



Research Paper

Contributions of Muslim Women to Malayalam Press : A Study on the Journalistic Efforts of M. Haleema Beevi

Muhammed Musthafa.K.P

Assistant Professor,
Department of Journalism and Mass communication,
Farook College, Kozhikode, Kerala

ABSTRACT

Kerala, the southernmost state of India has a unique place in the socio-political history of the country. As far as the press is concerned, media density in Kerala is very high than any other territory of India. Malayalam journalism grew along with the socio-political movements like the Literacy Movement. Since its inception, the Malayalam press has been addressing the woman question. But we would rarely find any female journalist or publisher in the early periods of Malayalam press. Women were employed as writers in some women-only magazines started by the then existing publishers. Special publications for women were started in Malayalam in 1888. The publication of *Keraleeya Suguna Bodhini* was started by the royal decree of Kerala Varma Valiya Koi Thampuran, the King of Travancore. In addition, women's publications such as *Sharadha* (1904), *Lakshmi Bhai* (1906), *Bhasha Sharadha* (1914) and *Mahila Ratnam* (1925) were in circulation. It can be seen that most of these publications dealt with topics such as cooking, art and decoration. "Early women's journals were published either by male social reformers or by political leaders" (J.Devika, 2000).

Haleema Beevi, a native of Thiruvalla, Kerala, holds a unique position in the history of Malayalam journalism, not just as a female journalist, but as a daring journalist who refused to submit her will before the autocratic Travancore Divan and the then existed conventional social system in the clergy owned society. Despite all odds, whether it is financial, or political, she fought for women against all the social evils like oppression, colonialism and tyranny. Ironically, media historians hardly pay attention to her contributions to Malayalam journalism until recently. The study focuses on the contributions of early Muslim women journalists, especially on the journalistic endeavours of Haleema Beevi.

KEY WORDS: Press in Kerala, Muslim Women, M.Haleema Beevi, Women in Press, Malayalam Press, Muslim Press.

Received 06 Feb, 2021; Revised: 18 Feb, 2021; Accepted 20 Feb, 2021 © The author(s) 2021.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. PRESS IN KERALA - AN OVERVIEW

Hebarmas classifies the historical evolution of the print media into three phases. In the first stage, printing was a handicraft practised by artisans to make money, as if they were stitching boots or hammering horseshoes. The second stage is that of 'literary journalism', wherein 'the newspaper's publisher changed from being a merchant of news into a 'dealer in public opinion' and 'the commercial purpose, receded almost entirely into the background'. The third stage, the 'profitability of the enterprise got the upper hand over its publicist intention'. Moving into the mass media age where 'the publisher appoints editors in the expectation that they will do as they are told in the private interest of a profit-oriented enterprise'.

Robin Jeffrey reframes Hebarmas' classification in his popular essay *Testing Concepts of Print, Newspaper, Politics in Kerala 1800-2001*.¹ The aforementioned study classifies the stages of development of newspapers and print media of Kerala into three; they are *rare*, *scarce* and *mass*.

The first newspaper in Kerala was published by Basal Mission Society in 1847 from Thalassery. In his studies, Jeffrey points out that, unlike the other parts of India, Kerala is a region where the growth and development of newspapers has taken place rapidly. However, in Kerala, where women outnumber men in terms of population, the number of women in the field of journalism is still very low. It is still rare to find women in chief positions even in the leading Malayalam newspapers and journals.

II. WOMEN IN MALAYALAM PRESS

Special publications for women in Malayalam were started in 1888. The publication of *Keraleeya Suguna Bodhini* was started by the royal decree of Kerala Varma Valiya Koi Thampuran, the then King of Travancore. In addition, women's publications such as *Sharadha* (1904) , *Lakshmi Bhai* (1906), *Bhasha Sharadha* (1914) and *Mahila Ratnam* (1925) were in circulation. It is apparent that, most of these publications dealt with topics such as cooking, art and decoration .

