ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue



JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)

An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Empowering Kerala Muslims: The Transformative Role of Jamaat-e-Islami in Education and Sociocultural Development

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Abstract

This article attempts to evaluate and determine the educational interventions of the Islamic social reform movement, Jamaat-e-Islami, in Kerala. Jamaat-e-Islami a modern reformist organization based on Islamic ideology, has developed a distinctive style and methodology in its activities across the country. They were the pioneering organisation to start both religious and modern secular education in Kerala through various institutions. Their, socio-cultural endeavours and initiatives such as the Ideal Relief Wing (IRW), Kerala Masjid Council, People's Foundation, AICL, etc., Additionally, the movement emphasizes the role of literary works and contributions through its literary agents, including publications like Prabhodhanam Weekly, Aaramam Weekly, Madhyamam Weekly, Malarvadi Monthly, Madhyamam Daily News, and the Media One Television Channel and Islamic Publishing House (IPH). This study adopts a descriptive and analytical methodology to analyse the collected data, providing a comprehensive understanding of Jamaat-e-Islami's educational activities and its impact among the Kerala Muslims. It also examines the various educational institutions and other socio-cultural activities of this organisation.

Key Words

Jamaat-e Islami, Education, Islamia Colleges, <mark>Maj</mark>lisu ta'aleemil Islami, Peoples foundation and Hikma Examinations.

Introduction

The contribution of Islam to the socio-cultural and educational transformation of India, particularly in Kerala, is both valuable and well-documented. In Kerala, the influence of Islam and various Muslim organisations and their activities on education and socio-cultural reformation has been more pronounced than in any other part of the country. Jamaat-e-Islami, founded in 1941 by Abul Ala Maududi, an eminent Islamic scholar, philosopher, and theoretician of political Islam, has played a significant role in this transformation. V.P. Muhammad Ali, commonly known as 'Haji Sahib,' was the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in Kerala. A pivotal meeting held at Valanchery in 1948 marked the historic decision to transform 'Jamiyath-ul-Mustarshidin' into the first unit of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in Kerala.¹

The fundamental creed of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind is 'La Ilaha Illa Allah Muhammadur Rasulullah,2' and its primary objective is 'Iqamat-e-Deen,' aimed at achieving Divine pleasure and success in the hereafter. This study aims to analyse the operations of the Indian Jamaat-e-Islami and its educational activities in Kerala. The importance of this study is immense, given that the Muslim community is actively seeking identity and ideology under the banner of Islam. The Muslim community faces numerous global challenges across all facets of social life. The creative interventions of Jamaat-e-Islami in Kerala have significantly transformed the socio-cultural, religious, economic, and political landscapes for Kerala Muslims.

Islam reached Kerala during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime in the seventh century. Arab merchants, who engaged in brisk trade relations with Kerala, were the torchbearers of Islam in the region. The famous Cheraman Perumal legend illustrates the early presence of Islam in Kerala. Cheraman Perumal, the last ruler of unified Kerala, embraced Islam and travelled to Mecca to meet Prophet Muhammad in his later years. This event is well-documented by Shaikh Zainuddin in his work 'Tuhfat-al-Mujahidin'.⁴ Following these early developments, Islam in Kerala experienced numerous historic and dramatic events across socio-cultural and religious fields. By the mid-20th century, one of the leading revivalist movements, Jamaat-e-Islami, was established in undivided India. Following the partition, the movement split into Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan. In 1948, this movement extended its reach to Kerala through the efforts of V.P. Muhammad Ali (Haji Sahib), significantly impacting the region's socio-cultural dynamics.⁵

Before the formation of Jamaat-e-Islami and its activities in Kerala, V.P. Muhammad Ali established an organization named 'Jamiyath-ul-Mustarshidin' in 1946 at Valanchery, Malappuram, where he served as an Imam (prayer leader) in a mosque.⁶ The first annual meeting of this organization took place at the residence of C.M. Moideen Kutty Sahib, which subsequently hosted important lectures and discussions on various topics. This pivotal meeting decided to transform 'Jamiyath-ul-Mustarshidin' into the first unit of Jamaat-e-Islami in Kerala on August 21, 1948.⁷ V.P. Muhammad Ali, also known as Haji Sahib, became the first leader of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in Kerala and was elected as the 'Qayyim' of the organization. This title was later changed to 'Amir' (President), and he served in this capacity until his death in 1959.⁸ The growth and development of Jamaat-e-Islami in Kerala were remarkably rapid, influenced by various direct and indirect factors. Haji Sahib's leadership and the organizational structure played a crucial role in this expansion, supported by a strong foundation of Islamic principles and a clear vision for social and cultural reform⁹.

