



Redefining Madrassa Education: An Analysis on the Impact of Madrassa Education on the Muslims in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

The Madrassa education system, which produced many legendary figures in strengthening the religious and social wellbeing of the Kerala state, is in the verge of decline. The responsibility for the failure of the system falls on the religious organizations, teachers, parents and the Mahallu committee. Contemporary Kerala society needs the rejuvenation of the Madrassa education system to ensure religious harmony and overall development of the community and the society. This paper tries to expose the failures of the Madrassa education system in Kerala and puts forth the remedial measures to rejuvenate the system.

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Introduction

The Muslims in Kerala, which constitute about one-fourth of the whole population of the state, like all other religions aims at the wellness of the people preaching peace and tolerance. The religion, spread through the traders from Arabia – the followers of Prophet Mohammed - pervaded the fragrance of the religion and attracted millions of people including the rich and the poor. The religion which came crossing the seas spread to every nooks and corners of the state as the religions in Kerala were attracted towards the elegant behavior of the traders. The rich soil supplied the nutrients of hospitality and freedom for religious dissemination for Islam to grow and spread its foliage with all its manifestations. The traders, who came for the fragrance and warmth of the 'black gold', spread the fragrance of the religion and many 'bees' enjoyed the nectar from the blossomed religion. The magnificence and rich hospitality of the Kerala minds accepted the Arabs along with their culture and religion. New communities, culture, and lifestyle evolved as the Arabs settled in Kerala exchanging men and matters. Kings and rulers of the provinces welcomed the Arabs and came forward to accept the religion with open hearts. Religious transformations and institutions sprouted in almost all parts of the Kerala soil.

The colonial period discussed the religion a lot as the anti colonial resistance from the part of the Muslims was at its zenith. At the time of independence struggle the Muslims in Kerala marked an unparalleled role to produce great patriots like Variankunnath Kunjahammad Haji, who fought for the liberation of the motherland. For them the liberation of the motherland was the divine venture to make their life in this earth and heaven the best. Though the British imperialists tried to crush the strength of Muslims or Mappila in Kerala the thirst for martyrdom made the Muslims to come forward in the freedom struggle and to challenge the Empire. The number of Muslims increased in Kerala as the shackles of the feudal system and caste system forced the people to be free from the evils of Hinduism and take

refuge in Islam. The resistance was so powerful that the British could not step into the Mappila land for months and the Malabar Passport confused the British Empire. Though the British suffocated the Muslims by strict laws and stringent measures like banning the martial arts *Kalarippayattu*, they creatively moulded the new art of *Kolkali* with songs of inspiration and the steps of *Kalarippayattu*. The Mappila Revolt and the year 1921 remain as a milestone in the history of Indian Independence Struggle proclaiming the valor and strength of the Muslims in Kerala. Though the misinterpretations of history made Mappila the symbol of rude, cruel, uncultured savage, the resistance from the Malabar with fight and might was the result of the inspiration from the religious education. The freedom fight was inspired by the ideas of the religious scriptures and messages of the prophet Mohammed. The Muslims taught the message of the religion and Arabic language to the young through the Othupallis controlled by both men and women. Othupallis, the pioneer form of education among Muslims in Kerala, taught the followers of the religion to recite holy texts and learn the religious scriptures and propagated the necessity of maintaining the peace among the citizens, fighting against evils and cooperation in the virtuous deeds. The Othupallis were adjacent to the Mappila schools established by the British to educate the Muslims with modern English education and to bridge the gap between British and Muslims. The Muslims were hostile towards the English language, culture and products and they even considered English as the fume of hell. Higher education and research was done through the *Dars* system - like the *Gurukula* system- oriented in the mosques under the supervision of an Islamic intellectual. The *Dars* system produced many intellectuals and eminent thinkers for the post colonial independent India to fuel the ignition for the wellbeing of the Muslims in Kerala.

