

THE ARABIC LANGUAGE IN KERALA AND THE STAGES OF ITS DEVELOPMENT OVER THE DECADES

Dr. M.R. Thameem Ansari,

*Assistant Professor of Arabic,
PG and Research Department of Arabic,
The New College,
Affiliated to the University of Madras,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India*

الدكتور تميم أنصاري،

الأستاذ المساعد، قسم البحوث والدراسات العربية العليا،
الكلية الجديدة (حكم ذاتي)، شنائي،
ولاية تامل نادو، الهند

Dr. K. Jamaludeen Farooqi,

*Former Principal and HOD of Arabic,
WMO Arts and Science College, Muttill,
Wayanad, Kerala, India*

الدكتور جمال الدين الفاروقي،

الرئيس السابق لقسم اللغة العربية في كلية WMO
واياناد، كيرالا، الهند.

Abstract:

The article explores the evolution of Arabic in Kerala, tracing its development from ancient trade routes to its significance in religious and academic spheres. It discusses the spread of Islam, establishment of madrasas, contributions of local scholars, modern adaptations, educational integration and cultural exchanges that have preserved the relevance of Arabic in Kerala. The narrative delves into the historical context, emphasizing how ancient maritime trade routes facilitated the initial introduction of Arabic to Kerala. As Islam spread in the region, Arabic emerged as a prominent language for religious and educational purposes. The establishment of madrasas played a pivotal role in this linguistic evolution, nurturing young minds in Islamic principles and Arabic language. These institutions were instrumental in cultivating a cadre of scholars who made substantial contributions to religious and secular knowledge.

Local scholars in Kerala have left a significant mark on Arabic literature and studies by blending regional influences with classical Arabic traditions. This fusion enriched the academic landscape, fostering a dynamic intellectual community. In contemporary times, Arabic has seamlessly integrated into modern educational systems, featuring in school curricula and higher education institutions. This integration ensures the language's continued relevance, meeting both traditional and contemporary educational demands.

Moreover, ongoing cultural exchanges between Kerala and Arab nations reinforce the enduring significance of Arabic. Literary events and academic collaborations serve to strengthen these cultural bonds, underscoring the language's preservation and celebration as an integral component of Kerala's diverse cultural heritage.

Keywords:

Arabic language in Kerala, Development of Arabic in Kerala, Arabic and Islamic studies in Arabic, Eminent personalities in Arabic in Kerala, and Relationship between Kerala and Arabs.

Introduction:

The Arabic language has had a longstanding connection with Kerala since ancient times, evolving its ties with the Arabian Peninsula and its people through centuries of maritime trade led by the Arabs. The rise of Islam in the early seventh century CE further fueled the language's influence in the region. The establishment of ten mosques by Malik bin Habib, as mentioned in "تحفة المجاهدين," stands as a testament to the language's widespread presence and its significant role in shaping the cultural and civilizational landscape of Kerala.

The book "The History of the Appearance of Islam in Malabar" notes that Islam was established in the years 22-21 AH, marking the beginning of regular Arabic study and teaching. Furthermore, the graves in Nilamuttam village, in Kannur district, display names of the deceased in undotted letters, indicating the early spread of Arabic in Kerala before the sixties AH. The dotted Arabic letters were developed by Nasr bin Asim (d. 84 AH) نصر بن عاصم (الحجاج بن يوسف الثقفي).

The first Arabic document in Kerala:

The Arabic letters were first documented in Kerala on a copper scroll granted by King Stanu Ravi Kulashekara to Christian residents of Kollam for the construction of a church. Arab merchants signed and inscribed their names in Kufic script in 849 CE. The jurist Hussein's book "The Comprehensive Record" is the earliest Arabic text on the state, mentioned by the traveler Ibn Battuta in his book on India.

The emergence of the Makhdoomi family and their role in developing Arabic:

Arabic has significantly advanced and flourished with the emergence of the Makhdoomi family on Kerala's cultural landscape. They are recognized for enhancing the religious education movement in the state, organizing it, and facilitating the exploration of religious sciences. The leaders of this family were pivotal in resisting and opposing colonial forces that sought to exert influence over the region and its people. The first member to arrive Kerala from 'معبير' of Yemen, was Mr. Zain al-Din Ibrahim bin Ahmed al-Ma'bari, who initially settled in the city of Cochin before relocating to Ponnani.

