaders who were more worried about this materialistic values. Though the Gulf money had improved salaries and working conditions of the Mappila religious leaders, they worried about the religious lives of the community. At the existing level, the religious leaders had to content with this growing materialism that affected religious practices (Miller, 1992: 324). The religious leaders were holding an authoritative position in all walks of Mappila lives. From the birth of a Mappila to his death, religious leaders had a significant role to play. In this scenario, they worried about the Mappila lives and also their own position challenging in the background of the growing materialism. It was in this period a schismatic trend within the Mappila community had grown immensely. The traditional Mappila leaders had worried about the growing influence of the revivalist and reformist movements such as the Mujahid and the Jamaat-e-Islami movements which had a significant impact in the Persian Gulf states. On the one side, these reformist movements were taking initiatives

to modernize Mappila Islam and retain the puritanical character of it by educating the Mappilas. On the other hand, the traditional and the orthodox Mappila religious leaders with the material help from the gulf expatriates also advancing for a parallel change that will restrict the Mappila attraction to new reformist trends. This trend seemed to be challenging the new movements and at the same time retaining the traditional religiosity. Altogether, as Miller illustrated, money played magic.

At the social level, the materialistic values encouraged by the Gulf money kept the interest group communalism powerful and demanding. For the purpose of advancing the community interests, they traditionally favoured and followed the Muslim League since it had, by the time, established a powerful base and had become emerged as a powerful institution in the bargaining politics. At the same time, such the materialist advancement of the Mappilas contributed to the emergence of a new middle class capable of running the society and party (Varshney, 2002: 158-160). With this advancement, the society had changed dramatically as it brought equality and eradicated poverty. It also undermined the social disparity and a sense of deference between the indigenous converts and the Arab descendants. This social disparity and the sense of deference, however not evident, had been dominating the Mappila social and political lives in the 1950s and 1960s. This social distinction was a part of the culture of the Muslim League (Chiriyankandathil, 2004). The Muslim League leadership was dominated by the Yemeni descendent Tangals, the trading class Koyas and Keyis, the landowning Bahadurs and the English educated professionals. However, also being highly regarded religious leaders of Mappila community; the Tangals stood aloof from the electoral politics but dominated the party affairs and became the arbiter of the party. His decisions and commands became the final words of the party. Unlike other dominant class in the Muslim League, the Tangals played a significant role in reaching the party to the masses. It was the Tangal family, from Bafaqi Tangal to Hyder Ali Tangal, who have changed the dominant class characteristic of the party by acting as a link between the 'high' class and the common Mappilas.

The Muslim League, which had been dominated by the northern 'high' class trading Mappilas in the initial decades, now seems to be in a position of making appeal to the majority poor Mappila interests whilst not undermining the interests of the wealthy and influential. As a result of this transaction, at one level the League had appealed for the interests of the poor Mappilas which they have been deprived of like better education for boys and girls, access to government jobs, reservation in public sectors, and employment opportunities in Gulf. At the other level, the League had solicitously concerned about the interests of the traditional religious leaders and appeased with

provisions such as pensions for the Mukris.<sup>17</sup> Mappila business interests also flourished along with the ‘general’ interest and the nexus with power and wealth played a crucial role for the development.

However, as time passed, the League faced problems from within the same community whom it had set the background to foster. With changes happening in the social, economic and political situations, the Mappila attitude was also going through changes. In the given social settings, the Mappilas now feel no differences, no disparity, no inequality, and no insecurity within the Kerala society. Being in power in almost all governments in the 1960s and 1970s, the League had perhaps played with its power tactics to achieve what the community was deprived of or perhaps what the community wants. However, the very social and economic changes that the League helped to foster within the community also contributed in developing a new Mappila public (Chiriyankandathil, 2004). The community, now only apprehensive of their future in the background of Kerala’s growing educational unemployment and large scale emigrant returnees from the Gulf especially in the wake of Kuwait crisis on 1990-1991 and their inability to resume their accustomed mode of life. According to the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) data, there were 511,000 return out-migrants in 2011 in Kerala (Zachariah, 2003). Though the exact estimate of the return out-migrants during the Gulf crisis was not known, it is estimated that approximately 1.5 crores migrants might have returned to Kerala and among them a more than 65 percent were Muslims. The apprehension of the Muslims was evident especially among the educated unemployed Mappila youths in the central and southern districts where the state had recorded high unemployment and where the Muslim League had only a peripheral presence (Chiriyankandathil, 2004). What the Gulf money provided was a temporary economic relief, a surge of confidence building and a door of opportunity to deal with the community’s inherited problems. It was in this background Muslim fundamentalist organization such as the Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS) sought support by appealing to the Muslim and minority grievances.

