Development of the Malabar Muslim worldview from the folklore arts: A conceptual study

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Abstract

Since a worldview is developed by a natural process from an everyday life continuity of a society (Alparsalan, 1996), the social situation of a community has a key role in molding its own worldview. Starting from a context of individual setting, the formation and development of a worldview is influenced by the social setting which is to be interpreted using different methods of understanding. The main focus of this paper would be on conceptualizing the development of Malabar Muslim worldview from their folklore arts, including the languages and terminologies with which they use to have a close connection. While analyzing the philosophy of language with special reference to the folklore arts by which the identity of Malabar Muslim community was and is being established, the paper would also be looking into the relation of its educational philosophy with their present worldview. The philosophical understanding of the worldview of a living community does not need to have a systematic way or structure of its own and therefore the situational interpretations of the ideas can be different from the current theories pertaining to the structured terrain. Rather than pointing out the features of the folklore arts especially which marks the Muslim identity, the study would be giving a scope for developing the worldview from the social situation of Malabar.

Introduction

Looking from a general point of view, we can assert that every society has its own worldview and it is not incorrect to say that every individual has his or her worldview which is formed by the social settings. There are different factors to shape the worldview of an individual as well as a community including the education, religion, language, psychology, and the environment

(Alparslan, 1996). The worldview formed in individual or the society, by and large, may not be organized or systematically structured and therefore the concept sometimes is hidden in them without purposefully knowing that this is their worldview on this. This paper, after giving an outline about the concept of worldview would be conceptualizing the development of a worldview for the Malabar Muslim community with some philosophical interpretations.

Defining the worldview

According to Vidal (2008), the term 'worldview' is often used to emphasize the personal and historical point of view. He holds the view that the worldview is a form of philosophy. That is to say when we use the term we refer to a different form of philosophy.

Alparslan (1996) gives various interpretations for the concept of worldview in his book named 'Islamic Science towards a Definition'. He points out that it refers to 'a conceptual totality as an attempt to grasp the universe, and as such a worldview is an architectonic whole, in which notions, ideas, and beliefs are so interconnected that together they form a network of organized concepts' (p.13). In this context he opines that it is related to the idea of understanding the universe as a whole and all the mentioned entities are connected with each other. The formation of worldview then occurs naturally. He continues by revealing that a worldview is an architectonic network of ideas, conceptions, aspirations and beliefs in which all these entities are coherently organized but not necessarily in a systematic manner.

Berghout (n.d.) says that generally a worldview may be defined as an individual's or group's contemplation, perception or concept of world; a view or philosophy of life. Here, as we are discussing the Muslim worldview, it is inevitable to know of the Islamic concept of worldview. By his own definition, 'Islamic worldview is the collective *ummatic* vision of existence through which Muslims interpret and provide answers to the ultimate questions about the Creator, the existence of the seen and the unseen worlds, the universe, life, humanity, prophethood, vicegerency, society, history, and the Hereafter' (p.24). We can see the same categorization in the chapter mentioning the Qur'anic worldview in the book 'God and Man in the Qur'an' by Izutsu. Whenever we name a discipline as 'Islamic' the cardinal aspect which

should be noticed is that it should be formed and constructed from the framework of Islamic worldview.

But, there is lack of studies on the development of worldview studies from both a historical and a conceptual perspective within the Islamic context. As a matter of fact, no specific area of disciplines deals mainly with the history of worldview research as well as its conceptual construction and development from an Islamic perspective (Berghout, n.d.). In the scripture of Islam, we cannot see any specific discipline which is called 'worldview studies'. Nevertheless there are certain indicators showing the philosophy of the religion on different matters. Hence this paper would only put forward some conceptual aspects of the worldview development of Malabar Muslims through their arts by which they are (to be) identified.

