

1. **Contested Space of Diaspora: A Case Study of Gujarati and Bohra Diasporas of Kozhikode City**

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Calicut is one of the most prominent port city, since 20th century in the south-west coast of India. Along with natives a few diaspora communities too played a major role in shaping the socio-cultural and political life of the city. There were basically four immigrant Hindu communities in the city, namely, the Gujaratis, the Konkini Brhmins, the Tamil Brahmins, and the Marvadees. Among them, the Gujaratis and Kongini Brahmins are the merchant communities whereas the Tamil Brahmins are associated with temple complexes. The Marvadees had their settlement only after with the establishment of Mavoor Gwalyore Reyons factory In 1960s. So, among the Hindu diaspora, only the first two are coming under the study as per the specificities pertaining to the selected groups occupational and chronological boundaries. The majority of the city's Muslim population is fundamentally the local converts to Islam, known as the Mappila Muslims. There are also a few immigrant Muslim communities as well. They are the Bohras, the Dhaknis, the Memons, the Batkals, the Barahmis and the Marikars. They were the trading communities. Baramis became very much a local community by the time as children of west Asian fathers and local mothers and Marikars were seafarers. This study, hence centred on the socio-cultural life of the two prominent Diaspora communities belong two religions, the Hindu Gujaratis and the Muslim Bohras.

Gujaratis

Gujaratis consisted of one of the most prominent business communities in the world. Like other major cities in India, they are a numerically weak, but an economically powerful community in Calicut as well. Though their prominence has been weakened during the course of time they wielded so much influence in the economic life of the city in the prescribed period. There is even a street named after them, the Gujarati Street, in the heart of the cities commercial metropolis.

History

Gujaratis had a very long relationship with the city as traders. Along with their Muslim counterparts the Gujarati Hindus carried out the regions intra and international trade. It is said that Portuguese reached in

the city in 1498 with the help of a Gujarati trader. Whatever may be the case the Gujarati settlement established here before 180 years. The integration of India under the British fuelled the process.

The early immigrants were from the Jamnagar region of Gujarat. They specialised in pulse trade. Though Kerala was almost self-sufficient in food grain production during the time, it needed cereals. Rice was also in demand when crop damages took place during heavy monsoon. They bought these commodities here and procured Malabar spices which were in great demand around the world. Trade was often done in the barter system. When the British currency system gained ground a shift had taken place to it.

In addition to trade, they also imported precious metals like gold, stones and chemicals to the city. Gold was collected from then Bombay. In the local market, it was the Konginees who did gold business in hands with the local goldsmiths.

Social Life

Gujarati settlers are from four castes, namely the Lohanas, Bhatyas, and Brahmins. The fourth one was the Jains. All of them belonged to the Vaisnava sect. Among them, Brahmins were small in numbers and worked mainly as priests to cater the spiritual and religious needs of the settlers. Since the Gujaratis are a very religious community the priests were very high in demand. Some of them also did trade and helped the traders as office staff.

By the prescribed time there had been two temples built, namely the Balakrishna temple and saint Jay ram temple. They were small temples modelled after the nagara style. Both were re built in 1960s, the spiritual life of the community was centred around these temples. Women from the community used recite bhajans daily in the morning.

Deepavali and Navarathri were the main festivals they celebrated. Deepavali was an occasion to repay the credits as well it also marked an occasion for the communities outreach. They used to send homemade sweets to neighbours and business partners during the time. In fact Deepavali festival was very instrumental in introducing many new sweets in the city.

Navarthri was more an exclusive festival. There were extensive rituals associated with it in the temples. Children's beginning of learning was most important among them. Though Navratri was also celebrated by the local Hindus, it was mainly confined to the temples then and was not a prominent a festival.

During the prescribed time, men are formally educated whereas women's education was least a concern. Boys used to enter into Ganapat School, Malabar Christian college school and the model school. In most cases, school education was confined to formal level as all had family business to look after. So, after matriculation, no interest was shown in higher studies. Women education was ignored due to the community's traditional outlook. The Gujarati reform movement was not that effective to touch the convictions of their distant brethren.

But, changes started slowly. The leadership of two Gujaratis in the national movement had an impact. Inspired by Gandhiji and Patel some Gujaratis forged hand with the national movement, Shamji Sunder das and Lakshmi Moonji was two of them. The latter even took part in the Dandi march and later on elected to Calicut Municipal Corporation. According to Vijaysi Pathanji, aged 77, who is the senior most member of the community now, Gujaratis in the city had no political affiliations^[i]. As a business community, they always stood with those who in power. Though Gandhiji was well admired and local leaders like Shamji was respected, the community was not ready to support the national movement. All political affiliations were personal.

This proximity to power helped the community many ways. Government always took a lenient approach to them. When the community applied to get sanction to run a school, it was allowed soon after filing the application in 1947. The school named as Gujarathi School was very instrumental in giving education to the children in the beach area. Apart from Gujarati, Muslims and local Hindu families found the school as a great help to educate their children. It was to run the school the first organisation of the community formed in 1953, namely the Gujarati Vidyalaya Association. Subsequently, the Gujarati Samaj was also formed in the same year. The Samaj had the responsibility to look after the temples and to take care of the aged members of the community.

