

DECIPHERING DELIBERATE EFFORTS TO CONFIRM REPRESENTATION AND COEXISTENCE THROUGH SOFT POWER IN A POLITICALLY DYNAMIC SOCIETY-EXEMPLAR OF KODUNGALLUR.

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ABSTRACT

Equilibrium is an optimistic sign exemplify stability of a politically dynamic society, and it is essential for the very existence of the society as it is. Here such a very politically dynamic civil society experiencing set of exercises by specific as well as an important socio-political group of it to gain soft power to recapitulate its representation and co-existence within. Mostly the socio-political equilibrium thrusts on peaceful-coexistence within the society through sensible self-corrections or self-regulations time to time. The said socio-political group of that civil society has cognizant while inducing for the changes that may lead to equilibrium and hence attain co-existence. In this paper an attempt made to delineate some simple set of affirmative processes which brought desirable output to stabilize a civil society during desperate time of communal distress. The area chosen for this study is Mussiris, considered as one among the oldest seaports in South East Asia, which played a pivotal role in international relations during ancient times.

Keywords: *Soft Power, Politically Dynamic, Socio-Political, Society-Exemplar, Self-Corrections and Self-Regulations.*

Soft power is the competence to shape the preferences and influence others through appeal and attraction, often rooted in its culture, political values, and foreign policies, without the use of force or tangible rewards and penalties. It operates through the ability to shape perceptions and create favorable impressions.

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural society stands as the jewel crown of India. Through the profound proclamation of Unity in Diversity, it tries not only to celebrate but also elevate this distinctive facet of India into an exquisite character. While homogeneity often renders systems monotonous, it is the very heterogeneity that bestows beauty upon them. Just as a garden adorned with flowers of myriad hues captivates the senses, so does India, a captivating tapestry woven from diverse cultures. The task of preserving such diversity is no small feat, for differences themselves can often sow the seeds of conflict. This article delves into the efforts of a sect steadfastly striving to safeguard its existence by fostering harmony among various religious cultures. At its core, this article underscores the indispensable nature of religious harmony and coexistence for the economic and social resilience of minority communities within a society, along with their endeavors to meet this imperative. Central to this diktat is the notion of soft power, a concept wielded within the sphere under examination. In the realm of politics, particularly on the international stage, soft power entails the shaping of preferences through allure and appeal. As articulated by Nye, "soft power is not a form of idealism or liberalism. It is simply a form of power, one way of getting desired outcomes". The tangible and theoretical manifestations of this concept are palpably evident throughout this discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The author has chosen the municipal area of Kodungallur in Thrissur district of southern state Kerala for the study. Here Kodungallur is selected for this particular case study because the place had a significant role in the history of both the state as well as the country. Many of the historians suggest that the present day Kodungallur is the ancient peninsular port named Mussiris. Many religions spread across continents

through the interactions at the ocean coasts. Kodungallur served as a delightful host to many religions. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, and Buddhists had their existence in Kodungallur. Co-existence of diverse religions and cultures and its mutual amity formed the basic characteristics of the mentioned locality. The place has a cosmopolitan nature. Kodungallur received and propagated both the indigenous and foreign religions. Kodungallur also accepted new cultures from different areas and regions of the globe. It is very important to select this place for case study because many religious communities harbored here. History reveals, religious differences may result in adverse side effect like communalism in a civil society. The study area itself is a prominent land of religious and cultural diversities. So, it is very relevant to check the escalating tensions among these diversities according to the changing political circumstances of this particular area on par with contemporary global issues. Kodungallur has implication in the present transitional political scenario in India, hence the significance of a study on Kodungallur increases. In the present scenario the religious tensions that could lead towards riots. In such a situation it is necessary to enquire about the religious unity and later transitions happened in a prominent location like that of Kodungallur.

The trade along the enchanting Kerala coast thrived on the rhythm of the monsoon winds, creating a vibrant maritime tapestry that flourished from May to January. Intrepid transcontinental voyagers had to navigate their journeys carefully, returning home before the winds began to stir in March. Similarly, Roman ships aimed to arrive at Muchiri (Mussiris) before the close of September, ensuring safe passage. Muchiri served as a melting pot for diverse cultures, drawing influences from major cradles of civilization, such as Egypt, Rome, Palestine, Arabia, Somalia, Ethiopia, Babylon in the Euphrates-Tigris River basin, Persia, Indus, Punjab, Gandaram (Gadhadhar in present day Afghanistan), China, and Jain-Buddhist Brahmin cultures composited or influenced Muchiri and fostered cultural progress of Kerala.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs the ethnographic method as its foundational approach. The researcher meticulously gathered data from various credible sources, including pertinent records, periodicals, newspapers, as well as through engaging in personal interviews and immersive field experiences.

