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The Transformation of Islamic Education in Malabar: From *Othupalli* to Primary Madrasa

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the transformation of primary Islamic education in Malabar, focusing on the evolution from the informal *Othupalli* system to the structured Primary Madrasa system during the twentieth century. This transformation was driven by socio-cultural shifts, political influences during colonial and postcolonial periods, and active community participation, which collectively ensured the preservation and modernization of Islamic education amid the rise of secular schooling. The continued use of Arabi-Malayalam highlights cultural adaptability in sustaining religious knowledge transmission. This study contributes a historically grounded, localized perspective to global scholarship on Islamic educational reform, emphasizing the interplay of linguistic innovation, community agency, and institutional modernization. It underscores the resilience of Malabar's Muslim community in negotiating educational preservation and reform. The findings call for ongoing reforms that integrate holistic Islamic values with contemporary pedagogical approaches to address current challenges and ensure the madrasa system's future relevance.

Keywords: *Othupalli*, Primary Madrasa, Islamic education, Transformation, Malabar

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Muslims of Malabar in the southern region of contemporary India, demonstrate unique characteristics in both historical and educational contexts when compared to their northern counterparts. Nevertheless, the social, political, and cultural heritage of Malabar has not been adequately addressed in the historical studies of contemporary academia (Basheer, 2016). The limited exploration of the historical transformation of traditional Islamic educational systems in Malabar underscores a significant gap in academic research that demands thorough investigation to uncover the nuanced evolution of pedagogical methods and curricular frameworks within these institutions, especially the shift from the informal *Othupalli* system to the structured Primary Madrasa system. By examining this transformation, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how socio-cultural, political, and community dynamics influenced educational reforms and how traditional practices adapted to modern demands. This focus not only enriches the historical narrative of Islamic education in Malabar but also offers valuable insights into the preservation and modernization of religious education in similar Muslim contexts worldwide (Atifnigar et al., 2025).

Interestingly, the history of Islamic education in Malabar reveals four primary educational systems. In medieval Malabar, two main systems were prevalent: *Othupalli* for primary education and Pallidars for higher education (KP & P, 2025). By the mid-twentieth century, these systems had evolved into what became known as Primary Madrasa and College, respectively. Among these, this study seeks to thoroughly examine the development of primary religious educational institutions, focusing on the medieval *Othupalli* and its transformation into the primary madrasa in the twentieth century.

Othupalli is the name given by Malabar Muslims to the traditional primary religious education system, which was called Kuttab in the Muslim world (Sayyid Abdurahman Alaidarusi Al Azhari, 1993). The primary religious education facility at the *Othupalli* is run in very informally arranged sheds under a single teacher, without a common curriculum or teaching methodology (Quansar & Muhammed, 2014). Without advanced classrooms or teaching aids, they learned by sitting on the floor, smearing soil on wooden boards, and writing with bamboo sticks dipped in ink. During the first half of 20th century, the informal *Othupalli* system gradually underwent significant reforms. Initially, this involved establishing dedicated buildings with basic facilities, leading to the emergence of primary madrasas or maktabas. Subsequently, these institutions evolved further, coming under the purview of separate Madrasa Boards, which were responsible for organizing the curriculum, textbooks, examinations, etc. The

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primary madrasas or maktabas, which Muslims in Malabar call madrasas, are the name given to the system that reformed the *Othupalli* and converted them into separate institutions.

This study looks at ‘how the informal *Othupalli* system changed into the structured Primary Madrasa system in twentieth-century Malabar?’. It explores how social, cultural, political, and community factors influenced this change. the study has four specific study questions: -

1. How did the infrastructural differences between the informal *Othupalli* system and the Primary Madrasa system influence the educational experience in Malabar?
2. In what ways did the pedagogical shift from oral, individualized teaching in *Othupalli* to standardized, curriculum-based instruction in Primary Madrasas affect student learning outcomes?
3. How did community involvement and the establishment of Madrasa Boards contribute to the modernization and quality assurance of Islamic primary education in Malabar?
4. What are the main contemporary challenges faced by Primary Madrasas in balancing traditional spiritual mentorship with modern educational demands, including scheduling conflicts and teacher training?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Regrettably, only a limited number of studies have specifically addressed the transformation of Islamic education, which boasts a heritage spanning over ten centuries. Among these, only a few are indexed in recognized academic databases, rendering a comprehensive literature review on the theme of this study. Nevertheless, it is feasible to conduct a focused review by examining relevant studies that broadly discuss aspects related to this transformation.

