



Tracing the Connections between *Othupalli* of Malabar and *Kuttab* of the Muslim World

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Abstract

Studies on tracing connections between traditional education systems across different parts of the medieval Muslim world not only contribute to our understanding of Islamic educational history but also provide insights into the development of cultural identity and transmission of religious knowledge in diverse Muslim communities. This study examines the historical connections between the *Othupalli* educational system in Malabar, India, and the broader *Kuttab* system of the medieval Muslim world, addressing a significant gap in the academic research. Using a qualitative approach based on a comprehensive literature review, this study provides a comparative analysis of the historical development, organizational structures, and educational methodologies of these systems. The study reveals significant parallels, including their setup as single-teacher institutions focused on Quranic recitation and basic Islamic teachings, while highlighting the *unique adaptations of the Othupalli system*, such as the use of Arabi-Malayalam. Notably, this study uncovers the overlooked role of women as educators in the *Othupalli* system. Both systems face challenges in standardization, curriculum development, and quality control. This comparative analysis contributes to our understanding of how Islamic educational traditions have been preserved and adapted across different cultural contexts. These findings have implications for understanding historical Islamic education practices and their potential relevance to contemporary educational challenges in Muslim societies.

Keywords: Islamic Learning, History, *Othupalli* of Malabar, *Kuttab* of the Muslim World.

Abstrak

Kajian mengenai penelusuran keterhubungan antara sistem pendidikan tradisional di berbagai wilayah dunia Muslim pada abad pertengahan tidak hanya berkontribusi pada pemahaman sejarah pendidikan Islam, tetapi juga memberikan wawasan mengenai perkembangan identitas budaya dan transmisi pengetahuan keagamaan di komunitas Muslim yang beragam. Penelitian ini menelaah keterhubungan historis antara sistem pendidikan *Othupalli* di Malabar, India, dan sistem *Kuttab* yang lebih luas di dunia Muslim pada abad pertengahan, guna mengisi kesenjangan signifikan dalam penelitian akademik. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis telaah literatur komprehensif, penelitian ini menyajikan analisis komparatif mengenai perkembangan historis, struktur organisasi, dan metodologi pendidikan dari kedua sistem tersebut. Penelitian ini mengungkap adanya kesamaan yang signifikan, termasuk bentuk lembaga satu guru yang berfokus pada pembacaan Al-Qur'an dan pengajaran dasar-

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dasar Islam, sekaligus menyoroti adaptasi unik dalam sistem Othupalli seperti penggunaan Arabi-Melayalam. Secara mencolok, penelitian ini juga menyingkap peran perempuan sebagai pendidik dalam sistem Othupalli yang selama ini terabaikan. Kedua sistem menghadapi tantangan dalam hal standardisasi, pengembangan kurikulum, dan kontrol kualitas. Analisis komparatif ini memperkaya pemahaman mengenai bagaimana tradisi pendidikan Islam dipertahankan dan diadaptasi di berbagai konteks budaya. Temuan ini memiliki implikasi untuk memahami praktik pendidikan Islam historis dan potensi relevansinya terhadap tantangan pendidikan kontemporer di masyarakat Muslim.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran Islam, Sejarah, Othupalli Malabar, Kuttab Dunia Muslim.

Introduction

Engaging with the history of traditional religious learning systems among different indigenous Muslim communities offers invaluable insights into their cultural identity and the transmission of spiritual and religious knowledge. Studying these systems provides a rich and multifaceted educational experience, encompassing how Muslim societies have been shaped by religious ideas and practices and how these have impacted social structures and ethical frameworks. Islam emphasizes the importance of education, particularly during early childhood, in preparing individuals for future challenges and outlines principles and methods that align with religious teachings.¹ Since the commencement of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) propagation, various initiatives for imparting knowledge have been introduced, considering the developmental stages of children and the youth.² This study aims to trace the connections between two such systems: the *Othupalli* of Malabar in southern India and the *Kuttab* of the broader Muslim world. Both emerged during the medieval period as primary centers for Islamic education, serving similar purposes in their respective regions to this day. The *Kuttab*, established across Asia and Africa during the Middle Ages,³ and the *Othupalli*, developed in Malabar, were instrumental in imparting basic religious teachings and training to Muslim children and youth.

