

KuthuRatheeb –A Reflection of the Varied Culture of Kerala Muslims:

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The performative progression of KuthuRatheeb: 'KuthuRatheeb' is a ritual which is a part of one community's cultural tradition. It is the believers and the Ustad who talk about KuthuRatheeb and make an arrangement about the things needed for the performance and the number of performers required. Generally, the contribution of women towards KuthuRatheeb is minimal during its performance. Only as spectators do they intervene in the performance. Otherwise, they intervene in a very passive manner. The ritual, KuthuRatheeb is popular in Iraq and is presented in the Darga of Mohayudheen Shaikh. During any time of day, KuthuRatheeb can be performed. The belief is that Shaikh Faridhudheen, the disciple of 'Hazrat Shaikh Khwaja Syed Muhammad MuhayudheenChisthi', had come to Kerala and started the practice of KuthuRatheeb among Kerala Muslims. Later, the presentation of KuthuRatheeb has spread to all parts of Kerala and has also become popular in Lakshadweep and Srilanka as well. In DaffarJalaini cave mosque at Kuragala near Balagonda in Srilanka, Muhayudheen Shaikh meditated for eleven years. The people of that place, in memory of Shaikh have built a Darga there and have practised a ritual similar to that of or instead of KuthuRatheeb. Here, the performers stab with sharp iron weapons into one's own body. The book written by Muslim scholars for the presentation of ritual practice KuthuRatheeb includes the glories of holy beings, especially of 'Rifayi Shaikh'. The books used by all the groups in Kerala are 'Kai Pusthakam' (handwritten book). The respective Ustadhs got these handwritten books traditionally. The content of all the books is the same. But, in the order of the Byth and also in its expressions, there are small variations. It is UstadMoyduPayyoli and UstadMahammoodMemunda who had compiled the handwritten books for the performance of KuthuRatheeb. The disciples of these Ustads are still following this book which has been transferred for around seventy years. The performers after taking bath wear traditional dress i.e. white cloth in the lower part and white shirt in the upper part of the body. They don't use any intoxicants for performance which are against the religion. It is with complete devotion do these people observe KuthuRatheeb. Even if the knowledge about the performance of KuthuRatheeb is gained from any text, each presentation of KuthuRatheeb is performed differently from the ones before. None of the performance is similar to the older ones. Because each performance is in its special conditions, manner, and kind. The KuthuRatheeb which had happened in the KottakalIringal Village of Koyilandi Taluk of Kerala's Calicut district is very relevant. The stage for the performance is set up by making a shed on top of the house. It was only a temporary shed. It is in this shed that the performance occurred. Including Ustad, there were seventeen performers. It has started around six in the evening. Both Muslims and non- Muslims have come to watch this performance. Even before the time of arrival of spectators, the performers occupied the space and the occupied space is split into two sections. They make a rectangular space. By spreading a mat, space is differentiated. Encircling this rectangular space, there is another space. Spectators either sit on the ground or chairs. Space is determined for the Ustad to sit (a seat). The seat for the Ustad is arranged facing towards one side of the rectangle. The performers split into two groups and sit on knees along the lengthier sides of the rectangle. The performers, who sit along both sides, sit as they sit during the prayer. The tradition of lighting kunthirikkam (Frankincense) and spreading its smell through smoke is a tradition that could not be separated from Kerala's own culture. It is also an inseparable part of KuthuRatheeb. In KuthuRatheeb, different weapons to stab could be seen in the performance space. Weapons like Dabbos, Khadir, sword, knife, etc. Are used in KuthuRatheeb. Using these weapons, performers pierce their body during the performance and torture one self. In the ritual of KuthuRatheeb, in different parts of the body, injuries are made by stabbing themselves using different weapons. These weapons for performance are placed in front of the Ustad, on top of a pillow. By the rhythm of Daffu, Ustad chants Dikr (praises of Allah) and Salath (praises of the Prophet) and starts the ritual of KuthuRatheeb. Devotees or spectators repeat this and one by one comes forward and place their hands on top of the 'Kithab' in front of the Ustad. It is the local religious book created by the scholars of the land for the performance of KuthuRatheeb ritual. It is for the blessings from Allah that they place their hands on the Kithab. After that, all the performers including the Ustad chants the Quran verses of its first chapter, SurathulYaseen (Quran's middle

