Ancestral Centers of Kerala Muslim Socio-Cultural and Educational Enlightenments

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Abstract: This piece of research paper attempts to show that the genesis and growth of Islam, a monotheistic religion in Kerala. Of the Indian states, Malabar was the most important state with which the Arabs engaged in trade from very ancient time. Advance of Islam in Kerala, it is even today a matter of controversy. Any way as per the established authentic historical records, we can definitely conclude that Islam reached Kerala coast through the peaceful propagation of Arab-Muslim traders during the life time of prophet Muhammad. Muslims had been the torch bearers of knowledge and learning during the middle ages. Traditional education centres, i.e *Maqthabs, Othupallis, Madrasas* and *Darses* were the ancestral centres of socio-cultural and educational enlightenments, where a new language, Arabic-Malayalam took its birth. It was widely used to impart educational process and to exhort anti-colonial feelings and religious preaching in Medieval Kerala.

Keywords: Darses, Arabi-Malayalam, Othupalli, Madrasa.

Introduction:

Movements of revitalization, renewal and reform are periodically found in the glorious history of Islam since its very beginning. For higher religious learning, there were special arrangements in prominent mosques. In the early years of Islam, the scholars from Arab countries used to come here frequently and some of them were entrusted with the charges of the *Darses*, higher learning centres, one such prominent institution was in Ponnani. It flourished due to the services rendered by the versatile scholars belong to the *Maqdum* family.Sheikh Zainuddin first, the founder of first mosque in Ponnani, *thottungal palli* and a *Dars* attached with it in 1510 A.D. This is the most important *Dars* in Kerala and henceforth, the system became generalized. *Dars* became the centres of religious activities, social engagements, cultural transactions and political directions. Furthermore, *Darses* became the pivotal places of a new language, *Arabic-Malayalam*, a cultural synthesis of Arab-Malayalam for all public engagements of life in medieval period. These centres became stimulating factors of socio-cultural and educational enlightenments of Muslims in Kerala.

DARSES: The Houses of Socio-Cultural and Educational Movements

The contributions of Masjids to the growth and enlightenment of Kerala Muslims are enormous. The religious learning centers attached to Masjids played a key role in sustaining the religious culture and customs in Kerala. The discussion about the socio-cultural enlightenment of Kerala Muslims will be incomplete without referring to the role of *Darses* played in it.¹

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The history of Darses traces back to the life of Prophet Muhammad himself. The first model Dars was of the prophet the participants of which were called Ahlussuffa who stayed and studied at the Masjidu Nabawi in Madina. His followers continued the same model here. It is through the Masjids the culture and education are disseminated in the Muslim world. In Kerala, the centers built adjacent to the Masjids were known as Othu Palli, centres built separate from Masjids were known as Madrassas and centers run in the Masjids were known as Darses. Ibnu Batuta the famous traveler who visited Kerala in 14th century recorded that there were *Darses* at the Masjid at Madayi near Ezhimala and Mangalore.² William Logan says in his Malabar Manual that there were as many as 127 Masjids in Ponnani.³ It is evident from this the influence of *Darses* in Kerala Muslim society and their acceptance in religious education. Thanur Valiya Kulangara Palli Dars is one of the early Darses in Kerala. Imam Muhammed Ibnu Abdi Ilahil Adrami of Yemen started this Dars in Hijra 670. He taught here till Hijra 677. Many renowned scholars served as teachers here. A large number of scholars in and out India got educated from this prestigious Dars. There is a good collection of rare books on various discipilnes in the Kutub Khana at Thanur Valiyakulangara Masjid. It is in this mosque the biggest collection of manuscripts in South India. The teachings of Imam Al-Ghazzali were taught in this Dars. The well known freedom fighter Veliyamcode Umar Qadi and Parappanagadi Oukkoya Musliyars were among the Mudarriss (Teachers) of this Dars. This Dars had a very important role in the Malabar rebellion if 1921.