Educational Activities

The Jamaat entered the field of Islamic education in the early 1950s. The movement and its leaders were very interested and attentive in the matters of facilitate to learning. They Encourage Arabic and Urdu language learning right from primary level and learning Quran with meaning from the lower classes. The early institutions like Madrassas were established at Chendamangalore, Kodinji and Mullyamkurisi and started functions. Madrasatul Banat was established in 1960 under the leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami, the first Muslim women's school in Kerala.

It is not possible to see Jamaat-e-Islami and Nadvathul Mujahideen as separate activities in the early reformation activities. With the formation of these organizations in the 1960s, distinctly different activities appeared in the field of education. While describing the educational reforms implemented under the leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami, V. P. Muhammadali Haji, K. C. Abdullah Maulavi, A. Muhammad Abdul Jalal Maulavi, and the services of scholars like K V Abdul Qadir Maulavi are invaluable. Izzuddeen Maulavi, who struggled to establish religious schools in Kerala, has been mentioned earlier. The curriculum has been designed and implemented from primary madrasa to college level with the objective of cultivating strong scholars to preach Islam as a holistic way of life and to inculcate a holistic view of Islam in the next generation. Accordingly, madrasas and learning centers were established in various parts of the country. Madrasahs were upgraded to colleges at Shantapuram, Chendamangalore and Thirurkkad. In addition to Arabic and Urdu languages, English and Malayalam languages are also taught in the colleges. The teaching method was in addition to religious subjects, but to develop skilful and creative achievements in these subjects enabled those who came out of these places to see excellent activities in social and cultural sectors in various parts of the world, including Western countries. In 1975, a committee called *Majlisuthaaleemul Islami* was formed under the Indian Societies Act to oversee the educational activities of the Jamaat-e Islami and to supervise them. Madrasahs and Arabic colleges were affiliated to this committee.

Majlisu Ta'aleemil Islami

Majlisu ta'aleemil Islami is an educational department under Jamaat-e Islami in Kerala has the following are main objectives. To Spread Islamic knowledge and culture. To provide effective guidelines for the educational advancement of the Muslim community and to plan and implement exemplary programs for the same. To impart Islamic discipline to Muslim boys and Girls and young people raise them to be model citizens with exemplary and cultural purity. To spread Islamic knowledge and moral teachings among the Muslim women and masses. Devise and implement programs for the educational and material upliftment of the citizens of the country without regard to caste and religion to develop it as a model society.

Legal and technical aspects to make the functions of *Majlisu ta'aleemil Islami* more efficient. In view of this, a charitable trust was registered in 2011 in the name of Majlis Educational Charitable Trust. It is working under the name Plus Education Board under School for Islamic education. More than six hundred Madrasahs are affiliated, and fifty thousand students are studying in it. About 100 CBSE English schools are functioning, and

more than seventy thousand students are studying here. 25 Arabic colleges are functioning, and more than 3000 students are studying in various subjects including Usooludheen in these colleges.¹⁰ More than sixty percent of them are girls. More than ten self-financed colleges with facilities for various university courses including one training college and two paramedical institutions are functioning. There are separate boards to look after each area. Apart from Kerala, Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Qatar, U. A. E, Sharjah, Muscat, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and other foreign countries also operate institutions that conduct studies according to the Majlis curriculum. Eight quality orphanages are functioning under this trust.¹¹

For almost all the classes in the madrasa, the syllabus is determined for most of the subjects and the textbooks are prepared accordingly. Trainings and workshops are organized for the teachers as per requirement with and without change of textbooks. Two months of in-service training is also organized for the selected candidates. The Majlis supervises the examinations. The question papers are prepared by the expert teachers at the affiliated institutes, checked by experts and distributed to the institutes after quality assurance. Conducting public examinations at primary, secondary and higher secondary levels and issuing certificates. It is developed from the ground up with the objective of preparing the students for the competitive exams which require natural, intellectual and creative skills. It also conducts talent search exams in all classes and thousands of students from an affiliated schools are participating in this.