chapter) and Muhavadathaini (last three chapters). During this occasion, the believers pray to the prophet and chant Dikr and repeat the names of various holy beings of Islam. In between the performance, at one time, the performers keep the Arabana (Daffu) on the ground and chant the Dikrs without the rhythm of Arabana. Praises chant so, is chanted as Baiths. Those which are sung during the performance without the accompaniment of musical instruments like Arabana, Daffu, etc. Are NasheedaBaith. NasheedaBaith is praise songs of religious subjects. When NasheedaBaith is chanted, the performer in KuthuRatheeb gets to rest. After that, the performers again start beating Daffu/ Arabana and start singing Baiths in the glory of God, the Prophet, and his followers. Baith again progresses on. During the performance, AshraqBaith is also sung in memory of Hijra. It is believed that when Prophet Mohammad and his followers fled from Mecca to Madina, the people of Madina welcomed the prophet by chanting AshraqBaith. It is the praises of Allah and the Prophet. It is after these Baiths, which start with the praises to Prophet that the performance begins. These chants describe the holiness and supernatural deeds of KuthuRatheeb. During this time, the rhythm of Arabana becomes swift and the performers and spectators reach a state of ecstasy. This is the point where performers and spectators merge. Here, both of them perform in the same manner. Along with these chants which describe the life of these saints and holy beings of Islam, in speed and sound, Arabana is beaten. Along with the beat of Arabana, performers repeat the chant “Shaikh, Shaikh, Huvallah”. (Oh almighty God....Allah). This time, each performer, nearly sixteen people, one after the other comes and shakes the hands of the Ustad as a sign of receiving blessings from the Ustad. The performers receive weapons from the Ustad. Only those performers who got special mental power during the performance will get weapons from the Ustad. Only they will get special permission from the Ustad. This permission is known as ‘Ijazath’. ‘Power to transmit’ is the meaning of the word ‘Ijazath’. Before coming to the ritual performance, the performers learn how to use the weapons. When the ritual starts with the sounds of the praises and chants in the name of Allah, the Prophet, and other saints, during when Arabana is beaten, the performers reach trance and by themselves approach the Ustad. When the Baith, “Allahu, Allahu, Allahu....Allah...YaMaula” starts, he takes weapons from the Ustad and gives it back to the Ustad. After blessing the weapons, the Ustad gives back all these weapons to the performer. It is believed that this blessing of the Ustad protects the performers from pain during the performance. When Baiths are repeatedly chanted along with the beat of the drum, the ambience created thus are echoed on and the performers strike their stomach and pierce their cheeks with Khadir (weapon) and pierce their hands in rhythm. By raising knives, the performer loudly repeats the word, ya... Shaikh...Raliyallah...The performer who bends backward through movements according to the rhythm of the beat of Arabana loudly calls on Shaikh and Allah. “Oh...holy being, Allah be merciful on him” is what is loudly said by the performer. With swift movements, the performer beats in his stomach and makes fearful gestures and makes parallel wounds and strikes on the stomach. After that, the performer approaches the Ustad with blood shedding stomach and gives him back the knife and other weapons. Usually, using a new white cloth, the blood is wiped off, in order not to show it off in a big manner or not to make it appear as cruel and violent. Afterwards, Ustad will chant some verses and keep his hands-on top of the wound and wipes the wounds three times. After that, the performer is given some water by the Ustad. After that, he, goes and sits with other performers who are chanting Baiths squatting. Some performers may be waiting for their turn. They might be ready with their weapons. The performance of performers transcends their body and the number and depth of the wounds increases. These types of them lose their consciousness and fall into the mat on the ground. At this time, in the manner of healing, Ustad, by chanting some verses rub the bodies of those who are lying down. The performers receive it as healing and they stand up and go back to the squatting position. After that, all performers say Salam (Salutation) and pay homage to holy beings and the Prophet. After these chants, the performers start chanting Du’Ah (combined prayer) under the leadership of Ustad; bring to an end the ritual performance of KuthuRatheeb. After the ritual performance, the performers who used weapons are congratulated by the spectators. On the request of the spectators, the performers go to their houses and pray for the people of that house. It is to get blessings and goodness for the people of the house that the performers pray. The performers refuse the acknowledgments from others and acknowledge that they could do this ritual with the blessings and help of the holy beings and the Ustad. During the performance or before, if the performer makes any mistakes, Ustad rectifies the mistake and also does not congratulate the performers after the performance. All the performers who practice KuthuRatheeb must pray five times every day. Also, they should be following an Islamic way of life. The performers seek blessings and help of God through the mediation of holy beings. This mediated prayer is known as ThawasulDua. Other than some Muslim groups, all Muslims (Sunni Muslims) believe in rituals and traditions like Nercha, Urooss, Maulud, Malapattu, Ratheeb and KuthuRatheeb. The performance where the body is not struck is called ‘Ratheeb’. Here, by only chanting the Baiths, the performers go to trance. The method of using Daffu or Arabana is in Ratheeb also. It is in KuthuRatheeb does excess of stabbing and striking comes in. This is also considered as a holy ritual by the Kerala Muslims.

