

**CPI (M)'s Political Engagement with Muslims of Malabar,
Kerala (1980-2018)**

*A Thesis Submitted to the University of Hyderabad in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of*

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In

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By

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DECLARATION

I, **Shefeeque V** (11SPPH01), hereby declare that the work embodied in this dissertation titled “**CPI (M)’s Political Engagement with Muslims of Malabar, Kerala (1980-2018)**”, is carried out under the supervision of **Prof. Manjari Katju**, Professor, Dept. of Political Science, University of Hyderabad for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in School of Social Sciences. The dissertation is an original work of mine to the best of my knowledge and no part of this dissertation has been submitted in part or in full to this University or any other university or institution for the award of any other degree or diploma. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my thesis can be uploaded in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET. A report on plagiarism statistics from the University Librarian is enclosed.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**CPI (M)’s Political Engagement with Muslims of Malabar, Kerala (1980-2018)**” submitted by **Mr. Shefeeque V** bearing registration number **11SPPH01** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by him under the supervision of **Prof. Manjari Katju**. This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

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Further, the student has the following publication (s) before submission of the thesis/monograph for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in relevant area of his research.

Parts of the thesis have been published in the following publication

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Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfilment of the coursework requirement for his PhD/was exempted from doing coursework (recommended by Doctoral Committee) on the basis of following courses passed during his M.Phil program and the M.Phil degree was awarded:

Course Code	Course Title	Credit	Pass/ Fail
1.	SP 600: Research Methodology- I	4	PASS
2.	SP 601: Research Methodology-II	4	PASS
3.	SP 602: Advance Theories in Indian Political Process	4	PASS
4.	SP 603: Individual Course	4	PASS

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Abbreviations

ADS	Area Development Societies
AIDWA	All India Democratic Women's Association
AIMIM	All India Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen
AMU	Aligarh Muslim University
APL	Above Poverty Line
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CDS	Community Development Societies
CFI	Campus Front of India
CHRO	Confederation of Human Rights Organization
CITU	Centre for Indian Trade Unions
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
DYFI	Democratic Youth Federation of India
EPW	Economic and Political Weekly
GIO	Girls Islamic Organization
INC	Indian National Congress
INL	Indian National League
ISI	Inter Services Intelligences
ISM	Ithihadul Shubbnil Mujahideen
IUML	Indian Union Muslim League
JIH	Jamaat-e-Islami Hind
JMI	Jamia Millia Islammia

KGOA	Kerala Gazetted Officers Association
KJU	Kerala Jammiyathul Ulama
KNM	Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen
KPCC	Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee
KPMS	Kerala Pulaya Maha Sabha
KSSP	Kerala Shasthra Sahithya Parishad
KSTA	Kerala State Teachers Association
KSU	Kerala Students Union
LDF	Left Democratic Front
MES	Muslim Educational Society
MGM	Muslim Girls Movement
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MSF	Muslim Students Federation
MSM	Muslim Students Movement
MSP	Malabar Special Police
MSS	Muslim Services Society
MYL	Muslim Youth League
NCP	Nationalist Congress Party
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDF	National Development Front
NGO Union	Non Gazetted Officers Union
NHG	Neighborhood Group
NREGA	The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NSS	Nair Service Society

NSSO	National Sample Survey Organization
PB	Polit Bureau
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party
PFI	Popular Front of India
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SBS	Sunni Bala Sangham
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCR	Sachar Committee Report
SDPI	Socialist Democratic Party of India
SFI	Students Federation of India
SHG	Self Help Group
SIO	Students Islamic Organization
SKJM	Samastha Kerala Sunni Jammiyathul Mua'llimeen
SKJU	Samastha Kerala Jammiyath ul – Ulama
SKSBV	Samastha Kerala Sunni Bala Vedi
SKSMF	Samastha Kerala Sunni Mahal Federation
SKSSF	Samstha Kerala Sunni Students Federation
SNDP	Sree Narayana Darma Paripalana Yogham
SP	Samajwadi Party
SSF	Sunni Students Federation
ST	Scheduled Tribes
STU	Swathanthra Thozhilali Union
SYF	Sunni Yuvajana Federation

SYM	Solidarity Youth Movement
SYS	Sunni Yuvajan Sangham
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
WPI	Welfare Party of India

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s [henceforth, the CPI (M)] understanding of social processes is incommensurable with that of Islam. The Marxist Leninist fundamentals of the party, in its initial appearance make the observer realize that it is a political party that mobilizes the masses mainly on the basis of class positions. The engagement of CPI (M) with the Muslim community therefore, in a situation where the understanding of social processes is contradictory to each other, is a potential area for research. This is precisely what is taken up in this thesis. It explores the engagement of CPI (M) with the Muslims of Malabar in Kerala.¹

The study is broadly grounded within the theme of political socialization and mobilization, especially the strategies adopted by modern political parties to engage with and galvanize communities. The study assumes relevance as it attempts to historically map the various ideological standpoints and the electoral and organizational tactics used by CPI (M) to engage with Malabar Muslims. The ideological position of CPI (M) on religion, the significant influence of the *Ulama* through Muslim community organizations² and the active presence of the Indian Union Muslim League (henceforth, the IUML) circumscribed the party's interaction with Muslims in the initial decades of independence in Kerala. The various national and international developments like emergence of *Hindutva* forces, the US 'imperialism' in West Asia and intra community divisions among Muslims since the 1970s have opened up new avenues for the party to mobilize Muslims which apparently produced electoral and organizational advantages for

¹ The Malabar region is the geographic area of southwest India covering six districts of Kerala. It includes Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Malappuram and Palakkad districts. It lies between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats (Reference, Kerala: Encyclopedia Britannica)

² By Muslim community organizations, I mean those organizations working in the domain of religion and community development. They have specific standpoints on socio-political matters. However, they do not contest elections. Though all these organizations primarily stand for the empowerment of Muslims, there is a visible difference in the modus operandi of each organization. The socio-political standpoints, support base and activities of each Muslim community organization will be discussed in Chapter 3.

it. Moreover, the major socio-political and economic shifts in Kerala polity since 1970s have reoriented both the Left and Muslim politics. On this backdrop, this study focuses on the CPI (M)'s engagement with the Muslims of Malabar since 1980.³ The ambiguities, conflicts, consensus and possibilities that emerge during the course of this engagement will also be discussed.

Contrary to the popular perception on the decline of religion in the wake of certain secularization processes at work, the religious form of identification plays a growing role in many contemporary societies (see, Asad 2003; Hunter 2009). The organizations based on ethnicities and religious identification have come to acquire a marked presence in the socio-political terrains of India. Many such organizations have immense potential to motivate their support base into performing citizenship roles through both civic and political participation. The state of Kerala offers considerable empirical evidence of such religious and caste organizations acting as an “accessible entry point for their members for civic and political participation”. The Nair Service Society (henceforth, the NSS), Sree Narayana Darma Paripalana Yogam (henceforth, the SNDP Yogam), Sunni Yuvajana Sangham (henceforth, the SYS), Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen (henceforth KNM) Catholic Council, and Kerala Pulaya Maha Sabha (henceforth, the KPMS) which are active in the public sphere of Kerala. Both majority and minority communities have these types of organizations which have considerable support in the state. Hence it is vital for any political party to engage with them to further its political career.

Religious communities are mobilized both by political parties and respective community organizations. They often use certain issues that work up religious/community sentiments to consolidate their ground support. The Shah Bano case and subsequent legal and political developments, Mandal Commission Report, the demolition of Babri Masjid, minority status of Aligarh Muslim University (henceforth,

³ The socio-political developments in 1970s and subsequent reorientation of Left and Muslim politics have had a profound influence on the engagement between the CPI (M) and Muslims of Malabar. This has had an impact on the mobilization strategies of the party from early 1980s. Hence, this study begins from 1980. This will be discussed in the next chapter in detail.

AMU) and Jamia Millia Islamia (henceforth, JMI), status of Urdu language, special status of Jammu and Kashmir, communal carnages in different parts of the country, institutional negligence towards minority populated areas, minority appeasement, ‘myths’ about Muslim population and targeting of Muslim youth in the name of terrorism are some of the major concerns associated with the political mobilization of Muslims in India. It may be noted that all communities come within the ambit of this form of mobilization sometime or the other.⁴

1.2 Pattern of Muslim Political Mobilization in India

The ‘Muslims of India’ (the second largest Muslim community in the world), have always been a part of sensitive political deliberations both in pre and post colonial India. Their substantial share in the population⁵ and the demographic concentration has raised their role in the highly competitive coalition politics of the country. The Muslim community in post Independent India has been mobilized mainly on three issues – ‘security’, ‘religious-cultural identity’ and ‘equity’ (Engineer 2014).⁶ The mainstream secular political parties try to mobilize the community on these issues. The political strategy of the major Muslim political parties⁷ like IUML, All India Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen (henceforth, the AIMIM) and Popular Front of India (henceforth, the PFI)

⁴ On contrary, the ability of religious groups to mobilize religious identities is moderated by the organization of religion itself (Chibber 2016). The intra community dimensions (caste/sect/faction) act as a major hindrance for the formation of permanent grand alliance based on religious identities. This is the major reason for IUML or Bharatiya Janata Party’s (henceforth, the BJP) inability to form a grand alliance of Muslims and Hindus, respectively.

⁵ As per the 2011 Census, Muslims consist of 14.23 percent (172 million) of the total population of India. In Jammu Kashmir and Lakshadweep, Muslims make up the majority of the total population. Muslims have large concentration in states like Assam (30.9%), West Bengal (25.2%) and Kerala (24.7%) and Uttar Pradesh (18.6%). The unofficial estimates of Muslims population in 2017 are 189 million. 19 districts in the country (out of 675) where there are more than 50 percent Muslims in the total population (Source: ‘All India Religious Census Data 2011’, www.census2011.co.in accessed on 12.05.2018).

⁶ It needs to be recognized that the issues related of identity, security and equity are intricately linked in complex /multiple ways at different levels. However, many of these linkages may be empirically intractable.

⁷ By Muslims political parties, I mean, the political parties that primarily works for the development of Muslims and have their substantial support base among Muslims. Like other parties, they also contest the elections and even form the government with other secular political parties. They also adhere to the secular democratic principles of the nation. However, their key mobilization strategies are on the issues of “Muslims”.

shows that the community could be mobilized on another issue- “counter assertion aiming at community unity” (ibid). These mobilizational platforms are discussed below.

1.2.1 Mobilization Based on the Security Issues

It has been widely seen that the Muslim community lacks a sense of security and this has been highlighted by many studies on Indian Muslims (see, Hasan 2017; Shaban 2018). The Sachar Committee Report (henceforth, the SCR)⁸ offers a detailed explanation on the security concerns of Indian Muslims. However, there is considerable variation in the intensity and magnitude of it across different states of the country. The SCR (2006) observes that “any communal tension or untoward incident in any part of the country is enough to make the Muslims fear for their safety and security” (SCR 2006:13). The emergence of right wing *Hindutva* groups and re-appearance of Islamophobia⁹ after the demolition of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001¹⁰ has deepened the apprehensions of the community. Political parties look at these concerns of the Muslims as ‘terrains’ on which they can be mobilized.

Since the colonial period, the Indian National Congress (henceforth, the Congress party) has portrayed itself as a party that addresses the concerns of Indian Muslims. However, a series of communal riots in the post independence period and the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 resulted in the erosion of Muslims support for the Congress party in many parts of the country. This resulted in the shift of Muslims to other secular political parties. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (henceforth, the RJD) in Bihar, CPI (M) in

⁸ The Sachar Committee reported on the contemporary status of Muslims in India. It was appointed in 2005 by the then Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh. The Committee had 7 members and was headed by Rajinder Sachar, former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court. The other members of the committee were Sayyid Hamid, M.A. Basith, Rakesh Basant, Akhtar Majeed, Abu Saleh Shariff and T.K. Oommen. The Committee did not have any woman member, although it did consult women's groups and activists (Source: SCR 2006).

⁹ Oxford English dictionary defines Islamophobia as “intense dislike or fear of Islam, especially as a political force; hostility or prejudice towards Muslims”.

¹⁰ The September 11, 2001 attacks have resulted in the portrait of Islam and Muslims as “terrorists” and the community is often blamed for any terror/violent attacks. Even in India, concerns were expressed over police highhandedness in dealing with Muslims whenever any ‘terror’ related issues occurred in any part of the country. The SCR (2006) pointed out that, “Muslim boys are picked up by the police even without any proof in terror related issues” (SCR 2006:14). A general paranoia is created towards Muslim community and even a Muslim man with a beard is considered an ISI agent (Ibid.).

Kerala and West Bengal, Samajwadi Party (henceforth, the SP) in Uttar Pradesh etc. came up as a viable political alternative for Muslims. For example, CPI (M) in Kerala established rehabilitation centers for the Muslims who were driven out from their houses at the time of the Marad violence in 2002. The CPI (M) also claims that Muslim community did not face any security threat when they ruled the state of West Bengal for 33 consecutive years. The RJD and SP also provided similar support to Muslim community at many points in Uttar Pradesh. They also rallied behind Muslim political parties like IUML and AIMIM that mainly focus on Muslim issues in Kerala and Telangana respectively.

Further, the limitations of some of these secular political parties and Muslim political parties to address the security concerns of the community have resulted in severe disillusionment among a section of Muslim youth. This has led to the formation of community organizations and political parties who claim to base themselves on the tenets of the Islam and community identity. This is a relatively new pattern of political assertion in the post Babri period. Kerala is one of the states that have seen more instances of this kind. Organizations like National Development Front (henceforth, the NDF) and PFI and Political parties like Peoples Democratic Party (henceforth, the PDP), Social Democratic Party of India (henceforth, the SDPI), and Welfare Party of India (henceforth, the WPI) formed during this period reflects the political developments in the state.

The formation of these new community organizations and political parties marked a shift in the pattern of mobilization of Muslims in India. Even though, these groups and parties cannot mobilize the majority of Muslims, they can influence the public opinion of the community to a considerable extent. They have also strengthened counter assertions aiming at community unity.¹¹ While the initiatives of secular political parties linked the community with secular platforms, these new community organizations and political parties often placed the community as an 'exclusive' unit that had to contest both the mainstream secular platform and *Hindutva* forces.

¹¹The IUML's politics is different from this general pattern. It focuses more on community initiatives like education, employment and material development of Muslims than identity issues. But, the pattern of IUML's mobilization is also undergoing a gradual change mainly due to pressures it is facing.

The ‘security’ related issues have been a matter of worry for Indian Muslims in the both pre and post Independence India. The partition and its aftermath created a fear among Muslims in the initial decades of independence which was deepened by the intensification of the politics of Hindu nationalism from the 1980s. The general pattern reveals that Muslims extend their complete support to those political parties that promise security to the community. However, this does not have a uniform pattern across the country. In many places they prefer backing secular political parties like the CPI (M), SP, Trinamool Congress, Janata Dal etc. or Muslim political parties like IUML that adhere to the values of secular democracy. A majority of Muslims reject the politics of Muslim fundamentalist organizations and political parties. Their adherence to the “constitutional language of politics” (Ahmed 2018) and “collaborative/adversarial politics” (Prabhash 2000:1) in many states makes Indian Muslims stand by secular political parties than exclusively Muslim political parties.

1.2.2 Mobilization Based on the Question of Identity

The SCR (2006) states that “one of the major issues for Indian Muslims is about being identified as ‘Muslim’ in the public domain” (SCR 2006:14). “Muslim identity” is taken as a theme for mobilizing them which includes both religious and cultural symbols that differentiate a Muslim from the rest of the population. The major stereotypes of Muslim identity in the public domain include the *burqa*, the *purdah*, the beard, the *topi*, the Urdu language etc. All major political parties including the right wing Hindu parties use these stereotypes as major tools of mobilization.

Secular political parties, Muslim political parties and Muslim community organizations engage with Muslims mainly on the question of ‘identity’. The Muslim fundamentalist political parties and community organizations like SDPI and NDF expanded their influence mainly on mobilization based on ‘Muslim identity’. Secular political parties face a difficulty in using ‘identity’ as a tool of political mobilization in the same way as Muslim fundamentalist groups or *Hindutva* organizations. For instance, when the Congress party, SP and Muslim organizations try to mobilize the community on the minority status of AMU, the *Sangh Parivar* also does the same on the other end. It

often creates communal polarizations in favor of *Sangh Parivar* and Muslim fundamentalist organizations. The complex socio-political and cultural developments restrict the secular political parties from advancing the issues related with Muslim identity beyond a point. Even the mainstream Muslim political parties like IUML, that shares secular political platforms cannot carry this forward it beyond a point. This limitation of secular politics benefits the fundamentalist voices among the Muslims. They were able to attract a section of the community towards their politics.

Identity and security issues of Muslims are complementary. Many Muslim youngsters were targeted and prosecuted by the security agencies in ‘terrorism’ related cases, especially after the 9/11 incident. But a number of these cases were fabricated and several Muslim community organizations and political parties allege that Muslim youth were arrested only because of their religious identity as it happened in the *Mecca Masjid* blast case (2007). The Muslims also face discrimination for their heir food habits, dressing patterns and cultural practices in many parts of the country. Majority of political parties, secular groups and Muslim community organizations have protested against the communal approach of the security forces and *Sangh Parivar*. For example, in Kerala, CPI (M) organized beef festival when Akhlak, a Muslim farmer was killed by *Sangh Parivar* groups for keeping beef in his house. In another instance, when a Muslim girls was banned from wearing *burqa* in a college, the Campus Front of India (henceforth, the CFI), a student group affiliated to the PFI organized mass protests across the state of Kerala. Muslim community organizations like *Jamaat* also promote its members to follow ‘Islamic dress code’ in public.

These organizations expand their base through the assertion of Islamic identity in both private and public domain. The Muslims, by and large, has lent their support to those community organizations and political parties that have stood with the community when it faces ‘identity and security concerns’. One of the major causes of the CPI (M)’s victory in the Kerala state assembly elections of 2016 was the immense support it received from different sections of Muslims. Party’s initiatives on Muslim issues have

received wide support from all sections of the community, especially the way it deals with the identity and security concerns of Muslims.

Issues related to the Muslim Personal Law have been a basis of political mobilizations of Muslims since independence. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board and major Muslim organizations like IUML, AIMIM, *Jamaat-e-Islami* (henceforth, the *Jamaat*), *Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind* etc actively take up the mobilization of the community whenever the state intervenes in the issues related with Personal Law. Their standpoints on Muslim women's rights, Shah Bano case, and recent judgment on instant Triple *Talaq* (August 2017) demonstrate how they galvanize the community on Muslim Personal Laws. These organizations 'exploit' the "religious sentiments" by projecting the reforms in Muslim Personal Law as a threat to Islam and significant sections of the community often succumb to their maneuverings.

The standpoints of mainstream secular political parties (except the Left parties) on Muslim Personal Law are similar to that of Muslim community organizations and Muslim political parties. They seek the community's support through these points of view as it was the position of the Congress party or SP on Shah Bano case and instant Triple *Talaq*. The Left political parties like CPI (M) and Communist Party of India (henceforth, the CPI) often try to mobilize Muslim women and other progressive groups on the program of gender and social justice. They are of the opinion that certain provisions of the personal law (of all communities) are against the rights of women and hence required reforms. But, this position is different from that of the *Sangh Parivar*. The *Sangh Parivar* demands that Muslim Personal Law should be reformed. The CPI (M) and CPI on the other hand maintain the position that all personal laws have to be reformed. They oppose the *Sangh Parivar*'s agenda to pushing the uniform civil code on everyone in the name of personal law reforms (*The Indian Express*, 24 October 2016). The *Sangh Parivar* brings in the family dimension and attempts to construct false identity makers like "Muslims marry 4 times and have 25 children".

1.2.3 Mobilization Based on the Question of Equity

According to the SCR (2006), the material conditions of Indian Muslims are worse than that of Dalits. Muslim participation in education, employment and governance is abysmally poor. The condition of Muslim women in many parts of the country is really pathetic in all walks of life. The Report says, “the low representation combined with the problems of identity and security has led to an acute sense of inferiority in the community which comes in the way of its full participation in the public arena and results in collective alienation” (SCR 2006:15). While the material wellbeing of Indian Muslims is on the agenda of all major secular political parties, that no party has approached this subject with the same spirit as they raised the issues of identity and safety. It is always easy for the political parties to raise the issues of identity and security than that of equity and material wellbeing.

The SCR published in 2006 raised the issue of material conditions of Indian Muslims. Though poorly implemented, the then Congress party led United Progressive Alliance (henceforth, the UPA) government did come up with 15 points for the socio-economic upliftment of Muslims. For the first time since independence, mobilization based on welfare issues dominated the discourse on Indian Muslims. The Congress party governments in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra declared reservation for backward class Muslims (Engineer 2014:2) though challenged in the High Court and subsequently squashed by it. Left Front governments in Kerala and West Bengal declared special programs based on the centre’s 15 point programs for the progress of Muslim minority as discussed in the later chapters.

Though ‘discrimination’ often figures in their agendas, Muslim community organizations and Muslim political parties also do not give as much importance to the issues of equity as they give to identity and security. Further, they see the material problems of the community as an identity/cultural issue rather than a material concern. Brass (1974) has identified this as phenomenon of Muslim politics in India. Material conditions of Muslims have never been a serious agenda for mobilization of Muslims in India despite *Sangh Parivar* propaganda on this. However, Muslims from weaker classes

and castes have benefited from the government programs for the upliftment of these sections.

Politics in the state of Kerala offers a field of study to understand the pattern of political mobilization of Muslims. Kerala Muslims hold a peculiar socio-economic, cultural and political profile among Indian Muslims. A good amount of research in this area focused on the prominent Muslim community organizations and Muslim political parties (see, Kutty 1987; Bahahuddin 1992; Miller 1992; 2015; Engineer 1995; Ganghadharan 1995; Chirayankandath 1996; Samad 1998; Kurup 1998; 2014; Salah 2013). This study bases itself in the terrain of party politics in Kerala and focuses on the engagement of CPI (M), a Marxist-Leninist party, with the Muslims of Malabar, in the northern part of Kerala, between 1980 and 2018. Here, the Muslims constitute a significant share of the population, and both the CPI (M) and the Muslim community organizations have a marked presence in the public domain.

1.3 Why focus on Kerala and CPI (M)?

Islam's first contact with India took place in Kerala (Kodungallur in present Thrissur district) in the early 7th century AD (Engineer 1995; Sikand 2007). Islam in Kerala grew, peacefully and steadily, as "a calm movement" (Engineer 1995:2-3). This process of expansion is in sharp contrast to the progress of Islam in north India (Miller 1992:5). This different trajectory of evolution and expansion has had a profound impact upon the socio-economic, political and cultural profile of Kerala Muslims. Kerala Muslims were cut off from Muslims in other parts of India by the barriers of language, culture and geography (Miller 1992: 173). This uniqueness makes the focus on Kerala Muslims important.

1.3.1 Features of Kerala Muslims

The immersion of Kerala Muslims in the culture of Kerala goes beyond Hindu-Muslim rural syncretism (Varshney 2002: 142). It is deeply imbedded in the local culture and ethos. A majority of Muslims resides in the 6 districts of northern Kerala. This

regional concentration aided the community to establish a formidable space in the highly competitive bipolar politics of Kerala. The total Muslim population in Kerala as recorded in the 2011 census was 88.57 million which is 26.5 percent of Kerala's total population ('Census', www.census2011.co.in accessed on 16.05.2017).

The educational achievement of Muslims in Kerala must be noted to understand the socio-economic progress the community has achieved over a period of time. Their literacy rate is 87.45 percent where men have attained 89.4 and women 85.5 percent of literacy. This is highest among the Muslims in other states ('Literacy', www.prokerala.com, accessed on 12.08.2017). The educational achievements of Muslims in Kerala are tied to a variety of factors that can be categorized as social, economic and political. The administrative changes, internal and external migration, demographic transition, changes in income distribution and efforts made by community organizations have helped to achieve this level of education. It has also reflected in the employment rate of both Muslim men and women in the state. The large scale migration of Muslim men has led to a growth of 'decision making' capacities in Muslim women (see, Zacharia 2003; Rajan 2015).

The SCR (2006) observes that Muslim women in Kerala have attained better economic and educational status. They have right of inheritance from both father and husband and this has had a peculiar impact on their decision making capacity within the family. The introduction of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and establishment of state wide Self Help Groups (henceforth, the SHG) has hastened Muslim women's entry into the public arena. This has also their better presence in the local governance. Many Muslim women have been giving leadership of different roles in political parties and socio-political organizations. The *Jamaat* has started to incorporate Muslim women in the local mosque administration too.

Another major feature of Muslims in Kerala is the role of active socio-political and educational movements in the development of the community. The IUML has substantial support base among the Malabar Muslims. The party was an alliance partner of both the CPI (M) and Congress party and shared state power with both these political

parties. The party leaders also headed various important ministries and offices in the state.¹² Political parties like SDPI, PFI, WPI and INL also have support base among certain sections of the community. Other than the political parties, all the major Islamic sects have separate organizations to mobilize youth, students and women. Muslim and political parties and community organizations run numerous publishing houses that publish journals targeting different sections of the community. The *Jamaat* and E K *Sunni* faction¹³ run a 24 hour TV channel. Organizations like the Muslim Educational Society (henceforth, the MES), the Muslim Service Society (henceforth, the MSS) are active in the educational sector. Their efforts in the modern educational fields helped Muslims in remote areas to access modern education- both at the elementary and higher levels. All these features point towards the uniqueness of Muslims as a community in Kerala that sets them apart from Muslims in the rest of the country.¹⁴

1.3.2 Why focus on CPI (M)?

The Indian communist parties are one of the few Left parties in the world that hold state power. Though CPI (M) puts forward a class based approach to analyze politics and society, it is flexible in its political strategies like any other Left political party that contests elections and practice parliamentary politics. Hence this study focuses more on what the CPI (M) does rather than what it says. It looks at the activities of the CPI (M) in cause of its mobilizational drives in the politics of Kerala. In fact, this tactical politics shapes the party's electoral activity. The CPI (M)'s support to the Congress party led UPA to form a government at the Centre in 2004 or electoral understanding with regional political parties at state level reflects this tactical line of the party. It has a greater resemblance to the Social Democratic Party in Sweden than the Chinese Communist Party. The CPI (M) has adopted a pragmatic stance on electoral coalitions as

¹² IUML is a prominent member of the United Democratic Front (henceforth the UDF) governments led by INC in Kerala. In 1967, IUML also shared power with CPI (M) for a period of 2 years. The IUML leader C. H. Mohammed Koya held the post of Chief Minister of Kerala from 12 October 1979 to 1 December 1979 (approximately 2 months) as part of the UDF.

¹³ E K *Sunnis* (also known as *Chelari Samastha*) are the prominent section of *Sunnis* in Kerala. Details on them follow in the subsequent chapters.

¹⁴ A detailed profile of Kerala Muslims in general will be presented in Chapter 3.

well as administrative policies, however its social base and ideological commitments makes it stand apart from other political parties in the country.

Though the CPI (M) is the largest political party in Kerala in terms of organizational strength and electoral support as in 2018, it is not a party that represents the majority of the public opinion. The party has not been able to secure 50 percent of the total votes polled in any elections. The organizational and political weakness of the party among the minority communities of the state has been identified by it as a major obstacle in achieving this (CPM 2011). However, it had tried to make efforts to fill this gap among minorities. The regional concentration of minority population gives minority political parties and community organizations a bigger say in many state assembly and parliament seats in Kerala. The electoral performance of the CPI (M) is not satisfactory in many of these seats. Moreover, the United Democratic Front (henceforth, the UDF) led by the Congress party has significant support in these constituencies. The CPI (M) realizes that it is vital to overcome this political deficiency to maintain its political supremacy.

Coalition politics in Kerala – the LDF led by the CPI (M) and the UDF led by the Congress party - is highly competitive. Elections in Kerala are mainly dominated by four major community groups in the state- Ezhavas (forming the lower layers of the Hindu caste hierarchy), Nairs (upper caste Hindus), Christians and Muslims. The inability of the CPI (M) coalition to maintain consistent supremacy over state power in Kerala shows that the electorate is more or less equally divided between the two fronts. The recent election data show that BJP is also emerging as a significant force in certain state assembly and parliament constituencies. The BJP led NDA has increased its vote share from 6.3% in 2011 to 16% in 2016 state assembly elections. BJP also won one assembly constituency (Nemom in Trivandrum district) for the first time in the history of the state. The BJP alone secured 10.5 % votes in the elections. The BJP is trying to bring more political and social groups to its fold.

The failure of the Left in general and CPI (M) in particular to gain a clear dominance in electoral politics is seen by some as feature of the weakness of its class-secular strategy to pull a clear majority to its side (Biju 2017:3). Compared to IUML, the

organizational strength of the party in Muslim dominated areas is weak. Out of the total 140 assembly constituencies in the state, the districts of Malappuram and Kozhikode together constitute 28 assembly constituencies.¹⁵ A week presence in the region has an electoral and organizational impact on the party. Hence, it is considered by the CPI (M) to gather the support of minority communities to keep its political supremacy in the state. For that, it uses different mobilizational strategies.

1.3.3 Pattern of Left Political Mobilization

There are different kinds of Communist and Socialist parties across the globe. Though they have a general agreement on the basic principles of Marxism propounded by the Karl Marl and Frederick Engels, each Communist and Socialist party has devised a peculiar way of achieving the goals of social revolution, which is specific to its socio-cultural context. The works by Jeili Li (1993), Jeffrey et.al (2007), Brown and Hutton (2009) and Lifend Li (2015) on the Chinese Communist Party; Peter Lange et.al (1990) on Italian Communist Party; Busse (2002) and Waller et.al (2014) on Communist Parties of East Central Europe; Anna Paretskaya (2010) on Soviet Communist Party; Weyland et.al (2010) on Communist Party of Yugoslavia and Sader (2011) and Huber and Stephens (2012) on Latin American Left parties discuss the mobilization strategies of different Communist/Socialist parties. The literature on the post Soviet Communist/Socialist party mobilizations can be categorized into three groups- 1) Chinese Communist Party, 2) Latin American 'New Left' and 3) Communist parties in liberal democracies. The literature on Indian Communist Parties predominantly argues that the Indian Communist Parties [mainly the CPI (M) and CPI] have greater resemblance with Communist Parties of post Communist Europe than Chinese or Soviet Communist Parties (see, Heller 2001; Desai 2001; Basu 2002; Devika 2010).

¹⁵ Malappuram has both the highest number of population and assembly constituencies. The district also has highest number of local self governments in the state. According to the 2011 census, the total population of the district is 4.111 million out of which 70.1% are Muslims. The district also has 16 assembly constituencies (out of 140) and 3 Lok Sabha constituencies (out of 20). Thanks to coalition politics, the IUML could wins some of the assembly constituencies in the Kozhikode and Palakkad districts that has a sizable Muslim population.

The first party program of Communist Party in 1951 rejected both dominant perspectives of Communist mobilization in China and Soviet Union and preferred an Indian revolutionary path (Alam 2002: 301-303). Though there was a difference of opinion on the nature of Indian bourgeoisie within the party, the party accepted the basic premises of the Indian state and the leadership of the government (Ibid.). Subsequent Left governments in Kerala and West Bengal also opted for the parliamentary means of politics to achieve radical reforms (Desai 2001: 38-39; Basu 2002: 317). The crisis of working class politics has “forced the Left to retreat from class politics” (Alam 2002: 290) and this has resulted in the shift in the reorientation of Left politics since 1980s in India (see, Issac and Mohan Kumar 1991; Heller 1999; Alam 2002, Basu 2002). These shifts also forced the Indian Communist Parties to rely on parliamentary methods to achieve the goals of social revolution. However, the programmatic difference on the characteristics of Indian bourgeoisie, and means to achieve social transformations resulted in multiple splits in the Indian Communist Party. The result was the emergence of CPI (M), CPI and different sections of CPI (ML) groups from these splits.

The literature on Indian Communist Parties projects a visible difference between the political mobilization strategies of mainstream communist parties in Kerala and West Bengal. Desai (2001) identifies the apparent divergence in the conditions of “party formation” in both these states as the major reason for this distinction (Desai 2001:39-40). In Kerala, the CPI grew out of the nationalist movement and for different socio-historic reasons including strong social reform movements; it developed a mass base and became a rooted organization. The Communist party of Kerala also created strong ties with civil society that has apparently helped it to develop a unique state-civil society synergy (see, Heller 2001; Prabhash 2004; Nirmala 2010). This synergy helped the party to achieve its goals through “egalitarian developmentalism” rather than through radical political mobilizations (see, Harris 2000; Menon 2001; Devika 2010). On the other hand, the West Bengal unit of the party developed through a different strategy which was more isolated from popular movements and build its own rural base “without much impetus of reforms from below” (Desai 2001: 38-40). Hence it is clear that the way a party evolves

in a particular spatial location largely determines the support base of the party and the way it carries forward its politics.

1.4 Review of Literature

1.4.1 Understanding Muslim Politics in India

The contemporary research on Muslim politics in India mostly deals with issues related to Muslim Personal Law, Muslim “vote bank”, the Shah Bano case, demolition of Babri Masjid, identity and security threats of the community, policies and programs of Muslim political parties and community organizations and fundamentalism. The works by Mushirul Hasan (2006), Syed Iqbal Hasnain (2009), Irfan Ahmad (2010), Hilal Ahmed (2014), Hugo Gorringer (2015), Saeed Naqvi (2016) and Stanly Johny (2018) are some scholars who have recently published on Muslim politics in India.

Some of these scholars attempt to conceptualize the Muslim politics in country. Imtiaz Ahmad (1981) observes that “pluralism” marks Indian Islam and that there is a synthesis between the Islamic principles and “custom-centric” tradition in south Asian Islam. This argument assumes specific importance in the context of Kerala Muslims. Islam in Kerala has been strongly influenced by local customs and traditions. The practices of *Uroos* and *Nercha* best exemplify this. He also identifies a process of Islamization among Indian Muslims and argues that the increasing presence of Hindu communalism in the country created a sense of fear among common Muslims and consequently Islamization became “a form of social and political expression of Muslim grievances” (Ahmad 1969 quoted in Ahmed 2014: 12). Though this argument was made by Imtiaz Ahmad in late 1960s, this analysis is still relevant in the discourses on Indian Muslims. The emergence of “hard-line” organizations among Kerala Muslims like SDPI and PFI validates this observation.

Asghar Ali Engineer (1990) and Paul Brass (1974; 2002) were of the view that the Muslim elites mobilized the masses for their vested interests. In his class analysis of Indian Muslims, Engineer (1990) argues that the issues of majority of Muslims who

belong to the lower strata have been neglected by the elites and Muslims should join the struggles with other deprived sections (Engineer 1990: 1-15). Though Brass locates Muslim politics in India in a different perspective, he also observes that the Muslim elites use the cultural issues of the community as a major tool to mobilize Muslim masses for political action (Brass 1974 quoted in Ahmed 2014: 17). The material issues of poor Muslims were neglected. This is one of the prominent criticisms against the IUML in Kerala that the party always highlights the interest of elites within the community (see, Randathani 2013).

Mushirul Hasan offers another perspective on Muslim politics in India. He argues that there is a link between colonial and post colonial Muslim politics in India (Hasan 1997:51). Criticizing the “*minorityism*” of Muslim elites in contemporary India, Hasan argues that Muslim leaders still follow the path of the League’s politics of pre Independence India and pointed out the activism of *Tablighi Jamaat* and *Jamaat-e-Islami* to validate his argument. He proposes a new kind of “Muslim liberal modernist secular intelligentsia that represents a different version of Muslim culture” (Hasan 1997:221) as an alternative to Muslim politics of minorityism. Irfan Ahmad (2010) in his study on the transformation of *Jamaat-e-Islami Hind* argues that Indian Muslims embrace democracy and pluralism if secular democracy is responsive to their aspirations and traditions while also pointing out that they turn radical when secular democracy become exclusionary and majoritarian.

Hilal Ahmed (2014) classifies the literature on Muslim politics in India in two broad categories- “Muslim homogeneity perspective” and the “secular heterogeneity perspective” (Ahmed 2014: 5). He identifies the literature that conceptualizes Indian Muslims as a single political unit and that focuses on the constitutional discourse of minority rights as “Muslim homogeneity perspective” (Ibid.). This view of Muslim politics in the country is rejected by certain scholars and Ahmed argues that for them “Muslim politics represents a kind of *communal* politics in the country” (Ibid.). He is of the opinion that most of the existing approaches to post colonial Muslim political experiences offer only an essentialist understanding and hence need to re-examine the

many facets of Muslim politics in the country (Ahmed 2014: 28). This study also agrees with the observation of Ahmed.

1.4.2 Muslim Political Mobilization in India with Special Reference to Kerala and the Left

As Salah (2013) argues, an understanding of colonial history of the public sphere of Malabar is needed to comprehend the “construction of present-day Muslim identity in Kerala in terms of power and domination”. In that sense, the *Mappila* rebellion of 1921 can be considered as a ‘pivotal point’ in the formation of political identity of Malabar Muslims and any discussion on the Muslims of Malabar has to start from it. There are multiple and often contradictory perspectives on this historical episode. K. N. Panikkar (1989), an eminent Marxist historian, views it as anti-British and anti-feudal uprisings of *Mappila* peasantry uprising against the inhuman policies of both. Panikkar rightly remarks that the rebellion was not a part of religious fanaticism of *Mappilas* but their circumstances led them to use religion as a tool against their enemies. M.T. Ansari (2005), in his article “Refiguring the Fanatics: Malabar 1836- 1922” also tries to sketch the rebellion as a resistance to British rulers and land lords, and critiques the Congress’ and Gandhi’s strategic attitude towards the rebellion. S. F. Dale (1980) offers a different perspective on the rebellion. He tries to depict *Mappilas* as religious fanatics, and religion is viewed as the “causal factor of these revolts”. He further states that, one of the main aims of the people who participated in the rebellion was “to establish an Islamic state” (Dale 1980:195).

The emergence and formation of *Mappila* Muslims as a social and political force has received substantial attention from the academia. Shaykh Zainuddin Makdhum’s “*Tuhfat al- Mujahidin*” (published in the mid 16th century) is considered as the first historical work on Kerala Muslims. A. P. Ibrahim Kunju’s (1989) “*Mappila* Muslims of Kerala: Their History and Culture”, is another major work about the general depiction of *Mappilas* of Kerala. However, Roland E Miller’s (1992) “*Mappila* Muslims of Kerala: A Study of Islamic Trends” gives a thorough account of ‘unknown Muslims’ of the Indian sub continent. He recounts the changing nature of *Mappila* Muslims over a period of time

and how this influenced its socio-economic and political engagements. Asghar Ali Engineer (1996) also gives a historical account of Kerala Muslims by elaborating their socio-economic and educational profile.

K. K. N. Kurup & E. Ismail (2008) in their work titled “Emergence of Islam in Kerala” discuss the community profile of Muslims. M. Abdul Samad’s (1998) work titled “Islam in Kerala: Groups and Movements in the 20th Century” also follows a similar trajectory. These works give a glimpse into the emergence of different community organizations and their socio-political activism in Kerala. In a recently published work, Miller (2015) portrays how the Muslim community in Kerala blended both tradition and modernity and how this helped in their socio-economic and political progress.

Very few studies have looked at the political engagements of Muslims in Kerala. M. Abdul Aziz’s (1992) “Rise of Muslims in Kerala Politics”, deals with the development of Muslim politics which centered on the IUML. The rise and fall of the IUML in its different political settings and its contributions to Kerala in general and Muslims in particular are the major points of discussion. James Chirayankandath (1996) in his article “Changing Muslim Politics in Kerala: Identity, Interest and Political Strategies”, tries to analyze the meteoric rise of militant politics of Kerala society, especially after the rise of Hindu nationalism in relation to *Babri Masjid* issue, and the response of the Muslim community to it.

Same is the case with the literature on mobilization of Muslim communities by mainstream Communist Parties in Kerala. One of the notable exception is (even though Muslim mobilizations is a small part of the discussion) T. J. Nossiter’s (1982) notable work, “Communism in Kerala – A Study in Political Adaptation”. Describing the social features of the Muslim community in Malabar, Nossiter maintains that the Communist Party could not make significant inroads into the Muslim community, except among the landless *Mappilas* of Malabar (Miller 1982: 26). Quoting Miller, he further argues that Communist Parties got support mainly from the *Sunni* sect of the community because of their regional concentration (Malabar) and backwardness (ibid: 28-29).

In his discussion on CPI (M)'s dilemma about alliance with the IUML, J. Prabhash (2005) points to the party's unclear and ambiguous stances regarding a major Muslim political party. He maintains "adversarial/collaborative state politics" forces the party to make these kinds of alliances. Though the focus is not on the CPI (M)'s engagement with Muslim community, works by Osella and Osella (2008), Williams (2011), Mannathukkaren (2011), Jafar (2013), Biju (2017) and Steur (2017) refer to the different facets of these interactions indirectly.

1.4.3 Marxism and Religion

In the course of their work, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels made numerous references to religion. The young Marx's (1844) influential work titled "On the Jewish Question" is a noted work to understand the Marxist conception of religion. Engels contributed a number of interesting studies to the historical development and role of Christianity, particularly in "The Peasant War in Germany" (1850), "Anti-Dühring" (1878), "The Introduction to the English Edition of Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" (1880), "Bruno Bauer and Early Christianity" (1882), and "The History of Early Christianity" (1894). Rather than taking all the religious institutions at face value, these works regarded religion as "distorted reflections and expressions of real social needs and interests" (Molyneux 2008: 9).

Nevertheless, as opposed to popular conception (often misrepresentation), proper analysis of Marxist literature reveals that Marxist socialists are absolutely opposed to the idea of banning religion. Engels (1874) made this position very clear. Marxists argued that the "religion should be a matter of private affair in relation to state, and complete freedom of religion should be there" (Molyneux 2008; Namboodiripad 1995).

Liberation theology dominates the contemporary Marxist discourse on religion. The idea was accurately encapsulated by Leonardo and Clodovis Boff in 1987.¹⁶ Tariq

¹⁶ Liberation theology is an interpretation of Christian theology that emphasizes a concern for the liberation of the oppressed that evolved in 1950s and 1960s in South America. Later it has moved to different parts of the world. The ideology has a close connection with Marxism and Socialism that stand for the liberation of the poor and working class (see, Leonardo and Boff 1987; Brown 1993; Müller and Gutiérrez 2004).

