



MADRASA EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KERALA : AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The Madrasa system that operates in Kerala is a highly effective machinery for imparting basic religious education to the growing generation up to plus two level which is run in a smooth manner with well defined aims and objectives supported by a well planned curriculum, syllabi and other tools required for an educational system . It is designed in such a way that a student can pursue his religious studies together with modern education in schools. Hence, in Kerala almost every Muslim child essentially passes through the madrasa education system by the time it reaches the age of adolescence. However, the engagement with Madrasas does not hinder in any way their achievements and progress in the field of modern education. It rather contributes to their all round development and specially helps in their moral and spiritual development. This study will give an overview of Kerala Madrasa Education system and its evolution through decades and outline of various Madrasa Boards working in Kerala.

Key words: *Muslim Education, Madrasa Education, Curriculum Revision, Instructional strategies, Dars System, Othupalli*



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Introduction

Islam has given utmost importance to the study and transmission of knowledge. It is the heart of Islamic civilization. Muslims around the world have founded a variety of teaching and learning centers, both at primary and higher levels to educate everybody in the community about the basic tenets of the religion and to produce the religious scholars respectively. The very first revelation of the Holy Quran is also about the importance and source of knowledge. It is worth mentioning that the word knowledge- *Ilm* in Arabic language, is the second most repeated word in Quran. The word *Quran* originated from the word '*qara-a*' meaning 'to read'. In numerous verses, the Quran has attached great

importance to the pursuit of knowledge. In the very first revelation of the book, Prophet Muhammad was given a command to read and write. In a number of sayings, Prophet Muhammad has emphasized the need to seek knowledge from cradle to grave and to regard it as their sacred duty. The Prophet's sayings cover such modern ideas as compulsory education for the sexes, adult and continuing education, and exchanges in the field of education and learning (Ahmed 1990). According to Islam, education is the most powerful tool for bringing about positive social change and to put an end to ignorance and superstitions. The arrival of Islam created a revolution in the world and laid the foundation of a glorious civilization and culture.

Avowed aim of Madrasa education is to inculcate the belief and practice of Islam among its followers and guide them to follow Quran and traditions of the Prophet. The foundation of Madrasa education is therefore, basically stands on two pillars of *Quran* and *Sunna* (Tradition of Prophet Mohammad). Even though the structural form of Madrasa that we see today did not exist in the period of Prophet Muhammad, a strong system of learning and teaching was there. The learning and teaching process was stressed from the very moment the first revelation came upon Prophet Muhammad.

Madrasa Education In Kerala

Historically, Kerala is the land which is believed to be blessed with the initial advent of Islam in the whole of India, as Muslims believe, a disciple of the Prophet landed in Kerala and converted a local ruler to Islam through the hands of Prophet Muhammad. Islam entered India in earlier times, some maintain even during Prophet's lifetime through Kerala, and a century later through Sindh in North India(Engineer, A.A, 2009) .Starting with this tradition, Kerala Muslims kept diverse characteristics of social, cultural and economic dynamics largely acculturated with the local traditions and practices. With extensive acculturating trajectories, they constructed their own modes and forms of socialization mostly connected to the educational systems. The system of Islamic education must have started at the same time as the first few *Masjids* were established in Kerala. This system evolved over a thousand year period and even though for a century there was great emphasis on modern education, the Islamic education system survived and with the addition of some new trends it continues to thrive.

Kerala's Muslims are unique among their co-religionists in India in fashioning a system of education that enables their children to attend both religious as well as regular schools at the same time. Muslims account for around one fourth of Kerala's population, and

the state's Muslims, known as *Mappilas*, are among the most literate of the various Muslim communities in the country. Kerala boasts of the highest literacy rate in India, and the Kerala Muslims are the most well educated Muslim community in the country.

The system of Islamic education in Kerala presents a considerable contrast to its counterparts elsewhere in India, who have been overtaken by a large and expanding network of reformed Madrasas that have incorporated secular subjects and teaching methods to varying degrees. One of the major factors responsible for the high literacy rate among Kerala's Muslims is the vast network of educational institutions that community leaders have established across the state. Religious education provision for Muslims of Malabar can be divided into five distinct pattern.

Othupalli Or Maktab

Othupalli, a Malabari terminology generally used to single teacher schools is set up adjacent to mosques. It is not quite different from their counterparts in North India or any Muslim countries. They are institutional forms for religious elementary education which can be judged as the symbol of the high moral and educational consciousness of Kerala Muslims since the advent of Islam in the region. Most of the *Othupallis* were established adjacent to the mosques and it was a sort of primary school for religious and Arabic education for young Muslim boys and girls. The *Imam* (who leads the five times prayer) of the mosque also acts as the teacher of the *Othupalli* and gives basic Islamic education to the children of the area. The *Mullakka*, *Mulla* or *muaddin* were the assistants who helped the *Imam* to run the *Othupalli* effectively. Both boys and girls are admitted for learning primary *surahs* and *duas* from Quran and to learn to read and write Arabic. They also learn how to pray and other basic Islamic teachings are practiced (Naseer, 2011).

