

## **Pu -Islam Education in Elementary Schools in Malabar: A History and Analysis**

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*The education of Muslims in the Madras Presidency was initially neglected under British rule. However, the government later took steps to improve the situation, such as providing special grants to schools for Mappilas and appointing dedicated inspectors for Muslim schools. Despite these efforts, a 1902-1907 report found that Muslims continued to underperform in education due to several factors, including poverty, lack of interest, and differing educational goals. To address these challenges, the government implemented some initiatives, such as fee waivers and scholarships for Muslim students. In addition, the government promoted vocational education, which was particularly relevant to the Pu-Islam community, a group of converted Muslims who were traditionally involved in fishing. These measures helped to improve the educational attainment of Muslims in the Madras Presidency. This research paper focuses on Pu-Islam education in elementary schools in Malabar. This study aims to examine the implementation of Pu-Islam education in elementary schools in the Malabar region and also to understand the effectiveness of this program. By understanding that education system, the study seeks to provide insights into the potential benefits and challenges of Pu-Islam education.*

**Keywords:** Muslim schools, Fisher folk community, Malabar history, Pu-Islam education, Comprehensive curriculum

During British rule in India, Malabar belonged to the Madras Presidency. This district encompassed an area of 5,794 square miles.<sup>1</sup> There is debate about the origin of the name Malabar. While Al-Biruni is credited with first using the name Malabar, Egyptian merchants, including Cosmos Indicopleustes, referred to the region much earlier.<sup>2</sup> For centuries, Malabar was a hub for Arab trade. By the 7th century AD, many Arabs had settled permanently in Malabar's port cities. Malayalam is the dominant language spoken by most people on the Malabar Coast.

Muslim education in India evolved from a focus on religious instruction to a more comprehensive curriculum that included secular subjects as well. Herbert Spencer argues that education is a process of training that helps us to live complete lives. Religion is one of the most important aspects of education, as it helps us to develop our spiritual side. A complete person is not just someone who is intelligent, but someone who is well-rounded and uses all of their faculties, including their spiritual ones.<sup>3</sup>

Elementary education was provided in *maktabs*, while higher education was provided in madrasas. *Maktabs* were typically run by public donations, while madrasas were typically maintained by rulers or nobles.<sup>4</sup> Warren Hastings started the Calcutta Madrassa, he intended to educate the sons of Mohammadan gentlemen.<sup>5</sup> The education of Muslims in the Madras Presidency was neglected in the early days of British rule. The only schools available to them were *Yeomiah* schools, which taught pupils to read the Quran but did not provide a comprehensive education. The Madrasa-I Azam, Mylapore Middle School, and Harris School were the only high schools in Madras specifically intended for Muslims. In 1870-71, the total number of Muslim boys under instruction throughout the Presidency was 4,301, but most of them were in primary classes; few were in middle school classes, and even fewer were in Matriculation classes.<sup>6</sup>

In 1872-73, the government took special measures to improve the education of Muslims in Madras Presidency. In Malabar, special grants were given to schools for Mappilas, and other measures were introduced to promote education in this community. When the results

system<sup>7</sup> was introduced, Muslim teachers did not come forward for government aid, so a scheme of examination was not laid down for Muslim schools. However, Mr. Garthwaite's report for 1871-72 noted that a significant development in lower-class education in Malabar that year was the inspection of Mappila schools, which were attached to every mosque. Two normal schools were established in the 3<sup>rd</sup> division during the year 1880, one in Madras for the training of Muhammadan teachers.<sup>8</sup>

The government appointed a special Deputy Inspector of Mappila schools in Malabar and special Inspecting Schoolmasters for Muslim schools. In 1885, H B Grigg, Director of Public Instruction suggested that grants to Mappila schools be made a provincial charge, which was approved by the government. This change is credited with the remarkable advance of Mappila education in Malabar. In 1890, the government sanctioned the employment of two additional Sub-Assistants in the Northern and Southern Circles to extend the special Inspecting agency for Muslims. This has also helped to improve the education of Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

The progress education report from 1902-1907 found that the Muslim community's underperformance in education is due to several factors, including poverty, lack of interest, and their educational goals being different from those of the rest of the population. Muslim children are taught to memorize the Quran at a young age, while other children are beginning to learn secular subjects.<sup>10</sup>

