

DEPARTMENT OF USUL AL-DIN AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

KULIYYAH OF ISLAMIC REVEALED KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN SCIENCE

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**THE CONTRIBUTION OF SHEIKH SAYED ISMAIL SHIHBUDHEEN TO EDUCATION IN KERALA, INDIA AND BEYOND**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

**Background of the Study**

India is one of the countries with the oldest civilization in the world. It is full of diverse traditions, beliefs, arts, and cultures. Islam was spread among the locals by many Islamic scholars who came with traders and merchants. Arab traders who came to Malabar for trade purposes introduced Islam to India as early as the 7th century.[[1]](#footnote-1) Since then Islam has spread throughout India. Kerala is a part of the country located on the West Coast of India. The people of Kerala believe that Islam has arrived at Kerala since the time of the companions (ṣaḥābah) of the Prophet (PBUH). One of the famous successors (tābi‘īn) known as Malik Ibn Dinar is believed to have arrived in Kerala by the invitation of the Chera king (c. 9th-12th century AD).[[2]](#footnote-2) He built the first mosque in India, the Cheraman Mosque in Kerala province. The mosque is believed to have been built in 629 AD.[[3]](#footnote-3) The history of how Islam came to India is very long and has many versions. India has been known as the center of Hinduism, but we need to know that Islam has become the second-largest religion in India on the 2011 census.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The peak of Islamic success in India began during the Mughal Empire. The Mughal Empire was a kingdom that once ruled India and its subcontinent during the pre-modern era, approximately from the 16th to 18th centuries A.D.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, after the end of the Mughal Empire, India was put under the British rule. In the early stages of British domination in India, the progress of western civilization had begun to be felt by the people of India whether they are Hindus or Muslims. Among the factors of the fall of the Mughal Empire was the increasing expansion of British colonialism in India.[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus, in such a depressed condition, the Muslims of India began to realize their backwardness and weakness. This prompted Islamic thinkers at that time to come up with ideas and reform projects to improve the situation of the Muslims in India. This situation raised the awareness of Islamic thinkers to find a solution to overcome the problem. One of the most influential scholars and figures among Muslims at that time was Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898). He is known for his contributions to Islam especially in education to redevelop the Muslim community in India. Other than that, many other local Islamic thinkers contributed immensely to the Muslim world especially to the Muslim community in India.

Among the fields that have progressed in India are the fields of science, economics, art, literature, and culture. Today the curriculum of Islamic education in India has evolved and experienced modernity so that Islamic education there follows the trend of collaborating with its national curriculum.[[7]](#footnote-7) There was a contemporary Muslim scholar who has contributed his works to the Islamic world. Sheikh Sayid Ismail Shihbudheen Pookoyathangal (d. 2010) is another important Islamic scholar from India. He is a person who has contributed a lot to the Muslim world, especially to the Muslim community in Kerala, India. His contributions are not only focusing on the community in Kerala, but, to the world as well. However, this figure is less known in Kerala, especially among Muslims themselves**.**

**Problem Statement**

Seeking knowledge is a noble act in Islam. Many Muslim scholars in the world contributed to the field of education. Without education, human beings cannot develop and continue their living in humanely manner. This clearly shows that education is important to all human beings. Islam in particular has emphasized on the importance of education through the first verse revealed in the Holy Quran (al-Qur'ān) which is the “Read” (Iqrā) verse from chapter 96 (Sūrah al-ʻAlaq).

Many Muslim scholars including those in Kerala have contributed immensely to the development of education there. Among them is Sheikh Sayid Ismail Shihbudheen Pookoyathangal (d. 2010). He is one of the contemporary Muslim scholars who has contributed to the field of education in Kerala. Unlike others, he was unknown to many including some Muslims in Kerala itself.

Therefore, this research is going to undertake a study on the contribution of Sheikh Sayid Ismail Shihbudheen to education in Kerala. His written works and other educational initiatives are going to be explored and highlighted. This research is important as it unveils a Muslim scholar who has contributed a lot to the Islamic world despite being unknown to many people. Later, this research will expose the historical background of this contemporary Muslim scholar and let people know about him.