Qadi Ramalanu Shaliyathi (d. 1500 A.D.) conducted *Dars* in Kuttichira *Mishkal Palli, Kuttichira Jumuath Palli* and *Muchunthi Palli*. After him *Qadi* Fakhruddin Abubakr continued *Dars* here. It was he who introduced the *Dars* syllabus 'Assilsiliyathul Fargiyya'. Imam Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya, Fathihathul Ulum* and other works were taught here. The *Dars* started by Sheikh Zainuddin Maqdum al Kabeer at Ponnani revolutionized the religious, spiritual and social domains. The *Dars* came into being modeling this *Dars* enlightened the life of Muslims in different parts of Kerala.

All the genius who controlled the movements of Muslim society were the products of *Darses*. Makthi Tangal, K.M. Moulavi, Vakkom Moulavi (taught in his own residence by notable *Qazis* and teachers from Vellore, Keelakara, Kayalpattanom (Tamil Nadu) and Ponnani etc, were the products of *Dars* from where they learned the lessons of social dynamics and eventually became the leaders of renaissance and reforms. The Muslims who learned from *Othu Palli, Madrassas* and *Darses* excelled in character formation and spiritual purification, piety and patriotism. The reason for this is the education based on spirituality. Those who led this movement are the scholars who were inspired by the towering scholars like Imam Al-Ghazzali.⁴

Kerala Muslims can be proud of anti- colonial tradition. They waged wars against imperial forces for five centuries from 1498 to 1921. The leaders led all these struggles were those who studied in *Darses*. Instead of cowardice they taught us the lessons of bravery and endless struggle. At the same time they didn't covet the pleasures of power. In fact they wanted to save the motherland from the clutches of invaders. This was the splendid model they inherited traditionally from the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazzali.⁵

From Zainuddin Maqdum the first who declared *Jihad* against Portuguese at the grand Masjid of Ponnani till Ali Musliyar, the *mudarris* of Tirurangadi Masjid who was the leader of the *Khilafath* Movement of 1921 were against imperialism. A long line of scholars who took strong actions against the colonialists from Veliyamcode Umar Qadi (1765 - 1857) who started no-tax payment strike against the British rulers two centuries prior to Gandhiji. Pangil Ahammed Kutty Musliar who resigned the teacher ship in the pro- British locality were the daring sons of *Dars* education system. Undoubtedly, the light and energy inspired them was taken from Imam Al- Ghazzali.⁶

Arabic-Malayalam Literature

The Arabic-Malayalam language and literature is one of the great contributions of Kerala Muslims (*Mappilas*) to the Indian culture. The new language was developed from the desire to retain the purity of Islam and the wish to imbibe the benefits of other languages and literature. *Arabic-Malayalam* though had its roots in religious needs grew into such a state that it could serve for all the secular needs of the community. The Muslims were able to develop a new language (*Arabic-Malayalam*) for their varied purposes. It was the influence of Imam Al-Ghazzali that made the Muslims of Kerala competent enough to produce the rich wealth of knowledge and culture. *Mappila* Muslims of Kerala widely used *Arabic-Malayalam* language as the medium of instruction to communicate Ghazzalian thoughts for the public at large through *Sufi* songs (*Malas*) such as Muhiyuddin Mala, Rifai Mala, Badar Mala, Nafeesath Mala, Mamburam Mala, etc.

When Islam grew beyond the limits of Arabia, the Muslim missionary invented a new system of language to cater to the requirements of the new non- Arab speaking Muslim communities. The *Arabic-Malayalam* is one among them. In fact, *Arabic-Tamil* was formed in Tamil Nadu before *Arabic-Malayalam*. Malayalam alphabet does not have the entire letters equivalent to Arabic alphabet. This limitation of Malayalam causes distortion of the pronunciation of many technical terms in Arabic. Religiously it is essential to pronounce the Arabic words properly in prayers and when reciting Quran. When the limitation caused troubles for the new believers a new language came into being. In other words the religious necessity led to the creation of a new system of expression. Then it became the common link language of the *Mappila Muslims* and eventually produced a treasure of literature.