OVERSEAS TRADERS FROM MIDDLE EAST (ARABIC TRADERS AND CULT)

Kodungallur holds a significant place in the Islamic history of both Kerala and India. The arrival of Islam in India can be traced back to the coastal town of Kodungallur, where Arab traders settled alongside Christians and Jews. This vibrant trading hub had established strong ties with the Arab world even before the advent of Islam, allowing the faith to take root in these early days. In the 7th and 8th centuries A.D., Arab merchants played a pivotal role in introducing Islam to the region, leading to many conversions. A well-known legend tells of Cheraman Perumal, a revered local king who embraced Islam and undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca, symbolizing the profound impact of this new faith on the cultural tapestry of Kodungallur. Much like the first Christian church, the first mosque in India is found in Kodungallur: the Cheraman Juma Masjid. This remarkable mosque holds the distinction of being the first Islamic place of worship in India and the second in all of Asia. Historical records suggest that Islam began to take root in Kodungallur during the very days of its emergence in Arabia, with evidence indicating that Arab traders established a colony in this vibrant coastal town.

REFORMATION AMONG MUSLIMS

In the context of Kodungallur, a significant portion of land ownership was held by the Nair, Ezhava, and Muslim communities historically. Within these communities, certain families wielded considerable influence across cultural, economic, and political domains within the region. Kodungallur has played a pivotal role in the renaissance of Kerala, with its contributions resonating deeply within the state's secular

cultural fabric. The reformation endeavors of Kerala have found staunch support from families rooted in Kodungallur, representing the aforementioned communities. Notably, the feudal aristocratic Muslim community in Kodungallur deserves special recognition for its unwavering backing. Leaders of the Renaissance movement from the Muslim community of Kodungallur endeavored to consolidate their community's strength under the banner of the 'Aikya Sangam' and propagated the ideals of revival among its members and it became an episode of unique and silent revolution in India. It was a best example of how a minority community initiated self-democratization among themselves.

The Self-Modernization Project sparked the Kerala Muslim Reformation, with its origins traced back to Kodungallur. The catalytic force behind the modernization of Kerala's Muslim community was the 'Aikya Sangam'. Post-Malabar conflict, Muslim intellectuals recognized the imperative to uplift their community. Previously, Kodungallur was marred by endless factional conflicts among feudal Muslims, dominated by two clans. The ceaseless skirmishes, stabbings, and killings jeopardized communal peace, compelling individuals to align with either dominant clan, relegating the community to turmoil. The aftermath of the Malabar Rebellion (1921-22) witnessed numerous Muslim scholars seeking refuge in Kodungallur. The local feudal families stood at the forefront, extending a noble welcome and safeguarding the asylum seekers. Recognizing that inter-clan strife hindered Muslim social progress in Kodungallur, religious scholars from Malabar initiated efforts to reconcile differences. Thus, under the leadership of Mr. Manapat Kunju Muhammad Haji of Kodungallur, the 'Nikshpakshasangam' emerged. Subsequently, this organization metamorphosed into the 'Muslim Aikya Sangam,' aimed at resolving disputes among community leaders and instigating a new chapter in the Muslim renaissance. While prior attempts at social reform had been undertaken by esteemed figures among Kerala's Muslims, the formation of the 'Nikshpakshasangam' in January 1922, at the coastal market 'Eriyad', marked the inception of a reform movement that heralded transformative change throughout Kerala.

The Great Muslim conference held at Eriyad (five km coastal to Kodungallur town) in 1922 was under the leadership of sheik Muhammed Mahin Hamadani (a prominent social reformer who was working in Azhikode and Eriyad areas at that time). They were shaped a new union in the title 'Nikshpakshasangam', their intention was to solve the tribulations among the Muslim families through mediation. The purpose of this meeting was to form a Muslim Aikya Sangam. But the members of the meeting opined that, before forming a united body, it is necessary to end the schismatic conflicts. So, Mr. Manapadan suggested the name 'Nikshpakshasangam' for this association. The name was unanimously approved in the conference.