The study, ‘Indian Madrasas: Evolution and Growth with Special Reference to Kerala Model’ (Unais, 2021) offers a comprehensive historical overview of madrasah education in India, tracing its evolution from the 7th century to the present. It highlights the ‘golden age’ under Mughal rule, contrasts the educational reforms of Akbar with the traditionalism of Aurangzeb, and details the challenges posed by British colonialism. The paper’s key contribution is its detailed examination of the ‘Kerala Model,’ presenting it as a uniquely successful and systematic approach to modern Islamic education, driven by organizations like Samastha Kerala Jameyyathul Ulema. The study concludes that this model offers hope for the future of Islamic education across India.

The second work (Hassan J, 2018) investigates the need for modernizing Madrasa education in Southern Kerala, highlighting that the current system’s modernization is slow and fails to meet community challenges. The research, based on a survey of 65 students and 15 Imams, reveals dissatisfaction with the quality of education, with 33.84% of students and 20% of teachers finding it ‘not satisfactory’. The paper advocates for curriculum updates, integrating modern technologies like ICT, and providing adequate teacher training to enhance the teaching-learning process and improve educational quality.

An analytical review, ‘The Traditional Islamic Curriculum of Pallidars in Malabar: A Content Analysis of ‘Min Nawabigi Ulama’i Malaibar’ (KP & P, 2025) reveals a focused and valuable contribution to the historical study of Islamic education in South India. The paper’s primary strength lies in its novel approach of using a single, significant text—Sayyid Abdu-Rahman Al Azhari’s ‘Min Nawabigi Ulama’i Malaibar’—as a lens to uncover and analyze the historical curricula of the Pallidars system. This content analysis method allows the study to move beyond general histories of Islamic education in Malabar and delve into the specific structures and evolutions of its curriculum.

The work ‘Education, Modernity and Reform: The Malabar Case -1850-1950’ (Navath & Mueen, 2024) This study effectively chronicles the transformation of education in Malabar (1850-1950) as a cornerstone of social reform. It highlights how reformers across communities, from Sree Narayana Guru to Makti Tangal, championed Western education to dismantle traditional hierarchies. They saw English education not just as a tool for employment within the colonial system but as a liberating force against oppressive customs and a means for social mobility. The paper details the modernization of traditional schools and the push for female education, framing education as the primary catalyst for achieving cultural capital and social progress. Another study (Parakkallil, 2025) focuses on the early trade and cultural relations between Arabia and Kerala, the arrival and spread of Islam, the influence of Arab traders on Mappila culture, the roles of figures like Malik ibn Dinar and Cheraman Perumal, and the contributions of scholarly families such as the Makhdums, Qazis of Calicut, Ba Alavis, and Bukharis.

The present study distinguishes itself from the works mentioned in the Literature Review by focusing specifically on the localized transformation of primary Islamic education in Malabar from the informal *Othupalli* system to the structured Primary Madrasa system during the twentieth century. Unlike broader historical overviews or analyses of Islamic education in India or Kerala (e.g., Unais, 2021; Hassan, 2018), this study provides a detailed, historically grounded investigation into the socio-cultural, political, and community-driven factors that shaped this transformation in Malabar. It uniquely emphasizes the infrastructural,