Historian Abdul Rahman Mangatt testifies that Arabi-Malayalam printing presses were established and books were published at the same time as the Basel Mission Society were publishing from Thalassery. Thipputhil Kunjahammed and Aniyapuram Ammu, who learned the printing technology from Bailey's printing press, had prepared the printing mould for various publications. The printing press for the newspaper *Salahul Iqwan* started by Saitalikutty in Tirur was made by Aniyapurath Ammu.(*Muslim pathra pravarthanam avibaktha Kannur jillayil* - Abdurahman Mangatt). Apart from *Swalahul Islam*, there were many other small publications in circulation among the Muslims of Kerala at that time. It is an undeniable fact that , for historical reasons, the number of Muslims who could read and write Malayalam was very low during that time unlike other communities.

C H Muhammed Koya, who worked from the front to start the *Chandrika* newspaper in 1931, describes the situation at that time as follows " The history of Muslim journalism begins at a time when the number of educated people in the community was very low and the number of people who can get educated was low and the number of people who were willing to read the newspaper was very low" (*Kerala Muslim Directory* -1960, page 461).

The role of religious reform movements in the printing history of Kerala is remarkable.

The case of early Muslim publications is no different . The publications started by the religious renaissance movements also addressed women within the religion. According to KM Seethi Sahib, women used to read articles in publications by Vakkom Abdul Qadir Moulavi² and others with great passion and interest (Athouhid Magazine - Mujeeb Rahman Kinalur - August 2017) . But the authors of such publications were mostly men. The creative interventions of women was something that rarely happens in these magazines. Shamsad Hussain reports that an article appeared in the magazine *Muslim Mitram* under the name of 'Qasim Mistress' (*Collection of essays on Kannur Muslim Heritage Congress* - 2019). Despite this socio-political context, M Haleema Beavi's journalistic endeavour stands out .

III. THE LEGACY OF M HALEEMA BEEVI

Haleema Beevi hails from a middle class Muslim family in thiruvalla in erstwhile kingdom of Travancore. Her mother Meitheen Beevi was actively involved in social reform movements in the Muslim community especially among Muslim women. Haleema Beevi was married to Mr.Moidu Maulavi who was a disciple of Vakkom Abdulkhader Maulavi.Moidu Moulavi also worked in Swadeshbhimani³, the famous newspaper started by Vakkom Maulavi.

Haleema Beevi's journalistic career sets out at the age of 20 as the editor of the *Muslim Vanitha Magazine*. K M Moulavi's journalistic experiences in the publications of Vakkom Moulavi helped her on many occasions. Haleema Beavi was the managing editor of *Muslim Vanitha*, but she was also interested in the technical aspects of the journal, including printing. *Muslim Vanitha* published articles that strengthened the social progress and enriched the intellectual sphere among Muslim women. There were no other publications for Muslim women at that time. Haleema Beevi and *Muslim Vanitha* faced severe criticism from conservative Muslims. The price of the magazine was half 'ana'. Financial crisis and agents' non-cooperation prompted Haleema to suspend the publication of *Muslim Vanitha* (Pathradhipa - page 32).

After *Muslim Vanitha* magazine , *Bharatha Chandrika* weekly was started in 1944 under the leadership of Haleema Beevi. The journal was printed from St. Joseph's Press, Thiruvalla. Unlike *Muslim Vanitha*, *Bharatha Chandrika* was aimed at general readers. Haleema Beavi was the Editor-in-Chief and the Managing Editor of the *Bharatha Chandrika*, which began publishing in January 1944. Abdul Qadir Moulavi has also been the editor of some volumes of *Bharatha Chandrika* (Pathradhipa- page 33). Since it was published during World War II, in-depth articles on war can be found in its volumes. *Bharatha Chandrika* gave great importance to literary works. Many eminent writers such as Thakazhi, G. Sankara Kurupp, MP Ayyappan, P. Keshavadev, P. Kunjiraman Nayar, O N V Kurup, Guptan Nayar, Balamani Amma And others regularly published works in *Bharatha Chandrika* .The price of the Journal was two 'ana'. It is clear from the advertisements for donation appeared in a few issues published in February 1945 that, *Bharatha Chandrika* was plagued by a severe financial crisis (Mappila Heritage Library Archives). However, in 1948 it was published as a daily newspaper . Haleema Beevi has been publishing a magazine called *Vanitha* since 1943, parallel to *Bharatha Chandrika*. In content , it can be seen as a continuation of *Muslim Vanitha* (Pathradhipa -Page 34) . The *Vanitha*, which cost four 'ana', also had military issues. Haleema Beevi herself was its publisher and editor . In