In Malayalam literature the presence of *Mappila* was felt because of the *Arabic-Malayalam* language. *Muhiyuddin mala* written by Qadi Muhammad (980-1078 AH) of Kozhikode is a remarkable work in this language. Qadi Muhammed had studied the works and thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazzali from his teachers at the Ponnani Masjid. He adopted *Qadriyya Tareeqath* as his spiritual path. *Muhyuddin Mala*, the first work in *Arabic-Malayalam* language. This *Mala* was composed in the Malyalam year 782 as mentioned in the *mala* itself. That means *Muhiyddin Mala*, the first work in *Arabic-Malayalam* language was written half a century before Thunchath Ezhuthachan formulated the Malayalam script. Qadi Muhammad praises his spiritual guide Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani in the *mala*. The poet who was trained in the *Maqdumi* tradition was an ardent lover of Ghazzalian method and a committed patriot. He used his pen as sharp weapon

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against Portuguese invaders. He recorded the exciting moments of retrieving the chaliyam fort from the hands of Portugal in his great Work *Fathhul Mubeen*⁷ Kerala Muslims were never backward in religious awareness and in literature. Moreover it is they who paved the way for Malayalam language.⁸

Arabic-Malayalam guided the Kerala Muslims through literature. When pure Arabic was difficult for the Muslims of Kerala to follow they modified Arabic for their purpose. Later Islamic books were written in non-Arabic languages in Kerala just as Imam Al-Ghazzali wrote books in Persian language.⁹ Thus the Arabic-Malayalam language is the tool of various conditions like the need for a common link language for Muslims, the requirement for a means to master the Arabic texts of Quran and prayers and the persuasion from the Darses. Ever before the commencement of Malayalam language the Arabic-Malayalam authors contributed stories, Poetry and novels to Kerala. Novels were plenty in Arabic-Malayalam language well before O.Chanthumenon wrote "Indu Lekha", the first novel in Malayalam. The Persian novel Char Darvesh written by Ameer Qusru in 1303 A.D. was translated into Arabic-Malayalam. Thousands of Arabic-Malayalam books were written in different topics like History, Medicine, Astrology, Vedanta and mathematics. Sufi orders and great Sufis had a great role in this. Arabic- Malayalam triggered a revolution in purifying the hearts through an ocean of songs. Nool Madh, Kappappat¹⁰, Khilafath Lahala Pattu. *Thumbippattu, Padappattu* etc are some of them. The *Padappatts* are about the battles of the prophet such as Badar and Uhd. All these played a key role in getting the Muslims spiritually equipped for fighting against the invading foreign armies. The British officers even confiscated the Cherur, Thrikkalyoor and Mannarkkadu Padappattus. Muhiyuddin Mala, Rifai Mala, Nafeesath Mala etc played a strong role in spreading the spiritual thoughts in the society. The influence of *Sufi Tareeqath* can be seen in all these.

Imam Al-Ghazzali saved *Thasawwuf* from the Greco-Roman- Persian influence and never supported extreme and wild *Sufism*. On the contrary he severely opposed it. It was he who saved *Sufism* from wild guesses and anti Islamic and brought back it to the original Islamic purity. The *Sufi* ideals of Imam Al-Ghazzali who firmly stood for the genuine *Sufism* by refuting the Greek rationalism and fought against cruel monarchs and the wretched pack of scholars by tooth and nail were well accepted in Kerala.

Ponnani *Maqdums* were the members of *Chisti-Qadiri Tareeqaths*. The *Qadis* of Kozhikode also adopted the same *Tareeqaths*. All these scholars used *Arabic-Malayalam* to make the Islamic rites in the true spirit to the common Folk and thereby enforce piety. Sooranadu Kunan Pillai says about the influence of Arabic-Malayalam: "If the Ali, the Kannur Arakkal King had ruled all over Kerala the standard Malayalam script would have been that of *Arabic-Malayalam*.¹¹

There were changes and reformations in *Arabic-Malayalam* language along with time. The students and *Mudarris* of *Darses* (teachers) influenced by the teachings of Imam Al-Ghazzali becam reformers of *Arabic-Malayalam* script. *Arabic-Malayalam* marks a milestone in the history of Islam in Kerala. It is obvious that the newly formed *Arabic-Malayalam* language laid the foundations for all the later socio-cultural developments in Kerala Muslims.

