



"Makthi Thangal: A Bold Pioneer in the Renaissance of Kerala Muslims"

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Abstract:

Sanaullah Makthi Thangal, a scholar, orator, litterateur, newspaper editor, and writer, emerged as a prominent figure in the Muslim reform movement in Kerala during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His resignation as an Excise Inspector and his unwavering commitment to uplifting the Muslim community through education exemplify his selflessness and dedication. Thangal's multifaceted contributions extended beyond education to encompass social reform and interfaith dialogue, profoundly shaping the identity and self-perception of Kerala's Muslim community. This paper delves into the multifaceted contributions of Sanaullah Makthi Thangal and examines their enduring impact on Kerala's Muslim community. Thangal's unwavering commitment to education was prompted by the publication of the first biography of Prophet Muhammad written in Malayalam language, leading him to effectively disseminate religious teachings and foster interfaith dialogue through his literary pursuits, including newspaper editing and writing. Thangal's reformist efforts extended to social spheres, where he vehemently opposed Christian missionary activities and championed the preservation of Islamic identity. Despite facing financial limitations and limited resources, he persisted in spreading Islamic teachings throughout Kerala for many years. His resilience in the face of adversity epitomizes his unwavering commitment to the betterment of his community. Through his multifaceted contributions in education, social reform, and interfaith dialogue, Sanaullah Makthi Thangal left an indelible mark on the identity and self-perception of Kerala's Muslim community. His legacy continues to inspire and guide future generations, fostering a sense of pride and empowerment within the community.

Key words: ponnani, arabi-malayalam, christian missionaries, muslim reform movement makthi thangal, british government, marumakkathayam, herman gundert, fatwa, taallimul ikhwan, muallimul ikhwan, swalihul ikhwan, kadhorkuttaaram, nabinaanayam.

Makthi Thangal and his discourses can be understood in the context of the transformative events like the Channar Lahala of (1822-1859)¹ the Cherur incident of 1843,² and the teachings of Taikkav Ayya swamis³ etc. These socio-political arenas that influenced both his life and mission. By situating Makthi Thangal amidst these transformative events, we gain a deeper appreciation of the forces that shaped his legacy. Through his vibrant interventions in this regard, he became a beacon of reformation and enlightenment. Syed Sanaullah Makthi Thangal, Chalilakat Kunjahammad Haji, Sheikh Muhammad Mahin Hamdani Thangal, and Vakkam Muhammad Abdul Qader Maulavi are notable figures in the leadership of the Muslim resurgence in Kerala.⁴ Syed Sanaullah Makthi Thangal (1847-1912) was a scholar who actively opposed the superstitions and customs

that had proliferated within the Muslim community in Kerala. Makthi Thangal, who had a lifespan of just sixty-five years, spent three decades traveling throughout Kerala, dedicatedly delivering her teachings. The dynamic period of Mappila theological reform began after 1921, but its seeds were sown in the late 1800s. The driving forces for reform originated from the central and southern regions of Kerala, challenging the traditional stronghold of northern Malabar. The initial proponents of reform were strong individuals like Sayyid Sanaullah Makthi Thangal, who acted as pioneers rather than leaders of a unified movement⁵ He is known as an individual trailblazer. Roland E Miller recognized Makthi Thangal as a fervent fire-eating reformer,⁶ illustrating his unwavering commitment to transformative principles. The phrase "fire-eating" in this context suggests that Sayyid Sanaullah Makthi Thangal was a passionate and outspoken reformer, willing to confront and challenge deeply ingrained beliefs and practices. His fiery rhetoric and unwavering commitment to his ideals earned him both admiration and criticism. While some revered him as a fearless champion of change, others found his approach too confrontational and disruptive. The term "fire-eating" emphasizes Makthi Thangal 's direct and fearless approach to criticizing practices he deemed outdated or superstitious.

His ancestors belonged to the Saqaf tribe of Arabia.⁷ The Saqaf tribe gained renown for its active participation in trade and commerce during the pre-Islamic period. The family's roots in India can be traced back to Karnataka, where their ancestors initially settled. Around 1800, under the leadership of their grandfather Muhammad Maqtum Saqaf Thangal, the early generations migrated to Veliyankode near Ponnani. Saqaf's wife had Mughal origins. Syed Ahmed Thangal, the son of Saqaf, became the father of Makthi. His mother, Sharifa Beevi, was a member of the Hamadani clan. Syed Sanaullah Makthi Thangal, hailing from Veliyankode in Ponnani Taluk, emerged as the vanguard of communal social metamorphosis within the Malabar-Kochi regions. Born in 1847,⁸ Makthi Thangal attained proficiency in an array of languages, including Malayalam, Arabic, Arabi-Malayalam, Hindustani, Persian, Urdu, and Tamil. He commenced his initial educational pursuits under the guidance of his father. His father, Syed Ahmad, adhered to the teachings of Umar Qadi Veliyankode.⁹ He received his early education at Veliyankode Juma'at Palli Dars in 1847 and continued his studies up to fourth class at Chavakkad Primary School.¹⁰ His pursuit of religious knowledge led him to Kokkur, Marancheri, and Ponnani Dars. Embarking on an educational journey at a precociously tender age, he construed the pursuit of knowledge as a rigorous act of penance. His use of English quotations in various articles implies that he possessed the necessary English language skills to read and comprehend information. His early intellectual endeavors garnered notice as he systematically articulated ideological responses against the British colonial

