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THE INDIAN UNION MUSLIM LEAGUE IN KERALA: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION, POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) has played a pivotal role in the political, social, and educational development of Kerala's Muslim community. Originating from the All India Muslim League (AIML) in 1906, the IUML was formally established in India on March 10, 1948, under the leadership of Muhammad Ismail Sahib. This paper traces the League's evolution from its early activism led by K. M. Seethi Sahib, through its expansion in South India, to its role in post-independence Kerala politics. The League's contributions include promoting secular and democratic policies, advocating for the rights of marginalized communities, supporting women's education, establishing higher education institutions, and implementing extensive social welfare programmes such as the Baitul Rahma housing initiative. The IUML's organizational structure, political alliances, and engagement with contemporary social issues, including communal harmony and secular governance, are analyzed. By examining its historical and modern significance, this study highlights the IUML as a model of inclusive political activism that balances community empowerment with broader societal welfare.

Keywords: IUML, AIML, Muslim League, NGO, Socio-cultural Organization, Secular democratic, Legislative Assembly

INTRODUCTION

Employing secular and democratic policies, and ensuring that the sentiments of other communities are not hurt, the Muslim League in Kerala has been instrumental in the political mobilization of backward classes, especially Muslims. The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML**)**, often referred to simply as the League, is a Kerala-based political organization in India that has been recognized by the Election Commission of India**.** The All India Muslim League (AIML**)**, founded in 1906, aimed to safeguard the rights of Muslims and other marginalized groups and to help them achieve their political aspirations in India. This mission was carried forward by the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML**)**, established on March 10, 1948. Today, the Muslim League maintains a limited organizational presence in states such as Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Karnataka**,** while itsprimary stronghold remains in Kerala. In Kerala, the League's contribution to the upliftment and empowerment of the Muslim community has been remarkably significant.

K. M. Seethi Sahib, a native of Kodungallur, was a distinguished Muslim leader who played a significant role in the socio-political awakening of Kerala's Muslim community. He took the initiative to establish an organization dedicated to the upliftment and empowerment of Muslims during a time of social transformation. Seethi Sahib was also known for his close association with national leaders; he translated the speeches of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru during their visits to Kerala, facilitating wider public understanding of their messages (Becker 2013). As a representative of the Madras Presidency, Seethi Sahib participated in the All India Muslim League (AIML) meeting held in Karachi, reflecting his prominence within the League's national framework. He was later elected from Kodungallur to the Legislative Sabha of Kochi Prajamandalam, where he continued his efforts toward social justice and equality.

One of the defining moments in his public life was his intervention in the case of Ammokutty, a Dalit woman who voluntarily converted to Islam and adopted the name Aiysha. When no one was willing to advocate on her behalf, Seethi Sahib courageously took up the case, and his efforts ensured that she received justice from the court (Jalal, 1985). This act not only highlighted his commitment to justice and equality but also earned him widespread public respect. Responding to popular

demand and in the wake of this case, he later moved his legal practice from Kodungallur to Thalassery, where he continued his social and political service.

During his time in Thalassery, K. M. Seethi Sahib came into contact with several influential Muslim leaders such as K. M. Moulavi, Uppi Sahib, Poker Sahib, and Sathar Sait, who were deeply engaged in the socio-religious reform movements of the period. With their cooperation and guidance, Seethi Sahib initiated the publication of a series of periodicals from Thalassery aimed at awakening the local Muslim community to their socio-educational and religious backwardness. These publications played a crucial role in fostering awareness and promoting reform-oriented thinking among Muslims in the Malabar region.Encouraged by these leaders, Seethi Sahib and his contemporaries went on to establish a regional organization modeled after the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) at the national level (Rehman, 2012).

In the 1936 Madras Presidency elections, the group selected Sathar Sait as their candidate to contest against the Congress nominee, Mohammed Abdul Rahman Sahib. Despite being close friends, Seethi Sahib remained steadfast in his League ideology and actively supported Sathar Sait's campaign. The election resulted in Sathar Sait's decisive victory over Abdul Rahman Sahib, marking a turning point in the political landscape of Malabar Muslims.Following this event, political rivalry emerged between Seethi Sahib and M. A. Rahman Sahib. The latter began publishing articles critical of the League leadership through his journals. In response to these criticisms, Seethi Sahib founded a monthly periodical, *Chandrika*, from Thalassery to defend the League's position and propagate its ideology (Haneef, 2020). Over time, *Chandrika* evolved into the official mouthpiece of the Indian Union Muslim League—a role it continues to play even today.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a qualitative and descriptive research approach. The information presented in this work has been collected from secondary sources such as books, research articles, government reports, journals, newspapers, and authentic online resourcesrelated to the history and activities of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) in Kerala.The research focuses on analyzing the historical background, and political evolution ofthe Muslim League in Kerala.