Qutub al Zaman, (pivot of the Age) Mamburam Sayyid Alawi Tangal (1749-1844) was the prominent among the early reformers of *Arabic- Malayalam* script. His son Sayyid Fazal Pookoya tangal (1823-1901A.D.), Their contemporaries Veliyamcode Umar Qadi (1785-1853 A.D.), Moulana Abubakr Koya Musliyar of Parappanangadi Naha family (Aukoya Musliyar) were reformers of *Arabic-Malayalam* script. Andathode Shujayi Moidu Musliyar the author of *Fathul Fathah* (3 volumes), *Faidul Fayyah* (History, Spirituality), *Safala Mala* (Ode) and Abdurahman Maqdum Tangal alias Cheriya Bava Musliyar also contribute to *Arabic-Malayalam* reformation. All these renowned scholars were influenced by the spiritual thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazzali and joined *Tareeqaths* as a result.¹²

Social Leadership

Since the time when the monotheistic Islam was taught in Kerala, the works of Al-Ghazzali including *lhya ulumuddin, Fathihathul Ulum, Mizanul Amal, Naseehathul Mulook, Musthasfa, Al Wajiz, Al Wasit, Bidayathul Hidaya, Minhajul Abideen and Ayyuhal Walad* guided the religious scholars i.e., Mamburam Tangal, Fazal Pookoya Tangal, Veliyamcode Umar Qazi, Makti Tangal, Ali Musliyar, etc. were the glaring examples to work for the well being of the society without being attracted to the material benefits.¹³ The spiritual as well as political thoughts spearheaded by Imam Al-Ghazzali reflected not only in the personal but also in the social life because of the initiation of the *Maqdums* of Ponnani. This was possible as they assimilated the thoughts of Al-Ghazzali wholeheartedly. *Shafi'i* jurisprudence (*Madhab*) spread in Kerala because of the initiation of the *Maqdums*. Since Imam Al-Ghazzali wrote *Al Wazit, Al Wajiz* praising the Jurisprudence of Imam *Shafi'i* he became the promoter of *Shafi'i* school of thought. *Maqdums* kept the *Shafi'i Madhab* alive in Kerala by promoting the thoughts of Al-Ghazzali. In Kerala, *Shafi'i Madhab* has the largest number followers the credit of which goes to *Maqdums*.

Shujayi Moidu Musliyar (1861-1919 A.D.)

Shujayi Moidu Musliyar was a multi lingual scholar who also deserves attention here. His life and works were highly influenced by Imam Al- Ghazzali. Shujayi Moidu Musliyar mentions the eminence of Imam Al- Ghazzali in his book *Nahjud-Daqaiq*.¹⁴ Besides, the impact of Ghazzalian thoughts is evident in his *Sufi* mystical poem *Safala Mala*, Shujayi Moidu Musliyar commonly known as Andathode Musliyar the great scholar was a follower of *Qadiriyya Tareeqath* after getting much inspirations from Ghazzalian thoughts. He died in Makkah in 1919 soon after performing *Hajj*. He was evidently influenced by the spiritual thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazzali.¹⁵

Further it is clear that the later renaissance and religious movements in Kerala owe to *Arabic-Malayalam*. The enmity of British rulers and the growth of reform movements caused the death of *Arabic-Malayalam* language. The later religious reformative movements spearheaded by Jamaluddin Afghani, Muhammad Abdu, Rasheed Rida etc had strong ideological influence on the reform movements like *Islahi, Mujahid, Salafi* and *Jama't* movements in Kerala. As the movements started to present Islam in Malayalam and English languages the *Arabic-Malayalam* language slowly began to disappear. The movements alleged that the *Malas, Kissa* songs, *Madh* songs etc written in *Arabic-Malayalam* contain blasphemy and anti

