

# Muslim Press in Kerala with special reference to Travancore

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Kerala has made significant contribution to the progress of Indian Journalism. The history of journalism in Kerala back to slightly more than a century. In the religious to and were fired with seal of Christian missionaries later on the press in Kerala advocated the need for social reform movement. Lastly they played a great part in raising national consciousness among the people of Kerala. It was also responsible to a great extent for the active participation of a large number of people preaching the gospel of nationalism and patriotism.

The first book in India was printed using the printed machine of Portuguese and that was in Portuguese language. It was “*Doctrine Christain*” A Bible Writer by Saint Francis Xavier. In 1821 the first Malayalam press C.M.S in Kerala was established at Kottayam Rev. Benjamin Bailey. In 1780 January 29 the first newspaper in India. Bengal Gazette was published in English.

The *Mappila* Muslim also were aware the necessity of journals in the progress of their community. In order to educate and to revive the society they looked for strong medium. They realized the fact that without a strong vehicle they cannot spread their innovative ideas among the society. Hence they started a number of journals in the form of fortnightly, weekly, monthly, etc. Through there journals they hoped to carry out social and religious reform to the community.

The names of Sayyid Sanauallah Makhtic Tangal, Syed Ali Kutty Master, Vakkom Abdul Qadar Moulavi, etc... were the great contributors of the field of the Mappilas of Kerala. Khadirsha Haji from Cochin was the fore father of Muslim journalism. In 1878 he started a magazine Kerala *Deepakam* and drawn the attention of the public. In the same year another two magazine were published in *Arabi-Malayalam* language

in the name of “*Refikh-Ul-Islam*” and “*Salah-Ul-Ikhwan*” under the editorship of C. Syed Alikutty from mattanchery.

“*Thuhfath-Ul-Akhiyar-va-Hidayat-ul-Asrar*” magazine was published by Sayyid Sanaullah Makhti Thangal in the year of 1894. “*Paropakari*” and “*Turky Samacharam*”. “*Turky Samacharam*” was an evening daily published in the year 1909.

The early newspapers of Muslim were published in Arabi-Malayalam, the cultural language medium of the Kerala Muslims. Abdulla Koya the nephew of Mamburam Sayyed Alavi Thangal published the first Arabi-Malayalam monthly “*Hidayathul-Iqwan*”. It was printed in a press named “*Ameer-ul-Islam-fimaddin-ulum*” in Thirurangadi and was owned by Chalilakathu Kunjahammed Haji Theeputhil Kunjahammad, a native of Thalassery, who had acquired training from Basel mission press, established the first Arabi-Malayalam press

Many small and big magazines came into print during the period 1917-24. The important ones included *Khilafath Patrika*, *Al-Manar*, *Muhammadiya Darpanam*, *Muslim Mahila Masika*, *Muhammad Ali*, *Islam Deepam*, *Islam Doothan*, *Muslim Aikyam*, *Shamsul Islam*, *Navalokam Hidayath*, *Kerala Chandrika*, etc.

The first newspaper that mobilized the Muslim for anti-capitalist struggle was “*Al-Ameen*” started in 1924 under the editorship of renowned freedom fighter Muhammad Abdul Rahman Sahib. He acted as a sharp sword representing the progressive ideas of Muslim and national struggle for independence. “*Al-Ameen*” was published as a tri-monthly until 1931 with the special blessing of the great Vallothol and later became a daily. The promising articles of Vakkom Abdul Qadar Moulavi and T.K Raman Menon increased the influence of *Al-Ameen* in the Kerala Society. *Yuvalokam* was a Muslim newspaper which was started from the *Al-Ameen* press on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1926. It gave place to progressive ideas along with Muslim religious matters.

“*Chandrika*” became one of the greatest milestones in the history of Islamic Journalism. It began from Thalassery on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1932 as a weekly newspaper, *chandrika* started its regular publication from Calicut since February 1946. Thayyiland Mohammed was the first printer and publisher. The founders were Seethi Sahib, Sathar Seethu, A. K Kunjumayan Haji etc. The first editor of *Chandrika* was K.K Muhammed Shafi

printed from Malabar Muslim press. 21 August 1993 *Chandrika* celebrated newspapers golden Jubilee. *Chandrika* is the oldest Muslim newspaper among the existing modern dailies.