pedagogical, and institutional changes, including the role of Arabi-Malayalam and Madrasa Boards, which are not the central focus of the other studies.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative research approach rooted in an indigenous theoretical framework, specifically designed to fit the historical and cultural context of Islamic education in Malabar. This methodology encompasses following key components: 1. *Criteria for Data Selection*, data were primarily gathered through extensive library research, utilizing both primary sources, such as manuscripts and secondary scholarly works. The selection focused on materials that offer historical insights into the transition from the informal *Othupalli* system to the structured Primary Madrasa system. 2. *Analysis Procedures*, data analysis was conducted through thematic examination, concentrating on historical developments in Islamic education in Malabar, pedagogical changes from informal to formalized teaching, community involvement in educational reforms, and linguistic adaptations, particularly the role of Arabi-Malayalam. This thematic approach facilitated an in-depth, context-sensitive exploration of structural, social, and educational dynamics. The analysis aimed to holistically understand how traditional Islamic education evolved while preserving cultural identity amid socio-political changes. 3. *Indigenous Approach*, the author's insider perspective, as a former student and part-time teacher in a primary madrasa, along with doctoral research experience, informed the choice of relevant data and enriched the contextual understanding. The interpretive process was enriched by combining personal experience with scholarly research, supporting a nuanced and credible analysis. The qualitative design, grounded in indigenous theory, ensured that findings are contextually relevant and culturally sensitive. The study's reliance on well-documented historical sources and recent academic works further supports the trustworthiness of the conclusions. This comprehensive qualitative methodology ensures that the findings are credible, contextually grounded, and reflective of both historical realities and contemporary educational transformations in Malabar's Islamic education system.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The transformation from the informal *Othupalli* system to the structured Primary Madrasa system in Malabar significantly influenced the educational experience by introducing infrastructural and pedagogical reforms. Unlike the basic and informal *Othupalli* settings that characterized by simple sheds, floor seating, and individualized oral teaching without a standardized curriculum, the Primary Madrasa system established dedicated buildings with classrooms, organized seating, and formal teaching schedules. This infrastructural shift enabled a more systematic and resource-equipped learning environment. Pedagogically, the transition involved moving from oral recitation and memorization under a single teacher to a standardized curriculum regulated by Madrasa Boards, incorporating subjects such as Qur'an, Tajweed, Arabic language, Hadith, and Islamic history. The introduction of formal examinations, teacher training, and certification processes enhanced the quality assurance and accountability of education, promoting improved student learning outcomes and aligning madrasa education with contemporary educational standards.

Community involvement and the establishment of Madrasa Boards played a pivotal role in modernizing Islamic primary education in Malabar. Local communities actively contributed land, funds, and infrastructure, while religious organizations provided academic leadership and quality control through curriculum development, textbook preparation, and examination administration. The boards, such as the Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidyabhyasa Board, ensured standardized instruction and organized teacher training programs, fostering a cohesive educational framework. However, contemporary challenges persist, including scheduling conflicts with formal schooling, increased dropout rates, and a perceived decline in spiritual mentorship due to the emphasis on formal classroom instruction and examinations. Addressing these challenges requires integrating holistic Islamic values with modern pedagogical techniques and enhancing collaboration between madrasas and formal schools to support students' dual commitments and sustain the madrasa system's relevance and effectiveness.

4.1 *Othupalli* and Madrasa of Malabar: An Introduction

The *Othupalli* and Madrasa represent the two principal systems of primary Islamic education in Malabar, South India, with the former being predominant prior to 20th century and the latter gaining prominence thereafter. The term '*Othupalli*' derives from the words '*othu*', meaning reading and studying, and '*palli*', which historically referred to religious centers. There are several types of *Othupalli*: 1. Those adjacent to a mosque's building 2. Those located near a mosque 3. Those situated in a separate building 4. Additionally, a system of home tuition was available for special students.

While the concept of the Madrasa among Malabar Muslims differs from the traditional academic institutions of the Muslim world, as it represents an updated version of the *Othupalli*, which provides foundational Islamic teachings in a systematic manner. In the broader academic context, the term 'madrasa' typically refers to a system of Islamic higher education, comparable to a college or university. To reconcile the distinct conceptions held by Malabar Muslims with those of the wider academic community, this study employs the term 'Primary Madrasa' to denote the primary religious education institutions that have evolved from the traditional *Othupalli*.