The collected data has been critically examined to understand the role of the IUML in the political mobilization of the Muslim community in Kerala.

Formation and Expansion of the Muslim League in South India

In 1936, Seethy Sahib, while serving in the Madras Presidency, established contact with the national leaders of the AIML and sought their approval to form a South Indian branch of the League in Thalassery. With their consent, the first committee of the Kerala Muslim League was constituted. The leadership of the committee comprised Mohamed Ali Raja (the Arakkal King) as president, Sathar Sait as general secretary, and K. M. Moulavi along with K. M. Seethi Sahib as joint secretaries. This marked the formal beginning of organized Muslim League activities in Kerala (Sharafudeen, 2003).

Under the dynamic leadership of these pioneers, the League's ideology rapidly spread across the former Madras Presidency, attracting widespread support from the Muslim community. In the 1939 elections, the League nominated Pocker Sahib as its candidate to contest against the Congress representative, Atta Koya Thangal, who was a close relative of the renowned Muslim spiritual leader, Sayyid Abdurahman Bafaqi Thangal. Although Atta Koya won the election, the massive public support for Pocker Sahib impressed Bafaqi Thangal, leading him to resign his association with the Congress and join the Following this development, a large number of Muslims from the Eranad and Valluvanad regions embraced the League, strengthening its political base. The party's influence further expanded when another eminent Muslim leader, P. M. S. A. Thangal—descended from the Prophetic lineage—joined the League. His association greatly enhanced the League's credibility and popularity among the Muslim masses. The headquarters of the Muslim League, known as *Kodappanakkal*, was established in the ancestral residence of P. M. S. A. Thangal, symbolizing the consolidation of the League's leadership and vision in South India.

The Muslim League in the Final Phase of British India

In the final elections held in British India in 1944, the Muslim League contested 29 seats from the Madras Presidency and achieved a remarkable victory by winning all of them. This success established the League as the principal opposition in the Madras Legislative Assembly, with Mohammed Ismail Sahib serving as the

Leader of the Opposition and Begum Ameera as the Deputy Leader (Aziz, 1992). Among the prominent League members in this assembly were K. M. Seethi Sahib, Pocker Sahib, and Uppi Sahib, who played influential roles in shaping the League's policies and programs.

In the 1946 elections to the Constituent Legislature, leading League figures such as Sathar Sait and Pocker Sahib were elected as representatives. During their tenure, they worked with dedication for the upliftment and welfare of the backward communities in India. The Muslim League also played a significant role in ensuring the inclusion of constitutional safeguards such as the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion—fundamental provisions that remain central to the Indian Constitution today. Furthermore, the League took the initiative to support the inclusion of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly, recognizing his intellectual and reformist contributions to the nation.

Meanwhile, at the national level, the All India Muslim League (AIML) convened a meeting in Calcutta under the leadership of H. S. Suhrawardy, the head of the Bengal Muslim League, where a resolution was passed to dissolve the AIML following the partition of India. However, prominent leaders from the Madras Presidency, including K. M. Seethi Sahib and Quaid-e-Millat Mohammed Ismail Sahib, strongly opposed this decision and argued for the continued existence of the League in India.Subsequently, Mohammed Ali Jinnah convened another meeting of the AIML in Karachi on December 15, 1947, where it was formally decided to dissolve the united body and establish separate Muslim League organizations in India, Pakistan, and later Bangladesh. This marked the beginning of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) as a distinct political entity representing the interests of Muslims within independent India.

Formation of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and the Post-Partition Challenges

Following the Partition of India in 1947, the need arose to reorganize the Muslim League within the Indian Union. Consequently, under the leadership of Muhammad Ismail Sahib, the then President of the Madras Muslim League, the Indian branch of the Muslim League—known as the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML**)**—was formally established on March 10, 1948**,** at Rajaji Hall in Madras. In this new organization, Mehbub Ali Beg was

appointed as the General Secretary, and Hasan Ali P. Ibrahim assumed the role of Treasurer.

The partition, however, led to a major exodus of prominent Muslim League leaders. In Kerala, influential figures such as Kader Kutty and Ummer Koya left the League, while others like Chaudhary Qaliq Saman**,** Haji Abdul Sattar Sait, and Haji Ishaq Sait migrated to Pakistan (Chekkutty, 2002). These departures weakened the organizational base of the League and dealt a severe blow to its political reputation. Moreover, in the early years after independence, the Muslim League faced widespread criticism and skepticism. Many in the newly independent and secular India perceived the League as a communal organization, primarily blaming it for its role in the partition of the country. As a result, the party struggled to regain its relevance and legitimacy within the secular democratic framework of postcolonial India.