apparatus.¹¹ He subsequently secured employment within the British Government as Excise Inspector, leveraging his linguistic prowess to navigate the intricate socio-political landscape.

During that epoch, characterized by the bountiful patronage of Christian missionary endeavors courtesy of the British Government,¹² he assumed a pivotal role in overseeing epistolary and literary productions, disseminating them extensively among the populace. The modus operandi of the missionaries revolved around the propagation and dissemination of Islamic tenets and ideologies. During that period, Islam and its Prophet faced relentless assaults from Christian missionaries who conducted lectures extensively across the nation.¹³ They disseminated numerous books and pamphlets that portrayed Islam and its prophet through caricatures and disparaging content.¹⁴ No Muslim scholar dared to confront the defamatory tactics employed by Christians.

They adeptly crafted sacred texts utilizing the Arabic-Malayalam script, strategically designed to foment confusion and misapprehension within the Muslim community itself. By adroitly manipulating the historical nexus between the Bible and the Qur'an, the missionaries achieved a modicum of success in instigating certain misapprehensions within the Muslim community. Bolstered by the moral backing of the British, they persisted unabated in the execution of their undertakings. Makthi Thangal astutely apprehended the perilous trajectory of this unfolding trend, recognizing the imperative of according it due gravity. In response to the orchestrated activities backed by the British Government, Makthi Thangal opted for a course of protest. Foremost among his actions was the deliberate relinquishment of his position within the bureaucratic echelons under the aegis of the British Government. Expressing deep dismay over this situation, Makthi Thangal resigned from his position in 1882¹⁵ and committed himself to the mission of refuting the allegations made by Christian missionaries. A mere 35 years of age in the pivotal year of 1882, he took the momentous decision to sever ties with the British Government, thereby initiating a decisive juncture in his trajectory. After resigning from the post, Makthi moved to Kochi and sought more challenging employment opportunities in Muslim reform endeavors, aiming to contribute his skills and expertise to initiatives focused on positive change and progress within the Muslim community. Reverend Father CD David, Vidhan Kutty, and Reverend Pronmayer, prominent Christian figures from Thrissur, have participated in religious dialogues with Makthi Thangal.¹⁶ He traversed the expanse of Kerala, vehemently countering the propagandist efforts of Christian missionaries with a tenacious commitment to his cause. His actions didn't sit well with fellow scholars, who began to voice their objections and even issued fatwas discouraging support for his endeavors. Fatwas were issued, advising against providing rice from

the hotel, even if he offered payment.¹⁷ In his autobiography, "Makthi Manahklesam," he detailed the hardships and challenges he faced as a result.¹⁸

He was deeply disturbed to find himself falsely accused and implicated in grave criminal charges. Due to the avoidance and reluctance of Muslims to come near or engage with him, he had to resort to purchasing rice and broth from local restaurants for six months to sustain himself and protect his well-being.¹⁹ Makthi Thangal, a prodigious orator of formidable prowess, vehemently repudiated anti-Islamic propaganda with compelling articulation, delivering resolute lectures and penning incisive articles. In the nascent phase of his literary contributions, his articles and publications encapsulated trenchant critiques directed at Christian ideologies.

His works

Makthi Thangal authored numerous articles in both Arabi-Malayalam and Malayalam languages. These articles were published in various newspapers of that era, including *Swadeshabhmani*, *Sanatana Dharmam*, *Malayalam Rajyam*, *Kerala Sanchari*, *Swalihul Ikhwan*, and others. He wrote three books in Arabic-Malayalam: *Taallimul Ikhwan*, *Muallimul Ikhwan*, and *Marumakkathayam*. In addition to this, he created fifty works²⁰ in the Malayalam language, which were the linguistic compositions for which Makthi gained renown during his lifetime. Makthi Thangal was compelled to publish a book in Malayalam script because using Arabic Malayalam would have made it inaccessible to missionaries and other Malayalis. It is essential to assess these texts in any context by considering the timeframe in which they were written. To thoroughly examine the particulars of these books.²¹

