

# Modernisation Of Islamic Education In Kerala: Tracing The Trajectory

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## Abstract

This article discusses the evolution of the Islamic education system in the Malabar region of South India from colonial times to the contemporary era. By tracing the trajectory of modernisation in Islamic education in the region, the study highlights the history of Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom I and II who played a seminal role in setting up the institutional framework of mosque-based Islamic education in Malabar. Makhdoom family's engagement with the colonial struggle also influenced the mosque-based 'dars' model of Islamic education in the region. During the waning stage of colonialism in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century, the reformist and modernist trends were visible among Kerala Muslims. The reformist wave became a matter of contention among the Muslim community dividing them into reformists and traditionalists. It paved the way for the revival of Islamic education system which culminated in forming of different madrasa boards and institutions by various Muslim groups.

**Keywords:** Islamic education, Colonialism, Reformism, Modernisation.

## 1. Introduction

Though there is no unanimous opinion among the historians on the origin of Islam in Kerala, the most acclaimed stand is that Kerala witnessed the presence of Islam in AD 9<sup>th</sup> century itself (Miller, 1992). According to William Logan (Logan, 2010), Cheraman Perumal who was reigning the Kodungallur region of the central part of Kerala happened to know about the Prophet Muhammed in Arabia and his new religion through the Arabian pilgrims who were going to Sri Lanka to visit Adam mala (Mountain of Adam). Earlier, Perumal had experienced a dream in which he saw the moon at Mecca in Arabia split into two; one half remained in the sky and the other half fell down into the earth. Soon after, the two halves joined and set. The pilgrims explained to Perumal about the Prophet Muhammed and his

new religion and how the people embraced Islam through the miracle of moon splitting event. Perumal decided to embrace Islam and he joined the pilgrims when they were returning from Sri Lanka to Arabia. After reaching Arabia, Perumal embraced Islam and changed his name to Abdu Rahman Samuri. Samuri planned to return to Kerala and build the mosques in his motherland, but he fell ill, died and was buried at Zuphar on the Arabian coast in 822 AD. After the death of Samuri his missionary group under the leadership of Malik bin Dinar reached Kerala along with the letter of Samuri which was handed over to them when he fell ill. The letter recommended the local chieftains of Kerala to give the missionary a warm welcome. Thus, after reading the letter, the chieftains of Kerala arranged the missionary a warm welcome and helped them to build the mosques. Accordingly, Malik bin Dinar built nine

mosques at different regions in Kerala and these mosques are said to be the first informal Islamic education centres in Kerala.<sup>1</sup>

The above-mentioned mosques and qazi activism paved the way for starting of the dars system in Kerala<sup>2</sup>. Dars system, unlike the contemporary college and university model of Islamic education, is a mosque based religious education system in which the students called mutallims<sup>3</sup> stayed at the mosque and studied there. As per the available evidence, the first dars in Kerala was established at Valiyakulangara mosque in Tanur (currently at Malappuram district) around AD 1271/670AH by Abu Abdillahil Hadrami who was a Yemeni scholar (Faizy 2013:18). Ibn Battuta who was a Moroccan traveler and explorer wrote during his visit to Kerala in the 14<sup>th</sup> century in his travelogue namely as 'Rihla' that there was an existing dars system at Madayi near Ezhimala (currently existing in Kannur district of Kerala) and at Mangalore (currently existing at southern part of Karnataka). Later, another dars was established at Kuttichira mosque in Calicut in AD 1385/AH 785<sup>4</sup>. Its curriculum known as 'assilsilathul farhiyya' was designed by Qadhi Faqrudheen Aboobacker. This dars curriculum is noted by its great alumnus named Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom I who left for Mecca for further studies. After returning from Mecca, Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom I established dars education at Ponnani which is currently existing in the Malappuram district of Kerala. Later Ponnani became a centre for Islamic education in Kerala.

## 2. Methodology

In order to understand the evolution of the Islamic education system in the Malabar region of Kerala, a detailed analysis of secondary data including books, articles, and historical documents had been carried out. The monographs written about Ponnani where systematic mosque based dars model of Islamic education was started by Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom helped us to include precise historical data about the origin, growth

and development of spiritual learning in the region. In addition to that, information available in the websites of various Muslim groups like Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama, All India Jamiyyathul Ulama, Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen and Jamat-e-Islami were used to present a picture on the recent developments in the Islamic education system in the region.

