

INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN KERALA: THE PIONEERING ROLE OF SAYYED ISMAIL SHIHABUDDIN POOKKOYA THANGAL OF PANOOR (1936-2010)

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Abstract This paper aims at analysing the concept of integrated education and its implementation by Sayyed Ismail Shihabuddin Pookkoya Thangal of Panoor (d. 2010) in Kerala, India. The scholar ardently advocated the importance of integrated education. He established educational institutions and spearheaded them till the end of his life. He believed that integrated education is instrumental in fulfilling the duties of a Mu'min (true believer) in this world, i.e., *Khilāfah* (vicegerency), *'ubūdiyyah* (servitude) and *amānah* (trust). Furthermore, he believed that Islam is misunderstood and misrepresented in the modern world for a variety of causes, which could only be addressed via good da'wah activities filled with al-ikmah (wisdom). These works can only be done after Muslims have a thorough understanding of both Islamic and human sciences. This paper uses textual analysis of Sayyed Ismail's relevant literature, followed by a discussion of its social implications. This paper found that Sayyed Ismail could be regarded among the first in Kerala who put forth the idea of education that integrates the Islamic sciences (Naqli knowledge) and the rational sciences (Aqli knowledge) with an aim to produce Muslims who can efficiently deal with the needs and challenges of the modern world.

Keywords: Education, integrated, Islamic sciences, rational science, Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the countries with the oldest civilisation in the world. It is full of diverse traditions, beliefs, arts and cultures. Islam was spread among the locals by many Islamic scholars who came with traders and merchants. Arab traders who came to Malabar for trade purposes introduced Islam to India as early as the 7th century (Salim Shana, 2017). Kerala is situated on the west coast of India. The people of Kerala believe that Islam has arrived at Kerala since the time of the companions (ṣaḥābah) of the Prophet (PBUH). Prophet's Companion Malik Dinar is believed to have built the first mosque in India, the Cheraman Mosque in Kerala, in 629 A.D (Haseena, 2015). India is known to be the centre of Hinduism, but Islam has become the second-largest religion in India on the 2011 census (Setiawan, 2018).

The peak of Islamic success in India began during the Mughal Empire. The Mughal Empire was a kingdom that once ruled the Indian subcontinent during the pre-modern era, approximately from the 16th to 18th centuries A.D. (Roslan & Zulfadzlee, 2017). However, after the end of the Mughal Empire, India was put under British rule. In the early stages of British colonisation in India, the progress of western civilisation had begun to be felt by the people of India, whether they are Hindus or Muslims. Among the factors of the fall of the Mughal Empire was the increasing expansion of British colonialism in India (Amin, 2018). Thus, in such a depressed condition, the Muslims in India began to realise their backwardness and weakness. This situation prompted Islamic scholars to find solutions to overcome the problem. One of the most influential scholars and figures among Muslims in India was Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898). He is known for his contributions to Islam, especially in education, to redevelop the Muslim community in India. Other than that, many other local Islamic scholars contributed immensely to the Muslim world, primarily to the Muslim community in India.

Many Muslim scholars contributed to the process. Sayyed Ismail Shihabuddin Pookkoya Thangal of Panoor (d. 2010) is among the latest examples who contributed to the betterment of the Muslim community. He has committed significantly to the Muslim community in Kerala, India.

His contributions focus not only on the needs of the Muslim community in Kerala but also on the entire world. However, despite such magnitude of contributions he has made to the community, he is still less known in Kerala, including among the Muslims themselves.

This article will look into the life of Sayyed Ismail before going into the discussion on his contribution to integrated education in Kerala. Several important works of Sayyed Ismail related to his educational endeavour will be elaborated accordingly. Finally, a survey of educational institutions established by him in an effort to introduce integrated education to the local community will complete the entire mission of reforming the mind and life of the Muslim communities.