1970, Haleema Beevi started another publication, *Aadhunika Vanitha*. Filomina Kuryan, Baby Varghese, B.Sudha, K K Kamalakshi Amma, M. Rahuma Bheegam were the editorial board members and Haleema Beevi herself was its editor. (*Pathradhipa* - page 38).

Through her publications, Haleema Beevi vehemently criticised the policies of the then Diwan of Travancore, Sir C.P Ramaswami. It provoked the Diwan. He even offered her a modern printing press to keep her away from such criticism. When the Malayala Manorama⁴ press was seized by the government, Haleema Beevi printed Manorama Daily from her own press.

IV. CONCLUSION

Haleema Beevi was a prominent figure in the history of Malayalam press. We can't find any other muslim woman who ran a newspaper anywhere in the history of Indian Journalism. Deliberate disregard towards this fact is an injustice, which needs to be corrected.

There was a time when the major newspapers were reluctant to employ female journalists. Women were kept out of the news desk as it works at night. There was a time when Muslim community believed that, educating women is worthless. M.Haleema Beevi had to fight with all such patriarchal notions to survive as a woman journalist. She could be termed as the 'Mother of malayalam journalism'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No part of this Article was neither published nor presented elsewhere. I thank Mrs.Fathima Hasna,Dr.Asees Tharuvana,Muhsin, Mr.Jihad for their comments and suggestions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no political conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and /or publication of this article.

Funding

The author recieved no financial support for the research, authorship and / or publication of the article.

Notes

1. Robin Jeffrey concludes his study by stating that print Capitalism does not make any effect in kerala as proposed by Benedict Anderson. It seems that he is ignorent about the local dielects like Arabi- Malayalam mostly used among muslim Community, and Gharshoni -Malayalam used among Christian community.
2. Vakkam Abdul Khader Maulavi is a prominent figure of socio religious reform movement in kerala.
3. Swadeshabhimani was the one among the prominent newspaper in Travencore which vehimently criticised the autocracy of Diwan of travencore and the colonial British empaire. Swadeshabhimani was sealed in 1910 and the then Editor Ramakrishnapillai deported from Travencore.
4. Malayala Manorama is the largest circulated vernacular newspaper in India as per Audit Burea of Circulation Reports.

REFERENCE

- [1]. Noora, Noorjahan, (2020)'Patradhipa'(publisher)- Bukkafe, Kozhikkod
- [2]. Tharuvana, Asees, (2019) Haleema Beevi, A Legend walks ahead of centuries' Madhyamam Weekly, - Kozhikkod
- [3]. Devika.J,(2005) ' A welcome Speech' (oru swagatha prasangam') Madhyamam Weekly, 2005 March 18- Kozhikkod
- [4]. Vazhakkad. Sadarudheen, (2013) Muslim Women in Thiru-kochi- A memoir of Haleema Beevi- Prabhodanam Weekly-2013 May 14- Kozhikkod
- [5]. Hussain.Shamsad KT, (2015)Women in Mappilapattu- Muslim and non muslim women- Red Cherry Books
- [6]. Jeffrey.Robin 'Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800-2009' The Journal of Asian StudiesVol. 68, No. 2 (May, 2009), pp. 465-489 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20619735>
- [7]. Beoder.Peter, (2015) 'Habermas' heritage, the fiture of public sphere in the network society'.<https://firstmonday.org/article/view/1280/112>