## 3. Makhdoomian Legacy in Dars System

It is believed that Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom I (AD 1467-1522) built the grant mosque at Ponnani and started the dars system there. The dars syllabus which was introduced by Makhdoom was known as the 'Ponnani syllabus' which got great acceptance among Muslims of the Malabar region. Later, the dars system was started in many mosques in different regions of Malabar pursuing the Ponnani syllabus. The Ponnani syllabus also called as 'Makhdoomian syllabus' got acceptance among the people beyond the boundaries of the Indian subcontinent. The students from different countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka visited Kerala to study in Ponnani dars (Rahman Kutty, 2016). The alumni of Ponnani dars initiated to start the dars system in their own region following the Makhdoomian syllabus and in turn, it paved the way to spread the fame of Ponnani dars across the globe.

The geographical location of Ponnani as a port city further contributed to its cultural and religious significance. It is said that Ponnani had established diplomatic relationships with foreign countries from the ancient period itself (Rahman Kutty, 2016). Thus, Ponnani dars could attract foreign students and spread its reach. Ponnani was the second headquarters of the Samoothiri Kingdom which ruled the Malabar region in the medieval period. Soon after the establishment of Ponnani dars, the place was called as 'small Mecca' because of its religious significance as the centre of traditional Islamic education. The erudition of Sheikh Makhdoom who left for Saudi Arabia and Egypt for higher studies in

traditional Islamic knowledge made him accepted among Muslims of Malabar. The people of Ponnani made him qazi<sup>5</sup>. Sheikh Makhdoom led the freedom struggle against the Portuguese who was major colonial power in Ponnani and surrounding regions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Sheikh Makhdoom I played a pivotal role in reviving dars system Kerala. Although dars system existed earlier in the Malabar region especially in Calicut and Tanur, it was not in systematic arrangement. The students approached different teachers for getting knowledge in different disciplines. Sheikh Makhdoom synchronized the regional dars syllabus with style of Azhari syllabus of Al Azhar University in Egypt and formulated the new syllabus namely as 'Ponnani syllabus'. Thus, Ponnani syllabus included the Islamic disciplines such as Quranic studies, Hadeeth (prophetic tradition), Thafseer (Quranic commentary), Tasawuf (mysticism), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Ilmul Kalam (Theology), Mantiq (Logic), Falsafa (Philosophy), Hanthasa (Geometry), Nahvu and Swarf (syntax and morphology). Being Ponnani syllabus included all Islamic disciplines, hereafter, the students were not needed to approach different persons for getting trained in different disciplines. It made the Ponnani syllabus more accepted among Mappila Muslims.

Spiritual upliftment was one of the major aims of the dars system. Usthad<sup>6</sup> will observe all mundane activities of mutallim<sup>7</sup> including dressing style, doing prayers etc. and he will correct them if it is not in accordance with the norms of Islamic jurisprudence. One who completes their study at dars will be granted the title of 'musliyar' and as part of the convocation ceremony, the graduates of dars will be granted a turban and a sanad (graduation certificate).

Ponnani dars was known for its 'Vilakkathirikkal', which is a practice associated with the studying process there. Etymologically, Vilakkathirikkal means sitting around a lamp. It

was basically a custom at Ponnani grant mosque where the lamp will be lit just before maghrib namaz (prayer at the time of sunset) and it will be put off after subh namz (prayer at the time of sunrise) and it was started at a time when the dars system was established by Sheikh Makhdoom. This practice of lightening and putting off the lamp is continuing even today as a ritual in the Ponnani grant mosque.

Education at free of cost was a major privilege for dars students. They studied on the ground floor of the mosque and stayed on the first floor. The neighboring households fed the students and the students in turn taught the female members of the host homes with Islamic texts including Quran and hadeeth. Thus it was a symbiotic relationship between dars students and the host households. This symbiotic relationship among the native people and dars students caused to spread the Islamic cognisance in Ponnani region and in turn, it spread to the surrounding spaces of Malabar where the dars system was established on the model of Ponnani dars.