Under Majlis the following items also conducts all years like, Hikma Talent Search Exam. This exam is conducted in five categories namely Lower Kids, Kids, Sub Junior, Junior and Senior. Current Islamic developments, history, mental ability to deal with the issues etc. are the areas to be tested. Around 15,000 students are participating in this in 200 centers. Participating talents are also given follow-up evaluations called 'Talent Hundreds'. Literature Fests, to develop the artistic abilities of the students and the skills in the fields of literature and knowledge, separate arts festivals, sports competitions etc. are organized for the students of madrasas, schools and colleges. Science Expo is organized with the objective of developing scientific aptitudes and capabilities in technical fields.

Majlis is also preparing and conducting the syllabus, textbooks, teacher trainings, examinations and extracurricular activities in each category of Madrassa, School, and College levels etc. Principals Council, Academic Councils and Head Teacher Committees of the respective categories are formed to consult and take decisions. The Majlis has framed and implemented the service wage system applicable to all institutions. The service and pay scales are revised from time to time. Teachers Welfare Fund, Education Management Council etc were smoothly going on.

Arts & Islamic Course

In the early days, religious institutions were started with the aim of producing knowledgeable scholars and personalities capable of leading religious teaching activities. It was a complete success in many years, but many changes have made due to the pressure of circumstances. It has made necessary so far as educated youth are concerned to obtain recognized permanent degrees. In this situation, the structure of the courses implemented in Islamia Colleges was slightly changed and it was possible to obtain degrees like BA and B. Com from recognized universities. Its name was Arts and Islamic Courses. Through this, it has been possible to give birth to many graduates who are skilled in Islamic subjects and to provide service in many high positions. Some colleges have implemented Usooludheen courses that allow interested students to pursue full-time theological studies without aiming for a recognized degree. Also designing a postgraduate da'wah course for those who have completed the Arts and Islamic course with more knowledge in religious studies and special study and training for religious instruction.

The movement was carried out by various methods, such as to encourage the community to acquire all forms of education by exposing the shortcomings of modern physical education. Those who integrate Islamic education and modern education and prepare their own curriculum and implement it through their own educational institutions. To produce scholars with in-depth knowledge and research skills in Islamic subjects as well as general knowledge in physical subjects. World Famous Al-Jamia Shantapuram, Alia Kasaragod, Islahiya Chendamangalore etc. were the higher learning institutions under Jamaat-e Islami Kerala.

Higher Education

The Jamaat-e-Islami has consistently recognized the necessity of establishing an institution to effectively implement its educational agenda. The organization has particularly excelled in the realm of education, devising a comprehensive scheme that allows Muslim students to access a blend of religious and secular knowledge. ¹² Acknowledging the transformative power of education in modernizing societies, the Jamaat-e-Islami has successfully founded numerous influential institutions dedicated to this cause.

Jamaat-e-Islami strongly upheld the belief in the indispensability of education for the holistic development of an individual's personality. A fundamental principle of the organization was to provide education in accordance with Islamic principles to those in need. From its inception, Jama'at-e-Islami recognized that without significant improvements in both secular and religious education, any Islamic revival would remain elusive. As a crucial aspect of this vision, Jama'at-e-Islami established numerous educational centers across various regions of Kerala. Among these institutions, Aliya Arabic College in Kasargod held particular significance, having been founded by Muhammed Izzuddeen Umari in 1940. The Jama'at-e-Islami endeavoured to position it as a focal institution, and it eventually became the intellectual hub of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in Kerala. Notably, Aliya Arabic College was the sole institution directly under the control of the Kerala Amir, who served as its chairman. Under the management of Aliya Trust, several other significant institutions were operated, including the Junior Arabic College for Women, an Integrated Residential School catering to English and Malayalam medium students in the primary and upper primary levels, and the Aliya Technical and Trade Institution.