1. *Kadhorakuttaaram*,
2. *Cristheeya anjeyavijayam parkkaleetha porkkalam*,
3. *Sathyadarshini*,
4. *Cristheeya vaayadappu*,
5. *Thandaan kandamaala*,
6. *Thandaan kondaattachenda*,
7. *Muhammad nabi avakaashaposhanam cristheeya manapoorva moshanam*,
8. *Maqdi samvadajayam*,
9. *Kuttoravajram*,
10. *Jayaanandhaghosham*,
11. *Cristheeya mathamathippu*,
12. *Threeyekanaasham mahaanaasham*
13. *Madyapaanam masheehaa mathaabhimaanam*,
14. *Njaan njaan thane*
15. *Nabinaanayam*
16. *Muslimkalum rajabhakthiyum*
17. *Paadavaadam paathakapaadakam*
18. *Muslimkalum vidyaabhyaasavum*

19. *Quran vedavilaapam*
20. *Oru vivadam*
21. *Maqdi thangal aagosham*
22. *Thangalagosham mahaagosham*
23. *Ahankaragosham*
24. *Praavu shodhana*
25. *Dambhaachaara vichaari*
26. *Islam vaalu daiva vaalu*
27. *Orkkaathaarkkunnathinnorappu*
28. *Paalillapaayasam*
29. *Naaree narabhichaari*
30. *Mooda ahankaram mahaandhakaaram*
31. *Moudyadambhara naasham*
32. *Paropadra parihaari*
33. *Iaa maujoodin laa poyantu*
34. *Makthi manahaklesham*
35. *Moossakkuttikkutharam*
36. *Moossakkuttiyude mookku kuthi*
37. *Daivam*
38. *Svargathilekku vazhikaatti cristhuvo pauloso*
39. *Cristhava muudaproudi darpanam upalekhanam*
40. *Suvishesha naasham*²²

Kadora Kudaram

Muslim Sanaullah Makthi Thangal holds the distinction of being the pioneer to compose a book in Malayalam script, with his inaugural work titled "Kadora Kudaram". In response to the derogatory articles targeting Islam and the Prophet published in Christian magazines such as *Keralopakari*,²³ Muslim Sanaullah Makthi Thangal addressed the issue by releasing *Kadora Kudaram* in Malayalam script in 1884. In this scenario, Makthi Thangal is neither opposing Christianity nor praising Islam, rather, he underscores the futility of attempting conversions by exploiting the ignorance of the economically disadvantaged.

In 1884, Sayyid Sanaullah Makthi Thangal, published his influential work "*Kadora Kudaram*,"²⁴ It is a seminal tome that conducted a meticulous critical examination of the Trinitarian²⁵ doctrine intrinsic to Christianity. It is a simple book that created a huge stir in the field of religious instruction. A marginal refutation of the *Kadora* tent was written by a Christian scholar named Vidvankutty.²⁶ In the face of vehement opposition from Christian scholars to the aforementioned tome, he defiantly released the rejoinder "*Kadora Vajram*."²⁷ It is a simple book that created a huge stir in the field of religious instruction.

Christhiya Angheneya Vijayam" or "Parakhalita Porkalam"

On the identical subject matter, he disseminated a book titled "Christhiya Angheneya Vijayam" or "Parakhalita Porkalam"²⁸ from Thiruvananthapuram in 1892,²⁹ underscoring his unyielding stance with enhanced linguistic rigor. The labor, which substantiates, in the luminosity of those textual sources, that Prophet Muhammad is the prophesied messenger delineated in both the Bible and Jewish scriptures, elicited a profound commotion.³⁰ He issued a challenge, asserting that if anyone could substantiate their refutation of his conclusion using evidence from the Bible, he would remit a sum of 200 rupees.³¹ Alternatively, the individuals facing charges purchased it and eliminated it by paying a price of up to one pawan.(gold)³²

Nabi Nanayam

Makthi Thangal amassed modest donations from Cochin's small-scale shopkeepers, utilizing the funds to publish the biographical account of Prophet Muhammad, titled "Nabi Nanayam."³³ The title 'Nabi Nanayam' is attributed to its funding, which involved gathering individual coins from the community in Kochi.³⁴ Apart from providing a direct historical narrative, 'Nabi Nanayam' incorporates accounts from European historians and addresses and rebuts objections raised by adherents of different faiths. In his groundbreaking book, Makthi Thangal provides a logical counterargument to the inaccuracies presented in Gundert's history (mahammathacharithram)³⁵ of Prophet Muhammad.³⁶ It seems that Hermann Gundert's book "Mahammatacharitram" was published in 1844, predating Makthi Thangal's work. Gundert's work appears to be the earlier publication discussing Prophet Muhammad in Malayalam.