The family was known for producing distinguished leaders and scholars like Sayyid Zain al-Din al-Makhdoom al-Awal (1467 - 1522). He gained knowledge in Hadith and jurisprudence from Sheikh Shihab al-Din bin Othman in Makkah before attending Al-Azhar University. He might have been the first person from Malabar to study at Al-Azhar University. At that time, his professors at Al-Azhar were renowned scholars. This era was marked by a fervor for educational and teaching concepts, leading to the establishment of religious schools in Ponnani.

Upon completing his studies at Al-Azhar, he returned to Ponnani to start his educational endeavors. He delved into educational pursuits and writing, focusing on beneficial works. He extensively wrote about Sufism and Islamic jurisprudence. His poem "تحريض أهل الإيمان على جهاد" consisting of 173 couplets, urged Muslims to resist the Portuguese occupation and liberate the country from their control.

Another poem "هداية الأذكياء إلى طريق الأولياء" that includes commandments and guidance meant to resonate with the hearts and inspire faith and sincerity. Among his works are:

مرشد الطلاب، وسراج القلوب، والسراج المنير، والمسعد في ذكر الموت، وشمس الهدى، وتحفة الأحبة، وإرشاد القاصدين، وشعب الإيمان، وتسهيل القافية، وشرح الألفية، وقصص الأنبياء، وشرح تحفة الوردية، والسيرة النبوية. وكتاب شعب الإيمان ترجمته من الأصل الفارسي.

Within this dynasty lies Abdul Aziz Al-Makhdoom (1508 - 1586), also known as the son of Zaid Al-Din Al-Makhdoom-I (عبد العزيز بن زين الدين المخدوم الأول). He was known for his brilliance and followed his father's footsteps by providing explanations for many of his works, in addition to his independent works, like:

باب معرفة الصغرى والكبرى، وإرشاد الألباء، وقصيدة الأقسام، وشرح ألفية بن مالك، وأركان الإيمان، ومراقبة القلوب، والمتفرد، ومسلك الأتقياء.

In this family, Sheikh Zain al-Din al-Makhdoom II (1531 - 1583), the well-known and respected scholar, stands out as the most prominent figure, being the grandson of Zain al-Din al-Awal. He made significant contributions to the Muslim community and Arab academia by promoting the knowledge through research, education, and writing. Following his primary education, he journeyed to Makkah where he spent a decade learning from esteemed scholars. One of his notable mentors was Sheikh Ibn Hajar Al-Haytami, a distinguished Shafi'i scholar.

After arriving in Kerala, he started developing educational programs for religious studies, establishing a comprehensive curriculum and system that attracted students from distant places to Ponnani for academic success. His renowned work, "تحفة المجاهدين", stands as a remarkable piece of original Arabic literature, being the foremost piece to illuminate Kerala's ancient history. This work has been translated into thirty-five languages worldwide.

The book captures Kerala's historical journey spanning 85 years from 1498 to 1583. It delves into the emergence of Islam in Malabar, the customs within Hindu society, the atrocities committed by Portuguese soldiers, and the need for resistance. It remains a valuable resource for those studying the social history of ancient Kerala. Among the author's notable works is the book "فتح المعين". This book has been studied and explained by Arab scholars like Sheikh Ali bin al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Saqqaf al-Yamani through his work 'ترشيح المستفدين', and by Sheikh Abu Bakr

Al-Bakri, through this work 'إعانة الطالبين'. From Kerala, Sheikh Ali bin Abdul Rahman (Kunjoti Musliyar) wrote 'تنشيط المطالعين', as explanation to المعين.

In addition to this, Sheikh Zain al-Din al-Makhdoum has other books in Arabic of scientific value, such as:

1. مختصر شرح الصدور
2. الأجوبة العجيبة عن المسألة الغربية
3. المنهج الواضح
4. الفتاوى الهندية
5. الجواهر في عقوبة أهل الكبائر
6. أحكام إحكام النكاح
7. إرشاد العباد

He authored إرشاد العباد, an explanation and clarification of the two books: "الزواج" by ابن حجر and إرشاد العباد by his grandfather Zain Al-Din Al-Makhdoum Al-Awal. As for the book الأجوبة العجيبة is a collection of religious fatwas that he issued on various occasions.