Even though Sheikh Makhdoom I established a mosque based dars system at Ponnani he wanted to develop it into an Islamic University on the model of Al Azhar University in Egypt (Rahman Kutty, 2016). Zamorin who was the ruler of Malabar region had granted land for this purpose in Ponnani itself but Sheikh Makhdoom couldn't materialize his dream during his lifetime. This land, however, was misused in the British regime which was followed the Zamorin rule and the conflict among the Mappila Muslims namely as Kondotty-Ponnani kaitharkkam<sup>8</sup> also caused to lapse the land which was earmarked for establishing an Islamic University at Ponnani as an extension of the dars system. Though, Sheikh Makhdoom wanted to develop the dars system into an Islamic university some of the contemporary advocates of the dars system are clinching with the old model of Ponnani dars without extending it as a college or university. They criticize the modernized college or university kind of Islamic education system.

As part of the dars system, idadars (part-time dars studying) also existed in the Ponnani mosque. While the students in the full-time dars are from faraway places, the students of idadars are from the nearby areas. The school going students from nearby localities of the mosque will come to dars at morning or evening to get a primary study on Islam. These types of idadars can be seen even today in many parts of the region. The parents see this as a chance to impart their children Islamic knowledge without compromising their secular education.

### 3.1 Ponnani as Centre of Anti-Colonial Struggle

The Arabs had established contact with Kerala in the first centuries of AD years. King Zamorin approached the Arabs in a cordial manner and the Arabs conversely engaged in trade with him. With the advent of Vasco da Gama at Calicut in 1498 May, however, the situation changed. The Portuguese under Gama behaved with King Zamorin seemingly with a dominating mentality upon the latter. It provoked King Zamorin and he proclaimed the Portuguese as invaders with countering their invasive deeds. At the same time, the Portuguese formed an alliance with rivalries of King Zamorin including King Kolathiri of Kannur and the Cochin king. This alliance made the Portuguese stronger and paved the way to cement the ground support. Thus, the Portuguese incessantly attacked the armies of King Zamorin and the Muslims who were strong supporters of him underwent the cruel attack of the Portuguese. The Portuguese also tried to divide between Muslims and Hindus with a view to dominate Kerala, especially the Malabar region. The communal divide between Hindus and Muslims was increasing after the Portuguese invasion of Malabar.

The major reason for the rivalry between the Portuguese and Muslims was that the latter controlled the maritime trade. When the Portuguese tried to establish monopoly in maritime trade the Mappila Muslims countered it. The Portuguese who were equipped with modern weapons oppressed Muslims cruelly. They raped Muslim women, set fire to the holy

Quran to provoke Muslims, detained the leaders and the rich and misbehaved them in various forms. The Portuguese destroyed the mosques and built churches instead. When the brutalities and unjust activities of the Portuguese continued, Muslims approached King Zamorin requesting protection. King Zamorin who was also a rival of the invasive Portuguese planned to defend the colonial power with the support of Muslims. Thus, Ponnani started its struggle against colonial power even in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom I gave all kinds of support to King Zamorin for struggling against the Portuguese. Makhdoom I wrote the famous work namely 'Thahreedu ahlil eeman ala jihadi abadathi sulban'<sup>9</sup> to motivate Muslims to engage in the struggle against the Portuguese. After, Makhdoom II also came forward to lead the colonial struggle by drafting the work known as 'Thuhfathul Mujahideen'<sup>10</sup> to urge the believers to engage in the struggle against the Portuguese rule.

The service of the Kunjali Marakkar family was a major strength to King Zamorin to counter the Portuguese cruelties in the sea. Kunjali Marakkar I, the original name being Muhammad, was son of Kuttiali Marakkar who was inheritor of Mammali Marakkar. Mammali Markkar had been credited to a major chunk of sea trade and was inherently handed over to the successors. The Portuguese destroyed the ships and trading centres of the Marakkar family in Cochin and disturbed their business activities. Thus, Muhammad Markkar family left for Ponnani and settled there. King Zamorin appointed Muhammed Markkar as the chief of his naval army and thereafter he was known under the title of Kunjali Marakkar. There were four Kunjali Marakkars who served as chief of the naval army of King Zamorin.

After settling in Ponnani, Kujali Marakkar I made it his headquarters of anti-colonial struggle. The Portuguese targeted Ponnani and its inhabitants, especially Muslims from whom Kunjali Marakkar comes. They attacked Muslims brutally. Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom I exhorted Muslims of Ponnani to align under

Kunjali Marakkar and support him in the struggle against the Portuguese. The Muslim youth were trained locally to counter the Portuguese under Kunjali Marakkar. Thus, Samoothiri-Makhdoom-Marakkar trio was formed at the inception of the sixteenth century. It continued from AD 1508 to 1584. Ponnani witnessed the major struggles between the trio and the Portuguese. Within one century (between 1498-1600) fifteen Samoothiris, four Kunjalis and three famous Makhdooms namely Sheikh Zainuddeen ibn Ali (Makhdoom I), Allama Abdul Azeez Ibn Zainuddeen (Makhdoom II), Ahmad Zainuddeen Bin Gazzali (Makhdoom III) had lived and sharpened the counter-attack against the colonial power.