The method of teaching in these schools is oral, the *mullakka* recites the *Surat* and the students would be asked to repeat the same until memorized. The curriculum was limited in addition to the recitation of Qur'an, *zikh*, *hamd*, and *salath*. Most of the *Othupallis* had been converted to the Primary School, when British Government in India tried to transform them by providing salary and contingency to the *Mulla* (teacher). However, they serve as center of Islamic education for students attending schools where they learn modern subjects. Classes under *Othupallis* are held either before or after regular school hours to accommodate school going children.

PALLI DARS: It is the Mosque centric residential learning system. It is an educational establishment started with the advent of Islam and continues to exist even today. *Dars*,

literally meaning class, is the educational system attached with mosques. In the centuries ensuing the advent of Islam, the number of *Darses* went on increasing in mosques in every nook and corner of Kerala which still exists in large numbers. In order to impart religious education Muslims of Kerala evolved a simple programme in which students were fed by the villagers from their homes. The villagers divided students and teachers among themselves. Its scheme is unique in how it utilizes the resources available in the community for the propagation of knowledge. Most of the mosques in Kerala have a second (or more) floor. The purpose of the second floor is not only to accommodate the overflow of worshippers on special prayer days, but it also serves as a place where a group of students can be lodged. The first floor of the mosque doubles as a classroom during non-prayer times. The other interesting feature of the *Dars* system is that the education and accommodation are free for the students. These students are also considered guests of the locality where the *Masjid* is situated and each house of the area is assigned a student and they are responsible for his food. In return for food, the student teaches the young children of the house. This way, the best use of limited resources is ensured and in the process, young generations get served with religious education. In the curriculum of many *darses*, Computer literacy, Library reading and Co-curricular activities like art/literary training are included.

Dars system being independent and small scale, served the community well until recently. Muslim leaders were quick to realize that this system needs to be improved with the changing times (Pasha, 2005). On the one hand they improved the standardization of teaching in *Othupallis and Darses* while improving the conditions of teachers serving in these centuries old community institutions. On the other hand, big Madrasas were established that have specialized teachers and a well-developed curriculum.

Madrasa operates parallel to general school system from Primary classes to Senior Secondary, working in the mornings before school time. (from 1st standard to 12th standard)

Boarding Madrasa is a residential Madrasa which offers Madrasa and School education with in the same campus charging a fee for education, boarding and food.

Arabic College in which students study both Islamic and secular subjects of Degree/ P.G levels in residential campuses. Arabic colleges are the new mode of education parallel to sophisticated modern educational system largely developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. Absorbing the features of Western models of college education, they introduced the religious education with innovative models of teaching, infrastructures, and

management. Arabic Colleges were much popularized in the twentieth century among the Kerala Muslims, and its novelty still continues among the religious-knowledge seekers.

Islamic University is affiliated to international bodies and offers advanced education including research level courses. Two Islamic Universities are functioning in Kerala with International accreditations. Darul Huda, a relatively new institution with a fresh vision, established in 1986, set up a number of feeder institutions which admits the brightest students after completion of their primary schooling and takes them through 12 years of grueling Islamic and modern education to nurture new generation of scholars who can work in this new age and new world. While learning finer points of religion they also master subjects like Social Studies, History and English. Al Jamia Islamia at Shanthapuram in Malappuram provides Journalism, Islamic Finance, Political Science, Philosophy, Comparative religion etc in its varied curriculum.

Constitution of Madrasa Boards

By the ‘educating’ and ‘civilizing’ attempts of British government in Malabar towards the Mappila Muslims (the Muslims largely in northern Kerala, that is Malabar), the *Ottupallis* were interestingly attached to the newly established schools by the British Government to attract the Muslim students. This caused a close interconnection of ‘formal secular school education’ and ‘non-formal religious *Ottupalli* education’ under the same umbrella; consequently leading to the disappearance of *Ottupallis* attached to the mosques.

Just after the independence of India, the Madras government decided to stop religious education in the government institutions which led to the unavoidable stoppage of religious *ottupalli* education in the government schools established by the British Government. This directed the contemporary Muslim scholars to shift the modes of religious education to other institutions. Consequently, they formulated a ‘Madrasa Movement’ with much popularization in post-colonial India. Madrasas of Kerala operate very systematically with a large network and curriculum, and accommodate the formal educational options of the students by structuring the timings either before or after the usual school timings.