Dhawoodi Bohras

The Dawoodi Bohras were the sole Shiite group among the immigrant Muslim communities of Calicut. They have been living here for the last two centuries. We do not have ample evidence pertaining to the cause of the migration, but available documents shed light to their three hundred years old contacts with the city.^[ii] It is believed that the business potential of Kallai^[iii] might be the reason to form a settlement here. The assumption is backed by the prominence achieved by the Bohras in the timber trade in Calicut in the beginning of the twentieth century.

The word Bohra derived from the Gujarati root *vohoro* or *vyavahar* meaning 'to trade'. The term was used to denote Hindu, Muslim and Jain traders. However, it is the Muslim who generally called as Bohras. They are a sub-sect of the Ismailia Shiah Islam; the belief system has its origin in Yemen.^[iv] In Yemen, they evolved from the Fatimid Caliphate and they were persecuted due to their difference from mainstream Sunni Islam.

Contours in the Islamic Space of Calicut

Among the Muslims in the city the Boras were the first to accept the English language with an open heart, which imparted them an extra mileage in the socio-economic life. Though they always keep good relation with the local Muslims they maintain the cultural roots of the community intact. It may be due to the insistence that they never took part in age-old revelry existed between the Shiites of the adherent Kondotty region with the Ponnani Sunni group. This policy can be seen as psychological measure to protect the community from local influence. When they opened the window to the West they closed it for the fellow religionists of the neighbourhood. It is a difficult strategy to comprehend. The Gujaratis did the same in the case of Hindu reform movements during the time. Amado. M. Padilla had observed the decline in cultural awareness from the first generation of the immigrants to the fourth generation.^[v] The Gujaratis, Konginis and Bohra Muslims of Calicut offer a strange contradiction to the theory. Though many generations have been passed, they never allowed their cultural seclusion to be broken to the locals. At the same time they selectively permit the western cultural elements to enter, as evident in the New Year celebration and all. The approach takes the researcher to a grey area where identity politics assumes a strange costume. As pointed out by Frederic Jameson deterritorialisation always keep some channels closed while others to let in^[vi] by closing the cultural window to the local Muslims the Bohra Muslim psyche seems to have represented the difference, providing it a safe hole to vent. It is relevant in the context of well to do minority duels in the ocean of an arrogant and sectarian co-religionists. As in the case of any representation of differences the element of protest is also embedded in it. The collective memory of Shia prosecution and the alienation of the sect in the Sunni dominated Islamic space must have been the constitutive element here. As pointed out by John Lie,^[vii] it is no longer assumed that immigrants make a sharp break from their homelands. Rather pre- emigration networks, culture and capital remain silent. The sojourn follows multifarious trajectories. But, the Gujaratis were not that open two western culture like the Boras. They were eager to get modern education with a psychological filter to safeguard themselves from the alien cultural influences. It may be due to the dominant position they enjoyed in the elite Hindu fold unlike Boras, the prosecuted, in the global Islamic space. In the Islamic space of the Calicut city the Bohra community marks an invisible presence. They stand in the periphery of

the grand-narrative of cultural Islam in the city. Their involvement in the Islamic space of Calicut clearly illustrates the fact. They never came in the centre of any religious debate in the city. Instead their contributions mainly lie in the educational sector. They were instrumental in the establishment of Farook College and the foundation of J.D.T. orphanage. The Gujaratis also have the story to tell. They catalysed the modernisation process in the city by establishing schools and kept themselves away from the troubles which the native reformists faced.

Conclusion

More than the co-religionists the Gujaratis of Kozhikode are closer to the Bhora Muslims of the city. So be the case of the Bohras. Historical and cultural affinities can be seen as the cementing factor in these ties. Both are trading communities coming from the same region. Though they are in competition with each other in national and international trade, the Diaspora status in an alien city might have brought the cultural affinities in the surface above the religious boundaries and professional revelries. Moreover the Shia identity of the Bohras might have occasioned the social coming together as the sect represents both a counter social and cultural reading and practise of the grant Islamic narrative van guarded by the Sunni tradition. Modern institutions like the Gujarati School became another meeting space of the post-independent generations of both communities to practise a salad bowl model of multiculturalism.

^[ii] Interview with Vijaysi Pathansi, Valiyangadi, 16 June 2016

^[iii] P.P. Muhammed Koya Parappil, *Kozhikkotte Muslinglude Charitram*, , Focus publication, Calicut, 1994, pp.205-206.

^[iii] During the period the banks of the river *Kallai* was one of the largest centres of wood industries in the world.

^[iv] Farhad Daftary, *The Ismaili-Their History and Doctrine*, OUP, London, 2004, pp300-316.

^{[v][v]} Amado .M. Padilla and William Perez, *Acculturation, social identity and social cognition-a new perspective*, SUP, 2003, pp.35-55.

^[vi] Federic Jameson, "On Cultural Studies", *Social Text*, Vol.34, no.1, 1993 pp. 34-58.

^[vii] Jon Lie, *From International Migration to Transnational Diaspora*, contemporary sociology, Vol.24,no.4,1995, pp.303-306.