### 3.2 The Impact of Colonial Aggression on the Dars System

The continuous struggle between the Portuguese and the people of Malabar under the Samoothiri-Makhdoom-Marakkar trio paved the way to the deterioration of the economic condition of the people. The war that continued from the sixteenth to eighteenth century had made Mappila Muslims of Malabar economically weak. The antagonistic political scenario negatively impacted the social life of people and also it adversely affected the smooth functioning of the dars system.

An amicable and friendly socio-economic and political atmosphere is an essential factor for the smooth running of an education system. The Ponnani based dars system had attained its zenith when Mappila Muslims sustained economic prosperity and political security. The stakeholders of the dars system not only availed the financial support from within the community but whenever it was needed the local governments also gave economic backup for the functioning of Ponnani based education. For example, Thirumalashery Tampuran who was the ruler of Ponnani had allocated financial allowance for the running of Ponnani mosques and the dars system. The Zamorin Raja who conquered Ponnani after Thirumalashery Tampuran also carried on this legacy. Sheikh Makhdoom II mentions in his 'Thuhfathul Mujahideen' that qazis and mullahs at major mosques were appointed by the government and

they were getting their monthly payments from the government treasury.

However, the economic prosperity of Mappila Muslims was gradually deteriorating during the later period of the Portuguese. The incessant struggle with the Portuguese adversely affected the economic status of Muslim merchants who benevolently donated to the survival of the dars system and mosques. The economic entitlements from the local governments were also gradually discontinued. Finally, the dars system could not survive due to the financial crisis and it was declining during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries although it was surviving in some parts of Malabar. Today, even though the modern bureaucratic type of college and university model of the Islamic education systematically replaced the dars system massively, some darses including Ponnani dars are sustaining.

## 4. Reformist Trend Among Mappila Muslims

Kerala Muslims witnessed the advent of reformism and revivalist trend at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. The efforts of Sayed Sanaulla Makthi Thangal (AD 1847-1912) and Shaikh Muhammed Hamadhani Thangal (d. AD 1922) were instrumental in apprising the Muslim community of the significance of secular and modern education. In the wake of the rise of the reformist wave, the Muslim community were broadly divided into the traditionalists and the reformists. This division also reflected in the drafting of different Islamic education curricula which, in turn, was caused to form multiple madrasas boards by various Muslim groups including the Sunnis, the Mujahids and Jamat-e-Islami.

### 4.1 Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangam

Kerala witnessed the rise of organized forms of Islamic revivalist activities only after the Malabar rebellion in 1921. Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangam (United Kerala Muslim Association) was the first initiative of such kind of revivalist trend. It was formed in 1922 at Kodungallur, currently part of

the Thrissur district of Kerala, under the leadership of Kottapurath Seethi Muhamad Sahib. Some other prominent leaders like Sheik Hamadani Thangal, E.K Moulavi, Manappattu Kunhahammad Haji, K.M Moulavi, and Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi played a pivotal role in the formation of the Sangam. The proclaimed aims of Aikaya Sangam were to unite all Muslims under an umbrella of an organized platform and to make them socially reformed and educationally empowered (Muhammad, 2007).

Aikya Sangam conducted its first annual conference in 1923 at Eriyad in Trissur. Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi who is widely believed as the father of the Muslim renaissance in Kerala presided over the session. Many Muslim leaders across Kerala participated in the conference. During the conference, a committee named as Kerala Muslim College Committee was formed for the sake of founding a college at Aluva and raised funds for the same (Ali, 1990). The Aikya Sangam conducted its annual conferences in various places in Kerala till 1934. In its twelfth conference at Kannur in 1934, the Sangam dissolved itself and merged with a new organization called as the Kerala Muslim Majlis (Muhammed, 2007). The whole assets of the Sangam was handed over to Farook College, which is a government aided college in Kozhikode district of Kerala.