In the Madras Presidency, Muslim students pay half the fees at all public institutions of all grades, and the same concession is almost invariably granted at privately managed institutions. In nearly all branches of education above the elementary grade, scholarships are either reserved for Muslims or they have a preference. Even elementary school scholarships are awarded to Mappilas.<sup>11</sup> The education females among Muhammadan bear the same characteristics as that of males, but more strongly marked; that is to say, the numbers in attendance at primary schools are below even the low average of India as a whole and the number and attendance at higher constitutions is extremely small.<sup>12</sup>

The number of secondary schools increased from 4 to 6, including the excellent Madrassa-i-Azam. This was a significant increase, as it shows that the government is investing in education for all, including Muslims. There were also special primary schools for Muslim students, which was another important step in ensuring that all children have access to education. In addition, the government made significant efforts to educate the backward Mappila community on the West Coast. As a result, the number of schools in this region increased by 112, and the number of pupils increased by 13,664. This was a remarkable achievement, and it shows that the government is committed to improving the lives of all its citizens.<sup>13</sup> In April 1913, the Indian government issued a circular with advice on how to educate Muslims. The circular stated that while Muslims did well in primary schools, they were still behind in higher education.<sup>14</sup> The second period in the history of modern Indian education began in 1854 with the publication of Wood's Despatch on Education and ended in 1921 with the transfer of control of education to Indian ministers.<sup>15</sup>

Sir F.A. Nicholson proposed a special type of school for the fishing communities of the Madras presidency. He found the need for such a school due to the unique circumstances of this community. First, fishing communities mostly live in hamlets detached from the residential quarters of other communities. Second, the government was promoting vocational education in various provinces at the time. The idea of establishing vocational educational institutions in India first appeared in the Woods Despatch in 1854.

The British introduced vocational education to India, including the fisheries sector, during the 20th century. This was a significant change from the traditional Indian educational system, which focused on academics. Vocational education for fisheries received much attention because of the importance of the fisheries sector to the Indian economy. The establishment of the Fisheries Training Institute in Calicut marked a significant turning point in the lives of the fishermen community in Malabar. The vocational education system introduced at the institute provided the fishermen community with an unprecedented opportunity to acquire new skills and enhance their knowledge of their traditional occupation. This newfound expertise

enabled them to become more proficient fishermen, leading to improved livelihoods and a brighter future for their families.<sup>16</sup>

Pu-Islam is people of a Muslim community in the Malabar coastal belt. They are mainly converted people. The converts are called Pu-Islam or Puthiya Islam (new Islam). All Pu-Islams follow the occupation of fishing. They are converted from backward Hindu communities. The Zamorin of Calicut was the first Indian ruler to take steps to develop the fishing industry and encourage the conversion of fishermen to Islam. He believed that this would strengthen trade with the Arabs and benefit the region. He ordered that at least one male member of every fisherman family in his domain be raised as a Muslim.<sup>17</sup> The Madras, Census Report of 1891 noted that some Mappila had converted back to “Pu-Islam,” which is a more conservative form of Islam.<sup>18</sup> This was likely due to some factors, including the growing influence of Islamic reform movements in the region and the desire of some Mappila to assert their Muslim identity in the face of British colonial rule. The conversion of Mappila to Pu-Islam is a complex and contested topic, and there is no single explanation for it. However, it is clear that it was a significant phenomenon in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Until recently, Mappilas of Malabar didn't used to get married the people of Pu-Islams. They had separate mahals. They were socially, economically, and educationally backward people. Their main occupation was fishing and because of this they mainly lived in coastal belts. Even though missionaries came to Malabar and educated the people of the coastal belts, Pu- Islam people were excluded from this education because they were Muslim. With the coming of Britishers, a new education policy was implemented in Madras Presidency. As a part of this, fisheries schools were started in coastal belts, and through this the Pu-Islam people received education.

### **Kadalundi School:**

The Pu Islam fisherfolk community is a marginalized group in Kerala. They have traditionally been excluded from the mainstream educational system. The founding of this school in 1921<sup>19</sup> was a significant event for the community, as it provided their children with

access to education for the first time. The schoolmaster was a key figure in the community. He was not only responsible for educating the children but also involved in other community development activities, such as the cooperative society. This shows that the school is not just a place of learning, but also a centre for community empowerment. The school provided education to thousands of children over the years, and it played a vital role in the development of the community. Making the school permanent would ensure that future generations of Pu Islam fisherfolk children have access to a quality education.