Sheikh Othman bin Jamal al-Din al-Ma'bari (1504 - 1583) was a scholar from this distinguished family, husband of the daughter of المخدم الأول, known for his Arabic commentary on the book قطر الندى في النحو. The Makhdoumi scholars, including Sheikh Othman, made significant contributions to the medical encyclopedia Hortus Malabaricus, also known as the Garden of Malabar. It was compiled by the Dutch ruler Hendrik Van Rheede. This comprehensive work delves into 742 medicinal plants from forests of Malabar and Karnataka. After thirty years of research, the encyclopedia was published in twelve volumes in Amsterdam in 1678. The plant names were listed in Latin, Malayalam, Arabic, and Diwanakri languages, with the Arabic names provided by the Makhdoumi scholars.

Sheikh Ibrahim Musliyar (1871 - 1951) authored "مختزن المفردات الطبية" in Arabic, a work later reviewed by Dr. Muhammad Yusuf al-Nadwi.

During the Portuguese occupation, another notable scholar was القاضي محمد الكالكوتي, known as Judge Muhammad al-Kalikooti (1572 - 1616). Through his insightful writings and compassionate nature, he impacted generations and confronted adversaries. In his revered poem 'الفتح المبين', he instilled a sense of dedication in people, urging them to resist Portuguese

influence to safeguard their homeland. He also played his role in Arabic writing, and his books include:

1. الدرّة الفصيحة
2. القصيدة في نصيحة الإخوان
3. منظومة في علم الحساب
4. ملتقط الفرائض
5. مقاصد النكاح
6. منظومة في تجويد القرآن
7. مدخل الجنان
8. منظومة في علم الأفلاك والنجوم
9. منظومة في الرسائل والخطوط

The Arabic language in Kerala entered its second stage of development in the nineteenth century AD. During this period, the following notable scholars made significant contributions:

- السيد جفري
- القاضي عمر
- السيد مامبورم علوي تنغل
- السيد فضل تنغل

The following Arabic books were authored by السيد جفري, who died in 1222 AH:

كنز البراهين، الكواكب الذرية، والإرشادات الجفرية

The renowned Malabar scholar known for his staunch resistance against occupation was القاضي عمر Al Qadhi Omar (1177 - 1273) AH. He played a pivotal role in the fight for independence and opposing the British rule. Through his writings and speeches, he vehemently criticized the British and highlighted their attempts to disrupt national unity. In the meantime, he contributed to the Arabic language with his rhyming compositions, such as:

1. نفائس الدرر
2. لاح الإله
3. صلى الإله

4. مقاصد النكاح

5. كتاب الذبح والاصطياد

Mampuram Syed Alawi Thangal is known for his involvement in Arabic, highlighted in his book *السيف البتار على من يوالي الكفار*, which strongly opposes British occupation. His son, السيد فضل، also stood against English dominance, leading a united resistance involving Muslims and others. His book, 'عدة الأمراء والحكام لإهانة الكفرة وعبدة الأصنام', reflects his character and resolute mindset, inspiring citizens with courage and determination. The resistance during this period marks a significant chapter in the struggle against British rule. Among his books are:

خلل الإحسان في تزيين الإنسان ، وأساس الإسلام ببيان الأحكام، ورسالة المسلم العالي لإدراك المعالي

When the British tried to exile him, he traveled to Oman and from there to Turkey, where Sultan Abdul Hamid - II السلطان عبد الحميد الثاني honored him and assumed the position of chief advisor.