The empowerment activities conducted by the Aikya Sangam were enormous and had far-reaching consequences. During the life span of twelve years, it could appraise the Muslim leaders as well as the common people about the importance of education and convinced them of the significance of modern and secular education to escape from the darkness of social and educational backwardness. The Sangam through its multi-faceted approach of Ulama conferences, publication of periodicals in Malayalam and Arabi Malayalam, speeches and seminars incessantly opposed the superstitions in which the Muslim community were stepped in. It exhorted the community members to be educated to realise the fallacy of superstitions and to uproot it from the society. Moreover, the Sangam argued for

women's education which was underestimated by the community for a long period.

#### 4.2 The Islahi Movement

The social backwardness of Kerala Muslims pushed Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi (1873-1932), a social reformer, to preach revivalist ideas among the community so as to make them socially reformed and culturally enriched. Vakkom Moulavi's in-depth reading habit made him aware of the reform movements in the Arab world, especially in Egypt. Owing to the advent of the press, Egypt witnessed national consciousness in the later part of the nineteenth century. The activities of Muhammad Abdu (1845-1905) who was a great Egyptian reformer made the Islahi movement stronger in Egypt. Through his lectures, writings, and commentaries on the Quran, Muhammad Abdu articulated his reformist ideas and he argued that Islam could be congruent with modernity (Hourani 1993). Highlighting the importance of reason in Islam, Abdu viewed to include the subjects of geography, ethics and history in the madrasa curriculum. Moreover, Qasim Amin (1863-1908), the Egyptian philosopher and reformer, had published two books in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century highlighting the emancipation of Muslim women and arguing for their empowerment through education (Hourani, 1993). Rashid Rida (1865-1935) who was an Egyptian theologian, reformer and also a student of Muhammad Abdu started an Arab periodical namely 'Al Manar' which became a channel to preach the reformist ideas of Abdu. Tracing the path of Abdu, Rida questioned the conventional mystical practices which were prevalent among Muslims and stood for equal rights for women (Lakshmi, 2012).

These revivalist and reformist ideas of Muhammad Abdu and Rasheed Rida influenced Vakkom Moulavi and pursuing their path, he thought to work for the emancipation of Kerala Muslims from superstitions and blind beliefs. He employed the print medium to preach his ideas among Mappila Muslims. Buying a press from the Pierce Lesly Company at Alappuzha in 1905 he started to publish a Malayalam paper named

‘Swadeshabhimani’. It tried to become a catalyst for the social and cultural empowerment of Kerala Muslims. Later, in 1906, Moulavi started to publish another periodical named ‘the Muslim’ from the Swadeshabimani press. The sole aim of this monthly was to empower the Muslim community and the periodical incessantly remembered the Mappila community about the necessity of getting empowered through education.

Influenced by the Hindu reform movements, Vakkom Moulavi wanted to form a Muslim reformist organisation. Later, his vision was materialised through the formation of Travancore Muslim Samajam. When the first annual meeting of the Samajam was conducted in 1914 in Varkala, the participants were not only Muslims but several Hindus also joined the meeting. The meeting discussed in detail about the pathetic backward condition of the Muslim community and the status of Muslim women. Thus, Samajam created a controversy among the thangals<sup>11</sup> of Malabar over the subject of elevating the status of women through education which was further discussed in The Muslim monthly. This was understood when a group of readers and subscribers of Al Islam<sup>12</sup> from Chadayamangalam gave back the monthly to the publishers. The publishers enquired about the incident to the person who led the group of boycotters of Al Islam monthly. He replied that as part of the visit to their place for founding dars, Ali Moulavi Thangal, the son-in-law of the Ponnani Makhdoom Thangal, happened to see Al Islam there. The thangal exhorted the subscribers to give back the monthly because, in his view, it was antithetical to the original teaching of Islam. Further, the Thangal challenged that if there is any teaching of the Prophet Muhammed permitting the women to be educated, he wants to be shown its reference (Lakshmi, 2012). Thus, Islahi movement under the stewardship of Vakkom Moulavi strived to challenge the authority of these kind of conservative ulama and to spread the message of women empowerment among the Muslim community.