The school has had a significant impact on the Pu Islam fisherfolk community. It has helped to improve the community's literacy rates and educational levels. It also helped to empower the community and improve their social and economic status. The school faced a number of challenges over the years, including financial constraints, lack of resources, and discrimination. However, the school has managed to overcome these challenges and continue to provide education to the children of the community. It was well-supported by the community and the government. The school also expanded its curriculum and facilities to meet the changing needs of the community.<sup>20</sup>

### **Chaliyam School**

Chaliyam School has good attendance, with an average of over 80. The inspection was on September 30, 1921, when there were 55 boys and 30 girls on the roll. All of the students are from the Pu Islam community, which was a very backward community with no literate members. Most of the students are eager to learn, and it would be a great benefit to them.<sup>21</sup> The people were very keen on the establishment of a fisheries school at Chaliyam. The strength of the day school was so large that it was impossible for one teacher to manage, so it was desirable to have two teachers. The Muhammedan teacher, C. Alavi, had reported for duty and was demanding a salary of Rs. 12/- per mensem<sup>22</sup> for the day work and an allowance of Rs. 3/- for the night duty. The Director's proposal to open a fisheries school at Chaliyam for a period of 2 years and to appoint teachers on salaries of Rs. 15 and Rs. 12 respectively if trained and Rs. 10 if

untrained was sanctioned. The Assistant Director's action in having sanctioned with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 1920 is also sanctioned.<sup>23</sup>

### **Blangad School**

The school in Blangad was taken over by the Department of Fisheries on April 1, 1921. It is located in the middle of a fishing hamlet and were currently housed in a temporary shed. The owner of the shed was building a permanent masonry building for the school. The school also provided some vocational training, such as net making, fish curing, and sewing, on a small scale.<sup>24</sup> The school has four teachers (three permanent and one temporary) for six classes, with a total of 142 students. According to rule 71 of the Madras Educational Rules, there should be at least one regular teacher for every 40 students on the roll. Therefore, four teachers were permissible for this school.<sup>25</sup>

The low attendance at the school was due to the conservative beliefs of the Mappila fisher folk and their lack of interest in secular education for their children. To overcome this apathy and achieve educational progress in this extremely backward community, it was necessary to make persistent efforts to spread education. Despite the appointment of a Mappila fisherman as headmaster and a "mullah"<sup>26</sup> as assistant, the progress of the school has been slow. This suggests that the conservatism of the community is a major barrier to educational progress.<sup>27</sup>

### **Tanur School**

Tanur is a large fishing center with a close connection to the fisheries department. Most fishermen in Tanur are Pu Muslims, and they abstain from fishing on Fridays. The fisheries department has two fish curing yards, a government experimental yard, a night school, and a large staff in Tanur. Therefore, the fisheries department was in a much better position than the taluk board to understand the needs of the community and to run the day school for the Muslim fishermen population of the place. The taluk board agreed to hand over the management of the day school to the fisheries department, and this opportunity should be taken by the department to take over control of the school. The fisheries department also helped to promote thrift, sanitation, cooperation, and technical education among the fishermen

population in Tanur. This enabled the fishermen to appreciate and benefit from the work of the department to a greater extent than in the past.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Naduvattom Fisheries School**

The school was located in a central location between Kallai and Beypore, making it easily accessible to students from both towns. This made it a valuable resource for the fishing community in the region. The school was opened in July 1922 and has been extended several times. It has had more than 100 students since September 1929 and currently has 120 students in four grades, taught by four teachers. The school was run as a Muslim school due to the large number of Pu-Islam in the area.<sup>29</sup>

The Department of Fisheries supported the proposal to make the school permanent and to acquire the land on which it is located. This ensured that the school continued to serve the fishing community in the region for many years to come. The government has also decided to keep the fisheries elementary schools at Naduvattam open forever and to hire permanent staff to teach there. This was a positive development for the school and the community it serves.<sup>30</sup>

The Mannalamkunnu school was a school for Pu-Islam children. The Pu-Islam community is a particularly backward group in terms of education. It is important to note that schools for backward communities should not be judged according to the same standards as schools for more enlightened classes. When fisheries schools were first started, they were all in more or less the same condition as the Mannalamkunnu school. The Muhammadan fishermen, to which the Pu-Islam community belongs, are more backward than Hindu fishermen, and their schools require more time to come up to the standard of other schools.<sup>31</sup>