Ramdan (2008) has extended this to Islam as well. The setbacks suffered by many Muslim communities in the 20th century and the geopolitical situation at the beginning of 21st century resulted in the demand for an “Islamic liberation theology” (Ramdan 2008 quoted in Prado 2012:5; Amin 2012). But none of these studies provide an empirical explanation on how Marxism and religion engage in material conditions, especially in the East as this was not their focus.

While there has been a vigorous interest in examining the relationship between religion and politics, especially in the context of the USSR (Lewis 1954; Khalid 2009), there has been scant focus on the empirical analysis of Marxism and religion in the Indian context, especially in relation to religious minorities. Different aspects of this process have been discussed in Rajendran (1974), Thomas (1985), Patrick Heller (2001), Monica Erwer (2003), Biju. B.L (2016) and Robin Jeffrey (2016), but thinly. Focus of these discussions has mainly been on CPI (M)’s engagement with the majority community (Hindu) in Kerala.

The CPI (M) has published party documents that deal with the party’s engagement with religious communities. The following documents, namely, “Communalism, Religion and Marxism” (1991), “Religion and Communalism” (2002) and “Marxist Analysis of Indian Society” (2004) have been published on party’s engagement with religious communities- both majority and minority. Vernacular literature has been published in this area. CPI (M) leader Pinarayi Vijayan’s (2014) article titled “Malabar Muslims and Communist party” precisely looked at the CPI (M)’s engagement with Muslims of the Malabar. This article examines party’s interaction with the largest religious minority (Muslims) in the state. He elucidates the possibility of the party’s engagement with Muslim community in Kerala in a historical perspective. He also points out the prospects and challenges in this process of engagement.

1.4.4 Muslim Women in Kerala

Even after seven decades of Indian independence, a majority of Muslim women in India remain hugely disadvantaged, economically impoverished and politically

marginalized. There have been several studies that discuss the socio-economic and political conditions of Muslim women in India. Indu Menon (1981), Gopal Singh Committee Report (1983), Asghar Ali Engineer (1993), Aruna Reddy (1999), Sachar Committee Report (2006) and Zoya Hasan (2003; 2009) are a few of them. This literature on Muslim women in Kerala depicts the diversity of Muslim women's lives.

Muslim women in Kerala have a distinct identity in all walks of social life when compared to the rest of the Muslim women in the country. They are different with regard to their dress, food, habits, cultural practices, customary practices and involvement and performance in religious and social rituals and socio-economic engagements though there have been some changes lately which will be discussed later. It needs to be pointed out that the socio-economic, educational and political status of Muslim women in Kerala, in the initial decades of independence, was pathetic as compared to other communities (Panikkar 1983; Koya 1988).

Socio-economic progress attained by the state of Kerala through the famous 'Kerala model of development' had a deep impact on Muslim women as well. The literacy rate among Muslim women went up significantly (Jafar 2010). Widespread migration also had a positive impact on the social, economic and leadership roles of Muslim women (Simister 2011; Jafar 2015). The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and subsequent legislative reforms helped in increasing the presence of Muslim women in local self governments (Jafar 2013; Devika and Thampi 2014). Despite the advancements made, the strong patriarchal tendencies and influence of Muslim clergy acted as a major hindrance in the further progress of Muslim women in the state as pointed out by the studies of Jafar (2013; 2015).

1.4.5 Communist Movement in Kerala

Evolution and expansion of communism in Kerala received considerable attention from scholars like Jithendra V Singh (1959), Victor. M. Fic (1970), Krishnan (1971), E.M.S. Namboodiripad (1976; 1984), T.J. Nossiter (1982) and M.V.S. Koteswara Rao (2003). Both the communist parties [CPI and CPI (M)] have also published extensively

on their growth in Kerala. The CPI (M) is of the opinion that changes in the socio-economic and political conditions of Kerala during the initial decades of the 20th century created an environment congenial to the growth of communist parties. Emergence of different social reform movements in the same period as pointed out by the Kurup also influenced the growth of the parties Kurup (1998).

Other than the organizational efforts, subsequent initiatives of Left governments helped the communist parties in general and CPI (M) in particular to expand their base among different sections of Kerala society, especially among the lower strata as pointed out by E.M.S. Namboodiripad (henceforth, Namboodiripad) (1984), Thomas Issac (1986; 1995; 2002), Chandavarkar (1997), Manali Desai (2001), John Moolakattu (2007) and Govindan Parayil (2010). The CPI and later CPI (M)'s reforms in land and agrarian relations and education had focused on the lower strata of the society. This politics has undergone a significant change in the 1980s and will be taken up later indeed. Thomas Issac and Mohan Kumar (1991) and K.N. Ganesh (2009) explain these shifts in their works in detail.

Many studies made the communist governments and their policies have been a focus of research. While Namboodiripad (1974) and Issac and Kumar (1991) gave a sympathetic account of communist governments, complexities in party policies were pointed out by Herring (1989), John Oommen (1999), Bidyut Chakrabarty (2001) and James Chirayankandath (2007). J. Prabhash (2000) and James Chirayankandath (2007a). The "Kerala model of development" was heavily criticized by Ravi Raman (2010) and J. Devika (2010).

1.4.6 Communist Party and Women

Unlike the literature produced at the international level, most of the studies on Indian Communist parties address the question of women in mainstream Left parties as a subset of the larger women's movement in the country. The works by Amritha Basu

(1994), Radha Kumar (1997), Raka Ray (2000), M.S. Roy (2011) and Bidyut Chakrabarti (2014) follow this pattern. One notable exception is Elisabeth Armstrong's (2003) ethnographic research work titled "Gender and Neo Liberalism: The All India Democratic Women's Association and Globalization politics". This work explains the changing landscape of women's politics and activities for equality and liberation during neoliberal era in India.

Literature on women participation in the Communist movement in Kerala also followed the national pattern that overlooks the role of women in this specific movement. Studies by M.A. Gould (1965), T.J. Nossitter (1982), E. Balakrishnan (1998), Manali Desai (2001) and M.V.S. Rao (2003) are a few examples. Robin Jeffrey (2003) has made a critical analysis of the role of women in dominant communist parties of the state. By summarizing K. R. Gouri's 'bitter experience in politics' (Jeffrey 2003) argues that "the masculine dominance within the party acts as a major deterrent to new women entrants in the party" (Jeffrey 2003:214). Similar arguments were made by many feminist writers on CPI (M) and CPI – two dominant Communist parties in the state. Works by J. Devika (2007; 2008; 2009), J. Devika and Binitha. V. Thampi (2012) is in this direction.

Literature on the politics of Kerala after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments attempted to analyze the level of 'empowerment' and the challenges women encounter while trying to create a space for themselves in the hitherto – exclusively male domain of local governments and how different political parties react to these changes. Works by Chathukulam and John (2000); Thomas Issac (2005); George (2006); J. Devika and Binitha. V. Thampi (2012) explain this in detail.

Devika and Thambi (2012) have examined the role of women in the "dominant" Left in detail, especially in local politics. This work places political decentralization and its possibilities for women within its historical and contemporary context and argues that though the CPI (M) has made a much more explicit commitment to treating women's issue as central to the party's political agenda, such an integration has not really taken off (Devika and Thampi 2012:29).

1.4.7 Analysis of Available Literature

The different approaches to understand Muslim politics fail to offer a comprehensive analysis of the internal complexities of the community which is needed to understand its political stances. This is needed today to understand the process of mobilization of highly heterogeneous and internally diverse Muslim community of Malabar region of Kerala. Most of the works on Kerala Muslims do not give an intra community analysis and have not studied the community by looking at it in a differentiated manner. These works do not attempt a sectional analysis of the Muslim community which is needed to understand the Muslim community of Kerala in all its dimensions.

Other than certain in-depth studies on the *Mappila* rebellion of 1921, the scholarship have not addressed political activism and stances of the Kerala Muslims in an adequate manner. Most of the studies on Muslim politics in Kerala look at it as a subset of national politics. Being a state with substantial influence for both Left politics and active Muslim community organizations and political parties, no serious attention has been paid to the politics of the Muslims. Same is the case with the engagement of religion or believers by the Communist parties. While large volumes of literature examine the theoretical underpinnings of Marxism and religion, scholarly works have failed to analyze the empirical interactions of the Marxist/Socialist political parties with religious groups. Analysis of the available literature shows that there is a visible ambivalence on the part of Marxist parties as far as religious groups or believers are concerned and this has not been captured in the available literature.

To understand the process of the CPI (M)'s political engagement with Muslims in Malabar, this study focuses on the party's engagement with Muslim women and Muslim community organizations. As mentioned earlier, Muslim women are the most vulnerable section of minority communities in India. However, the profile of Muslim women of Kerala provides a better socio-economic, political and educational sphere- as compared to the rest of the country. While the political mobilization of Muslim women in the context of political decentralization has received some attention, the scholarship often ignores

their presence in mainstream political parties- both at local and higher levels politics. Even the role of women in the dominant Left has not been properly addressed.

Muslim community organizations also have an active presence in Kerala's public domain. Studies on them largely focus on their interventions in the educational sector and also on intra community issues. Their role in shaping public opinion among the section of Muslim society has also been studied. A few studies look at IUML's association with Muslim community organizations and its impact on the socio-political development of Kerala Muslims (see, Gangadharan 1995; Chirayankandath 1996; Vadakara 2003). The focus here is more on the measures taken by the IUML supported state governments. Despite CPI (M)'s conscious efforts to mobilize Muslims for the last two decades, no academic work has examined this relation in depth. Only a few writing on electoral analysis have taken up this issue. Hence this study aims to add a new dimension to the available research on political mobilization in general and Muslims and Communist parties in particular.

1.5 Research Questions

The thesis focuses on the following research question:

How has the CPI (M) engaged with the Muslims of Malabar from 1980 to 2018?

To come up with viable answers to these questions, the study takes up three sub questions:

1. What are the CPI (M)'s mobilizational efforts with regards to Muslim women of Malabar?
2. How does the CPI (M) engage with Muslim community organizations in the state?
3. What are the conflicts, ambiguities, consensus and possibilities that emerge in this process of mobilization?

A look at these questions is needed to understand the CPI (M)'s engagement with Muslims of Malabar from 1980 to 2018.

1.6 A Note on Method

This study seeks to understand the various dynamics of CPI (M)'s engagement with the Muslims of Malabar region of Kerala. This is important to understand not only the configuration that shape the political standpoints of the CPI (M), but also the critical factors and inputs that take Kerala's politics in certain directions. This study is primarily a qualitative research work.

This study considers Muslims of Malabar as a highly heterogeneous population with significant internal complexities. Muslim community organizations are those organizations working among Muslims on religious and community affairs. Regarding the CPI (M), this thesis look at how the party functions from the local to state level than what it says. At the same time, its impact on the ideological standpoints of the party would be analyzed to understand the ambiguities, conflicts, consensus and opportunities it produces. By party's engagements, I mean the engagement initiated by CPI (M) and its major front organizations like All Indian Democratic Women's Association (henceforth, the AIDWA), Democratic Youth Federation of India (henceforth, the DYFI), Students Federation of India (henceforth, the SFI) etc. Though the study focuses on Malabar, the general condition of Kerala Muslims have discussed at many points in this study. The major support base of all Muslim community organizations belongs to Malabar. However, all of them functions as state level organizations. Hence, Kerala has been used as a synonym to Malabar at times in this thesis.

This research has based itself on methodological tools like– unstructured interviews, participant observations and published materials. It has used published literature of the CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations in both English and Malayalam. It includes government records – census data, official reports like Sachar Commission Report, Paloli Committee Report etc. It also uses autobiographies and biographies of communist party leaders, newspapers and periodicals. Souvenirs published

by different Muslim community organizations as part of their conferences were extensively used to understand the trajectory of each organization. Major share of data was drawn from the Communist party libraries at Trivandrum (AKG library run by CPI (M) and MN library run by CPI), CDS Trivandrum, University library Trivandrum and CH library of Calicut University.

Along with the *Deshabhimani* daily (Malayalam daily run by the CPIM), newspapers run by Muslim community organizations – *Madhyamam* (*Jamaat*), *Siraj* (A P *Sunni* faction), *Suprabhatham* (E K *Sunni* faction), *Thejas* (PFI/SDPI), *Chandrika* (IUML) and *Varthamanam* (*Mujahid* groups) were referred to understand the standpoints of these organizations about different socio-political developments. Popular vernacular periodicals such as *Chandrika* weekly, *Deshabhimani* weekly, *India Today*, *Kerala Shabhdham*, *Madhyamam* weekly, *Malayalam* weekly, *Mathrubhumi* illustrated weekly, *Prabhodhanam* weekly, *Aaram* weekly, *Sthreeshabhdam*, *Risala*, *Sunni* voice, *Shabab* weekly etc. have been referred to. Major national dailies like *The Hindu* newspaper, *Indian Express*, *The Times of India* and *Frontline* were also used to collect data. Popular cultural tools like literary texts, poetry, plays and folk songs were also made use of, especially to understand the early engagement of the Communist party with the Muslims of Malabar.

Online sources were also used to collect data. Back volumes of many journals (mainly *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Social Scientist*), newspapers and other periodicals were looked at. YouTube videos were extensively used to get old speeches and reports on historical incidents. Websites of different organizations were also a major source of data to get to know the structure and programs of different organizations. Though their authenticity may be questioned, different discussions in social media (Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp) were also followed to fathom the various aspects of social issues. This is vital because the social media has become as a major tool of activism for all organizations in the state in the last one decade.

Interviews were conducted between 2011 and 2018 and these form major sources of data for this research. Open ended, structured, semi-structured and unstructured

interviews of leaders and activists of both CPI (M) and the Muslim community organizations and ordinary supporters of the party and community were held. The CPI (M) supporters are not the members of the party, but participate in its activities like election campaigns, public meetings etc. were also interviewed. The supporters of Muslim community organizations who were interviewed are ordinary Muslims who attend the religious gatherings of these organizations and meetings and other programs organized by these organizations.

The CPI (M) leaders and activists who were interviewed belong to different ranks of the party. Most of the 'interviews' were in the nature of discussions. The CPI (M) central committee members A. Vijayaraghavan, Elamaram Kareem and Paloli Muhammed Kutty, state committee members P.K. Sainaba, Dr. V. Sivadasan, T. K. Hamza, P. Sreeramakrishnan and P. Jayarajan, district committee members V. Sasikumar, A. Sivadasan, and A.A. Rahim were spoken to. Intense discussions were held with A. Vijayaraghavan and P.K. Sainaba over the course of research. Nilambur Ayisha, one of the early activists of Communist Party and also a prominent member in the cultural field were also interviewed. Along with this, scores of party activists working at the local levels like local government presidents, members, *Kudumbashree* members, NREGA workers and students and youth leaders were also spoken to for information. Local level members and activists were from the four districts of Malabar –Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode and Kannur. The pivot of field work was the Malappuram district, the Muslim majority district of the state.

Leaders of Muslim community organizations and political parties like E.T. Muhammed Basheer MP (IUML National Secretary), C. Dawood (*Jamaat-e-Islami*), Prof. Abdurahman (AP *Sunni* faction), Darimi (E K *Sunni* faction) and many local level Muslim community organizations activists and ordinary followers of the community were also interviewed. They were from Malappuram and Kozhikode districts. Along with this, social critics like M.N. Karassery, Hameed Chennamangaloor and Dr. Khadeeja Mumthaz were interviewed. Conversations with scholars working in related fields to corroborate information received from these interviews.

An apprehension exists in research forums that non-random sampling method of data collection results in a biased perception of the subject the context of study. This problem was overcome by a triangulation method (validation of data through cross verification) of data collection. Efforts were made to compare different kinds of data and methods to construct a possible, unified meaning. This sort of method has been practiced in similar studies (see, Mannathukaran 2006).

I also participated in numerous programs organized both by the CPI (M) (including its major front organizations) and different Muslim community organizations across the state. These programs include conventions, conferences, seminars, workshops, protest marches and organizational meetings. Among these, the CPI (M) convention on Muslim issues and release of *Mukhyadhara* magazine at Calicut (09 November 2013), and the CPI (M) convention on Muslim minorities at Kannur (31 October 2015) were particularly informative.

1.7 Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into six chapters including the introduction and conclusion. This chapter titled 'Introduction' explains why this study concentrates on the CPI (M) and Muslims in the Malabar region of Kerala. It also discusses the general pattern of Muslim and Left political mobilization in India and review of literature.

The second chapter titled 'Social Shifts in Kerala in 1970s' examines the context of the study in detail. Since this is one of the first endeavors to understand the different facets of CPI (M)'s engagement with Muslims of Malabar, a detailed discussion is attempted to understand the context of the study. This chapter begins with a note on the evolution of the communist movement and CPI (M) in Kerala. It also discusses the different aspects of the relation between the united Communist party (till 1964) and CPI (M) and Muslims of Malabar till 1980. The major contributions of Left/LDF governments on the minority question and also the major impediments in the mobilization strategies of the United Communist Party (before 1964) and CPI (M) (1964-1980) are subject matter of the chapter. The chapter ends with a note on the major socio-

political, economic and cultural shifts in 1980s and its impact on the CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations.

The third chapter titled ‘Muslims of Kerala: Modes of Operations’ presents the profile of Kerala Muslims. Evolution, expansion and intra-community dimensions of the Kerala Muslims are one of the major themes dealt with in this chapter. It includes the social composition of the *Sunnis* and the *Mujahids* – two major sects of Kerala Muslims; ‘traditionalists/ reformists’ debate between the *Sunnis* and the *Mujahids*; a detailed profile of different organizations working among the Kerala Muslims; the *Sunni-Salafi* ideological engagements; and the subsequent expansion of the social base of each group. It also deals with the educational development of Kerala Muslims. The second part explores the profile of Muslim women in detail. Since the mainstream Muslim community organizations do not represent Muslim women adequately, a separate discussion on their profile is attempted in this chapter. The chapter ends with a discussion on the transformation that the Kerala Muslims have undergone over the years. The chapter looks at the context of transformation and the role of *Salafism* in this process and also how different actors involve themselves in this change.

Chapter 4 titled, ‘CPI (M) and Muslim Women in Malabar’ looks at strategies of mobilization which the CPI (M) deploys to garner support among Muslim women of Kerala. The chapter begins with a theoretical analysis of how CPI (M) addresses the women’s question in the Indian context. The next section is an empirical analysis of how party interacts with the Muslim women of Malabar. It includes how the party uses political decentralization, self help groups, problems related with Muslim Personal Law and ‘voices’ of Muslim women to engage with them. The nature of this mobilization is discussed in the next section. It addresses how the party negotiates with the challenges in this process of mobilization. The chapter concludes with a detailed note on the changing pattern of party’s relation with Muslim women of Malabar.

Chapter 5 titled, ‘CPI (M)’s Engagements with Muslim Community Organizations’ deals with the consensus, complements, conflicts and ambiguities in the CPI (M)’s negotiation with the Muslim community organizations working in Malabar

region of Kerala. The chapter begins with the context of this engagement. It discusses the electoral and non-electoral interactions of the party with these groups. This discussion focuses on the factors that influence this negotiation and the advantages and conflicts that came up in the process. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ideological and political questions that come up in the CPI (M)'s engagement with the Muslim community organizations.

Chapter 6 presents the overall findings of the research.

Chapter II

Social Shifts in Kerala in 1970s

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Communist Party's engagement with the Muslims of Malabar from the time of its formation in 1920s to 1980. To sketch the context of the study, it also focuses on the major socio-political and economic shifts in 1970s and its impact on both the left and Muslim politics of Kerala. The first section highlights the different facets of the engagement between the Left- both united Communist Party and CPI (M) and Muslims of Malabar, up to 1980. The chapter begins with short note on the evolution of the communist movement in Kerala and also the context in which the CPI (M) and LDF were formed. Considering the importance of the Malabar rebellion in shaping Muslim identity, the discussion on the party's engagement with Malabar Muslims begins with the impact of Malabar rebellion (1921) and the Left views on it. It also examines the major contributions made by the Left Front governments to the Muslim minorities and the major obstacles in the mobilization strategies devised by the party. The major socio-political, economic and cultural shifts in Kerala in the 1970s form the focus of the final section.

2.2 Evolution of the Communist Movement in Kerala

The communist movement in India emerged out of the anti-imperialist and democratic struggle of the people in the early 20th century, especially after the First World War (CPM 1994:59). The same period also witnessed a strong anti-imperialist upsurge across the globe. Some of the Muslims who crossed the Afghanistan border to fight for Turkey as part of the Khilafath movement managed to reach Russia and became communists like Abdul Reza, Shaukat Usmani and Rafiq Ahmed (Nossitter 1988:14). The formation of the Communist International in Moscow also exerted a profound influence on the formation of a Communist party unit in India. By the Second Congress of the 'Third International' in 1920, an 'Indian Communist Centre' had been set up under

M.N. Roy which later developed into a formal unit under him at Tashkent (ibid: 14-5). The inaugural meeting decided to work out a party program of the party that was 'suited to the conditions of India'. Shafiq was elected as the first secretary of the party unit ('Party Formation', www.cpim.org accessed on 12.05.2013).

Developments in the international arena had an impact on the politics of Kerala as well. Changes in the socio-economic and political situation in Kerala during the initial decades of 20th century created conditions congenial to the growth of the Communist Party here. New strains of thought developed laid the foundation of the social reform movements in various sections of Kerala society (CPM 1994: 60).¹⁷ The efforts at social reform that started with the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928), Ayyankali (1863-1941) in the southern part of the state, and Vagbhatananda (1885-1939) in the northern part of state evolved into influential social movements.

The ideas of socialism and communism reached the state in the same period. Both agricultural and industrial workers started opposing the imperialists and landlords. Small organizations of farmers and agricultural workers formed in different parts of the state to protect against the existing work conditions (Kurup 1988:120). The Congress Socialist Party (henceforth, the CSP) formed by Namboodiripad and other leaders of Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (henceforth, the KPCC) laid the foundation of a Communist Party in Kerala. The official group of Communist Party was formed in December 1939 at Pinarayi, presently a part of the Kannur district of the state. The founding meeting was attended by 90 prominent members of CSP (Ibid.). They decided to join ranks with the popular agrarian and working class struggles against the economic crisis and sufferings brought about by the world war and British rule. The formation of the Communist Party was declared on 26th January 1940 through the wall writings (CPM 1994: 25). Tar was used to announce this significant political development (Ibid.). Even

¹⁷ The development literature has tended to see peasants and workers as either mere beneficiaries or victims of the development process. But, in Kerala, they acted as active agents of economic and political transformations. Scholars like Patrick Heller (1999) have argued that the mobilization of subordinate classes (working class) has resulted in the transformation of Kerala in 1930s and 1940s. The advancement of English education and subsequent emergence of middle class accelerated this process.

from its early period of formation in Kerala, the Unified Communist Party focused on an alliance of all working class against imperialist rule (Nossiter 1988).

2.2.1 Formation of CPI (M)

In the 4th Communist Party Congress held at Palakkad (Kerala) in 1956, acute difference of opinions surfaced in relations to the approach to be adapted towards the Congress Party, the then ruling party. This difference was in nature of Indian state in general and the political system in particular. One section of leaders put forward the idea of forming an alliance with the Congress party. But, another section labeled that position as “revisionist idea of class collaboration” and dismissed any sort of alliance with the Congress party. They considered the Congress party as a “bourgeoisie” political party that serves the interest of ruling classes. These differences of opinion on ideological and tactical lines split the CPI and led to the formation of CPI (M) in 1964 (‘Party Formation’, www.cpim.org accessed on 06.11.2016). The United Communist Party leaders had intense differences on the approach towards the “Chinese line” (political and tactical line proposed by the Chinese Communist Party) and the “Soviet line” (political and tactical line proposed by the Soviet Communist Party) and this influenced the split in the party which “line” did the Communist Party take. The CPI (M) was formed by those who did not accept the alliance with Congress party.

2.2.2 Formation of the Left Democratic Front (LDF)

The 10th Party Congress held at Jalandhar (Punjab) in 1978 put forward the view of forming a united Left and democratic front against the Congress party in the state of Kerala as in West Bengal. Based on this view, the LDF was formed in Kerala in 1979. Taking a significant deviation from the direction of Party Congress, the CPI (M) in Kerala formed the LDF according to the local political situation of Kerala. LDF in Kerala has many non Left political parties as well.

After the collapse of Janata government what came up as an alternative to Congress party in many north Indian states was the BJP. However, the CPI (M)’s

“tactical” political moves stalled the coming of the BJP in Kerala and also in West Bengal (Ibid.). Taking into consideration the all India situation, the 11th Party Congress that was held at Vijayawada in 1982 proposed a plan of action to fight communalism. The CPI (M) accordingly chalked out and adopted a plan of action to implement this decision. The Party’s tactical line for the state assembly elections of 1987 was adopted taking these factors into consideration (ibid1.). The LDF won the election without the support of any ‘caste’ or ‘communal’ groups in the election. This period also witnessed a continuous growth of the party and class-mass organizations and also different teachers and employees’ organizations associated with it.

Parties with both far-Left and Centrist positions attained membership in LDF. Other than CPI (M), the CPI, Revolutionary Socialist Party (henceforth, the RSP), Janata Dal (Secular) and Nationalist Congress Party (henceforth. the NCP) were some prominent constituents of the LDF. Though not a formal member, the Indian National League also shared political platforms with LDF. Parties like Janata Dal, RSP and NCP undergone multiple splits and any of the one faction remain with LDF. The CPI (M) that had political strength across the state became the leading member of LDF. Other parties including the CPI had a political base only in certain pockets of the state. This is a major weakness of LDF. While the UDF has two major members- the IUML and Kerala Congress (Mani faction) that have substantial influence in three major districts helps them to win elections comfortably. These three districts- Kozhikode, Malappuram and Kottayam together constitute 38 assembly constituencies and 6 Lok Sabha constituencies of the state. While the CPI (M) has strong presence across the state, CPI’s strength is limited to the districts like Idukki, Kollam, Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram and certain pockets in other districts. Parties like NCP, Janatha Dal etc. have presence only in certain assembly constituencies of the state.

2.3 Malabar Muslims and the Left (1921- 1980)

2.3.1 Malabar Rebellion

The Malabar rebellion (also known as *Mappila* rebellion) was the outcome of a series of revolts against the upper caste/ upper class landlords and the British colonial state, which broke out in the 19th century. It took place in 1921 and 1922. While the origin of Muslim struggles in Kerala goes back to the trade conflicts with the Portuguese, local uprisings started during the 19th century when subordination and oppression of *Mappilas* by British administrators and local landlords became ever more severe. Upper caste (mainly Hindu) domination and their onslaught generated political consciousness and a sense of collective identity among Muslims. A series of struggles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries turned into mass rebellions popularly known as *Mappila* rebellion in 1921 (See, Dale 1972; Panikkar 1989; Ganesh 1997; Menon 2002; Salah 2013; Vijayan 2014). An understanding of the Malabar rebellion is needed to understand the present day Muslim identity in Kerala “in terms of power, domination and its social relations” (see, Salah 2013).

A predominant view on the rebellion is that it was a “fanatic outbreak” (Dale 1972). But, Marxist scholars like K N Panikkar (1989) have brought out that the consciousness that underlay these uprisings was primarily rooted in an opposition to landlord and the colonial state. A third view by scholars like Gangadharan (2004) integrated the earlier two views and argued that though it was an uprising against the colonial state and landlords, religious consciousness of *Mappilas* did play an important role. The CPI (M) upholds the views of Panikkar and disagrees with the standpoints of IUML and Congress Party of the rebellion (Vijayan 2014:3). Vijayan points out that the IUML stood with the upper classes of the Muslim community and had a negative view on the rebellion. He also says that the Left wing in KPCC under Namboodiripad supported

the Malabar rebellion as a peasant's uprising and this resulted in the formation of the socialist wing in KPCC.¹⁸

The Communist Party had transformed the 'negative' consciousness of the peasantry and working class to a 'positive' outlook and tried to develop a class consciousness among them. Mannathukkaren (2006) describes it as a process that continued and was built on tactics of Muslim rebellion like "targeting of the most reprehensible landlords and memorializations of martyrs" (Mannathukkaren 2006:125). The British government introduced many restrictions over the *Mappila* Muslims after the rebellion and it continued even in the post-independent India.

The CPI (M) claims that it addressed the concerns of Muslims in the post rebellion period (see, Vijayan 2014). The first Communist government of Kerala (1957) removed the ban on Muslims to join the Malabar Special Police (henceforth, the MSP), which was introduced by the British after the Malabar rebellion. It also removed the ban on construction of Mosques, introduced by the British. The *Mappila* Muslims had to obtain special permission from the Collector while the same law allowed other communities to construct temples or churches. The discrimination continued even after independence and under Congress party governments. When the Communist government came to power in 1957, a group of Muslim leaders from Malabar, including Bapputty Master, Malavattath Muhammed Haji, U. C. Kalanthar and Kanjiramutath Haji, met the then Chief Minister Namboodiripad with the request to grant permission to construction of a mosque in Pulamanthol town. The government then decided to repeal the condition on constructing mosques. Interestingly, Namboodiripad, an atheist, laid the foundation stone of the mosque and later it known as "EMS mosque" ('EMS Mosque', www.cpim.org accessed on 30.05.2012).

¹⁸ The Communist Party conference held at the Calicut in August 1946 analyzed the aftermath of the rebellion in detail. It passed a resolution titled 'Malabar rebellion- Call and warning' unanimously. While stressing the class character of the rebellion, the party cautioned about the tendencies to communalize the rebellion. *Deshabhimani*, the official organ of the Communist Party, was banned by the British government for publishing this resolution.

Vijayan (2014) claims that the LDF governments took appropriate measures to honor the leaders of the Malabar rebellion. He says that the LDF government build monument for Ali Musliyar and Madhavan Nair, two prominent figures of the rebellion (Vijayan 2014:4). The Tirur municipal corporations (in Malappuram district) ruled by the LDF build monuments in remembrance of the victims of Wagon tragedy despite the fact that the Municipal Corporation was ruled by the UDF for a long period.¹⁹ The LDF government also directed the removal of the monument of Hitchcock (Commander of British army) placed at Vellamburam, presently part of the Malappuram district ('Hitchcock monument', www.historicalalleys.blogspot.in accessed on 19.05.2014). These two measures greatly influenced the Muslim population of the state.

2.3.2 The Engagement between the Communists and Muslims of Malabar

The communists had a "proper appreciation" (Vijayan 2014:1) of the contributions of the Islamic faith to human values. The progressive role played by the community in different phases of social evolution has also been acknowledged in the writings of communist stalwarts. Engels (1883) in his introduction to the "Nature of Dialectics" noted the different values of "Arab culture" which later promoted rational and scientific ideas across the globe (Engels 1883 quoted in Vijayan 2014:2). The role played by the "Arab traders" in the process of the exchange of these values was also emphasized by Engels. Vijayan (2014) claims that the Kerala unit of the party upholds the contribution of Arab traders to human progress.

The strong anti-imperialist standpoints of the party²⁰ and Muslims act as one of the major media for it to engage with the Muslims of Malabar. Vijayan (2014) highlights

¹⁹ The Wagon tragedy incident led to the death of 67 prisoners on 20 November 1921 in Tirur, Malappuram district. The prisoners were taken into custody following the Malabar rebellion.

²⁰ The CPI (M)'s party program begins like this, "The Communist Party inherited the progressive, anti-imperialist and revolutionary traditions of the Indian people. Since its formation in 1920, by a small group of determined anti-imperialist fighters inspired by the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, the Party had set before itself the goal of fighting for complete independence and basic social transformation ('Party Program', www.cpim.org accessed on 21.4.2014). The Party also organized different programs to exhibit its strong anti-imperialist positions. The CPI (M) empathizes with anti-imperialist struggles all over the globe. The Party led solidarity movements against any sort of imperial actions by the imperialist forces.

the strong anti-imperialist stances of Malabar Muslims (Vijayan 2014:2). In his article, he discussed how Kunjali Marakars fought with Portuguese navy for Zamorins of Calicut and how it has opened an arena for anti-imperialist struggles in Malabar.

Another major mode of interaction was through addressing the identity, security and equity concerns of Malabar Muslims. The party has employed mainly two strategies for this. The first was through the different measures taken by the Left governments to uplift the weaker sections in general and Muslim in particular and second was through the protests and struggles led by the party on the issues of peasants and working class. The social profile of *Mappila* Muslims of Malabar in the initial decades of independence shows that the majority of them belonged to the peasants and working class.

Building upon Namboodiripad's (1968) analysis on the class situation of Malabar, Vijayan observed that the majority of Muslims of Malabar belong to weaker sections of society (Vijayan 2014:2). Unemployment, poverty, starvation, price hike, exploitation by upper class and other social evils have dominated the daily life of Malabar Muslims in the first six-seven decades of 20th century. Like other communities, the party was keen on mobilizing the weaker sections of the Muslims in Malabar.

The measures taken by the first communist ministry had substantial impact on the life of Muslims. The most important contribution of the first Communist government was in the sphere of agrarian reforms. The approach of the government was guided by the understanding of the Communist Party that the peasant question stood as a foremost national question. It was quite different from Congress party's position on the land and agrarian questions. The government passed rules that help the common people and the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill being the most decisive step. It prohibited all evictions of tenants, sub-tenants and occupants of homestead land on any ground including failure to pay rent. Furthermore, all court proceedings initiated by landlords against tenants, sub-tenants or occupants of homestead were stayed (Pillai 1999: 2). The Agrarian Bill and

The *hartal* called by the party to protest the hanging of former Iraq President Saddam Hussain seen as an example of its "anti- imperialist stance.

Land Reforms Bill introduced and implemented by the communist governments of 1957 and 1967 had significant impact on the Muslim tenants.²¹

Communist Party units across the state had an active involvement in the execution of land reforms in the state. In a personal interview Nalakath Nani, one of the earliest Communist party activists in the Nilambur area (Malappuram district), said that it was Agrarian Reforms Bill and the Education Bill of first Communist ministry that helped in the expansion of the Communist Party in the area. The weaker sections that have benefited through the Bill from all communities rallied behind the Communist Party across the state. It was no difference with the Muslim community. (Interview held on 15.08.2015 at Karulai). Poor Muslim agricultural workers, small peasants and other small scale industrial worker who were landless and tenants of feudal have benefited from these reforms by the Communist governments of 1957 and 1969.

The first Communist ministry's decision to extend reservations to backward sections including Muslim minorities also helped Muslims to achieve government jobs and better educational opportunities. The introduction of Muslim sub quota had helped the Muslims to avail benefits of reservation. The reservation of positions in education and employment played a vital role in the socio-economic progress of Muslims in Kerala that has helped them to avail better job both within the country and abroad. The Malappuram district, with a Muslim majority, was formed by the Left Front government²² in 1967. This immensely helped on the development of the region. The same government took steps to establish the University of Calicut in 1969. Vijayan (2014) highlighted the measures taken by the LDF governments in the educational and health sectors that benefited the *Mappila* Muslims who formed the lower ranks of Kerala society.

²¹ In a public speech, the CPI (M) state committee member T. K. Hamza claimed that the Land Reform Bill by the first Communist government played as a major reason for the better living condition of Malabar Muslims who were the tenants of Hindu and Muslim landlords. Majority of the first generation migrants to the gulf found money for their tickets and visas by selling the land they owned through the legislation. The remittance from the gulf migration resulted in the better living standards for Malabar Muslims in all walks of life (Speech by T. K. Hamza on "Comrade Kunjali Martyr Day" at Karulai on 28.07.2014).

²² The IUML was a constituent of this ministry led by the Namboodiripad. Hence, IUML also claims the credit for the formation of Malappuram district and University of Calicut.

The CPI (M) claims itself to be a party that provided security to the Muslim community of the state (CPM 2008). The Party often cites the Thalassery (Kannur district) communal riot happened in 1971 as a major example of this. In early 1970s, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (henceforth, the RSS) had initiated violence against Muslim community of Thalassery that resulted in the Hindu-Muslim communal violence in 1971 ('Communal Violence', www.peoplesdemocracy.in accessed on 15.05.2016). The CPI (M) lost one of its members named U. Kunchiraman (a Hindu) when he was protecting a mosque from the RSS attack ('Thalassery communal riot and CPIM', www.openthemagazine.com accessed on 10.01.2016).²³

Various struggles waged by the united Communist party and later by the CPI (M) against landlords attracted the working class and small peasants to the party. It is believed that when the Mappila labor class rallied round the Communist movement, the IUML had started its own trade union called the Muslim Labor Union as a reaction to it (Muhammed 2001). The peasants and laborers came in to the fold of Communist party through the agricultural workers unions and trade unions. The party organized labor strikes on various grounds. Among them the Tile Factory Strike of Feroke (1935), Cotton Mill Strike of Kozhikode (1935), Tin Factory Strike of Palluruthi (1936), Beedi Workers Strike of Ponnani (1939) etc. deserve special mention. There were 16 Trade Unions in Malabar by 1937. Most of these labor unions were controlled by the communist leaders and they used red colored flags. By becoming members of such trade unions, the *Mappila* laborers also became communist activists. That's how the *Mappila* beedi workers of Kondotty, Tellicherry, Ponnani etc. and the plantation workers of Kalikavu, Karuvarakundu and Nilambur turned as activists of the party. The present strongholds of CPI (M) in Malabar have a history of either land struggles or continuous fight for the cause of the working class including agricultural workers. In Malappuram district (Muslim majority district), the CPI (M) has strong a base in Nilambur, Perinthalmanna, Kondotty, Ponnani and Edappal. All these places have the strong history of either agrarian or working class struggles in the early decades of Independence .While

²³ The Party also claimed that it set up rehabilitation centers for Muslims when Muslims were ousted from their habitat by *Sangh Parivar* at the time of Marad (Calicut) communal violence in 2001 and 2003 (Thomas P Joseph Commission Report 2006:13). A detail discussion on this will be done in Chapter 6.

Nilambur has the history of strong agrarian movements and plantation movements, Ponnani and Edappal has significant trade union movements of fishermen and Kondotty has strong beedi workers movement. Same is the case with Kozhikode or Kannur district that has sizable sections of Muslim population.

Other than the above actions, the systematic and disciplined style of functioning of the Communist Party, its critical approach to social relations, intense pressure for change from different sections of the society and party's call for a new world order created enthusiasm among a section of *Mappila* Muslims, especially among lower section of the community. The party's outlook against the social conservatism created an impression among the educated youth and also influenced various social reform movements within the community.²⁴ Other than the influential party leaders like Namboodiripad, the party gave the responsibility of work among *Mappila* Muslims to the Muslim members of the party. K.V. Muhammed Ishaq, the first Muslim candidate of the party contested in a general election (1920-1992), Sadhu P Ahmadkutty, Trade Union leader (1911-1975), E. K. Imbichi Bava, Trade Union leader and former state minister and Member of Parliament (1917-1995), K. Kunchali, former member of state assembly (1924-1969), K. Saidalikutty, party district secretary for more than 2 decades (1934-2010), K. Ummer Master, party district secretary (1936-2013) and Paloli Muhammed Kutty, party central committee member and former state minister (b. 1931) were the prominent leaders from Muslim community.

Interventions in the cultural field had promoted the party among the rural mass to a greater extent, through the medium of art. *Yuva Kala Samithi* formed at Nilambur and *Yuvajana Sangham* formed at Areacode was some notable movements in this direction. Local communist activists Nilambur Balan, Nilambur Ayisha, M. Usman, K. Kunjali and K. Saidalikutty were connected to the activities of the party through this (Randathani 1996). Plays like '*Ijju Nalloru Manusanaakaan Nokku*' (You better try to be a good man), '*Ee Duniyaavil Njan Ottakkanu*' (I am alone on this earth) were staged by *Yuva*

²⁴ Interview with Nalakath Nani on 15.08.2015 at Karulai.

Kala Samithi across the Malabar in the initial decades after the state formation and was well appreciated by the people, especially those who are on the margins of the society.

Through such efforts of the party, the Muslims from the lower strata of the society joined the united Communist Party (before 1964) and later the CPI (M). It is the Party's work on the material issues of *Mappila* Muslims attracted them to it. The Communist governments' and party's general policy of anti imperialism and anti communalism also brought forth significant support from a section of Muslims in Malabar. Nevertheless, majority of Muslims did not join the party.

2.3.3 Major Impediments in the Mobilization Strategy

The CPI (M) could make inroads mainly among landless laborers (Nossiter 1983:26). The major support (though limited when considering the total population of the community) came from the *Sunni* sect of the community that consisted of majority of backward class Muslims (Miller 1976 quoted in Nossiter 1983:29). But the strong presence of the IUML in Muslims pockets of the state (mainly in Malappuram district) and the image of the party as "anti religious party" reduced the electoral prospects of the party in Muslim concentrated areas.

To Nossiter (1983), the strong control of the IUML over the local mosques and support of the clergy since the time of the *Mappila* rebellion was the main reason for IUML's dominance over the Muslims in Malabar (Nossiter 1986: 115). Despite major populist measures, the Communist Party was labeled as an anti religious party and this alienated a large section of religious believers from it. The first generation Communist Party leaders were also quite open about their atheism. This brought forth challenges in their public and private lives.²⁵ Moreover, the IUML leadership and a section of the Muslim clergy indulged in political propaganda about the "anti religious" nature of Communist Party. In their religious speeches, they described the 'sickle' of Communist Party as a weapon to kill god and the hammer to strike at the heads of believers

²⁵ Interview with Nalakath Nani on 15.08.2015 at Karulai.

(Muhammed 2001:192). They even said that the joining Communist Party would result in the “natural expulsion of Muslims” from Islam as communism negates religion.

The Muslim landlords and elite strongly stood against the Communist Party as they felt that its growth would impede their interests in future (Muhammed 2001:192). They extended their support to IUML and majority of its leaders came from either religious leadership (like *Thangal* family) or the community elite. The formation of a separate trade union by the IUML called Muslim Labor Union (now it is known as Swathanthra Thozhilali Union), also acted as a check against the *Mappila* working class joining the Communist Party (Ibid.). But the situation changed in the mid 1970s and *Mappila* Muslims started joining the party. This had an effect on the electoral performance of the party in subsequent years.