Another noteworthy establishment was *Islahiya College in Chennamangallur*, founded in 1952 under the name *Al-Madrasathul Islamiya*. It marked the first Madrasa established by Jamaat-e-Islami. Subsequently, in 1960, it transformed into a secular and religious institution and was renamed Islahiya College. This institution became affiliated with Calicut University in 1967.¹⁵ Within institutions like Islahiya Women's College, Al Madrasathul Islamiya (Secondary), Chennamangallur High School, Vadi Rahma Kodiyathoor, Arts and Islamic courses, Al Islah Orphanage, Asmabinth Aboobacker Girls Orphanage, and Vadi Rahma English School served as sister concerns of Islahiya College.

Another significant establishment is Islamiya College in Shantapuram, ¹⁶ Malappuram district, initiated in 1955 by V.P. Muhammed Ali, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami in Kerala. Initially offering the Faqeeh al-din (FD) course in a 10-year pattern, it later evolved into the AIC and Usooludheen course, incorporating Afzal-al-ulama. From 2000 onwards, the syllabi of the Usooludheen din course underwent changes, and the Afzal-al-Ulama course was discontinued. Presently, the institution offers *Tamheedi* for SSLC students, Usooludheen and Sharia College at the integrated level, Quran College, Hadith College, and Da'wah College for PG students. Additionally, PG diploma programs in Arabic and English, as well as Islamic economics and finance, are offered under the supervision of the Islamic Mission Trust. Since 2003, this campus has been known as Al Jamia-al Islamiya. ¹⁷

Now the Shantapuram Islamic college has gained the recognition of foreign Universities such as Islamic University in Madeena, and Qatar University. In its present form, Shantapuram Islamiya College is recognized as Jamia Islamia. The formal declaration of its status as a university and its inauguration took place in 2003, with the distinguished international Islamic scholar Dr. Yusuf Al Qardawi officiating the ceremony. The university currently comprises various faculties and centers, including the Preparatory Course, *Usooludheen* Faculty and *Usooludheen* Faculty for Women, Sharia Faculty, Qur'an Faculty, Da'wa Faculty, Institution for Imams and Katheebs, Centre for Islamic Economics, Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, and Centre for Information Technology. The university authorities have ambitious plans for the future, intending to establish additional colleges and institutions to further contribute to Islamic education and research in the region. The institution plays a crucial role in shaping the intellectual and educational landscape, with its graduates leading various sectors and wings of Jamaat-e Islami in Kerala.

Ilahiya College Thirurkkad, established in 1967 in Malappuram district by the *Nuzaruthul Islam Association*, stood out as one of the most notable institutions under Jamaat-e-Islami in the educational field. The affiliated institutions under this association included the Islamic Oriental High School, Boarding Madrasa, Afzal ul Ulama Course, Usooludheen College, Azad Residential Urdu College, and the Industrial Training Centre. Another noteworthy institution, Islamiya College in Vadanappally, Thrissur district, was founded in 1970 by the Islamic Educational Trust. It played a crucial role in contributing capable scholars and workers to Jamaat-e-Islami. Additionally, Islamiya College in Mannam, Ernakulam District, initially under its patronage in 1994, is now operating in Chalakkal in Ernakulam District.

Women Education

Jamaat-e-Islami has taken a prominent role in the empowerment of Muslim women. Like Mujahid organizations, Jamaat-e-Islami has actively advocated for women's education and inclusivity, going so far as to open the doors of its mosques to women. The organization has made substantial efforts to enrol girls in significant numbers in Arabic Colleges and Madrasas. Furthermore, Jamaat-e-Islami has taken a progressive step by establishing separate Madrasas and colleges exclusively for women, emphasizing the importance of providing educational opportunities tailored to the needs and aspirations of Muslim women. Numerous institutions, partly overseen by Jamaat-e-Islami, have made significant contributions to the dissemination of Islamic culture. Many of these institutions operate without charging fees from students, providing not only education but also free lodging and food. The impact of the Mujahid movement extends beyond education, encompassing a pivotal role in combating age-old superstitions, un-Islamic trends within the community, and prejudices against modern education and women's education. This multifaceted engagement underscores the broader societal influence and transformative efforts undertaken by the Jamaat-e-Islami. They started many higher education institutions for girls in different parts of Kerala.²⁰.