Contrasting the nature and reach of KuthuRatheeb practice in olden and current time: Today, Muslims conduct KuthuRatheeb ritual for wellbeing, safe and comfortable delivery, mental calmness, etc. But in olden times, it was for relief from communicable diseases like smallpox, tuberculosis, etc. That KuthuRatheeb was

practised. In early times, each village had 50-60 KuthuRatheeb ritual performances, that too within a year. But now a day, this range has gone down to 20-25. To the new generation, who are not interested to follow ritual traditions, Ustads are not able to teach KuthuRatheeb. Some of the Muslim communities of these times opposes KuthuRatheeb and argue that this ritual is 'making a share in God'. Some progressive Muslim people consider KuthuRatheeb as a ritual where God is worshipped in ways other than that is prescribed by God. So KuthuRatheeb is considered unIslamic by them. Their argument is that there is nobody in between God and man (mediator). So, to conduct these kinds of rituals in Islam is meaningless. The Sunni ideologies of Islam are opposed by them. For Sunni Muslims, Prophet Muhammad is a mediator between God and Man. Based on this, KuthuRatheeb is not against the way of the Quran, says Sunni Muslims.

Different sections of Sunni Muslims where performative differences of practices exist: The debates among Sunni Muslims are related to three matters, Istigaza (to pray for me), Tawasul and Taqlid. Istigazameans praying, seeking for help or protection to holy beings that are either dead or are alive. Tawasul means to look upon these prophets (holy beings) as mediators between God and devotees. Using these mediators, they seek for the blessings of God. Sunni Muslims are the largest section of Islam. The word 'Sunni' means those who follow the words and deeds (way) of Prophet Mohammad. Madhabs are of four types. Madhab also has the meaning as a branch. In Islam, these four Madhabs are interpreted by four Imamas (leaders). One is Abu Hanifa's Hanafi Madhab. The Muslims of Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Afganistan, Iraq, and Turkey follow Hanafi Madhab. The second one is Maliqi Madhab. Malik IbnuAnas is its spokesman. Malik BinuAnas has spread his ideas in Madina. All African Muslims other than Lower Egypt and South Africa follow this branch on belief. The third Madhab is introduced by Muhammad Binu Idris Al Shafi. Muslims of Indonesia, Lower Egypt, Malaysia, Singapore, Somalia, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, India (Kerala), Sri Lanka, Palestine, Yemen, Kurd Muslims of the place Kurdish etc. Are followers of Shafi Madhab. The fourth Madhab (school) is Hambali Madhab. Ahmad BinuHambal is its spokesman. It is the people in Arabian sub islands who acknowledge the laws of this school. Even though these four schools practice same belief systems, in some other things like the culture of traditions, in its practices and in its lawful interpretation of divine judgments (Shariat), they stand differently. But still, Sunni Muslims consider all these as valid. Kerala Muslims follow the school of Shafi. Madhab has the meaning, of the law. Dynasty or sect based on these transactions (lived Islam) is what has led to the interpretation of textual Islam. In lived Islam, the code of conduct and also cultural practices of local surroundings are also included.