The *Kuttab* system, which can be traced back to the first century Hijrah, spread widely in the wake of Arab-Islamic conquests.⁴ It played a crucial role in providing elementary education, including the memorization and recitation of the Qur'an, reading, writing, spelling, and basic religious duties. Similarly, the *Othupalli* served as an informal and classic-traditional model of education in Malabar, deeply rooted in maritime relations

¹ Muhammad Amirul Ramli, "Early Childhood Education in Islamic Perspective," *Bulletin of Early Childhood* 1, no. 1 (June 2022): 32–35, <https://doi.org/10.51278/bec.v1i1.416>; Nur Chanifah et al., "Designing a Spirituality-Based Islamic Education Framework for Young Muslim Generations: A Case Study from Two Indonesian Universities," *Higher Education Pedagogies* 6, no. 1 (January 2021): 195–211, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2021.1960879>.

² Dr. Md. Kamal Hossain, "An Analytical Overview of the Historical Development of Madrasah Education in the Medieval Muslim World," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* IX, no. IIIS (2025): 5582, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0406>.

³ Sudrajat Sudrajat, Muthoifin Muthoifin, and Sri Nurhayati, "Examining The Integration of Faith and Qur'an Curriculum in Kuttab Ibnu Abbas," *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan* 9, no. 3 (August 2024): 1931, <https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v9i3.2381>.

⁴ Fathurrahman Muhtar, "Comparative Study of Kuttab Islamic Education System and Madrasah Ibtidayah Education System," *SYAMIL: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education)* 9, no. 1 (June 2021): 7–11, <https://doi.org/10.21093/sy.v9i1.3019>; Elad Giladi, "'And Never the Twain Shall Meet'? The Western Other in the Saudi Novel and the Contrastive Construction of Saudi Identity," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 4 (August 2023): 905–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2022.2041400>.

with Arabs since the rise of the Madina state. This system of religious education, which was maintained in the same form in different parts of the medieval Muslim world, was a source of mutual social, cultural, and educational exchange between Muslims of that time.⁵

Regrettably, despite their historical significance, there is a huge gap in academic research regarding the key aspects of traditional educational systems of Muslims in various regions, particularly in studies on *Othupalli*. Currently, no academic studies have specifically addressed the historical development or societal impact of the *Othupalli* education system in the Malabar region. Available research focuses only on the broader themes of Islamic education, social development, and marginalized communities in Kerala but does not analyze the *Othupalli* system in depth. Previous studies, Shaffeeque PP,⁶ Unais,⁷ K. Mohammed Basheer,⁸ Sharafuddin K. V.,⁹ Dr. Thajudeen A.S., Noushad V.,¹⁰ who, among very few recent authors, had only presented the brief history of *Othupalli*. The relevance of the present study is that it attempts to provide a detailed account of *Othupalli* and identify similarities between *the Othupalli* of Malabar and the *Kuttab* of the Muslim World.

This study seeks to address this gap by providing a comparative analysis of the *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems, examining their historical development, organizational structures, and educational methodologies. By exploring the parallels and differences between these two similar systems, this study contributes to our understanding of how Islamic education traditions were preserved and adapted across different cultural contexts. The paper is structured as follows: First, it examines the historical context of both the *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems. Next, it compares their organizational setups, curriculum content, and teaching methods. It also explores the role of women in *Othupalli* educational systems, a topic that presents a significant area for further research. Finally, this study

⁵ Muhammad Ismail and Amdadul Haque Khan, "Historical Impact of Madrasah of Arab Countries on Indian Madrasah Education," *Journal Of Creative Writing (ISSN-2410-6259)* 5, no. 1 (June 2021): 57–58, <https://doi.org/10.70771/jocw.v5i1.49>; Rushain Abbasi, "Islam and the Invention of Religion: A Study of Medieval Muslim Discourses on Dīn," *Studia Islamica* 116, no. 1 (May 2021): 1–106, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19585705-12341437>; Jonas Kolb, "Muslim Diversity, Religious Formation and Islamic Religious Education. Everyday Practical Insights into Muslim Parents' Concepts of Religious Education in Austria," *British Journal of Religious Education* 45, no. 2 (April 2023): 172–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1911787>.

⁶ Shaffeeque P.P., "Madrasa Education and Its Contribution to Arabic Language and Culture in Kerala" (PhD, University of Calicut, 2023), <https://scholar.uoc.ac.in/server/api/core/bitstreams/fd2424f5-4179-4680-ac07-e0551193af76/content>.