2.4 Social Shifts in Kerala Society in the 1970s

The shift in Indian politics in the late 1960s and 1970s had a profound influence on Kerala society as well. The split in the Congress party, evolution of identity based regional political parties, the problems of economic strategies of industrialization, 42nd and 44th constitutional amendments, declaration of emergency, growth of Bharatiya Jana Sangh and other right wing outfits and the split in CPI (M) and formation of CPI (ML) groups etc. were some of the prominent developments.

The split in the Congress party and the formation of the Kerala Congress, a party that was predominantly by Christians of Central Travancore was a major shift in the state politics of Kerala. The Christian churches had a deep influence on different factions of Kerala Congress. This intensified ‘minority politics’ in the state. The alliance of the CPI (M) with the IUML was another major political development. The formation of Malappuram district in 1969 by the CPI (M) lead government had set off an intense debate and political campaign by Jana Sangham. Emergence of the autonomous women, Dalit and environmental movements made the political arena more vibrant. The rising influence of minority groups in politics, the formation of Malappuram district and the

economic affluence of minority communities have helped the *Sangh Parivar* to make a social base among certain sections of majority Hindu community.

The large scale migration to the Gulf countries, Europe and North America had substantial influence on the socio-economic sectors of Kerala. Minority communities benefited from the first wave of migration. The economic mobility acquired through remittance resulted in the formation of a powerful middle class among the minority communities of the state. Later a section of majority community also gained through migration. Other than the economic affluence, the migration had socio-cultural impacts, especially on the status of women. The migration and the subsequent emergence of the middle class resulted in a shift in the socio-political landscape of Kerala. The following section will discuss two major social shifts in 1970s—caste and communal polarization and the emergence of the middle class.

2.4.1 Caste and Communal Polarization

“Modern Kerala presents us with a paradox: the state best known to the outside world for its association with communism is also a place where communalism had, arguably found its most political expression” (Chiriyankandath 1993:1). Religion at many points informed the social existence of Kerala society. The communal allegiance for political preferences has been a feature of Kerala politics since colonial period. Chiriyankandath (1993: 2) observes that people expressed their political preference on the basis of their caste and religious identities in the municipal elections held in the colonial period itself. The simultaneous existence of both communism and communalism in the pre independence state politics continued in the post independence period as well. Since 1959, neither the Congress party nor the communists succeeded in winning power without the support of at least one of the two biggest “communally” parties—the IUML and the Syrian Christian dominated Kerala Congress (except in 1987). Unlike other Indian states, minority communities enjoy a greater share in the state power in Kerala. Assertion of communal identity could help the minority communities to affirm their position in the political process of the state. Precisely, this was one of the base lines of the caste and communal politics of Kerala till 1980s which could be identified with the

caste and communal identity assertion in the Indian politics since late 1960s. The rising of caste, communal and political violence and the shocking criminalization of social life rudely shook the claims of Kerala society regarding the “essentially progressive character” of the state (See, Ramachandran 1995; Kunhahamed 2006).

Various developments since 1970s including the internal and external migration , mounting inequality within Kerala society (both in terms of class and caste), split in various caste and community organizations, emergence of right wing political parties and community organizations, Shah Bano case and subsequent legal actions, Mandal politics, demolition of Babri Masjid, western interference in the Arab world and its impact on the Muslims etc. resulted in a major shift in the orientation of caste and communal groups in state politics.

Since the early 1970s, both internal and external migration has resulted in an unparalleled affluence among minority communities in Kerala. Certain sections of the majority community also gathered from it. The socio-economic progress by the remittance economy improved the material condition of the minorities significantly. Now, Christian and Muslims occupy an undeniable role in the socio-economic sphere of the state owing a large number of educational and other institutions run by them. The political importance of both IUML and Kerala Congress groups in the coalition politics of the state helped the minorities to occupy key posts in the state administration as well. This has created a ‘jealous and suspicion’ among certain sections of the majority community. This economic inequality resulted in a polarization on communal and caste lines and the Hindu right wing organizations used for political gains.²⁶

²⁶ This feeling has been growing among the majority communities and various statements by the Hindu community organization leaders underline this fact. The statements by the Hindu Aikhya Vedi leaders like K.P. Sasikala and R.V. Babu are glaring examples. Interestingly, the suspicion is more towards the affluence of Muslims as the majority community feels it would question their very existence. Main reason for this lies in the global paranoid towards the Islam. This feeling is strong even among some of the Communist party members. One CPI (M) branch secretary from Malappuram district, 2 SFI activists from Trivandrum district shared the same feeling with the researcher in personal interviews with them. They pointed that their friends or neighbors who had same material condition like them have undergone ‘unbelievable’ changes in their life style and they are leading almost same material condition even now. Some others have even raised suspicion about the source of this wealth and even doubts ISI (Pakistan

The economic factor, which contributed to building power, social status and even security, occupied the nucleus of discourse for a long time. The economic mobility achieved by minority communities through migration was used by the Right wing forces to create paranoia among the majority community, especially among lower caste Hindus ('Sasikala Awakening Hindus in Kerala', www.ndtv.com accessed on 18.12.2018). The *Sangh Parivar* consciously utilized this to mobilize Hindu sentiments and alleged that the both LDF and UDF neglected the sentiments of the Hindu community (Radhakrishnan 2012). General paranoia towards the Muslim community resulted in the slow, but steady spread of the 'other' label. While past communal clashes were largely related to economic reasons, the current trend is to organize sustained attacks against the 'other' with the aim to generate feelings of communal hatred. Violence in Nadapuram (in Calicut district) in 2003 and 2015 underline this argument. Other than the bodily harm, there were organized attempts to destroy the material assets of Muslims in this violence.

Scholars like Oommen (1995) have argued that the "opportunism" displayed by major political parties also intensified caste and communal polarization in Kerala. By aligning with small splinter communal parties, the major political parties like CPI (M) and Congress party who could have played an important role in secularizing the political process also became participants in communalizations of social life. Consequently, the communal divide gets reinforced and the possibilities for secular platforms get narrowed in the political system (Oommen 1995:3).

2.4.2 Emergence of an Influential Middle Class

The emergence of a middle class also produced substantial shifts in Kerala society. The introduction of modern industries (mainly small scale industries) like cottage, textiles, coir, coconut etc. in the mid 19th century and the subsequent changes in the multiple forms of social relations resulted in the formation of a middle class in

Intelligence agency)'s role in this money. They also criticize political parties including CPI (M) for the 'unnecessary' promotion of these communities.

Not as explicit as minority/ majority syndrome, the same process is evident between the different groups in the same religion or even in the same caste. It is evident among Latins and Catholics among Christians and Nairs and Ezhavas among Hindus.

colonial Kerala. However, it was not a homogeneous group. Ganesh (2009) explains that the advancement of colonial education and modern industries resulted in the emergence of a new class (middle class) among different caste and community groups (Ganesh 2009:3). This newly formed class that emerged under the auspices of colonialism had both “residual and emergent features” and it had a “basic contradiction with the traditional working class who were oppressed both in the pre colonial and colonial economic relations” (Ibid.). Nevertheless, it was this middle class that led the various social reform movements against the “evil and decadent” practices of “pre modern society” formed by the caste and community regulations (see, Osella and Osella 2006; Ganesh 2009).

According to the National Sample Survey (2000), out of 240 million Indians belonging to the middle class, 16.7 million are in Kerala. The State accounted for only 3.1% of the country’s population but 6.9% of the middle class. However, the middle class has had a substantial impact upon the socio-political organizations and government agencies in policy matters. An analysis of leadership (especially youth) of socio-political organizations apparently revealed that majority were from middle class families. For example, the present DYFI leaders like, P. A. Muhammed Riyas (national committee president) A. N. Shamseer MLA (state president), M. Swaraj MLA (state secretary) or the leaders of Indian Youth Congress like Dean Kuriakose (state president), Hibi Eden MLA, Shafi Parambil MLA (state leaders) or the leaders of Muslim Youth League like P.K. Firos belong to middle class families. Same is the case with other organizations.

Many studies have looked at the emergence of a new middle class in India and its characteristics (see, Jhodka 2001; Fernandes 2006; Varma 2007; ADB 2010; Lahiri 2014; Krishnan 2017). Though there are not many studies on the nature of middle class in Kerala, the available literature affirmed that they follow the national pattern to a large extent (see, KSSP 2006; Ganesh 2009; Pillai 2016; Forsberg 2017). In the post independence period, the remittance from the “West” and “Gulf” mainly resulted in the formation of new middle class in Kerala. The consumption rate was higher among them and their economic roles were different from the traditional middle class, which

encompass government employees and teachers.²⁷ Majority of them had ideological commitment to market led development on one hand and to the institutions of democracy on the other, with the promise of equitable justice (Jhodka 2001:47). They argued for greater economic freedom and demanded efficiency and merit, instead of affirmative action in the market.

Even while supporting different political parties, they protected their interests and rallied behind the new social movements and caste organizations in the state. The leaders of all these new social movements and caste organizations mainly belong to the middle class. It is interesting to note that while the middle class referred to themselves as 'progressive', majority of them followed caste, communal and gender norms in public and private domains. Marriage ceremonies among middle class are a best example to illustrate this 'paradox'. This paradox is visible among all middle class groups in Kerala.

Realizing the potential of the middle class politics, all three major political fronts in Kerala- the LDF, UDF and NDA have oriented their politics towards the interests of the middle class to a large extent. The aspirations of middle class have received better attention from all political parties and also caste and community organizations in the state. The UDF led by the Congress party followed the path of "class pacification" (Ganesh 2009:5). It depended on religion and community organizations as their uniting force and these organizations have profound influence on the political and administrative decisions of the UDF governments. These groups have greater role in deciding different portfolios and government offices when the Congress party led governments come to power.

The Left political parties have had a different opinion of the middle class in the initial decades of Kerala formation. It was largely based on the conception of Karl Marx on the middle class. The Marxists understand the middle class as the social class below the ruling class and above the proletariat in the Marxist social schema and it they use it as a synonymous with the term "petty-bourgeoisie". Marx conceptualized the middle class

²⁷ The class that has emerged as a consequence of the impact of globalization is primarily engaged in the service sector and has been called as the 'New Middle Class'.

as a section without a future. He expected it to disappear along with the social evolutionary process. He theorized that a section of it would improve its condition and join the bourgeois and the rest, would join the working class ('Marx and Middle Class', www.marxists.org accessed on 03.04.2013).

However, statistical data reveals that instead of disappearing, the middle class was expanded in Kerala very fast and it started influence the socio-political, economical and cultural spaces significantly. The CPI (M) self critically admitted that the impact of Left ideology had declined among this section and there was a fundamental incongruity in the aspirations of this new middle class and the party's standpoints (CPM 2016:3). The party realized that the market and the middle classes significantly influenced social perceptions. It also realized that the middle classes were not interested in the kind of politics that the party like CPI (M) put forward.²⁸ This understanding has resulted in a shift in the political strategies of the party.

2.4.3 Impact of Social Shifts on Political Platforms

Large scale remittance from migrations since mid 1970s facilitated the emergence of a new middle class mainly among Muslims and Christian of Kerala. While the economic boom with the large amount of remittance resulted in the emergence of a new middle class and consequent changes in the socio-political, economic and cultural arena, this also resulted in the exclusion of a significant population including Dalits, tribes, and working class from the mainstream. These changes have had an impact upon the political platforms developing in the last three decades, mainly questioning the Left's hegemony (see, Ganesh 2009; Devika 2010).

²⁸ In its review of Lok Sabha election held in 2014, the CPI (M) said that the party could not attract the new generation voters and middle classes towards its politics. The Party counts this as one of the major reasons for its poor electoral performance (CPM 2014). In another document on middle class, the party self critically analyzed that despite its theoretical opposition to the trickledown economics, it failed to assess the gravity of its percolation and hence party's demands did not resonate with the aspirations of middle class. On this understanding, the CPI (M) put forward 13 points program to increase its strength among different section of middle classes (CPM 2016:4-5).

These changes had a perceptive impact on all political platforms developed since 1980s- on traditional political parties and also on the new platforms that were established. The state witnessed intense demonstrations against unemployment, issues of coastal people, land issues of Dalits and Adivasis, displacements for developmental projects etc in this period. For this, one section of marginalized finds the solutions in broad democratic struggles, and the other had tried to identify the issues in the framework of identity politics. Issues of various groups including tribals, Dalits, women and various community groups have articulated in terms of identity politics. Both the Right wing and the Left wing political parties had to negotiate with these positions (Ganesh 2009:5).

2.4.4 Impact of Social Shifts on the CPI (M)

The changes in the social, economical, cultural and political spheres have reoriented the agendas of Left politics in the state, especially of CPI (M). Kerala's development experience, popularly known as the 'Kerala model' could not produce expected results in the socio- economic fields. The Right wing's allegation on 'trade union militancy' by the Left trade union was well received by a significant section of Kerala society. This led the Left political leadership to rethink their political strategies.

Thomas Issac, the central committee member of CPI (M) and state finance minister and Kumar (1991) accepted this allegation partially and admitted that this had produced "stagnation" in the economic arena (Issac and Kumar 1991:2). They also pointed out that the stagnation in the Left agrarian movements (which was very active in 1960s and 1970s), "the degeneration of the coalition politics into the opportunistic manipulations of parties and groups and subsequent increase of corruption and nepotism" led to problems for the Left in Kerala. Also, the "degeneration" of political ethos at every level, the incapability of the Left struggles to materialize radical reforms added to the problems. This was compounded by the ascendancy of caste and communal organizations in the socio-economic and cultural sphere subsequently act as a major obstacle for the

growth of the Left politics in Kerala (Ibid.). They are of the opinion that the traditional Marxist analysis of agrarian structure had lost its validity in Kerala by the 1970s itself.²⁹

Minorities have a significant share in the state's population. Unlike the Hindu community, social reforms within the minority communities were relatively conservative in nature. Consequently, the hold of religious hierarchy and institutions and their "fundamentalist" interpretations of the religious tenets were very strong on the masses. The failure to make significant inroads into the minority communities proved to be a major weakness of the Left politics in Kerala. The "class" politics was not able to always fetch support of the minority communities. Hence a need was felt for a shift in strategy. The erosion of the hegemony that the Left enjoyed in the cultural sphere during the 1950s to 1960s especially in popular culture began to erode in the 1970s. This also prompted the Left to change its strategies of political mobilization (Ibid.).

The Left thus began exploring the different possibilities of expansion of its social base among minorities. Such an expansion of the support base needed a deviation from mobilizing the masses purely on the basis of "class". One of the strategies that the party has adopted is to forge alliance with community based political parties (secular in nature) for elections. A few of them were included in the LDF as well. Other than the assembly elections of 1987, the LDF has atleast one community based organizations in its front (Nossiter 1982; Gopakumar 2004).

As mentioned earlier, the economic remittance from migrations produced a significant middle class among minority communities in Kerala. The party also admits that it did not have substantial base among middle classes. As to address this lacuna, the party moved from a purely "working class and peasantry" oriented party to a "working class, peasantry and middle class" one which has apparently redefined its understanding of "class".³⁰ The formation of AIDWA to work among all sections of women and DYFI

²⁹ But this argument was denounced by a section of Left leadership itself. They believe that the agricultural workers and peasantry have significant role to play in the political process of contemporary Kerala society.

³⁰ CPI (M) units across the country have seen this shift. Javeed Alam (2002) explains this as the shift from "united front of left and democratic forces to secular democratic forces" (Alam 2002:290). Amritha Basu (2002) who studied the West Bengal unit of CPI (M) also saw this shift in the political orientation of the

to work among youth reflects this shift. Since its formation, these two organizations have greater role in determining the agendas of the party.

The first generation leaders of the party emerged from working class and peasantry. A.K. Gopalan, V. S. Achuthanandan, Susheela Gopalan, Paloli Muhammed Kutty etc. are a few examples. The present leaders of the party including the Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Polit Bureau members Kodayeri Balakrishnan, M. A. Baby, P. K. Srimathi teacher etc. entered the party through mass organizations like SFI, DYFI and AIDWA. This shows the influence of these organizations in the party. Situation is same at the central level of the party. Unlike the leaders like Jyothi Basu, Har Kishan Singh Surjit who joined party through peasants and working class movements, the present leaders like Sitharam Yechury, Prakash Karat and Brinda Karat joined party through students' front. They are also from either middle or upper class families. It is evident in the party membership in the state. In 2018, out of 463472 members, poor farmers represent only 6.26% in Kerala party (CPM 2018).

Further, this had reflected on the policy preferences of the LDF governments as well. For example, the LDF governments have taken favorable measures to establish self financing colleges (both professional and arts and science) in the state. The educational policy of the Left is to strengthen the public funded institutions and to set up more educational institutions in the government sector. Moreover, it opposes the privatization of higher education. But, since the students from middle class families are the major beneficiaries of these institutions and the party does not have an alternative to the increasing needs of higher education, the party has compromised its standpoint. Majority of these institutions are either managed by community organizations or individuals or trusts formed by middle class entrepreneurs.

party from a pure "class" mobilization to a broader "mass" mobilization (Basu 2002: 317-319). Menon (2001) observes that these shifts have reoriented Left politics from "radical political mobilization to egalitarian developmentalism".

2.4.5 Impact of Social Shifts on Muslim Politics

Remarkable shifts marked Muslim politics since 1970s. The rise of Abdu Nasar Madani (a firebrand religious leader), split in the IUML, emergence of fundamentalist organizations and political parties, and splits in many Muslim organizations resulted in major shifts in the pattern of Muslim politics in the state. The predominance that the IUML had over the Muslim politics weakened through these developments. The newly formed Muslim political parties and community organizations have tried to gather community support through the identity assertion and using provocative languages which were not the part of the Muslim mobilization (Karassery 2005, 2011; Chendamangalloor 2011). These organizations act as a catalyst in introducing new cultural practices like '*purdah*' which was not in practices among Malabar Muslims. A section of the community has moved towards the secular political parties like CPI (M) and the Congress party. They believe that only broader secular democratic platforms that adhere to the constitutional democracy could address the identity, security and material concerns of Muslims. They are also of the opinion that minority fundamentalism would strengthen the majority communalism in the country (Chennamangalloor 2011). Since the IUML support one section of Muslim community organizations in the intra community conflicts, the "rivals" have to approach either the CPI (M) for political support.

Another major impact on Muslim politics was the emergence of a 'new modernity' among the Muslims critiquing the "dominant perspective of Kerala/Malayali modernity". A section of academia understands it as "an alternative modernity that develops outside the western perspective" (see, Pandian 2002; Guru 2015). Largely influenced by the subaltern studies, this perception of Kerala/Malayali modernity stresses "the variegated negotiation of colonial modernity by subaltern subjects and communities in the region, which radically different from the dominant communities' engagement with modernity in its modalities, expectation, and experiences" (see, Bose and Varughese 2015). Hence, the dominant version of Kerala modernity is critiqued for the exclusion of the Dalits and certain other communities like Muslims and scholars like Gopal Guru

demands that those absent voices have to take into account. They question the representation of “upper caste traditions” as “Kerala tradition” (see, Pandian 2002). For example, the debate, whether *Onam* can be considered as the “national festival of Kerala” is part of this new discourse. Certain lower caste Hindu groups and Muslim community organizations argue that the *Hindutva* narratives of *Onam* have been significantly different from the images and experiences of lower caste Hindus, Adivasis, Muslims and Christians. (‘Onam and Right Wing Imagination’, [www. thewire.in](http://www.thewire.in) accessed on 11.11.2017). This marks to the “construction” of a new discourse on *Onam* by “deconstructing” the dominant perception. This trend is visible in many other aspects of socio-political lives of Kerala polity.

The Gulf migration and the emergence of new middle class among Muslims have played an important role in shaping this new modernity. Hence, it has overthrown the nation-region axis in the formation of modernity. The outward openness of the region (Malabar) and the population (Muslims) or the “globality of the region” is quite significant in understanding the new modernity put forwarded by certain sections of Muslims (see, Devika 2012). Consequently, the new modernity has a greater influence of Arab Islam than the indigenous local culture. This has introduced many new cultural practices among Muslims and also discouraged certain traditional Islamic practices like *Urus* and *Nercha* which is close to the indigenous local culture of the state.³¹ The Arabic terms are consciously used to describe the religious practices and beliefs instead of Malayalam terms which have been in practice for decades. For example, the Arabic term “*Eid*” is using instead of the Malayalam term “*Perunnal*” which has been using by the Kerala Muslims since its formation in Kerala. The Muslim community organizations like *Jamaat* and PFI and political parties like WPI and SDPI use this new modernity to advance their politics. They question the mainstream secular political parties [especially the CPI (M)] for imposing the “upper caste *Hindutva* culture” as the Kerala culture and

³¹ The transformation of popular Islam will be discussed in the Chapter 3.

branded them as perpetrators' of "soft *Hindutva*". Even a section of IUML supporters have succumbed to the discourse of new modernity.³²

But the empirical evidences manifest that, within the framework of this 'new modernity', what is happening is the revival of the orthodoxy which is alien to Kerala Muslims. 'Neo orthodoxy' is developing among Kerala Muslims that tries to disturb the advantages of modernity. For example, the new platforms established by the organizations like *Jamaat* and PFI give scope to Muslim women to come out and express their opinion and interests and also to be active in the public floors. But, this 'liberation' is possible only within the structures of patriarchy and women cannot question the larger patriarchal direction and orders from Muslim orthodoxy, Muslim community organizations and political parties. The CPI (M) understands this as "neo orthodoxy" and party considers it as its responsibility to struggle against these anti secular and ultra orthodoxy which goes against the principles of women emancipation.³³

2.5 Conclusion

The socio-political, economic and cultural changes since 1970s have significant influence on the political interactions between the CPI (M) and Muslims of Malabar. The social shifts in the Kerala polity since 1970s opened both opportunities and posed new challenges before the party. The emergence of a strong middle class among the Muslims necessitated the CPI (M) to change its standpoint on the middle class and subsequently the notion of the "class" itself. As a result strategies of Left politics refashioned itself in the state since early 1980s mainly to draw the support of the influential middle classes and also the various sections of the minority groups.

³² This will be discussed in chapter 5 in detail.

³³ Interview with A. Vijayaraghavan on 17.01.2018 at Thrissur.

Chapter III

Muslims of Kerala: Modes of Operations

3.1 Introduction

Islam is the second largest religion in India. According to the 2011 census, the total Muslim population of the country stands at 172.2 million (14.23% of total population) and it is estimated to be 184 million in 2016 ('Muslim population'. www.census2011.com accessed on 03.09.2016). Officially, India has the third largest Muslim population, next only to Indonesia and Pakistan (Ibid.). At the same time, it is important to note that Indian Muslims do not form a monolithic community, nor do they follow uniform practices (see, SCR 2006; Khalid 2006). Region, language and caste play an important role in this variety. Moreover, the nature of Islam's entry into the subcontinent was also highly diverse.

Islam's first contact with India took place in Kerala (Kodungallur in present Thrissur district) in the early 7th century AD (see, Aziz 1992; Bahauddin 1992; Engineer 1995; Sikand 2007). This was through the traders from West Asia. But in north, it came through conquerors and their armies from the present central Asia and Afghanistan (Vazhakkunnam 2011:9). Sufism also played an important role in the evolution of Islam in subcontinent (Islam 2004). Sufi Islam's influence on rural India helped to strengthen the cultural and religious roots of Indian Muslims by interlinking local traditions and customs with Islamic beliefs and practices (Gottschalk 2005:22). This has profoundly influenced the evolution of an 'Indianized version of Islam'. Though Islam as a religion emerged in the Arab world, Indian Muslims have developed their version of Islam over a period of time. Many of their religious and cultural practices are similar to their Hindu counterparts than those of Arab Muslims.

The objective of this chapter is not to generate a history of the evolution of Islam in the subcontinent. Rather the focus is on the Muslim community in one regional location, namely, Kerala. The particular focus of this chapter is to explain the socio-economic,

cultural and political dynamics of Kerala Muslims. This discussion will help to understand the diffusion of Islam's religious traditions in Kerala and the formation of distinct religious practices in the region and how it has changed over the period of time. The profile of different Muslims community organizations and Muslim political parties is discussed in detail to understand their support base and socio-political standpoints. Since the mainstream Muslim community organizations and Muslim political parties do not represent women adequately, this chapter offers a separate discussion on the profile of Muslim women in Kerala. The chapter ends with a detailed note on the transformation of Muslim community over the period of time in Kerala. This discussion is in the background of factors explained in the Chapter 2.

3.2 Kerala Muslims: Evolution and Expansion

Asghar Ali Engineer, in his introduction to his edited work, *Kerala Muslims: A Historical Perspective* (1995), rightly emphasizes that the Muslim community of India is not a monolithic community, and that any attempt to project the community such is only for purposes of political propaganda (Engineer 1995:1-2). Muslims of India have their regional, linguistic and cultural specificities, and there are inter-sectarian differences in the way Islam is propagated and practiced by Indian Muslims. While Kerala Muslims mainly follow *Shafi'* (following the Imam Shafi's school of jurisprudence), the Kashmiri Muslims and certain north Indian Muslims follow the *Hanafi* (following the Imam Abu Hanifa's school of jurisprudence) school.

The way Islam entered the state of Kerala was different from that of north India. Miller (1992) has argued that Islam reached India through Kerala and the Kerala Muslims are the descendants of the first generation of Indian Muslims (Miller 1992:39). Unlike north India, Islam in Kerala grew peacefully and steadily as "a calm movement" (ibid). Even the process of Islamic proselytization happened in a relatively peaceful manner (Koya 1983: 1-2). Moreover, Islam spread without any political support here (Bahauddin 1992: 18). The factors which helped the expansion of Islam in the state were the peculiar geographical location of the region, the economic benefits that the Muslim traders

brought through their trade with Arabs, the caste system prevailed among Hindus and the consequent social oppression at that point of time (Ibid.).

Kerala Islam has certain specific features that differentiate it from Muslim communities in the rest of the country. There is a large Muslim middle class in Kerala. The remittance from migration and general socio-economic progress the state of Kerala achieved has resulted in the formation of middle class among Kerala Muslims. They are well integrated into political and social spheres. Other than secular political parties like CPI (M) and Congress party, the active Muslim political parties and community organizations play an important role in the socio-political integration of Kerala Muslims. Also, Kerala Muslims are a well embedded part of civil society.

The approach and standpoint of Kerala Muslims towards the partition of the Indian sub continent played an important role in the location of Kerala Muslims in a specific socio-economic and political situation. The partition affected the north Indian Muslims significantly, while it did not have substantial impact on Muslims in south India (Sikand 2007). Miller (1992) argues that, while it has been noted that “the Muslims of North India were politically divided and weakened” following the partition, Muslims in Kerala (especially middle class) “steadily grew in the post-Partition period, especially due to the Gulf boom from the 1970s onwards” and later “played a key role in mobilizing the Muslims as a strong, effective force” to be taken seriously by various political parties ((Miller 1992: 174). In this backdrop, a look at the intra community nuances and the social base of each group among Kerala Muslims is crucial to take the study forward.

3.3 Intra Community Dimensions of Kerala Muslims

The Muslims of Kerala, based on theological difference between them, can be grouped into three broad categories- *Sunnis*, *Mujahids* and followers of *Jamaat-e-Islami*.³⁴ A small minority follows the tenets of *Tablighi Jamaat* (henceforth *Tabligh*). Another section is the *Ahmadi* community though it is not considered as “Muslims” by

³⁴ Certain scholars argue that all these three groups belong to the *Sunni* branch of Islam. The *Sunni* referred here are identified by their practices and strict adherences to the *Shafi Madhab*. The two movements- *Mujahids* and *Jamaat* are considered as the movements within the *Sunni* Islam (Nair 2016).

mainstream Muslim sects. However, Indian law regards *Ahmadis* as Muslims. A landmark rule by the Kerala High Court in 1970 upheld their legal status as Muslims. But they were not allowed to sit on the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, which is regarded in India as the ‘official’ representative body of Indian Muslims. Though there is no available statistics on the numbers of followers of each sect, a majority of Kerala Muslims are *Sunnis*. *Sunnis* also claim a moral prominence in religious matters. They consider *Mujahid*, *Jamaat*, *Ahmadi* community and *Tabligh* as ‘*Puthan Prasthanakkar*’ or new group and many *Sunnis* do not consider them as ‘real Muslims’.³⁵

The ideological articulations of the *Mujahid* sect stem from the 19th and early 20th century impulses that challenged the then popular version of Islam (Vazhakkunnan 2008:35). *Mujahids* saw themselves as ‘reformist’ because of their favorable attitude towards modern education and their emphasis on *Ijithihad* (independent reasoning) to apply *madhab* (traditional Islamic jurisprudence) to understand the contemporary social conditions. On the other hand, *Sunnis* are labeled as ‘anti reformists’/ ‘traditionalists’ due to their inclination towards local customs and rituals in the name of ‘traditional Islamic practices’ (ibid). This was considered as ‘unislamic’ by *Mujahids*.

Over a period of time, the reformist movements among the Muslim community took the form of urban “modernism /reformism” (Osella 2007). This gap between the urban “modernism/reformism” and rural “traditionalism/conservatism” was bridged, to some extent, by several factors including the emergence of the IUML (Ibid.). Certain sections of *Sunnis* like A P *Sunnis* oppose many of the reformist agendas of *Mujahids* stating it as “against *Sharia*”.³⁶ However, the strong reformist nature of Kerala society and active social reform movements among Hindus and Christians has profoundly influenced the growth of these movements among Kerala Muslims, especially among the educated middle class. At the same time, it needs to be mentioned that there is no

³⁵ Many *Sunnis* do not greet the *Mujahids* and *Jamaat* in the usual way of Islamic greetings. According to Islamic principles, when a Muslim meet the another Muslim, the one has to wish the other by ‘*Assalamualaikkum*’ (“may the God’s peace upon you”) and other has to reply ‘*Valaikkumussalam*’ (“same to you”). Earlier, marriage was uncommon between these sects. But, there are changes brought about by political factors.

³⁶ Interview with Abdurahman, A P *Sunni* faction activist on 30.04.2014 at Nilambur.

difference on basic Islamic tenets like *namaz*, *zakaat*, fasting, and pilgrimage among these two sects.

There were no formal organized socio-political or religious Islamic movements in 18th or 19th centuries. The formation of *Sunnis* and *Mujahids* as organized movements constitute a major departure in the socio-economic, cultural and political life of Muslims of Kerala. The *Mujahid* movement emerged in the state as an organized group that promotes reformism among Kerala Muslims under the banner of Muslim *Aikhya Sangham* in 1920s. The *Jamaat* also emerged as a movement in the beginning of 1950s. The *Sunnis* of the state has a different trajectory of evolution. Since a majority Muslims rallied behind *Sunnis*, they did not feel a necessity to form an organized movement. Moreover, the local mosques and clergy had control over them. Hence, they were not an organized community like *Mujahids* or *Jamaat*. But an organized *Sunni* movement ‘Samastha Kerala Jamiyyatul-Ulama’ was formed in 1926 to counter the challenges put forwarded by the organized *Mujahid* group. The diverse views on the question of reform and revival act as a catalyst in this process. Differences in many practices of religion also marked an important area of contestation between the two sects. The following section will discuss the profile of each Muslim community organization in detail.

3.4 Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham

The emergence of Muslim community organizations started mainly with the Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham (henceforth, the *Aikya Sangham*), the first well organized reformative movement in Kerala. It was established at Kodungallur (in the present Thrissur district) in 1922, with the effort of stalwarts like K.M. Seethi Sahib (1898-1961), K.M. Maulavi (1873-1932), E.K. Maulavi and E. Moidu Maulavi (1886-1995) etc (Kunj 1989: 45). All of them were leading Islamic scholars of their time. The main aim of *Aikya Sangham* was to initiate reforms among the Muslim community, particularly in social, religious and educational fields (ibid). The leaders of *Aikya Sangham* were influenced by the ‘reformative’ ideals of Muhammed Ibn Abdul Wahab, a religious leader and theologian from Central Arabia (1703-1792) and Jamaluddin Afgani, an Islamic ideologist who advocated ‘Pan Islamism’ (1839-1897). It later helped the formation of

Mujahid or *Salafi* movement in Kerala. The *Aikya Sangham* started its operations in the name of *Nikshpaksha Sangham* (impartial group) in its earlier days to settle the disputes among the wealthy Muslim families (Maulavi 1997:113).

The Muslim community leadership was in the hands of clergy who were against modern education such as *Othupally* (for elementary religious education) and *Dars* (for higher education) were the only centers of education for Muslims. It was in this context, - that the *Aikya Sangham* evolved the following aims and objectives for its work (Samad 1998: 81-2)

- (a) Unity and general welfare of Muslim community,
- (b) The promotion of modern secular education including women's education and to purge the community from of prevalent superstitious beliefs,
- (c) Settlement of various disputes within the Muslim community, and reforming the religious and moral space by removing anti-Islamic practices

To strengthen the religious activities of the *Aikya Sangham*, the Kerala Jamiyyatul Ulama (henceforth, the KJU) was formed in its 2nd annual conference at Alwaye (present Aluva in Ernakulam district) in 1924. In its early phase of formation, it was admired by the *Ulama* (religious leaders who are expert in religious affairs) from both orthodox and reformist sects. In 1926, a group of *Ulama* disassociated themselves from the ideology of KJU and formed the Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (henceforth, the SKJU). It was the first ideological division within Muslim community of Kerala. This was followed by many divisions on political and ideological grounds (Maulavi 1997:113-27).

The SKJU was dissolved in its 12th annual conference in 1934 and merged with KJU (Ibid.). However, the inspiration and guidance from the *Aikya Sangham* paved the

way for the formation of many Muslim organizations in Kerala, mainly *Mujahid* groups along with other socio- educational organizations.³⁷

3.4.1 *Mujahids* or *Salafis*

Mujahid is the second major Muslim group among Kerala Muslims in terms of number of followers (Jabbar 2001). The history of Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen (henceforth, the KNM), which was established on 20th April 1950, is directly related to the *Aikya Sangham*. K.M. Maulavi³⁸ was the first president of KNM and it was through his efforts that the *Mujahid* movement developed in Kerala. The main motto of the organization was to return to *Quran* and *Sunnah* (the Prophet Muhammed's precepts) and fight against *Shirk*³⁹ (KNM Souvenir 2006).⁴⁰ The KJU is the umbrella organization of the *Mujahids* in Kerala. This body is considered as the apex body on religious affairs of *Mujahid* groups in Kerala and its headquarters is in Calicut. However, the KNM is the public face of *Mujahids* in the state.

According to the KNM, the *Islahi* Movement of Kerala (*Mujahids* describe their movement as *Islahi* movement) "is a reformist organization with the goals of fighting prejudice, priesthood dependency, and polytheism, in essence attempting to remove the influence of Hinduism and non-Islamic native cultures on Kerala Muslims" ('KNM', <http://blue2rose.blogspot.in>. accessed on 11.01.2016). The influence of local cultures on the Muslims was questioned by *Mujahids* and they often described such activities by *Sunnis* as *Shirk* (Ibid.). The *Mujahid* movement was an "expression of struggle across the Islamic world to oppose the influence of European reform and renaissance movements starting from late 17th century" (Formation', www.knm.org accessed on 12.01.2006).

³⁷ *Sunnis* are of the opinion that *Aikya Sangham* cannot be considered as the reformist movement as it only created division among the Muslims. *Samastha E K Sunni* faction, Cherusseri Sainudheen Musliyar in an article argued that the *Aikya Sangham* introduced many practices that are against the *Sharia* (Chandrika News paper, 18 July 2012).

³⁸ Tayyil Muhammed kutty Maulavi also Known as K.M. Maulavi (1886-1964) was born in Malabar region of the then Kerala. After the Malabar Rebellion, he escaped to Kochi. He later joined the activities of *Aikya Sangham* and KJU. He was the first president of KNM in 1950 (Jabbar 2001).

³⁹ In Islam, *Shirk* means the "sin" of practicing polytheism and idolatry

⁴⁰ *Mujahids* were under the impression that *Sunnis* have diluted the Islam with inducting local culture into it. Many practices like *Uroos* that the *Sunnis* follow were practiced by neither Prophet Muhammad nor his followers. This was the precise reason behind this objective.

The organization claims that “the socio- cultural, educational and religious activities of KNM enhances the Kerala Muslim renaissance, and enables the community to create its own characteristics and peculiarities that distinguish them from other Muslim communities in India” (KNM Souvenir 2006).⁴¹

The KNM established a youth movement named Ithihadu Shubbanil Mujahideen (henceforth, the ISM), in 1967 to strengthen its activities among the youth. The Mujahid Students Movement (henceforth, the MSM) works among students, and Muslim Girls and Women Movement (henceforth, the MGM) works among girls and women. The formation of separate girls and women’s organizations constitute a major difference between the *Sunni* and *Mujahid* working styles. *Al-Manar* (The Light House) and *Shabab* (The Youth) are the two publications run by *Mujahid* groups in Kerala and can be considered as mouthpieces of the organization. Compared with their *Sunni* counterparts, *Mujahids* were prominent in promoting modern education among both men and women (Ibid.). The *Mujahid* leadership set up the two major Arts and Sciences Colleges in the Malabar region of the state- Farook College (established in 1948) in Calicut district and Sullamusalam College (established in 1995) in Malappuram district. These two colleges have become leading Arts & Science colleges in the region.

The initiation of delivering *Juma Khutuba* (Friday prayer) in the local language, Malayalam, was another major step taken by the movement. It encouraged women’s education and their attendance in mosques, published *Quran* translations and religious books in Malayalam, and started the centralized distribution of *Zakat* fund to the poor and needy.⁴² *Mujahids* also promotes religious education in the local language.

⁴¹ Though this statement may be contested, the efforts by the organization to enhance modern education, especially among Muslim girls have helped the community to acquire a better share in the public domain in terms of employment and other institutional support. The organization has also started publication of Islamic texts in the local language which helps it to reach the literate Muslims in Kerala.

⁴² The *Sunnis* in Kerala do not promote Friday prayers in the local language or women’s entry in to mosques. Kerala had witnessed an intense debate between the *Sunnis* and *Mujahids* over these issues. These standpoints gave a “reformist” image to the *Mujahids* and “conservative” for *Sunnis* in the state. But the latest positions of *Mujahids* on many issues have been questioned by secular voices within and outside the community (‘KNM’, <http://blue2rose.blogspot.in>. accessed on 11.01.2016).

The KNM witnesses a major split in 2002. The main reason for the split was a difference of opinion among its leadership. After split, all organizations use the same name for their organizations to claim the legacy of the movement. Hence it is often difficult to identify the differences between the activities of each group. Like *Sunnis*, the differences of opinion between young and old generation leaders acted as the major cause for the split. The 'official wing' was under T.P. Abdulla Koya Madani as president and the splinter group was 'Madavur' fraction led by Husain Madavur, the then youth leader. The 'official' group underwent another split in 2010 when a set of leaders under Hussain Salafi were expelled from the movement for both organizational and ideological issues. Difference of opinion on some *Sharia* issues resulted in this split and the open violation of organizational principles resulted in the expulsion of these leaders. Later they formed their own movement to propagate their version of Islam.

Factors like the "Gulf boom" played an important role in the formation of a support base for *Mujahid* groups in Kerala. With the gulf boom that took place since the 1970s, the reformist movements came to rely upon *Wahabism*⁴³ and *Salafism*⁴⁴ for funding and organizing power. It resulted in urban support base for organizations like KNM and KJU. The promotion of women education, religious literature in vernacular language and Friday prayer in Malayalam etc. attracted a section of educated youth to the movement. They belong to both lower and middle class of Malabar. Since women are allowed to attend prayer in the mosque, it has fetched support from a section of women as well. The organization like MSM and MGM organize activities in certain colleges of northern Kerala and this has fetched attention to its activities from different sections of student community. It is interesting to note that they are more active in professional colleges than the Arts and Science colleges and hence it strengthens the middle class base

⁴³ *Wahhabism* was introduced by a late nineteenth century Arab dates grower named Abdul ibn Wahhab who set certain rules consisting of rigid religious practices, dehumanization of women, promoting sectarianism in the name of puritanical Islam (Hussain 2013).

⁴⁴ *Salafism* is an ultra conservative reform movement within Islam that developed in Arabia in the first half of 18th century, against the backdrop of colonialism (Esposito 2004:275). *Salafism* advocated a return to the traditions of the "devout ancestors" (the *Salaf*). The *Salafist* doctrine can be summed up as taking "a fundamentalist approach to Islam, emulating the Prophet Muhammad and his earliest followers – *al-salaf al-salih*, the 'pious forefathers'. They reject religious innovation, or *bid'ah*, and support the implementation of *sharia*, Islamic law" (Esposito 2004:275)

of the organization. It is also to be noted that major activists of movement do not design themselves to any particular political party as the organization hesitates to demonstrate its strength politically.

A majority of the *Mujahids* support IUML in the state. A small section supports the Congress party and CPI (M) as well. Many IUML leaders are also active in the *Mujahid* movement. The excess influence of the *Mujahids* in IUML was creating tensions between the IUML and E K *Sunni* (who are the major support base of IUML) faction for quite some time ('IUML v/s E K *Sunnis*', www.doolnews.com accessed on 15.01.2016). The 'over' influence of 'official' *Mujahid* group on IUML created tensions among the 'Madavur' faction. A set of their activists supported the LDF in the 2014 general elections and the state assembly election held in 2016. They are of the opinion that the Congress party cannot resist *Sangh Parivar* in Kerala and they are optimistic on the activities of CPI (M) in this direction.⁴⁵

3.5 *Sunnis* in Kerala

A majority of Kerala Muslims are *Sunnis*. The first official *Sunni* movement in Kerala was SKJU. The split in the *Aikya Sangham* in 1926 resulted in the formation of SKJU with 40 members *Mushavara* (a top religious consultative body). The main aim of the organization was to prevent people from taking to the *Wahabist* (new ideologues) routes, which according to it are far from *Thowhid* - the actual Islamic path, according to *Sunnis* (Maulavi 1997:113). The *Ulama* felt the need to organize, to defend and protect Kerala's Islamic tradition and to wage a revivalist movement against the new interpretations by *Wahabi* groups (Engineer 1975: 74).