“*Prabodhanam*” Weekly is the official magazine of Kerala Zone. The article in *prabodhanam* gives importance not only to the official viewpoints of “*Jamaat-e islami*”. But also to other wider of interest. The first edition of *prabodhanam* was published on August 1942. The men behind this magazine were Haji V. P Muhammed Sahib, the founder of *Jamaat-e – Islami* Kerala chapter and K. C Abdulla Moulavi. The main feature of *prabodhanam* were its respectful and noble presentation and pure and beautiful usage of language.

“*Madhyamam*” is the first international Indian newspaper published in Malayalam language from Kerala Since 1987. It was founded by ideal publication trust. It is the fourth largest read newspaper in Kerala. Vaikom Muhammed Basheer the Malayalam writer described it as “*the birth of a silver star*” it is leading vehicle of the *Jamaat-e Islami*.

A long as the press is monopolized by the rich business groups and political organizations; “true reporting” becomes practically impossible. If we look in to the history of Muslim Journalism it started towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Everybody knows *Swadeshabhimani* Ramakrishna Pillai but nobody trying to dig out the name *Swadeshabhimani* so this present study. There are so many Newspapers and Journals in Kerala even before *Swadeshabhimani*. *Rajya Samacharam*, *Malayali*, *Nair*, *Sujanandini*, *Vivakodayam*, *NasraniDeepika*, *Malayalamanorama*, *Kerala Mitram*, *Kerala Patrika*, and *Kerala Darpanam* are some of them. Almost all community had publications throughout this period but Muslims had not one.<sup>1</sup> Dealing with Muslims Vakkam Maulavi did this job in Travancore. But relating to the criticism against the rulers and rights of the people *Swadeshabhimani* was far more superior to any other else. *Swadeshabhimani* was the first Journal in Kerala which had direct connection with Reuter.

Abdul Khader was born on December 8, 1873 in Vakkam village near Chirayinkeezhu in Travancore (presently Trivandrum). He benefiting from an economically comfortable and intellectually vital home life,

and got the best education available. He studied under eminent scholars whom his wealthy father engaged for the education of his son whose thirst for knowledge was insatiable. Maulavi's field of action takes place in the first quarter of the 20th Century. During this period Kerala was in a state of backwardness in social and educational field, as well as Culture. It was through *Al-Manar* which influenced him to the field of Journalism.

Abdul Khader is best known for his Newspaper, *Swadeshabimani (Patriot)*.<sup>2</sup>

Starting a press he with the help of his brothers they were famous industrialist and through them he got the press from England. He man managed to import, directly from England, an automatic flatbed printing press, the latest type available then. He man managed to import, directly from England, an automatic flatbed printing press, the latest type available then, in 1905. They had contacts with companies of England, they manage to import directly a press from there through Pears Lesly company, of Alleppey for Rs. 12,000 In 1904 August the press was officially inaugurated by Pylopol, the then Magistrate of Anjengo.<sup>4</sup> He named the press as `Swadeshabhmani. Kerala Varma Valia Koyil Thampuran himself visited the Press. *Swadeshabhmani* started its first edition as periodic Journal of eight pages in Malayalam on January; 1905 under the ownership of Vakkom Abdul Khade Maulavi. At first *Swadeshabhmani* was published from Anchuthengu (Anjengo). Later the press shifted to *Vakkom*, near *Anchuthengu*. In 1907 the press again shifted to Trivandrum. Its first editor was *Chirayinkeezhu* C.P. Govinda Pillai, late Sri.Ramalcrishna Pillai in 1906. Ramakrishna Pillai, (1878-1916), joined the journal one year after it began publication.<sup>3</sup> He was a native of *Neyyatinkara*. Before joining the *Swadeshabhiman* Ramakrishna Pillai had worked in Kerala *Darpanam* Malayali and Kerala Panchika as editor. He also speak against the bureaucratic atrocities in Kerala. The authorities warned the Press authority Marthanda Thampy, so he advice Ramakrishna Pillai to change the style of writing, so Pillai come out from Kerala Panchika. Ramakrishna Pillai became adamant of his views and uncompromising adherence to Principles. In 1905 he started *Keralan*.