⁷ Unais, "Indian Madrasahs: Evolution And Growth With Special Reference To Kerala Model," *Akademik Platform Islami Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5, no. 2 (August 2021): 188–217, <https://doi.org/10.52115/apjir.947587>.

⁸ K. Mohammed Basheer, *Quality Enhancement in Madrasa Education: An Exploratory Study* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

⁹ Sharafuddin K.V., "History of Religious Organisations and Ideological Conflicts among the Muslims of Malabar from 1921-1989" (University of Calicut, 2022), http://scholar.uoc.ac.in/bitstream/handle/20.500.12818/450/1553_Sharafuddin%20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

¹⁰ Dr. Thajudeen A.S. and Noushad V., *The Role of Arabic Colleges in the Development of Literature and Culture in South Kerala*, UGC XI Plan Grant-in-aid 7th Installment Pl.A/5466/UGC.XI.VII/Arabic/NRA/1 (University of Kerala, 2014), 170, https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=The+Role+of+Arabic+Colleges+in+the+Development+of+Literature+and+Culture+in+South+Kerala&btnG=

critically analyzes the strengths and limitations of these systems and discusses their legacy in modern Islamic education.

Research Method

This study utilized a qualitative literature review approach, categorized as library research, to investigate the connections between the *Othupalli* of Malabar and the *Kuttab* of the Muslim World. The methodology involved systematic data collection from academic databases, historical archives, and scholarly publications, including books, journal articles, and documents relevant to Islamic education. The literature was selected based on its relevance to the *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems, encompassing historical accounts, educational practices, and cultural contexts, considering both primary and secondary sources. A comparative analysis was employed to examine the similarities and differences between the two systems by identifying key themes and comparing organizational structures, teaching methods, and curricula. The findings were interpreted within the broader history of Islamic education and the specific cultural settings of Malabar and the wider Muslim world. The study acknowledges limitations, particularly in comparison with divergent *Kuttab* forms that prevailed in Asia and Africa and women leadership and the formation of hybrid languages due to the scarcity of prior academic studies on the subject; however, it opens new horizons to establish foundations for future research.

Results and Discussion

Othupalli of Malabar: An Introduction

Othupalli was an early setup of Islamic learning in medieval Malabar to impart the basic teachings of Islam to infants and teenagers. The term is a sum of ‘*Othu*’ (reading) and ‘*Palli*’ (place of worship). This type of institution was arranged outside a mosque or as an annex to the house of a *muallim* to teach the Arabic and Arabi-Malayalam script, the recitation of the holy Qur’an, and the basic tenets and rituals of the religion. It was found in almost all Muslim localities in the region. The teacher in *Othupalli* is called *Mullaka* or *Mulla* in the local dialect. The content of learning in *Othupalli* consisted primarily of the memorization of some important chapters from the holy Quran, religious hymns, the fundamentals of Islamic belief, and basic general education, such as Malayalam, basic mathematics, and the development of primary writing skills. There was no systematic teaching method used in the *Othupalli* system, but it had a significant role in instilling honesty, hard work, and love for the teachings of Islam among the students. Educational reforms of the 20th century have increasingly led to the decline of the system, replaced by the primary madrasa system or modernized *maktab*, and, at present, it has completely vanished through a gradual process.

Tracing Historical Connections between *Othupalli* and *Kuttab*

The *Kuttab*, an early Islamic educational institution, originated in the Arabian Peninsula during the Middle Ages. The term *Kuttab* is derived from the Arabic root ‘*kataba*’¹¹ (to write), It served as an informal center for primary education throughout the

¹¹ Sangkot Sirait et al., “Kuttab in Indonesia: Its Existence and Development during the Reform Era,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 1 (June 2023): 115, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no1.10>.

Muslim world. *Kuttab* and *Maktab* were two terms used to refer to elementary educational institutions. However, experts referred to *Kuttab* as the center of primary education of medieval traditional religious education, deeming it more appropriate than *Maktab*.¹² The *Othupalli* system in Malabar, while similar to the *Kuttab*, developed in response to the religious needs of the local Muslim community.¹³ Both systems emerged as natural extensions of Islam's emphasis on education. In Malabar, as Islam took root through maritime connections with Arabs, the need for structured religious education led to the establishment of the *Othupalli*. *Othupalli*, like the *Kuttab*, focused on imparting basic Islamic principles and practices to children and youth.¹⁴ The curriculum in both systems centered on Quranic recitation, basic religious duties, and elementary literacy. However, the *Othupalli* adapted to local needs, incorporating instruction in Arabi-Malayalam, a hybrid script that facilitated better understanding of Arabic texts among Malabar Muslims. Organizationally, both *Kuttab* and *Othupalli* were typically single-teacher institutions, often associated with mosques or set up in teachers' homes. The teacher, known as *Mu'allim* in Arabic contexts and *Mulla*, *Mullakka*, or *Musliyar* in Malabar. Despite their similarities, the *Othupalli* system in Malabar developed unique characteristics, such as the use of Arabi-Malayalam and specific local traditions, reflecting the cultural context of the region.