Sunnis considered themselves as the real followers of Islam, who followed the ideals of *Ahle-Sunnah-wal-Jamaat* (basic principles of Islam). They have focused more on religious education.⁴⁶ To meet this end they constituted their official educational wing known as Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidyabhyasa Board, on 19th March, 1951

⁴⁵ Personal interview with Kabir, ISM activist on 15.06.2014 at Nilambur.

⁴⁶ The situation is changing now as different *Sunni* groups have started to run modern educational institutions ranging from primary schools to private universities.

(*Samastha* Souvenir 1985:56-60). The Souvenir that was published by *Samastha* in 1985 can be considered as the official document of the history of the *Sunni* movements in Kerala. This was published by *Samastha*'s state committee in connection with the 60th anniversary of the movement. In 1986, movement faced a major split and hence this document published in 1985 is considered to contain the official history of first six decades of the movement. The *Samastha* faced many minor splits in the initial decades itself. A fraction of members organized the Akhila Kerala Jam-Iyyatul-Ulama in 1966 and Kerala Samstana Jamiyyatul-Ulama under Sadaquatulla Maulavi, as a counter force against their mother organizations. The Muslim Modern Aged Society by Chekannur Maulavi was another fraction where the split from *Samastha* (*Samastha* Souvenir 1985). These were not viewed as major issues among *Sunnis* and they continued their operations against *Wahabist* and *Jamaat-e- Islami* smoothly till 1985.

Major differences emerged in *Samastha* on its 60th anniversary celebration in 1985. Members in *Mushavara* were divided into two groups; 29 members under the leadership of E.K. Abubacker Musliyar⁴⁷ (the then general secretary) and the rest under the leadership of A. P. Abubacker Musliyar (the then youth leader).⁴⁸ The former group is known as E K *Sunnis* and the latter as A P *Sunnis*. Rather than ideology, it was the problems among the leadership on different socio-political issues that ultimately resulted in the split in *Samastha*. In the aftermath of the split, both groups accused the other for the split in the movement. The E K faction argued that it was the rebels under A P Kanthapuram who conspire against the leadership and used the organization for their personal benefits. The conference of youth movement was organized without the consent of major group (Faizy 1996: 44-7). The A P faction argued that E K *Sunnis* tried to tie the

⁴⁷ E.K Abubacker Musliyar, also known as *Shamsul Ulama* (Moon among their religious scholars) (1914-1996) was a leading figure in the Islamic movement of Kerala. He was born to a Yemeni family, east Kozhikode, in the village of Paranbekadav, in 1914. After completing his studies, he became active in *Samstha* activities in Kerala. He was elected *Samastha* general secretary in 1957 and continued in the post till his death. An ideologue of movement, he was the leading figure in the campaign against *Salafis*, *Jamaat-e-Islaami* and Christianity ('E K Abubacker Musliyar', www.skssf.in accessed on 10.01.2016).

⁴⁸ Kanthapuram A P Abubacker Musliyar also known as Sheikh Abubacker Musliyar (1939-present) is the general secretary of All India Muslim Scholars Association and founder and Chancellor of *Jamia Markazu Ssaquafathi Sunniya*, Karanthur, Calicut. He is a leading figure in the Islamic educational activism in the country. ('About Sheikh', www.SheikhAbubackerAhmad.org, accessed on 10.01.2016).

movement in the ‘tail’ of IUML for their vested political interests and it was against the principals of *Sunnis* and Islam (Musliyar 2001: 77-115).

Both organizations have invested heavily in the educational sector. *Pattikkad Jamia-Nooriyya Islamiyya*, *Chemmad Darul Huda Islamic Academy* by E K *Sunnis* and *Markazu Saquafati Sunniyya* in Calicut, *Ma’din academy*, Malappuram by A P *Sunnis* are prominent among the education institutions functioning in Kerala. Under *Markaz* there are several educational institutions for both religious and secular education. Officially both these organizations have registered their names separately as Samasta Kerala Jam-Iyyatul Ulama and Samasta Kerala Jam-Iyyatul Muallimin, of E K and A P respectively.

Both the groups have separate annual conferences to exhibit their strengths and enhance their support. Both groups have sub organizations to enroll youth and students. As mentioned before, none of these organizations have women or girls’ organizations affiliated to it. They also organize numerous programs to exhibit their support base and organizational strength. The post-split history of the *Sunnis* is marked by the intra-*Sunni* conflicts that have resulted in the loss of many lives. As both sides have defined political affiliations, the difference between have often turned violent.

3.5.1 E K *Sunni* Faction

The E K faction of *Sunnis* functions under the banner of SKJU, formed in 1926 at Calicut. The organization claims itself to be the largest Muslim organization in the state of Kerala in terms of number of followers and institutions (‘Islamic Organizations’, www.keralaislamcinstitutes.com accessed on 11.01.2016). Sayyid Muhammad Jifri Muthukkoya Thangal and K. Alikutty Musliyar respectively are the present president and general secretary of the organization. A 40 member *Mushavara* acts as the ultimate decision making body of the organization.

The activities of the movement were lead by a 40-member *Mushavara* or working committee. Members were and continue to be elected on the basis of their scholarship in Islam, religious piety, faithfulness and devoutness. More than 30 colleges function under

SKJU in Kerala. Most of these institutions educate the students in both religious and non religious areas of education while a few concentrate only on religious education (Ibid.). The organization also runs a wide range of publications aimed at readership from all sections of the community including children and senior citizen. *Suprabhatham* is the Malayalam daily newspaper published under the SKJU. Even though, Muslim women have no representation in the organization, SKJU publishes '*Kudumbam*' (family) for women and other members of the family.

The SKJU functions through separate feeder organizations for each section of the community. The Sunni Yuvajana Sangham (henceforth, the SYS) works among the youth. Though the organization is primarily meant for youth, normally both youth and older people have membership in this. The main objective is to give an organizational setup for the *Samastha* at the grass root level ('SYS', www.skssf.in accessed on 10.1.2016). The Samastha Kerala Sunni Students Federation (henceforth, the SKSSF) works among the senior students). Though the organization is primarily meant for students, normally membership is given to young people as well. The SKSSF has been actively involved in all community related issues and struggling for their rights. In fact, the SKSSF is the face of E K *Sunnis* faction in the public through a wide range of activities across the state ('Organization', www.skssf.org accessed on 10.01.2016). These two are the major organizations of the E K *Sunnis* in the state. Other than this, the Samastha Kerala Sunni Bala Vedi (henceforth, the SKSBV) functions among the children, the Samastha Kerala Jam'iiyyathul Mu'allimeen (henceforth, the SKJM) works for the welfare of *Madrassa* teachers, the Samastha Kerala Sunni Mahallu Federation (henceforth, the SKSMF) is an association of the *Mahallu* federation and the *Samastha Kerala Islamic Education Board* coordinates more than 10,000 Madrasas run by the group.

The organization follows a flexible organizational set up and the local leadership largely resides with local feudal families (Ashley 2017). Entirely assimilated to the local way of life, their organizational structure exhibits all the possibilities and confinements of the local culture of the state. E K *Sunnis* may be among the very few organizations that

are the least funded from abroad (Ibid.). Their support mainly comes from the lower-class Muslims engaged in small scale business, agriculture workers and farmers. Though they do not have any role, sizable section of Muslim women who are mainly home makers support the E K *Sunnis*. But these women participate in the religious activities organize by different groups of the movement. For example, these organizations conduct “Islamic study class” for Muslim women occasionally at local levels. Women also can participate in the public religious talks conducted by the organizations, but are not allowed to sit with the men and often a curtain/wall separate both men and women in such programs. At the same time, the majority of traditional Muslim elites also support the E K *Sunnis*. Gulf migration and modern education built a new middle-class support base for the E K *Sunnis* which are reflected in the institutional expansion of the E K *Sunni* organizations.

The E K *Sunnis* form a major support base of the IUML in Kerala. Most often, the leadership of SYS, SKSSF, and SKJU are also the leaders of IUML at different levels. For decades, the post of the president of IUML state committee is ‘reserved’ for the members of the *Panakkad* family, who are also the president of SKJU or SYS. Now, several youth and student leaders have also emerged from this family. The present president of IUML, Panakkad Hyder Ali Shihab Thangal is a prominent member of *Samastha Mushavara*, the ultimate decision making body of the movement. But the influence of *Mujahids/Salafis* on the socio-political decisions of IUML has resulted in tensions between the IUML and *Samastha* leadership. Certain SKSSF leaders have come up against IUML publicly on this. E K *Sunnis* have also expressed their anger towards UDF governments (of which IUML is a major constituent) for what they see as the negligence of the Muslim community (‘E K *Sunni* and IUML’, www.doolnews.com accessed on 15.01.2016).

3.5.2 A P *Sunni* Faction

The A P faction of *Sunnis* also functions under the banner of Samastha Kerala Sunni Jamiyyathul Ulama also known as All India Muslim Scholars Association (henceforth, the Jamiyyathul Ulama). The organization was formed in 1985 at Calicut when AP Kanthapuram and other *Samastha* members were expelled from SKJU

(‘Organization’, www.kanthapuram.org accessed on 25.3.2015). AP Kanthapuram is the current general secretary of the organization.

The activities of the A P *Sunni* faction is led by a body called Sunni Yuvajana Sangham (henceforth, the SYS) (‘About Organization’, www.syskerala.com accessed on 25.03.2015). Like the E K faction, the A P faction’s SYS also claims that the movement was formed in 1954. However, the organization claims that its activities in the post 1985 (after split) made the organization biggest Islamic movement in the country (Ibid.). The SYS has also formed units in the states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal and Gujarat. The SYS is also active in the social service programs across the country. They build houses, hospitals, schools etc. in the Muslim populated areas in many states. The A P *Sunnis* built mosques across the country, especially in those places where Islam and Muslim community organizations have a limited presence (Musliyar 2014:35-45).

The Sunni Students Federation (henceforth, the SSF) is the students’ wing of the movement. The organization is active both at the local level and in the campuses in Muslim pockets of the state. The organization also has units in other states of the country. Though the organization is primarily meant for students, like SKSSF, membership is mainly given to Muslim youth. Different organizations for the children (Sunni Bala Sangham), religious teachers (Samastha Kerala Sunni Matha Vidhyabhyasa Board) etc. are affiliated to the A P *Sunnis*. These organizations run periodicals and publishing houses focusing different sections of Kerala Muslims. A Malayalam news paper called *Siraj* is also run by them.

Like the E K *Sunni* faction, the major base of A P *Sunnis* is also working class Muslims. They also receive support of the Muslim women who do not have any role in the organizational structures of the movement. But these women participate in the religious activities organize by different groups of the movement. Unlike E K *Sunni* faction, A P *Sunnis* do not have the support of the local Muslim elite families. In fact, many a times their activities are opposed by these families. They emerged as a force that

questions the prominence of these elite Muslim families in the local administration of mosques and other religious activities.

The impact of Gulf migration resulted in the formation of a new middle class among the support base of A P faction. The organization is remarkably supported by the wealth generated by the Gulf migration. This has helped them to have a better organizational and institutional mechanism than the E K *Sunnis*. A Majority of big institutions established by *Sunnis* in the last three decades are run by the A P *Sunnis*. Their leader, AP Kanthapuram is well connected throughout the Arabian Peninsula and even in certain regions of the West. The money generated through these networks is used to develop both religious (mosque) and secular (educational and health) institutions within and outside Kerala.

A majority of the members of A P *Sunnis* support CPI (M) and Left politics in the state. A small section supports the Congress party. Due to their support to CPI (M) and LDF, the A P *Sunnis* are also known as ‘sickle *Sunnis*’ [sickle is the electoral symbol of CPI (M)]. But the organization does not keep a permanent political association with any political party. The A P faction also tried to associate with the IUML, but it was not materialized due to the opposition from both sides.⁴⁹ Recently, A P *Sunnis* has formed a new organization named ‘Muslim *Jamaat*’ to deal with political affairs. However, the organization does not contest in elections unlike certain other Muslims organizations like Welfare Party of India (henceforth, WPI) formed by *Jamaat-e-Islami* and SDPI formed by the PFI.

The Muslim *Jamaat* claims itself to be an organization that represents the interests of all sections of Muslims. According to AP Kanthapuram, “the organization is not a political party that has direct political roles, but at the same time, it will intervene in

⁴⁹ E K *Sunnis* constitute the major support base of IUML and they do not allow any political alliance with A P *Sunnis*. It is interesting to note that the E K *Sunnis* do not have any problem in IUML’s association with *Mujahid* or *Jamaat* groups whom they do not consider as ‘pure Muslims’. The E K *Sunnis* also stood against the UDF government’s support to A P *Sunnis* in different matters. This has created a major hindrance before IUML to develop an association with A P faction. On the other hand, majority of CPI (M) supporters in A P *Sunni* faction are also against organizations’ alliance with IUML or UDF.

politics if the rights of Muslim minorities are not protected by the ruling classes and mainstream political parties” (‘Muslim *Jamaat* and Politics’, www.keralaonlinenews.com accessed on 10.01.2016). He has also criticized IUML for its political positions that support certain sections of the community, especially E K *Sunnis* and *Salafi* groups.

3.6 Jamaat-e-Islami

The *Jamaat-e-Islami* was formed by Abul Ala Maududi (henceforth, Maududi) in Lahore in pre partition India on 26 August 1941 (Ahmad 1992). Being an Islamic scholar, Maududi was under the impression that Muslims had abandoned “pure Islam” and became corrupted through their “Un Islamic” life (Siddiqui 1978: 25). He communicated this to his fellow Islamic scholars and the support from a section of them encouraged him to form the movement (Naushad 2009). Maududi formed *Jamaat*, with himself as its *Amir* (chief leader), and stated the pursuit of '*Hukumat-e-Ilahiya*', an Islamic state as its goal (Ibid.). Later, the objective was changed to '*Tkamathudheen*' which means the establishment of an Islamic way of life in all aspects of one's existence (Karappanchery 2010). The Kerala unit of the *Jamaat* was formed by V. P. Muhammadali Sahib in 1948 (1912-59) (see, Ali 1992; Kunchimuhammad 1992). The Kerala unit of *Jamaat* has its working units in every district of the state. It has committees from local panchayat to state level.

Programs organized by the Solidarity Youth movement, the Students Islamic Organization (henceforth, the SIO), the Girls Islamic Organization (henceforth, the GIO) and Fraternity Students Movement which are part of the *Jamaat* movement attract considerable support to it, especially youth and students. A new organization named Fraternity Students Movement (formed on 30 April, 2017) was established by *Jamaat* that works among youth and students. These organizations also try to garner support from all sections of the Muslim society and beyond.

The *Jamaat* is the least supported group among Kerala Muslims. The total followers of the *Jamaat* not even add up to the one-fifth of the supporters of the E K *Sunni* faction (Ashley 2017). But “it works relentlessly and makes itself visible

throughout its work in the printing and educational sectors” (Ibid.). It uses its gulf resources carefully so as to gain maximum benefits from it. Despite serious efforts to expand, the *Jamaat* is limited in its reach to educated middle-class of society. Its supporters include educated professionals and middle/high level businessmen. Since the organization permits women to be the part of it, large number of women participates in the activities of the *Jamaat*. The apparent opposition to its ideology both within and outside the community restricts its organizational expansion beyond a certain point (Shefeeque 2011).

Unlike other Muslim organizations, the *Jamaat* intervene in political affairs directly as a religious organization. The SIO, GIO and Fraternity movements actively participate in campus politics. Solidarity Youth Movement is active on social agendas. The WPI, the political party established by the *Jamaat* contests elections. The *Jamaat* consciously tries to attract the support of Dalits, Adivasis and other marginalized sections through different strategies. Solidarity Youth movement often tries to establish a joint platform of all marginalized sections. The *Jamaat* runs a newspaper called *Madhyamam* which has also played a very crucial role in the new political and development paradigm put forward by it. In fact, it was the *Madhyamam* that took the Solidarity Youth Movement's campaign to the common mass. Without *Madhyamam*, none of the protests or campaigns of Solidarity or *Jamaat* would have succeeded (Ibid.).

Though the *Jamaat* version of Islam does not have enough support of Muslims, its politics has influence among different section of Kerala Muslims. It can form joint platforms of different marginalized sections of the society on their livelihood issues. Many supporters of other Muslim community organizations and Muslim political parties are also influenced by *Jamaat's* politics even when they oppose it ideologically. The changing nature of IUML (though in a limited manner) is an example of *Jamaat's* influence. This is the influence of the *Jamaat* in Kerala which poses a challenge to parties like CPI (M).

3.7 Ahmadiyya-Jama'at

The *Ahmadiyya* group is an Islamic religious movement which was founded in India during the later quarter of the 19th century. It was founded by Mirza Gulam Ahmed (1835-1908) in *Qadian* province of Punjab in 1889. He claimed to be as the *Mahdi* of Muslims; same as the Messiah of the Christians and the incarnation of Krishna for the Hindus. He claimed to have a divine mandate for the revival of Islam and denied that Prophet Muhammed was the last Prophet. He was often labeled as anti-Islamic.

The adherents of the *Ahmadiyya* sect are referred to as *Ahmadis* or *Ahmadi* Muslims. The *Ahmadiyya* views on certain beliefs in Islam have been “controversial” and hence the sect was considered to be outside the orbit of Islam. The *Darul Uloom Deoband* (an Islamic school in India) has declared *Ahmadis* to be non-Muslims. They are of the opinion that *Ahmadiyya* sect violated both the fundamental principles of Islam- There is no God, But *Allah* and Prophet Muhammed is the last messenger of the God. Hence, they even urged Saudi Arabia to ban *Ahmadis* from Mecca visit (‘Darul Uloom on *Ahmadis*’, www.thepersecution.org.blogspot.com accessed on 14.11.2017). But officially, in India, *Ahmadiyyas* are considered to be Muslims by the Government of India on the basis of a court verdict in the case between Shihabuddin Koya vs. Ahammed Koya (A.I.R. 1971 Ker 206).

Since its formation, *Ahmadiyya* sect has some influence over the Islamic society in Kerala. It entered Kerala through Abdul Quadir Kutty, a Burma-based rice merchant from Kannur. He initiated the movement as a result of his close contact with and influence of Muhammed Deedi who was deported to Kannur from Mahal Island in 1896.⁵⁰ The first unit of the *Ahmadiyya Jama'at* was formed in November 1915 in Kannur with about 100 members and later it spread to Kozhikode and Malappuram.

Though they are small in number, the regional concentration of their population has helped them to function like any other major Muslim groups in certain pockets of the state. Majority of the *Ahmadiyya* followers are middle level businessmen. They have a

⁵⁰ www.alislam.org/library/history accessed on 15.09.2016

better educational profile same as the *Jamaat* group. A majority of the *Ahmadis* support the Congress party though they are not active in politics.⁵¹

3.8 National Development Front (NDF) & Popular Front of India (PFI)

The National Development Front (henceforth, the NDF) was formed in 1993 after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The main objective of the organization was to “focus on socio-economical issues of minorities giving focus to Kerala Muslims” (‘NDF’, www.rediff.com accessed on 15.03.2016). While a majority of the Muslim organizations preferred moderate positions after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the NDF choose “aggressive” politics which was not common among the Muslim community organizations in the state. The NDF had formed ‘defense forces’ (Chennamangaloor 2011) across the Muslim pockets of the state.⁵² They used provocative language make up anger among Muslims after the demolition of Babri Masjid. They also denounced secular parties and Muslim organizations for their ‘soft’ standpoint on *Sangh Parivar*.⁵³ The Muslim youth who were upset by decisions of the mainstream Muslim community organizations/political parties were the prime supporters of this Front. The main slogan of the NDF is “Freedom, Justice and Security” (Koya 1997). The organization was led by a 19-member supreme council. The organization was inspired by the pan Islamic reactionary movements that preferred militant politics against the ‘enemies’ of Islam and Muslim (Chennamangaloor 2013: 10).

The organization had to face accusations of being communal and its members were implicated in violent incidents across the state. The Justice Thomas Joseph Commission that enquired into the Marad (Calicut) communal violence found that “activists of IUML and NDF were actively involved in the massacre” (‘Report of Thomas Joseph Commission’, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com accessed on 15.03.2016). Members of the organization were also arrested for Kottakal (in Malappuram district)

⁵¹ They function as a closed group under a local mosque and have a substantial influence on the daily lives of its members. The life style of *Ahmadis* is quite similar to Evangelical Christian groups.

⁵² While the Muslim political parties like IUML focus more on the Malabar region, NDF has tried to establish units across the state.

⁵³ Interview with Hamid Chennamangaloor on 23.04.2015 at Calicut.

police station attack in 2007. The organization is also alleged to be involved in the efforts to propagate the Islamic *Sharia* code among moderate and cosmopolitan Muslims of the state. The cases were reported where NDF members manhandled Muslims who used liquor, abstained from fasting in the month of Ramadan, and also forced the wearing of *burqa* (NDF's Moral Policing', www.indianexpress.com accessed on 15.03.2015).

The extremist nature of the organization resulted in its political isolation from mainstream Muslim organizations and political parties. The CPI (M) and the Congress party accused the NDF for promoting extremist politics in the state (Aboobacker 2003). All Muslim political and community organizations issued joint statement against the activities of NDF and ran a campaign against it with the catchphrase "Militancy is no defense" ('Muslim groups against NDF', www.archive.indianexpress.com accessed on 15.03.2015). Muslim community organizations were concerned about losing their secular image and hence took a strong position against the NDF. The Muslim community organizations and political parties including IUML were also concerned because their cadres were also joining NDF, even in their strongholds like Malappuram district. This forced the IUML to take strong position against the NDF. The organization merged with Popular Front of India (henceforth, the PFI) in 2006.

The organizations like NDF (Kerala), Manitha Neethi Pasarai (Tamil Nadu), Karnataka Forum for Dignity (Karnataka) etc merged together to form a common organization named PFI in 2006 ('Organization', www.popularfrontindia.org accessed on 16.03.2015). The public objective of the organization is to make efforts towards the socio-economic, cultural and political empowerment of the deprived. It also aims to establish "an egalitarian society in which freedom, justice and security are enjoyed by all sections of the society" (Ibid.).

However, it has faced serious allegations regarding its work and associations which include Islamist terrorist groups within and outside the country, organizing arms training camp in Narath, Kannur district, murder of members of other political parties, SMS campaign against people of north east India, attack on a college professor for

preparing question paper that had offended the religious sentiments,⁵⁴ the Shimoga violence etc. Recently it also faced serious allegations on the ground of ‘Love Jihad’- a term coined by *Sangh Parivar*.⁵⁵

3.9 Quran Sunnath Society

The Quran Sunnath Society was formed by Abul Hasan Maulavi (b.1936), popularly known as Chekannur Maulavi in the late 1960s. The movement was inspired by *Salafism* and argued that the *Quran* alone was true and it denounced authenticity of most of the *Hadiths*. It also questioned many fundamental principles of Islam (‘About Maulavi’, www.Maulavichekanoor.com, accessed on 11.11.2018). Abul Hasan Maulavi was of the opinion that a Muslim need not offer *namaz* (prayer) five times a day, and only three times is mandatory. In his view, the fasting in the month of *Ramzan* was also not mandatory. In 1993, Chekannur Maulavi disappeared (Ibid.). His wife and supporters allege that the A P *Sunni* leader AP Kanthapuram had role in the disappearance of Chekannur Maulavi. Despite the enquiry by state police and CBI, no evidence has been found yet (Source: The Hindu, 18 December 2000). The supporters of Chekannur Maulavi function as the Quran Sunnath Society. But, its support base is negligible compared with other Muslim community organizations. Most of its followers are the educated middle class and it supports different secular political parties.

There are some political parties functioning in Kerala which have a strong base among the Muslims. The following section looks at them and their activities in Kerala.

3.10 Indian Union Muslim League (IUML)

The IUML was formed on 10 March 1948 in Chennai (Aziz 1992: 36). Quaid-e-Millath Muhammed Ismail Sahib played key role in its formation of the party

⁵⁴The hands of a college professor named T.J. Joseph were chopped by PFI activists on the pretext that he prepared a question paper that hurt the sentiments of Muslim community of the state. 27 PFI activists were charged in this incident. (‘PFI in blasphemy case’, www.thehindu.com accessed on 16.03.2015).

⁵⁵ Love Jihad also called ‘Romeo Jihad’ is defined as an activity under which Muslim men are said to reportedly target young non Muslim girls for conversion to Islam by feigning love. The *Sangh Parivar* forces alleged that PFI has institutional mechanism to moot this and Sathayasarani, an institution run by PFI in Manjeri of Malappuram district has special cell that provide all services in this direction.

(‘Formation’, www.iuml.org accessed on 10.07.2014). The Kerala unit of IUML was formed in 1937 (Ibid.). Since then, the party comes to occupy an important place in Kerala politics. The party has emerged as one of the prominent political platforms for the Muslim community in the state. Leaders such as Syed Abdu Rahman Bhafaki Thangal, K. M. Seethi Sahib, Panakkad P.M.S.A. Pookoya Thangal, Syed Muhammadali Shihab Thangal etc. were some of the prominent leaders of the party in Kerala since its emergence. It has substantial influence in the Malabar districts like Malappuram, Kozhikode and in some parts of Kannur, Kasaragod, Thrissur and Palakkad and in a few pockets of Ernakulam and Kollam districts.

The IUML has adopted a politics of adaptation, negotiation and conflict within the political scenario of the state (Wright 1995:1) and this has helped the party to expand its base in Kerala. The party has alliance with both the Congress party and the CPI (M). The IUML has been with the UDF since 1980. The party had “strategical alliance” with the CPI (M) in certain panchayats in the local elections of 2000, 2005 and 2010 (‘LDF and IUML tie up’, www.frontline.in accessed on 15.7.2015). In fact, such strategies helped the IUML to occupy an important positions in the state government. Since 1952, the party has a presence in the Indian parliament. For a short period from 12 October 1979 to 01 December 1979, C. H. Muhammed Koya, the leader of the party became the chief minister of the state. Party members also occupied important portfolios in the state ministry when the fronts it supports come to power. E. Ahamed (1937-2017), the national president of the party served as the Minister of State for External Affairs (2004-2009 and 2011-2014) and Minister of State for Railways (2009-2011).

The political presence of IUML has played a decisive role in building political consciousness among Kerala Muslims.⁵⁶ This political consciousness of the community and active involvement in secular –public discourse transforms Muslim community from an interest group to pressure group and IUML has a decisive role in it. The IUML has

⁵⁶The socio-economic condition of Kerala Muslims (especially *Mappila* Muslims in Malabar) was pathetic in the aftermath of Malabar rebellion. The suppression by the colonial administration and subcontinent’s partition had profound influence on them. But, the organized activities of IUML among *Mappilas* has given them a confidence and also heightened their political consciousness.

been the party of both major fronts in power and has used its influence to address the concerns of the community to a certain extent. This has helped the IUMML in acquiring support from different sections of the Kerala polity, and more importantly, from all major Muslim groups. Further, despite severe intra-religious community conflicts among different Muslim community organizations, the IUMML could bring all these organizations together on many occasions. These initiatives helped IUMML to establish their control over Kerala Muslims. However, the party's attempts to unite the different groups of same sect did not produce expected result.

The IUMML stands as the political face of Muslim community organizations like *Sunnis* and *Mujahid*. It simply means that IUMML represents "contradictory identities namely urban-rural, feudal-expatriate and modern-traditional. Hence IUMML successfully portrays itself as a "communitarian" than "communal" (Chiriyankandath 1995). The local feudal/elite Muslim men do not find any difficulty in aligning with a fisherman or agricultural worker on the IUMML platform. The party's support base includes the small and big scale businessmen, artisans, working class, peasants and migrants. A sizable section of Muslim women also support the IUMML though they were ignored on the party's platforms. A few of them contest for the party in local body elections.

The views of IUMML on different socio-political issues are undergoing a shift over the period of time. The increasing *Salafi/Jamaat* influence on certain leaders and activists of IUMML has reflected on different standpoints of the party. The party's views on issues like *purdah* and Muslim fundamentalism underscores this. Certain sections of the party have an allegiance to the Arab version of Islam than the localized Islam that the IUMML promoted since its formation. Unlike the past, the young cadres of the IUMML associate themselves with Muslim fundamentalist organizations like PFI and this has resulted in their involvements in political and communal violence like the Marad communal violence. These shifts point to the changing nature of IUMML in the state.

3.11 Indian National League (INL)

In the aftermath of *Babri Masjid* demolition, the then All India president of IUML, Ebrahim Sulaiman Sait (henceforth, Sait) asked its Kerala unit to part ways with the Congress party in Kerala. The Kerala unit of the party, however, refused the direction from the national president. Later, the Sait voted against the then Congress government in the parliament which apparently resulted in the expulsion of him from the party. Sait and certain other IUML leaders and a few Muslim intellectuals jointly formed INL in an All India Muslim convention held at New Delhi on 23 April 1994. Over 700 delegates were invited from 14 states of the country and Sait was elected as the President of the new party (Source: ‘Sait’, www.ebrahimsulaimansait.in, accessed on 18.11.2015). The INL considered itself as a party open to all citizens of India who adhere to the secular and democratic values of the Indian constitution (Ibid.).

Since its inception, the INL was the ‘unofficial political partner’ of CPI (M) led LDF in elections. However, the party has not yet been included in the LDF as an ‘official’ member. INL has requested the LDF leadership to include them in the front. But coalition partners of LDF are not in agreement with INL’s politics. The CPI (M) mainly considers INL as a channel to reach out to certain sections of Kerala Muslims mainly in the districts of Malappuram, Kozhikode and Kannur. However, CPI (M) offers state assembly seats and membership in government corporations and government committees for *Hajj* and *Waqf* properties.⁵⁷ Though the party has limited followers, the nature of its support base is more or less similar to IUML.

3.12 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)

The Peoples Democratic Party (henceforth, the PDP) was formed by Muslim political activist and cleric, Abdul Nasar Madani (henceforth Madani) after the demolition of *Babri Masjid*. The PDP was formed after the ban of *Islamic Sevak Sangh*

⁵⁷ The INL state leader Prof. A. P. Abdul Wahab was selected as state Minority Finance Development Corporation Chairman by the present LDF ministry. The INL’s representative Zuhra teacher (Kasargod) became the first Muslim women in the state *Hajj* committee in 2018. In 2006, the candidate of the party elected to the state assembly.

(ISS) formed by Madani in 1989. The main objective of the party was to create a ‘Dalit-Muslim-Backward’ alliance under the slogan of ‘power to *Avarnas* and liberation to the oppressed’ (Chennamangaloor 2011). The PDP’s slogan was a breakthrough in the history of Muslim politics of the state and later many movements including *Jamaat* and PFI advanced this politics of sectional unity of those on the margins. No organization had imagined the possibility of a broader political alliance of the oppressed politics in the state until the PDP put forward this agenda. Lower class Muslims, especially working class constitute the major support base of the party. The party’s strength is limited to certain pockets of southern Kerala despite the fact that the leader Madani has support from significant number of Muslims. Their support was to the “cause” that the Madani put forward. But, they also do not support the way he adopts to attain his objectives. The PDP had electoral understanding with both the LDF and UDF in elections.

3.13 Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI)

The popular image of NDF and PFI acted as a major hindrance for both organizations to participate in election. The inability of the NDF and PFI to be part of the electoral process in a significant way led them to launch the Social Democratic Party of India (henceforth, the SDPI). It was formed on 21 June 2009. The manifesto “calls for the empowerment of all marginalized sections of the society by mobilizing themselves into a political force” (‘Aims and Objectives’, www.sdpi.in accessed on 18.03.2015). While most of the Muslim political parties have a green flag, the SDPI has bi color flag with both green and red in it. The SDPI tries to advance the politics put forward by Madani and the PDP that goes beyond the Muslim community. Out of the nine office bearers in the state, two members belong to backward Hindu community and one belongs to the Christian community. One of the state secretaries is a woman (Ibid.).

The SDPI has been involved in several socio-economic and political activities within and outside the state including political campaigns and charity work. But association of SDPI with PFI has acted as a hindrance to its socio-political expansion. Despite this, the party performed well in local body elections in some parts of the state. Party candidates won more than 40 seats in the local body elections held in 2015. It is

interesting to note that a majority of the seats won by the party are in the central and southern part of Kerala rather than Malabar. Many non-Muslim candidates also won from the party panel ('Elections', www.sdpikerala.org accessed on 18.3.2015). The party fielded 89 candidates in state assembly election held in May 2016. The performance of party candidates was not up to expectation. The emergence of BJP has resulted in a situation where the common Muslims voted for secular parties in LDF and UDF and they believe that the SDPI would weaken the broader secular platform against *Sangh Parivar*.

The major support base of the SDPI is Muslim youth, which form the middle and lower classes. The profile of its supporters ranges from the high income professionals and businessmen to the high school educated working as drivers and shop keepers. They also have followers among the Kerala Muslim youth working in Gulf countries. Most of these young men felt upset with mainstream political parties including the IUML and joined the SDPI for the "protection of Muslims".

3.14 Welfare Party of India (WPI)

The WPI was formed by members associated with *Jamaat-e-Islami Hind* on 18 April 2009 in Delhi. The party called itself the "voice of voiceless" and projected itself as the savior of the downtrodden. It put forward three major objectives- "value based politics, welfare state and religious pluralism" ('Objectives', www.welfarepartyofindia.org accessed on 18.03.2015). Though the organization is formed by the *Jamaat*, the central and state executive committees represent delegates from different states, religions, castes and community groups. The organization has a tri-color flag which is green, white and red. Following the politics put forward by the PDP and the SDPI, the WPI also gives substantial space to members of other communities. The WPI has five office bearers (out of ten) from the Hindu community and two of them are Hindu women ('Organization', www.welfarpartykerala.org accessed on 25.03.2015). But organization could not get much support either from the Muslim community or other backward sections. The electoral performance of the party is abysmally poor. The *Jamaat* members constitute the major support base of the party.

3.15. Educational Development of Kerala Muslims

Reformist organizations made considerable efforts to change the material conditions of Muslims. The *Aikya Sangham* was formed to promote the unity and advancement of the community and to bring about reforms, especially the advance of modern education. This agenda was put forward to deflect criticism coming from the conservative sections. The initiatives by Khan Bahadur, K. Muhammad and K. M. Seethi Sahib- the 'reformist' leaders, were inspirational for young Muslims to establish more educational institutions (Miller 1992: 206-07). The establishment of Farook College in 1948 at Feroke, near Calicut, under the management of *Rouzalthul Uloom Association*, was a singularly important event in the educational progress of Kerala Muslims. Importantly, in all these efforts, the Islamic ethos was deliberately maintained (Ibid.). Like the Aligarh movement in north India, Farook College has succeeded in generating constructive engagements of progress and modernity among Kerala Muslims (Ali 1990:135).

Another important development towards modern secular education was the formation of the Muslim Educational Society (henceforth, the M E S) in 1964 by a group of young well-educated Muslims under the leadership of Dr. P. K. Abdul Gafoor, a physician from Kodungallur, Thrissur. Having its headquarters at Calicut, the initiative began as a result of intense dissatisfaction with the way the socio-economic progress of the community. The objective of the organization remains the cultural, economic and educational uplift of the Muslims of the country in general and Kerala in particular. Interestingly, it has emphasized both religious and women's education. The organization claims that it is the largest educational agency of the Muslim community in India, having thousands of life members (more than 8,000 life members) and hundreds of institutions. The organization also has units in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and also in West Asia ('Management', www.meskerala.com accessed on 10.01.2016).

The MES experience was followed by others and many organizations became active in the arena of modern education. The Muslim Service Society (henceforth, the MSS) that formed in 1980 is an example ('About us', www.mssonline.in accessed on

12.11.2016). There were other institutions run by local managements (usually trusts formed by local community leaders) that were formed in the state, especially in its Muslim pockets to cater to the educational needs. For example, the PSMO College was established by a trust run by local Muslim elites in 1968. Other than this, all Muslim community organizations are running educational institutions across the state. Thanks to both community and state initiatives on higher education, the educational profile of the community is also getting better. It is particularly visible in the girls' education.⁵⁸

3.16. Intra Community Engagements among Kerala Muslims

Conflicts, discussions and debates play an important role in the evolution of movements. They represent “replication” of one’s character in the other, and are, therefore, cause for the “revitalization of the traditions and norms” (Coser 1956 quoted in Madappally 2013). Hence as Coser argues, conflict promote loyalty within groups, social change, and create new levels of social integration over a period of time. They also strengthen the organizational and functional base of the movements.

Intra-community debates are common among Kerala Muslims. To understand the nuances of intra community dialogues or debates, Youtube is one of the best sources. Youtube has large collection of videos uploaded by these groups to manifest the ‘truth’ in their arguments against other groups. It is also interesting to note that social media and new technologies are being widely used to circulate the arguments among supporters and opponents. Often, the leaders use the web technology including video clippings to validate their arguments counter the opponents. Ideological differences set in motion with the emergence of SKJU and KJU has turned to intense over a period of time. Differences of the opinion on socio-economic and political issues also result in intense debates. Many times these debates turned violent leading to loss of life. For example, in March 2013, a 62 year old man was killed in a clash between A P and E K *Sunni* factions at a Madrasa in Elamkoor in Malappuram district. The fight reportedly started over the choice of song

⁵⁸ It has been understood from my personal experience with the MES Mampad college, one of the biggest Arts and Science colleges in the Malabar, that the gender ratio of the college is 76: 24 (girls to boys) and in some courses (mainly science and literature), more than 90 percent of total enrolled students are girls.

played at a meeting. When the E K faction played their song, the A P faction objected and subsequently a fight started between the two groups ('AP-EK clash', www.coastaldigest.com accessed on 15.04.2013). But there is no uniform pattern for the process of engagement among different groups. The marked difference between the Islam practiced by different Muslim community organizations and their diverse socio-political interests are the main reason for this inconsistent pattern.

Other than intra-community differences, intra-group or factional dialogues/differences are also common among the Muslims of the state as the split in *Aikhya Sangham* in 1926 indicates. The *Sunnis* and *Mujahids* of the state have undergone multiple splits in the last three decades. All the factions believe that the "truth" is with them and appeal to others to follow them. The *Ulama* have always been questioned by other *Ulama* without allowing any one scholar to occupy the post of priesthood.

The Muslim community has seen intellectual debates and differences between various sects (both intra community and intra faction). This led to "internalization by the ideas by opposing faction", even if they are disagreement with them initially. The traditional *Ulama* and the traditional Muslims also gained intellectually through the inter- and intra-dialogues. Though differences and debate are productive, the aftermath of many intra-community dialogues saw differences grow into physical violence. Besides, these intra-community differences could not lead to an informed debate on issues like instant triple *talaq* or other problems faced by Muslim women. Women issues have always been sidelined in these dialogues/conflicts.

Muslim women do not have any serious role in the organizational or functional structure of Muslim community organizations or political parties. Majority of them continue as sheer support group and participate in the programs wherever they can attend. The *Sunnis* neither allow them to enter the mosque nor give representation in the organizations. But, the huge participation of Muslim women in the religious meetings of *Sunnis* shows that they take advantages of any opportunity to enter the public domain. *Mujahids* and *Jamaat* have separate organizations for women and students. However,

they do not have an influential role in the parent organization. Same is the case with the Muslim political parties.

Despite their meager representation in the Muslim community organizations and political parties, the role of Muslim women in the socio-political arenas has tremendously increased since 1980s. The general progress that the *Malayali* women attained through the state initiatives as part of the 'Kerala Model of Development' has extended itself to Muslim women as well. Other than this, the 'reformist projects' within the community, migration, institutionalization of welfare measures like the reservation in local governance and the establishment of SHGs etc. have accelerated Muslim women's entry to public domain. This has increased the political participation of Muslim women. Since the discussion on Muslim community organizations did not discuss the nuances of Muslim women, the following section offers a profile of Muslim women in Kerala.

3.17 Muslim Women in Kerala

As mentioned before, the Muslim women have distinct social identity and they practice a different pattern of life with regard to their dress, food, cultural practices, habits and involvement in the socio-religious affairs when compared with their counterparts in the rest of the country. In traditional society, Muslim women were subjected to sharp and rigorous restrictions in various spheres of their life. It was commonly perceived that Muslim women were more marginalized and had less access to the world outside their homes than their counterparts in other communities (Karassery 2011). Muslim girls were socialized in a way that their character was constructed in a gender appropriate culture. In a joint family, they always lived under the hegemony or domination of male centric society. Religious education provided through *Madrassas* was the only source of knowledge. But, the factors discussed in the previous section resulted in a social condition where the Muslim women's socio-economic and political status have been changed over the period of time.

3.17.1 Educational and Employment Status of Muslim Women

The Gulf migration brought a peculiar social situation in Kerala where the number of Muslim women outnumbered Muslim men in graduate and post graduate courses including professional education (see, Miller 1992; De Jong 2004; Mohammed 2007).⁵⁹ According to the Census 2001, literacy rate of Muslim women are 85.5 percent in Kerala while it is 20 percent in Rajasthan. The national average was only 64.8 percent. Other than the better public education system, the economic remittance from the Gulf migration also influenced the high literacy rate of Muslim women in Kerala. In 2012, 600 Muslim girls completed MBBS and 650 girls BDS in Kerala. 12 Muslim girls from Kerala cleared AIIMS entrance in 2012-13 (Muhammed 2013: 48-50). In 2015, a Muslim girl named Hiba. P. from Manjery secured first rank in the All India Medical Entrance (*Madhyamam*, 20 May 2015). Many Muslim girls have cleared All India Civil Services examinations and different exams conducted by the Kerala State Public Service Commission. The enrollment rate of Muslim girls in different higher education institutions shows the upward mobility of them in the field of higher education. MES Mampad College, one of the biggest Arts and Science colleges situated in the Malappuram district has more than 80 percent of girls in its roll. Though all these girls are not Muslims, but this trend shows that sizable number of Muslim girls enroll for higher education.⁶⁰ While Muslim girls from the weaker sections prefer Arts and Science colleges, girls from middle class and elite families prefer both Arts and Science colleges and professional colleges. Large number of Muslim girls (mainly from middle and upper class) is enrolling in the central universities and other premier institutes across the country.⁶¹

⁵⁹ N. P. Hafis Muhammed (2013) narrates a story on the changes in the educational status of Kerala Muslim women. In 1955, one of his relatives named Saina had to discontinue her primary education due to the pressure from the community. She was mentally harassed by the men of her locality when she was going to school. Author, who is also a councilor, narrates another experience in 2010. A mother brought their daughter to the author and asked him to council her daughter to change her mind of not going to college. This shows how the Muslim community has changed over the period of time in Kerala (Muhammed 2013: 46-9).