In the year of 1912 Madrassa education system was launched in Kuttichira, Kozhikode by the tireless struggle of Chalilakath Kunjahammed Haji. The first Madrassa was established in 1914 at Vazhakkad taught by eminent teachers like

K.M. Moulavi, E.K.Moulavi, E. Moidu Moulavi, and P.K.Moosa Moulavi.

Though they established the Madrassa system and laid the foundation for the systematic teaching of the Muslim community, majority of the Muslims discouraged the innovative move towards Muslim education. The traditional fundamentalists attacked the innovators with all their might charging transgression and they even portrayed the Madrassa system as evolved from the hell. But the realization of the benefits of the system and the involvement of Sayyid Abdurahiman Bafakhi Thangal made the majority to adapt the system. Thus the Madrassa education system spread to the different nooks and corners of Kerala aiming at the overall development of the Muslims. The system educated the followers to invite and propagate the values of the religion among the fellow religions in Kerala. Even the very younger generation of the community was given proper religious education to produce staunch believers who can help to maintain the life of the individual and the society peaceful and secure. The Muslims thought of imparting the religious education in imprinting the fundamentals of the religion in the younger minds before beginning the mundane education. In order to make the younger generation aware of the religious scriptures which gave importance to values and ethics in human life the system was established in the state. The system aimed at the fostering of the younger generation of the religion with essential values and virtues for peaceful social life. The Muslims consulted the religious scriptures for all the matters concerning both religion and the mundane world. So, learning the religion with all its manifestations became mandatory for every individual in the community. The system not only gave importance to nurture the essential qualities among the believers but also exhorted to maintain tolerance with the other communities of the state. According to Robert .W. Hefner: "Like Aristotle in the ancient world Muslim authorities also regarded ethical education essential for the formation of virtuous subjects and the maintenance of a common good" [1]. Thus, the Muslims in Kerala achieved unparalleled position in the history of Kerala and produced legendary figures like Umer Khazi, Zainudheen Maqdoom and Variyankunnath Kunjahammed through their religious education system.

No other religions in Kerala demand the establishment and preservation of the systematic learning of the religion with all its manifestations. The Kerala mornings witness the marching of children in skull caps and scarf to the nearest Madrassa. Dars system and Arabic colleges of different Muslim organizations and movements compete to produce maximum number of teachers and researchers to lead the Madrassas and to direct the children towards goodness. The organizations have intellectuals, think-tanks and academics to frame the syllabus and curriculum for the Madrassas under the Madrassa Education Boards. The *Mahallu* committees and the elders are vigilant in running the Madrassa effectively and efficiently.

But the analysis of the modern, contemporary Muslims in Kerala reveals that they are in the forefront of the antisocial activities and crimes, drenched in immorality and evils. The number of criminals, smugglers, and rogues are rocketing when compared to other religions in the state. Alcohol consumption and drug abuse are rocketing in the community at a high speed. The very religion which exhorted the believers to keep away from wine, women, and war is drenched in the evils of alcoholism, vulgarity, and violence. The paradox is that

even the children who undergo systematic religious education are indulged in all the obscenities and crimes in their future life. The Muslim younger generation who gets proper religious education and guidance to make the life of the individual and the society good are far ahead in crimes and vices than the other communities who lack proper religious education. The younger generation who are exhorted to keep aloof from the crimes and evils affecting the society and the individual are indulging in the antisocial activities including sexual atrocities and extremism. Despite the advices, exhortations and guidance the younger generation is moving towards catastrophe. This proves that the Madrassa education had lost its luster and it fails to have an impact on the mental and intellectual health of the children who begin the education even at the age of four. A system, which produced great legendary figures are now unproductive even to influence the mental and intellectual health of the children in the community. The education fails to produce students who can lead both the society and the community towards wellness, prosperity and peace. This necessitates the analysis of the contemporary Kerala's Madrassa education system. The effectiveness and the efficiency of the teaching and research in the religious education must be scrutinized to unveil the flaws in the system.