The textual and lived natures of Islam where law based and performative practices of Muslims happen. The study of KuthuRatheeb adopts another model. Islam is made of two realms, lived and textual. They are inseparable and unison. For example, the Quran and Hadeeth (deeds of the prophet) are practices to be followed by an Islamic devotee. Five times prayer (namaz) is codified in the Quran. Even then, it is the conversation between Allah and the Prophet which is the basis for all these traditions. Thus, practising becomes an inevitable part of the word. There is no difference in the idea of textual Islam and Lived Islam. Most of the Islam of the Middle East is believed to have spread, like in India, through the followers of the Prophet (Shahabas) or holy beings (Shaikhs, Auliyas, Peer). In early times, rituals and customs were started and maintained for the propagation of religion. To express the superhuman powers of saints, they used these rituals. Some customs, miracles, casting away the evil spirit, etc. Which were done by saints are incorporated in to the religion as part of Islam. These kinds of evidences show us that there is no difference between textual Islam and Lived Islam. Almost all Auliyas and saints lived a simple life that of a Fakir (poor). On top of the tombs of these holy beings, Mappilas (Kerala Muslims) had built structures and had maintained it. All these holy beings are believed to be capable of carrying out miraculous deeds. Devotees give offerings as money, things or worship. Nerchas (offerings) are there in worship culture. Quran recitation is there in Nerchas. The presentation of rituals happens in mosques, Dargas, the house of believers or other public places.

The leadership among Kerala Muslims and stating the complementary nature of Islam by focusing on the performance of KuthuRatheeb: The main Nerchas of the Malabar region are Malappuram Nercha, KondottiNercha, MamburamNercha, PonnaniNercha, KoottayiNercha, PattambiNercha etc. After the death of holy people, their tombs are worshipped as Dargas and annual festivals like Urooss, Nercha etc. Are practiced as a sign of respect towards them. Devotees reach Dargas for fulfilling their wishes. If we closely observe performances related to holy beings, we could see ones like that of KuthuRatheeb. These rituals do not tell us the difference between textual Islam and lived Islam but prove that all is one. It exists as complementary. There are two types of religious leadership among Mappila Muslims. The first one is having divine powers of healing, they are called Mullas. The second group is Maulavis and Qasis. Mullas do their work by being in houses or Dargas. They can do miracles, believe the believers. Casting off evil spirits is their main healing process. They got this power from holy beings is what is believed. The second group i.e. Maulavis and Qasis are appointed based on religious education and schooling. They are the group who carry out worship traditions and