⁶⁰ No official statistics is available on the number of Muslim girls enrolled in different colleges and universities in Kerala.

⁶¹ Muslim girls (mainly from Malabar) join the universities of like Hyderabad Central University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and Pondicherry Central University for Post Graduate courses. A

However, the greater access to higher education did not reflect on employment status of Muslim women in Kerala, especially in organized sector.⁶² As per the census 2011, the work participation rate of Muslim women in Kerala was 5.9 percent only ('Census', www.census2011.co.in accessed on 16.05.2017). The attitude of the family members and religious custom mainly results in this situation. The Gulf money effect called by Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006) as 'income effect' also act as a reason for the low level of labor participation among Kerala Muslim women. Though the number of Muslim women is minimal in the state government service, a large number of them have joined as teachers from primary school to college. Muslim women from the middle and upper classes join the aided school services giving donations to the management.⁶³

But, the pattern of work participation of Muslim women has been changing since 2000. The poor material conditions, increase in the cost of living and the economic crisis in Gulf countries and subsequent return migration⁶⁴ compel a section of Muslim women to find alternative livelihood means to run the family. The community's attitude on women's employment has also undergone a tremendous change over the period of time and many Muslim community organizations themselves promote the employment of Muslim women. Along with these domestic demands, the introduction of state wide SHGs, government schemes like MGNREGA and loan/aid schemes to begin self employment facilitate Muslim women's employment status.

section of them are also joining for research in these institutions. Significant number of Muslim girls also joined universities in Kerala for research.

⁶² According to various statistics, Muslim women work participation rates are the lowest in the country. One survey found that 60.7 percent of Muslim women are 'house wives' compared to 32.4 of Hindu women and 32.4 of Christian women. Only 31.8 percent of Muslim women are job seekers compared to 40.5 percent among Hindu women and 41 percent among Christians (Aravindan 2006).

⁶³ The economic mobility mainly due to the migration helps Muslim women from the middle and upper class to mobilize a few lakh rupees to join the aided schools and colleges. Rather than the employment for women, certain Muslim men considered this as a safe mode of investment for the family. (From interview with two Muslim women college teachers from Malappuram district on 16.08.2016). Both teachers whom I have interviewed shared me that their ATM cards and bank accounts are maintained by either husbands or father in laws, if husband is in abroad.

⁶⁴ The number of Kerala migrants who returned from abroad is 12.5 lakhs in 2014 which was 11.5 in 2011, 11.6 in 2008, 8.9 in 2003 and 7.4 lakhs in 1998 (Zachariah, 2014). Further, the majority of the return migrants are unskilled laborers (Ibid.).

The Muslim women constitute 11% of total *Kudumbashree* members in 2015-16 (Kannan 2017: 116). The total membership of *Kudumbashree* was 43,06,976 spread across the 277175 Neighborhood Groups across the state as on 15 March 2017 ('About Us', <http://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/171> accessed on 18.11.2017). This means that 4.75 lakh Muslim women have enrolled themselves with the *Kudumbashree*. 49.4% of these women belong to BPL families. This reveals the poor economic condition of a section of Kerala Muslims. Further, the majority of these members belong to the age group 25-55. 16.9% of Muslim women in *Kudumbashree* are widowed and 5.3% are either divorced or separated (see, Kannan 2017). The poor economic condition reflects in the number of Muslim women enrolled for MGNREGA program. Other than the SC and ST, 212245 job cards were issued in the Malappuram district in 2011-12. Being a Muslim majority district, it is quite logical that significant number of these women belong to Muslims.⁶⁵

3.17.2 Political Participation of Muslim Women

The socio-economic and educational status of Muslim women, role of organized Muslim political movements, regional concentration of Muslim population and more importantly, the reservation for women in local governance resulted in the better status for Muslim women in political affairs. The available statistics on the Muslim women's political representation manifest that they have better presence in the local governance than high politics.⁶⁶ Hence it is understood that the political opportunities come to Muslim women as 'strategic opportunities' (in this case, reservation in the local governance) and not as a normal expansion of political space in majority cases (see, Devika 2012). Many of the Muslim women are keener to make use of this 'strategic opportunities' as it is the only medium to enter political space.

Certain studies identify that the Muslim women do not have adequate representation even in local governance where the Muslims constitute more than 25% of

⁶⁵ There is no religious wise data available on the employment generated under the scheme in Kerala.

⁶⁶ Muslim women do not have representation in the present state assembly, Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha. Out of 69 women elected to the Kerala state assembly, only 8 are from Muslim community. Majority of them are from CPI (M) and CPI.

total population, except Malappuram (see, Sidheeque 2005; Hasan and Menon 2005; Devika 2012; Shefееque 2015). Being a Muslim majority district, the political parties are forced to depute Muslim women for local governance in the seats reserved for women. Hence, many a time, it appears that such political spaces are not claimed as political/individual rights, but as an errand from the above.⁶⁷ The case of Malappuram makes it obvious that the political opportunities come to Muslim women as ‘strategic opportunities’ than the normal expansion of political space. The representation of Muslim women in the party organizations and other higher bodies underscore this.

The IUML has significant support among Muslims of Malabar. The party does not have any women in its ‘High Power Committee’, the supreme decision making body. In 2018, the party has elected three Muslim women to its state secretariat- Kamarunnisa Anwar, Noorbina Rasheed and K. P. Mariyumma (*The New Indian Express*, 13 February 2018). Party’s student wing, the MSF also recently elected one Muslim girl named Fathima Thahliya to its national committee. Women’s League is the affiliated women wing of the party. But, this organization is not active as other women organizations in Kerala. The major functions of the organization include women’s conference and organizational meetings at the time of elections. Zuhra Mampad is the state president of the organization. The MSF has a girl’s wing named ‘*Haritha*’ (Green) to mobilize students. While IUML would not allow Muslim women to attend party’s public processions, members of ‘*Haritha*’ are allowed to participate in the public programs of MSF including rallies and protests. ‘*Haritha*’ also organize protest demonstrations and campaigns on community and gender related issues. This is relatively a new mode of activism engaged by the organization. Majority of the leaders and activists of Women’s League, *Haritha* and MSF belong to *Mujahid* sect of Islam. Most of them come from educated middle class. *Sunnis*, the major support base of the IUML do not encourage

⁶⁷ Experiences of Malappuram municipal chairperson C. H. Jameela is narrated in the N. P. Hafis Muhammed’s work on the Muslim women of a Kerala. C. H. Jameela says that, had reservation not been there, she would not have been in public sphere and if she is in public sphere, it is because of the reservation (C. H. Jameela quoted in Hafis Muhammed 2013:69). Many Muslim women whom I have interviewed also shared the same opinion.

Muslim women's presence in public domain. *Sunni* women remain as sheer voters of the party.⁶⁸

The representation of Muslim women is negligible. Of the 175 MLA's that the IUML has sent to the state assembly, not even one is a woman.⁶⁹ No Muslim women even contested for the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha elections. However, reservations in the local governance helped the Muslim women 'claim' representation in the local governance. For example, K. P. Mariyumma (2000-05) and Zuhra Mampad (2010-14) got elected as the president of Malappuram district panchayat.

The Congress party does not have a concrete plan to interact with Muslim women. The presence of IUML in the party led UDF creates a serious hamper for the Congress party to make inroads into Muslim pockets, especially in the Malabar region. The party and its major front organizations like the Kerala Students Union (henceforth, KSU), Mahila Congress and the Indian Youth Congress (henceforth, IYC) has Muslim women in its committees and membership fold. Shanimol Usman is the prominent Muslim women in the Congress party leadership in the state.⁷⁰ There are a few instances where the Congress party tries to address the issues of Muslim women specifically. The most important is Shah Bano case. In the case of Shah Bano, the Congress party stood with the male dominated clergy than the Muslim women. The majority of party's Muslim women activists and leaders come from educated middle class and lower middle class. But, the support group includes Muslim women from all sections. Muslim women in the southern Kerala are more active in the party organization than the Malabar. Other than the apparent weakness of the Congress party in Malabar, the active presence of IUML restricted party's entry to Muslims.

⁶⁸ In an interview with an IUML women representative in the Malappuram block panchayat, who also belongs to *Sunni* sect of Islam, she said that the *Sunni* Islam does not allow her to become very active in the public domain as her colleagues in the party who belong to *Mujahids* (interview with IUML women representative on 12.04.2015 at Malappuram).

⁶⁹ Khamarunneesa Anwar is the only women contested in the state assembly election representing the party.

⁷⁰ She has been nominated as the Secretary of All India Congress Committee and also was the President of Kerala Pradesh Women Congress for long period.

The Congress party fields Muslim women for the Lok Sabha and state assembly elections. But, none of them won in the elections. Scores of Muslim women got elected to the local governance since the implementation of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. Many of them have been inducted in the party's local leadership. Many Muslim girls are active in the KSU in campuses and they contest for the students' union elections and other student bodies.

The CPI (M) also mobilizes Muslim women for both organizational and electoral purposes. The CPI (M) state committee has only one Muslim woman in it. Party's major front organizations like AIDWA, DYFI, SFI and CITU have good number of Muslims in its membership fold and also at leadership level. The CPI (M) uses different strategies to engage with Muslim women. The introduction of institutional reforms like reservation in local governance, establishment of SHGs etc. has opened new opportunities for the party to interact with Muslim women which it did not have before. Other than this, the CPI (M) and its major front organizations take up the identity, security and equity concerns of Muslim women and this has attracted a section of Muslim women to it. These initiatives have helped the party mobilize different sections of Muslim women. Hence its support base ranges from working class women to urban educated working professionals. The progressive views of the party on many issues attract youth and students to it.

The CPI (M) fields Muslim women to the Lok Sabha and state assembly elections. P.K. Sainaba contested to Lok Sabha from Malappuram constituency. K.S. Saleekha got elected to Kerala state assembly twice from Kuzhalmandam assembly constituency in Palakkad district. Scores of Muslim women are being elected to local governance and the party consciously recruits them to different organizational bodies of the party. Many Muslim girls active in the SFI and DYFI are also recruited to the party. Many Muslim girls contest students' union elections in SFI panel.

Jamaat-e-Islami is the only Muslim community organization that gives representation for women in their decision making bodies. Two women- K. K. Fathima Zuhra and P. V. Rahmabi are in the state council of the organization ('Leaders', www.jihkerala.org accessed on 12.09.2017). However, this is relatively a new

phenomenon. Other than this, the GIO works in the college and university campuses among Muslim girls. Both these organizations conduct campaigns and protests on both community and gender related issues. GIO has unites in many campuses of Malabar. The SIO and Solidarity Youth Movement do not have women in their membership fold. But, the WPI and Fraternity Students Movement, two political organizations associated with the movement have both Muslim and non Muslim women in their committees. The women members of different organization associated with *Jamaat* mainly belong to educated middle class. Many of them are working professionals.

Recently, the *Jamaat* has decided to include Muslim women in the administration of local mosque. A few mosques in Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of Kerala have elected women representatives in their decision-making bodies. The Sivapuram mosque in Kozhikode district has elected three women members to the mosque's *Mahal* committee (decision making body) in 2011 ('Muslim Women in Mosque Administration', www.newageislam.com accessed on 12.09.2016). A few Muslim women are elected to the local governance from the WPI panel.

The PFI also try to mobilize Muslim women. However, the organization does not give representation to women. National Women Front (henceforth, the NWF), the SDPI, political party associated with PFI and the CFI, students organization has women members in its committees and work among Muslim women. K. K. Raihanath is the state vice president of the SDPI. The SDPI and CFI have non Muslim women members in their membership fold. Like PFI, these organizations also try to mobilize Muslim women on the question of identity and security of community in general and women in particular. Right to *Hijab* campaign, campaign against Uniform Civil Code, right to conversion etc. are some of the major campaigns led by these organizations. Women and students from both lower social class and middle class mainly comprise the support base of these organizations. The leaders of these organizations are educated working professionals. A few Muslim women elected to the local governance from the SDPI panel and a few Muslim girls elected to students unions of colleges. The party also fielded a few Muslim women for the state assembly elections.

3.19 Conclusion

The Kerala Muslims have a different trajectory of evolution and expansion and hence their socio-political profile is different from their counterparts in rest of India. The state has active Muslim community organizations and political parties that act as platforms for Muslims for civil and political participation. The community is also well integrated into social and political platforms of the state. However, most of these organizations do not have adequate representation of Muslim women who merely remain sheer participants in the religious programs of these organizations.

But the syncretistic popular Islam conceived and practiced by the Muslim masses of the state is undergoing a visible transformation since 1970s. Other than the conceptual transformation of the postulates of Islamism, the gulf migration and subsequent introduction of Arab/textual Islam and emergence of identity politics has profoundly influenced this transformation. The expansion of *Salafi* ideas among Muslims also accelerated this. Subsequently, 'neo orthodoxy' has been developed among Kerala Muslims and it has multiple impacts on the socio-political realms of Kerala Muslims. It is with this changing '*Mappila*' that CPI (M) engaged with.

Chapter IV

CPI (M) and Muslim Women in Malabar

4.1 Introduction

The introduction of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in the early 1990s ensured a better presence for women in the public sphere. The same period also witnessed improved levels of participation of women in the struggles of peasants, agricultural workers, students, teachers and other sections of society. Many independent women's groups emerged in civil society. Institutional innovations like initiation of SHGs also led to improved presence of women in the public space. With this increased visibility of women in the public realm, the CPI (M) felt the importance of further strengthening women's voices in Kerala. Thus, efforts were made to bring more women to the party fold, give particular attention to preparing them as "communists" and also ensure a prominent place to them at all levels of the party structure (CPM 2005). The party has always considered the general struggle of women against subjugation and unequal citizenship as an important part of mobilization against the present social system (Namboodiripad 1994; CPM 2005). Being a party that claims to represent the working class, it paid special attention to mobilizing women of the weaker sections (including Dalits, Tribals and minority communities) to bring about social transformation (CPM 2005). The party was of the opinion that any weakness to grasp the full significance and importance of party work among women amounted to missing out a valuable contribution to democratic revolution (CPM 2005:2; CPM 2016:18).⁷¹

Considering the significant share in the population and the demographic concentration of a Muslims in the state of Kerala (especially in Malabar), it is vital for any political party or community organization in the state to engage with the community for both electoral and organizational purposes. Women constitute more than 50 percent of

⁷¹ All Marxist and socialist political parties have a similar understanding of the women's question. For example, Leon Trotsky (1924) argued that "in order to change the conditions of life, we must learn to see them through the eyes of women" ('Trotsky on Women's Question', www.marxist.org accessed on 12.05.2015).

the Muslim population of Kerala.⁷² They have a better socio-economic, cultural and educational status compared to their counterparts in the rest of the country as stated in the previous chapter. Same is the case with their presence in politics. The migration of Muslim men in big number to Gulf countries has had a significant impact on the decision making capacity of Muslim women in Kerala. The increasing public presence of Muslim women has provided a good opportunity to the CPI (M) to mobilize them.⁷³ The party documents emphasize that it needs to intensify its political work among Muslim women in Kerala (ibid: 13). This effort increased since 1980s.

Three major developments in the last decades of the 20th century resulted in a paradigm shift in women's politics in Kerala. These three developments were: (i) reservation for women in local governance, (ii) formation of massive state wide SHGs like *Kudumbashree*, (iii) increasing struggles outside the state institutions for land, human rights, livelihood, water and other resources. The Left front under the leadership of the CPI (M) was instrumental in acting as a catalyst in the first two processes. Political socialization over the years (not in the least by the left forces itself) but seen by some as its "political deficit" (Devika and Thampi 2012) was the driving force behind the third. These developments made the CPI (M) to put in conscious efforts to mobilize the Muslim community of Kerala, especially the Muslim women.

This chapter looks at the nature of mobilization of Muslim women by CPI (M) in the Malabar region of Kerala. In the light of the Marxist understanding of the women's question, this chapter surveys the efforts of the CPI (M) in mobilizing Muslim women in support of its politics. The chapter focuses on the *Kudumbashree* program, other SHG activities, local governance, the Muslim Personal Law and 'opinions' of Muslim women as arenas where these mobilizational efforts are made. This discussion brings out the equations between 'power' and 'ideology' and shows how power considerations override commitment to ideology. The ambiguities and conflicts that come up in the process of

⁷² As per the census data of 2011, the Muslims have the highest sex ratio in the state. While the state average is 1058, it is 1086 for Muslims (The *Hindu*, 22 September 2004).

⁷³ Muslim women had limited opportunity to enter the public domain before 1990s. The institutional reforms and large scale migration of Muslim men offer new prospects for Muslim women to be active in public life.

mobilization are discussed in detail in this chapter. The ‘voices’ of these ‘mobilized women’ at different levels of the party hierarchy are also discussed. The chapter ends with an assessment of CPI (M)’s interaction with Muslim women.

4.2 Mobilizing Muslim Women by CPI (M) in Kerala

The initial focus of the united Communist Party and then the CPI (M) was to mobilize working class Muslim women. Since the participation of Muslim women in the work force was small, the party did not have a proper platform to engage with the majority of Muslim women in the initial decades of state formation. The particular social character of the Muslim community also restricted the party’s engagement with Muslim women. But, certain socio-political and economic developments since 1980s have opened new avenues for the party to engage with Muslim women. The transformation that the party and Muslim community went through in this period also influenced the relation between the two. The reorientation of the notion of “class” and the formation of AIDWA accelerated this engagement. Against this background, the CPI (M) used different modes of engagement with Muslim women in Malabar. It focused on women’s reservation in local governance, establishment of state wide SHGs, issues related with the Muslim Personal Laws and party’s standpoint on certain socio-political issues for mobilizing Muslim women in Malabar region of Kerala. This section aims to comprehend the ambiguities, consensus and conflicts that party faced at the social, political, ideological and practical levels while mobilizing Muslim women.

4.2.1 Reservation in Local Governance, Self Help Groups and Political Mobilization by CPI (M)

The People’s Planning Program (henceforth, the PPP) announced by the LDF government in 1996 was a significant effort to mainstream gender and democratize development. This was done through new institutions of local governance in Kerala and it fetched considerable attention. While the objective of the program was debated intensely by scholars, they agreed that the PPP was a political project, and some associated it with reviving the hegemony of political Left in the state (see, Devika and Thampi 2012),

which had been facing challenges from a variety of forces. The introduction of women reservations at the local level administration was part of this scheme and it was indeed to increase the popularity of the Left.

Reserving 33 percent seats in local panchayats and municipalities as part of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments (later it was increased to 50 percent by the LDF government in 2010) helped CPI (M) bring many Muslim women to the forefront of local governance and subsequently, to party organizations at different levels. The CPI (M) claims that the party's commitment to the cause of gender justice resulted in the increase of the quantum of women's reservation in local governance. The Party also feels that this would help in ensuring greater presence of women in local administration.⁷⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, Muslim women had limited opportunities to enter politics before the introduction of reservations in local governance. Unlike other Muslim community organizations and Muslim political parties like IUML, the CPI (M) did not have any substantial platform to engage with them before the introduction of reservations in local governance. The introduction of reservations in Kerala opened up a new arena of meaningful interaction between the party and Muslim women in Kerala. The party also realized that this would bring significant electoral and organizational benefits to the party. This led the LDF government headed by the CPI (M) to increase women's reservations to 50 percent (from 33 percent stipulated by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments) in 2010.

Many women entered politics (and also the public domain) as local level leaders of the party and AIDWA through reservations in local self government institutions. Some of them were promoted to the party's higher committees and were also proposed as candidates for state assembly elections and other major positions. For instance, K.S. Saleekha from Palakkad district was elected to the Kerala state assembly twice (2006 and 2011). Saleekha represented the Shornur constituency, one of the strongholds of the party in the state. She entered politics through election to the local government upon which she

⁷⁴ Interview with P.K. Sainaba, AIDWA leader and CPI (M) state committee member on 30.04.2014 at Nilambur.

served as the Sreekrishnapuram block panchayat president in 1995 and member of Palakkad district panchayat in 2000. She is also the member of CPI (M) Palakkad district committee and presently holds the post of the Chairperson of the Kerala State Women Development Corporation (KSWDC under the state government). The CPI (M) generally does not give party tickets for more than two consecutive terms. Hence, she did not contest state assembly elections of 2016. In a similar fashion, Muslim women from both lower and middle class families were elected to important positions. Many educated women were able to enter politics after the implementation of the mandatory reservations for women in local governments. The profile of elected women panchayat members who assumed office after the introduction of reservations (viz. in the elections in 1995 and 2000) shows that majority of them were well educated and belonged to professional backgrounds. Likewise, many women from varied social backgrounds were able to occupy positions of power in local governments because of *Kudumbashree* and other SHG schemes and also through different programs associated with the PPP.

The profile of a majority of local level women leaders of the CPI (M) reveals that most of them joined the party organization once they got elected to the local panchayats or other tiers of the local governance. For instance, in 2013, all the three women local committee members of the party in Karulai of Malappuram district joined the party and AIDWA after they were elected to the *grama panchayat*. Haseena, another local DYFI leader and party branch member in Karakkunnu, started associating with the party and DYFI after she became an intern in PPP in *grama panchayat* when party was ruling it. This kind of induction is more visible in the case of Muslim women as compared to women of other communities. However, the experiences of the elected representatives of the 1995 local body elections (first local body election after the introduction of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments) and post 2000 elections show that there is considerable difference between the attitude of the party and its major front organizations in the induction of women to party organizations (committees). This is illustrated by the experiences of Safia (a high school teacher) and Mariyam (a cooperative bank employee) from Malappuram and Kozhikode districts, respectively. They narrated that it was only because of mandatory reservations that they could contest in elections and get elected to

the local panchayat as CPI (M) candidates. They contested in local panchayat elections in 1995, the first elections after the implementation of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. While Safia is the wife of a local CPI (M) leader, Mariyam's family does not have active political affiliations. Despite their active interventions in local administration and AIDWA, it took a decade for them to get elected to the party local committee. It is interesting to note that only one woman was in such a committee at that point of time. But, the situation has changed drastically since 2000. Now, many elected representatives of panchayats are inducted in party local and zonal level committees. The strong direction from the party's higher bodies and increasing presence of women in the party activities has resulted in better presence of women in party committees. The party document on women's question states that "there must be a target set for the recruitment of women into the party which should be closely monitored". It also directs its units that "there must be a conscious policy for promotion of women into committees and posts at all levels of the party" (CPM 2005).

Reservation in local governments and PPP opened many indirect opportunities in local administrative bodies to women in general and Muslim women in particular. This included members of different working groups and committees who began to be involved in local bodies for the successful implementation of PPP. Many Muslim women had enrolled as volunteers in different mission programs conducted by local governments. Over a period of time, many of these women started attending the party's programs actively. They were inducted into the party and its major front organizations in different capacities subsequently.

The CPI (M) at the central level itself has been emphasizing the role of SHGs to enhance the economic and social status of women from backward sections, especially from Dalit, tribal and Muslim minority communities (CPM 2005:17). The CPI (M) led governments in the past in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala initiated various SHG programs and the party had maintained substantial presence/ influence over these groups both at the administrative and executive levels. The CPI (M) claimed that unlike the World Bank Model, the SHGs in party ruling states would lay emphasis on developing

women's skills in the production of marketable items and also help develop markets for promoting self-reliance among women. Instead of retreating from its responsibilities as practiced in many states, the Left Front governments played an active role in helping these groups.⁷⁵ The CPI (M) also defended these SHGs when the UDF government tried to destabilize the *Kudumbashree* program by cutting funds to it.

In Kerala, it is widely considered that the CPI (M) effectively used the *Kudumbashree* projects to expand its base since a majority of the local units of *Kudumbashree* were led by party associates. Though there is no official statistics on the party affiliations of the elected Community Development Societies (henceforth, the CDS) the members who run *Kudumbashree*, it is a well known fact, are CPI (M) members. This would have prompted the Congress party led UDF government to initiate another SHG in the state named, '*Janasree* Sustainable Development Mission', popularly known as *Janasree* under the chairmanship of the party leader M.M. Hassan in 2009. The controls over the institutional mechanisms which run *Kudumbashree* have helped the party in executing its programs to a great extent. Though the benefits have been distributed impartially to people of all parties, the CPI (M) has used its networks in the *Kudumbashree* projects to strength its base among the underprivileged. This has opened a vast opportunity for the party to get the support of women and deploy its women cadres to work among weaker sections. These networks have also helped the party in elections significantly.

The members of these SHGs have obtained considerable attention through their active intervention in community work. They have developed leadership qualities as well. A large number of Muslim women have joined *Kudumbashree* and other SHGs in Malabar. Most of them are from the lower levels of the society. The poor material conditions of these women make them join these programs. Like reservations in local governance, this has enabled them to active by participate in the public arena.

⁷⁵ Interview with K N Haritha, CDS member at Calicut on 18.07.2013.

The numbers of *Kudumbashree* members contesting in panchayat elections on CPI (M) tickets is growing steadily.⁷⁶ In 2015, 13,993 *Kudumbashree* members contested the local body elections out of which 7,376 won. Nearly 8,000 women contested the elections in 2010 (*The Times of India*, 28 November 2015; *The Hindu*, 29 November 2015). Though there are no official statistics on the status of Muslim women elected, significant number of *Kudumbashree* members elected to different local bodies in Malappuram and Kozhikode districts are Muslims. In Malappuram, more than half of the 1,260 women candidates are members of *Kudumbashree* (*The Hindu*, 19 October 2015). Considering the demographic status of the region, most of them would be Muslim.

Though the CPI (M) is not the biggest political party in Malappuram or in many Muslim dominated areas of Malabar, the party has control over *Kudumbashree* units. A majority of the CDS chairpersons and other members of the committee are from the party.⁷⁷ Party/AIDWA members lead Neighborhood Groups (henceforth, the NHG) and Area Development Societies (henceforth, the ADS) in most panchayats. The party nominates its senior women members to the post of Chairperson of the CDS. The CPI (M) has been giving special attention to appoint Muslim women to these posts in the Malabar region as it helps the party to establish contacts with the community.⁷⁸ The party also campaigns for its members in elections to CDS, ADS and NHGs. These strategies help the party and AIDWA to form links with women at the neighborhood level, especially to the women from lower sections of the society.

Many Muslim women from the Backward Classes joined SHGs as it is the agency through which many of the state benefits are acquired and also it is an entry point to the public arena. The CPI (M) has fielded many of these women for local government elections. Their wider networks in the local areas and leadership qualities help them win elections. The CPI (M) is able to win many wards reserved for women through these

⁷⁶ There is no official statistics available on the number of *Kudumbashree* women contested from the CPI (M). Nevertheless, the CPI (M) leaders claim that significant number of its candidates is also the members of the *Kudumbashree* mission (Source: Interview with P.K. Sainaba on 30.12.2012).

⁷⁷ Though the *Kudumbashree* does not conduct elections on political lines, all major political parties file their nominations for the elections and often political parties work for the victory of their candidates. The election results often appear in the media on political lines.

⁷⁸ Interview with P K Sainaba on 30.12.2012 at Nilambur.

candidates despite the fact that the party does not have much strength in these wards.⁷⁹ These women are also inducted in the local committees of the party and its major front organizations like AIDWA and DYFI. Other than its routine organizational works, the AIDWA uses the network of SHGs for its activities. The members of these SHGs are the regular participants of the CPI (M) and AIDWA's campaigns and protest demonstrations.

The *Kudumbashree* itself has been organized through the conscious interventions of the party and AIDWA. The strength of organized *Kudumbashree* units was on display for example in the indefinite strike organized by the *Kudumbashree* in Trivandrum against the decision of the UDF government to fund projects to the Congress party supported *Janasree* instead of *Kudumbashree*, a state mission program (*Madhyamam*, 07 October 2012). Thousands of women from different parts of the state participated in the 8 day long day-night protest. Though many of them were either activists of CPI (M) or AIDWA, many independent *Kudumbashree* members (who do not have formal political affiliations) also attended the strike. Subaida, a Muslim woman from Palakkad, attended the protest on all 8 days even though she did not have any formal association with CPI (M) or AIDWA. She said that it was vital for her to be the part of the protest though she is not a member of CPI (M) or AIDWA because the state government's decision would directly affect their livelihood. She slept on the footpath with fellow members and did not find any problem in it (*The Times of India*, 05 October 2012).

Subaida's case exemplifies an important dimension of CPI (M)'s conscious intervention in the SHG driven politicization of women. It shows how the party works at the grass-roots for politicization of women. This has also led to higher women's participation in political life as well as gender sensitization of the public arena. It is all the more crucial in the case of Muslim women since the party has limited options to interact with them. P.K. Sainaba said that the AIDWA takes it as its prime responsibility to politicize women and make them aware of their rights. The party documents on

⁷⁹ For example, Ward No. 2 (Karulai Town) of Nilambur Block Panchayat was a traditional strong hold of IUML and the CPI (M) could never win that ward until 2010. In 2010, the party fielded Khadeeja, an active member of *Kudumbashree*, and won that ward. The CPI (M) had miserably failed in many of its strong holds in that election. Despite an anti incumbency factor, she won the election.

women advise its units to employ different strategies and interventions in this regard (CPM 2005). The experiences of women who participated in the day-night protest in the state capital and in different district head quarters show that the party and AIDWA have succeeded in politicizing the members of *Kudumbashree* to a great extent. In an interview, Sheeba, a Muslim woman from Palakkad, said that nobody can dismantle the *Kudumbashree* mission since each one of them knows how their lives have been changed through it. *Kudumbashree* has eradicated poverty and misery in their lives and enabled them to recognize their inner strength and motivated them to come out publicly (*The Times of India*, 08 October 2012). The words of Sheeba, a school dropout, demonstrate how the mission has helped them to recognize their rights and protect them. Many *Kudumbashree* members whom I interviewed had shared similar experiences.

However, critics like Devika and Thambi (2012) are of the view that a vast majority of women in *Kudumbashree*, are from the lower strata of society and are deemed as “subjects”. Also, many times these associations do not equip the women to critique the existing social structure (Devika and Thambi 2012: 63). The cases of different women members of *Kudumbashree* cited here however question the arguments of Devika and Thambi. It is evident that reservation in local governance and establishment of SHGs has had positive effect on the lives of Muslim women. The CPI (M) has been successful in engaging and mobilizing substantial number of these women. This has led to 2 things: one, women have attained a consciousness about their rights, and two, the party has gained organizationally and politically. It has been a relation of mutual accomplishments.

4.2.2 CPI (M) and Muslim Personal Law Related Issues

The party document on women (2005) explains the CPI (M)’s standpoint on Muslim women in detail. Though all sections of women face discrimination, the party is of the opinion that women members of minority communities face discrimination because of their gender and negative portrayal of the community by the Hindu right wing (CPM 2005:13). The party also speaks against the fundamentalist forces in the Muslim community for their refusal to reform personal law. It feels that this refusal undermine

the constitutional rights of Muslim women. For the party this is one of the crucial problems faced by Muslim women (Ibid.).

The party document on women (2005) highlights that many Muslim women are coming forward to protest against the retrograde *fatwas* of the “fundamentalist” clergy. These protests are an “extremely positive trend within the Muslim community” and the party directs its units to support these movements fully. The CPI (M) also calls upon governments to take appropriate measures to reform the Muslim Personal Law. The party recognizes the issues of Muslim women as both community and state issues and hence requires multiple levels interventions to resolve it (*The Hindu*, 31 March 2007).

The Kerala unit of the party and its major front organizations like AIDWA, SFI, DYFI and CITU has chalked out their plan of action on issues related with Muslim Personal Laws on this understanding. The Shah Bano case was the first instance where the party and its major front organizations were actively involved. The Kerala unit of the CPI (M) organized intense campaigns against the central government’s decision on the Shah Bano judgment (1985) and subsequent measures by the then central government to “appease” Muslim clergy. As stated in the party program, it had build up a joint platform of intellectuals, activists and organizations to oppose the central government’s decision. Through these campaigns, the CPI (M) brought to the forefront many Muslim intellectuals like K. E. N. Kunhahammed and Hamid Chennamangaloor (two college teachers) who later became active in the cultural front of the party. Many progressive minded youth, students and Muslim women joined the party and its front organizations at the time of campaign.

P K Sainaba, national vice president of AIDWA and the first Muslim woman member in CPI (M) Kerala state committee also joined the party at that time. She acquired prominence when heated debates started on the Shah Bano case, *Sharia* and other broad issues concerning women's rights during 1985-86. In Malappuram, the CPI (M) kept her on the forefront of the party campaign against the *Sharia* Bill. She led the campaign for bringing illiterate Muslim women abandoned by their husbands under the

purview of the Divorce Maintenance Act. Because of this, Sainaba had to face the wrath of conservative Muslims, both men and women. Recalling those days she said:

Our fight was not against any particular religion, and was not even against the *Sharia* as was projected. We fought against the wrong interpretations of *Sharia* because of which Muslim women, especially illiterates, were persecuted and exploited. A section of the religious leadership was using the community for their political and vested interests. Muslim women were denied their rights when divorce cases were settled at the mosque. Our fundamental objective was to ensure justice for Muslim women who are the victims of misinterpretation of religious rules.⁸⁰

The role played by Sainaba in the *Sharia* debate led to her appointment as a member of CPI (M) Malappuram District Committee in 1987. Later she was also elected to the state committee of the party and was also nominated as the member of the State's Women Commission. She also contested the Malappuram parliamentary seat in 2014. She was also elected to the state and central committee of the AIDWA.

Many Muslims, especially women, who were not active members of the party, became its sympathizers after this campaign. This influenced the electoral performance of the party in several ways. While this campaign got for the party the support of Muslim women and other secular sections of the state, it made the community organizations of the Muslims antagonistic towards the party. Despite this antagonism, the CPI (M) could win the 1987 state assembly elections (held soon after the Shah Bano judgment) with a comfortable majority. Its vote share in the Muslim majority areas increased significantly. For instance, in the Calicut assembly constituency, the CPI (M) candidate C.P. Kunhu secured 43.54% vote and defeated the IUML candidate by 2323 votes. The party lost the same election earlier by more than 6000 votes to the IUML candidate. This campaign helped the CPI (M) to reaffirm its secular and progressive character across the country. The AIDWA's sturdy stand on this issue made other secular women's groups also to come out in support. The AIDWA tried to form a joint platform of all likeminded organizations to build pressure on the government and political parties on other issues concerning Muslim women.

⁸⁰ Interview with P K Sainaba on 30.12.2012 at Nilambur.

Most victims of issues under Muslim Personal Law were women from weaker sections. The AIDWA attempted to address these issues. It persuaded these women to approach the state's legal institutions rather than local mosque committees and other religious institutions that often undermined the interests of women. P. K. Sainaba proudly claimed that the intervention of the party and the AIDWA in these cases (many times challenging the religious leadership) resulted in the legal settlement of divorce cases which was not the case earlier.⁸¹ This led to differences between the CPI (M) and the community organizations of the Muslims in many areas of Malabar, primarily because of latter's control over the local mosque committees. Issues related to divorce cases generally comes to the local mosque committees since they conduct the *nikah* (official Muslim marriage). Majority of the mosque committees in Malabar are run by the IUML and Muslim community organizations associates with them. The settlement at the mosques often denies Muslim women their legal rights as the Islamic rules on marriage are patriarchal. Local mosque committees sustain their hold over the community mainly through their authority in matters related to marriage, death etc. So, when the divorce cases move to legal courts, it weakens the 'hegemony' of local mosques over the community. No other political party other than the CPI (M) prefers legal settlement on divorce cases. This results in a rift between the party and local community leadership. The IUML, which has control over local mosques, can easily convert the community's sentiments against the CPI (M) in such circumstances. The increase in the number of divorce cases in legal courts shows that the situation is gradually changing and the CPI (M) and the AIDWA have played a major role in this change.

For instance, a few families who traditionally supported the IUML in Calicut district have recently joined the CPI (M) because of such issues which resulted in a fight between the CPI (M) and NDF (*The Hindu*, 28 July 2017). Another Muslim woman, Abida, from Tirur (Malappuram district) also became close to AIDWA because AIDWA helped her in her divorce case. Abida's family members are traditional supporters of IUML. When she separated from her husband, her parents preferred to 'settle' the issue through the local mosque committee. But, one of her friends, working in AIDWA,

⁸¹ Interview with P K Sainaba on 30.12.2012 at Nilambur.

persuaded her to approach the court for a better compensation for herself and her two children. Initially her parents refused as they feared the local mosque committee. Somehow, she convinced her parents with the support of the local AIDWA and CPI (M) members and approached the court. The AIDWA also extended legal support to her family. She claimed that she received a decent compensation which was unimaginable if the ‘settlement’ had been done through the mosque committee.⁸²

The AIDWA works through its own organizational mechanisms on these issues. Its efforts to get the legislation on domestic violence passed had a profound effect on women. Now it is also working on issues related to the ‘Mysore *Kalyanam* (marriage)’ among Muslims from the lower sections of Malabar. It is a practice in which Muslim men from Mysore marry Muslim women from poor families from the Malabar. Since the marriage is an expensive affair among Muslims of Malabar, many poor families cannot afford the expenses and hence marry their young girls to Muslim men from Mysore who ‘claim’ relatively lesser dowry. Many of these marriages broke up and the young Muslim brides were sent back to their native places with three or four children. Most of these cases were dealt by the local mosque committees of Mysore. The women victims in most cases did not take legal recourse due to ignorance about their rights and the language problem. The AIDWA and CPI (M) intervened in such cases and demanded that they be dealt with legally and severely.

These efforts of AIDWA created a sympathetic wave towards the party among the lower sections of the Muslim community. Zeenath, a zonal level leader of AIDWA in Malappuram, claimed that the party and AIDWA receive considerable attention from Muslim families. She has been working with AIDWA since 1990. She said that it was very difficult to discuss politics with Muslim women in the 1990s and even in the early 2000s. Apparently, the Muslim women hardly showed any interest in politics despite them participating in election as voters. But, continuous efforts in the arena of women’s rights including personal laws, reservation in local governance and establishment of SHGs have opened an entry point for AIDWA members to interact with Muslim women,

⁸²Interview with Abida on 15.10.2013 at Tirur, Malapuram district.

especially women from the lower sections of society. She said that interventions in issues like instant triple *talaq* have created a confidence in Muslim women, and many among them have approached AIDWA for support and help. She claims that even those Muslim women who support IUML have approached her for help.⁸³ There are cases where some of these women joined the AIDWA and CPI (M).

The state governments led by the CPI (M) initiated certain reforms in Muslim Personal Laws whenever they were in power. In Kerala, the Law Commission appointed by the LDF ministry in 2006 formulated a Bill to regulate indiscrete marriages and divorce in the Muslim community. Muslim community organizations like SKJU and KJU opposed this Bill as it would dilute *Sharia* laws. Despite their opposition, the government was able to pass the Bill in the assembly. The same government also initiated a Bill that made it mandatory that all Muslim marriages and divorces are registered with the local registrar of marriage (*The Hindu*, 25 March 2009). This provided legal security to Muslim women as the local mosque committees were often non-supportive in their issues and needs. The Paloli Committee appointed by the same government in 2010 had recommended institutional support to these women to start self employment.⁸⁴

The party initiated some other measures to help the cause of the rights of Muslim women. The UDF government's (2011-16) decision to challenge the provisions of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 enacted by the LDF government was strongly opposed by CPI (M) and its mass organizations (Krishnakumar 2014). Along with AIDWA, the SFI and DYFI also protested the government's move to allow the "age of puberty" to be considered for marriage. The demand is to let Muslims follow their Personal Laws in this matter, to lower the age of marriage, especially of Muslim women. The circular on the proposed legislation was initiated by Kerala State Local Administration Department headed by an IUML minister. The government had to withdraw the Bill due to the strong opposition it faced. The SFI launched a state wide campaign that demanded "Education at the age of 16, not marriage". This campaign got

⁸³ Interview with Zeenath on 15.04.2014 at Malappuram.

⁸⁴ The details of the committee will be discussed in the next chapter.

enormous support all over the state. The SFI, DYFI, AIDWA and other progressive cultural organizations also organized protest demonstrations in the state. A similar move by the party and its mass organizations resulted in anti CPI (M) campaign by IUML and other Muslim organizations (Ibid.).⁸⁵ Other than this, a delegation of the organization met the union law minister in March 2018 and submitted a memorandum regarding the Bill of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2017, bringing to his attention concerns of various women's organizations and individuals regarding the same ('AIDWA delegation met minister', www.peopledemocracy.in accessed on 07.04.2018).

On a limited level, the party and AIDWA also tried to rehabilitate divorced and widowed women through SHGs like *Kudumbashree* and its institutional mechanisms including cooperative banks. Over a period of time, many of these women started to associate with the party and AIDWA. The AIDWA through its activities also indirectly imparted political education to these women who became associated with it. This has prompted other Muslim community organizations and political parties to adopt this strategy now. This is another positive impact of AIDWA's intervention in issues related with Muslim Personal Law. Many of these divorced and widowed women have been given jobs in the educational and health care institutions run by the Muslim community organizations and political parties. The SHGs run by the IUML gave special preferences to these women. In a limited manner, the IUML also provided legal support in the cases related with Muslim Personal Law. These attempts by the Muslim community organizations and political parties like CPI (M) have provided crucial moral confidence for Muslim women to face these sorts of issues.