4.2 Historical Perspectives of Both Systems

Othupalli refers to the traditional Muslim educational system in Kerala, which historically served as a community-based religious learning centre. It functioned as centres for imparting Islamic teachings, focusing primarily on Quranic studies and religious instruction for children and youth. Although the precise period of *Othupalli*'s inception remains undocumented, the significant role of education in Islam likely contributed to the establishment of religious education, which probably coincided with the advent of Islam in the Malabar region.

The historical perspectives of *Othupalli* in Malabar reveal its origins as the traditional primary Islamic educational system, locally named by Malabar Muslims and analogous to the Kuttab found throughout the Muslim world. The historical linkages between the *Othupalli* educational system in Malabar, India, and the widespread Kuttab system in the medieval Muslim world are significant. Both systems were characterized by their single-teacher model and their focus on Quranic recitation and foundational Islamic teachings. These systems showed remarkable adaptability to local conditions, notably using Arabi-vernacular hybrid script that enhanced the comprehension of Arabic texts among local non-Arab Muslims. Despite their pivotal roles, both educational systems faced challenges in standardization, curriculum development, and quality assurance, primarily due to their decentralized structures and reliance on the expertise of individual educators (Idris, n.d.). Nonetheless, these systems were instrumental in the preservation and dissemination of Islamic knowledge and cultural traditions within their respective communities in medieval and pre-modern periods.

In contrast, the development of the primary madrasa education system, which emerged from the *Othupalli*, in Malabar was influenced by distinct socio-cultural and political dynamics in the 20th century. Socio-culturally, the decline in interest towards the traditional informal *Othupalli* system, partly due to the rise of secular modern education, created a pressing need for a structured religious education that could coexist with contemporary schooling. The transformation aimed to preserve Islamic teachings and identity amid rapid social changes and modernization pressures. Politically, government interventions during British colonial rule and after India's independence, including the banning of religious education in state-supported schools, necessitated alternative institutional frameworks to sustain Islamic education. Reformist Muslim leaders and organizations responded by creating formal madrasas with standardized curricula and organized administration, ensuring religious education remained accessible and relevant. Madras Boards, like the '*Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidyabhyasa Board*' institutionalized this system, promoting community cohesion and educational upliftment (Samastha.info, n.d.).

4.3 Set-up of *Othupalli* and Madrasa

The infrastructure of the traditional *Othupalli* system was very basic and informal. Most *Othupallis* were small huts or simple sheds located adjacent to or near mosques, or sometimes in separate buildings. Students typically sat on the floor during lessons and used wooden boards smeared with soil and bamboo sticks dipped in ink for writing (Mohammed, 2007). The facilities were minimal, often without dedicated furniture or formal learning environments, and the teacher operated independently without organizational support or standardized resources. These structures lacked advanced classrooms or teaching aids, reflecting the informal nature of the institution (Midlaj Ch, 2016).

In contrast, the madrasa system that evolved from the *Othupalli* experienced significant improvements in infrastructure. Primary madrasas were established in dedicated buildings with basic facilities designed to support a more formalized educational environment. These institutions incorporated classroom-based teaching, enabling organized seating and structured lessons. The modernization process included the development of institutional frameworks under madrasa boards, which facilitated the provision of standardized curricula and textbooks. It is reflecting a more developed and resource-equipped infrastructure compared to the earlier *Othupalli* system.