The evolution of these systems varied across regions. In some areas, like Iraq, the *Kuttab* persisted well into the mid-20th century, functioning similarly to first and second-grade schools.¹⁵ In Nigeria, a comparable system known as piazza schools emerged, managed by *mallams* (teachers). Indonesia developed the *pesantren* system,¹⁶ which shares similarities with Malaysia's *pondok* system but has maintained its relevance and popularity.¹⁷ Both *Kuttab* and *Othupalli* faced challenges in standardization and quality control, as the education provided was largely dependent on individual teachers' knowledge and capabilities. However, they played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting Islamic knowledge and maintaining cultural continuity in their respective communities. The historical development of these systems provides valuable insights into the evolution of Islamic education and its adaptation to diverse cultural contexts. Their legacy continues to influence contemporary Islamic educational practices and debates on religious instruction in Muslim communities. In short, the term *Othupalli* refers to the meaning of the Arabic word, *Kuttab*; the common word has been used for the institutions that provide elementary religious education all over the world. The famous Muslim writers like Taha Hussain and Ahmad Amin also used this term *Kuttab* in their literary works. It was an Islamic elementary school

¹² Muhtar, "Comparative Study of Kuttab Islamic Education System and Madrasah Ibtidayah Education System," 5.

¹³ Ibrahim Badhusha Parakkallil, "An Intellectual Legacy: Chalilakath Kunjahammed Haji's Role in Modernizing Madrasa Education," *Al-Fadlan: Journal of Islamic Education and Teaching* 3, no. 1 (May 2025): 129, <https://doi.org/10.61166/fadlan.v3i1.90>.

¹⁴ Sayyid Abdurahman Alaidarusi Al Azhari, *Min Nawabigi Ulama'i Malaibar*, 1st ed. (Dubai: Matabi al Bayan Atijariya, 1993), 1:7–15.

¹⁵ Muhammad Ismail and Amdadul Haque Khan, "Historical Impact of Madrasah of Arab Countries on Indian Madrasah Education," 57–58.

¹⁶ Nurdianto Nurdianto et al., "History of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Its Relevance to the Modern Era," *Edunesia : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 5, no. 2 (June 2024): 854, <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v5i2.886>.

¹⁷ Rosnani Hashim and Saheed Ahmad Rufai, "Traditional Islamic Education in Asia and Africa: A Comparative Study of Malaysia's Pondok, Indonesia's Pesantren and Nigeria's Traditional Madrasah," *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1, no. 2 (2011): 95–97.

frequently attached to a mosque or situated above a fountain where boys and girls are instructed Quran and the fundamental teachings of Islam. So, it can be said that *Othupalli* is the Mappila terminology for the *Kuttab* of Taha Hussain and Ahmad Amin.

1. Setup of *Othupalli* and *Kuttab*

The physical and organizational setup of *Othupalli* in Malabar and *Kuttab* in the broader Muslim world shared many similarities, reflecting their common purpose of providing elementary Islamic education. Both institutions were typically simple in their physical setup. *Kuttabs* were often located in teachers' houses or in simple structures near mosques.¹⁸ Similarly, *Othupalli* were usually established in *Mullakka*'s homes or in small huts set up outside mosques.¹⁹ The learning environment was undeveloped, with students often sitting on the floor or on simple wooden boards placed on stones. Generally, both *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* were characterized by a single-teacher system. In *Othupalli*, the educator was referred to as *Mulla*, *Mullakka*, or *Musliyar*, whereas in *Kuttab*, the term used was *Mu'allim*.²⁰ However, it is imperative to conduct comprehensive studies to identify the local dialectical variations of 'Muallim' within the distinctive framework of the *Kuttab* system in the remote regions of medieval Muslim communities in Asia and Africa.