In 1871, the famous Koyappathodi family of Vazhakkad set up the first Madrasa in the region, *Tanmiyathul Uloom Madrasa*. In 1911, A.M. Koyakunhi started Madanul Uloom Madrasa, in Cannanore, (Huda 2010) Eminent scholar Chalilakath Kunchammed Haji (1866-1919), started Darul Uloom Madrasa Vazhakkadu in 1912 who is rightly called the father of the modern *Madrasa* education of Kerala. Syed Abdurahiman Bafakhy Thangal, initiated

systematic Madrasa education to the public through All Kerala Islamic Education Board as the first ever Madrasa education Board.

There is no Madrasa Board in Kerala at Government level. All Boards are private. The difference is based on the different schools of thoughts among Muslims. The Samastha (SKIMVB) , Dakshina (DKIMVB), Sunni Board(SKSVB) and Samasthana are from *Ahlussunna* school of thought and for one or the other reason , came out from the Samastha Board. Kerala Nadvathul MujahideenVidhyabhyasa Board (KNM) and The Council for Islamic Education and Research (CIER) are based on *Ahle Hadith* school, while *Majlis* represent *Jamathe e Islami* . The Madrasa Boards in Kerala are the following.

1. Samastha Kerala Islam MathaVidhyabhyasa Board(SKIMVB)
2. Kerala Nadvathul MujahideenVidhyabhyasa Board (KNM)
3. Majlissu Taalimul Islami Kerala (Majlis)
4. Dakshina Kerala Islam MathaVidhyabhyasa Board (DKIMVB)
5. Samastha Kerala Sunni Vidhyabhyasa Board(SKSVB)
6. Samasthana Islamic Education Board (Samasthana)
7. The Council for Islamic Education and Research (CIER)

The lion's share (80%) of the Madrasas are affiliated to Samastha Kerala Islam MathaVidhyabhyasa Board(SKIMVB).

Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidhyabhyasa Board (Samastha)

To improve the condition of the *Othupallis* and *Dars* systems of education, one of the organizations Samastha Kerala Jami-yyathul Ulama (SKJU) started a Madrasa Board called Samastha Kerala Islam MathaVidhyabhyasa Board (All Kerala Muslim Educational Board) in 1951. The Board has started functioning with KPA Mohiyadheen Kutty Moulavi as the first President. At present, there are a total of 9636 (Dec 2013) Madrasas registered under the Board including 9636 lower primary , 5810 upper primary, 2560 secondary and 570 senior secondary Madrasas. 11, 86, 640 students (including 585554 boys and 630836 girls) and 85690 teachers (all are male) are engaged in the education process. There are 141 officials employed under the Board in various activities including 96 Academic inspectors, office staff: 28, Teacher Trainers : 6, Qari (reciters) : 06 and Organizer :05. Besides these Madrasas, the Board runs one Engineering College, one well equipped residential Boarding Madrasa near its headquarters, one womens' college, one Muallim Training Centre and 180 schools. The Board has spread its educational activities in Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep ,United Arab

Emirates, Oman, Bahrain , Qatar, Kuwait Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. The salary of the teachers and all expenses of the Madrasa are met by the villagers where these Madrasas are situated. The Board takes care of the pension of the teachers when they retire and also deposits money in their welfare funds. The Board itself is funded by exam fees. Public Examinations are conducted at 5th, 7th, 10th, and 12th grade levels. The Madrasa are co-educational (Samastha 2009).

Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen Vidhyabhyasa Board (KNM)

The KNM Board started functioning in 1956 with Janab Mohammed Amani Moulavi as the chairman. The Board is associated with Salafi school of *Ahl –e-- Hadith* Movement . It is observed that the inspiration behind the establishment of major educational institutions in Kerala including a number of Arabic colleges, Arts and Science colleges, technical institutes, and schools was actually the activities of the Board.

Majlis Education Trust (Majlis)

Majlis Education Trust was established by Jamath-e Islami, Kerala in **1980** to monitor the Madrasas and to renovate its curricula. A number of Madrasas, secondary schools and colleges have been set up by the trust across the state. The Trust now undertakes activities such as preparing the syllabus and annual plan, publishing of text books, holding of inspections, organizing of orientation programmes and examinations, conduct of distance education programmes, cultural fests and teacher welfare programmes. At present, there are a total number of 246 Madrasas registered with the Board, 22,024 students (including 9924 boys and 12100 girls) and 1484 teachers (610 males, 874 females) are engaged in the education process. There are five officials including 2 Academic Inspectors employed by the Board.

Conclusion

Although the Madrasa system of Kerala has seen many developments over the decades, the academia has not paid much attention to study scientifically its working, strengths and contributions. Most of the research work accomplished so far deal with generalities and peculiarities of the Kerala Islam, in comparison and contrast to the other Muslim and Islamic experiences without much focusing on educational initiatives of the Kerala Muslims. In many writings it is acknowledged Kerala Model of education is unique in nature and it is the role model for all other states.

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