Formation of worldview in the context of Malabar Muslims

The formation of a worldview occurs through various aspects. The worldview for a society is innate in their daily life and therefore the life cycle of the society itself is one of the best media for the formation of their worldview. The worldview is formed through culture, technology, scientific, religious and speculative ideas that we acquire through education and other means. It may be formed also through a conscious effort to gain knowledge or through both of the aforementioned aspects. (Alparslan, 1996).

Looking through the context of Malabar Muslims' life environment, the analysis of these three aspects gives us a conceptual picture on how their worldview on different human- related matters is formed. For instance, as a positive side, the concept of tolerance with others who are different in terms of religion, community, or ethnicity is a culture of the Malabar Muslims. The aforementioned culture has been nurtured and grown up in them through their environment, which enabled them to view the others from outside the community with a humanistic perspective. When we go through the literature deeply, we simply find that the forefathers of Malabar Muslims were being converted to Islam. This reality forces us to think that the conversion, to an extent, has helped the religious co-existence among the society and thus it caused for a worldview on that topic to be constructed within the society.

As for the negative side, the early Malabar Muslim worldview on educational point formed from the traditional view that only the religious education was something relevant for the community.

> 'They therefore confined themselves to studies relating to the law, literature, and theology of Islam. As a result of this it is pointed out that while other communities greedily rushed to reap the benefits of western education, Muslims preserved a policy of hesitation. This resulted in their lagging far behind others.' (Muhammed, 2007, p.42).

It is evident that this hesitation which was prevalent in the Muslim community in 1830s has clearly influenced the formation of their worldview on the abovementioned matter, although it has dramatically changed throughout the decades. The paradoxical point which is to be noticed here is that while the Muslim intelligentsia in a global setting acquired the knowledge disseminated from various parts of the world and constructed the scientific worldview by themselves, the Muslims of Malabar region knowingly or unknowingly opted for the rejection of this type of worldview and this led to a weak terrain in their educational sector for years. Yet, it is seen that recently the mental development of the community adhere the true educational philosophy of Islam.

Place of the Malabar Muslim folklore arts in forming and developing their worldview

When we root for the history of the tradition and the notion of the folklore arts developed by the Malabar Muslim community, we find that these are as old as the Arabian Islam which had not entered to the land of Malabar at that time. The term *fulful* (pepper) has been found in the Arabian poetry before the Islamic renaissance in the Malabar area. However the artistic varieties became flourished during the period in which the Arabs found their way of life in the region (Kunjhi Muhammed, 2004, p.8). Here, instead of going to a deep description of the Malabar Muslim folklore arts I would conceptualize the relationship of the linguistic varieties used in them, which are inevitable to mention, with the formation and development of their worldview. Actually the arts, which are within our area of description, are identified with a special type of language formed by the Arabs who settled here and the Malabar Muslims. In almost all arts like

*oppana, kolkkali,daf muttu,arabana,kalarippayattu, baithu pattu*and *Mappila* literature like *malappattu,mappilappattu, qissappattu,baith, Padappattu* etc. the language is the main identity by which the Muslim community began to mark their life in a social setting. The language named '*arabi-malayalam*' caused the development of a worldview which was unfamiliar to the society at that time. Language, by and large, help significantly to construct the vision about the world (Fantini, 1989) and therefore the language for a society is like an individual for them.

The art for the Malabar Muslim community, in spite of being only for an entertainment became an entity which helped to identify their vision of life in the early periods. At that time they were unable to express what in their minds as well as their life and by the development of their own arts and literature they could mark something in the history of Kerala. The art they founded not only helped to identify their existence and significance in the society but also the cultural and social transformation found its way of advancement; the religious and political co-existence in the land of Kerala is very good example for that.