These learning shelters lacked formal administrative structures or committees, with the teacher being responsible for all aspects of education and running. In the case of student composition, both systems were inclusive in terms of age and gender. In *Othupalli*, boys and girls, as well as adults and children, studied together. The *Kuttab* system similarly accommodated students of varying ages, with attendance being voluntary. The system did not have a formal fee structure; instead, small payments or donations, or food were handed over to the teacher. In addition to this, in *Othupalli*, teachers were honored with specific milestones of learners, like when a student completes their studies, the family arranges a special party for the teacher or student itself handover gifts to the teacher. At this party, they also gave some money and contributions of rice on special days. However, it also led to variations in educational quality and content of *Othupalli* and *Kuttab*, depending largely on the individual teacher's knowledge and capabilities.

2. Study Contents, Method of Learning, and Medium of Instruction

The curriculum and teaching methods in both the *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems were primarily focused on imparting basic Islamic knowledge and literacy skills. At the core of their curriculum was Quranic recitation, which formed the central focus of education. Students were taught to recite the Quran, often memorizing significant portions. Alongside this, fundamental principles of Islam, including prayers, fasting, zakat (almsgiving), and Hajj (pilgrimage), were taught. Arabic literacy was also a key

¹⁸ Qasmi, Muhammadullah Khalili. *Madrassa Education Its strength and Weakness*. New Delhi: mmerc, Mumbai, 2005.

¹⁹ Sajna T. A., "Unveiling Lives Of Women: A Critical Analysis Of Socio-Religious Reform Among Muslims In The 20th Century Kerala" (Phd, University Of Calicut, 2023), 54–56.

²⁰ Prof.U.Mohammed. *Educational Empowerment of Kerala Muslims*. Calicut: Other books, 2007., p.31

component, with students learning to read and write Arabic, starting from the alphabet and progressing to more complex sentence structures.

The teaching methods employed in these systems were predominantly oral. Teachers would recite lessons, and students were expected to memorize them. Writing practice was conducted using improvised tools. In *Kuttab*, for instance, students used dried bamboo pieces on wooden boards covered with soil. Despite often large class sizes, teachers strived to provide personalized attention to each student. Interestingly, the teaching materials of both systems were simple and locally sourced. In *Othupalli*, lessons were taught using wooden slate polished occasionally by white clay covered with soil, on which the teacher would write with the help of specially made pen and ink.²¹ More research is needed to establish potential connections or cultural exchanges that may have influenced similar teaching methods in *Othupalli* and *Kuttab*.

In the discussion of the Medium of Instruction, it's noteworthy to mention that the *Othupalli* system in Malabar had some unique elements that set it apart. One of the most significant was the use of Arabi-Malayalam, a hybrid script developed to help Malabar Muslims better understand Arabic texts and pronounce Arabic words clearly.²² This adaptation was necessary because many sounds in Arabic had no corresponding phonetic equivalent in Malayalam. The adaptation of teaching methods to local needs, such as the use of Arabi-Malayalam in *Othupalli*, demonstrates how these educational systems evolved to meet the specific cultural contexts in which they operated. This type of hybrid scripts and languages allowed for the effective transmission of Islamic knowledge in medieval world. A detailed study may need to identify other hybrid languages used in the *Kuttab* of Muslims, which is one of the limitations of this study and a clue for further research as well. The curriculum also incorporated local literature, particularly Arabi-Malayalam literature, including hymns. These songs covered a wide range of themes, from hymns and martial songs to moral lessons and historical events, enriching the cultural aspect of education. In the *Othupalli* system, student progress was marked by the completion of specific Surahs, such as Al-Fatiha, Al Al-Yaseen, and Al-Mulk.

In *Othupalli*, teachers observed strict discipline and could be harsh in special circumstances. Duration of study in both systems was flexible, often lasting several years. The curriculum focused primarily on Quranic recitation, basic literacy, and fundamental Islamic teachings. Despite their importance in preserving and transmitting Islamic knowledge and culture, both the *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems had limitations. They lacked a common syllabus or general curriculum. Evaluation in these systems was not standardized. The quality of education and teaching methods were largely dependent on the qualification, encouragement, and honesty of each teacher as discussed above.

3. Role of Women

²¹ U. Mohammed, *Educational Empowerment of Kerala Muslims: A Socio-Historical Perspective* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 2007), 32.