The experience of Khadeeja, a widow who hails from the Malappuram district display the level of political understanding imbibed by Muslim women through AIDWA's interventions. She joined *Kudumbashree* and NREGA after her husband's demise. Since she is a high school dropout, she was ineligible to apply for jobs in the government and private sector and hence she had to join the NREGA as a worker. She

⁸⁵ This is a new tendency in state politics. Community organizations (of any religion) often interpret the criticisms on them as 'communal' and in this way change the direction of the discussions. Though this strategy was employed by communal groups for long time in India, the state of Kerala was an exception.

also took membership of the CITU union for NREGA workers. She felt that her association with the Left movement will help her address her problems. The CITU has helped her in the different problems she has faced. For the first time in her life, she joined a protest demonstration at the Malappuram district head quarters (which is 60 km away from her native place) demanding hike in allowance. Though some of her family members were not happy about her association with the Left and her participation in protest demonstrations, she said that participation proved crucial for her as it was directly connected to her life. She also dismisses the charge by many of her relatives that CPI (M) is an “anti religious” party. She said that neither the party nor AIDWA interfere in her religious affairs and that she has only benefited from her association with them and hence she does not care much about the criticism from her family members.⁸⁶

The CPI (M) and AIDWA are of the opinion that all Personal Laws require certain reforms to protect the interests of women. They stand for greater autonomy of women in all religious communities. This is visible in the party’s approach to the ban on the entry of woman in *Sabarimala* temple, one of the famous temples in south India. When the government led by the party once filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court in support of the ban on women’s entry, the party state committee secretary Kodyeri Balakrishnan categorically stated that the LDF government should not back such a move and asked the government to file a revised petition in the Supreme Court. He said that the party is of the view that all women should be allowed in all temples. Like other community organizations, this position was attacked by the Hindu fundamentalist organizations. They alleged that the party is “unnecessarily interfering” in the religious matters of the Hindu community, while it is not doing so in the case of other communities (*Malayala Manorama*, 14 July 2016).⁸⁷ However, the party program lays a special emphasis on the condition of Muslim women in the country. The active involvement of

⁸⁶ Interview with Khadeeja on 27.09.2013 at Malappuram.

⁸⁷ The NDA government’s suggestion to ban instant triple *talaq* has triggered intense debate in Kerala. The CPI (M)’s position on the issue has fetched the wrath of Muslim community organizations. But the standpoint has silenced the Hindu right wing forces who consistently argue that CPI (M) is playing the ‘minority’ card in the state. The discussion on triple *talaq* has evolved at a juncture where CPI (M) demanded entry for all women in *Sabarimala*. Hence, it is clear that all communal organizations use this strategy to make political gains.

CPI (M) and its major front organizations on the issues related to *Sharia* and Muslim Personal Law have brought about significant social changes.

While the issues related with instant triple *talaq* were compromised /settled within the mosque committees, the conscious intervention of AIDWA and the party resulted in a social situation where Muslim women could approach legal courts for justice. Since the *Sharia* rules favor men over women, the settlement at mosques could not ensure justice to women. The CPI (M)'s and AIDWA's work has also influenced Muslim organizations and political parties like IUML who also started to accept this transformation and encouraged women to approach legal courts. Through these interventions, the CPI (M) and AIDWA could initiate a discussion on raising the question whether the laws constituted a social/political issue or a religious one. They channeled the discussion towards the human rights of Muslim women rather than the cultural rights of the Muslim community.

The CPI (M) also gained from intervening on issues of Muslim Personal Law in general and instant triple *talaq* in particular. Its active help in extending legal, emotional and other forms of support to Muslim women resulted in the larger acceptance of CPI (M) and AIDWA in Kerala. This provided a chance to the party to discuss its politics with Muslim women which was not the case till 1990s. Reservations in local governance and the establishment of state wide SHGs had accelerated this interaction. The CPI (M) has benefited both electorally and organizationally in Muslim dominated areas through such efforts. Though many Muslim women who benefited from the AIDWA's intervention did not join the organization or party, they came close to it and it helped them with their "rights and duties". This was a political gain for the party, which had come to it through its relentless work among Muslim women.

As stated in the party program (CPM 2000) and the document on women (CPM 2005), the party could build a secular- democratic platform on women's issues in the state. The party's position on the present NDA government's Bill on Muslim women (The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017) underscores its commitment to the secular democratic principles and minority rights. Though the party

accepts the spirit of the Bill, it opposed the motive of NDA government to introduce Uniform Civil Code through the Bill and hence described it as “unwarranted” and “politically motivated” (*The Indian Express*, 26 December 2017). The party understands the issue of triple *talaq* as a civil matter and hence opposes any move to consider it as criminal case as proposed by the NDA government. This projects the position of the party on *Sharia* and Muslim personal laws (Ibid.).

4.2.3 CPI (M) and the ‘Voice’ of Muslim Women

In the face of rise of the CPI during 1940s and in its immediate aftermath, the conservative Muslim clergy which had close associations with the IUML leadership had prohibited Muslims from joining the communist movement (Randathani 1996). Their campaign which stated that “voting for *sickle* (election symbol of Communist party) is anti-Islam and would fetch hell after death” was adhered to by a significant section of the community. Women and girls were not even allowed to go out of the house at that time. Being active in the public domain was restricted for women. But in the 1950s and 1960s, many Muslims, mostly from the lower sections of society joined the party for different reasons. But, even then, very few women rose to the organizational structure of the party or even its major front organizations.

Cultural spaces were used as a major platform for mobilization by the Communist Party in the early years of its formation. Resisting stiff opposition from religious leadership, a few Muslim women became active in the cultural front. The acclaimed theatre activist Nilambur Ayisha is one among them. Born to an affluent family in the Eranad region of Malappuram district, and possessing several creative talents, she could hardly find space to express it. When her husband abandoned her at the age of 14 with a girl child, it was a Communist Party activist, E. K. Ayamun who introduced her to the stage. It was not just a means of livelihood for her; but a new space which was not there before. Ayisha was of the opinion that it was the support and help by the party that gave her confidence to be part of theatre and make it her profession.⁸⁸ The party was of the

⁸⁸ Interview with Nilambur Ayisha on 18.10.2013 at Nilambur, Malappuram district.

opinion that such acts were required to break the strong hold of patriarchy over the Muslim community. The structure of patriarchy was not adequately addressed by the reform movements. The party felt that it had a responsibility to carry forward the reform process and help women.

The party continues its work in similar directions and intervenes when help is needed. For example, the CPI (M), AIDWA and DYFI took a staunch position when a Muslim girl and her family were excommunicated from the community for performing *Bharathanatyam* (a particular dance form). Their intervention in the issue resulted in the withdrawal of the *Masjid* committee's decision on excommunication (*Deshabhimani*, 28 September 2006). The girl and her family faced several problems. She said that many Muslim students kept distance from her and her sister (who is also a dancer) at school and the *madrassa*. They were also excluded from many public programs. It was the support of CPI (M) and progressive forces that helped her to continue in her profession (*The News Minute*, 19 January 2015). In another instance, three Muslim girls were targeted for participating in a flash mob by the 'self declared guardians of the religion' on social media. The SFI extended complete support to these girls and organized flash mobs across the state against the moral policing and character assassination (*The Times of India*, 12 December 2017). Very recently, the CPI (M) and its fronts have made significant interventions in the cases of 'moral policing', where women are prime targets. The party and its front organizations, its publications play a proactive role in making the issue public.⁸⁹ The LDF government also enacts strong rules to curb issues related with the moral policing.

⁸⁹ The CPI (M) Polit Bureau member and present Chief Minister of the state Pinarayi Vijayan in his Facebook post made it very clear that CPI (M) would not support any act of moral policing and culprits (even if they are CPI (M) members) would be punished in such cases. The party would not protect such elements (*Deshabhimani*, 12 July 2015). The party's state committee member Kadakampally Surendran in a press statement also clarified the party's position when a branch secretary of party was arrested in a moral policing case (*Deshabhimani*, 10 July 2015). Another central committee member of the party, Dr. Thomas Issac clarified the party's position in a facebook post when a complaint on CP I (M) members was registered for abusing a woman on social media (Issac's Facebook post on 12 August 2015).

Many women became active in the ‘political arena’⁹⁰ as well. Najmu, zonal level leader of CPI (M) and AIDWA shared similar experiences like that of Nilambur Ayisha, but on a different platform. It was the space which the party provided to her (which was denied before) in the public domain that attracted her to the party. She came to the public domain as a candidate in the local body elections (after the implementation of women’s reservation in local governance) in 1995 and got elected as a panchayat president. Later, she was promoted to the different committees of the party and AIDWA and also elected to the block panchayat as its member.⁹¹

Many Muslim girls have become active in college and university campuses. The educational uplift of Muslim girls has resulted in a better enrollment of Muslim girls in higher education. Many Muslim girls (both from the ‘Left’ leaning families and others) have started to associate with SFI and DYFI at local levels. While girl students become active in the campuses under SFI, the DYFI works among them at local levels. The SFI has immense potential to mobilize for different socio-political causes. Since majority of the SFI’s activism takes place within college/university campuses, a section of Muslim girls active in the SFI feel that it would not create any problem for them. Certain SFI members express a feeling that “too much active” in the public domain would affect their future as most of the men do not prefer “activists” as their “life partners”.⁹² Though most of them want to attend SFI’s public functions outside the campus, they find it difficult to get permission from their families and hence restrict themselves to the campuses.⁹³ Many Muslim girls have been elected to the students’ unions and to the different committees of SFI. For example, V.P. Rajeena, presently DYFI central committee member was the first woman district president of SFI in Malappuram. She was also an elected representative of Calicut University students’ union and later became to state leader of SFI and DYFI. Many AIDWA and party’s young woman leaders have started their political activism

⁹⁰ By this I mean electoral and organizational politics.

⁹¹ Interview with Najmu on 21.05.2015 at Malappuram.

⁹² Source: Interview with SFI members at MES Mampad College, Farook College, Calicut and University campus, Thenjippalam.

⁹³ Interview with SFI members at MES Mampad College and University of Calicut campus.

from campuses. These girls also become active in the co-curricular activities on campuses led by the students' union and SFI.

Two SFI members, Najida from Farook College, Calicut and Fathima from Calicut University campus, Thenjippalam expressed the same view on their association with the SFI. Both shared the wish of many Muslim girls to be active in campus politics and said that participation in cultural activities had become possible due to being part of the SFI.⁹⁴ It is still considered “immoral” in Farook College campus if a Muslim girl associates with the SFI. But the political front is dominated by Muslim students. The SFI girl's association with their male counterparts in meetings, conferences and protest demonstrations is often labeled as “wrong and immoral” activity and often such girls are victims of severe criticisms bordering on questioning their character. At times, the college managements run by certain Muslim organizations also “control” Muslim girls' entry to the public domain and “report” this to their family members. For example, the Farook College has suspended 9 students (5 boys and 4 girls) from a class for sitting together on a bench in class. These students were asked to return to the college only with their parents. The SFI has organized protest against this issue across the state and many CPI (M), AIDWA and DYFI leaders raised their voices against the decision of college authorities (‘Protest Against Segregation in the Farook College’, www.indianexpress.com accessed on 12.04.2018). Farook College reportedly has separate seating areas in the cafeteria for boys and girls. In the college corridor benches only boys are allowed to sit (‘Farook College does not Allow Boys and Girls to Sit’, www.dnaindia.com accessed on 12.04.2018). But the party and its organizations raise their voices against such segregation and try to strengthen the rights and freedoms of women students.

The CPI (M) and its front organizations have succeeded in mobilizing of Muslim girls to a great extent. As discussed above, the socio-economic and educational progress

⁹⁴ Muslim students' organizations including MSF, SIO would not allow Muslim girls to participate in organizational activities including protests and campaigns. Moreover, those students who become active in the campus often face moral policing from different corners. Many girls fear that it would even affect their future by not getting ‘standard’ marriage proposals. But recently these organizations have shifted their positions and girls are being included in college union elections since the majority students are girls in campuses. This is a result of left activism largely.

of Muslims and certain institutional reforms had a big effect in these efforts. These changes also helped Muslim women to enter those 'spaces' that were denied to them before. The enrollment of Muslim girls in SFI and DYFI bring out this point clearly. But, the party document also mentions of 'certain wrong tendencies that exist within the party that hamper women's increased participation in the public realm' (CPM 2005). It acknowledges that despite the intervention of the party, women still have to face opposition on entering the public arena, both from within and outside the party.⁹⁵

Najmu's case illustrates the graveness of the situation. Even though it was her family members who asked her to contest elections for the first time (which she resisted at first), they asked her to step back from party activities and also from the public domain once her term as a panchayat member was over (in 2000). They faced issues from the community as well. But she defended herself and continued to be active in the public domain and was later promoted to the higher committees of the party and AIDWA. She was also elected to the block panchayat as its member. Najmu's experiences as a member of the local panchayat, and the political education she received from the AIDWA and the party made her continue her political activities. She felt that this was her 'right'. P.K. Sainaba said that there are many more "Najmus" in party who defy family and community dictates to continue their political careers.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ The party documents (2005:14) says "Communist families should discourage conformity to stereotypical roles expected of women, particularly newlywed women, of head covering, taking to the *Purdah*, of shouldering the main burdens of domestic responsibility etc or of discrimination between sons and daughters. The party members should set an example within their own homes also. There should be a conscious effort to set standards of communist morality and ethics in relations within families.

The party members and especially leaders should encourage women family members to be politically active in whatever way is best suited to them. It should not be the case, as sometimes happens that party members discourage their wives from joining political work on the plea that 'at least one of us should stay at home'. Communists have to uphold democratic practices like registration of marriage within their own families, equal treatment to daughters and sons within the family, eschewing of rituals and religious ceremonies many of which have an anti - woman and castes bias. There have been many examples of two active comrades in the party deciding to get married of their own choice. In some cases the marriage then becomes a barrier for the woman's advance because once married she is expected to play the role of a housewife giving up her political life. By not intervening, the party actually loses a talented and committed cadre apart from the negative impact on the woman herself.

The party has to make conscious efforts to root out alien patriarchal notions about women and women's role within the family and in public life. Setting examples in personal life also will be of immense help in fulfilling the political task of mobilizing larger sections of women."

⁹⁶ Interview with P.K. Sainaba on 30.03.2013.

Many girls from Left leaning families or even party families become active in the organizations on entering campus life, which shows that such an opportunity is denied to them in their homes and native place. Hafsath, the block leader, DYFI, who was earlier active in students' front, expressed such a concern. She narrated a few cases where active SFI cadres (who were with her in college) have 'disappeared' from the party organization after completing their studies. The saddest part for her was that even a couple of SFI women leaders who married DYFI block and district level leaders met with the same fate. Hafsath is of the opinion that many Muslim girls wanted to be publicly active and be with the party organization. However, restrictions from families 'suppress' their desires. She also points out that many fundamentalist organizations are recruiting Muslim girls to their organizations with the consent of their families and their organizations identify women as a potential force.⁹⁷

Another Muslim girl member of the SFI in MES Mampad College complained that certain male members in the same unit underrated her contributions to the movement and 'advised' her not to be 'too' active as it would affect her future.⁹⁸ This could also be the reason for many party activists leaving their activism after their campus life was over.⁹⁹ This raises some question about the gender sensitivity within the 'left and progressive' families of Kerala.¹⁰⁰

Though the party documents direct CPI (M) members to encourage women family members to be politically active in whatever way it suits them, the cases discussed above bring out that many male party members themselves discourage their female relations

⁹⁷ Interview with Hafsath on 12.05.2013 at Tirur

⁹⁸ Interview with a SFI Member in MES Mampad College on 28.11.2014 at Mampad

⁹⁹ Three major front organizations of the party in the state- SFI, DYFI and AIDWA together claim that they have more than one crore membership. But this does not reflect either on the organizational or electoral performance of the party. Many party documents seriously introspect these issues and chalked out plans to recruit members to the party from these organizations, especially recruitment of women. Despite this, party could not recruit members from these organizations as party documents envisaged. The attitude of the men in the party as shown in the cases could be one of the reasons for this situation.

¹⁰⁰ The party rectification document (2000) cautioned the party on this. It says "some party members succumb to social and religious practices alien to Communist standards within the family and the community on questions such as dowry taking, inter -caste marriages, child marriage, equal status to girl child etc. The tendency is to go along with family or community pressures rather than have a firm and principled stand behaving as a Communist. (CPM 2000:19).

from participating party programs. The explanation given by them is “at least one of us should stay at home to care of the family”.¹⁰¹ Given this, the cases mentioned above demonstrate that many times Muslim women could attain political positions through ‘strategic opportunities’ (Devika 2012) than through the normal expansion of such spaces. However, the political education that women imbibed through the party and their experiences as a political activist enabled them to demand and defend their ‘rights’. The educational upliftment that they achieve also added weight to this. The SFI women members in the Calicut University campus demand more autonomy and space within the organization and its activities.¹⁰² Further, the women in the party approach its organizational mechanisms to solve the issues that they face within and outside the family and this has resulted in conflicts in many party units. The party has received many complaints in this regard. But, since these are handled within the organization, its details are not available to the public. At times, the CPI (M) release press statement on the actions taken by the party on complaints received from its women members. A few women whom I interviewed confirmed that they know cases where women complained to the party leadership against the attitude of party men. This raises the point about the political consciousness of many CPI (M) men. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged, given the evidence, that CPI (M) has opened up political opportunities for women and made them conscious about their rights in Malabar.

It is pertinent to compare the status of women members of CPI (M) with those of other organizations. For instance, in contrast to the experiences of IUML’s elected women members, the women in CPI (M) have better space both within and outside the organization. The women members in IUML have to “reproduce/reaffirm elite femininity (mainly through certain dress codes and deference the orders of male leaders) to continue in the public domain”.¹⁰³ Resignation of an elected IUML *grama panchayat* president,

¹⁰¹ The situation is more or less same in all communities. However, the AIDWA members from Hindu community feel that they “have little more freedom” than the other communities in participating party programs. (Source: interview with the AIDWA members on 15.08.2014 at Kannur and 16.07.2015 at Malappuram.

¹⁰² Interview with SFI members in Calicut University campus on 07.06.2014.

¹⁰³ One of the striking features of early 20th century community reformism in Kerala was an emphasis on ‘respectable’ dressing. This was common to all religious community. The prominence of *purdha* shows the

Vattassery Mariyumma (Kuzhimanna grama panchayat, Malappuram) protesting “excess control” on her administrative powers and male supremacy in decision making is a case in point (*The Hindu*, March 13 2013). In 2010 local body elections, the IUMML directed its Muslim women candidates to follow ‘Islamic dress code’. It also instructed its candidates to leave the public places by evening and also directed them sit on any corner on the stage (*The Telegraph*, 19 September 2010). However, the IUMML state secretary K.N.A. Khadar defended his party’s code of conduct for Muslim women stating that there is nothing unusual in it. He said that it is to ensure that religious rules are being followed by its members (*The Hindu*, 24 September 2010).

Nevertheless, the majority of IUMML women members do not have a ‘problem’ in following the dress code prescribed by the party. One IUMML panchayat member from Kozhikode district defended wearing *hijab* as it is the only means for her to enter the public domain. She was of the opinion that it is compulsory to dress like an “ideal Muslim women” when one enters the public arena. According to her, a woman needed to gain the trust of her family members and husband to do political activism (for details, see, Devika and Thampi 2012).¹⁰⁴ Hence it is clear that, the IUMML women politicians were keen to make use of the ‘strategic opportunities’ to establish themselves within the party and gain upward mobility both in the party organization and electoral politics. In fact the strategic opportunities are perceived to be as important as the expansion of formal spaces for women, especially in the case of Muslim women.

The CPI (M) and AIDWA criticized these actions and alleged that IUMML had introduced *Talibanism* among Muslim women (*Deshabhimani*, September 28 2014). Fathima Salim, a widow, was elected from the Karulai *grama panchayat* and joined the CPI (M) and AIDWA. Her views were contrary to the IUMML elected members. Elected from a traditional UDF ward, she said that the party encourages her to intervene in all

continuation of early 20th century reformism in political Islam of the last two decades. (For details, see Devika 2007).

¹⁰⁴ The IUMML does not promote women in the public programs organized by the party. For example, IUMML women’s wing president was stopped from addressing the audience at the state conference of Muslim Youth League (held at Calicut on 12 November 2016) stating that the party did not have a precedent of a women addressing a male crowd (*Deshabhimani*, 13 November 2016). Even the programs organized by women’s league are dominated by the male leaders of the party.

issues of the ward at all times and in every place.¹⁰⁵ She has been promoted as an Area Committee Member of the CPI (M) and also District Committee member of CITU and AIDWA. Some Muslim women members of the party face problems for not following the traditional dress code. Many of the CPI (M) women elected representatives and local level activists have faced sharp criticisms from orthodox Muslim groups for not following a strict dress code and this has affected their electoral performance. An AIDWA activist in Kasargod district received death threat for the same reason (Undaunted by Death Threats', www.rediff.com accessed on 15.12.2013). A couple of local AIDWA activists in Kannur revealed that they have lost the local body elections because of not following *purdha*. Rival political groups have sharply criticized them on this ground, which in fact resulted in their defeat.¹⁰⁶

While a sizable section of leaders and activists of party and its mass organizations believe that *hijab* hinders the women's freedom and mobility, they let women with *hijab* become representatives of Muslim women. The party's daily, *Deshabhimani* and the television channel *Kairali* often carry the pictures of Muslim who wear *purdha* when they cover any party program in the Muslim majority areas. This is a conscious effort from the party's side to show that even those Muslim women who wear *purdha* have been accepted into the party fold. This indicates the flexibility of the party in its work among the Muslims of Malabar.

Despite the fact that the CPI (M)'s engagement with Muslim women has produced substantial organizational and electoral benefits for the party, this process of mobilization has also produced many tricky situations for it in its organizational work. It opens up contradictions between its written program and ground level work of the party. Besides, CPI (M)'s indistinctness in dealing with the 'neo orthodoxy' that emerged among Muslim minorities restricts the party in carrying forward its agendas for Muslim women. This contradiction is evident from the party's response to the new cultural

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Fathima Salim at Karulai on 05.02.2015.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Sakeena TP and Majida at Kannur on 15.08.2014.

practices like *hijab*¹⁰⁷ that emerged among Muslims of Malabar from the 1980s. This has created some obstacles in the party's efforts to mobilize Muslim women in Malabar, especially addressing the question of reform.

Further, focus on electoral politics has led the party to make some changes in the way it looks at the women's question. The electoral understanding with certain Muslim community organizations like A P *Sunnis* has resulted in a situation where the party works around its political principles. For instance, a local CPI (M) leader in Kannur (on anonymity) mentioned an incident where the party changed the candidature of a Muslim woman contesting for the post of municipal councilor succumbing to pressure from A P *Sunnis*. A P *Sunnis* does not favor a Muslim woman to be in public domain. Hence they intimate CPI (M) local leadership to cancel the candidature of the Muslim woman and field a woman from non Muslim community. A P *Sunnis* have significant vote share in that panchayat ward and their support is vital for the CPI (M) to win the election. Subsequently, the party gave the seat to an AIDWA activist from Hindu community and she won the election.

In another case, the CPI (M) state committee member and AIDWA leader, P.K. Sainaba who contested from the Malappuram parliament constituency faced many problems for not following the 'dress code' of Muslim women in public. P. K. Sainaba does not wear the shawl considered to be essential in a Muslim women's attire. Her election posters and banners also have pictures of her without the shawl. However, succumbing to orthodox pressures, she had to use a photo of herself with a shawl for the election campaign. The major pressure came from A P *Sunnis*, who traditionally support the CPI (M) and the LDF. But, A P *Sunnis* follow a highly retrograde position on the question of gender equality in the Muslim community. The A P *Sunni* leader AP Kanthapuram openly declared that his organization do not consider men as equal to women and also said that Islam does not support it ('Kanthapuram Against Gender Equality, www.thehindu.in accessed on 05.12.2015). Association with such organizations

¹⁰⁷ CPI (M) does not have an official standpoint on the *hijab*. However, the majority of its leaders identified it as a dress code imposed by political Islamists on Muslim women (Source: Interview with CPI (M) and AIDWA leaders).

has generated discontent among a section of supporters of the party who support it for its secular principles. However, this is justified on the grounds of striking a balance between its electoral requirements and principled political positions in parliamentary politics.

The CPI (M)'s attempts to address the Muslim Personal Law and issues of Muslim women have been resisted by a section of Muslim community organizations and Muslims. They portray CPI (M)'s work as an agenda against Islam, and argue that politics has no role to play in religion.¹⁰⁸ They highlight the rights guaranteed by the constitution to protect the cultural rights of the minorities as a defense against CPI (M)'s interventions on Muslim women's issues. Interestingly, organizational differences dissolve when it comes to the question of taking a stand against the CPI (M) on women's issues. For example, E K *Sunnis*, the major rival of A P *Sunnis* have supported the A P *Sunni* leader AP Kanthapuram when he faced criticisms on his comments on gender equality (*The Times of India*, 03 December 2015). They argued that the controversy is a conspiracy to destroy Islam (Ibid.). Similar arguments have been made by the supporters of different Muslim community organizations. When a college teacher was criticized for his remarks on Muslim girls by SFI and AIDWA, E K *Sunnis* organized a rally to support him and alleged that the CPI (M) also share the '*Hindutva*' agenda to destroy Islam (. (Source: *The Hindu*, 23 March 2018; *The Times of India*, 20 March 2018; *The Times of India*, 24 March 2018).¹⁰⁹ This campaign has apparently influenced a section of Muslim women whom the party aims to mobilize. Safi, an A P *Sunni* activist said that the women's entry to public domain has resulted in degradation of human life.¹¹⁰ Interestingly, the same opinion was shared by an E K *Sunni* activist Shereef on the role of women in public domain.¹¹¹ Both of them opposed women's reservation in local governance.

Many Muslim girls (who are also members of different Muslim girls' organizations) also speak against CPI (M) and its front organizations stating that they do

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Safi, an activist of AP *Sunni* on 22.01.2014 at Nilambur.

¹⁰⁹ More details will be provided in the next chapter.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Safi, an activist of A P *Sunni* on 22.01.2014 at Nilambur.

¹¹¹ Interview with Shereef, an activist of E K *Sunni* on 18.12.2014 at Nilambur.

not need the ‘agency’ of CPI (M) to protect their rights.¹¹² In fact, this conflict is the continuation of the party’s ambiguities on the ‘neo orthodoxy’ that is experienced among the Malabar Muslims as these forms of resistance by Muslim girls being the offshoot are of this version of modernity. Counter to the party’s position, organizations like PFI and GIO organize campaigns maintain that ‘wearing *hijab* is their right’ and the CPI (M) need not to interfere in such issues.

One small section of Kerala Muslims tries to address the issues of Muslim women within the framework of ‘Islam’ itself. They attempt to reread the *Quran* and *Hadith* to “reclaim their religion and undermine both Islamist patriarchal distortions and Western stereotypes of Islam as backward and terroristic” (Moghadam 2004:53). They criticize the clergy for distorting the Islamic principles on gender justice and put forward Islamic version of feminism (see, Wadud 1993, Engineer 2010, Karassery 2011). While the objectives of Islamic feminists are more or less similar to that of “secular feminists”, their understanding of patriarchy in Muslim societies and the remedies they propose are different from the latter (Vatuk 490-492). Unlike other feminist groups that refer to constitutional values or universalistic human right principles, Islamic feminists trust the authority of Quran, which, they believe, grants Muslim women equal rights with Muslim men. They see themselves as feminist though not considered so by many (see, Moghissi 1999, Moghadam 2002, Nair 2005). This group consists of scholars, activists and organizations demand for the emancipation of Muslim women from the clutches of patriarchy and Muslim clergy in Kerala and they believe that the “original texts” of Islam treat men and women equally. Their activism mainly revolves around the patriarchal nature of Muslim Personal Law and position of clergy, but they are loosely organized. Some of the AIDWA, SFI and DYFI activists whom I have interviewed had also shared similar views about the gender equality as professed by Islamic texts. Many of them have openly questioned the clergy and Muslim fundamentalist organizations for their anti women standpoints and they seek direction in the Holy Book of Muslims.

¹¹² Activists of CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations have heated arguments on the rights of Muslim women and often accuse the CPI (M) of trying to act as an ‘agency’ to protect Muslim girls while remaining silent on women from other sections of society. Many feminist groups also argue that the CPI (M) and its major front organizations have little regard for the ‘agency’ of women.

Many members of Muslim political parties and community organizations also share progressive views of CPI (M) on the gender issues. The views of many Muslim youth and students' organization on the decision of UDF government to reduce the age of marriage of Muslim girls display the fact that the youth and students in the community uphold values of gender justice despite the different opinion exerted by their parent organizations on it. When 9 Muslim organizations under the leadership of IUML decided to approach the Supreme Court to exclude the Muslim women from the law prescribing minimum marital age, organizations including the MSF and the MYL opposed that decision publicly. The MSF national president T. P. Ashrafali in a statement made it clear that such a move would block Muslim girl's educational progress ('Muslim Groups Want Minimal Age to be Scrapped', [www. indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in) accessed on 25.10.2014). They are also ready to associate with the CPI (M) and other mainstream political parties and community organizations to protect the rights of Muslim women. This is a new discourse on gender rights among Muslims of Kerala. Certain Muslim community organizations and political parties also took initiatives in this direction. The *Jamaat* has inducted Muslim women to the administration of local mosques as discussed in the previous chapter and the IUML's women wing has started demanding seats to contest in the state assembly and parliamentary elections. They also organized campaigns and protests for women rights, taking up the empowerment of Muslim women.

The case of Jamida teacher is particularly important. She led Friday prayers for the first time in Kerala in January 2018. She is the General Secretary of Quran Sunnath Society, an organization that questions many established concepts of Islam (Muslim Women lead Friday Prayer', www.thenewsminute.com accessed on 10.02.2018). She is of the opinion that the *Quran* does not speak against women and it was the interpretation of men that made the *Quran* anti woman. Amina Wadud who led a Friday prayer in the USA was her source of inspiration (Ibid.).¹¹³ She claimed that *Quran* did not ban Muslim women from leading the Friday prayers. Though there were certain hate campaigns

¹¹³ However, Friday prayer was not held in the mosque. It was held in their organization's office in Wandoor, Malappuram district.

against her on social media, mainstream Muslim community organizations did not respond to this incident.

To a large extent, the CPI (M) also agrees with the views that the religious leadership act as a major hindrance in the progress of Muslim women. According to P.K. Sainaba, the religious leadership has a role in the pathetic condition of women in all religions and hence personal law have to be amended.¹¹⁴ But, the party is not explicit in its standpoints on many of these developments. One of the major reasons is the electoral compulsions from the different Muslim community organizations. Since these organizations have strong influence over the community in Malabar, the CPI (M) has to tactically deal with these issues.¹¹⁵ Another reason is Muslim women's general reluctance on acts like women leading Friday prayers. Most of them are of the opinion that this kind of activism will not resolve the issues they face.¹¹⁶ They do not support the "ultra" versions of "Islamic feminism" propagated by scholars like Amina Wadud or even by the vernacular scholars like M.N. Karassery and Hamid Chennamangaloor. They 'fight and question' the male centric notion of religion and community Islam within mainstream Islam. Further, the general reluctance towards the notion of 'feminism' by a section of the party and AIDWA leaders also resulted in the "cold response" of the party towards the interventions of "Islamic feminists".¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Interview with the P.K. Sainaba on 30.04.2014 at Nilambur.

¹¹⁵ A detailed discussion on this will be done in next chapter.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Sulekha and Jinju mol, two school teachers and members of AIDWA at Manjery on 11.06.2018.

¹¹⁷ Kranzire (2009) who worked on the AIDWA argue that an analysis of AIDWA's constitution apparently divulge the struggle of the organization with the idea of feminism as well as the concept of Marxism which might have to do with the ambivalence to the Western concept of feminism, the diversity of the Indian women's movement, the diversity of Indian feminism, or the sex-blindness of Marxism itself (Kranzire 2009:3). But, Kranzire's argument of ambivalence based on the constitution of AIDWA would not hold since the objectives of the movement were laid out on the Marxist understanding of the women's question. The ambivalence on feminism stems from the manner the concept is being understood by the common people of the state. At the local level, the concept of feminism has been established as an ideology that destroys the women's cause and pits the male dominated society against women. Critics argue that rather than the fear of the destruction of working class unity, it is the 'fear' of loss of support from CPI (M) and its other major fronts that are dominated by men manifest.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter looked at how the CPI (M) makes use of reservations in local governance, SHGs, issues related with Muslim personal laws and the issues related with the ‘voices’ of Muslim women in public and private domain to mobilize them. The CPI (M)’s interaction gave greater visibility and ensured better participation of Muslim women in the public domain of Malabar and also helped in their politicization and secularization. The exposure to politics and the confidence provided by the party and its major front organizations has equipped Muslim women with substantial autonomy to fight for their rights in the public and private domains. The interventions of the party and AIDWA in the issues of Muslim women has made them conscious of their rights as individuals rather than existing merely as part of a community.

Despite these social advances, this engagement has produced some ambiguities and differences within and outside the party. The electoral compulsions and the pressure from formidable Muslim community organizations have compelled the party to compromise at times on its emancipatory principles.

Chapter V

CPI (M)'s Engagements with Muslim Community Organizations

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapters, the Muslim community organizations play an active role in the socio-political realm of Kerala. They have an immense potential to mobilize their supporters, through both civic and political activities. These organizations act as an accessible entry point for their members for civic and political participation. This chapter examines the different facets of CPI (M)'s engagement with Muslim community organizations since 1980. This chapter begins with an enquiry on why the CPI (M) tries to engage with the Muslim community organizations and why this alliance is important. It focuses on the electoral arrangements between the party and Muslim community organizations. This section focuses on how the party negotiates with the Muslim community organizations for their support to its candidates in elections.

The non-electoral interactions (that fall outside the direct electoral realm) form the core of the next section. This includes the major issues taken up by the party (issues related with the security, identity and equity concerns of Muslims) and the obstacles, ambiguities and problems which it faces while addressing these issues. It also discusses the manner in which the party gained an understanding through these interactions. It should be mentioned here that the emergence of identity politics and the subsequent efforts by certain Muslim organizations like *Jamaat* and PFI to develop a Dalit-Muslim platform posed a serious challenge to the CPI (M) in Malabar. This made the party more circumspect in dealing with the issues related to Muslims. Moreover, the various socio-political and cultural developments among Kerala Muslims made the party to reconsider its conventional pattern of mobilization and adopt new strategies, especially to accommodate middle class. These shifts in mobilizational strategies are explained in detail. The final section tries to assess the impact of these interactions between the party and Muslim community organizations.

5.2 Context of Engagement

Muslim community organizations have a significant role in the socio-economic integration of Muslims and their engagement with mainstream society in Kerala. Scholars have argued that Muslim community organizations working in the political and religious realms have acted as an instrument of political integration and mobilization of Muslims in Kerala (see, Aziz 1990; Chiriyankandath 1993; Prabhash 2000; Shefeeque 2011; Mannathukaran 2015). The case of Muslim community organizations in Kerala bring out the facets of what can be called “active citizenship”. Mario Peucker and Rauf Ceylan (2017:1-3) argues that, ethno-religious minority community groups tend to serve as “a training ground for entry into the wider society- building civic skills and encouraging active civic involvement”. This would have positive effects on their political and civil participation (Ibid.).

Empirical evidence suggests that the Muslim community organizations facilitate cross community engagements and collaborations of Muslims with the rest of society. Though there are organizational changes, the power, and personal ambitions of the leadership play a major role in shifts towards cross community engagements, it demonstrates the dynamic facets of the community’s active citizenship. All the major Muslim community organizations invite the leaders of different political parties, caste and religious groups and prominent civil society activists for conferences and other public functions organized by them. Even the leaders of the BJP are invited for public programs. For example, the BJP Kerala state president P.S. Sreedharan Pillai was invited for the *Mujahid* conference and E K *Sunni* faction conference in 2017. It is to be noted that the same political party leaders attend the conferences of different factions of same sect. The *Jamaat*, *Mujahid* and *Sunni* groups include non-Muslims as beneficiaries in their relief and social service activities. Muslim political parties also foster similar cross community engagements. For example, the IUML is the major constituent of the UDF, a political front that has many parties represents diverse caste, class and religious interests. The party does not find it as a problem to share political platforms with its alliance partners. The IUML was also the constituent of the LDF for a short period. The Indian

National League, another political party has been associating with the LDF since its formation in 1993. The Peoples Democratic Party, Welfare Party of India and Social Democratic Party of India give representation to non-Muslims in their state and regional committees. Most of these organizations try to establish a joint platform of all marginalized groups to advance their politics.

Many Muslim community organizations see community activism as a gateway to political participation. The IUML's focus was more on community initiatives for a long period before it became active in electoral politics. The Kerala unit of the *Jamaat* formed the WPI after decades of activism within the community. Same is the case with the SDPI. It was formed by the National Development Front after long years of activities among Muslims. Both the A P and E K *Sunni* groups have initiated dialogues and discussions on direct political involvement. These organizations often present their opinion on socio-political and economic issues. Moreover, A P *Sunnis* also formed an organization named 'Muslim *Jamaat*' to deal with the political affairs. A look at Muslim participation in community and political affairs shows that the role of Muslim community organizations has played an important role as both facilitator and mobilizers of opinion as Chapter 3 showed. These diverse and heterogeneous experiences of Kerala Muslims open opportunities and challenges for a party like CPI (M) in Kerala, especially in a context where they have significant role in politics.

The CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations share similar views on many national and international issues and this fosters a substantial engagement between the two. The party in the past realized that developments in West Asia and Latin America since the last decade of the 20th century offered an opportunity for the party and Muslim community organizations to come together against the "imperialist" agendas of the West (*The Hindu*, 11 February 2000). The then party's state secretary, the present Chief Minister of the state, Pinarayi Vijayan said that the new relationship developing between Venezuela and Iran is an example of the possible platforms where the communist/socialist parties and Muslims and could come together. He also argued that those ridiculing these sorts of platforms scuttle the struggle against imperialism (Vijayan

2000). It is interesting to note that this speech was made at a conference organized by the A P Sunnis in Calicut (Markaz conference 2000). The party organs have also published many articles on this issue. Leaders of USSR also tried to woo the support of Arab countries on similar lines. The emergence of right wing *Hindutva* politics in the country has been a matter of concern for both entities.

The CPI (M)'s consistent opposition of *Sangh Parivar* politics has fetched considerable Muslim support to the party. Many activists of Muslim community organizations' told this researcher that even though they do not agree with many postulates of communism, the CPI (M)'s standpoint against imperialism and communalism must be respected. Even the supporters of the IUML underscore this.¹¹⁸ Hence, they do not find any problem in an alliance with the CPI (M). The party candidate's victory in the Manjery Lok Sabha constituency in 2004 and state assembly elections in 2006 and 2016 displayed this collaboration. Manjery Lok Sabha constituency was one of the strongholds of IUML in Malabar. But, the IUML candidate K.P.A. Majeed lost elections in 2004 to CPI (M)'s T K Hamza by 47000 votes. It must be noted that the IUML candidate won that seat with 123000 votes in 1999. The CPI (M)'s candidates also made substantial gains in the state assembly elections held in 2006 and 2016. Its position on Marad violence, Gujarat carnage, U S imperialism etc. fetched it Muslim support in the state. The communal carnage in Gujarat in 2002 and U S war on terror in post 9/11 period created intense identity and security concerns for the Muslims. The CPI (M)'s position on all these socio-political issues helped the party to get support from Muslims and subsequently win elections. The party also used the portraits of Yasar Arafath, Saddam Husain etc. to woo Muslims voters. It is interesting to note that the CPI (M) called for a state level *Bhandh* (strike) when Saddam Husain was hanged in 2006.

Hence, it is clear that, political issues, both within the country and outside, played an important role in the shift in the attitude of Muslim community organizations towards the CPI (M). Many Muslim community organizations which kept a distance from the

¹¹⁸ Interview with the activists of Muslim community organizations held in the months of April and May, 2015)

party for its views on religion began to accommodate the CPI (M) leaders and activists in their programs. The CPI (M) leaders are invited for all major conferences, seminars and other public programs organized by all Muslim community organizations. Even the E K *Sunnis* who traditionally support the IUML and UDF invited the CPI (M) leaders and party's elected representatives at different levels to their programs. Some of the CPI (M) leaders were even invited to the religious programs organized by these groups. For instance, the A P *Sunnis* invited the CPI (M) state committee member T.K. Hamza to the Annual prayer program organized on *Ramzan* at Malappuram in 2009. In turn, the CPI (M) also invited leaders of Muslim community organizations in the seminars held in connection with the party conferences and other academic and cultural platforms of the party. Other than the protests against imperialism and politics of the *Sangh Parivar*, many activists of the Muslim community organizations joined the party's protest against Muslim fundamentalism. For example, many Muslim community leaders attended SFI and DYFI's campaign titled 'Down with Communalism' when an SFI leader was killed by PFI members. Abhimanyu, a student of Maharajas College was killed by PFI and Campus Front members for writing 'Down with Communalism' over the Campus Front's poster in 2018. This has opened a space for the party to engage with Muslim community organizations which was not the case in the past.

The electoral and organizational interests of the CPI (M) also encouraged the party to reach out to the Muslim community organizations. The CPI (M) faced certain challenges in its traditional constituencies- among Dalits, Adivasis and other marginalized groups. This posed formidable challenges to the political dominance of the party. Hence, the party had to work among different social constituencies to retain its organizational and political footing. Moreover, the party felt that though it was the largest party in the state, it still could not ensure the support of more than 50 percent of total population (CPM 2014) if it did not re-work its strategies. For this, the party acknowledged its weak base among the minority communities- the Muslims and Christians that constitute 44.94% of total population of the state (see, Census 2011).

The party also required the support of Muslim community organizations to break the electoral and organizational dominance of IUMML in the Muslim pockets of Malabar. The IUMML has a stronghold over the E K *Sunni* faction and *Mujahid* groups, two prominent sections of Kerala Muslims. The CPI (M)'s apparent limitations to engage with all sections of Muslims also forced the party to forge alliance with certain organizations, mainly with organizations that are antagonistic to IUMML. Political developments outside Kerala in the last three decades facilitated the interaction between the CPI (M) and Muslims of Malabar.