The esteemed committee members of the 'Nikshpakshasangam' include Mr. Seethi Muhammad Haji (President), Mr. Manapat Kunju Muhammad Haji (General Secretary), Mr. Ayyaril Kunjipokker Kutty (Vice President), Mr. Ayyaril Kuttykkamadh (Vice President), Mr. Karukapadathu Puthenveetil Kunju Muhammad, Mr. Manapat P.K. Kochu Moideen, Mr. K.M. Moulavi, Mr. E.K. Moulavi, and Mr. M.C.C. Abdul Rahman. Among the driving forces behind this initiative was Mr. K.M. Seethi (later he became the second speaker of Kerala Legislative Assembly), a dedicated student in Thiruvananthapuram at the time, alongside a group of progressive youth. The primary mission of the 'Nikshpakshasangam' was to foster harmony within the community by addressing and resolving personal feuds, family rivalries, and disputes through thoughtful mediation. This commitment to peace and unity has been a cornerstone of their efforts, helping to weave stronger bonds among community members.

The 'Nikshpakshasangam' flourished and garnered significant support from activists, prompting them to envision its transformation into a sustainable movement rooted in Kerala. Thus, the organization underwent a significant metamorphosis, evolving into the 'Muslim Aikya Sangam'. Spanning across

Kerala, the Sangam aimed to eradicate superstitions and outdated customs within the community, fostering a modern societal outlook. Emphasizing education, particularly for girls with a focus on English proficiency, the Sangam endeavored to empower its members to integrate seamlessly into mainstream civil society while upholding virtuous principles and opposing malevolent forces. The inaugural gathering of the 'Aikya Sangam' convened at Eriyadu market in 1923, presided over by Mr. Vakkam Abdul Khadar Moulavi (pioneer Muslim reformist leader of Kerala), marking the birth of an organization poised to impact Kerala's Muslim populace at large.

The 'Aikya Sangam' surged forth like a tempest, confronting superstitions head-on. Through their pamphlet 'Al-Hidaya,' the 'Aikya Sangam' vehemently opposed prevailing superstitions within the community. Their efforts extended beyond printed materials, encompassing impassioned speeches and enlightening awareness classes aimed at guiding the community onto the right path. Mr. Manapadan, Mr. K.M. Seethi, Mr. K.M. Moulavi, Mr. E.K. Moulavi, and other dedicated workers of the 'Aikya Sangam' traversed door to door, tirelessly endeavoring to lead people towards enlightenment. The indelible contributions of these visionaries resonated deeply. Under Mr. Manapadan's guidance, a procession commenced from Kodungallur marched resolutely towards the renowned 'Chandanakudam festival' vow at the Manathala mosque, seeking to educate the populace. While unable to halt Chandanakudam, several progressive youths from Manathala embraced the ideals of the 'Aikya Sangam.' Mr. Manapadan steadfastly advocated for the 'Khutba' to be delivered in Malayalam on Fridays and for the inclusion of Muslim women in Jumma prayers. Despite facing staunch resistance from conservatives, both initiatives were successfully implemented at the Muhiuddin Masjid in Maadavana (near Kodungallur). This groundbreaking move marked one of Kerala's earliest instances where women attended mosque and participated in Jumma prayers, accompanied by Malayalam sermons.

DELIBERATE EFFORTS AND CAUSES

The local Muslim community also held a pivotal role in the commercial sector as did like ancient Arabic traders, and showcasing remarkable influence during the later time too. Minority groups retained their steadfast presence, particularly in managing trading centers within the festival grounds of Kodungallur temple. During festival seasons, these commercial spaces at temple ground were actively auctioned by the Muslim community, marking their profound economic involvement. However, contemporary circumstances portray a stark departure from this historical narrative. The shifting political landscape of Kodungallur has exerted a profound impact on such economic engagements. Presently, the auctioning of commercial spaces at temple ground by minorities and their participation in trade activities have dwindled significantly, signifying a transformation in the socio-economic fabric of the region.