²² Mahmood Kooria, "Arabi-Malayalam Texts at the British Library: Themes, Genres, and Production," *International Journal of Islam in Asia* 3, nos. 1–2 (September 2023): 105–6, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25899996-20230014>.

The role of women in *Othupalli* systems provides an interesting insight into gender dynamics in Islamic education during different historical periods and across various regions. In Malabar, women played a significant role as educators in *Othupallis*. These female teachers, known as *Mollachi*, were respected figures in various parts of Malabar, including Manjeri, Tirur, Ponnani, Kannur, Thalassery, and Valapattanam.²³ Alappuzha Pulikkal Rukyabeevi, Ambalapuzha Kacherimukkil Fathimabeevi, Veliyamkot TK Fathima, Parappanangadi Usthad, Nabeesa, Ayisha, Fathima, Kunjamina of Ponnani, Koottilangadi Biyyunni, Mollachi, Patterkadav Srambikkal Fathima, and other women, remarkably led the system.²⁴ The absence of serious academic research on the significant roles played by these women educators in the traditional religious education of the region offers an opportunity for further study on the participation of Muslim women in socio-religious life in medieval Malabar. Similarly, the evolving role of women in Islamic education in different *Kuttabs* in the Muslim world remains an important area for further research and understanding.

4. Decline Of *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* and Emergence of New Educational Paradigms

The decline of *the Othupalli* in Malabar and *the Kuttab* in the broader Muslim world, along with their evolution into new forms, represents a significant shift in Islamic education systems. This transformation was driven by various factors, resulting in the emergence of new educational paradigms. Several challenges have precipitated the decline of the traditional *Kuttab* and *Othupalli* systems. The emergence of modern educational paradigms and the pressures of secular education necessitated a shift towards more comprehensive models, such as schools and madrasas. Government policies also played a critical role; for instance, a ban on religious instruction in state-supported schools in Kerala in 1947 directly impacted the *Othupalli* system, requiring a reevaluation of religious education delivery.²⁵ Similarly, traditional *Kuttab* pedagogy faced criticism for its rigid, rote-learning methods, a lack of emphasis on critical thinking and creativity, and deficiencies in professionalism and intellectual values, as highlighted in literary critiques.²⁶ The secularization and modernization trend in many Muslim countries led to the replacement of traditional religious teachers with secularly trained educators in Qur'anic schools. Colonialism, particularly French influence in the Maghreb, further marginalized the *Kuttab* by creating a bifurcated education system into modern and traditional sectors.

In response to these pressures, the *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems have been altered into modern primary institutions either as primary madrasa (modernized maktab) under private management²⁷ or primary public school under government. Similarly, in

²³ Sajna T. A., "Unveiling Lives Of Women: A Critical Analysis Of Socio-Religious Reform Among Muslims In The 20th Century Kerala," 58–59.

²⁴ Dr. Ajmal Mueen MA, "Educating The Marginalized Muslim Girls; The Kerala Experience," *Kanpur Philosophers* 8, no. 2 (2021): 546.

²⁵ Zubair K, "Development and Modernisation of Religious Education in Kerala: Role of Samastha Kerala Jam'eyyat Ul-Ulama" (MPhil, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2006), 54–59.

²⁶ Idris, As. Rakhmad, "Kuttab Educational Perspective in Taha Husayn's Novel Al-Ayyam and Syajarat Al-Bu's," *ICOGEN*, 2022, 530–34.

²⁷ Unais Koduvayakkal, "Indian Madrasahs: Evolution And Growth With Special Reference To Kerala Model," *Akademik Platform Islami Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5, no. 2 (August 2021): 231, <https://doi.org/10.52115/apjir.947587>.

the same era, significant changes happened in traditional *kuttabs* as many Muslim countries evolved into modernised *maktabs* and the primary madrasa system of education.²⁸ This modernization, while ensuring relevance, also altered their traditional status. In some areas, local rulers exemplified this integration by introducing subjects like natural sciences, mathematics, and geography into their curriculum, adopting a more comprehensive educational approach within an Islamic framework. Religious leaders also initiated reforms, establishing madrasas with revised curricula, syllabuses, and textbooks to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of Islamic education in contemporary times.²⁹ Recent studies on re-emergence of the *Kuttab* such as ‘*Kuttab* in Indonesia: Its Existence and Development during the Reform Era’,³⁰ ‘Analysis of *Kuttab* School Curricula Using the CIPP Framework: A Social and Environmental Management Perspective’,³¹ ‘The Evolution of Islamic Educational Institutions in North Sumatra Indonesia’,³² ‘The Role of *Kuttab* in Indonesia as an Agent of Religious Values Socialization from a Structural Functional Perspective’,³³ etc. highlight the adaptation of traditional *Kuttab* practices to contemporary educational needs, emphasizing the integration of religious values with modern pedagogical approaches and curriculum development.