### **Communalism in Kerala:**

The word community has a positive connotation in the West and is used to express fellowship of relations or feelings, common character, agreement and sharing, and communalism means an expression of this community feeling (Jhingran, 1995: 147). In India, the word ‘community’ is used mostly in the sense of religious community, i.e., a

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<sup>17</sup>Mukris are those people who extensively engaged with religious activities in mosques.

group of people who share a religion, even though they may not have anything else in common. According to Bipan Chandra (1984), “communalism is the belief that, because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political, and economic, interest.

Historically, communalism and the kind of aggressive Hindu nationalism that shook the north India did not find much headway in Kerala. Unlike in the north Indian states, Kerala remained relatively low affected by communalism (Varshney, 2002). However, with the emergence of Hindu nationalism and the social and economic impacts of the post-Gulf migration, there seems to be a considerable growth in communal activities. It was during this period, a revival for a Hindu identity and a movement for Hindu National unity emerged. The most visible manifestation of the movement for a Hindu national identity was the Babri Masjid controversy and the subsequent communal riots. In Kerala, the reaction to the destruction of a Muslim symbolic identity in Ayodhya had shown in the form of, if not communal riots, emergence of a Muslim ‘fundamental’ group called as Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS). There was also another dimension to it. By the time, the Kerala politics had entered a new era where either a United Front or a Left Front came to power with the support of ‘communal’ organisations and parties. The politics by the time had become a politics of appeasement to a particular community in power. This ‘appeasement politics’ had contributed to the emergence of a growing disenchantment with the established parties of the two front (Chiriyankandathil, 2004). At the same time the Mappila drive for community recognition and power, expressed primarily through a Muslim political organisation, gave the impression to the Hindus that the Mappilas were maintaining attitudes of the past in a new form. It shows that the holocaust of the Partition was not going to fade away so easily even after 50 years of independence.

The post 1980 political system of the state has challenged the existing theories of Indian politics. The political system of the state had evolved from one party dominant system to multiparty coalition system in which accommodation of various communal identities has become inevitable. Political parties in the state had become highly dependent on its ‘vote banks’ based on community identities no matter whether it is a national party or a regional party. Apparently governance and its deliverance had become much of form of appeasement to the communities which constitutes its vote banks. As Victor M. Fic (1970) argues, the political dynamism of the state was deeply rooted in communal aspirations which imbued with it with the attributes of communal and caste politics par excellence. The caste association has become the very pillars of politics in Kerala, and the slightest shift in their voting patterns greatly influences the fortune of political

parties. In a state like Kerala where caste cleavages still exist which apparently make it difficult to the Hindu nationalists to appeal for Hindu unity. Several attempts were made in the post 1980s to replace the Kerala's caste cleavages with an overarching Hindu identity to challenge the existing political system evolved around two blocs- the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF), however failed.<sup>18</sup> The Christians, the Nairs, the Ezhavas, and the Muslims were the dominant 'communal' blocs in the state in which the Christians, the Nairs and the Muslims are largely regarded as 'vote-banks' of UDF while the Ezhavas are traditionally favouring the LDF. In the post 1980s when these 'vote-banks' became an established partners in the concerned Fronts, any threat to pose a challenge to the existing political system might not find a ground. In the post 1980, the Muslim League had found probably a happy and secure position in the UDF bloc.