BIOGRAPHY OF SAYYED ISMAIL

Sayyed Ismail Shihabuddin Pookkoya Thangal of Panoor, locally known as Panoor Thangal, was a recent Muslim scholar from Kerala, India. He was born in January 1936 A.D. at Karota in Manjeshwar, formerly belonging to the South Kanara district (Kurup, 2012). He passed away at 74 years old on Monday of May 2010 A.D. (Al-Wafi, 2018). He is the son of Sayyed Hussain Koyamma Thangal and Fatima Kunju Beevi. He was a Sufi who spent many nights in a burial pit excavated by his grandfather at his home. Kunju Beevi, his wife, was from Talankara in Chemmanad, the daughter of Antunhi and Sainabi. She gave birth to a daughter, Panjunhi or Fathima, and returned to her father's household after her husband died. In this condition, Hussain Koyamma Thangal married her and became her second husband (Kurup, 2012). Sayyed Ismail was raised by his maternal uncle after his mother died.

He learnt at various Darses at Kasargod from scholars such as Abdurahman Musliar, Shamsul Ulama and Ullal Thangal. Then, in 1957 till 1959, he studied at Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband where he had several opportunities to meet Arab students and debate with senior experts. He excelled in Arabic, Urdu and English languages. After taking his degree, he returned to Malabar and started a Dars at Parakkadav, his first teaching stage from 1959 to 1962. Sayyed Ismail married Shareefa Beevi, the daughter of

S.M. Pookkoya Thangal of Thangal Pedika in 1961. Then, he devoted his life to spreading knowledge and became a teacher in Palli Dars in various regions, including Elatur, Payyoli, Parkand and Talipparamba (Kunnakkadan et al., 2020). He continued his services at Ummathur Islamic College and started Sakhafatul Islam Arabic College, where he worked as a college principal. As he had a long-held dream of integrating religious education with contemporary education, it was realised here (Kurup, 2012). After his service in Ummatur Islamic College, he continued his services in the multiple cities of Kerala. Long years of experience in education propelled him for establishing a college for integrated education which came true through Jamia al-Zahra.

THE MAIN WORKS OF SAYYED ISMAIL

Sayyed Ismail wrote books in Arabic and some of them got appreciation from Arab scholars. According to Farooq (2015), universities and colleges outside and within India have designated Sayyed Ismail's works as part of their curriculum. They are in diverse areas and distinguished by their great style, distinct phrases, integrated words and exquisite elegance. Although he was not an Arab by birth or background, he became educated and cultured in the Arabic language due to his hard work and devotion to knowledge. It can be observed that he genuinely loved the Arabic language until his intellectual life became oriented to Arab-Islamic culture in all of its regions, as evidenced by his biography. He left no sign of his academic work unless the reader thinks that it is the work of an Arab writer rather than a foreigner (Farooq, 2015). This standard is due to the high proficiency in Arabic.

Many Muslims scholars who want to create a scientific and cultural renaissance chose the Arabic language as their preferred language. Sayyed Ismail goes into the tafsir, hadith, aqidah, tarikh and akhlaq with profound awareness and knowledge. He writes in his works with eloquence, serves for it and seeks to promote it in order to propagate the Qur'anic language. It is also the language of the Prophet of Islam, the language of the people of Paradise and the language of Muslim culture internationally.

By writing in Arabic, he wanted to communicate and reach out as many people as possible. Among his works are *Adāb al-Muslim fī Manhaj al-Islām*, *Ṣafwat al-Kalām fī ‘Aqibat al-Islām*, *Al-Mantiq fī Sharah al-Tahdhīb*, *al-Kalām fī sharah ‘Aqāid al-Nasafiyya*, *Nukhbtum fī Tārīkh al-Islām*, *al-Nibras fī Maslak al-Fiqh al-Shāfi’*, *al-Madārij fī Tārīkh al-Ghayat wal-Taqrīb* in Arabic, as well *al-Tahaddiyat* and *al-Inhirafath*” in the local language Malayalam (Kunnakkadan et al., 2020). Some of those works are taught in the syllabus for Zahra Islamic Studies college, the educational institution built by him. His most prominent work is *‘Alā Hāmishi al-Taḥāsīr: Ta’līqatun ‘Ala Taḥsīr al-Jalalayn*. His commentary was the first Qur’anic commentary in Arabic completed by a Keralite scholar. This commentary is based chiefly on 18 commentaries and arranged in seven volumes. It took nine years (1998-2007) to complete this work. For preparing this commentary, he has conducted a thorough analysis of several other commentaries like *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, *Al-Asāsu fī Tafsīr and Jāmi’ al-Bayān*. However, his work revolves around *Tafsīr al-Jalalain*. This choice is because he found that work to be more comprehensive and critical. He wished to provide a new dimension to morals and ethics in modern society. This publication has been used as a reference work for theological studies by several universities in the Gulf region, including Qatar University (Kurup, 2012). Without a doubt, all of these works demonstrate Sayyed Ismail’s expertise in Islamic studies.

THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRATED EDUCATION

The idea of integration in teaching and learning refers to combining the best, most engaging, suitable and practical techniques to ensure the success of the educational process. The integration of knowledge also refers to the synthesis between the knowledge of revelation and the knowledge of the intellect. A good education can encourage people to submit to Allah’s commands and prohibitions. In Islam, upgrading education must begin with an awareness of the comprehensive concept of knowledge based on the strength of faith (Ismail & Radiman, 2015).

We can see the role of Sayyed Ismail in making education more developed and his effort to integrate education in Kerala particularly. As previously stated, Sayyed Ismail was a Mudarris who taught in several *dars* of Malabar. When he started his career as a teacher in various centres of *dars* and *madrassa*, he envisioned an educational system that combined religious and modern worldly subjects for a life to be lived in this world (Kurup, 2012). He recognised that education brings men closer to the Creator. Producing a holistic personality was his ultimate ambition and goal in delivering education to the community. However, he found that *dars* alone will not achieve these proclaimed goals of life. He desired a more significant thing, i.e., to run an educational complex where religious and worldly education were harmoniously and adequately integrated. He was sincere, and his tireless efforts resulted in significant changes in the field of education. He brought together the better aspects of material and spiritual elements to education (Kurup, 2012).

Sayyed Ismail realized that his community can be lagging far behind in walks of life if they were not revitalized with knowledge and exposure to the world of science together. For that, from the initial stages of his teaching life, he planned for an educational revolution. A revolution which will equip the community to keep abreast of latest technological innovation and utilize them for the welfare of the humanity. But he insisted that the core element in the education is the mastery of Islamic science. These thoughts led him to introduce integrated education in Kerala (Farooq, 2015).

In an interview, Sayyed explained his motives behind the initiatives for integrated education. He was upset of thinking the backwardness of Muslim community and their stagnant life in 1960's. He apprehended that it was because of their incapacities in and carelessness towards the material or modern education. He was also worried that Muslims will later follow the belief systems and ideologies which conflict with Islamic principles, then they will acculture with the Western culture and ideas. As a result, Muslims will be divided into two: (1) people of religious knowledge and (2) people of modern education. It is dangerous because religiously educated people will not be able to comprehend the current world and face the contemporary challenges, whereas the second group will not give any

care for the religion but they will end up as opponents of religion, thinking that religion is holding them back in going forward to the developments. While he was occupied with these thoughts, an article was published in the *Journal of Muslim Educational Society* in which its leader argued for the review of the Quran according to the needs of modern time as Jews and Christians could make progress only when they renewed their divine texts (Farooq, 2015). Seeing this kind of arguments, he realized the urgency of integrated education. Failure to understand the meanings of the Quran and inability to appreciate its everlasting relevance led people to think against the Quran itself. This issue can be solved by a group of scholars who have mastery simultaneously in both religious sciences and modern education.

Sayyed Ismail has elaborated his approach to various important religious and social issues, including education during the early years of the 1960's. He said that those who only study religion is unable to solve or respond to challenges in life. Those who had studied a worldly or modern education were unable to consider *deen* or religion as a way of life. In the long run, Islamic society in India will be facing a crisis as in other countries (Kurup, 2012; Rahmani, 2018). Accordingly, he has developed several educational institutions in Kerala. The educational institutions that he has developed have the concept of integration whose syllabus not only focuses on religious areas but also promises to transform young people into real architects of modern India. He had a desire to combine religious education with modern education (Rahmani, 2018). Moreover, his commentary uses modern Arabic, making it easier for the reader to understand its contents and convey them. His work discusses the law or religious matters, but he also includes scientific things contemporary matters.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN KERALA

Muslims in Kerala have made significant efforts in the realm of education since being positioned under the rule of the British Empire. However, Islamic education in India has had challenges since it is deemed a minority and is underfunded by the authorities. However, in the spirit of this Muslim minority, some have advocated for Islamic education reform in India. According to Setiawan (2018), the fact is that Islamic education in

India, such as *madrassa* (Islamic religious school), has been integrated with the modern curriculum so that many students study there. Although it is known as *madrassa*, people in the area see it as an attractive regular school. Muslims in India at that time had started to build hundreds of schools and many Islamic-based universities.