Through the examples, it would be clear how the Malabar Muslim folklore arts helped the formation and development of a worldview. For the clarification it is cardinal to turn to the linguistic aspects which are highlighted in their arts. In one of the *Mappila* lyrics, the *baithu pattu,* two lines were very much attractive for me, as the terminologies which the author used are the clear marks of their worldview. The lines are as follows:

EllÉ balÉ'um Éfathum edangerukal musÊbathum

badrÊngale barkathinÉl shifayÉkkanam yÉ rabbanÉ…

The lines refers to a supplication to the God to save from all the tests, tragedies, calamities with the help of a divine blessing that is given to the people of Bader. The word *balÉ'* means the test which refers to the test given by the God. *ibthilÉ* is another derivation of the same word. The idea of testing has a significant place in the life of Muslims. In fact the human being has been given all the facilities to live in the present world as a vicegerent of Allah, the almighty God (*khalÊfathullÉh*). The humanity therefore has been blessed by the creator with many qualifications, and abilities. These entities clearly reflect the abovementioned vicegerancy of the human being in the Islamic worldview. In the worldview, then the terms *balÉ* or *ibthilÉ* means that the humanity is in a state of being tested by the God to determine and convince whether he

is successful in his viegerency or not. That is to say human beings are continuously tested by the things they are given by the God. This worldview is formed from the QurÉn. In the second chapter we can find the verse as follows:

> "Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere." (2:155)

In another verse the God says the test will be by the birth and death (67:2). Figure 1.1 shows the concept of test by the God.

Figure 1.1

The concept of test (bala' or ibthila')

The concept of testing is one of the cardinal aspects when it comes to the worldview of Islam (Berghout, n.d.) and here the aforementioned *baith* shows how the *mappilas* have given importance to it. The holy Qur'an clearly states "that which is on earth we have made but as a glittering show of earth, in order that we may test them- as to which of them are best in conduct" (18:7).

The term *musÊbah* which has been used in the poem is another basis by which we can identify the worldview of Malabar Muslims. The word refers to the calamity that may occur to human being. In Islamic point of view, the calamity is a cause for the remembrance of God and the Quran qualifies those who are patient by saying that,

> "Who say, when a misfortune striketh them: Lo! we are Allah's and Lo! unto Him we are returning" (2: 156).

The calamity is also a part of testing by the God, as the Quran has mentioned about this fact in various context. Facing a calamity and being patient by expecting the goodness from the God is something worth rewarding. By using the term *musÊbah* the Quran has given an idea that the God promises something good for those who are patient when the calamity occurs to them. In the lines of the poem we mentioned earlier, the poet prays to God to give a good recovery from

all calamities which he may have to face. It is evident from the divine words that the word *musÊbah* is an indicator to the power of the God over the human being. The Muslim worldview develops from such a basis. It is notable that the poet has used the words referring to the Qur'anic use of the terms in various contexts and every one of the Muslims, including those of Malabar is very much familiar with these terminologies being these words have influenced the formation and development of their worldview significantly.

Another term the author used here is *badreengal* which means 'the people of Bader'. The history of Islam form the period of the Prophet Muhammad upon whom be peace has turned to a crucial point by the event of Bader and therefore the battle of Bader has an unforgettable place in the Islamic worldview. The event of Bader in which the first category of the Muslim warriors fought against the *kuffÉr* of Mecca, has been given a wonderful position by the God because of the patience, courage, aspiration and submission of the Prophet and his companions towards Islam when there was no any supporting factor in the Arabian Peninsula. The people of Bader have been gaining a special reputation in the Muslim minds since the event. The Muslims of Malabar often recite the poems which praise the people of Bader, their courage etc. and they call it as *Bader moulid.* The thing to be noticed here is that the event of Bader has developed a worldview for the Muslims of Malabar by giving an idea that Islam is a religion of submission to God and it needs a lot of regular practices by defending the devilish power from the world. The Muslims believe that removing the evil is a responsibility of everyone and to an extent, the event of Bader is (to be) a motive for doing it.