4.4 Pedagogical Aspects in *Othupalli* and Primary Madrasa

The teaching methods of *Othupalli* and madrasa systems in Malabar exhibit distinct characteristics reflecting their historical contexts and levels of formalization. Teaching Method in the *Othupalli* system was highly informal and individualized. Teaching was conducted by a single teacher in simple settings such as small huts or sheds near mosques (Thajudeen & Noushad 2014, p. 42). There was no standardized curriculum or formal teaching methodology. Education relied heavily on oral transmission, memorization, and recitation, particularly of the Qur'an. Students learned by sitting on the floor using wooden boards smeared with soil and bamboo sticks dipped in ink for writing (Mohammed, 2007). The instruction focused on Qur'anic recitation with tajwid Arabic alphabets, and basic Islamic beliefs and practices. Teaching was mostly dictation and repetition, with little emphasis on understanding the meaning of texts. There was no proper method of payment for the teachers, and the teacher had to manage his earnings from the little amount of fee given by students. The fee was paid in both cash and in-kind, such as rice or food items. When a student completed his study, the family arranged a special party for the teacher. In this party, they also voluntarily give some money, which comprises the main income of the teacher. Smart and talented students who completed their basic instruction in the *Othupalli* moved toward *Pallidars* for higher education. The system had no formal examinations or organizational oversight, and teaching quality depended largely on the individual teacher's qualifications and dedication.

Interestingly, the teaching method in the madrasa system introduced formalized and structured teaching methods. Classes were held in dedicated buildings with classroom settings, allowing organized seating and scheduled lessons. The madrasa curriculum was standardized under madrasa boards, incorporating Qur'an, Tajweed, Arabic language, Hadith, Fiqh, Islamic history, and moral teachings (Shafeeque, 2023). Teaching included regular examinations and inspections, with student promotion based on performance and certification upon completion. Classes were typically supplementary to national school education, held before or after regular school hours, encouraging students to attend both. The teaching methods became more systematic, with classroom discipline, standardized textbooks, and formal teacher training under organizational supervision. Salaries paid monthly by management committee from the religious donations and special fees from parents, that teachers can meet livelihood expenses in an extent. They are allowed to seek other earnings after two hours' madrasa classes. This comparison between two systems highlights the transition from an informal, teacher-dependent, oral-based method in *Othupalli* to a formal, curriculum-driven, and institutionally regulated teaching approach in the madrasa system.

4.5 Arabi-Malayalam as a Medium of Instruction

Arabi-Malayalam originated as a hybrid script combining the Arabic script with the Malayalam language, developed among the Muslim community of Malabar, Kerala, India (Kp & Khan, 2025). This script emerged through centuries of religious, cultural, and commercial interactions between Arab traders and the local Malayalam-speaking population (Kottaparamban, 2019). It facilitated communication and religious instruction by adapting the Arabic script to phonetically represent Malayalam sounds (Cheerangote, 2022). It includes distinctive graphemes for vowels and diphthongs, enabling it to serve as an effective medium for both religious and cultural texts (Jafar Paramboor, 2022). This adaptation allowed the community to maintain their linguistic identity while engaging with Islamic literature and culture, making Arabi-Malayalam a significant example of linguistic hybridization and cultural fusion (Ayyappan, 2024). Arabi-Malayalam works in both prose and poetry which encompassing not only literary compositions but also scientific, religious, philosophical, and historical texts (Government of Kerala, 2025). As a legacy of lost heritage, a lot of Arabi-Malayalam works still preserved in major libraries of the world (Kooria, 2023).

Arabi Malayalam played a significant role in Islamic education in Malabar, especially within the traditional *Othupalli* system. This adaptation was essential because several Arabic phonetic sounds do not have direct equivalents in Malayalam, making it difficult to transmit key religious terms like "Allah" and "Muhammad" correctly without distortion. In the *Othupalli* system, Arabi Malayalam served as the medium of instruction to teach Arabic alphabets and Quranic recitation effectively. It helped students learn the fundamentals of Islamic belief and practice by bridging the linguistic gap between Arabic and Malayalam, thus enhancing comprehension and memorization. The use of Arabi Malayalam was a distinctive feature that allowed the local Muslim population to engage with Islamic teachings in a culturally and linguistically accessible manner (Ilfa K. M. & S. A. Shanavas, 2023).