The 'power' factor also played a crucial role in this engagement.¹¹⁹ Majority of the Muslim community organizations support IUMML and UDF as discussed in the Chapter 3. However, the intra-community contradictions restrict IUMML efforts to rally all Muslim community organizations together in its support. Since the Congress party and IUMML were in the same alliance, those Muslim community organizations that do not support IUMML support a party which is in the opposite alliance. The CPI (M) is the natural option for such groups. Most of the Muslim community organizations have undergone a split since the 1970s. The IUMML is not supported by all groups many of whom go for the other alliance. Hence, rather than the Congress party, the CPI (M) appears a better choice for these groups. Hence the A P *Sunnis*, the Madavoor faction of *Mujahids* etc. support the CPI (M). Further, these groups also require state support for many institutions they run. Since the CPI (M) usually forms the government every alternate five years, all community organizations are forced to approach the government. This also opens a space for the party to interact with these organizations. It is in the background of these developments that the CPI (M) is able to develop an electoral and non electoral engagement/understanding with Muslim community organizations.

5.3 Electoral Engagement of CPI (M) with Muslim Community Organizations

Considering their demographic concentration and substantial share in the population, Muslims play an important role in elections in Kerala. Certain sections of

¹¹⁹ By this I meant, the way the party was positioned in the state institutions.

Kerala Muslims (mainly working class) have voted for the CPI (M) and Left Front since the first state assembly elections of 1957. Various developments from 1970s accelerated the engagement between the CPI (M) and Muslims.¹²⁰ These developments have helped the party to get the support of non-working class groups also. Other than the party's views on political and socio-economic affairs, there are other ways in which the party acquires support of the community organizations.

It should be mentioned here that the relationship between the CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations has been replete with ambiguities and confusions. The ideological compulsions and resistance from the party organization and the support bases of the party often force the CPI (M) to keep Muslim organizations at bay.¹²¹ However, the collaborative/adversarial politics of the state has forced the party to reconsider its position often (Prabhash 2000). Often it has to balance its stance between collaboration and opposition.

While the CPI (M) has a coherent perspective on communalism and religious fundamentalism, there is a sheer ambiguity that prevails in the ranks about the nature of different religious organizations. The party considers it as a “responsibility to expose the self bestowed guardianship of religion by the communal and religious fundamentalist forces” (Yechury 2013). It sees it as an integral part of the struggle against existing social conditions. Communalism is viewed as an instrument used by the ruling classes to overcome the popular discontent against it (Ibid.). This position apparently holds that all political parties and community organizations use of religion as an instrument of political mobilization and as “communal”. However, the party cannot put forward this perspective in the realm of parliamentary politics. It often negotiates with different community organization for their support in all elections.

The CPI (M) has either negotiated or forged alliances/understanding with all Muslim community organizations and political parties except NDF/SDPI/PFI at the state

¹²⁰ The various socio-economic, political and cultural developments since 1970s that led to a greater engagement between the party and Muslim community organizations are discussed in the Chapter 1 and 3.

¹²¹ Though there is an explicit electoral understanding with the A P *Sunnis* for decades, CPI (M) has not accepted it as a formal relationship.

level. The NDF, SDPI and PFI are considered “ultra extremists” within the Muslim community. The CPI (M) considers PFI and RSS as two sides of the same coin. Probably, these are the only Muslim organizations that CPI (M) calls as “religious fundamentalists”. However, the CPI (M) has been blamed for certain local level understandings with PFI and SDPI in panchayat elections in certain pockets of Malabar. Recently, the CPI (M) directed its local units to repeal the alliances with SDPI and PFI, if there were any (*Malayala Manorama*, 10 July 2018). CPI (M) Central Committee Member Elamaram Kareem in an article said that the party would intensify the ideological campaign against PFI and other Muslim fundamentalist organizations (*The Times of India*, 10 July 2018). While the party forms alliances with IUML, PDP and INL; it negotiates and often forges agreements with organizations like A P *Sunnis*, E K *Sunnis*, different *Mujahid* groups and *Jamaat*.

5.3.1 CPI (M) and A P *Sunnis*

The A P *Sunnis*, commonly known as ‘sickle *Sunnis*’ are the major support base of CPI (M) among Muslims in Malabar as discussed in the Chapter 3. The CPI (M) uses two major means to engage with AP *Sunnis* for their electoral support. The first is the negotiation at the leadership level. This occurs at both the state and local levels. The CPI (M) senior leaders meet the A P *Sunni* leaders prior to every Lok Sabha and state assembly elections. Other than the party’s state secretary or Polit Bureau members, the delegation also includes CPI (M) leaders from the Muslim community. There are also some independent Muslim leaders who join these talks to help the party. For example, prior to the Lok Sabha elections of 2009, the then Home Minister and CPI (M) Polit Bureau member Kodyeri Balakrishnan met A P *Sunni* supreme leader AP Kanthapuram with the then minister Elamaram Kareem and M L A K. T. Jaleel (the then CPI (M) supported independent MLA and present state minister for higher education) who is very close to AP Kanthapuram (*The Hindu*, 01 April 2009). Since these are close room discussions, not much is known about the proceedings of the meetings. A CPI (M) leader on the condition of anonymity told this researcher that A P *Sunni* leaders usually put

forwards some conditions on the candidates, policy matters and also demands certain positions and favors for their members if the party comes to power.

Except for a few occasions, the A P *Sunnis* never declared their support openly for anyone and this is their official policy. For instance, after meeting CPI (M) leaders in 2009, the A P *Sunni* faction leader AP Kanthapuram told the media that his organization would fix the support only after detailed discussions within the organization and it does not have a system of declaring it openly (*The Hindu*, 01 April 2009). In the initial decades of its formation, the A P *Sunni* group extended its unconditional support to the CPI (M) and LDF. However, the organization changed its position to “we will help whoever helps us” since 2000 (*The Hindu*, 25 March 2014). This shift in the organization’s standpoint is more of a pressure tactic in a highly competitive coalition politics of Kerala.

Since the CPI (M) and LDF often help the A P *Sunni* group, the party candidates receive their support in all elections. This is known through the positions taken by the local level A P *Sunni* leaders and activists. But certain Congress party and IUML leaders also receive the benefit of this policy. The Congress party leaders like Aryadan Muhammed, M. I. Shanavas, T. Siddique etc. have received the support from A P *Sunnis* in many elections. On the other hand, the E K *Sunnis* support the IUML and UDF candidates. The Congress party, a major secular political party in the state is the ally of IUML and hence the Congress party cannot take an open stand against E K *Sunnis*. However, some Congress party leaders like Aryadan Muhammed (former minister and AICC member) keeps good relations with A P *Sunnis* and support and help it at times. The CPI (M) also provides all possible political and governmental support to the A P *Sunni* faction. The *Waqf* Board, *Hajj* committee, directors in many offices for minority development etc. are the major offices where the representatives of A P *Sunnis* are nominated by the LDF governments. Though the LDF government offers positions to other Muslims organizations as well, A P *Sunnis* get the key posts like ‘chairman’ in such committees. The present LDF government has nominated the A P *Sunni* nominee as the chairperson of *Hajj* committee and *Waqf* Board. When the UDF governments rule the

state, these offices usually go for IUML and E K *Sunni* leaders and often the A P *Sunnis* are not considered at that time. This makes A P *Sunnis* support CPI (M) and LDF in elections at different levels.

The second method the party adopts to ensure the support of A P *Sunnis* is through its cadres (party members or supporters) who are also the supporters/activists of A P *Sunnis*. Though this equation seems to be little contradictory, some members and supporters of CPI (M) associate with the A P *Sunni* faction as well. As per the rules of the CPI (M), party members are not supposed to be the part of any caste or religious community organizations. The party considers these organizations as highly reactionary and alleges that these organizations weaken working class unity. But, a substantial share of Muslims in CPI (M) is practicing Muslims. However, the party does not permit its leaders (who occupy party positions from the local to national level) to join any of these organizations. One of the CPI (M) Area Committee members in Nilambur (Malappuram) was asked by the party to abandon his membership of SYS, the youth wing of A P *Sunnis*. Many CPI (M) members associate with community organizations functioning among both majority and minority religious communities. These party members and supporters have a crucial role in influencing the organization's leadership to support the CPI (M) and also to make sure that the organization's votes are polled in favor of the party. They also organize campaigns among their members for CPI (M) candidates. The CPI (M) candidates and party leaders also attend the conventions or meetings organized by the various organizations affiliated to A P *Sunni* faction to interact with the members of the organization at election time. The active presence of CPI (M) members and supporters within the organization influences the electoral alliances of the A P *Sunni* faction. This plays a more vital role in the local body elections, but not so much in the parliamentary or state assembly elections.

Despite the fact that the official standpoint of the organization is not to openly declare their support for any candidate, there are certain exceptions to this rule. The A P *Sunni* leadership (including its supreme leader AP Kanthapuram) explicitly directs their members to ensure the victory or defeat of certain candidates, mainly in state assembly or

parliament elections. In these circumstances, different front organizations of A P *Sunnis* vigorously campaign for or against such candidates. The A P faction never asked its members to defeat the candidates of CPI (M) or Congress party, but they take a different position in relation to the IUML candidates. They openly campaign against IUML candidates in many elections. The IUML's support to E K *Sunnis* and their position on the conflicts between A P and E K make A P *Sunnis* to take a strong stand against IUML. Certain leaders of IUML also take an open stand against A P *Sunnis*. When such leaders contest elections, A P *Sunnis* conduct intense campaigns against them. The Manjery (in Malappuram district) Lok Sabha election in 2004 and Mannarkkad assembly election in 2016 (in Palakkad district) are cases which display this position. Ponnani (in Malappuram district) Lok Sabha election in 2009 is another case which illustrate this position.¹²²

The support of A P *Sunnis* helped the CPI (M) win the Manjery Lok Sabha constituency for the first time in history in 2004, but the LDF candidates lost elections in Ponnani Lok Sabha constituency in 2009 and Mannarkkad assembly constituency in 2016. In the case of the Ponnani Lok Sabha constituency, other than the A P *Sunnis*, the PDP, a Muslim political party (which is yet to establish its secular credentials) also supported the LDF candidate. Though the candidate was an independent college professor close to the A P *Sunni* faction, the election results indicated that the voters outrightly rejected the LDF candidate. The IUML candidate E. T. Muhammed Basheer won the elections by 82684 votes (*The Hindu*, 17 May 2009). The election result shows that the CPI (M) backed candidate did not get the expected numbers of votes even in party strongholds. Dr. Randathani, the LDF candidate got a lead of just 2677 votes in Thrithala, a predominantly Hindu majority assembly constituency and a CPI (M) stronghold, where CPI (M) candidate secured a majority of more than 10000 votes. The BJP candidate got only 7.5 percent votes in the elections. This was the lowest vote share of the BJP in Ponnani Lok Sabha constituency in the elections held after the demolition of Babri

¹²² In the first (Manjery Loksabha constituency) and third (Ponnai Loksabha constituency) case, AP Kanathapuram gave a call for the victory of CPI (M) candidates. In the second (Mannarkkad state assembly constituency) case, AP Kanthapuram directed his members to ensure the defeat of the IUML candidate.

Masjid.¹²³ While the support of PDP backfired for Ponnani, it was the A P *Sunnis*' open campaign that resulted in the poor performance of the LDF candidate in Mannarkkad assembly constituency as there was a consolidation against the A P support. Both the LDF and UDF has substantial support base in Mannarkkad. The anti-Incumbency factor always works in Mannarkkad assembly constituency. For example, the UDF won the assembly elections in 2001. But, the LDF regained the seat in 2006. Again in 2011, the UDF won the election. In 2016, the LDF wave was active across the state including Mannarkkad. Nevertheless, the front could not make use of it.¹²⁴

Even though the A P *Sunni* support helped the CPI (M) to make substantial electoral gains in different constituencies in Malabar, it also raised certain ideological and organizational problems for the party. A section of the party members and its supporters were unhappy with the views of A P *Sunnis* on many socio-political matters (for example, on gender issues)¹²⁵ and they felt that an explicit support coming from the A P *Sunnis* would adversely affect the Left politics in the state.¹²⁶ They felt that religious views should not interfere with the politics and the open support offered by A P *Sunnis* would weaken their arguments against political parties and fundamentalist organizations

¹²³ Election results indicate that even the Hindus who traditionally vote for CPI (M) voted for IUML candidate than the BJP. The dismal performances of BJP candidate in the assembly constituencies where Hindu communities have a substantial vote share display this. Even though the LDF candidate was a college professor with a clean image, the political support of PDP was not acceptable to a majority of the population- both Hindus and Muslims. The IUML candidate got 50.2 percentage of total votes polled (*The Hindu*, 17 May 2009). It was apparent that the majority of voters do not want a candidate supported by the PDP and Abdul Nasar Madani won the election, despite the fact that the LDF candidate is nowhere associated with the PDP. A comparative analysis of 2004, 2009 and 2014 Lok Sabha election substantiate this point.

¹²⁴ The A P *Sunni* leader AP Kanathapuram in their conference gave an open call to ensure the defeat of IUML candidate Advocate N. Shamsudheen in Mannarkkad. He hinted that the MLA had a role in the murder of two A P *Sunni* activists in Mannarkkad. The A P *Sunnis* conducted a vigorous campaign for the LDF candidate. Hundreds of activists from different districts of Malabar came to Mannarkkad for A P *Sunni* faction's election campaign. At the same time, the open call by A P *Sunnis* has provoked E K *Sunnis* and they used their organizational machinery for the UDF candidate. The election had become a fight between A P *Sunnis* and E K *Sunnis*. The UDF candidate won the election with a significant majority of 12329. This was a quite an unexpected result. Different election surveys predicted a neck to neck fight in the constituency and that the winning majority would be below 5000. But, all these predictions proved wrong and UDF candidate won with significant majority.

¹²⁵ The A P *Sunni* leader AP Kanthapuram described the concept of gender equality as "unIslamic" and said that the power to control the universe "lay in the hands of men". He is of the opinion that gender equality is "against Islam and humanity and intellectually wrong" (*Gulf News*, 30 November 2015).

¹²⁶ Interview with CPI (M) activists of Mannarkkad assembly constituency on 10.05.2016 at Mannarkkad.

that use religion for political gains. Moreover, the party had to compromise some of its principled positions under the pressure from community organizations for electoral gains. There are instances where the CPI (M) changed the candidature of Muslim woman from contesting the election under the pressure of A P *Sunnis*. This act clouds the party's commitment to women liberation. A section of party activists and AIDWA members were unhappy with this decision.

A section of party leadership under senior party leader V. S. Achuthanandan always resisted the party decisions to forge alliances or electoral understandings with caste or religious community organizations. He strongly felt that any such action would weaken the secular credentials of the party. He said that the alliance with the IUML in 1967 and with IAML in 1977 was a mistake that should not be repeated (*The Hindu*, 29 May 2014). He also openly criticized the party's decision to form an alliance with the PDP in 2009 Lok Sabha elections and with the IUML in some panchayats in Malabar in 2014 (*Ibid.*). The party central committee also cautioned the Kerala state unit that any attempt to compromise the secular position should be eschewed. It also reminded the state unit that the secular position taken by the party helped it to expand its influence among the common people belonging to different castes or religions (CPM 2009:17). The secular credentials of the party suffered some damage through some of these alliances. Even the party like IUML analyzed the election result as a setback to the CPI (M)'s "wrong and dangerous" political experiment (*The Hindu*, 17 May 2009).

The CPI (M) finds it difficult to convince its "conventional supporters" about its electoral understanding with community organizations (in this case with the A P *Sunnis*). The electoral defeat of the LDF candidates in Ponnani Lok Sabha constituency (2009) and Mannarkkad assembly constituency (2016) highlights this fact. The LDF candidate was from the CPI. For example, the demographic status of Mannarkkad assembly constituency shows that it has a substantial non-Muslim population, especially lower caste Hindus, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes unlike Manjery parliament constituency. The LDF has a significant base among the non-Muslim population in the constituency. Election result makes it visible that the party could not convince a section

of its supporters on the open support of A P *Sunnis*, despite the fact that the A P *Sunnis* gave their support owing to their own personal reasons. Moreover, the party did not concede any 'special' requests of the A P *Sunni* leadership. The 'backlash' was not confined to these constituencies. The performance of party candidates in many other constituencies in the state, especially in the southern districts was affected. This also points to the deficiency of party's tactics to break the vote base of IUML. These issues have become a major hindrance for the party in advancing itself politically with an electoral alliance with A P *Sunnis* in Muslim pockets of Malabar.

Nevertheless, an assessment of the electoral understanding with A P *Sunnis* at an overall level shows that the CPI (M) has enormously gained from this alliance. This has also boosted the morale of a section of party cadres. Since the chances of victory are slim, the CPI (M) does not give a good fight in many IUML strongholds and it often gives such seats to its alliance partners. However, the situation has changed in the last two decades. The support of A P *Sunnis* and certain other groups have given a confidence to the party to give a good fight in most of these seats. The victory in Manjery Lok Sabha constituency in 2004, a seat the party often loses by more than one lakh votes provides a kind of assurance to the party that it can win any constituency. The results of subsequent elections also showed that the party's electoral performance improved in elections at all levels from the panchayat to the Lok Sabha.

5.3.2 CPI (M) and E K *Sunnis*

The E K *Sunnis* form the traditional support base of IUML and UDF. The CPI (M) leaders generally do not seek support from E K *Sunnis* for elections. One major hindrance to this political partnership is that a majority of the IUML leaders are also the leaders of different front organizations of E K *Sunnis*. Panakkad Syed Haidarali Shihab Thangal, the present president of IUML, also holds the position of vice president in E K *Samastha*. The same intermingling can be seen at district and panchayat levels. Many activists and members of the E K *Sunnis* also contest the elections (mainly for local government) on IUML tickets.

But, socio-political developments since 1990s have helped the CPI (M) establish a link with certain leaders of E K *Sunnis*. A section of E K *Sunni* leadership is upset with the IUML's decision to incorporate A P *Sunnis* in its fold. Moreover, they are also of the opinion that the Congress party could not contain the onslaught of the *Sangh Parivar* in the country. The *Suprabhatham*, newspaper run by E K *Sunnis* criticized the Congress party Chief Minister Oommen Chandy for sidelining the community's interest.¹²⁷ *Sunni Yuvajana Sangham* state secretary Abdul Hameed Faizy Ambalakkadavu said that though they do not agree with the ideology of CPI (M), there is sincerity in the party's opposition to fascism (*The Times of India*, 11 October 2015). He said that minority communities should extend their support to CPI (M) in their fight against communalism and fascism (Ibid.). One obvious reason behind Abdul Hameed Faizy Ambalakkadavu's statement is intimidating IUML and UDF leadership. Even so, this also has another dimension. They do not think it as a problem if Muslims associate with CPI (M) for larger causes like communalism and imperialism. This proves that the party's views on religion are not an issue for Muslim organizations to engage with CPI (M) and LDF.

The E K *Sunnis* also extend their support to the LDF candidates when they are not comfortable with the IUML or UDF candidates. This marks a significant shift in their political positions. Earlier, the E K *Sunnis* extend 'blanket support' to the candidates proposed by the IUML. The standpoint of E K *Sunnis* in the Karuvarakundu district panchayat division of Malappuram district (2015) shows the deviation in organization's political views. T. P. Ashrafali, a moderate IUML youth leader who question many regressive positions (especially on gender) of E K *Sunnis* was vehemently opposed by the E K *Sunnis* and he could win the election only with a small margin. While the IUML candidate Jalseemiya (a Muslim lady) won this constituency by more than 12000 votes in 2010, Ashrafali won the election with a margin of 5000 votes only. Moreover, the UDF won 17 seats out of 21 in the Karuvarakundu *grama panchayat* in the same election. This proves that E K *Sunnis* are not a permanent vote bank of IUML or UDF any longer.

¹²⁷Other than the *Suprabhatham* newspaper, the journals run by E K *Samastha* publish articles on the Congress party's inefficiency in dealing with the *Sangh Parivar*.

Unlike A P *Sunnis*, the electoral support from E K *Sunnis* is largely influenced by the standpoints of the CPI (M) on different socio-political developments and also on IUML's approach towards A P *Sunnis*. There is a visible change in the approach of E K *Sunnis* towards CPI (M) since 2000, especially among its common supporters. The change in the attitude of the local mosque has influenced them. Till late 1990s, the local priests in mosques 'enlightened' the believers on the anti-religious nature of communism. This had led to an 'anti-communist' leanings among many Muslims. But a change in the attitude of the local mosques has opened a new space for the party to interact with them, especially concerning the elections. The former IUML president and E K *Samastha* vice president, Syed Muhammadali Shihab Thangal once said that he is upset with the decline of secular politics in the country and this would be harmful for the minority communities. This point to the changing attitude of the E K *Sunni* leadership towards secular political parties like CPI (M).

The recent election data makes it obvious that this has benefited the party. Some of the E K *Sunni* activists feel that the IUML should have an electoral alliance with the CPI (M) instead of the Congress party and UDF as this would strengthen the secular and democratic forces in the state and also benefit the Muslim minority. The CPI (M) had formed an alliance with the IUML twice in the history of Kerala. The first was in 1967-69 (2 years) and later was in 1977-85 (7 years). The second phase was with the All India Muslim League (henceforth AIML), a breakaway faction of IUML (Azeez 1992:210-11). A section within the CPI (M) also wanted to have an alliance with the IUML for better electoral performance in Muslims areas. But, another group resisted it arguing that it would affect the secular credentials of the party. The question of an alliance with the IUML has resulted in a minor split in the party as well. In 1987, one section led by the then senior leader M.V. Raghavan argued for an alliance with IUML. But this was rejected by the section lead by E.M.S. Namboodiripad and they reiterated the position of 'zero tolerance' for any communal force. Despite the opposition from the party, M.V. Raghavan presented an alternative thesis stating that there is no harm in aligning with communal forces, especially with IUML in the party congress. This led to the expulsion

of M.V. Raghavan and a few other leaders from the party. They later formed Communist Marxist Party (CMP) in 1987.

5.3.3 CPI (M) and *Jamaat-e-Islami*

The ideological position of the CPI (M) is contrary to that of the *Jamaat*. Unlike other Muslim organizations, the *Jamaat*'s main objective is to establish an Islamic society. Despite this, the CPI (M) had an electoral understanding with *Jamaat* in many elections. The major mode of interaction with the *Jamaat* is the leadership level negotiations, which mainly occur at the state level. Like in the case of A P *Sunnis*, the CPI (M) senior leaders meet the *Jamaat* state leadership before every election. For example, CPI (M)'s then state secretary Pinarayi Vijayan met *Jamaat* leaders prior to the state assembly election of 2011 (*The Hindu*, 05 April 2011). The party's views on the contemporary socio-political issues influenced these negotiations to a great extent.

The *Jamaat* openly declares its political support in elections to different parties, unlike many other Muslim community organizations. The *Jamaat* is keen to ensure the representation of Muslims in state assemblies and parliament and hence many Muslim candidates from both fronts receive support from *Jamaat*. For example, while the *Jamaat* declared its support for LDF in the 2009 parliamentary elections, 2 candidates of UDF- M. I. Shanavas (the Congress party, Wayanad) and E. T. Muhammed Basheer (IUML, Ponnani) received support from the *Jamaat*. This shows that *Jamaat* is keen to ensure the victory of certain candidates who stand for the Muslim cause. It also works for the victory of certain candidates from both LDF and UDF and there are instances where the organization supported certain independent candidates who highlighted the socio-economic issues related to Muslims. But, the poor organizational mechanisms of the *Jamaat*, makes its influence insignificant compared to that of the A P or E K *Sunnis*. But considering the narrow margins between the LDF and UDF in some constituencies, the *Jamaat*'s support matters a lot for the alliance they support. The *Jamaat* has openly supported LDF in 2006 and 2011 state assembly elections, and 2004 Lok Sabha elections. This support has been given despite its support for certain Muslim candidates of UDF.

The formation of Welfare Party of India and the *Jamaat*'s efforts to establish a platform of all marginalized sections has changed how it is looked upon by major political parties. The WPI's efforts to develop an alternative political platform in the state led it to field 41 candidates in the assembly elections in 2016. But, its candidates secured only 0.31 percent of total votes polled (61653 votes). Still, many LDF and a few UDF candidates received its support in 2016 assembly elections. It also fielded many candidates in the local government elections across the state. Many of their candidates are non-Muslims and non *Jamaat* members. The WPI and *Jamaat* have also supported leaders and activists of many social movements.

Though *Jamaat* is not able to substantially influence parliamentary and state assembly elections, it plays an important role in local body elections. The CPI (M) has had an electoral understanding with the *Jamaat* in certain panchayat/corporation wards in local body elections held in 2015. The CPI (M) did not field its candidates in Thuvamburam and Puthussery wards in Panoor municipality (in Kannur district) and also in Kodyathur and Karassery panchayats in Kozhikode district as part of the electoral understanding (*The Hindu*, 19 October 2015). Similar adjustments were made in the Kondotty Municipality of Malappuram district and Vanimel Panchayat of Kozhikode district. The CPI (M) supported independent candidates fielded by *Jamaat* (also WPI) in these wards. The main objective of the party was to defeat IUML candidates in these wards. For example, in Vanimel panchayat of Kozhikode, the CPI (M) took initiative to form a 'people alliance' to defeat IUML. Four seats were allotted to *Jamaat* candidates and they contested as independent candidates. The CPI (M) local committee secretary K.P. Rajan and *Jamaat* leader M. A. Vanimel said that this alliance is to end the 'unholy rule' of IUML in the panchayats (*Mathrubhumi*, 25 September 2015).

The LDF governments usually nominate the representatives of *Jamaat* to posts in *Waqf* Board, *Hajj* committee and other independent Boards and Corporations run by the government. They are also included in government committees to study the issues of Muslims in the state. O. Abdurahman, prominent *Jamaat* leader was the member of Paloli Committee constituted by the LDF government in 2008 to study the problems of Kerala

Muslims. This was the most important committee formed by the Kerala government on Kerala Muslims and the *Jamaat*'s representative was included in it (see, Paloli Committee Report 2010).

But this alliance/understanding created problems within the party, the LDF and also among a section of supporters of the party. The alliance partners in LDF (mainly CPI) expressed their dissatisfaction with such an alliance (*The Hindu*, 25 November 2015). Many intellectuals and social activists also criticized the CPI (M) for its alliance with communal groups, mainly the *Jamaat* (*The Hindu*, 19 October 2015). Political parties like the Congress party, IUML and BJP also criticize the CPI (M) for this sort of alliance (*Outlook*, 04 April 2011). The BJP leaders went to the extent of saying that the CPI (M) had forged an alliance with “terrorist groups” and they highlighted this issue across the country (Ibid.). More importantly, a section of party members (mainly youth and students) protested against this electoral understanding. They were of the opinion that it would weaken the secular credentials of the party. When this question was posed to a senior CPI (M) leader, he said that the party never makes an alliance with any community organization. The party faces every election with a manifesto and anyone who accepts it can vote and support the party. He said that the meetings with community organizations are just “casual” and the party seeks the support for its manifesto and candidates in these meetings.¹²⁸

The support offered to LDF created certain issues within the *Jamaat* as well. A sizable section of its youth membership (mainly from SIO and GIO) questioned its support to LDF saying that the CPI (M) is an “anti-minority party”.¹²⁹ One of the senior leaders of the *Jamaat* resigned from the party protesting its support to LDF. Kerala *Jamaat*'s former political secretary Hameed Vanimel left the organization stating that the Kerala unit of the *Jamaat* decided to back the LDF without analyzing the five years of LDF rule. He said that the CPI (M) had hypocritical policies and wanted to destroy the

¹²⁸ Interview with a CPI (M) state committee member (who does not want to disclose his name) on 12.08.2013 at Malappuram.

¹²⁹ This is the main allegation against CPI (M) by SIO activists and they often post this in social media. They call the activists of CPI (M) “Chuvappinullile Kaavi” (Saffrons within the Red).

Jamaat through power and influence. He was of the opinion that the CPI (M) considers the *Jamaat* as a “terrorist organization” and hence supporting the CPI (M) is not a rational decision (*The Hindu*, 03 April 2011). But, the *Jamaat* leadership justifies this alliance as an inevitable position in the contemporary socio-political conditions to ensure the defeat of communal forces.

5.3.4 CPI (M) and the *Mujahid/Salafi* Groups

The *Mujahid* groups are traditional supporters of IUML and UDF. But, a split in the *Mujahids* forced a section led by the Hussain Madavoor to establish a link with the CPI (M). Since the group led by Abdulla Koya Madani supported IUML, the Madavoor group began supporting the CPI (M).¹³⁰ Here too, the major mode of interaction is the leadership level negotiations. However, the understanding at the leadership level has not percolated down to the lower levels and a majority of the *Mujahids* continues to support the IUML and UDF in elections. The CPI (M)’s views on imperialism and communalism have attracted a small section of *Mujahids* to the party. Though the main support base of IUML comes from the E K *Sunnis*, a significant section of its leaders belong to the *Mujahid/Salafi* groups. Former leaders like C.H. Muhammed Koya, Seethi Haji and the present leaders like state general secretary K.P.A. Majeed, national organizing secretary E.T. Muhammed Basheer etc. follow the *Salafi* mode of Islam. Like other Muslim organizations, the CPI (M) led governments offer a few positions in *Hajj* committee and *Waqf* boards to the representatives of *Mujahid* groups.

5.3.5 CPI (M)’s Engagement with MES and MSS

The CPI (M) also tries to get the support of small community organizations like *Ahmadiyya Jamaat*, MES and MSS. Though these organizations are not influential in elections, their support helps the party to create an impression that the “Muslims support the party in election”. The party’s positions on different socio-political and economic issues attract these organizations to it. The MES and MSS have progressive views on

¹³⁰ The first official split in KNM happened in 2002. But, both groups reunite in 2016 after series of discussions (*The Times of India*, 26 November 2016). However, the united KNM again underwent a split July 2018 (*Malayala Manorama*, 29 July 2018).

issues related to gender and public participation of Muslim women. These positions also bring the CPI (M) and these organizations together. MES state president Dr. Fazal Ghafoor was the member of the Paloli Committee. Various educational and health institutions run by MES and MSS receive support from LDF governments.

5.3.6 Appraisal of CPI (M)'s Electoral Understanding with Muslim Community Organizations

The electoral understanding of the CPI (M) with Muslim organizations had a profound influence on its electoral performance in the Malabar region of Kerala. Other than the electoral gains, the main benefit of this alliance is that the CPI (M) has succeeded in bringing the lapses of the IUML to the forefront, more importantly, before the Muslims themselves. The partnership of these organizations with the CPI (M) brings out that the IUML alone is not able to address the concerns of the community. The fallout of this also is the broadening of representation for Muslims in Kerala which earlier was largely confined to the IUML. The views of CPI (M) on socio-economic and political issues have opened a new opportunity for the Muslim community that was forced to approach IUML for all its problems and issues. For example, the Muslims by and large had to vote for IUML and UDF in the elections after the demolition of *Babri Masjid*. The community did not have a viable alternative at that point of time. But, a significant section of Muslims voted for the CPI (M) and LDF in the local government elections of 2005 and 2015, state assembly elections of 2006 and 2016 when the Congress party led UDF could not resist the *Sangh Parivar* in the state. The lapses of IUML as a party to address the concerns of Muslims were widely discussed in these elections. The support of CPI (M) is a moral boost for the organizations that oppose IUML as well.

But, this alliance also raised serious ideological and organizational questions before the CPI (M). The party's efforts to ally with the Muslim community organizations to break the political dominance of IUML is questioned by its supporters and alliance partners often. They argue that the views of these organizations on many issues like gender are unacceptable for Left politics. The secular credentials of the party also suffer a

setback through these alliances. The electoral defeat of the party candidates in Ponnani parliament constituency and Mannarkkad assembly constituency brings out this clearly.

5.4 Non -Electoral Engagements

As noted before, the CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations do not have a linear relation. The perspective of both sides on socio-economic, political and cultural developments defines the nature of this relation. While the ideological incommensurability of CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations plays a small role in their electoral relations, it does play an important role in their non-electoral engagements. This section discusses the CPI (M)'s efforts to interact with the Muslim community organizations in non-electoral arenas between 1980 and 2018. This includes major modes of interaction, issues taken up by the party and the obstacles and problems that come up in these interactions. The section also looks at how the party benefits from these interactions- both electorally and organizationally.

The CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations share similar views on many national and international issues. The party organizes many programs on these issues which subsequently opens a channel for interaction with these organizations. Another major mode of communication comes up through the party's initiatives in addressing the security, identity and equity concerns of the Muslims. Other than this, the party also conducts programs like seminars, conferences, discussion forums and public lectures to seek the support of Muslim community organizations. Their leaders and activists are invited to these programs as speakers and participants. The party also publishes a journal named "*Mukhyadhara*" (mainstream) to discuss the issues of Muslim minorities in the country. The *Deshabhimani*, the party's official mouthpiece also gives prominence to the issues of Muslim minorities.

"Imperialism" and "communalism" are two issues that the party and Muslim community organizations share similar views on. Both sections identify these as major threat to the Indian society. The Gulf war (1990), demolition of *Babri Masjid* (1992) and subsequent communal riots (1992 and 1993), US imperialism and 'war on terrorism'

(2001), Gujarat carnage (2002), Marad violence (2002 and 2003), the execution of Saddam Hussain (2006), assault on T. J. Joseph, a college teacher by PFI (2010), Muzaffarnagar riots (2013), murder of Abhimanyu, SFI leader by PFI (2018), attacks by *Sangh Parivar* and Muslim fundamentalist groups etc. are some of the cases where both sides share similar views. The CPI (M) held protests and campaigns on these issues which were well received by the Muslims and subsequently, it was supported by them in elections. The Muslim community leaders were invited to many of these programs and they participated actively.

The CPI (M) also organized many campaigns against Muslim fundamentalist groups like the PFI in the context of Marad violence, hand chopping of Prof. T. J. Joseph, murder of Abhimanyu, a SFI activist in the Maharajas College, Ernakulam etc. The PFI members stood accused in all these cases. The party was able to bring out the main Muslim community organizations in these campaigns. For example, many Muslim priests and community organization's leaders participated in the campaign organized by the CPI (M) and its major front organizations against the murder of Abhimanyu, by the PFI and Campus Front (its student's wing) activists. They also participated in the party programs to protest the hand chopping of Prof. T. J. Joseph by the PFI members. This helped the party in highlighting the threats posed by both majority and minority communalism. Political parties like IUML allege that CPI (M) forges an 'unholy alliance' with Muslim fundamentalist forces like PFI and PDP to weaken IUML in Malabar. The IUML is of the opinion that the CPI (M) 'misuses' the feelings of the Muslim youth by highlighting the dangers of the *Sangh Parivar* and creates an impression that the IUML is soft on *Sangh Parivar* (Shaji 2017).

The party's initiatives to address the equity, identity and security concerns of Kerala Muslims also act as ways of its interactions with the Muslim community organizations. The different measures taken by the LDF governments hastened this process. The Left Front governments have taken many initiatives to improve the lives of weaker and marginalized sections of Kerala. This includes the land reform legislation, literacy campaign, reservation for socially marginalized sections (sub quota for Muslims,

Ezhava community etc.) and the benefits of these measures have percolated to Muslims as well. Along with this, specific measures have been taken by the Left governments to improve the socio-economic conditions of Kerala Muslims as discussed in chapter 2.

The first communist government in 1957 and second government in 1967 introduced many schemes and programs that helped improve the wellbeing of Muslims in Malabar. In 1996, the LDF government formed NORKA (Department of Non-Resident Keralites Association) to redress the grievances of nonresident Keralites (www.norkaroots.net.in accessed on 12.07.2018). Muslims constitute a significant section of migrants in Kerala. According to the Kerala Migration Survey (2015), nearly half of the total emigrants of the state are Muslims (44.3 %) though they consists only 26 % of the total state population. The Malappuram district has the highest number of emigrants in the state (18.8% of total emigrants). Kannur district comes second with 12. 4 %. In Malappuram, 71% of households have in them either an emigrant or a return emigrant in each. Both the Malappuram and Kannur districts have significant share of Muslims in their total population. Moreover, a majority of them (71.85 %) have no technical education (Kerala Migration Survey 2015). Most of them work in the unorganized sectors (Ibid.). Hence, any measure to improve the lives of migrants and return migrants would have a significant impact on Muslims of Malabar.

In 2000, the LDF government led by E.K. Nayanar appointed Justice Narendran Commission to study and report on the adequacy or otherwise of representation for Backward Classes in the state public services. The Commission identified that backward sections like Muslims, Latin Catholics, Nadars etc are underrepresented in the state service and recommended a special recruitment drive to remove the backlog and get equal rights for all sections of Kerala society (Randathani 2013: 72). The Commission's findings were welcomed by all major political parties and Muslim and other backward community organizations. The Commission reported that despite the 12% sub-quota for Muslims in the OBC reservation, there was a deficiency of 7383 posts for Muslims in the state services including teaching posts. The Commission also pointed out the educational

backwardness of Muslims as they performed poorly in competitive examinations (*The Hindu*, 19 July 2014).¹³¹

The Paloli Committee constituted by the LDF government in 2007 was another major initiative by the party to address the equity concerns of Muslims of Kerala. The committee was appointed by the then LDF government to submit its recommendations regarding the implementation of the Sachar Committee Report in the state. The Committee was headed by the then minister of Local Self Administration and CPI (M) Central Committee member Paloli Muhammed Kutty and had delegates of all major Muslim community organizations different political parties.

The committee analyzed all major aspects of Muslim life in the state including education, social security, reservation, employment, economic growth and *wakf*. The Committee proposed schemes and programs to address the equity concerns of the community. It includes a pension scheme for *Madrasa* teachers, establishment of Kerala State *Madrasa* Teachers' Welfare Fund, assistance for widows, and a special package for migrants and return migrants. Special recommendations were made to improve the educational status of Muslim girls and employability skills of Muslim students and youth. The Committee also recommended rectifying the problems within the existing reservation system in the state to ensure a decent representation of backward sections in state services. It strongly recommended establishing a minority development department in the state with adequate personnel and facilities to monitor the government schemes.

As a follow up to the Report, the LDF government took many policy decisions that had a profound influence on the material conditions of Muslims. A new government department was set up to coordinate the activities of minority development programs. Subsequently, directorates were established in the government secretariat and district collectorates. Special schemes were announced for the promotion of Arabic language,

¹³¹ The Commission report says, "Better educational standards of Ezhavas have given them a good leverage in competing for Government jobs at least in the recruitment of lower categories. If the Muslim community and its leaders take more interest in the matter of education and make a concerted effort, this community can also reach a similar level of educational advancement in the not distant future. The other communities among the Backward Classes can also improve their presence in the public services by paying more attention for the education of their children" (*The Hindu*, 19 July 2014).

development of Madrasa teachers, migrants and Muslim girls. New educational institutions were set up in areas where Muslims predominantly reside (Malabar). A branch campus of Aligarh Muslim University was set up in Perinthalmanna in Malappuram district. Chapters highlighting the role of Muslims in the national movement were included in the school syllabus. A new *Hajj* house was constructed at the Calicut International airport for the convenience of *Hajj* pilgrims. The government also paid special attention to the infrastructure development of Malabar region where a majority of Muslims live.

The Committee report and subsequent measures by the government was well appreciated by the community organizations. For example, the welfare measures for *Madrasa* teachers were long pending demands of Muslim community organizations. The UDF governments in which IUML has a substantial voice could not address that demand. But, the LDF government introduced many measures for the welfare for *Madrasa* teachers and this was widely acknowledged. The representatives of all major Muslim organizations were the members of the Committee and this has helped the government to get the opinions of all sections of Muslim community in the terms of reference of the committee.¹³² Further, the party was able to establish a connection with all major Muslim community organizations through this committee.

The CPI (M) is of the opinion that addressing the material or equity concerns of the Muslims tend to be the best way to mobilize Muslims of the region.¹³³ The party still has solid bases in areas like Eranad, Valluvanadu, Ponnani, Bepore and Mavoor where the party had mobilized working class Muslims in the initial decades of state formation. The party observes that the crisis of global capitalism and subsequent economic crisis in West Asia has affected the expatriate population of these countries to a great extent and a sizable section of expatriates have either lost their jobs or suffered salary cuts. The global economic crisis of 2008, the '*Nitaqat* policy' introduced in 2012, internal conflicts among Arab countries and localization of business and trade in most of the Arab countries have

¹³² Public sittings were conducted across the state to garner the opinion of all stakeholders.

¹³³ Interview with A. Vijayaraghavan on 17.01.2018 at Trivandrum.

created unprecedented loss of employment and fall in economic activities in the gulf region that resulted in the large scale return migration of expatriates to Kerala, especially to Malabar. This has mainly affected the marginal and low paid migrant workers in gulf countries and many of them have to return to their home countries temporarily or permanently. The number of Kerala migrants who returned from abroad was 12.5 lakhs in 2014, up from 11.5 lakhs in 2011, 11.6 lakhs in 2008, 8.9 lakhs in 2003 and 7.4 lakhs in 1998 (Zacharia 2014). This means that the number has increased each year.

The party's opinion was that the crisis of capital required an alternative economic policy that only a party like CPI (M) could put forward. It also felt that these policies would attract working class Muslims to the party.¹³⁴ The present LDF government (2016-continue) has announced different schemes to support the return of migrants from the West Asia through government agencies like NORKA and Directorate of Minority Welfare. For example, the NORKA would provide 15% subsidy for projects that would cost up to Rs 20 Lakh for the expatriates who had returned to Kerala after working for at least two years abroad (Source: www.norkaroots.net accessed on 12 September 2017).

Unlike Muslims in the other parts of the country, the Muslims of Kerala have not faced a serious threat of communal violence. The state was comparatively peaceful even at the time of demolition of *Babri Masjid*. The Marad violence that took place in 2002 and 2003 was an exception as discussed earlier. While Muslims were displaced from Marad, the CPI (M) opened two relief camps at Chaliyam in Kozhikode district (*Mathrubhumi*, 03 August 2003). The state was under the rule of UDF when the Marad issue happened. The CPI (M) was able to project itself as a party that could protect the Muslim minority at a time when the Congress party and IUML led state government could not ensure it. The party also claims that it put up resistance against the rioters to protect helpless women and children when they came under attack by the RSS. The CPI (M) activists of the region – Balaraman and Purushothaman (apparently born in Hindu families) had given shelter to women and children who were under the threat of attack. Party men also put up resistance in Kaithavalappu and Rajiv colony against the mobsters.

¹³⁴ Interview with A Vijayaraghavan, CPI (M) central committee member on 17.1.2018 at Trivandrum.