In his short work Herman Gundert delves into the realms of Kabah, Quresh, the Quran, Prophet Muhammad, the pilgrimage, and the life of the Prophet, covering facets such as Khadeeja, Revelation, Hijrah, Madinah, AbuSufyan, the conquest of Mecca, Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali. Notably, Gundert provides distinctive insights into the Prophet's history and Mappilas of Malabar in a unique and varied manner.³⁷ Gundert's work, while valuable in its breadth and scope, contained certain inaccuracies that prompted Makthi Thangal to undertake a critical examination and provide a corrective response.³⁸ Makthi Thangal's response to Gundert's work is not merely a critique; it is a profound contribution to Islamic scholarship. By meticulously examining and correcting Gundert's inaccuracies, Thangal not only rectified historical errors but also reaffirmed the authenticity and accuracy of Islamic teachings. Makthi Thangal's initiative to address Gundert's inaccuracies underscores the importance of scholarly engagement with historical texts, ensuring that the narrative of Islam is preserved and

presented with integrity. His work serves as a reminder that historical accounts, even those from respected scholars, are not infallible and require careful evaluation to ensure their accuracy.

However, it's crucial to highlight that Makthi Thangal's book is a response that addresses and disputes the inaccuracies found in Gundert's work. This work marks the first time a Muslim scholar has authored a book about Prophet Muhammad in the Malayalam language. Makthi Thangal's contribution to Islamic scholarship is significant in its efforts to correct misconceptions and promote accurate understanding of the Prophet's life. Makthi Thangal's groundbreaking book provides a valuable counterpoint to Gundert's narrative, offering a fresh perspective that reflects Islamic traditions.

Critiquing other faiths was considered a missionary obligation for the religious establishment.³⁹ In the context of spreading their faith, early Christian missionaries in Kerala felt compelled to critique and examine existing religious beliefs and practices. This involved actively studying and evaluating local literature, including Hindu epics and other religious texts. This engagement with local traditions was not a one-sided affair. Rather, it was a dynamic process that involved both critique and adaptation. For instance, Christian priests, known as *Pathiris*, actively contributed to Christian literature by incorporating elements of Malayalam literature while offering critical perspectives on existing Hindu beliefs. This approach, which involved reviving and reinterpreting traditional stories while simultaneously critiquing them, served as a means of propagating Christian teachings in a culturally sensitive manner. Gundert provide an introduction to Prophet Muhammad and Islam for Malayalam-speaking readers. His work contained inaccuracies and misinterpretations due to his reliance on European sources and his lack of in-depth understanding of Islamic theology. Relied heavily on European sources, including orientalist writings, to interpret and present Islamic history and teachings. Islamic scholars reject Gundert's biography due to reliance on unreliable sources, Orientalist biases, a lack of understanding of Islamic sources, misrepresentation of history, and biased interpretations fostering negative stereotypes about Islam.

Makthi Thangal's Muhammadiya Press Inception

A lone individual took on the role of a movement for Muslims of Kerala. To spread his ideas, Makthi Thangal authored various booklets. When seeking funds for publishing, he faced reluctance from the affluent members of his own community. However, it was the enthusiasm of some young men in Alleppey that eventually helped him establish a press in Cochin in 1890.⁴⁰ It is known as Muhammadiya Press.⁴¹

Traversing the World of Newspapers with Satyaprakasam

Recognizing the newspaper's significance in shaping the current ideological landscape, he contemplated initiating a newspaper. Janab Qadir Shah Haji Bapu Sahib,⁴² a knowledgeable individual from Calvathi with the affectionate nickname Kaka, provided support in this endeavor.⁴³ In 1888 AD, Kaka Sahib as editor and, and Makthi Thangal, a respected Muslim scholar, jointly launched a weekly column titled 'Satyaprakasam' (The True Light)⁴⁴ in Kochi. The column ran for nine months. It was published from the Bharatkesari Press, founded by Adamji Bhimji Setu Sahib in Kochi. Kaka Sahib passed away in the year 1908. In 1894 AD, Makthi Thangal published a poem in Arabic-Malayalam titled Tuhfatul Akhyar Wahidayatul Ashrar in Kochi.⁴⁵ Chenathu Valapil Syed Abdur Rahman Hydros, also known as Adima Musliar in Cochin, collaborated with Aniyapurathu Ammu Sahib from Thalassery and Arakkal Kunjahmad Moulavi from Kochi as members of the Editorial Committee.⁴⁶ It was a newspaper that opposed traditional and conservative beliefs. Its slogan was as follows: did not leave the kitchen, did not meet knowledgeable people, did not study any Kitab, and did not lack Fatwa.⁴⁷