Conclusion

This study examined the historical connections between the *Othupalli* educational system in Malabar, India, and the broader *Kuttab* system prevalent in the medieval Muslim world. By analyzing the parallels between *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems across different cultural contexts, this research contributes to understanding the historical development and preservation of Islamic education traditions, while acknowledging their limitations in curriculum and pedagogy. The study revealed several key findings. Both the *Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems shared fundamental structural similarities, including their setup as single-teacher institutions and focus on Quranic recitation and basic Islamic teachings. The *Othupalli* system demonstrated significant adaptability to local contexts, particularly with Arabi-Malayalam, a hybrid script that facilitated better understanding of Arabic texts among Malabar Muslims. Notably, women played a significant role as educators in the *Othupalli* system, a fact that has been largely overlooked in previous research. Despite their importance, both systems faced challenges in terms of standardization, curriculum

²⁸ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, “Classical and Contemporary Approaches to Education: An Islamic Perspective,” *ICR Journal* 2, no. 3 (April 2011): 460, <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v2i3.625>.

²⁹ Mohammad Hafeez, “Towards the Development of Education System among the Muslims in Kerala: An Assessment,” *Islam and Muslim Societies*, 2015, 20–21.

³⁰ Desti Widiani et al., “Kuttab in Indonesia: Its Existence and Development during the Reform Era,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 1 (June 2023): 115–28, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no1.10>.

³¹ Jiyanto et al., “Analysis of Kuttab School Curricula Using the Cipp Framework: A Social and Environmental Management Perspective,” *Journal of Lifestyle and SDGs Review* 4, no. 3 (September 2024): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.47172/2965-730X.SDGsReview.v4.n03.pe02380>.

³² Solihah Titin Sumanti, Nunzairina Nunzairina, and Salminawati Salminawati, “The Evolution of Islamic Educational Institutions in North Sumatra Indonesia,” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (February 2024): 11, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i1.4419>.

³³ Fauziah Sri Wahyuni and Sucianingsih Sucianingsih, “The Role of Kuttab in Indonesia as an Agent of Religious Values Socialization from a Structural Functional Perspective,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi Dan Humaniora* 15, no. 2 (October 2024): 526–35, <https://doi.org/10.26418/j-psh.v15i2.84994>.

development, and quality control, largely due to their decentralized nature and dependence on individual teachers' capabilities. Nevertheless, these systems played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting Islamic knowledge and cultural practices in their respective communities. This study is limited by the availability and reliability of historical sources, as references to *Othupalli* in Malabar and *Kuttab* in the wider Muslim world are often fragmented or region-specific. The research relies largely on secondary sources and comparative historical analysis, which may not fully capture local variations or undocumented practices. Additionally, linguistic differences and the scarcity of contemporaneous records may constrain the depth of analysis regarding direct institutional connections between the two educational traditions.

This study opens several avenues for further research. A broader comparison with other traditional religious learning systems in the Muslim world would deepen the analysis. Including more explicit references to additional systems and methodologies would further enhance this discussion. More in-depth research is needed on the involvement and leadership of women in establishing and managing religious learning centers in the medieval period in Malabar and the broader Muslim world. Future studies should explore the long-term effects of these educational systems on literacy rates, social mobility, and cultural development in their respective societies. Research on how these traditional systems transitioned or adapted to modern educational practices can provide valuable insights into the evolution of Islamic education. Further investigation into the effects of using hybrid scripts such as Arabi-Malayalam on the linguistic and cultural development of Muslim communities could yield interesting findings. Additionally, a more detailed analysis of teaching methods and their effectiveness in these systems could contribute to our understanding of historical pedagogical approaches in religious education. In conclusion, while this study sheds light on the historical connections between *the Othupalli* and *Kuttab* systems, it also highlights the need for more comprehensive research in this field. Such research would not only contribute to our understanding of Islamic educational history but also provide insights into the development of cultural identity and religious knowledge transmission in diverse Muslim communities.

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