**Research Questions**

1. When did Islam started to arrive in Kerala, India?
2. Who is Sheikh Sayid Ismail Shihbudheen?
3. How is his effort in mastering education and making Islamic education important to the Muslim community in Kerala, India?
4. What is his contribution to education in Kerala, India and also to the Muslim world?

**Research Objectives**

1. To explore the history of the emergence of Islam in Kerala, India.
2. To understand the historical background of Sheikh Sayid Ismail Shihbudheen.
3. To examine his effort in mastering education and making Islamic education important to the Muslim community in Kerala, India.
4. To analyze his contribution to education in Kerala, India and the Muslim world.

**Scope of Research**

This paper will focus on one of the contemporary Muslim scholars in Kerala, India, Sheikh Sayid Ismail Shihbudheen. He was forward-thinking in his efforts to improve education in Kerala. Due to that, the research will study the history of the emergence of Islam in Kerala. The researcher examines his biography and attempts to master education and make Islamic education essential for the Muslim population in Kerala, India. However, the researchers also focused on observing his contribution to education in Kerala and beyond.

**Research Significance**

The findings of the study will benefit many people because education is so important in today’s world. Many Muslim scholars across the world have made significant contributions to the advancement of education. Sheikh Sayid Ismail Shihbudheen is a contemporary Muslim scholar who has made contributions to education in Kerala. This study is significant because it reveals a Muslim scholar who, despite his anonymity, has made significant contributions to the Islamic world. This study will reveal the historical basis of this contemporary Muslim scholar and inform others about him. The researcher hopes that this research will encourage people today to know more about him and his contribution to the Islamic world, especially in education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study on Sheikh Sayed Ismail Shihbudheen’s contribution to education in Kerala and beyond requires a proper review on few categories of literature namely the development of Islam in Kerala and India, the Islamic education in India, the writings of the sheikh’s background and his works, and with regard to education in particular. The review of the available literature will follow such categorisation in order to understand the extent of studies made about him and his contributions to education.

The following are some prominent works on the history of development of Islam in Kerala,a thesis submitted for a Bachelor’s degree entitled *Integration of Muslims into the Larger Social System in Kerala* written by Shana Salim[[8]](#footnote-8) discussed the early history of Islam in Kerala. The author also mentioned the establishment of Islamic educational institutions in Kerala such as Islamic colleges and public education to people by the late nineteenth century onwards. Besides, the author addressed the factors influencing Muslims mingled with other groups which are non-Muslims in Kerala in terms of politic, socio-economic, and culture. Geographically and demographically, the contributing factors to the strong integration of Muslims in Kerala have been described by the author. Overall, this writing is useful to the study which gives some relevant ideas to the present work to obtain information about the history of Islam in Kerala.

Mohd Roslan and Mohamad Zulfazdlee wrote an article *Kemelut Politik Mughal pada Penghujung Era Pemerintahan Shah Jahan*.[[9]](#footnote-9) It discussed the socio-political atmosphere of the Mughals during the reign of Shah Jahan (1627-1658 AD). The results showed Shah Jahan failed to control the situation after the political turmoil hit the Mughal palace. The author also stated several factors of the Mughal political turmoil during the end of the era of Shah Jahan’s rule. Even though this article does not discuss anything on Kerala, it has been of benefit to the reader in grasping the history of the peak of Islamic success in India at the time when the Mughal Empire was in power. It is useful to the study which gives some idea to the researcher to have knowledge about the development Islam in India.

An article *Peta Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam di India* wrote by Saidul Amin[[10]](#footnote-10) is a study on the Islamic reform movement in India, which has a long and illustrious history. The author narrated about some Muslim scholars who brought about changes in Islamic thought in India. Each of them had the same goal which was to restore Islam’s glory in India. Thus, many Islamic movements arose as a result of these developments, like liberalist, orthodox, reformist, and nationalist movements be able to accept and understand the teachings of Islam which wants Islam to be a part of India. Even though there are a little bit unrelated parts to the study, the article is useful in serving further knowledge on how Muslim scholars brought their ideas to bring about Islamic change in India at that time.