Many Muslim figures from India are trying to improve education in India, such as Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan. Sayyed Ismail is also one of the contemporary Muslim scholars from India who has the ability and mastery of religious and modern sciences. His extensive experience studying in *dars* in most places in Kerala has made him establish his integrated educational institution. He has experience as a Mudris (teacher) and had the opportunity to teach in several *dars*, namely in Purakkatteri of Elathur, Vambenad near Chawakkad, Payyoli, Olavattur and Karuvan Thuruthi (Kurup, 2012). After his experience in *dars*, he decided to go on to pursue higher education. After completing his degree (1957-1959), he returned to Kerala and taught again at *dars* at Parakkadav, next at Omachapuzha. In 1968, Sayyed Ismail started a *Dars* in Ummathur near Parakkadav. It continued until 1971, and he initiated starting Sakhafatul Islam Arabic College as a Principal. However, it was discontinued for some reasons. Later, after leaving Ummathur, he established al-Madrasah Zahrah Islamic Arts and Science College. The college was eventually known as Jamia Zahra until today.

Jamia Zahra is an educational institution formed in 1975 and has since evolved into a prominent centre of learning. The ultimate goal of this institution is to uphold the rich legacy of the glorious past with its cultural heritage by teaching pure, spiritual knowledge completely committed to overall social development. According to Rahmani (2018), it is worth noting that between 1960 and 1970, Muslims were highly opposed to modern education, labelling it anti-Muslim due to its excessive western influence. In such conditions, the innovative leadership of Sayyed Ismail, who had a clear vision of life and a tremendous purpose to fulfil, came to the rescue of the Muslim community from the clutches of ignorance and superstitions. Apart from that, women education suffers significantly because of several reasons. More facilities for women's education, including a distinct institution, may be available to the urban population. However, rural areas where many girls

live have no facilities for boarding and lodging due to acute poverty. As a result, institutions must be made more accessible to them (Kurup, 2012).

The educational institution, Jamia Zahra, has taken on a bigger mission of improving their country's educationally backward areas by establishing an environment conducive to study further, therefore transforming their potential youth into nation-building mission (Rahmani, 2018). Jamia Zahra has now completed 48 years of dedicated service, enhancing Kerala's Muslim community's educational and cultural life in particular. Sayyed Ismail's efforts in reforming the local people's educational needs in Kerala have resulted in significant improvements in the area of education. He established a team of well-equipped Muslim scholars who are utterly responsive to changes in their social and cultural lives. It was a subtle move that influenced their society to adopt and adapt to modern education to keep up with the changing needs of modern life while maintaining its ideological and spiritual foundation. Jamia Zahra educates people from preschool to postgraduate levels through a variety of institutions. Among the Jamia Zahra institutes were Zahra College of Islamic Sciences, Zahra High School and Higher Secondary School, Zahra Public School (CBSE), Zahra Central School, Thooneri (CBSE), Muhyaddin Juma Masjid, Zahra Boarding Madrasa, Zahra Arabic College, Zahra Hifsul Quran College, Zahra Arts and Science College which is for women (Rahmani, 2018). The list of his institutions would highlight the efforts he made in his achievement as an organiser and builder to provide a place for the public to seek knowledge, notably the community in Kerala. It shows the importance of education for all groups.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, efforts made by Sayyed Ismail in bringing the integrated form of education to the local people in Kerala is a continuation of the struggle of many contemporary Muslim scholars in the world. The establishment of various educational institutions under the umbrella of Jamia Zahra is a manifestation of his belief that only education can uplift the life of the people, Muslims and non-Muslims. Despite being little known to the people in India and other parts of the Muslim world, his contributions are worth being brought to public knowledge.

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