#### 4.3 The Sunni Movement

As a reaction to the Islahi movement led by Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi and KM Moulavi, traditional Ulama of Malabar organized under the banner of Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (All Kerala Alliance of Ulama) to defend the reformist agenda. Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (hereafter Samastha) was founded in 1926 in Calicut as Varakkal Mullakoya Thangal the first president. When the Islahi reformers opposed the durga veneration of sufi saints as anti thetical to Islam the Sunni ulama argued that it is inherent in the religion. The Sunni Ulama believe that the Sufis are the people who are close to God through their good deeds in their living time. So, if anyone goes to the durga he will get the blessings and if he prays for any material needs to the God on behalf of the Sufi, it is most likely to fulfill that need from the God. The Salafi reformers opposed this view by saying that it is a kind of act in which the sovereignty of God is questioned. The Salafi reformers exhort the believers to pray to God directly not on behalf of any intermediate. The Mujahids oppose the practices such as visiting durga and praying to God on behalf of the Sufis and they have pointed out that those are against the tauheed (monotheist concept) of Islam. Moreover, the Sunnis go to the graves of their relatives to pray for them believing that their prayers would cause them to get rewards from God while the Islahi scholars oppose it saying the dead ones never get rewards from God if any living one prays for him/her. The Islahi reformers argue that a man will get the reward from God after his death only for his good deeds in his living time and not for the prayers of his relatives for him after his death.

The Sunni ulama also clinched with madhab thaqleed<sup>13</sup> and practised the Shafi school of thought as their accepted jurisprudence whilst the Islahi reformers opposed thaqleed and stood for the ijthihad<sup>14</sup>. According to the Sunni Ulamas, the door of ijthidad is closed and any effort to initiate

it further is a bida<sup>15</sup>. Further, the Sunni ulama opposed the entry of women into the mosque. The Islahi reformers, however, strongly stood for the entry of women into the mosque and they had their own evidence in the Quran and Hadith to prove their stand. The Sunnis say that even though there is some evidence in the Quran and the prophetic traditions which permit women to enter the masjid, the contextual analysis of this evidence proves that women's entry into the masjid should be prevented when there will be the threat of fitna<sup>16</sup>.

### **5. Modernisation of Islamic Education in the Contemporary Era: Role of Various Muslim Groups**

As mentioned earlier, Kerala Muslims have divided into various groups with the rise of the reformist wave and the consequent appearance of ideological differences between them. Each group becomes unique with its vibrant presence in the public sphere of Kerala after the second half of the twentieth century. Different groups including Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama, Kerala Nadvathul Muhahideen and Jamat-e-Islami tried to modernise the Islamic education system by establishing their own madrasa boards. To comprehend these modernisation drives, it would be better to employ the idea of 'multiple modernities' propounded by S.N Eisenstadt (Eisenstadt, 2000). Conceptually, the idea of multiple modernities problematises the prophecy of modernity thinkers like Karl Marx, and Emile Durkheim who viewed that with the spread of science and technology the relevance of religion would fade away from the public sphere and instead, it will be confined to the private sphere (Eisenstadt, 1999). However, when the cultural programme of modernity spread to various communities who lived in different parts of the world, the subjects did not accept it blindly. But the communities who clinched with their own tradition tried to appropriate the major outcomes of the cultural perspective of modernity so as to arrive at their own specific subjectivities (Eisenstadt, 2000). The modernisation initiatives of various Muslim groups to revive Islamic

education can be understood as an attempt to sustain their own tradition in the modern age by accepting some aspects of modernity which deemed fit to their own perspective.

#### **5.1 Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama**

As a response to the rise of the Salafist movement in Kerala after the 1920s under Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi and KM Moulavi, traditionalist oriented Ulama formed an organisation named as Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (hereafter Samastha) in 1926 at Kozhikode. In 1989, Samastha was split into two as Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (EK faction) and All India Sunni Jamiyyathul Ulama (AP faction) albeit the split was mere organisational and not ideological. Traditionalist ulama are widely termed as the Sunnis and the reformist oriented are popularly called as Mujahid or Salafi. Both the Sunnis and the Salafis had founded their own madrasas along with formulating the curriculum to preach their ideologies.

Samastha runs above 10000 primary madrasas and hundreds of higher madrasas. Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidhyabhyasa Board (SKIMVB), the first sub organization of Samastha, was formed in 1951 to undertake the opening of primary madrasas across the width and breadth of Kerala and now above ten thousand madrasas are registered under SKIMVB. The school-going children are dependent upon these primary madrasas and its time schedule is fixed in the morning so as to make it convenient for the students to attend the schools after spending some hours in madrasa. Besides in Kerala, the Board had founded madrasas in other states and union territories such as Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Puducherry, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep and in foreign countries including Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait<sup>17</sup>. The Board had appointed some mufathishs<sup>18</sup> to visit its madrasas for inspecting the infrastructure and education standard of each madrasa.