Then, *Historical Aspects of the Legend of Cheraman Perumal of Kodungallur in Kerala* by Dr. Haseena V.A[[11]](#footnote-11) discussed variety of stories of Cheraman Perumal (730-800 AD) which have a lot of storylines. Additionally, the author specified Kerala and Kodungallur Muslim heritage and the history of the Cheraman Mosque as well. This article is valuable to recognise the different versions of the story and it is connected to the study which provides discovery to the researcher to gain information about the history of Islam coming to Kerala.

A Master’s thesis, *Samasta’s Methodology of Ifta’: An Analytical Study of Selected Fatawa on Marriage and Divorce*,written by Sayyed Mohamed Muhsin[[12]](#footnote-12) focused on the Samasta Fatwa Committee (SFC) and its methodology of *ifta’* with special focus on *fatawa* issued on marriage and divorce. The author's purpose is to examine the implementation of fatawa-based approaches and their legal basis. The author emphasized that the SFC continues to rely only on traditional authoritative legal texts from the four classical schools of Islamic law in determining Shariah judgements on problems brought before them. Given that the majority of Kerala Muslims are Shafii School followers, the Shafii School is the primary reference used by SFC. According to the findings of this study, the SFC does more than only execute the duties of a mufti in Kerala, but it also performs dynamic roles with a significant influence on society. Furthermore, as part of this thesis, the author has discussed the history of the development of Islam in Kerala. Overall, although this thesis is irrelevant to the main focus of the study, it does give the researcher some historical knowledge of the history of Islam in Kerala.

Other than that, there is also an article which studied the Islamic education in India.Agus Setiawan the writer of the article *Analisis Pendidikan Islam di India dan Perbandingannya Dengan Pendidikan di Indonesia*[[13]](#footnote-13)studied about the education system in India and the history of the development of Islamic education in India. The author compared the Islamic education system in India and Indonesia which could assist Muslims in Indonesia in particular, to construct an improved and advanced Islamic education. The article is related to the study which enable the researcher to get the idea of how the Islamic education system in India as a whole and the history of it as well.

A Ph.D. thesis entitled *Development of Islamic Studies in Kerala During 18th Century to 20th Century* written by Sakkeer Husain[[14]](#footnote-14) explored the contribution of the Muslim scholars in Kerala and others in the field of four major disciplines like *Quran*, *Hadith, Fiqh* and *Tasawwuf*. At the beginning of his writing, the author gives a description of the arrival and spread of Islam in Kerala and leads to the important events and circumstances that led to the formation of the Muslim community. Then, the four main branches of Islamic studies are discussed in detail in each chapter of this thesis. The development of Quranic studies in Kerala is the first branch of the Islamic studies which is one of the topics among the existing chapters. In that chapter, the author has mentioned a work (*‘Ala Hamishi Tafasir)* compiled by Sheikh Ismail Shihbudheen. His work is said to be the only work written in Arabic and presented to readers of Islamic thinkers in Kerala. Hence, this thesis can be evaluated as a comprehensive study on the intellectual legacy of the Muslims of Kerala and this can assist researchers in obtaining information regarding the development of Islam in Kerala, which is relevant to the study.

In addition, there are some works relating toSheikh Ismail’s background and his workssuch by Mahmood in his writing in an online article entitled *Assayed Ismail Shihbudheen Al-Bukhari Al-Malibari (Panoor Thanggal (1936-2010): His vivid life and valuable services*[[15]](#footnote-15) talked about everything in relation to Sheikh Ismail’s life and his contributions to the Arabic language and its literature. The author stated some books which were written by Sheikh with a short briefing included in each book. Sheikh’s experience and efforts in producing his works are also being mentioned in this article. The author included the short history of the establishment of Zahra University. Hence, this article good to know the information about the Sheikh and is concerned to the study.

Then, the website entitled *Allahamishithafaseer: The Kerala Presence in the Interpretation of the Qur’an*[[16]](#footnote-16)has stated shortly about Sheikh’s life. The article told a little story about his journey while seeking knowledge until he became a teacher and his efforts in building an educational institute. However, this article focused more on the description of his commentary that is *Alahamishi tafaseer*. His commentary was the first Quranic commentary in Arabic completed by him in Malayali. This article also described briefly about the content which Sheikh emphasized in his commentary of the Qur’an. Nevertheless, this article could aid a little in providing relevant information about the study, even the article does not emphasize much on the exact inquiry of the study.