The Mannalamkunnu fishermen lived in a remote village on the coast where there were no other schools. The nearest school was about two miles away and was a board school for ordinary Mappila. The Pu-Islam children did not make as much progress at this school as they would at a fisheries school. If the Mannalamkunnu school

was closed, the children in the village would have had no access to education, which would have been a disaster for the community.<sup>32</sup>

Until the end of the 1935-36 school year, the absence of a qualified mullah teacher was a major factor in the school's poor performance. The mullah teacher was responsible for teaching the Quran, which is a very important subject for Mappila children. Without a mullah teacher, it was difficult to maintain regular attendance and the children were not able to learn as much as they could.<sup>33</sup>

This suggests that the role of the local Mullah was important in encouraging Muslim parents to send their children to school. It is possible that the Mullah was able to convince parents that the school was a safe and welcoming place for Muslim students, or that he was able to provide financial or other support to Muslim students.

The withdrawal of the Mullah's support is a setback for the school, and it may lead to a decrease in the number of Muslim students attending. It is important for the school to find ways to maintain its relationship with the local Muslim community, and to ensure that Muslim students feel welcome and supported at the school.<sup>34</sup>

The Deputy Inspector of the school conducted the annual inspection on June 18, 1937. He explained that the local Mullah engaged the Muslim children early in the morning for Koran classes and that these children could only be induced to attend the fisheries school if the Mullah took an interest in it and was qualified to impart religious instruction. He also reported that the guardians of the Muslim children attached greater importance to the teaching of the Koran by the Mullah.

The headmaster also believed that it is necessary to offer Quran instruction to the 36 Muslim students enrolled in the school before school hours each day, given that a Muslim school is working in rivalry with this school. The headmaster of the school requested an extension to the admission deadline, the sanction of a new position, and permission to offer Quran classes. They believed that these measures would help to improve the school's enrolment, attendance, and academic performance.<sup>35</sup>

### **Palapatty School:**

The local fisherfolk of Palapatty submitted a petition to the Assistant Director (coast), who said that the village of Palapatty sea-shore has a population of over 3,000 people and over 400 school-aged children. The government established a fisheries school in Palapatty in 1927, which currently has over 200 students. The fishermen were naturally poor, and the poverty has been exacerbated by the scarcity of fish. As a result, they were unable to send our children to distant schools. The petitioner argued that the need for a higher elementary school in Palapatty sea-shore is particularly urgent because the majority of the students in the local fisheries school are Pu-Islam, and there was no other higher elementary school in the area that caters to their needs. The Assistant Director of Fisheries also noted that there was no high school or higher elementary school near the village and that it was difficult and expensive for parents to send their children to distant schools.

The petitioner requested the authorities to open a Mappila higher elementary school in their midst. They argue that the current school is too far away and difficult to reach for their children, especially during the rainy and hot seasons. The petitioner also mentioned that they had already submitted a resolution passed unanimously at a public meeting held on 31st October 1940 praying for the starting of such a school. Finally, the petitioner humbly requested that the authorities open standard VI in the local fisheries school in June 1941 in the interest of the poor uneducated fishermen.

The villagers of Palapatty requested the government to open a VI standard in the Palapatty school with effect from 1st June 1941. The villagers were enthusiastic about the proposal and the school is the best Pu-Islam school in the department. The government approved the opening of a VI standard in the fisheries school at Palapatty starting in June 1941. They also approved the hiring of an additional teacher for the new standard. This was being done to ensure that the 25 students who were expected to be promoted to the VI standard in June 1941 were able to continue their studies, even though there was no other higher elementary school within  $2\frac{3}{4}$  miles of the Palapatty school. 15 of these 25 students belong to the fishermen community,

and the government recently emphasized the importance of fisheries schools for fisher children.<sup>36</sup>