The major aim of the curriculum of SKIMVB for primary madrasas is to teach the students fundamentals of Islam and its orthodoxy including the learning of Quran recitation, studying the basics of the religion, practicing the namaz etc. Almost all Muslim children in Kerala depend upon the primary madrasa for getting the basics learning of Islam barring some who study it from the schools run by Muslim managements. Devoid of attaining the elementary learning of Islam, a madrasa student inculcates the Islamic values in his daily life from the madrasa. After completing the madrasa study, some students will join with higher madrasas which is known as sharia/Arabic colleges to continue further studies in the religion while the remaining students would discontinue religious learning to continue their secular higher education.

Besides primary madrasa, Samastha overlooks the functioning of hundreds of higher madrasas across Kerala. The major higher madrasa models running under Samastha are Darul Huda Islamic University, Coordination of Islamic Colleges (CIC), Jamia Nooriyya Arabic College and Jamia Darulssalam Al-Islamiyya. The major aim of these higher madrasas is to train the ulama who can lead Islamic propagation. In order to fulfil that, their curriculum, unlike the primary madrasas, is included the classic Islamic texts from different Islamic disciplines like Saheeh Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim, Thafseer Baidhavi, Thuhfathul Muhthaj, and Fathahul Mueen. All of these classic Islamic texts are commonly taught in Sunni higher madrasas of Malabar. However, other secular contents may differ because each madrasa model formulated its own curriculum. Besides primary and higher madrasas, they also run Islamic preschools named as Al-Birr under which hundreds of kindergarten schools are running.

## 5.2 All India Sunni Jamiyyathul Ulama

As mentioned above, All India Sunni Jamiyyathul Ulama was formed in 1989 under the leadership of Kanthapuram AP Aboobacker Musliyar splitting the parent body of Samastha

Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama which was founded in 1926. The split is mere organisational and not ideological as both groups follow the Sunni principles. After the split, All India Sunni Jamiyyathul Ulama which is called AP Sunnis formed its own madrasa education board namely Samastha Kerala Sunni Vidhyabhyasa Board (SKSVB) formulating its own curriculum. SKSVB runs thousands of primary madrasas both inside and outside of Kerala. Besides primary madrasas, AP Sunnis also have established higher madrasas. The major higher madrasas run by AP Sunnis are Jamia Markaz at Calicut, Madeenthunoor at Panur, and Ihyassunna Ahsani Institution at Othukkungal. Markaz Knowledge City is worth mentioning here. Markaz Knowledge City is a group of institutions run by Jamia Markaz led by Kanthapuram AP Aboobacker Musliyar. It includes modernised Sharia college, Law college, and Unani medical college. Further, AP Sunnies also run Islamic preschools known as Thibyan.

## 5.3 Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen

Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen (KNM) is a Salafi oriented organization in Kerala. The followers of KNM are locally called Muhahids<sup>19</sup> or Salafis<sup>20</sup>. Mujahids are strong opponents of the Sunnis in the context of Malabar even though this dichotomy of Sunni and Mujahid is not congruent with the dichotomy of Sunni and Shia as per the global context<sup>21</sup>. There are some ideological conflicts between the Mujahid and Sunnis on the issues such as the veneration of Sufi saints, visiting the grave of relatives and praying for them, and permitting women to the mosques. When the Mujahids opposed the Durga veneration of Sufi saints as antithetical to Islam the Sunni ulama argued that it is inherent in the religion. But the former opposes it saying that through this act the sovereignty of God is questioned and they exhort the believers to pray to God directly not on behalf of any intermediate. Unlike Sunnis, Mujahids argue that a man will get reward from God after his death only for his good deeds in his lifetime and not because of the prayers of his relatives for him after his death.

Similarly, the Sunny Ulama opposed the entry of women into the prayers at the mosque whilst the mujahids allowed it.

KNM had established hundreds of primary madrasas to preach their own interpretation of Islam and to nourish the young generation aligned on its ideological doctrines. Muhahids claim that KNM is the first Muslim organization in Kerala who initiated to establish the primary madrasas after 1950s when the Madras Government<sup>22</sup> in post-independent India stopped religious training in public schools. Besides, Muhahids have established higher madrasas including Jamia Salfiyya at Pulikkal in Malappuram, Jamia Nadwiyya at Edavanna and Madeenathul Uloom at Pulikkal. All of these higher madrasas of Mujahid group are situated at Malappuram district of Kerala.