Social Service Activities

The societal interventions of Jamaat-e-Islami in Kerala are noteworthy for their emphasis on service to humanity as an extension of worship. The organization asserts that serving humanity complements the worship of the Lord of the universe. Across cities and villages in Kerala, the local, area, and district units of Jamaat-e-Islami are actively engaged in social service activities, providing crucial financial assistance to the deprived segments of society. These activities include support for medical treatments, children's education, marriages of dependents, house construction, and the promotion of regular income through small and medium-sized business enterprises. While some of these initiatives have attracted mass criticism from the public and government, others have been highly appreciated and emulated by different groups and acknowledged by relevant authorities. This dual reception underscores the complex impact of Jamaat-e-Islami's activities in Kerala, highlighting both the challenges and successes faced by the organization in its mission to serve the community and contribute to social development. Ideal Relief Wing (IRW) Ethical Medical Forum (EMF), Madhyamam Health Care Programme (MHCP), and Association of IDEAL Medical Services (AIMS), all these three endeavours serving under the guidance of Jamaat-e-Islami.

People's Foundation is a social service initiative dedicated to fostering innovative societal change. It operates on the belief that individual social problems and stalemates require permanent solutions rather than temporary fixes. The foundation aims to equip individuals and communities with the skills and opportunities needed for sustainable development. By ensuring resources are accessible to marginalized individuals and social groups, People's Foundation strives to create lasting change and transformation. Its approach maximizes the talents of all societal sections to contribute to national progress. The foundation's operational model promotes holistic development, encompassing social, spiritual, and cultural growth. It seeks to elevate Kerala's social service activities to a new level of effectiveness. People's Foundation is committed to promoting professional social work through need-based, result-oriented, and research-driven programs. By updating technology, employing goal-centered administration, and adopting a beneficiary-friendly approach, it partners with social work organizations and the community to mobilize a pool of morally committed human resources. Its mission includes the standardization of social and human welfare programs with a development-centered social work policy, augmenting resources, employing creative methodologies, and implementing sustainable projects to enhance the quality of life for individuals and society.

People's Foundation undertakes various projects and programs, including affiliation of Voluntary Organizations, Legal Aid and Counselling Centers, Disaster Management, Self-²¹Help Groups Microfinance, Medical Aid, Higher Education Scholarships, Housing Projects, Blood Donation Forum and Employment Schemes, Public Relations, Guidance and Counselling, Training, offering guidance, counselling, and training programs to improve community skills and knowledge.

Islamic Publishing House (IPH), established in 1954, is the official publishing arm of Jamaat-e-Islami in Kerala. It has been instrumental in disseminating Islamic knowledge and literature through its extensive range of publications. Some of the notable works published by IPH include 'Thahfim-ul-Quran' (six volumes, Maududi), 'Swahih-ul-Bukhari', 'Swahih-ul-Muslim', 'Figh Sunna' (Syed Sabig), a compilation of the history of the Islamic community (four volumes, Sarvad Sawlath), 'Undercurrents of Indian Culture' (T. Mohammad), 'Road to Mecca' (translation, Mohammed Assad), 'Social Justice in Islam' (Syed Qutub), 'Biography of Malcolm X', 'Islam'

Between East and West' (translation, Alija Izetbegovic), 'Sachar Committee Report', and 'Liberhan Commission Report'. To date, IPH has published over 800 books²²

One of the most remarkable works published by IPH is the 'Islamika Sarvavijana Kosham', (Malayalam) an encyclopaedic work on Islamic knowledge. the periodicals and other publications by Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in Kerala are Prabhodhanam Weekly Madhyamam Daily News Madhyamam Weekly Aaramam Weekly Malarvadi Monthly. Through these efforts, IPH has significantly contributed to the intellectual and cultural enrichment of the Muslim community in Kerala and beyond, ensuring access to authentic Islamic literature and fostering a deeper understanding of the religion's principles and values.