The scrutiny of the contemporary Muslim Madrassa education system proves that the responsibility of the failure of the system in influencing the children falls on the community, organizations, parents and the teachers. With the development of science and technology the community gave more importance for the mundane education than the religious education. The parents became a part of the competitive world and wanted their children to be part of the rush towards attaining heights of white collar jobs. They ignored the value of religious education and the Madrassa education was pushed to the margins. The Madrassa education became an unproductive and useless enterprise for the parents. The children are forced to go to Madrassa as a part of the custom. The parents find their children being sent to the Madrassa as a symbol of being Muslim. They consider it a shame to not be a part of the Madrassa education being a Muslim. The parents encourage children attend Madrassa only for namesake. Madrassa education provided the parents a Muslim identity and it gave the impression that they are the part of the community's Islamic venture to educate the young. This half mindedness among the parents creates problems among the children. The children are forced to study in the Madrassas, which the parents brand as unproductive and useless enterprise. The boom of English medium schools challenged the existence of the Madrassas as the children shed from the Madrassa and concentrated on the school education alone. The parents give little importance for the religious education while the children are burdened with it. They have to follow the suffocating busy schedule of attending the Madrassa in the morning, then attending the school for a long time and in the evening they have to attend the tuition classes. This situation destabilizes the mental health of the children. While the students are aware of the benefits of the academic learning and dream of the white collar jobs, they are puzzled at the aims and objectives of the Madrassa education. Parents, relatives and all others inquire about the academic education and explain its importance in the modern world and ignore the religious education. They consider it as unfruitful in the competitive world and it is confined to the world after death. The children have the burden of reciting, by-hearting, and

listening to religious scriptures, being ignorant of the values of the education. This namesake education bears no fruit and also affects the children in the negative way. The children are unaware of the meaning of the fundamental religious scriptures and prayers and they are ignorant about the benefits of the learning in the life of the society and the individual. They are puzzled at the meanings and interpretations of the Arabic incantations at the time of *namaaz*, for which the parents compel to perform at the proper times.

While the parents consider Madrassa education as a mere symbol of their religious identity, most of the teachers are not taking the teaching as a serious venture. They are not well educated and qualified in order to handle the children in helping them to shape their personality. Since the teaching profession is not a well paid job most of the persons are not attracted towards the profession. In the world of technological boom and urge for professional excellence most of the students from the Muslim community are turning away from the ecclesiastical profession. The brilliant students opt for the academic and professional courses and the ineffective students are attracted to the teaching profession in the Madrassas. The community sent the children to the Arabic colleges and the religious education institutions as a last refuge. The students who opt for the profession of teaching in the religious education are considering it as a mere job for earning income. But this profession must not be taken as a mere job to make both ends meet. The responsibilities and duties of the teacher in a Madrassa is not confined to the teaching the children to recite the holy books and the language of Arabic and its grammar. But the teacher has to not only take care of the academic development of the students but also should scrutinize the practicing of the learnt matter from the Madrassas. The students in Madrassas are not meant to learn for the academic excellence alone but they are sent to the Madrassas for the overall development to ensure their social and religious wellbeing. So the teacher must be well efficient enough to analyze the academic, social and, religious development of the student. For this the teacher must develop his multi faceted abilities, mental and intellectual faculties. The poor and ineffective teacher is not only spoiling the academic ability of the student in the Madrassa, but also is degenerating the social, religious and mental wellbeing of the community. Moreover the teacher is spoiling the future of the community by spoiling the younger generation in the Madrassa education system. The Dars education system which also produces teachers for the Madrassa is a less expensive course. So the families with less financial background are attracted towards this sector. The less qualified and ineffective teachers fails to have emotional attachment with the students and indulges in mechanical teaching, which is confined to mere reading, reciting and memorizing old religious scriptures and teaching them the religious rituals. The teacher is destined to undergo research with the available resources and knowledge to shape the children. For this he have adapt the religious scriptures and have to interpret the conditions of the students to point out remedial measures for the problems of the students and to make their education fruitful and productive. The children who fail to have an emotional attachment with the teacher withdraw from the circumstances when they have to consult the teacher for their mental problems. The teacher who is unaware of the contemporary social and mental wellbeing of the children puzzles at the problems of the students. The children are confused both at the utility of the learning and they finds a sea of problems

unsolved – both religious and mundane. This creates an aversion towards the Madrassa education among the students in the community.