Islamic elements. This also caused the premature passing away of the language. But the pioneering reformative leaders like Vakkom Moulavi etc had promoted *Arabic- Malayalam*. It is note-worthy that Vakkom Moulavi translated Imam Al- Ghazzali's *Keemia Sada* into Malayalam and *Arabic-Malayalam*.¹⁶

The orthodox *Sunnis* who followed *Shafi'i* School of jurisprudence and *Sufi* orders were the followers of Islamic *Shari'th* whereas sticking on to conventional beliefs, *As'ari Aqeedah* and *Zuhd*. They had adopted *Arabic- Malayalam* as their means for self expression. The traditional *Sunnis* took cudgels against European languages in protesting their atrocities and onslaughts to Muslim community and Islamic beliefs.

In Malabar and Southern Kerala, *Arabic-Malayalam is* still followed by traditional *Sunnis*. In their *Madrassas, Darses* and Arabic colleges *Arabic- Malayalam* is used and practiced. Thanks to them the system is not completely washed out which is indeed a relief for the lovers of *Arabic- Malayalam*.

Majority of the Muslims in Kerala are the *Sunnis* who follow the *Shafi'I madhab* (Rite). They generally follow the *Qadiri Tareeqath* which was in full accordance with the spiritual path recommended by the great *Sufi* philosopher *'Hujjathu Islam* Imam Al-Ghazzali. It was the *Maqdumis* of Ponnani who popularized *Shafi'i* School of Thought (*Shafi'i madhab*), Ghazzali thought and *Qadiriyya Tareeqath* (Spiritual way envisaged by Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani) in Kerala. Mamburam Tangal added his family *Tareeqath* Ba Alawi order to *Qadiriyya Tareeqath* in Kerala.¹⁷ When Sayyid Abdurahman Haidrose (d: 1759 AD) reached Ponnani from Hadramouth of Yemen the spiritual excellence of it once again glittered.

The objection of Ponnani group against *Kondoty Faqeer* was based on authentic books. They quoted Imam Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum-id-Din* to support their view.¹⁸ Ponnani group called for boycott of *Kondoty Tareeqath*. This made the situation of *Kondoty Tareeqath* difficult. They were unable to withstand the boycott. Finally when all agreed upon *Ihya Ulum-id-Din* the Sujood controversy came to an end. This incident shows the authenticity and acceptance of Imam-Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum-id-Din* among the Muslims of Kerala in those periods.

Sheikh Jiffri Tangal (B 1726 Ad)

Sheikh Jiffri Tangal who entered *Qadiri Tareeqath* also joined the family Tareeqath Ba Alawi'. In AD 1746 Sheikh Jiffri Tangal reached Calicut. Zamorin of Kozhikode welcomed him warmly and gave him the *Thekkum Thala* region in Kozhikode. Tippu sultan is said to be visited him. Within a short span of time he became the spiritual head of Malabar Muslims.

The later *Maqdum* of Ponnani and Sheikh Jiffri Tangal often related. Both had family roots in Yemen. When Sayyid Abdurahman Hydrose married from Ponnani Magdum family the ties between the two families became stronger. *Maqdums* and the scholars who supported them agreed the spiritual leadership of Sheikh Jiffri Tangal. The message Sheikh Jiffri Tangal spread throughout Malabar through them.

Many scholars and activists led the Muslim community learning lessons from *Maqdumis*, Mamburam Tangal, Fazal Pookoya Tangal and Umar Qadi. Ba Alawi family, under Sayyid Jiffri Tangal, Qadi Shihabuddin's family of Kozhikode, Qadi Muhammad first of Kozhikode, Oukoya Musliyar JETIR1908C66 Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR) www.jetir.org 521

Parappanangadi, Thanur Abdurahman Sheikh, Shujayi Moidu Musliyar and *Bukhari Sadats* were the *Sufi* leaders as well as the social reformers of that period.

Sayyid Sanaulla Makthi Tangal (1847-1912 A.D.)