Paropakari

After the closure of Sathya Prakasam Weekly, another magazine Paropakari (The Humanitarian)⁴⁸ in 1885, he published bimonthly in Kozhikode and Kochi, persisted for three years.⁴⁹ Different segments of this publication addressed critiques made by Christians regarding Islam. Running the Paropakari press left him in financial debt, to the extent that he had to sell the house where he resided.⁵⁰ Due to reluctance within the Islamic community, he encounters difficulty in obtaining housing, even for rental purposes, resulting in his homelessness. Makthi Thangal wanted to start a magazine called Nityajivan⁵¹ in 1902, but he was unable to secure enough subscribers to make it a success. Despite receiving funds from 38 individuals, he ultimately decided to return their money and abandon the project. This highlights the challenges faced by individuals seeking to start new initiatives for the service of humanity, even in the face of financial support. Makthi Thangal launched an evening newspaper called Turki Samacharam in 1909,⁵² primarily focusing on news related to the Ottoman Caliphs' religious, political, social, and economic activities in Turkey. However, due to financial constraints, the newspaper ceased publication after only six months. This underscores the challenges of sustaining a news publication in the face of financial limitations.

The intrepid Makthi thangal fearlessly challenged the Tariqat Sufi sect, which had embraced un-Islamic practices. In June 1909, he released the pamphlet "Lamoujudil Lapointe"⁵³ in Kochi, where he criticized numerous Tariqa Shaykhs and their followers of that era. He criticized Sufi orders like Rifai, Qadiri, Naqshbandi, Chishti, and Shadhuli, pointing out disputes, quarrels, and the prohibition of mosque entry between these groups. He denounced all these factions, emphasizing that innovative practices under the guise of Tariqah are not sanctioned in Islam. Certain Muslims didn't hesitate to issue a fatwa declaring that Makthi's actions were contrary to the principles of the Deen (religion).

Makthi Thangal left his job to work on community projects full-time. Determined to foster a sense of belonging and shared identity within his community, Makthi Thangal embarked on a mission to connect and engage its members through the power of the written word. Makthi Thangal, though not a rich man but he possessed a wealth of spirit and a profound commitment to his community's well-being. Despite reaching out to numerous individuals of considerable means within the Muslim community, Makthi Thangal's efforts to secure financial backing for his endeavors remained unfulfilled. From AD 1882, that revolutionary hero travelled all over Kerala. Islamic preaching activities continued unabated. There were not many people to help. How long can a person go ahead with reform activities alone?⁵⁴ It can be understood from the many lakhs of letters and advertisements that he was troubled by the financial problem with publications. This lack of support from a segment of society that ostensibly shared his faith and heritage underscored the challenges he faced in garnering support for his cause. They were not ready to accept or encourage Islamic propaganda through Aryan writing. He started a publishing house in Kochi with the help of some community friends from Alappuzha and Kochi. Subsequently, in the annals of 1888, emerged the inception of a periodical titled Satyaprakasam, marking a resolute foray into the realm of journalistic undertakings. Unfortunately, it lasted only nine months. He started publishing a daily newspaper in Arabic-Malayalam script, which was more widely read by Muslims than newspapers written in Malayalam. The newspaper Tuhfatul Akhyar Wahidayatul Asharar⁵⁵ was like modern newspapers, even though journalism was not yet a developed concept in Kerala at that time. The newspaper had about twelve sections, including local and foreign news, explanations of the Quran, stories and humor, history, proverbs, character development, question and answer columns, and responses to readers' questions. In the past, it was tough for newspapers and magazines that focused on serious subjects to survive, and the challenge persists today. The magazine he started in Kozhikode and Kochi, called Paropakari, lasted for three years. In 1909,⁵⁶ he launched

an evening newspaper named Turki Samacharam, which lasted only six months. This marked the end of his attempts to publish periodicals.