Scholars of the twentieth century:

At the onset of the twentieth century, Arabic language held a prominent position in the social fabric of Kerala. This era marked the emergence of religious and social reforms, with mosques and schools serving as vital platforms. Jalilath Kunj Ahmad Haji, (born in 1866), was a notable personality during this period. He significantly contributed to the reform of the educational sector from Vazhakkad, where he established the Tanmiyat al-Ulum School (مدرسة) (تنمية العلوم) in 1906. This school later evolved into the Dar al-Uloom Arabic College (كلية دار العلوم العربية), ushering in a wave of reform that enriched the Arabic language, enhancing its beauty and sophistication. Aside from his educational endeavors, the Sheikh was an avid writer, with works such as: رسالة القبلية، رسالة الحساب، وحاشية على الرسالة الماردينية، ورسالة الحساب، رسالة القبلية. He also revised Arabic curricula for religious schools.

Sheikh Wakm Abd al-Qadir al-Mawlawi 'الشيخ وكام عبد القادر المولوي' was a leading figure in religious and educational reform. He released magazines featuring important scientific and advocacy pieces to help improve the Muslim community. Additionally, he advocated for the inclusion of Arabic in educational curricula. In 1913, he presented a report to King of Thiruvithamkoor, leading to a conference of Muslim leaders exploring opportunities for Arabic education.

According to the conference agreement, Sri Rama Swamy Ayyar was employed by the government to oversee the education of Muslim children and encourage their enrollment in public schools. Arabic language was introduced in primary schools that year, with dedicated

teachers appointed for the purpose. Sheikh Wakm Abd al-Qadir al-Mawlawi himself led the effort to develop Arabic curricula and train teachers, positioning Kerala as a hub for Arabic education and setting a high standard in the educational sector compared to other Indian states. Furthermore, Al-Manar المنار magazine from Egypt featured several articles by Sheikh Abdul Qadir in Arabic.

The Almighty showered mercy upon this place, Kerala, during this period, with the scholars in Arabic, such as Sheikh Abu Al-Sabah Ahmed Ali, a graduate of Al-Azhar and the founder of <كلية روضة العلوم العربية>. With its establishment, Kerala witnessed rapid leaps in the field of education and social reform, and was supported in its missions by senior leaders and leaders in the state. A number of educational, pedagogical and vocational institutions emerged from <كلية روضة العلوم العربية> later, which today adorns the hill of Al-Farouq College. Sheikh Abu Al-Sabah used to write Arabic articles in Al-Murshid and Al-Ittihad magazines. Noteworthy figures like Sheikh K. M. Mawlawi, Sheikh Izz al-Din Mawlawi, and الشيخ بري كوتي مسليار also penned and published Arabic pieces in various Arabic publications, including the Umm Al-Qura أم القرى newspaper from Makkah.

Some of the most prominent scholars of Kerala these days were:

- الشيخ محي الدين الألواني
- السيد عبد الرحمن الأزهرى تنغل
- الشيخ كيناتا بيران كوني مسليار
- الشيخ أحمد كوبا الشالياتي
- الشيخ علي مسليار
- الشيخ والاكولام عبد الباري مسليار
- الشيخ تانور عبد الرحمن
- الشيخ فوكوتور محمد الباقوي
- الشيخ عبد الرحمن مسليار
- نلي كوت محمد على مسليار
- العلامة الدكتور حمزة عبد الله المليباري

One of the leading intellectuals in Kerala during this period was الشيخ محي الدين الألواني Sheikh Muhyiddin Al-Alwai. Renowned for his extensive work in the Arabic language, he has excelled as a writer, professor, journalist, broadcaster, and translator, leaving a lasting impact in various domains. Among his Arabic works are:

الأدب الهندي المعاصر، وحاضر الإسلام والمسلمين، ومنهاج الدعوة، ومن خصائص الدعوة الإسلامية، والإسلام وتطورات العالم، وعناصر الخلود في الدعوة الإسلامية، والإسلام وقضايا الإنسانية، والنبوة المحمدية نقديت المستشرقين، وأعلام الدعوة الإسلامية في شبه القارة الهندية، ومنهاج المعلمين لتعليم العربية.

In this list comes the name of Tangal Abdul Rahman Al-Azhari (Tangal), who graduated from Al-Azhar after his studies at the University of Lore and Dar Al-Uloom, Deoband. Some of his notable works include:

أبو نواس وحياته، التصوف الإسلامي، وتاريخ النحو وتطوره، من نوابغ علماء مليبار، العرب والعربية وغيرها.