Unlike the traditionalist Sunnis who insisted on teaching the medieval texts of Islamic disciplines, the Mujahids depended on the contemporary texts by promoting ijtiḥad on the burning issues of the present era. Thus, the higher education centres of the mujahids like Jamia Edavanna and Madeenathul Uloom Pulikkal were adopting the Afsal-ul-ulama course which was provided by the University of Calicut. Through teaching the Afsal-ul-ulama course, the mujahids wanted to equip the younger generation to attain mastery of the Islamic knowledge and to ensure their employability by becoming teachers in the Government schools and Colleges. It also helped the mujahids to step into mainstream education and consequently, the increased presence of the mujahids can be seen in Government employment. Besides these kinds of formal education, the mujahids also initiate for dissemination of Islamic knowledge in informal ways too. Malayalam periodicals such as pudava monthly and Islah weekly are published under the mujahids to reach their ideology to the laity.

#### 5.4 Jamath-e- Islami Kerala

Jamat-e- Islami is another major group among Muslims of Kerala. At the beginning years of its foundation in 1941 by Abul Ala Moudoodhi,

Jamate Islami was committed to establish an Islamic state in which sovereignty is assigned only to the almighty God. The leaders of Jamate Islamic initially exhorted their followers to abstain from parliamentary politics and casting the vote in the election was considered as an unIslamic activity among the members of Jamat-e- Islami. However, they corrected this view after the banning of Jamat-e- Islami during the time of emergency in 1975 and after it the leaders overhauled the policy and decided to participate in the parliamentary politics and election. The Jamat-e- Islami began its functioning in Kerala in 1948 and at that time they envisaged many objections and criticisms from the Sunnis and Muhahids. Nevertheless, as a result of its cadre level set up in the organisation, Jamat-e- Islami could become a significant group among Mappila Muslims around the 1960s. This organisation has a supreme head at the national level who is titled as 'ameer' and each state has a separate ameer.

Jamat-e- Islami plays a great role in spreading Islamic education among Kerala Muslims through informal ways and formal ways as well. In order to spread Islamic education through formal ways, they had founded hundreds of primary madrasas as well as some higher education institutes. To coordinate these education institutes, they have formed a madrasa board and another body namely 'Majlis Tha'leemul Islami' for the sake of setting the curriculum and training the teachers. Al Jamiaa Islamiya at Shanthapuram in Malappuram district is a major higher education centre of the organization under which many other off campuses are also being run. Established in 1955, Al Jamia offers both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in various Islamic disciplines including Quranic studies, Hadeeth, fiqh, sharia and da'wa.

As part of disseminating informal education, Jamate Islami has founded Islamic Publishing House (IPH) under which many globally significant works have been translated into Malayalam. Moreover, they publish many periodicals such as Bodhanam bimonthly, Prabhodanam weekly, Armam monthly for

women and Malarvadi for children. Besides these periodicals, they have started a popular daily newspaper known as Madhyamam which was launched in 1987. They also publish another variant of Madhyamam daily in the Gulf countries named as Gulf Madhyamam. In 2012, they started a news channel called Media one. Moreover, they also run web groups such as Islam Malayalam, Thafheemul Quran and Islam Padanam with the intention of preaching their ideology. The above-mentioned periodicals and publications for dissemination of Islamic knowledge have played a great role in educating youth and cherishing a positive attitude toward modern education and women education among Kerala Muslims.

## 6. Conclusion

This analysis is about the modernisation trajectory of the Islamic education system in the Malabar region of South India. The evolution of Islamic education from the colonial period up to the contemporary era is highlighted here. The discussion points to the fact the upsurge of the reformist trend among Mappila Muslims of Malabar at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century played a great role in transforming the Islamic education setting in the region. Mappila Muslims were broadly divided into reformists and traditionalists due to the rise of modernity and reformism among them. This division was also becoming a turning point in rejuvenating the Islamic education curriculum by each group of traditionalist and reformist sects. Currently, the different groups among Mappila Muslims including the Sunnis, the Mujahids and Jamat-e-Islami are claiming their theological stand as true Islam and in order to preach it, they have drafted their own Islamic education curriculum and established madrasas to teach it. The contestations among them reveal that the Malabar region is witnessing the Islamic revival owing to the transformation and modernisation attempts by each group and as a result, the quantity and quality of Islamic higher education centres are improving there.

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