Conclusion.

Jamaat-e-Islami is a premier organization dedicated to the Islamic renaissance in the Indian subcontinent. In India, and particularly in Kerala, numerous organizations work for the welfare of the Islamic community, but Jamaat-e-Islami stands out due to its unique creative endeavours and practical approaches. The mission and vision of Jamaat-e-Islami are firmly rooted in Islamic principles, seeking to enlighten people through an expansion of education in Kerala. Various institutions like Majlis Education Board, Madrassa Education Board, Islamiya Colleges and higher education institutions are developed and smoothly run by Jemaete Islami.

Various social service activities are carried out by members of the community as part of their Islamic duty. According to Islamic teachings, a Muslim's religious life is incomplete without serving humanity. Social welfare is presented as one of the principal values in Islamic tradition. Despite facing criticism from both outside and within the Muslim community, Jamaat-e-Islami has been proactive in addressing mistakes and upholding its true ideology. Jamaat-e-Islami's efforts are focused on providing comprehensive solutions to social issues, promoting education, supporting economic development, and ensuring the well-being of the community. Through its endeavours, the organization aims to foster a society that reflects the core values of Islam, emphasizing justice, compassion, and community service.

Notes and References

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² This the fundamental creed of Islam and the Islamic declaration of Faith. It translates to "there is no God but Allah, and Prophet Muhammed is the messenger of Allah.

³ The propagation and establishment of Islamic way of life based on the teachings and principles of Islam.

⁴ Muhammad Husayn Nainar, Thuhfathul Mujahideen, (Eng. tr), pp. 53-66

⁵ The Constitution of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, p. 1.

⁶ Roland E. Miller, Mappila Muslims of Kerala, A Study in Islamic Trends, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1976, p. 39

⁷ Ibrahim Kunju A.P. Mappila Muslims of Kerala, Their History and Culture, Sandhya Publications, Trivandrum, 1989, p. 19.

⁸ Abdul Jalal Moulavi P.M., pp. 100-106.

⁹ Abdul Rahman, O. (1992, May) "Jamaat-e-Islami Keralathil" Prabodhanam, Jamaat-e-Islami (50th year Special Issue), (Mal), Kozhikode

¹⁰ Aaramam Magazine, Shiak Muhammad Karakkunnu, 'Ee Pathrameganum Ninnupoyal', (Mal), Book: 31, Lakkam:1. Silver Hills, (April, 2014), Calicut

¹¹ Abdul Hakim P.A., "Anpathu Varsham Pinitta Jamaat-e-Islami", (2000) Kozhikode: Prabhodhanam (Hira Smrithi).

¹² Sayyid Abdu Ala Maududi (tran.S.M.A.Rauf) *The Education*, 2000, p.71

¹³K. Sharool, *Izzuddin Moulavi and Aliya College*, (Malayalam), Prabodhanam, Special issue, 1998, p.76.

¹⁴ O.P. Abdul Salam, *Jamaat-e-Islami Yude Vidyabhyasa Navodhana Samrambhangal*, (Malayalam), (Educational Institutions of Jamaat-e-Islami), Probodhanam, Special issue, 1998, p. 151.

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¹⁶ Abdussalam Vaniyambalam, 'Keralathil Oru Islamika Sarvakalashala' (Mai.), AlJamia-Al-Islamiya Souvenir, Santhapuram, 2003, p.13.

¹⁷ Mohammed Abdul Jalal, *Vidyabhyasa Rangath Oru <u>Viplavam, (Malayalam)</u>, (A Revolution in the Educational Sector) 50th year* Prabodhanam special 1992, p.263.

¹⁸ Abdussalam Vaniyambalam, op, cit, P.15

¹⁹ O.P.Abdul Salam, , op.cit, p. 148.

²⁰ The important women Arabic College under the direction of jama-at-Islami are, Al-Falah Women Arabic College, Peringady, Islamic Women College, Muvattupuzha, Islamic Women College Chennamangallur, Islamic Women College, Vandur, Islamic Woman College, Chalakkal, Islamic Women College, Mannam. etc,

²¹Ibid.

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²² Karmakalam, p. 258.