A significant feature of the modernized and transformed traditional Islamic education system is the continued use of the Arabi-Malayalam script by primary madrasas under traditional boards for the preparation of textbooks and examination papers. This practice aids students in achieving accurate pronunciation, thereby facilitating the natural acquisition of the Arabic language and preserving the heritage of the script's historical significance. This is accomplished by equipping students with proficiency in the Arabi-Malayalam script. However, some boards have entirely abandoned Arabi-Malayalam in favour of the modern Malayalam script, while others continue to leverage the advantages of Arabi-Malayalam. It is also observed that for higher-level classes and Arabic grammar instruction, some boards prepare materials in the Arabic medium. Some boards prepare texts in Tamil, Urdu for non-Malayalam students. Overall, however, Arabi-Malayalam has contributed to the preservation and transmission of Islamic knowledge in Malabar by enabling a clearer understanding and pronunciation of Arabic religious texts within both the informal and decentralized *Othupalli* education system and the modernized primary madrasa system to a considerable extent.

5. ROLE OF COMMUNITY AND PRIVATE MADRASA BOARDS

The Community members and private madrasa boards have been instrumental in transforming *Othupalli* from a single, teacher-centered system into a more comprehensive primary madrasa system with diverse participation. The community that faithfully believes religious education should be integral to religion, along with its leadership, holds a significant place in the history of Islamic education in Malabar. Since the early 20th century, madrasas have been evolving at various levels in Malabar, driven by renaissance initiatives and by revitalization process of *Othupalli*. Enthusiastic believers in each area have actively contributed land and basic facilities, including classroom construction, for these madrasas. The establishment of madrasas has been supported both financially and physically by voluntary contributions from people inspired by Islamic teachings through religious lecture series. In these constructed buildings, not only are essential learning materials and facilities provided, but local people also hire teachers and pay their salaries through the local madrasa management committee.

On the other hand, the primary service offered by Madrasa boards is to guide and train Madrasa teachers and oversee curricular activities. In Kerala, all primary madrasas are associated with various non-governmental religious boards. The most prominent and largest of these is the Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidyabhyasa Board (SKIMVB), which has over 10,000 affiliated madrasas. Other notable boards include the Samastha Kerala Sunni Vidyabhyasa Board (SKSVB), Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen

Vidyabhyasa Board (KNM), Majlis al Ta'lim al Islami Kerala (Majlis), Dakshina Kerala Islam Matha Vidyabhyasa Board (DKIMVB), and the Council for Islamic Education and Research (CIER).

The boards are responsible for planning, preparing, printing, and distributing textbooks for various subjects across all classes. They lead the entire process of conducting quarterly, half-yearly, and annual examinations in each class in a timely manner. Additionally, special public exams are held for certain classes, with special certificates and prizes awarded to those who complete that stage. Madrasa boards conduct special inspections and quality assurance in each madrasa by dispatching inspection teams. They have specific plans to enhance teaching and learning quality by regularly organizing special training programs for teachers. This effort contributes to improving teaching quality to some extent, depending on the level of training and the teachers' engagement. Another key program prioritized by madrasa boards is competitive programs to nurture students' natural talents. These programs are organized at the madrasa level and beyond, at district and state levels. In addition to this, the student festival of some madrasas, which spans several days in most madrasas during the month of Rabi'ul Awwal, is seen as an opportunity for both male and female students to gain numerous benefits.

In addition to these, role of scholars, like Chalilakath Kunjahammed Haji in modernizing Madrasa education is noteworthy (Parakkallil, 2025). Similarly, community leaders, remarkably, Sayyid Abdu Rahman Bafaqi also played significant role in popularizing the primary madrasa system in Malabar (Unais, 2021). In short, the active involvement and support of the local community in providing resources and infrastructure, combined with the academic leadership and quality assurance roles of madrasa boards, have collectively transformed and sustained a comprehensive, well-managed madrasa education system in Malabar (Zubair, 2006).