The CPI (M) state and district leaders reached Marad soon after the violence and began to lead the rescue and relief work (*The Hindu*, 25 January 2002). Moreover, the party also criticized NDF for its alleged role in the violence and creating communal tensions (*The Times of India*, 04 May 2003).

The CPI (M) also mobilized all secular-democratic forces at the time of *Babri Masjid* demolition and communal carnage in Gujarat in 2002. The party had given a call for state wide fund collection to help the victims of Gujarat carnage. Moreover, the party also organized a state wide campaign against the carnage. It includes protest demonstrations, cultural activities and peace marches. The leaders of different Muslim community organizations were invited for these programs which were attended by the leaders, supporters of these organizations. The CPI (M) did similar protests against US imperialism at the time of Gulf war, Iraq invasion after 9/11 and also at the time of *Babri Masjid* demolition. The party also organized campaign against Muzaffarnagar riots (2013) across the state.

The identity and security issues have gone together. While addressing the security concerns, the party also tried to address identity concerns. But, addressing the identity concerns of a religious community was not easy for a party like CPI (M), especially at a time when identity politics was gaining prominence.¹³⁵ The Muslims of Kerala do not face identity related issues as their counterparts in the rest of the country. However, the issues faced by Muslims in other parts of the country influence the Kerala Muslims to a great extent. For example, scores of Muslim youth were targeted by the security agencies and prosecuted in terrorism related cases. Many of these cases were fabricated by the

¹³⁵ The CPI (M) is of the opinion that the advent of an aggressive finance driven Capitalism and weakening of Socialism set the background for identity politics. Globalised finance capital finds it convenient to deal with the people or working class fragmented on the basis of different identities. It makes it easier to penetrate the market in a divided society. Consumerism and the market cater to all the disparate groups, but their fragmentation into innumerable identities prevents their coming together to challenge the exploitation of finance capital and its domination of the market (Karat 2011). The Party also questions the claim of the supporters of identity politics that a particular oppression of a community or group can be understood and experienced only by the people of that identity. It is of the opinion that this would weaken people's movement (Ibid.).

police and *Sangh Parivar* organizations.¹³⁶ Muslim community organizations like *Jamaat* and PFI, political parties like IUML, SDPI and WPI try to mobilize community projecting that the Muslims are insecure in the country because of their “identity”. Various publications run by these organizations also play a crucial role in “stimulating Muslims emotions” on such issues. This has generated identity concerns among a significant section of Kerala Muslims. Hence, secular political parties like CPI (M) have to address the identity issues of Muslims of Kerala.

The party and its major front organizations organize different sorts of programs protesting the *Sangh Parivar*’s and security agencies propaganda aimed at Muslim minorities. Regarding the fabrication of cases against Muslim youth, the party demanded that the “draconian provisions in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act be removed and sought compensation for and rehabilitation of the innocent persons implicated in such cases and provision of special courts with time-bound procedures to settle cases within a year” (CPM 2012).¹³⁷ The party gave call to hold protests against the killing of Muslim youth by a mob on the Delhi-Mathura local train across the state of Kerala. Similar protests were held when a Muslim man named Muhammed Akhlak was killed by the mob alleging stealing and slaughtering a cow in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh in September 2015. The DYFI and SFI held beef festivals across the state to protest Muhammed Akhlak’s murder and many secular and democratic organizations extended their support to these programs. This help to build its support among minorities (*The Hindu*, 07 October 2015). Leaders and activists of many Muslim community organizations attended these protests. The CPI (M) scored over the IUML and other Muslim in organizing these protests. The party also held similar protest when the present central government introduced Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2016, formulated under the PCA Act of 1960 (*The Hindu*, 27 May 2017). The active campaign on these issues helped

¹³⁶ For example, Muslim youth were arrested and prosecuted in the Mecca *Masjid* blast case in May 2007, but, the Central Bureau of Investigation identified that *Hindutva* terror groups are involved in the case. Subsequently, the Supreme Court released Muslim youth who were detailed in this case (*The Hindu*, 02 January 2009).

¹³⁷ One of the major initiatives in this direction was a party delegation led by the then General Secretary Prakash Karat who called on the then India President Pranab Mukherjee and submitted a memorandum outlining how scores of Muslim youth were targeted and persecuted in terrorism related cases (*The Hindu*, 18 November 2012).

the CPI (M) and LDF to get support of Muslims. This was reflected in the verdict of state assembly elections in 2016.

The leaders and activists of Muslim community organizations expressed their satisfaction on the various initiatives by the CPI (M) on Muslim identity related issues. Some of them openly said that only the CPI (M) could organize these programs as the party had strong secular credentials. Interestingly, many of them admitted that IUML and Congress party have certain “*parimithi*” (limitations) in fighting the *Sangh Parivar*.¹³⁸ The statement of SYS leader on the CPI (M)’s anti-communal positions discussed before endorsed its standpoint on communalism and fascism. This marks the change in the attitude of Muslim community organizations towards the CPI (M).

Other than this, the party also took certain organizational initiatives to woo the support of the community. The CPI (M) state conference held at Malappuram in February 2005 was important for many reasons. This was the first state conference of the party held in the district. The victory of party candidate in the Lok Sabha elections of 2004 at Manjery constituency gave the confidence to the party to hold a major conference in Malappuram district. The main objective of the campaign for the party state conference was to pursue the support of Muslims in the region. The 2,000-odd hoardings the party put up in different parts of the district attempted to draw Muslim community to the party. Some of the hoardings showed turbaned Muslim clergy imparting communist teachings to children wearing caps and *hijab*, and leading processions holding the red flag. This was meant for the traditional supporters of the IUML. The party also invited the leaders of many Muslim community organizations to the programs like seminars, public lectures, cultural meetings and exhibitions organized as part of the conference. A large number of supporters of different Muslim community organizations attended these programs.

The party also organized one convention and two national seminars related to Muslim minority issues in Malabar. It tried to address all the three major concerns of Muslims in these convention and seminars. A convention on Sachar Committee

¹³⁸ Interview with the activists and leaders of various Muslim community organizations in the month January and February 2016 in Malappuram district.

recommendations was held at Malappuram on 30th March 2007. A national level seminar on the Muslim questions was held at Calicut on 07th November 2013. Another seminar was held at Kannur on 20th December 2014 on 'Uniform Civil Code and Left'. Other than the CPI (M) leaders, the leaders of major Muslim community organizations were also invited to these programs. Other than the party leaders like Prakash Karat, Pinarayi Vijayan, Elamaram Kareem, Paloli Muhammed Kutty, many leading secular intellectuals and activists like Shabnam Hashmi, Dr. Khadija Mumtaz, Nilambur Ayisha, Hussain Randathani and Hamid Chennamangaloor and Muslim community leaders like Dr. K. K. Usman, Dr. P. A. Fazal Ghafoor, C. K. Abdul Azeez, Prof. A. P. Abdul Wahab, Jafar Atholi, N. Ali Abdulla, Dr. Jamal Muhammed and Mulloorkkara Muhammadali Saquafi (A P *Sunni* faction leader) spoke at these programs. This shows that the party wants to reach out to the larger Muslim masses through these programs. In Kannur, party also invited Qutubuddin Ansari and Ashok Mochi (from Gujarat) to the seminar.¹³⁹ This received wide publicity in media and other social circles. This had increased CPI (M)'s secular credentials among Kerala Muslims.

The party also proposed its agenda on Muslim Personal Law reforms through these programs. Its major front organizations organized many seminars and public talks on issues related to minority communities at regional levels as well. Even the members of the teachers and government employees' organizations associated with the party organized similar programs. Major topics of discussion include communalism, imperialism, secularism, material conditions of Muslims, issues of expatriates and issues related to Muslim personal laws. Other than the party supporters, a large number of common public also participates in these programs.

¹³⁹ Both Qutubuddin Ansari and Ashok Mochi are from Gujarat. Both of them became the faces of 2002 Gujarat communal carnage. Qutubuddin Ansari's picture was published by Reuters News Agency. In this picture, Ansari was shown "as a Muslim youth with hands folded in an expression of obeisance and his faintly bloodshot eyes are glazed with fear". Ashok Mochi's picture was published by the Outlook magazine. He was shown with a "saffron band around his head, a rod in one hand and other clinched into a fist". While the Ansari was portrayed as the victim, the Mochi was portrayed as the perpetrator. Both of them attended CPI (M) seminar in Kannur together and jointly released Ansari's book on Gujarat violence. Very interestingly, Ansari said that they could not have met in Gujarat like this and it was a new experience for both of them. The presence of them gave CPI (M) a good political mileage in Malabar.

The CPI (M) and all its front organizations also published journals in their respective areas. For example, the SFI publishes a magazine named ‘Student’, the AIDWA publishes ‘*Sthreeshabdham* magazine’ (voice of women) and the Kerala NGO Union (the government employees organization associated with the party) publishes ‘Kerala Service’ magazine. It also started a separate tri monthly journal to address the minority issues- *Mukhyadhara* (Mainstream). Dr. K. T. Jaleel, a fellow traveler of the party and the state higher education minister is the chief editor of the journal. Its main objective is to reach out to the common Muslims by addressing the issues and problems they face. The party does not want it to be labeled as a party journal and hence gives substantial space to all leading secular intellectuals and activists in the journal. Other than K. T. Jaleel, a majority of the editorial board members are also sympathizers of the party. It specifically focuses on issues of Muslim minorities from a Left perspective. It also provides a space to secular intellectuals to share ideas on Muslim issues. However, the journal could not come out regularly.

Though these engagements have proved to be advantageous for the party, this also produced conflicts and ambiguities within and outside the party organizations. While the party and Muslim community organizations share similar views on many national and international events, the party’s standpoint on certain other socio-political issues created tensions in this relation. The question of ‘intra – community reforms’ and certain religious practices brought about tensions.¹⁴⁰

The CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations differ on the women’s question leading to tension between them as we saw in chapter 4. Any attempt by the party to address issues pertaining to Muslim women is opposed stringently by Muslim community organizations.¹⁴¹ This is not a new phenomenon. The Shah Bano case for instance placed the party and the Muslim community organizations on opposite ends. The

¹⁴⁰ But in India both Hindu nationalists and Muslim leadership “have not focused much on religious or social reform rather they have concentrated on political mobilization. This trend does not mean that micro political issues have been totally absent.

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, the E K *Sunnis* supported the A P *Sunni* leader AP Kanthapuram when he faced intense criticism for his remarks on women’s role in the public domain. This shows that despite their intra community differences, these organizations have similar views on women’s issues (*The Times of India*, 03 December 2015).

party's decision to support the cause of Muslim women in the case of instant triple *talaq* was also criticized by these organizations. The same tensions came up when the party highlighted the problems of lowering the marriage age of Muslim girls, *purdha* and individual liberty of Muslim girls within the family and outside. A section of Muslim community organizations labeled the CPI (M) as “anti-Muslim” and “pro Hindu” party when it tried to address these issues. This was a new strategy employed by certain Muslim fundamentalist organizations to run down the CPI (M). For example, 3 Muslim girls who did a flash mob in Malappuram (in December 2017) to create awareness on AIDS were abused on social media by many Muslim fundamentalists alleging that they are a ‘curse to Islam’. Many condemned the girls and their families. But, this action of Muslim fundamentalists was criticized by the progressive forces of the state. The SFI conducted flash mobs across the state against this ‘moral policing’. But, this action of SFI was in turn condemned by many Muslim community organizations stating that SFI is trying to act as the ‘agency’ of Muslim girls and they do not need these agencies. Moreover, they also alleged that the CPI (M) and SFI are “pseudo secularists” who appease the majority communities. Many Muslim girls’ organizations also come up with similar statements. (Source: *The Time of India*, 04 December 2017; *The News Minute*, 09 December 2017).

While all Muslim organizations shared similar views on these issues, the *Jamaat* and PFI were more active in their criticisms of the CPI (M). A section of IUML and E K *Sunnis* also shared the position of *Jamaat* and PFI in these cases. They alleged that the CPI (M) is a party of Hindus and that it maintained the interests of *Savarna* Hindus. They try to portray the CPI (M)’s views as “anti-Muslim”. They went to the extent of saying that if CPI (M) is in government, it arrests Muslim on terrorism charges. But, these organizations did not take similar positions when the UDF governments charged Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (henceforth, UAPA) cases against Muslims in Kerala. The UDF government led by Oommen Chandy (2011-16) charged 136 UAPA cases against Muslim youth in Kerala. The IUML was the major constituent of UDF. In another case, when the LDF government slapped a case against an assistant professor of Farook College, Calicut on the charge of making sexually colored remarks about women,

many Muslim community organizations protest against the police decision and alleged that LDF government is “targeting minorities”. A joint statement was issued by the representatives of different Muslim community organizations and Muslim political parties. They also denounced the SFI and DYFI for protesting against the Farook college management and alleged that they have a secret agenda to malign the institution run by a Muslim management. (Source: *The Hindu*, 23 March 2018; *The Times of India*, 20 March 2018; *The Times of India*, 24 March 2018).

Many international and national events have created a sense of insecurity among Kerala Muslims. This sentiment was exploited by these organizations, especially among middle class Muslims. Moreover, popular Islam that was rooted in the local culture has also undergone a transformation in Kerala as discussed in Chapter 3. This has strengthened the fundamentalist voices among Malabar Muslims. Hence, it is easier for these organizations to label CPI (M) as an “anti Muslim” party. This has posed a big challenge for CPI (M) in the region.

Though, all major Muslim organizations disagree with the politics of *Jamaat* and PFI, a sizable section of their (especially youth) supporters subscribe to *Jamaat* and PFI politics. It is more visible in the universities and other educational institutions. They try to portray CPI (M) as an anti-Muslim party and this campaign is very strong in social media. A section of IUML supporters have started to set up a platform of all minority and backward sections to oppose *Sangh Parivar* led *Hindutva* forces. But, they also criticize the CPI (M) stating that many of its positions are “pro *Sangh Parivar*”. However, they do not oppose the Congress party. Politically, these two organizations pose a serious threat to IUML. However, a close analysis of IUML makes it clear that it has been influenced by *Jamaat* and PFI agendas. The position of E.T. Muhammed Basheer, Member of Parliament and IUML national leader and many of its youth leaders displays this influence. The responses of IUML youth leaders on SFI’s flash mob against the moral policing of Muslim fundamentalists or UAPA cases against Muslim youth show that they share the perspectives of *Jamaat* and PFI on such issues.

The CPI (M)'s stand on the issues like Jeevan (a controversy on a text book chapter introduced by the LDF government in 2008),¹⁴² inter caste/religious marriages etc. also resulted in the impasse between the party and Muslim community organization.¹⁴³ They often quote the statement of Karl Marx-‘Religion as the opium of masses’ to attack CPI (M) and illustrate the cases like Jeevan and thereby to validate their argument. While replying to a query by a Muslim who supports CPI (M), the leading Islamic scholar M.M. Akbar said that a Muslim cannot support CPI (M) or communism as both nullify the religion. He also said that the world view presented by both Islam and communism are different and Islam negates communism’s argument that the solution for all material issues lies in the economic transformation of the society. He denounced the concept of economic equality proposed by the communism and claimed that “real economic equality” can be achieved only through the Islamic concept of ‘*Zakaat*’. When the questioner pointed that it was the CPI (M) that protected the Muslims in his area when *Sangh Parivar* attacked Muslims (Padunna, Kasargod), M.M. Akbar replied that these are the mere strategies of the communist parties to attract the Muslims and an original believer cannot support or follow or become a member of CPI (M) for such reasons.¹⁴⁴

The resignation of the party’s two Members of Parliament (A.P. Abdullakutty from Kannur in 2010 and K.S. Manoj from Alappuzha in 2010) and a leading youth leader (Sindhu Joy from Ernakulam in 2011) over party’s stance on religion deepened the debate. K.S. Manoj resigned from the party stating that he could not accept party’s

¹⁴² The LDF government has introduced a chapter in 7th standard social science text book titled “*Mathamillatha Jeevan*” (The Jeevan Who has no Religion). The Head Master asked the parents of the Jeevan regarding his religion at the time of admission. They replied that he does not have religion and if he wishes to have one when he grew up, he can choose. The parents in the story were inter- religious couple. The opposition parties like the Congress party, BJP and IUML and community organizations allege that “the book has objectionable content, it propagates atheism, it is ‘anti-religion’ in approach and that its agenda is the promotion of communism among the young”. There were intense protests against the textbook. The activists of MSF burned 14,000 textbooks that were being loaded into a truck at Malappuram. The government had to withdraw the chapter later. (Source: Devika 2008; *The Hindu*, 25 June 2008; *The Hindu*, 09 July 2008).

¹⁴³ Along with Muslim community organizations, other caste and community organizations also share similar views on CPI (M)’s standpoint on religion. The incidents like Jeevan explicit the impasse between the party and these organizations.

¹⁴⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9kAsbRulJA> accessed on 12.05.2017.

directives on religion in the rectification document of the party published in 2009 (Source: *Gulf News*, 10 January 2010). Sindhu Joy also justified her resignation on similar line (Source: *The Hindu*, 25 March 2011). A.P. Abdullakutty claimed that the CPI (M) had negative attitude towards the religious freedoms of party members, and that party leaders had pulled him up for participating in *Umrah* (a pilgrimage to Mecca by Muslims and attending *Eid* prayers). He also said that the party has two different codes of conducts, one for Muslim leaders from Malappuram, and rest for the state (Abdullakutty 2010). Muslim community organizations also denounced concepts like “Islamic Marxism”¹⁴⁵ as well as Liberation Theology¹⁴⁶ and argued that the ideology of Islam¹⁴⁷ was not compatible with communism.

The Muslim community organizations appreciate the anti-imperialist standpoint of CPI (M), but they do not subscribe to the philosophical understanding of the party on imperialism that is drawn from V.I. Lenin. On the other hand, the Muslim community organizations have a non-historical view of imperialism and they understand it as a Western agenda to “overthrow” Islamic states and Islam. They recognize Samuel Huntington’s theory of “clash of civilizations” (1997) and “Islamophobia” as a Western agenda primarily pitted against Islam. Muslim community organizations are of the opinion that imperialism identifies Islam as the primary enemy in the post-Soviet era and they cite Samuel Huntington’s work as an example for it. In an interview with the *Jamaat* leader, C. Dawood, he pointed that all the wars led by Western imperialist forces are against Islamic states. Though he admits that there is a relation between imperialism and capitalism, he dismisses the Marxist understanding of imperialism and argue that imperialism see Islam as an enemy.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ “Islamic Marxism” is a concept proposed by Aseef Bayat to explain the application of Marxist economic, political and social teachings within an Islamic framework. Islamic Marxists believe that Islam meets the needs of society and can accommodate or guide social changes which Marxism hopes to accomplish. However, they dismiss the Marxist views on materialism and religion (Source: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1446> accessed on 18.07.2017).

¹⁴⁶ The concept has been discussed in the chapter 1.

¹⁴⁷ Muslim community organizations perceive Islam as an ideology and a way of life.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with C Dawood, *Jamaat* leader on 12.02.2012 at Calicut

The CPI (M) endorsed that trajectory of many Muslim anti-colonial leaders like Variyan Kunnathu Kunjahammed Haji, Muhammed Abdu Rahman etc. and considers Malabar rebellion as anti-imperialist struggle by *Mappila* Muslims. It views the struggles of these eminent personalities as against feudalism and colonialism and identifies it as corresponding with its ideology. The Marxist historian K.N. Panikkar called the Malabar rebellion as “against lord and state” (see, Panikkar 1989). But, this position was denounced by Muslim community organizations. They argued that the basis of Malabar rebellion and these Muslim anti colonial leaders had its foundation in the anti-imperialist spirit of Islam propagated by the Prophet Muhammed. Further, it argues that neither the Malabar rebellion nor the Muslim leaders like Muhammed Abdu Rahman did have any connection with either communism or communist parties. For instance, soon after the CPI (M)’s national seminar on minority issues at Kannur, *Risala* weekly, official organ of A P *Sunnis* published an extensive article titled ‘When did Varian Kunnath (the leader of Malabar rebellion) become Communist?. This article questions the CPI (M)’s claims that the party carries the legacies of many Muslim anti colonial leaders and argues that it was the spirit they imbibed from Islam that made them stand against the colonial powers (*Risala* 2014: 5-8). Other than *Risala*, the official journals of E K *Sunnis*, *Jamaat*, *Mujahids* and PFI also question the party’s claims regarding its relation to the leadership of the Malabar rebellion.

It is the issue of ideology that has an important place in the non-electoral engagement between the party and the Muslim community organizations. The party’s efforts to address the identity, security and equity concerns of Muslims accelerated the support offered by the Muslim community organizations to the party. However, any attempt to address the issues of community reform creates tensions between the two sides. These attempts were labeled as party’s “anti-Islam” agenda by certain Muslim fundamentalist organizations to lower its support among Muslims.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, like electoral engagements, the party’s non-electoral engagements with organizations like A P

¹⁴⁹ Imtiaz Ahmad (1974) discusses this phenomenon as the conscious effort to Islamize Muslims in the country.

Sunnis and *Jamaat* created tensions within the party organization and also among its supporters and sympathizers.

While organizations like *Jamaat* and PFI label the CPI (M) as an anti-Muslim party, the BJP, which has tried to establish a base for itself in Kerala, labels its efforts as “Muslim appeasement”. It even says that both the LDF and UDF are responsible for the ‘pathetic state of affairs of the majority Hindu community in the state of Kerala (‘CPM appeasing Muslims for votes’, www.saffronnews.in accessed on 12.05.2018). The demographic status of Kerala has undergone tremendous changes since the 1980s. The remittance from migration has profound influence on the material conditions of Muslims and Christians in Kerala. Their population has also increased. The *Sangh Parivar* highlights these two factors to create a fear among the majority community and also attack both the CPI (M) and Congress party for neglecting the rights of majority community (‘Hindu response to Kerala’s demographic changes’, www.swarajyamag.com accessed on 12.05.2018).

This campaign has influenced a small section of CPI (M) supporters from Hindu communities. For example, Anoop Yasodharan who grew up as CPI (M) cadre joined the RSS “when party unit abandoned him for the interest of a rich Christian expatriate who bought the land that lay between their house and the main road and blocked their access”. The RSS members helped him in his crisis. Hence, he joined RSS. He alleged that the CPI (M) is favoring minority communities than Hindus who constitute the major support base of the party. (‘Red Fades to Saffron in Kerala’, www.hindu.com accessed on 12.05.2018). In another case, a few CPI (M) members joined the BJP when the local party unit supported an A P *Sunni* institution that discharge waste to a nearby water canal. They alleged that the party and the panchayat run by it did not stand with the local community and favored the A P *Sunni* institution. This ‘majority-minority’ syndrome has added further complexities to the party’s efforts to mobilize the Muslims in Malabar.

5.5 Conclusion

The socio-political developments of 1970s, the intra community conflicts and IUML's inability to represent all Muslim community organizations, the *Sangh Parivar's* politics and increasing violence against minority communities, US intervention in West Asia etc. set the context for the CPI (M)'s engagement with Muslim community organizations in Malabar. The party's conscious efforts to address the identity, security and equity concerns of Muslims also attracted a sizable section of the community to it. The CPI (M)'s interaction with Muslim community organizations has enhanced its electoral and non-electoral prospects and this is evident in the electoral performance of the LDF in Muslim pockets of the state. Its electoral advancement has helped to politicize and democratize the public sphere which was earlier dominated by the IUML. The Muslim community organizations also benefited from their interactions with the CPI (M) in the changed socio-political scenario of the state.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This study has attempted to understand the process of political engagement of CPI (M) with Muslims of Malabar from 1980 to 2018. The study specifically looked at how the party mobilizes Muslim women and engages with Muslim community organizations of Malabar and the conflicts, ambiguities and possibilities that emerge in this process.

6.1 Context of the Engagement

The CPI (M) is the largest political party in Kerala in terms of electoral and organizational strength as in 2018. However, it is not the party that represents the majority of the population. The party never ever had more than 50 percent of the vote share in any election. The party acknowledges that its organizational and political weakness among the minority communities has led to this situation. Moreover, factors like the emergence of the middle class, caste and communal polarization and increasing social unrest among the marginalized sections on issues of development have posed serious challenges to Left politics in general and CPI (M) in particular in Kerala. The party realized that the traditional pattern of working class mobilization would not ensure electoral and organizational gains in future. Hence, it has to reach out to new social groups to maintain its political ascendancy in the state. The regional concentration of Muslim population and its peculiar socio-political features prompted the CPI (M) to focus on Muslims of Malabar.

The 1970s were marked by significant social shifts in the Kerala polity. This has resulted in the ‘reorientation’ of both Left and ‘Muslim politics’ in the state and subsequently opened opportunities for the CPI (M) to engage with Muslims of Malabar. The institutionalization of welfare measures within, and factors that developed outside the state acted as major forces that shaped this engagement. Reservations in local governance and establishment of state wide Self Help Groups accelerated Muslim women’s entry in the public domain. This provided new opportunities for the party to

interact with the Muslims of Malabar, especially with Muslim women. The politics of the *Sangh Parivar* and subsequent violence against minority communities, and US interventions in West Asia were events outside the state that became matters of concern for both the party and Muslims.

But, the mobilizational strategies of the party were not quite able to accommodate different social groups and the emerging middle class in Kerala. “Class”, a major tool of CPI (M)’s mobilization, had to be reoriented in such a way that it could accommodate varied social classes of the Kerala polity. Simultaneously, one also witnessed that a sizable section of Muslims wanted to move out of their “habitus” that was traditionally dominated by the IUML. The IUML’s politics was no longer able to adequately address their identity, security and equity concerns. The intense differences between various Muslim community organizations also resulted in a situation where the IUML became unable to represent all organizations. This opened avenues for the CPI (M) to start engaging with the Muslim community organizations as well.

6.2 Modes of Engagement

The CPI (M) employs different means to ensure electoral and non-electoral support of the Muslims of Malabar. The social contexts decide the mode of engagement. The views of the party on socio-political issues play an important role in determining the community’s to the party. Other than this, the party also initiates specific programs and campaigns to attract Muslims support to it. The party and its governments have implemented specific policies to address the identity, security and equity concerns of Muslims. The CPI (M) and its major front organizations also hold active campaigns on these issues. For example, the beef festivals organized by the DYFI and SFI protesting the Dadri killing have attracted the attention of a significant section of Muslims. The representatives of many Muslim community organizations participated in it. Major steps were taken on policy levels by the LDF governments. The Paloli Committee Report and subsequent policy decisions to improve the material conditions of Kerala Muslims are examples. The party held and continues to hold leadership level negotiations/discussions with the Muslim community organizations seeking their support to the LDF candidates in

elections. The party has given posts and positions in governments to the leaders of community organizations. State support to educational institutions run by these organizations is also given.

The Muslim women are being mobilized through specific interventions by the party and AIDWA. They make use of reservations in local governance, the state wide Self Help Groups, issues related with the Muslim Personal Law and also with the “voices” of Muslim women to mobilize them. The AIDWA runs legal aid networks and Self Help Groups where it gets an opportunity to engage with Muslim women. The party also consciously recruits Muslim women to different ranks of the party. The interactions through all these modes have produced substantial electoral and organizational advantages for the party and its major front organizations in Malabar while also strengthening the voice of Muslim women in political forums and public spaces.

6.3 Impact of the CPI (M)’s Political Engagement with Muslims of Malabar

The ideological positions (on various issues) of the CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations influence their interaction to a larger extent. Both sides share similar views on US interventions in West Asia (this has also been seen as “imperialism” by both) and on the emergence of the *Sangh Parivar*. The CPI (M)’s efforts has brought together both sides on these issues. The party was even able to mobilize mainstream Muslim community organizations on issues related to Muslim fundamentalism. For instance, the representatives of different *Sunni* and *Mujahid* factions participated in the party’s campaign against the murder of a SFI activist by PFI. However, certain issues and ideological positions also get muted in this process of engagement. The dichotomy of a “radical/progressive political party” and a “conservative religious community” often get erased in the party’s interface with Muslims, for instance, its silence on ‘*purdah*’. However, such a ‘silence’ is seen as necessary to draw out sections, like Muslim women, whose voices have previously been marginal in the political arena.

The “political and tactical line” set out by the party calls for an integrated struggle against the neo-liberal economic policies and communalism and also to build a broader secular-democratic platform against the RSS-BJP combine (CPM 2015:3). This validates the party’s silence on certain ideological positions as its main objective is to develop a broader secular-democratic alliance against communalism, neo-liberal economic policies and authoritarianism of the state. Hence, the practice of *purdah* is not seen as a reason to sideline a Muslim woman from the peoples’ democratic movement but efforts are made to make her a part of the fight against the “much bigger repressive systems”. The idea of “progressive political positions” signifies differently in a “majoritarian” and “minority” context and hence such a ‘silence’ is required in the party’s engagement with a religious minority community that faces challenges and threats on its security and identity every now and then. At the same time, the party cautions itself on any attempt to breach the spirit of “political and tactical lines” adopted by each party congress.

The institutionalization of welfare measures and large scale migration of Muslim men to the Gulf countries has resulted in the increased participation of Muslim women in the public domain. This has opened new possibilities for the CPI (M) to interact with Muslim women, which otherwise had few options to engage with them. One of the perceptible impacts of this engagement is on the issues of representation related to the Muslim Personal Law. The active intervention on the issues of Muslim women by the AIDWA has resulted in a social situation where Muslim women became capable of approaching legal courts than the local mosque committees to deal with the issues related to divorce and other family matters. A significant section of the community started questioning the anti-women *fatwas* and government decisions that undermine the role of Muslim women in both the private and public domain. The Muslim community’s response to the Shah Bano case and the decision to decrease the age of marriage of Muslim girls in Kerala underscores the shift in Muslims’ response on personal laws.

The intervention of the party and its major front organizations in both the cases highlights its role in shaping the discourse of reform in Muslim community practices. The discourse on Muslim Personal Law began to recognize the individual/political rights of

Muslim women within the Muslim community. The Muslim women gained confidences to “claim” their political space within and outside community boundaries. The case studies described in Chapter 4 demonstrate the level of political consciousness acquired by Muslim women through their participation in politics. The educational progress combined with other external factors enabled Muslim women to struggle with patriarchy as comes out clearly in their interactions with manifest in the Muslim community organizations. The CPI (M)’s efforts to address issues related to Muslim Personal Law worked both in favor of Muslim women and itself.

The IUML dominated Muslim politics till 1980s. The majority of Muslim community organizations rallied behind the party as it was the only entry point to civil and political participation. The Muslims did not have other viable political alternatives. In spite of the deep anger over the demolition of *Babri Masjid*, a majority of Muslims had to support the IUML and UDF in the subsequent elections. But the engagement of CPI (M) with Muslims in general and community organizations in particular have opened new political possibilities for the Muslims. For instance, Muslims supported the LDF candidates in the Lok Sabha elections of 2004 (election held after the ‘9/11’ and Gujarat carnage) and the state assembly election of 2016 (election held at the time when the minority communities closely saw the divisive politics of the *Sangh Parivar*). The weakness/failure of IUML has been brought to the public domain through the interventions of the CPI (M) on minority issues, more importantly to the Muslims themselves. Hence, it is evident that the CPI (M)’s engagement with Muslims of Malabar has helped to politicize, secularize and democratize the public sphere of Malabar.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Kerala Muslims have a better socio-economic and political profile as compared to their counterparts in the other parts of the country. Muslims of Kerala do not have any serious identity or security concerns. Though the Muslims of Malabar are not directly affected by the central level politics, the developments in the rest of the country and the Arab world have a significant influence on them. The Muslim community organizations like *Jamaat*, PFI etc. and their publications play an important role in this. This created a sense of insecurity among

Kerala Muslims. The organizations like *Jamaat* and PFI succeed in creating an impression that the principle of secularism propagated and promoted by mainstream secular political parties was ‘anti Islam’ and served the interests of the ‘majoritarian’ forces. They projected the CPI (M) as a part of the larger ‘anti-Islamic’ forces. Along with this, a ‘neo-orthodoxy’ combined with the growing influence of *Salafism* gained momentum among Kerala Muslims. This resulted in the emergence of strong extremist/revivalist movements within the community. Hence, the CPI (M) had to look for new modes of understanding religion and secularism to expand its base among Muslim minorities. The assessment of CPI (M)’s engagements with Muslims of Malabar displays that it has to chart a pragmatic course for its politics to expand among the Muslims of Malabar.

The members of the Communist Party had an indifferent approach to religion in the initial decades of its formation. It considered religion as a non-progressive force. This distanced a significant section of religious believers from it, especially members of the minority communities. The first generation leaders and activists of the party were predominantly atheists. But, the reorientation of its mobilization strategies from 1980s and conscious efforts to engage with different religious identities resulted in the induction of religious believers in the party and party committees. The “antipathy” towards any religious symbols has been amended and the party has repositioned itself on them. The CPI (M) made it clear that it does not bar religious believers from joining the party, however, it expects them to “oppose the intrusion of religion into the affairs of the state” (Karat 2009). The party also directed its leaders and cadres not to organize religious rituals in their personal and social lives (Ibid.). At the same time, the party permitted its elected representatives from attending religious ceremonies organized by different organizations. For example, T.K. Hamza, CPI (M), state committee member, attended the annual *Dua Majlis* organized by the A P *Sunnis* in connection with *Ramzan*.

Marxists seek “to radically alter the conditions that provide the basis and perpetuate religion as an instrument of class oppression” (CPM 1993). Following this understanding of the existence of religious faith, the communist parties intend to

secularize civil society. Though ‘secularization’ could not happen adequately even in states like Kerala and West Bengal where the CPI (M) was in power for a substantial period and also had strong influence on civil society, one did not witness any major communal riots in these two states and all religious communities enjoyed comparatively equal space in the public sphere – this was due to the Left parties efforts to build a secular polity. However, the party’s views on religion distanced a section of religious believers from it, especially among the Semitic religions. But, the engagement with religious communities and community organizations and also the call by the party’s political and tactical line to build a broader secular-democratic platform to defeat communal forces has altered its idea of secularism in the Indian context.

The CPI (M) has started to use certain religious and cultural symbols in its campaigns and programs. For example, the participation of Muslim women wearing *purdah* in party programs or using the religious symbols in party’s posters and campaign material has become common in the state of Kerala. The party did not object to its members visits to the places of religious importance. The party is of the view that the “secular/progressive” values of religion have to be promoted as the communal groups occupy cultural and religious spaces and distort the religious values. This marks the party’s changing stand on the idea of secularism. This also points to the remarkable ability of the party to adapt to changing social conditions.

At the same time, the deficiency of the party to deal with the question of reforms in Islam or with the ‘neo-orthodoxy’ that has emerged among Muslims of Malabar exemplifies the apparent limitation of both sides to condition each other. Though the CPI (M) and Muslim community organizations share identical views on “imperialism”, the philosophical understanding on which both sides develop their anti-imperial positions are incommensurable. Further, the Muslim community organizations negate the party’s claim of its anti-imperial legacy in Malabar and argue that it was the spirit of Islam that gave strength to Varian Kunnathu Kunjahammed Haji and others to fight against the British and oppressive landlords. Even the organizations that associate with the CPI (M) are not convinced with the theory of the party. This shows the limitation of the party to politicize

or “Lefticize” the communities it engages with. The inconsistency in the electoral performance of the party in Muslim pockets underlines it. It is seen that different sections of the Muslim community turn to the secular-democratic politics of the CPI (M) only at a time of grave crisis, especially when there is a clear attack on their identity from majoritarian politics. Further, succumbing to electoral pressure, the party also compromises some of its principle positions to ensure the support of these organizations. But, any such attempts to breach the spirit of the party program and “political and tactical line” were rectified by the party itself. For instance, the CPI (M) observed its electoral understanding with the PDP in the Lok Sabha elections held in 2009 had created confusion among a section of its supporters and secular minded people and cautioned the party to be careful to ensure that its secular identity does not get blurred (CPM 2009). The Party’s engagement with fringe groups among the Muslim community in the hope of enhancing its prospects in elections have often proved to fall short of its desired outcomes inviting criticism for its deviation from the principled stands of the party.

The CPI (M)’s political engagement with the Muslims of Malabar gave the community a greater visibility in the political life of the state. It has resulted in the increased participation of Muslim women in the political landscape of Kerala and also provided diverse political alternatives to Kerala Muslims. Such an interaction with the community has enhanced the electoral and political prospects of the CPI (M) in the highly competitive political landscape of Kerala. However, such engagements are not free from problems and challenges resulting in a certain ambiguity. In this process, the CPI (M) has reoriented some of its principles to accommodate members of the Muslim community without diluting its principled positions. The CPI (M)’s political engagement with the Muslims of Malabar has helped in making the public sphere more politicized, secularized and democratized.

Glossary

<i>Ahmadi</i>	an adherent of Ahmadiyya sect of Islam
<i>Bid'ah</i>	innovation in religious matters
<i>Burqa</i>	an enveloping outer garment worn by some Muslim women to cover themselves in public
<i>Chuvappu (M)</i>	Red color
<i>Dars</i>	higher Islamic education centre
<i>Da'wah</i>	preaching of Islam
<i>Dua</i>	prayer
<i>Hadith</i>	Islamic text discussing life of Prophet Muhammad
<i>Hajj</i>	pilgrimage made by Muslims to Mecca
<i>Haritha (M)</i>	girls' organization affiliated to IUML
<i>Hijab</i>	head covering using by Muslim women
<i>Hindutva</i>	term coined by V D Savarkar to indicate Hinduness or Hindu identity
<i>Ijithad</i>	Islamic legal term referring independent reasoning
<i>Islahi</i>	regenerative
<i>Juma Khutuba</i>	Friday prayer in Islam
<i>Kaavi (M)</i>	saffron color

<i>Kalyanam (M)</i>	marriage
<i>Kudumbam (M)</i>	family
<i>Madhhab</i>	a school of thought within traditional Islamic jurisprudence
<i>Madrassa</i>	religious educational institutions
<i>Mahal</i>	territorial division of mosques
<i>Mahdi</i>	a spiritual and temporal leader who will rule before the end of the world and restore peace and justice
<i>Majlis</i>	a place of sitting/council
<i>Malayali (M)</i>	Keralaite
<i>Mappila (M)</i>	synonym to son-in-law/bridegroom in Malayalam and also to describe the Muslims of North Kerala
<i>Matham (M)</i>	religion
<i>Masjid</i>	mosque
<i>Mujahid</i>	one who struggles for the sake of Allah and Islam also an organization of Kerala Muslims who follow Salafi Islam
<i>Mushavara</i>	a top Islamic consultative body
<i>Namaz</i>	prayer
<i>Nercha (M)</i>	offering to God
<i>Othupalli (M)</i>	elementary Islamic education centre
<i>Perunnal (M)</i>	a Muslim festival

<i>Purdah</i>	a practice in certain societies of screening women from men and strangers, especially by means of a curtain
<i>Quran</i>	religious text of Islam
<i>Salafism</i>	revivalist or reform movement emerged within the <i>Sunni</i> Islam in late 19 th century
<i>Samudayakatha (M)</i>	about communities
<i>Sangh Parivar</i>	Hindu nationalist organizations started by members of the RSS or drew inspiration from its ideology
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>Shirk</i>	sin of practicing polytheism and idolatry
<i>Sunnah</i>	body of traditional and social legal custom and practice of Muslims based on the life of Prophet Muhammed
<i>Sunni</i>	largest branch of the Muslim community guided by Sunnah
<i>Talaq</i>	divorce or repudiation
<i>Tawhid</i>	defining doctrine of Islam
<i>Ulama</i>	a body of Muslim scholars who are recognized as having specialist knowledge of Islamic laws and theology
<i>Uroos</i>	local festival celebrate by <i>Sunni</i> Muslims
<i>Vargeeyatha (M)</i>	communalism
<i>Waqf</i>	an endowment made by a Muslim to religious, educational or charitable cause

Wahabism

Islamic doctrine founded by Muhammed ibn al- Wahab

Zakat

religious obligation of a Muslim to meet the criterion of wealth

**M- Malayalam term*

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POLITICAL LEFT AND MUSLIM WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

The process of decentralization has opened enormous opportunities for women at different levels. Nevertheless, the discourses on these opportunities and subsequent empowerment present a complex analysis – mainly on the question of agency. This paper looks at how the Muslim women are being mobilized by CPI (M) through various institutions of political decentralizations. The paper seeks to understand the complexities of this mobilization and the 'agency' in it.

Key Words: Empowerment, community, Muslim women, CPI (M), mobilization

Introduction

Academic discussions and debates on Muslim women have widely dominated by many misconceptions. Majority of the literature identified the experiences of Muslim women as synonymous with those of Muslim men or women in general, thus reifying the categories of community and gender (Hasan and Menon 2004). However, this tendency is not a recent phenomenon. The colonial discourses also ignored Muslim women, because for colonial theorists, *pardah* removed Muslim women from scrutiny, both literally as well as figuratively (Minault 1998 quoted in Hasan and Menon 2004:1). In the post colonial discourses, Muslim women were viewed as a monolithic category and majority of literature identified the gender bias of the Mus-

lim personal law as key factor for the Muslim women's backwardness¹. Most of the literatures underscore the biasness of Muslim personal laws, male centric diverse laws, segregation, veil (*pardha*), high fertility rate and unrestrained influence of fundamentalist religious clergy as the major reasons for the predicament of Muslim women in India². Feminist analyses also followed similar line of argument. As Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon (2004) argue, a more deliberate engagement with the secular discourse of development and empowerment would be the best way out of the current impasse. This approach is crucial to understand the process of the political mobilization of Muslim women as well. It has particular importance when the notion of empowerment and access to the public politi-

1. Muslim personal law is a controversial issue and the eradication of the gender bias of personal laws is very important. But placing it as the sole reason for the backwardness could not help to improve the status of Muslim women, since it can be achieved through the schemes established on the basis of a person's involvement in the different facets of Indian polity.

2. Shilpa Roy's study of Muslim women makes a clear link between the subjugation of Muslim women and the Islam.

Certificate

Mr./Miss/Dr. *Sheeque V, Assistant Professor, Political Science*
of *M.E.S Mampad College (Autonomous)*
has participated/chaired a session/presented a paper on *Communism and Religion*
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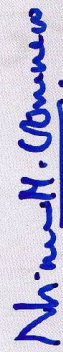
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