He firmly believed that community progress can be achieved only through education and turned his attention to that field. He held the firm belief that mastering Malayalam and English languages was indispensable for anyone seeking to excel in the realm of modern education. Despite recognizing the importance of Malayalam and English in modern education, Makthi Thanal faced significant resistance from within the Muslim community, who held deep-seated emotional objections to both languages. The vehement opposition to Malayalam and English stemmed from the vested interests of certain Muslim scholars who sought to maintain their influence within the community. Despite the undeniable importance of language in education, these scholars were unwilling to embrace even the most basic scientific principles in their approach to teaching Arabic. In 1888, Makthi Thanal published Taleemul Ikhwan,⁵⁷ a groundbreaking Arabic textbook that introduced a practical and effective method for learning the language. This marked the first time an Arabic textbook was published in Kerala. In 1891, Makthi Thanal authored Mu Allimul Ikhwan, a groundbreaking work dedicated to refining and standardizing the Arabic-Malayalam script. This book marked a significant milestone in the development of the script and its role in education and communication within the Muslim community of Kerala. Makthi Thanal embarked on a tireless journey across Kerala, passionately challenging the deeply ingrained superstitions that plagued the community. Makthi Thanal's fearless crusade against longstanding immoral practices within the community inevitably drew the ire of the entrenched power structures.⁵⁸ Makthi Thanal vehemently denounced the un-Islamic cults that revolved around individuals, recognizing them as a threat to the true principles of Islam. Makthi Thanal's progressive views and unwavering commitment to reform often faced fierce resistance from the conservative segments of the Muslim community. Undeterred by the objections of the conservative faction, Makthi Thanal remained steadfast in his pursuit of his deeply held convictions and unwavering commitment to progress and reform. Far from being discouraged by the physical hardships he faced, Makthi Thanal's resolve only grew stronger with each trial, fueling his unwavering commitment to his cause. Makthi Thanal imparted his progressive ideals to young Muslim minds through a comprehensive preaching training program, empowering them to carry forward his message of reform and enlightenment. Makthi Thanal remained a revered and active member of his community until his passing in 1912,⁵⁹ dedicating his life to the pursuit of reform and education.

Marumakkathayam

Islamic law is the system of law that is based on the Quran, the holy book of Islam. It covers all aspects of life, including inheritance. Marumakkathayam is a system of inheritance⁶⁰ that is matrilineal, meaning that property is inherited through the mother's line. It is a traditional system that is still followed by some Hindu and Muslim families⁶¹ in Kerala. Many Muslims in Kerala adhere to Islamic law, but a small group follows the Marumakkathayam system⁶² for their joint family properties. Marumakkathayee Muslims⁶³ are mainly located in North Malabar, with some families in Edava and Varkala in the former Travancore state.⁶⁴ The Marumakkathayam system they practice is similar to the one observed by Hindus. He expressed disapproval of the Marumakkathayam system, pointing to the Quran as proof that the practice of in-law relationships among Muslims in North Malabar contradicts Islamic teachings. He wrote and spread many articles in both Arabic-Malayalam and Malayalam script to show that Marumakkathayam was a leftover of Hindu culture. One time, he was severely beaten for delivering a speech from Kannur that criticized the Marumakkathayam system.⁶⁵ Makthi Thangal's defiance of Marumakkathayam, a traditional matrilineal inheritance system, epitomizes the spirit of reform and modernity that he embodied. It was a bold and revolutionary step that challenged the status quo and paved the way for social reform in Kerala.

In 1889 AD, Makthi Thangal organized the Muslim youth of Kannur and formed a cultural committee. Its name was Muhammadiyah Sabha.⁶⁶ Makthi Thangal's Muhammadiya Sabha had the potential to bring about significant change in Kerala's social landscape. Unfortunately, its transformative power was hindered by the Muslim community's resistance to change, leading to a missed opportunity for positive transformation. He stayed in Kannur for one year. Makthi Thangal's message to Kannur Arakkal Sultan in 1902, along with an accompanying letter, was published in the Salahul Ikhwan⁶⁷ newspaper.⁶⁸ The Sultan of Kannur Arakkal conscientiously considered the significant appeal. Starting from May 1, 1902, until his demise, Makthi Thangal received a monthly stipend of twenty-five rupees from the Arakkal Treasury.⁶⁹

Modern Education

The history reveals that Kerala Muslims were hesitant to adopt modern liberal education.⁷⁰ This reluctance stemmed partly from deep-seated religious and political prejudices and partly from the government's indifference to their issues. The years of oppression under British rule fostered an antagonistic attitude towards anything English, including the English language, which was, at one point, disdainfully referred to as the