Though there are some glimpses for the participation of women in the education system the number of lady teachers in the Madrassa education system is at its minimum. While organizations with a modern social reformative outlook include lady teachers in the Madrassa education system, the orthodox minds never allow the involvement of the women in the religious education system. The religious education system remains as the monopoly of the male. This creates many problems among the girls students. As Madrassa education aims at the private and public life of the individual, the matters concerning sex, sexuality, puberty, and menstruation are discussed and explained by the male teachers in the Madrassas. The girl students find it difficult to discuss the private matters with the male teachers in the Madrassas. This causes the shedding of the girl students from the Madrassas even at an earlier stage. The girl students, who are destined to lead the family and mould the society towards wellness, fail to gather knowledge from the Madrassas and they are confined to the inner, darker corners of the households.

The Muslims follow the Mahallu system for the overall development of the Muslims in an area. The Mahallu formed on the basis of geographical and ideological peculiarities will be administered based on a mosque or a Madrassa. The Mahallu committee is in charge of the religious and social matters of the Muslims in the region. The Mahallu committee is so powerful that it can take crucial decisions on the matters concerning the day to day life of the Muslims. The Mahallu committee is having the power of controlling and administering the matters concerning the Madrassa and the mosque. It includes the appointment of the teachers for the Madrassas and the religious clergy for ceremonies and rituals. The Mahallu committee collects a specific amount from the Mahallu inhabitants for the smooth functioning of the Madrassa and the mosque. All the functions and the ceremonies of the community and the families under the Mahallu are supervised by the Mahallu committee. The standard of the academic and administrative wellness of the mosque and the Madrassa depends upon the quality of the Mahallu committee. The quality of the teachers appointed for the Madrassas and the duties and responsibilities are decided by the Mahallu committee. Both the Mahallu committee and the teachers employed in the Madrassa must go hand in hand for the wellbeing of the region. The wellbeing of the Mahallu depends upon the quality and effectiveness of the Mahallu and the teaching faculty. But the Mahallu committees in Kerala are interested in developing the infrastructure for the religious rituals and education. They have accomplished in attaining the help of the NRI's and the foreigners to build the buildings and facilities for the Mahallu. But the psychological aspect of the people is always ignored by the authorities of the Mahallu committee. The students and the elders are attached to the Mahallu, Madrassa and the mosque only because of the implicit or explicit compulsion. The education from the Madrassa system never attached them to the religious stream as they never realized the benefits of clinging to the religious stream. The reflections of the benefits are not seen in the in the students who completed the secondary education under the Madrassa education system. The main failure is from the part of the teachers. The efficient teacher can direct and educate even the inefficient authorities of Mahallu committee to the correct path of the mental and social prosperity. The teachers

are not supposed to confine to the academic growth of the students in the Madrassa but also are expected to follow and direct the life of the students who completed the education from the Madrassas to ensure the spiritual and social prosperity of the students and the community. Moreover, Islam considers the teachers in the Madrassas not simply as the part of Madrassa education system but they are spiritually abreast to the religious mind of the community. The teachers are expected to take care of the overall development of the elders of the region who have gone astray from the religious environment. The responsibilities and the duties of the teachers in the Madrassas necessitates high quality and qualification with modern outlook and the ability to link the religious and mundane world there by leading the community to splendor and prosperity.