Ramakrishna Pilla wrote Twenty five books. Karl Marx (first in Indian language Benjamin Franklin, Mohandas Gandhi (first in Malayalam Language), *Virtandapathrapravarthana* (first in Malayalam about Journalism) are some of them. Maulavi Abdul Qadir looked for an editor for *Patriot* who would measure up

to the high standard integrity, courage and political principles he had set his journal. He finds Ramakrishna Pillai a bot companion in this field.<sup>4</sup> He was lucky to have foul such a man in a young graduate who had just then be sacked by his own uncle from the editorship of weekly journal because of his views of uncompromising adherence to principles. The selection and appointment of Ramakrishna Pillai as the editor of *Swadeshabhimani* proved to be decisive as far as the political history of the subsequent period was concerned. His selection later proved that he is the legitimate for the Post. Maulavi guaranteed that he would never interfere with the freedom of Ramakrishna Pillai as editor.<sup>5</sup> The main aim for this Journal was the all-round awakening of the people of Kerala.

Abdul Khader gave a freehand to his editor and believed in the duty of the Press and allows him to use it freely. Patriotism was the underlying force of the daily. The tone of *Swadeshabhimani* was something new to the people, they found something new and serious in each and every edition. It aimed at the development of the socially and culturally downtrodden classes. The paper criticized the social conditions and political climate in the state and special pages were allotted for foreign news.<sup>6</sup> Translations of the essays from *Al-Manar* were frequent. Maulavi himself contributed a lot of articles for the paper. The journal laid the foundations for fearless and objective journalism paying a heavy price. He became engaged in pungent journalistic criticism of existing structures.

Many important personalities fell victims to the onslaught of the daily. It had become a headache to those who wielded political and administrative powers. Maulavi gave a free hand to his editor and believed in the duty of press. From the start to the finish *Swadeshabhimani* retained its distinct mark in criticism without fear or favour. The paper had the patronage and direction of many respectable personalities of the time like Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Tamburan, E.K. Maulavi, A.R. Raja Raja Varma, and Dr. Palpu. In the first issue of the *Swadeshabhimani* states "We primarily wish the development of the people, we will try our level best for this end". It was a medium of all those who suffered under the reign of Sri Mulam Tirunal.<sup>7</sup> Bureaucratic atrocities were often exposed from this journal which provoked the authorities very much. The paper was the first to give the clarion call of protest and opposition to the autocracy of the king, and worse the Dewan,

Rajagopalachari and his equally History immoral and corrupt hangers-on. The titles of the editorials themselves were noteworthy: "Tampuran Tampi", "The Money of the Citizens", "The Supremacy of the courtiers", "The Royal servants and the kingdom of Travancore", "The Great Palace", "The Reformation of Travancore", and "Why can't we exile Sankaran Tampi", "Ode to the New Dewan Mr. Rajagopalachari", "Chalai Riot", "Bench and Bar", "One Lakh Rupees" etc, Maulavi was warned by his well-wishers several times to change his policies, knowing the hazardous days ahead. Even threats of government action did not deflect the Maulavi from giving Ramakrishna Pillai unstinted support.<sup>8</sup> Being a true journalist he preferred hardships to surrender. The price which the Moulavi had to pay for his temerity was the loss of his paper and the press.

### Confiscating of Press

The publication came to an end with the confiscation of *Swadeshabhimani* Press and deportation of its editor in 1910. The Maulavi didn't even try to get back the press as anyone normally did. When he was asked about his refusal to try for the press, by Kalyani Amma wife of Ramakrishna Pillai "he replied that he didn't want the press without Ramakrishna Pillai". Ramakrishna Pillai was arrested on a charge of sedition. Maulavi Abdul Khader gave him fullest backing, moral and material.<sup>9</sup> After a show trial he was sentenced to transportation for life and the *Swadeshabhimani* Press belonging to Maulavi Abdul Khader was confiscated. Ramalcrislma Pillai died in exile and press lay rusting in the Trivandrum Central Jail. All attempts in to subsequent years to, recover the press invariably failed. It took more than half a century and the formation of a democratically elected Communist Government in Kerala to erect a statue of Ramakrishna Pillai at Trivandrum to perpetuate his hallowed memory and to restore the confiscated *Swadeshabhimani* Press to its rightful owners. It undoubtedly goes to the credit of the first Communist Government of Kerala and its Chief Minister, E.M.S.Namboodiripad that on 26 January, 1968, at a public meeting held for that purpose, he presented a new press and equipment to the legal heirs of Maulavi Abdul Khader, 36 years after his death.<sup>10</sup>

Maulavi used the columns of *Swadeshabhimani* for the betterment of the Muslims. The number of educated among the Muslims was too low, so he stressed the need for educational advancement among them. Maulavi emphasizing the need for secular education especially that of females.<sup>11</sup> Abdul Khader continued his activities through other publications and books sacrificing his entire wealth in the process.