Local men who were willing to devote a few hours a week to teaching the Quran were found at these centres. However, there was a concern that if these local Mullahs were employed now and then discharged when trained teachers became available, the number of students would decrease due to the influence or opposition of the discharged Mullahs. This was because the local Mullahs are likely to attract students, but they are also likely to work against the interests of the school once they are discharged. As a result, the Assistant Director of Fisheries expected the number of students to decrease when new teachers were appointed.<sup>37</sup> The Assistant Director of Fisheries said that it was not possible to run a school with one teacher short and that a part-time village Mullah is not qualified to teach anything other than the Quran. If a trained teacher is replaced with a village Mullah, it will be difficult to teach the other subjects in the curriculum. The inspectors of fisheries suggested that part-time Mullah Teachers should be paid a salary of Rs.10 per month. The government considered the request and decided to appoint three part-time Mullahs to teach the Quran at the fisheries schools in Kumbla, Parapanangadi, and Veliangode. The Mullah would be paid a salary of Rs.6 per month. The government also stipulated that the part-time Mullah would be replaced by teachers trained at the Fisheries Training Institute.<sup>38</sup>

### **Puduponnani**

Puduponnani was the most important fishing village in the erstwhile British Malabar region. The people of Puduponnani were mostly Muslim fishermen, and they were very poor and uneducated. The fishing populace belonged to the Pu Islam community, which was a very backward group. Their socio-economic condition was extremely deplorable, as elsewhere in Malabar. The Pu Islam community, which are mostly Muslim fishermen, live in wards 1 to 4 of the town. Approximately 130 out of 203 houses in Ward One, 20 out of 199 houses in Ward Two, 270 out of 280 houses in Ward Three, and 200 out of 250 houses in Ward Four are occupied by the Pu Islam community.<sup>39</sup>

The second largest fishing village in the Ponnani taluk is home to about 6,000 Pu Islam fishermen. There were nearly 2475 children of school-going age in the village, but there is no fisheries school. <sup>40</sup> the Assistant Director of Fisheries (coast) Calicut, pointed out the need for an elementary school at Poduponnani. Khan Sahib Attakoya Thangal and Padaria Kathu Nooruddin Sahib of Ponnani are willing to build and rent a building for a fisheries school.

The site owned by Padaria Kathu Nooruddin Sahib was about half a mile from both the boys' and girls' schools, close to the new fish-curing yard site, and in the centre of the fishing village. There was a board lower elementary school for girls in the village about 2 furlongs away from the Puduponnani fish curing yard. This suggests that the boy's school was not meeting the needs of the community. It was possible that the school was not well-managed, or that it did not offer a curriculum that was relevant to the needs of the students. It is also possible that the school was not accessible to all students in the community, perhaps due to financial or geographical barriers.<sup>41</sup>

There was also a private school, but it was not working satisfactorily and its recognition was withdrawn on the understanding that a fisheries school would be opened in its place.<sup>42</sup> To improve the condition of the fishing community in Puduponnani, a fisheries school was started in the village in 1938. The school was opened in response to a memorial signed by nearly 150 people from the village.<sup>43</sup> The director of public instruction agreed that a fisheries school was needed in Puduponnani, and the school was opened on June 1, 1938.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these challenges, the number of Muslim students attending school and higher education institutions continued to increase in the early 20th century. This was due in part to the efforts of Muslim leaders and reformers who advocated for the importance of education.

The Pu-Islam community is a marginalized community in the coastal belts of Malabar. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, fisheries schools were established in the region, providing the Pu-Islam community with access to education for the first time. Quran education was also offered at these schools, which attracted many Pu Islam children. Historically, the Pu-Islam community is largely illiterate, their knowledge passed

down through generations focused on practical fishing techniques. However, the colonial era saw a shift with the establishment of elementary fisheries schools. These schools offered a unique blend of public education and religious instruction, making them more appealing to these communities where religious traditions held a strong influence. This initial step provided a crucial bridge for Pu-Islam children to enter the formal education system.

Furthermore, the introduction of vocational programs within these schools was a significant development. This curriculum weaved scientific principles like navigation and marine biology into the existing framework of traditional fishing knowledge. This empowered fishermen with a deeper understanding of the ocean and improved their fishing practices.

Unfortunately, with the formation of the Kerala State, these specialized fisheries schools were disbanded. This dismantled the established educational infrastructure and halted the progress made by the fishing community. The lack of similar programs left them without the specific vocational training that had bridged the gap between their traditional knowledge and the wider scientific world. Consequently, the fishermen's educational advancement stagnated, contributing to their marginalization within the larger society. However, in 1956, with the creation of Kerala state, these fisheries schools were closed. This had a devastating impact on the Pu Islam community, as it led to a decline in their educational attainment and a widening of the gap between them and other communities in Kerala.

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