In the modern world the Madrassa education system is facing many challenges. Allegations are arising against the Madrassa as the power house of the jihadist movements and terrorism. The advancement of science and technology has evoked many developed crimes which are to be interpreted and discouraged by the religion. The growing fumes of communalism and extremism are marching towards the community to engulf it in the flames. So the responsibility of the religious education system is acquiring new manifestations and dimensions. Though the fruits of science and technology touched every nooks and corners of the mundane education the Madrassa education system is still following the traditional methods of reciting and by hearting the religious scriptures and rituals. Confining the religion to a bundle of mere religious scriptures and rituals will lead to the death of the religion with a group of believers who are unaware of the value and relevance of the religion. The passive attitude of the religious education system, which fails to analyze and interpret the problems and challenges of the community and the society, will make a group of sterile individuals puzzled at the problems of the society and numb towards the realization of the need of the hour. The community is at a pathetic condition that it never realize the fact that the religious scriptures itself encourage the analysis and solving of the problems of the community and the society for the betterment of the living conditions of the fellow beings. "The Islamic religious scriptures and other doctrines are not at all against promotion of 'need-based' education which will lead to better living standards for human being in general. However ... Madrassa system neglect the total picture of the present day 'need' and what the society expects from any education system. They project Madrassa as a nerve centre of religious devotion and discourse" [2].

Both the teachers and the Madrassa education syllabus are controlled by particular organizations in Kerala. Even the Mahallu is formed based on the organizational basis. The syllabus and curriculum is designed by the Muslims organizations to which the Madrassa and the mosque is affiliated to. Almost all the Madrassas are controlled by the organizations which fight each other for trivial reasons. The misinterpretations of the religious scriptures for the personal benefits of the clergy who control the organizations create confusion and chaos among the Muslims who have the same fundamental principles for living in this world. This difference in opinion creates problems between the organizations and it generates enmity and competition among the organizations. So they are only concerned about the number of Madrassas to their credit and they are striving to increase the number of Madrassas under their recognition. The problems among the

organizations influence the syllabus and curriculum of the Madrassas. The organizations are working hard to increase the number of followers who adhere to the ideologies of their own organization and they want to prove that they are the only true propagators of Islam. This idea is propagated through the syllabus and the curriculum which affects the children in the concerned Madrassas. The children develop enmity and intolerance towards other ideologies and beliefs as a result of the learning. Politics and organizational vengeance make the syllabus and curriculum to frame against the opponents. Though not of syllabus, the teachers are narrow minded and creates chaos and confusion among the students by generation enmity towards the opponent organization. The paradox is that the system which is aimed at the wellness of the students by teaching them the values for peaceful life like tolerance and amity creates chaos and enmity among the followers of the religion while "The Quran is full of recommendations and insights on how to relate peacefully through goodwill and tolerance" [3]. The traditional methods of teaching which is based on superstitions and ideas unfit for the social life are still encouraged in some of the Madrassa in Kerala. They are blind towards the development and transformations in the society and are unwilling to rejuvenate the syllabus according to the changes in the society.

The organizations are blind towards the reformation of the Madrassa classes and the syllabus based on the need of the hour. The modern teaching aids like the LCD projectors, computers never reach the vicinity of the classrooms in the Madrassas. Though smart classrooms conquer the schools and other educational institutions the Madrassa is aloof from this facility. The organizations which govern the Madrassas and form the syllabus are unaware of the absence of proper libraries in the Madrassas for the reference and updating of knowledge of both teachers and students. The linking of religious education with vast arena of information technology is a dream for almost all the Madrassas in Kerala. The Madrassas with internet facility will remain as a dream as long as the organizations and the authorities governing the Madrassas realize the value of modern teaching methods and aids. "...Madrassa education is to be modernized, so as to suit the present situation. Change of timings of Madrassa classes, modernization of syllabi, use of new study aids (such as CD, TV, Radio) are recommended to make Madrassa education more student friendly"[4].

So there is a growing need to rejuvenate the Madrassa education system to foster the quality of the students who are destined to reform both the community and the society. Though there are some glimpses of reform in Madrassa education by some organizations, majority is sticking to the traditional ways of teaching without judging themselves to make the new generation fit for the society and community. In the words of Yoginder Sikand: "They argue that the Madrassas in the past produced great Islamic scholars, so there is no need for any change even today" [5]. Unless the Muslim organizations and the authorities of community come forward for the reforms in the Madrassa education system, the community and society will face the problems created by the generation who is destabilized by the faulty system.

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