The Role of the Indian Union Muslim League in Post-Independence Kerala

After the formation of the new state of Kerala in 1956, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) continued to play a vital role in the state's political, social, and educational development. In 1967, the League entered into an alliance with the Communist Party of India (Marxist**)**, marking an important phase of political cooperation. Later, in 1976, the party shifted its alliance and joined hands with the Indian National Congress, which laid the foundation for the long-standing United Democratic Front (UDF**)** coalition in Kerala politics.The League was instrumental in several landmark initiatives that transformed the socio-educational landscape of Malabar. It played a decisive role in the establishment of the University of Calicutin 1968, Kerala's second university, and in the formation of Malappuram District in 1969—a long-standing demand of the region's people. These initiatives were aimed at uplifting the educationally and socially backward Muslim community of Malabar, which had lagged behind in development compared to other regions of Kerala.

A major milestone in the League's history was the leadership of C. H. Muhammed Koya, the first Muslim Chief Minister of Kerala**.** He was a visionary leader and a strong advocate of women's education. During his tenure, he introduced scholarship schemes for female students and was instrumental in establishing major institutions such as the University of Calicut, the Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT**)**, and the Kerala

Agricultural University**.** Under the League's influence, new educational and cultural institutions such as the Universitiesof Malayalam and Sanskrit and the Manjeri Government Medical College were also established (Haneef, 2020).

Beyond politics and education, the IUML has remained deeply committed to social welfare and humanitarian service. The party has consistently mobilized public contributions to support the poor and marginalized, irrespective of religion, caste, or political affiliation. Through its charitable initiatives, the League has sponsored and distributed thousands of houses under the "Baitul Rahma" (Mercy Homes**)** project, providing shelter and dignity to homeless families across Kerala (Chekkutty, 2002).

Contemporary Role and Organizational Structure of the Indian Union Muslim League

In contemporary Kerala politics, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) continues to maintain its influence as a moderate and secular political organization. The party has consistently distinguished itself from other radical Muslim groups, often criticizing them for their extreme ideologies and lack of commitment to secular and democratic principles. The League's political stance emphasizes communal harmony and inclusive governance, aligning with its long-standing vision of social and educational advancement for all communities. During the recent Sabarimala controversy, the IUML publicly supported the Ayyappa devotees**,** reflecting its sensitivity to the cultural and religious sentiments of Kerala's broader population. Despite having allied at various times with the Communist Party of India (CPI**)**, theCommunist Party of India (Marxist)**,** and currently the Indian National Congress (INC**)** through theUnited Democratic Front (UDF)**,** the League has consistently pursued welfare-oriented policies that benefit people across caste and religious lines (Sharafudeen, 2003).

At present, the IUML is represented in the Lok Sabha by E. T. Mohammed Basheer**,** Abdul Samad Samadani**,** K. Navas Kani, and P. V. Abdul Wahab**.** In theKerala Legislative Assembly**,** the party holdsfifteen seats**,** maintaininga strong presence in state politics. The current national leadership includesK. M. Kader Mohideen (National President, Tamil Nadu),P. K. Kunhalikutty (National General Secretary**),** E. T. Mohammed Basheer (National Organising Secretary), and Sadiq Ali Thangal **(**Chairman, Political Advisory Committee).

The IUML also functions through several affiliated organizations representing diverse social and professional groups. These include theMuslim Youth League**;** Muslim Students Federation(MSF)**,** which serves as the student wing; the Indian Union Dalit League, representing Scheduled Caste communities; and the Muslim Women's League and Haritha**,** its women's and youth political wings. In addition, the League oversees trade and professional unions such as the Swathanthra Thozhilali Union (STU)**,** Independent Workers Union**,** Swathanthra Karshaka Sangam (farmers' wing), Lawyers' Forum**,** State Employees Union (SEU)**,** Teachers' Association**,** and the Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre (KMCC)**,** which serves as a global network for expatriate Keralites.

CONCLUSION

Malayali leaders played a significant role in establishing theMuslim League as a party of national prominence. Throughout its history, the League has coexisted peacefully with other religious communities within India's democratic framework, upholding the principles of equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The party has repeatedly risen to the occasion to mediate and resolve communal tensions, ensuring harmony during sensitive situations, such as the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition. Through its sustained political engagement, the IUML has contributed to the realization of constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal citizenship for Muslims and other marginalized communities, affirming its commitment to secular and democratic values. The League functions primarily as a political organization rather than a communal one**,** and over the decades, its activism has evolved in response to changing social and political contexts. From its inception, the League has been instrumental in fostering the educational, social, and political development of the Muslim community, thereby reinforcing its role as a constructive force in Indian democracy.

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