

Name of the Scholar : Shiraz S
Name of the Supervisor : Prof. Azra Razzack
Name of the Center : Dr. KRN Center for Dalit & Minorities Studies
Title: Social stratification and Negotiating Identities: The Mappilas in Contemporary Malabar

Abstract

Key words: Social stratification, Malabar, Mappila, Identity and Mobility

This study titled, 'Social Stratification and Negotiating Identities: The Mappilas in Contemporary Malabar' explores the nature and bases of the existing social stratification pattern among the Malabar Mappila Muslims of Kerala. Malabar Mappila Muslims are basically stratified into five categories - Tangals, Arabis Malabaris, Pusilans and Ossans. Tangals are Sayyids who trace their lineage to Prophet Muhammad. Arabis/People of Arab origin occupy position of high status next to Tangals among the Mappilas. A majority of Mappilas are Malabaris and they are mostly converts from the low caste Hindus, such as the Cherumans. The Pusilans are the converts from the fisher folk because of the missionary works and by the order of the then kings of Kozhikode. The Barber community is named as Ossans among Mappilas and by virtue of their occupation they were ranked the lowest.

Major Findings of the Study

The roots of stratification pattern among Mappila Muslims can be traced to the Hindu caste structure of that time. The caste structure was readily followed by the Tangals, Arabis and the Muslim nobility (taravadis). The *taravadis* used the existing caste system to endorse their supremacy over Muslim converts. Apart from this caste influence, the stratification among Mappilas was also maintained through other factors - economic, social, cultural, occupational, regional and through the justification of religious scholars.

Nature of the existing stratification pattern reveals that, all the Tangals in Malabar are not actually associated with Sayyids or all of them don't have lineage with the prophet Muhammed. Moreover, Tangal/ Sayyid tradition can't be acquired through birth but through true religious life, but the general public still offers special consideration and status to them. Once the trade supremacy of Arabis had gone, they also lost their social status. New generation Arabis are not interested in maintaining their lineage. Malabaris believe that, scholars and upper caste Muslim converts are the reason for creating the stratification pattern. Most of them are not even aware of this division. Pusilans and Ossans are victims of caste discrimination and they believe that the descendants of the first Muslim caravan members i.e. Tangals and Arabis absorbed Brahmanical supremacy and segregated them in the society. Even today, the people are divided in the community as per the old stratification pattern but they could not assign a particular position to a particular stratum when asked. Family names, marriage relationships, occupational division and the attitude of religious institutions are also supporting this pattern.

The basis of the stratification pattern reveals that, apart from the prime factor of caste influence, there are other reasons also. Economic, social, cultural, occupational, religious leadership, old jurisprudence texts, tradition and regionalism are playing important roles in dividing the people. When asked people could not identify a single reason or justification for the same, rather they almost equally divided in to three social, occupational and cultural reasons.

Negotiation of identities shows that, factors like money, power, educational qualification and identity membership are not generally a problem for upper strata to get consideration from the society but assigning a group identity negatively affects Pupilans and Ossans in getting sufficient consideration from the society. Transformation in the negotiation affected strata members in different ways. Majority of the Tangals believe that their status in the society is decreasing because of changed living conditions and processes of modernization. They are losing their spiritual status by striving for political and material benefits. Arabis are also losing their status in the society because of not keeping their tradition of acquaintance with the Arabic language and Islamic knowledge and they became just like Malbaris today. But the transformation process does not help the Pupilans and Ossans to become mobile and to change their identity tag in larger scale. Ossans' condition is more severe comparing with Pupilans in this regard.

Achieved status of strata members helps them to become more mobile in the society. As far as Malabar Muslims are concerned migration, education, active participation in the Islamic organizations and political involvement helped them in achieving status in the society. The upper strata became more mobile by using these factors but in the case of Pupilans and Ossans, albeit the mobility they have achieved mobility it is not helping them to change their social status or particular identity tag and the degradation associated with it.

Conclusion

Malabar Muslim stratification pattern is of local origin and is deeply influenced by the caste ridden Hindu social structure. Secure and stronger financial fore-bondings along with the ascribed socio-religious status associated with 'upper-strata' cause Tangals and Arabis to impose unequal social differentiation on the Mappilas of Malabar. *Taravadis* whole heartedly support this segmentation in order to sustain their supremacy. Even the political agenda supports this discriminatory segmentation of society.

The Pupilans and the Ossans were assigned a lower social status (at par with the Hindu caste structure) reaffirming their cultural difference. This diluted caste mindset is not in position to define culture as a factor to segregate certain strata because the assigned 'culturelessness' agents or factors are applicable to others also. The easy way of segregation found in the occupational division still has importance. Religious institutions like mahallu committees and its stake holders are segregating Pupilans especially Ossans in different arenas. Unethical, irreligious fatwas and explanations are used to segregate them. Physical segregation is not in practice in larger amount but it has psychical importance and is severe for Pupilans and Ossans. Role of education, migration, affiliation with different Islamic organizations and political participation are important in the reduction of segregation among Mappilas for the last four to five decades.