language of undesirable influences. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this resistance to modern education can also be rooted in a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and sociopolitical factors, which extend beyond a mere comparison to rote Quranic recitation.⁷¹ He authored a dedicated book titled "Muslims and Education."⁷² "His advocacy extended to urging fellow Muslims to adopt English and secular education, viewing these pursuits as essential for enhancing their lives and preventing societal marginalization."⁷³ Makthi Thangal emphasized on various occasions that it is essential for the community's progress to combine modern education with religious education.⁷⁴ He persistently opposed the traditional belief that English was a language associated with hell. This fact can be seen from the book "Muslims and Education."⁷⁵ In an updated version of the *Narinarabhichari*,⁷⁶ in his final days, Makthi Thangal, wrote a religious text that highlights the importance of educating women. This emphasis on female education reflects Makthi Thangal's progressive views and his understanding of the crucial role that women play in society. In his book "Mudha Ahankaram Mahandhakaram," he distinctly conveys the importance of English language education and proficiency in Malayalam, his native language, for Muslims. He criticizes those who argue that acquiring proficiency in these languages contradicts the Vedas, stating that such individuals lack insight and are spiritually blind. The difficulty in bringing people back from this dangerous opinion is not small. He says "Thanks to the blessings of God, English language education commenced in the northern region of Kerala. Individuals who have achieved prominent positions are now present within the Muslim community, but they are facing criticism."⁷⁷ Makthi Thangal spoke about his efforts to reform the religious education system and the Arabic-Malayalam script. In the year 1308 of the Hijra calendar, (1890 C.E.) he wrote and published the famous work "Taa'limul Ikhwan,"⁷⁸ which is the first Arabic alphabet textbook.⁷⁹ It is a hand book for Arabic learners. The inaugural book to present alterations and adaptations to the traditional Arabic-Malayalam script. Before that time, instruction in Arabic letters involved writing on wooden boards; however, the new approach presented lessons in a more conventional format.

This may be first attempt of this kind which has been widely used in primary schools throughout Kerala. In 1311 A.H., (1893-1894) Makthi Thangal authored a significant book titled "Muallimul Ikhwan" in the Arabic-Malayalam script. This book holds importance not only for its content but also for its relevance in the study of Malayalam grammar. It serves as a valuable resource for elucidating the grammatical rules in the Arabic-Malayalam context. Makthi Thangal modified the Arabic-Malayalam script by adding some dots and symbols to the Arabic-Persian script. The scheme was not universally accepted.

Thangal argued that embracing English and engaging with secular subjects would empower Muslims to actively participate in society and contribute to community development. He believed that acquiring such knowledge was crucial for Muslims not to be left behind in the rapidly evolving modern world. Thangal's significant contributions lie in dispelling damaging stereotypes about Islam and fostering mutual understanding between Muslims and Christians. His work played a pivotal role in encouraging Muslims to embrace education and fully participate in contemporary society. Makthi Thangal expressed a desire for a complete translation of the Quran into Malayalam. However, due to limited opportunities, the preacher could only accomplish the translation of a few chapters (surahs). He vehemently opposed the notion of prohibiting the Quran in the Malayalam language. While he acknowledged the commendable fear of God, he found it disheartening that even after a millennium, the concept of translating and comprehending scriptures in one's own language had not been embraced, describing it as a lamentable situation.⁸⁰

During that period, Makthi Thangal extensively travelled and preached across Malabar with the aim of putting an end to the futile resistance against the British and restoring the region's lost prestige through education. In an effort to discourage the Muslims of Malabar from engaging in the struggle, Makthi Thangal authored numerous concise articles in a blend of Arabic-Malayalam and their native language. Additionally, he composed a compact book titled "Paropadrava Parihari."⁸¹

Makthi Thangal criticized the eminent scholar Shujai Moitu Musliar for his lack of scholarship and his focus on superficial matters.⁸² A large section of Muslims became opponents of Makthi Thangal. Consequently, certain religious scholars from Ponnani and other areas issued a fatwa asserting that the preacher's Islamic teachings were inconsistent with Islam. The influence of the British government was also a contributing factor to the issuance of such fatwas.

Makthi Thangal initially disagreed with P.K. Musakutty Sahib's notion that Muslim women should advance through modern education. The two engaged in a discourse competition during which Makthi Thangal wrote articles such as "*Musakuttykoru Muk Koothi*" and "*Musakuttykut Oruttaram*."⁸³ (A Reply to Musakutty) P.K. Musakutty crafted a rebuttal in *Swadesabhimani* to counter Makthi Thangal's viewpoints during their discourse. Makthi Thangal initially expresses his disagreement with this idea, arguing that it would jeopardize the traditional values and roles of Muslim women. However, in his final days, Makthi Thangal ultimately came to fully support P.K.'s ideas. In the inaugural edition of the book "*Nari Narabhichari*," he underscored the