### **Founding of new Journal Muslim**

In 1906 brought out a cultural journal, "Muslim", first as a monthly and later as a weekly. Through this new Journal he tried to eradicate the superstitious practices of the Muslim community.<sup>12</sup> He opposed distortions from Islam and condemned such practices as *Chandanakudam*, *Nerchas* and *Kodi kuth*. Through the column of the Muslim he emphasized the need for extending modern education among the Muslims. Vakkom Moulavi continuously and unceasingly called upon his brethren in Kerala to abandon un-Islamic practices and beliefs, to take English education and to develop progressive attitude. As his many sided activities began to claim more and more of his time, Maulavi Abdul Khader entrusted the editorial responsibility for the Muslim to Maulavi Mohammad Kunju, who was his brother in law as well as his right hand man and devoted disciple.

### **Founding of Al-Islam Journal**

The Quran was translated and published through the Muslim. Its word was in simple Malayalam. Many articles were written by him in Muslim. He realized that the Journal Muslim, was not fully understandable to all the Muslims due to their illiteracy in Malayalam with a view to remedying this defect, in 1916 he started another periodical called Al-Islam in *Arabi-Malayalam* i.e. Malayalam written in Arabic script, mainly devoted to the cultural and religious education of Muslim women, who were familiar with the Arabic script.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Islam came out only five issues in 1919, this five issues sowed the seed of Islamic reform in Kerala. They created a storm from one end of Kerala to the other.

## Founding of Journal *Deepika*

He started his last monthly journal called "*Deepika*" or The Torch in 1931 A.D. This journal which provided articles and comments of high standard on religious, cultural, political and literary subjects had a wider appeal. Its outstanding feature was the serialization of the Malayalam translation of the Quran together with his brief commentary and the original text written in elegant and superb calligraphic style by Maulavi Abdul Khader himself. <sup>14</sup>

It was his life's ambition to produce a translation of the Quran in Malayalam, with his own commentary, but he was not destined to complete the work. He passed away on 31 October 1932 barely 21 months after the first issue of the *Deepika* had appeared. <sup>15</sup>

Vakkom Maulavi owned two publishing house also one was the *Islamia Publishing house*, and the other the *Ahalya Sunnath-van-jam-a-ath*, the latter being exclusively for translation work. The purpose behind all these publications was to eradicate the unhealthy practices that had come to exist within the Muslim community. Through them he recalls Muslims to the Quran and the true practices of the prophet away from un-Islamic practices, and to establish Islamic unity. He communicated clearly and widely from the message of Islam in a way that would reach the common people utilizing three languages, Malayalam, Arabic and Arabi Malayalam. <sup>16</sup> The orthodox Muslim leaders did not allow the people embrace the light of knowledge and hence the people remained in darkness. While the *Swadeshabhimani* deal with social problems, the Muslim concentrated on the religious aspects of Islam. Abdul Khader's *Swadeshabhimani* daily and Muslim monthly are the first known papers of the Kerala Muslims.

It is impossible to review the history of Muslim journalism without Maulavi. Maulavi understood that education is the keystone to progress and modernity. He stressed the need for education and championed the cause of liberal secular education. He succeeded in dispelling the misgivings of some orthodox Muslims who held that religion was opposed to education. His work for the spread of education in the Kerala Muslims attained its success at the hands of his successors. He interested not only the spiritual progress but also all



round progress and development of the Muslims. It affected the educational backwardness, Superstitious beliefs, were things of the past. The greatest change will be the perception of the role of women's education. Today his *Swadeshabhimani* live in the minds of the freedom-loving people of Kerala.