Significant transformations are underway in the local political landscape of Kodungallur. Once dominated by the right winged political ally like United Democratic Front - UDF (coalition between Indian National Congress and Indian Union Muslim League etc.) and the Left Democratic Front- LDF (comprising mainly left political parties), in the midst of this shift they now find strain in their political strongholds. The Left-wing parties are struggling to maintain their influence. The unabated ascent of another right-wing ally i.e national Democratic Alliance - NDA marks a pivotal shift in Kodungallur's political dynamics. Within this shifting landscape, minority communities harbor concerns regarding the burgeoning influence of transformed right-wing politics and mounting influence of majority religion, fearing its potential repercussions on their well-being and existence. In response, minority faction endeavor to garner popular support by championing deep secularist stance. This reality is underscored by the observation that a substantial portion of Kodungallur's major economic ventures is owned and operated by minority groups. Across diverse sectors such as healthcare, commerce, education, hospitality,

and retail. Entrepreneurs belong to Muslim community wield considerable influence, with their imprint visible in prominent hospitals, commercial hubs, shopping centers, educational institutions, eateries, and jewelry outlets, among others.

Concerned about recent political transformations in Kodungallur, it seems members of the Muslim community are actively synchronizing with the programs having secular vigor in the area. Notably, the individuals spearheading these initiatives are not youngsters; rather, they are descendants of the Muslim elite who possess a deep-rooted commitment to communal harmony. They consistently demonstrate wisdom and foresight by intervening whenever communal tensions arise.

One exemplary case involves a prominent social activist from Kodungallur who was Hindu by birth, later converted to Islam, he explicitly wished that his posthumous rites should adhere to Islamic traditions, with his body laid to rest in the Cheraman Mosque (considered as first mosque of India) at Kodungallur. However, subsequent to his demise, his family members wished for his body to be cremated according to Hindu rituals. This led to a complex situation, with some members of the Muslim community insisting on honoring the activist's wish. Recognizing the potential for discord and religious animosity, the Cheraman Mosque committee acted prudently by peacefully resolving the matter. Despite the differing perspectives, the committee ultimately decided to honor the wishes of the activist's family, handing over the mortal remains to them. The administrator of the Cheraman Mosque committee emphasized the importance of prioritizing peace and harmony over religious obstinacy. This decision, facilitated by the influence of the Muslim elite, played a crucial role in preventing a rift within Kodungallur's religious harmony. In essence, the concerted efforts of the extremely matured Muslim elite have not only fostered secular initiatives but also safeguarded the unity and cohesion of Kodungallur's diverse social and religious fabric. Their commitment to peace and inclusivity serves as a beacon of hope amidst the challenges posed by political changes and communal tensions.

The Muslim elites have rendered invaluable support and assistance in translating Daivdashakam (the philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru- one of the architects of Kerala renaissance) into hundred world languages. Additionally, under the guidance of the Cheraman Mosque, they extend aid to Sabarimala pilgrims and provide food and lodging for the devotees during the Kodungallur Bharani festival. Many of these initiatives have historical underpinnings. However, amid these commendable secular endeavors, interruptions occurred due to shifts in the local political landscape. The emergence of right-wing politics and the concurrent rise of minority communalism, albeit subtly, temporarily disrupted these efforts. Yet, buoyed by the backing of Left parties, minority elites are steadfast in their commitment to fostering secularism. Leveraging their soft power, they actively engage in community outreach and endeavor to orchestrate programs that underscore the importance of inclusivity. Their interventions serve to quell religious animosities and foster democratic cooperation between people and minority-owned institutions. Thus, they play a pivotal role in promoting harmony and mutual understanding amidst evolving societal dynamics.

CONCLUSION

Meantime, the conversation surrounding religious unity has captured considerable attention. This paper argues that perspectives grounded in secularism are deeply intertwined with socio-economic progress. The communities examined in our study have adeptly harnessed the concept of secularism for political ends, striving to maintain their social standing and promote economic development. However, the use of secularism as a tool for personal or communal benefit poses a significant challenge to combating communalism in the region.

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- 2) Dr. Syed Muhammad, who is the main coordinator of the cultural festivals based on secular outlook Interviewed at Kodungallur on 30/04/2022 time: 10.00 AM to 11.30 AM.
- 3) Shri Faisal.E.B (Administrator Cheraman Juma Masjid), Interviewed at Cheraman Juma Masjid on 30/04/2022 time: 12:00PM to 1:30 PM.