educational institutions. The scholars who got training are called Ulama. This means 'One who knows'. Rituals like KuthuRatheeb had produced a new line of leadership. That line of leadership is 'Ustads'. Either through lineage or as delegation, they could be the leader of KuthuRatheeb. Ustads are believed to have received powers to traverse between heaven and earth. We could see the relation between these two worlds in rituals like KuthuRatheeb. The body of the Rifayi Shaikh is buried in Iraq. It is believed that, through prayer, the priest could call upon that spirit to the performance space. After when the spirit comes, even though the performers hurt their body using weapons, they don't feel pain. This is the time when the believers reach trance because of their belief. The performers are helped to injure their bodies' without feeling pain is by this belief and the trance they get out of it. Sounds, Light, dressing style, the presence of spectators (believers), the place where performance happens, all these help the performer to reach trance. At this time, performers and spectators are not experiencing pain in the same manner. The belief is that the pain of the performer is in the body of the saint. The critical situations arise out of the usage of weapons by the performers are controlled by Ustads. KuthuRatheeb includes the presentation of the verses of holy text (Quran) and the ritualistic actions, formed out of rhythmic body movements in accordance with the tune of textual presentation in singing form and is done in their stomach. So, it is impossible to maintain the differentiations between textual Islam and lived Islam. One affirms the other. If the textual presentation during Namaz (prayer) and the textual presentation during KuthuRatheeb are clearly examined, we could see many similarities. Without prayer (Namaz), a believer can conduct KuthuRatheeb as a Nercha (offering). But that won't be instead of Namaz (prayer). Namaz (prayer) rely more on textual Islam. KuthuRatheeb is related to lived Islam. Thus, lived Islam is a continuation of textual Islam.

Iconotification of Islamic practices resulting in variations in Islamic society: The complementary nature of Mappila Muslims is not only between Lived Islam and textual Islam, but also among Muslims and non – Muslim communities in a specific landscape and cultural sphere. After all, India is a non-Muslim nation where Muslims are considered an inevitable part of the nation due to various political and historical reasons. So, the cultural practices of other communities have also influenced the Mappila community. The term used in folklore studies for the process of localizing traditions of folk manifestation is 'icotype'. The factors which cause iconotification are mostly historical or cultural facts. Most of the Islamic practices of Kerala do not stay away from localness. It is Karl Wilhelm Von Sydow (1965: 217 – 42) who coined the term icotype. Icotype is a local folk narrative form. In that, there are the peculiar features of the country and place. In the pressure of local surroundings to find the differences in narration is the main aim of icotype studies. The term "Muslim" to address the Islam followers of Kerala was changed to ' Mappila' because of historical reasons. Even before the Islamic conquest of northern India during the eleventh century, there was a large Muslim population in Kerala. Indian Muslims have their local, language based and cultural peculiarities. In Islam also, there are inter-communal differences. North Indian Islam is introduced by central Asian intruders. South Indian Islam is introduced here by the Arab traders. In Kerala, the term 'Mappila' was a generic term for non – Hindu occupiers. Kerala Muslims were known as 'JonakaMappilas', Kerala Christians as ' NasraniMappila' and Kerala Jews as 'JoothaMappila'. Later, only Kerala Muslims came to be known as Mappilas. It is a terminology used in reverence.

The development of Mappila literature and customary differences in Islamic societies of Kondotty and Ponnani: Indian Islam is a cultural product. The Muslims of Malabar are based on the Shafi'i school. In Sufism, they follow the Badri way established by Shaikh Abdul QadirJeelani. It is in Ponnani that its leadership is given. Leadership was offered by Makhdooms. The nineteenth century was the springtime of Mappila literature. Malappattu, Kissapattu, Baiths, mourning songs, Sufi songs, Padapattu, Maduh songs, Kalyanapattu (marriage songs) like these, in poetic literature arena, Mappila literature had evolved much. The great poet MoyinkuttiVaidyar is the champion of poetic literature. It is Shaikh SayidJifri who came forward for the cultural activities in the eighteenth century. The criticisms he raised against the ill practices in the name of Tariqas, the religious practices of Kondotty has made the society resist Sufi Tariqas. All the scholars of Ponnani had taken up this mission and had made the awareness about Tariqas. They made possible the awareness about Ba AlaviTariqa. Because of the propagation of Ba AlaviTariqa, it was able to keep QamiriTariqa solemnly. For spiritual refinement, this has become an inspiration. Devotional songs of God like HadadRatheeb, Qutubiyath etc., offerings like kuthuRatheeb, Muhayudheenmalas, etc. Became active during these days and the new believers were kept away from local and un-Islamic beliefs. Also, Muslim style and arts were bred. It is accused by the scholars that during Muhammad Shah's time, it is Shiite practices that were made to proceed in Kondotti but Muhammad Shah and followers had constantly refused the relation with Shiitism. However, during Muharram celebrations and all, the celebratory events that were observed in Taqiya were very much similar to that of Shiites. On Muharram 10, they use Taboot (coffin) and flags like the Shiites and also have observed certain special worship practices. A fire pit of the name 'Jafus' is made and jumping on to it, by guffawing 'Ya Ali', 'Ya Hasan', 'Ya Hussain', and entertainments like cockfight, tiger play (Puli kali) were also conducted.