K.K.N Kurup in his book *Sayyed Ismail Shihabuddin Pookkoya Thangal of Panoor (Life and Career)*[[17]](#footnote-17)discussed everything concerning Sheikh Ismail's life. The book is divided into several short chapters which open up the information of Sheikh Ismail. The author stated the background of Sheikh starting from his birth to his education while highlighting his career and achievements as an Islamic scholar. The author also made known briefly regarding Sheikh’s works in Arabic, and emphasized more on his main work the commentary on the holy Quran, namely *Alahamishi tafaseer*. In this book, the author also narrated a little history of how Sheikh Ismail developed the educational institute in the beginning. The book ends with a description of the Sheikh's nature as an individual. Accordingly, the content of this book is not entirely relevant to the title of the study. However, it helps in serving a lot of information specific to the study to be conducted.

The article *‘Ala Hamishi al-Tafasir Ta’liqatun ‘Ala Tafsir al-Jalalayn of Sayed Ismail Shihabudheen*: *A Systematic and Analytical Study* written by Abdul Hamid[[18]](#footnote-18) focuses on the main view of ‘*Ala Hamishi al-Tafasir*, a comprehensive commentary of the Holy Qur’an in Arabic. It is the first commentary written by the scholar~~s~~ of Kerala in the Arabic language. The author stated that Sheikh Ismail was a writer and scholar of Malabar who wrote seven volumes on the commentary of the Qur’an acquired a good image among intellectuals. The author also covered the life of Sheikh Ismail Shihbudheen in terms of his biography, education, works, *dakwah* technique, and his contribution to Islamic culture in Malabar. Therefore, this article to some extent helps to provide information for the study especially about Sheikh Sayed Ismail Shihbudheen in particular.

The website entitled *Shihab al-Din al-Bukhari is a scholar who has few equals in the Malayalam lands* written by Abdul Rashid al-Wafi[[19]](#footnote-19) has a brief overview of Sheikh’s life. The article presented a short description about his journey on seeking knowledge. However, the focus of this article was on the exposition of his popular writing, which is a commentary on the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, namely the *Alahamishi tafaseer*. The author mentioned that in his commentary, the Sheikh relied on current scientific knowledge and sought for cosmic events that alluded to the presence and oneness of God, as well as disputed the claims of atheists and heretics, among other things. Therefore, this article might help a bit in giving information on the study despite the fact that the article does not focus much on the specific query of the study.

On the other hand, the article entitled *The Relevance of Tafsir al-Jalalayn among the Muslims of Malabar* by Muhammed Unais Kunnakkadan, Nadzrah Ahmad, Nashwan Abdo Khaled[[20]](#footnote-20) mainly described the four recent works of Arabic commentary and two translations of *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* written by regional scholars in Kerala. One of the regional scholars who has worked on the commentary of the Qur’an and relying on *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* in Malabar is Sheikh Sayed Ismail Shihbudheen. The author mentioned briefly about his biography inclusive of his works. The author has discussed the Sheikh's approach in his Quranic commentary. Although this article is unrelated to the main focus of this research, it provides the researcher with understanding about the scholar in general.

There is also extensive literature on the contribution to education of Sheikh Ismail in Kerala.*Panoor Thangal; A Multi-Dimensional Reading* by M. A. Salami Rahmani Koottalungal[[21]](#footnote-21), mentioned a short history of Islam that arrived in Kerala. The author stated that the advent of Islam Kerala Muslim was blessed with the influence leadership of various sayyed families, Sufis, and great scholars. This book reveals about Sheikh Ismail’s birth and his journey of education from childhood until he can contribute to the development of the Muslim community in Kerala. In addition, the author also stated about Sheikh's educational institution, Jamia Zahra which has grown into a reputed center of learning and has various institutions. Through this book also, it indicates his views on some special issues and his famous works which written in Arabic language briefly. Thus, this book is indeed helpful for the study indeed to further acknowledge the contribution of the Sheikh in education as well as his life history.