And Sheikh K.M. Mawlawi was a famous writer in Arabic. He wrote:

الورقات، وماذا وظيفة الفقهاء، ورسالة التنبيه، والبراهين،

Sheikh Ahmed Kuba Al-Shalyati, who passed away in 1954, is the author of numerous Arabic books that cover a wide range of themes and cognitive perspectives, such as:

خير الأدلية في هدي استقبال القبلة، وتحقيق المقال في مبحث الاستقبال والمقال الحاوي في رد الفتاوى والدعاوى، وإتحاف الدليل في رد التجميل، والسير الحثيث لتخريج أربعين الحديث، والبيان الموثوق، وإفادة المستعيد بإعادة المستفيد أسماء المؤلفين في ديار مليبار والعوائد الدينية في تلخيص الفوائد المدنية والشرح اللطيف والبيان المنيف. وكشف الصادر لنظم عوامل الشيخ عبد القاهر الجرجاني

During the era of the Nizamiya in Hyderabad, he held the position of mufti. Additionally, he had a deep knowledge of rational sciences like chemistry and astronomy. His writings are abundant in the Al-Azhar library situated in Shaliyam <شاليام>.

Sheikh Ali (Ali Masliyar 1853-1952), was a key figure in the struggle for independence, stood out as a leading Arabic scholar during that era. Alongside his resistance against the British, he showed great dedication to teaching and writing in Arabic. Some of his notable works include:

حاشية تحفة الإخوان في علم البلاغة وشرح التحفة الوردية في النحو

Sheikh Walakulam Abd al-Bari Masliyar (d. 1965) played a significant role in this period. Some of his Arabic works include:

صاحح الشيخين ، وجمع الباري، والمتفرد في الفقه، والصرط المستقيم، والوسيلة العظمى

And Sheikh Tanur Abdul Rahman (1904), a renowned scholar known for his significant impact in social and spiritual realms, exhibited exceptional writing skills in Arabic. Some of his notable written works include:

إسعاد العباد في ذكر الموت والمعاد، وعوارف المعارف، والإفاضة القدسية وأسرار المحققين في معرفة رب العالمين، وشرح بسيط على كتاب الخفة المرسل في علم الحقائق

In this context, it is important to highlight the notable individual Ismail Shihab El-Din (1936-2012), who was dedicated to promoting the Arabic language and devoted his efforts to teaching and writing. His remarkable piece, "على هامش التفاسير," stands out as a significant Arabic literary work in Kerala. After nine years of work, he completed this extensive seven-volume project. He holds the distinction of being the first author in Kerala to pen a commentary (التفسير) in Arabic. Recently, this work was published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Qatar. Additionally, he authored:

المراقبة في عقيدة المسلم، وأدب المسلم في منبج الإسلام وصفوة الكلام في عقيدة الإسلام، والتبراس، والمدارج

The Islamic community has been greatly enriched by the contributions of Sheikh Fukatur Mohammed Al-Baqawi through over 71 books covering a wide range of topics, varying in size. Among his notable works are:

زميل القارئ في حل ألفاظ البخاري، والنسب والمصاهرة، والأضحية والعقيدة، وإعراب الإعراب، مداح النبي، وبلاغ السلام، ونجوم القرآن، وقواعد الخط، ودرر الصرف، ودراسة الألفاظ اللغوية

Sheikh Abd al-Rahman Musliyar, also known as كود امبوزا باوا مسليار, was born in 1946. He is a renowned Arabic scholar who has made significant contributions to enrich the Arab library through his writings. Some of his most notable works include:

عقيدة المهام، والأجساد العجيبة والأبدان الغربية، وبستان السبعة وإبراهيم بن أدهم حياته وسيرته وينايع الغني، ورزق الأصفياء وجنان الأدب، وسفينة الصحراء.

The late scholar Nili Kut Muhammad Ali Masliyar نلي كوت محمد على مسليار was renowned among Arabic scholars for his distinctive efforts to revive scientific and cultural heritage. His significant book, "تحفة الأخيار في تاريخ علماء مليبار," features biographies of over 1,800 prominent figures in Kerala.