Sanaulla Makthi Tangal remains a riddle to many who study about him. It was at this time Sanaulla Makthi Tangal, son of Ahammed Tangal the chief follower and student of Umar Qadi was born in veliyamkode in 1847. Makthi Tangal was ready to take up the challenge of his age. He studied at Veliyamkode, Maranchery and Ponnani *Darses*. His father was his first teacher. He studied at Chavakkad higher Elementary school and mastered Hindi, Persian, Tamil, Malayalam and English languages in addition to the Islamic subjects and Christology. As he was able to handle English and Persian languages, he got appointment as Excise Inspector without much difficulty.

When the Christian evangelical groups unleashed an intellectual assault against Kerala Muslims, Makthi Tangal resigned his government job (Excise inspector) and came forward to defend the missionaries.¹⁹ He was able to take up the challenges raised by the pastors brilliantly and effectively. In fact the Christian missionaries had launched a multi faceted movement against Muslims. They published pamphlets in *Arabic-Malayalam* accusing all bad things about Islam and Prophet Muhammad. No Muslim scholar of that time had nerve to address this challenge. The Muslims of that age did not have enough knowledge even to make out the argument put forward by the Christian missionaries.

Though some similarity can be found in the points of views of Makthi Tangal with the discourses of the reformer movements in Kerala Muslims, they had not been derived from them. He had his education in jurisprudence at *Darses* and from the traditional *Sunni* Arabic collages. He derived his energy and spirit from the works of Imam Al-Ghazzali *Ihya Ulum-id-Din, Fathihathul Ulum, Minhajul Abideen, Ayyahal Walad, Musthasfa.* It was this spirit persuaded him to defend the Christian Missionaries who turned against Islam and its Prophet.²⁰ He made a plea to the Muslim community donate funds to his activities against the Christian Missionaries. He collected coins from his fellow Muslims and made a fund under the name *Nabi Nanayam* for his activities. He saw the prophet as his grandfather and he respectfully called him '*Uppappa*' (Grand dad). He inherited this emotional attachment to the prophet from his forefather's *Dars*. He detested even the terminology used by the modern reformative groups as he feared that they may damage the greatness of the prophet.

History records that Makthi Tangal had exactly different opinions from those of the modern reformists. He endorsed the traditional *Sunni* views of *Thawassul* and *Istigasa*.²¹ Makti Tangal strongly objected the maternal system prevailed among Muslims in Kannoor, Kozhikode and Ponnani. According to him this practice was against Islamic *Shariath*. Further, he argued for imparting education to men and women. He said that it is the right of the women to get educated in the limits prescribed by Islam.²² He wrote a book about women under the title *Naree naraabhijari* (the women who follow the men). This shows that Makti Tangal was not a hard core reformist who represents the modern reformist stream. Instead he argued for the

rights of women within the frame work of Islam.²³ The eminent historian Dr. M. Gangadaran opines that Makti Tangal upheld the orthodox view of Islam.²⁴

In short the objective study about Makti Tangal and a close analysis of his books reveal the fact he strictly followed the traditional views of Islam as taught by the orthodox scholars which he had internalized at the time of his education at *Dars* where he got chance to go through the Works of Imam Al- Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum-id-Din, Fathihathul Ulum, Ayyuhal Walad*, etc.

The scholars who supported the *Mappila* rebellion and those who adopted the line of patience failed to appraise his merit. The authority that followed apolitical stance and the orthodox *Ulama* also could not see his significance. Due to all these the contributions of Sanaulla Makthi Tangal were not evaluated in the right sense. He was a renowned scholar and social reformer. His genealogy goes to prophet Muhammad (S.A). He wanted to educate the Muslims and bring them into the main stream by teaching them Malayalam and English languages. He didn't want the Muslim community turn its face against modernity. He asked the Muslim community to raise their standard through modern education. Makthi Tangal concentrated his activities in uplifting the Muslim community and making them part of the general society.²⁵

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¹⁶ See Appendix No.XIV, XV, XVI

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