The word *barakath* (*barakah*-the Arabic word means the blessings) refers to a concept that all the good deeds possess a kind of divine blessings. Besides this every pious people are the people of the divine blessings. We can hear this word from the daily life of the Malabar Muslims as they use it in various contexts. For instance, when somebody earn the livelihood from the interest made by lending money or something else, the Muslims of the region often says his money has no *barakath* because he is making it through the interest which is strictly prohibited in Islam. The Muslims often invite the pious people for particular religious occasions as well as other functions such as house warming, shop opening etc. because they are the people of *barakath* and it is believed that the functions would be embellished with *barakath* because of their presence.

We have a lot of other words to be familiar with when it comes to the worldview formation of Malabar Muslims. The art types of the community reached towards its perfection through these kinds of words and terminologies. The concept of eternal life after the Day of Judgment has an important place in the life of a Muslim. The life of a human, according to his belief is for the accomplishment of the reward from the God which is the life in the heaven (*jannah* in Arabic) in hereafter. The vision of the life for a Muslim has to be developed based upon this belief. The Malabar Muslims have been using different words that denote the importance of the hereafter such as *subarkkam* which means the heaven, *Ékhiram* which is the other world, hereafter and *qiyÉmam* which refers to the Day of Judgment.

The human being is in a state of being examined by the God in his everyday life. He has to follow the true path and reach towards the creator through the instruction given by the Prophet upon whom be peace. But when the human being loses the ability to control himself then for sure he is going to choose the other path, the path introduced by the devil, whom the Quran introduces as *iblÊs* and *shaiÏÉn*. According to the Quranic point of view he is the one who always tries to trap the man kind and welcomes to his way. He is the one who gives motivation to the human being to do the evil. The God almighty has cursed dismissed him from the heavenly world. Therefore, in the mind of the Muslim the most cursed one in the current world is *iblÊs* and one should consider him as his enemy until the end of life. In spite of this the Muslim has to fight against him by increasing good deeds and forbidding the bad. In many of the *maalappattu, baith paattu* and others the Malabar Muslim artists have used the two words to indicate the devilish activities. When the *mappilas* scold the others they often address their clients with the word *iblÊs* or *chaithÉn* (*shaiÏÉn*- they pronounce 'sh' as 'ch' in their slangs). It means that the man who is being scolded is the companion of the Satan and he is the cursed person by doing something wrong to the former. When they call others with these names they imply the hatred towards the evil and the devilish deeds.

In one of the art forms named *oppana* which is conducted during any special occasions such as festivals, marriage functions etc. the theme of the back songs will be about the *thrikkalyanam,* the marriage function of the Prophet Muhammad upon whom be peace from the heaven after the Day of Judgment. The Muslims believe that there would be a big marriage function of the Prophet and the pious people would be participating in it. Based upon the belief

the artistic minds of the Malabar Muslims has developed the *oppana* to imagine the function and adorned it with such kind of songs. In *araban muttu* or *daffu muttu*, and *kolkkali* the artists use the songs which describe the prophetic history, the life of the early warriors of Islam who submitted their life for the religion whole heartedly and became martyrs. These types of songs are known as *qissappattu* and *padappattu* respectively. In the early periods of the Malabar Muslims these art forms decorated with different types of the aforementioned songs or *baiths* were transformed from generation to generation and everyone knew the theme of what was presented in those arts at least in a holistic manner. It is the foundation for constructing and developing their worldview.

Conclusion

The paper has tried to give an outline on how the worldview for the Malabar Muslims can be developed through their folklore arts. This conceptual study opens the scopes to the detailed analysis of Malabar Muslim worldview formation and its historical and philosophical foundations. The Islamic perspective on the worldview gives support to widen the scope of the study as it is the basis for the social settings of Malabar Muslims. Instead of describing the features and peculiarities of the art varieties the paper has concentrated on the elements in them, which help to identify their worldview, such as the linguistic aspects and their contextual usages. The interpretations of the Islamic philosophy of life looking to the context of Malabar Muslims would enhance the understanding of their worldview when it comes to a further study on it.

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