The online writing in a website namely *Syed Ismail Shihabuddin Imbichi Koya Thangal: Inventor of Integrated Education* written by Jurais Puthanari[[22]](#footnote-22) discussed about Sheikh Ismail’s background briefly. The author put more emphasis Sheikh’s effort and ability to make education an institution that would include both religious and modern knowledge. Sheikh Ismail made many contributions in his writings, especially in the Arabic language. The author incorporated a list of his writing and mentioned a little information about Jamia Zahra which is an educational institution built by him. Hence, the writing is related to the title of the study that can be used as guidance for the study in knowing how he carried his idea in his own educational institute.

*Sayyid Ismayil Shihabuddin Al-Bukhari and his role in Islamic Jurisprudence* is thetitle for a Master thesis written by Umar Farouq.[[23]](#footnote-23) The author represented Sheikh Sayed Ismail Shihbudheen’s pious life as well as his contribution to Islamic Jurisprudence focusing on his views on modern *Fiqh* issues. Sheikh Ismail, the author of "*Al-Madarij*" and "*Al-Nibras*" was the best jurist of the twentieth century from the locality in *Fiqh*. His books are referred by scholars for higher studies and that proves the credibility of his books. Aside from that, the author discussed Sheikh Ismail’s life and contributions to education by founding educational institutions such as Jamia Zahra, the Islamic Shari’a College, the Library and the Islamic Research Centre, the Vocational Training Centre, and many more. Accordingly, this thesis is related to the study that can assist the researcher identify the scholar's contribution to Islamic studies, Islamic Jurisprudence in particular, as well as information on the educational institute he founded.

A booklet *Search for Identity: A Report of the Visit of a Cultural Team from Kerala to Qatar* written by Dr. K.K.N Kurup[[24]](#footnote-24) talked about a visit from a cultural team from Kerala to Qatar. Their visit was to promote the Sheikh’s Ismail classical work in Arabic, the commentary on the holy Qur’an namely “*Al Hamashi Tafsir*”. They also attended a meeting with the Press, visited the Indian Embassy to present the works of Sheikh Ismail, and initiated the Arab-Kerala Cultural Seminar. The seminar was a huge success in terms of bridging the cultural gap between Kerala and the Gulf countries. The author also stated about the formation of Zahra Centre for Indo-Arab Research and Heritage Studies together with the aim of the centre. Additionally, there are a few other visits and activities of the team from Kerala in Qatar reported in this booklet. Through this visit, the author claimed that the team could establish a strong background for promoting future relations of friendship, academic support, and sharing of knowledge and resources for future development. Therefore, this booklet helps in providing exposure to Sheikh’s works and the way his name was influenced beyond Kerala.

A Ph.D. thesis entitled *Sayyid Ismail Shihab al-Din al-Bukhari and his methodology in “Alā Hāmish al-Tafāsīr: Taʿlīqāt ʿalā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn”: An Analytical Study with Special Focus on Scientific Statements* written by Murshid P[[25]](#footnote-25) mainly discussed Sheikh Sayed Ismail’s work, which is his commentary on the Qur’an. The author focuses on his contribution to Qur’anic studies with special emphasis on the scientific statements mentioned in it as well as the method of commentary and the characteristics of the commentary. The author mentioned that the Sheikh had a special role and a great place in the science of the Qur’an, and he excelled in it. This thesis also stated everything about this Muslim scholar’s life, his skills and other contributions to various arts and also to his educational institutions. Essentially, this thesis allows researchers to learn more about him, particularly his contributions to specific Quranic studies and his other contributions.

In summary, there are some works on Kerala, India’s history, Sheikh Ismail's biography, his works, and also his contribution to Kerala. After making some analysis of the works related to the topic, there are many works referring to the contribution of Sheikh Ismail but there is none that goes into detail about his contribution to education in particular. Therefore, the proposed research will study and examine the contribution of Sheikh Sayed Ismail Shihbudheen to education in Kerala and beyond.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study on the contribution of Sheikh Sayed Ismail Shihbudheen to education in Kerala, India is primarily a library research. Library research is a vital method for the researcher to obtain the material needed to comprehend his biography and contributions made by him who is not known to many. It involves documentation-oriented research, which is a method of data collection by examining documents that are related to the problem under study. This method is used with reference to written materials that require some aid from readings. Hence, published books, web-based articles, published or unpublished thesis and official website are among the essential works that will be utilized.

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