However, in the changed political scenario of the 1990s where communal riots were occurring in different parts of India between Hindus and Muslims, the Muslims in Kerala also were seen as sharing the same feeling of Indian Muslim. They were becoming concerned about the repercussion of the surge in the Hindu nationalist activity spearheaded by the Hindu chauvinist organisations such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Chiriyankandathil, 2004). In this scenario, the Babri Masjid controversy stimulated the sense of belonging to a beleaguered minority. This sense of a beleaguered minority had multiplied when the Congress had failed to protect the interests of Muslims in the context of Babri Masjid controversy and the Muslim League, the protector of Muslim interest in Kerala, probably could not much being a partner in the government run by Congress. The consciousness of being a beleaguered minority and the fear of Hindu nationalism which might pose a real threat to Muslims in Kerala had sharpened with the rising tide of the Hindu nationalist party and its growing electoral success in the wake of Babri Masjid incident. The relative growth of communal riots in Kerala in the post 1990s increased this fear and security.<sup>19</sup>

### **Counter-reaction: the ISS**

The ISS was founded by Abdul Nazer Madani and originated in Kollam district of southern Kerala. Being a religious teacher (Maulavi) he was largely engaged in

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<sup>18</sup> In 1982 the BJP/RSS conducted a mass ceremony in Cochin that attracted 500,000 participants as a part of an attempt to unite the Nairs and the Ezhavas under a Hindu identity. See Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 184

<sup>19</sup> The first three decades of Kerala's existence had witnessed few communal outbreaks claiming just five deaths while between 1990 to 1992 there were six outbreaks claiming 30 lives. See James, *op.cit.*, p. 5

religious teachings and was running an orphanage and under the Anwar-ul-Islam foundation for providing education for the poor Muslims. He started this foundation at his mid-twenties.

Though a religious teacher, he was well aware of the political situation of the state and was not happy with the way the mainstream political parties are treating Muslims and the other minorities. According to Madani, it was the ineffectiveness of existing Muslim organization in protecting the Muslim interests and against the atrocities committed by the Hindu Nationalists against them that moved him to launch an organisation. As a result, eleven men together at Karunagapally, Kollam, formed an organization on 29 November 1990 called as Islamic Sevak Sangh. Madani himself said that it was an organization meant to protect the Muslims against the Hindutva threat. After the Babri Masjid controversy, the organization had gained considerable support mainly from the Muslims of central and south Kerala. The specific reasons for the popularity of ISS was: firstly, it has been accused that the Muslim League was not adequately representing the interests of the Muslims especially in wake of Hindu nationalism and emergence of coalition politics in the post 1980s. Secondly, unlike in the north where Muslim population is much larger and the lives are surrounded by their co-religionists, Muslim League had only a peripheral base in the central and southern districts and the Muslims in these states were concentrated in smaller enclaves, and therefore feel more prone to be isolated, insecure and in need of a defender. Finally, the personality clout and the charismatic leadership of Madani and his ability to appeal to a large section of young Muslims, often poor and unemployed constituted his support base.

In the wake of Babri Masjid demolition, the ISS and the RSS were banned. However, the communal riots that occurred during this period were, unlike in north India, mainly between the members of these two organizations. Though Malabar remained relatively calm, the ISS activities in the central and southern districts had disturbed the Muslim League which sharpened the conflict within its leadership. As a result of this conflict, the National President of the Muslim League, Ibrahim Sulaiman Saïtt, had resigned from the League and later formed a Indian National League (INL) in protest against the Leagues' decision to remain in the government headed by the Congress even after its Delhi committee had insisted to do so. The state wing of the League argued that the demolition of Ayodhya mosque was a loss to the nation, not simply to the Muslims (Varshney, 2002). The League argued that it can support Muslim interests best by being in power.

When the ISS was banned in the wake of the Babri Masjid incident, the organization went to launch a political party known as People Democratic Party (PDP) in January 1993 and decided to enter into electoral politics. Though the PDP poses less threat to the Muslim League since its support base were in central and southern Kerala, the dilemma Muslim League faces was its 'claim' to be secular by appealing to the Muslims and dalits. The confrontation between these two parties had multiplied when the Sulaiman Saith's INL joined hand with PDP in the electoral competition. But since as we have argued, the support base of both PDP and Muslim League is geographically different, the League still hold the recognition of being the sole representative of Muslims in Kerala. The PDP and the newly formed Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) supported by the Popular Front of India does pose a challenge to the Muslim League's secular claims, however not yet enough to challenge in electoral politics.

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