Heroic men of history who dared to challenge and fight the iniquities of autocrats and powerful vested interests often went down fighting. History tells of many such instances. The fate of *Swadeshabhimani* is another example not far removed from contemporary history. Its undaunted assaults on the citadels of corruption and its relentless campaign against the misdeeds of men at the top invited the wrath of the Dewan. Rajagopalachari was a ruthless man and more so when his own position was involved. He tried, and failed, to buy Maulavi Abdul Khader. His blandishments and threats having failed, he used his ultimate weapon. Maulavi Abdul Khader that he had found just the man he wanted. Ramakrishna Pillai was equally lucky to have found just the right man to work with. Maulavi Abdul Khader placed implicit faith in Ramakrishna Pillai's integrity, patriotism, and political ideals, which were identical of his own. Not once throughout the stormy life of the journal did Maulavi Abdul Khader find the need to interfere in the editorial policy of his journal to keep it on course he had charted for it. This political collaboration which began in 1906 between two young radical democrats forms a glorious chapter in the political history of Kerala. The saga of Maulavi Abdul Khader, *Swadeshabhimani* and Ramakrishna Pillai still remains to be told in full.<sup>17</sup> As a result of the continuous campaign throughout the State, the Maharaja's Government introduced the teaching of Arabic in all State schools where there were Muslim pupils and offered them fee concession and scholarships, girls being totally exempted from payment of fees.

Maulavi Abdul Khader wrote text books for children to learn Arabic and a manual for training Arabic instructors for primary schools. At the instance of Maulavi Abdul Khader the State Government soon instituted qualifying examinations for Arabic teachers of which he was made the chief examiner. Most of his younger disciples who flocked to his home to learn Arabic and Islamic religion eventually became Arabic teachers and carried his reformist ideas far and wide. In the midst of all this work the reformist movement went on with undiminished vigor, the "Muslim" and "Al Islam" serving as his mouthpiece. The momentous

changes that have taken place in the economic, social and political life in Kerala, as elsewhere, his achievements may seem less significant than they were in his own day.

It would be incorrect, as it would be unfair, to try to evaluate the contribution of a Journalist without reference to the age in which he had lived. The historical approach is, therefore, not merely relevant, but necessary, for a correct assessment of his place in history and in his contemporary society, as well as his contribution towards the reawakening of the Muslim community. He performed his task and carried forward his mission of educating his co-religionists through publication of journals. The impact of his publications still continues to see among Muslims of Kerala. Maulavi Abdul Khader was a man of character and a paragon of many rare qualities. His piety, humility and sincerity were transparent. Quiet and gentle, he personified an indomitable will and inflexible determination. He was kindhearted and generous to a fault. His faith and fortitude carried him through his last years of adversity. He was too proud and self-respecting to appeal for any help. It is little doubt that the Novel *Kumari Safiya* of M. Ahmed Kannu deals entirely with Vakkam Abdul Khader Maulavi. An ungrateful community to whose service he had devoted his life and wealth looked on with indifference as he slowly sank in indigence and ill health with advancing age. Men like Maulavi Mohammad Abdul Khader never served their country and people for any selfish gains or personal rewards. He had to face several cases in Court relating to *Swadeshbhimani*, but he faces it with courageously. Ramakrishna Pillai, the editor of the *Swadesabhimani*, owned by Maulavi, and died a political exile at Cannanore in April 1916 after a protracted illness. The nickname given to Ramakrishna Pillai as *Swadeshabhimani* Ramakrishna Pillai had its origin from the Press of Abdul Khader Maulavi. The name *Swadeshabhimani* is related to *Al-Vatan*, a newspaper from Egypt. He was a fearless champion of the depressed Muslims of Travancore. What Ramakrishna Pillai does in Maulavi's *Swadeshabhimani* is the same as what Maulavi did through the Journals Muslim, Al-Islam and *Deepika* to the improvement of Muslims of Kerala to 'their education, religious and social matter.

Native newspapers in the Kerala were able to provide the much needed political education to the people. They acted as an instrument of political education in the people of Kerala. The press in Kerala during the post-independence period play a creative role in the nation building and solving the problem of the state of Kerala.

The contribution made by the Muslim newspaper to the society became praise worthy. Some of the bad practices like *kathukuthu*, *Nercha*, *Kodikuth*, *chandanakudam*, child marriage etc. discourage by the Muslim Journalists. They were able to change Muslim newspaper played a vital role in fighting against the discrimination on religious and caste. Now there is a radical change in the Muslim media they are now playing a vital role in all sphere of media activities.

### End Notes

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