significance of women aligning with shari'a principles for their emancipation, concurrently highlighting the importance of gaining knowledge. This change of heart is a testament to his willingness to learn and grow, and it demonstrates the power of open dialogue and debate. Christians filed numerous cases against him during the British colonial era, but he effectively defended himself in every court appearance. Christian clerics and Muslim conservatives crumbled under Makthi's relentless censure.⁸⁴ In none of the cases were they able to punish him or seize his books. In a few of the cases initiated by Christians, there were Muslim followers who testified against that remarkable individual. Makthi Thangal's unwavering fight against superstitions and outdated customs went largely unrecognized by the Muslim community. Instead of supporting his efforts, they placed numerous obstacles in his path. He lived a 35-year-long missionary life full of sacrifice. He worked single-handedly with dedication in a field that was not possible even for the panditas in his own community. He gave a befitting reply to Christian missionaries. He skilfully countered his opponents' criticisms with wit and humour, disarming their arguments and turning their attacks into opportunities for further dialogue. Furthermore, in the years leading up to 1905, the Muslims in Travancore displayed increased assertiveness,⁸⁵ particularly under the influence of Vakkom Abdul Khader Maulavi, and this shift can be attributed significantly to the efforts spearheaded by Sanaullah Makthi Thangal. Makthi Thangal's criticisms of the Muslim conditions helped to establish the agenda of the Mappila theological reform.⁸⁶ This historical transformation also reinforces the idea that history is a continuous dialogue between the present and the past, as E.H. Carr observed.⁸⁷ This concept posits that history is an ongoing process of engagement between the historian and the facts, representing a perpetual conversation between the contemporary and the historical. Many individuals in today's generation lack awareness of a significant figure in the Muslim community in Kerala. These often-overlooked heroes symbolize genuine enlightenment, and their omission from mainstream historical records serves as a poignant reminder of our collective memory's fragility, the fleeting nature of fame, and the biases shaping our understanding of the past. To unveil these hidden treasures, we must delve into the narratives of these marginalized figures, viewing them not as mere relics but as dynamic tapestries woven with the threads of universal human experience. Within their stories, we'll discover echoes of our own challenges, aspirations, and dreams. Although their legacy has been obscured for too long, it can light our path and lead us toward a future where the voices of the marginalized are not silenced but instead celebrated as luminaries of enlightenment. In 1911, Makthi Thangal moved to Fort Kochi for health reasons and passed away on September 18, 1912. He was laid to rest within the esteemed confines of the historic Juma Masjid, located at Calvathy in Fort Kochi.⁸⁸

The title "Shield-Bearer"⁸⁹ aptly captures Makthi Thangal's unwavering commitment to safeguarding the Muslim community's well-being and upholding their dignity. He stood as a bulwark against oppression and marginalization, ensuring that the voices of the Muslims were heard and their rights were recognized. Upon his departure, Makthi Thangal entrusted a phalanx of seasoned reformers, imbued with the mantle of his legacy, to relentlessly pursue the flame of his transformative mission.

Conclusion

Despite their theological differences, both Christianity and Islam trace their roots back to Abraham and share a belief in one God. This common foundation provides a basis for dialogue and understanding between the two faiths. There is a wide range of interpretations and perspectives within each faith, and these differences can be a source of both conflict and enrichment. Engaging in open and respectful dialogue, such as the debates on Makthi Thangal and Christian missionaries, can help to break down stereotypes and misconceptions, and foster greater understanding and appreciation of each other's faith. While there have been periods of conflict and misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims, it is possible for people of these two faiths to live together in peace and harmony. People have always had a tendency to isolate themselves from others to demonstrate their superiority.⁹⁰ Despite their theological differences, Christians and Muslims share a common humanity and a desire for peace and justice. They can learn from each other's perspectives and work together to address common challenges facing the world. The emergence of reformist intellectuals like Makthi Thangal marked a turning point in the history of the Kerala Muslim community. These intellectuals challenged traditional practices and advocated for a more modern and inclusive Islam. Their ideas resonated with many members of the community, and they played a key role in shaping the community's development in the 20th century. He promoted education, particularly secular education, among Muslims. He encouraged Muslims to participate in politics and civic life. He challenged traditional gender roles and advocated for women's rights. He promoted interfaith understanding and tolerance. Despite the controversies surrounding his methods, Makthi Thangal's contributions to religious reform in Kerala are undeniable. His bold denunciations of superstitious practices sparked debates and encouraged self-reflection within the Muslim community. His critiques of non-Muslim practices, while controversial, also served as a catalyst for interfaith dialogue and understanding. Makthi Thangal's legacy is a complex one, marked by both unwavering commitment to reform and a confrontational style that often-generated friction. Nevertheless, his impact on religious discourse in Kerala cannot be

overlooked. He remains a significant figure in the history of Islamic thought and social reform in the region.

The work of Makthi Thangal had a profound impact on the Kerala Muslim community. Makthi's challenges were more societal and cultural than national. He believed that directly challenging the state and isolating oneself from opportunities for social and educational progress would be detrimental to the community's well-being. It helped to modernize the community and to make it more open and inclusive. His legacy continues to inspire Muslims in Kerala and around the world.

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