The scholar, Dr. Hamza Abdullah, العلامة الدكتور حمزة عبد الله المليباري, is widely respected for his notable contributions. His expertise, knowledge, and Arabic writings are acknowledged not only in Kerala but across the Arab world. Renowned for his editorial work and revisions in the field of hadith sciences, he hails from Kannur and currently serves as a professor at the Faculty of Arabic Language and Islamic Studies in Dubai. Dr. Hamza Abdullah obtained his degree from Al-Azhar University and completed his doctorate at Umm Al-Qura University, focusing his research on hadith sciences. His publications have become curricula at the universities in Jordan and Baghdad. Some of his notable works include:

ما هكذا تورّد الإبل يا سعد، والموازنة بين المتقدمين والمتأخرين في تصحيح الأحاديث وتضعيفها، والحديث المعلول، قواعد وضوابط ونظرات جديدة في علوم الحديث. وكيف يدرس علم تخريج الأحاديث وعبقرية الإمام مسلم في ترتيب أحاديث الصحيح.

Some of the prominent higher education institutions that play a vital role in advancing Arabic studies in Kerala include: University of Calicut, University of Kerala, Farook College, Calicut, WMO Arts and Science College, Wayanad, MES Mampad, Malappuram, Rouzathul Uloom Arabic College, Malappuram, Madeenathul Uloom Arabic College, Pulikkal, Anvarul Islam Women's Arabic College, Mongam, Sullamussalam Arabic College, Areakode, etc.

It is worth mentioning that the Department of Arabic at the University of Calicut publishes a Peer-Reviewed Academic Research Arabic Journal listed under UGC Care. This journal offers scholars an avenue to disseminate their research papers and articles for academic advancement.

When it comes to Arabic poetry, the involvement of Kerala scholars is truly fascinating. Arab poets excel in craftsmanship, skill, depiction, and creativity, which is nearly unmatched. In the past decade, there has been notable advancement in translating literary works from Arabic by a dedicated group of professors and writers. This progress facilitates cultural exchange between the two languages and cultures.

Hence, the significant input of Kerala scholars in advancing Arabic language studies is truly praiseworthy. This showcases the continuous growth and prosperity of the Arabic language in both the historical and current context of this coastal state, with a promising future ahead, بإذن الله.

Conclusion:

Scholars from Kerala have not only contributed to the academic and linguistic aspects of Arabic but have also fostered cultural exchanges that bridge communities. Their meticulous research and commitment to preserving and promoting the language have inspired countless students and academics across the globe.

Educational institutions in Kerala, renowned for their rigorous curriculum and emphasis on linguistic excellence, have become centers of learning where traditional knowledge meets modern pedagogy. These institutions often host international seminars and workshops, encouraging dialogue between scholars from diverse backgrounds and fostering a global appreciation for the rich heritage of the Arabic language.

Additionally, the translation of classical Arabic texts into regional languages has made these works accessible to a broader audience, enriching the literary landscape of Kerala. This translation work ensures that the wisdom and beauty of Arabic literature continue to inspire and educate future generations.

As we look ahead, it is clear that the legacy of Kerala's Arabic scholars will only grow stronger. With the advent of digital technology and the increasing interconnectedness of our world, the opportunities for collaboration and innovation in Arabic language studies are boundless. The future promises a vibrant exchange of ideas and a deepened understanding of the cultural and historical significance of the Arabic language.

References:

1. البعث الإسلامي <اللغة-العربية-في-كبر-ال-ومراحل-تطوره>/<<https://albasulislami.com/>
2. الشيخ أحمد زين الدين المعبري المليباري. (1985). تحفة المجاهدين. بيروت: مؤسسة الوفاء
3. محمد بن عبد الله اللواتي ابن بطوطة. (1987). رحلة ابن بطوطة. بيروت: دار إحياء العلوم
4. الشيخ أحمد زين الدين المعبري المليباري. (2004). فتح المعين. بيروت: دار ابن حزم
5. الدكتور محي الدين الألواني. (1972). الأدب الهندي المعاصر. القاهرة: كتابات معاصرة