Taking sandal pot and application of sandal paste on forehead and leg is the main part of this custom. By pointing on all these practices, Ponnani section of Scholars opposed the Fakir (Muhammad Shah). MamburamThangal had proclaimed that the Fakir is a Shiite of Bora section. They were called as Ravafi'i. To the Fatwa of 1840 December 1256 Ramzan 13th, in the response written by Ponnani section scholar, KitsingantakathuAbubakrKunju Haji, to the Caliph of KondottiTariqa, PulladuGarib Shah, has disclosed the Shiite practices of the Taqiya (Darga) and has imprinted that Fakir is the representative of the devil. In it, the practice of worshipping fire, like the 'Majoosi', Chandanakudam (sandal pot), Tabot etc. Are declared practices which are not per Islam that were tried to be realised by Garib Muhammad Shah. Muhammad Shah has proclaimed that he is the representative of Khadiri – ChistiTariqas, but Ponnani section of scholars who had followed the same Tariqas was not ready to acknowledge that. The stand of Kondotti people who did Sujood (praying by bowing the head) before Muhammad Shah was completely opposed by Ponnani scholars. It is by touching all seven organs in the ground, did they do Sujood, not in a standing position.

KuthuRatheeb and Nerchas, the unison of people of various cultures: The Mappila culture is more expressed in practices and customs related to the Dargas of the Sufis. The custom of seeking blessings by visiting holy beings is there in all the Muslims of the world. After death, the tomb of these greats become pilgrim centres. By visiting the Dargas and praying to Allah in the presence of the holy men who rest in peace there is done as a holy act. KuthuRatheeb that happens in the Dargas and other offerings is related to the native agricultural and trade conditions. In many places, Nerchas are local festivals. It is by neglecting religious restrictions, arts and sports entertainment and KuthuRatheeb is conducted in these types of festivals. Believers of the Hindu faith also practice KuthuRatheeb as an offering. When analysed as a cultural commune, KuthuRatheeb can be seen as a union of villagers or urban people beyond the differences in faith. By keeping the differences in faith itself, these festivals were useful in creating humanitarian communes. The Dargas of each land are the wish and hope of the people of the respective land. To get rain and for good yield, farmers by forgetting the religious faiths vow KuthuRatheeb or other similar offerings in Dargas. The Dargas of towns is the wish centres of traders. By visiting these Dargas, traders vow offerings for desired effects. By expecting alms offered as food during the KuthuRatheeb offering and also alms by the pilgrims to the dargas, many poor people rely on the Dargas. From earlier times itself, rituals like KuthuRatheeb were used for religious awakening. By collecting money from the rich, the poor were given alms and food during Nerchas. People of different castes and religious practices vow KuthuRatheeb as an offering for fulfilling their wishes. In Mappila art forms, rituals and sculptures, the union of it with Kerala styles are seen. Kerala art forms with little variations have been accepted by the Muslim community here. In KuthuRatheeb, Ilathalam, Oil lamp and incense sticks had come from Kerala's art forms and traditions. The Kolkali of Mappilas is another version of Kolaattam and Koladi song that existed among the Keralites .During Puranic time, this was an art form of Nair women.

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