6. CHALLENGES AMIDST OF TRANSFORMATION

Despite the transformed, modern primary madrasa system having supplanted the *Othupalli* and contributing significantly to education, it currently faces several challenges in the 21st century. The foremost challenge pertains to aligning madrasa study hours with those of formal schooling. In Malabar, madrasas have structured their schedules two hours in morning or evening to avoid conflicts with government school hours. However, the inability of madrasas to consistently conduct two-hour classes raises concerns about the effectiveness of their curriculum in meeting educational objectives.

Another significant challenge is the dropout rate from primary madrasa, particularly in higher classes, as students prioritize their formal education. It is increasingly common for students in grades 9, 10, and higher secondary levels to discontinue madrasa studies in favour of schoolwork. Additionally, the dropout rate is exacerbated by the presence of private schools offering separate religious education curricula, which diminishes, as few argue, the spiritual benefits traditionally associated with local madrasas, where students learn alongside peers under the guidance of traditional teachers. Furthermore, there is a perceived spiritual devaluation as critics argue that the current madrasa education system is overly focused on classroom instruction, examinations, and certification, lacking the spiritual growth once fostered by the *Othupalli* system, where a single teacher provided holistic guidance. The purity of the teacher-student relationship is also perceived to be compromised due to the curriculum's emphasis on subject matter over spiritual mentorship. Lastly, the lack of expertise among some teachers in contemporary pedagogical methods poses a challenge to the effective functioning of madrasas.

To overcome these challenges, madrasa institutions must prioritize teacher training programs that incorporate contemporary pedagogical techniques alongside traditional Islamic scholarship. Additionally, fostering stronger collaboration between madrasas and formal schools could help create more flexible schedules that support students' dual educational commitments. Emphasizing spiritual mentorship within the curriculum will also be crucial to restoring the holistic teacher-student relationship characteristic of the earlier *Othupalli* system.

7. CONCLUSION

The transformation of Islamic education in Malabar from the informal *Othupalli* system to the structured Primary Madrasa system reflects a dynamic interplay of socio-cultural, political, and community forces throughout the twentieth century. This study has demonstrated how the evolution of infrastructure, pedagogy, and institutional frameworks—anchored by active community participation and the establishment of Madrasa Boards—has enabled the preservation and modernization of primary Islamic education. The continued use of the Arabi-Malayalam script underscores the cultural adaptability and linguistic innovation within this educational tradition, facilitating effective transmission of religious knowledge. However, despite these advancements, contemporary madrasas face significant challenges, including aligning with formal schooling schedules, managing dropout rates, and balancing traditional spiritual objectives with modern pedagogical demands. Addressing these challenges requires a renewed commitment to integrating holistic Islamic educational values with structured curricula and teacher training. Ultimately, this transformation exemplifies the resilience and adaptability of Malabar's Muslim community in sustaining religious education amid changing historical contexts, highlighting the need for ongoing reforms that honor both tradition and contemporary educational imperatives.

Further research could explore comparative analyses between the Primary Madrasa system in Malabar and similar transformations in other regions to contextualize local developments within broader Islamic educational trends. Investigating the long-term impacts of madrasa education on students' socio-economic mobility and identity formation would provide valuable insights into its contemporary relevance. Additionally, empirical studies focusing on the effectiveness of teacher training programs and curriculum integration strategies could inform policy and practice aimed at addressing current challenges. The role of digital technologies and modern pedagogical tools in enhancing madrasa education also warrants examination, as does the influence of gender dynamics on access and participation within these institutions. Such inquiries would deepen understanding of how Islamic education in Malabar can evolve to meet future educational and community needs while preserving its distinct heritage.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This study is conceptual in nature and analyses existing literature without conducting any data collection from respondents. The sources or references used in this study were obtained legitimately through academic databases, and no personal information from any party was used. Accordingly, this study also adheres to research and academic publication ethics, including honesty and proper acknowledgement of the original authors.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The author contributed to the writing of this article.

Statement of Interest

The author declare that he have no conflicts of interest.

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