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DEBATES ON MALABARI SCRIPT AND RASM AL-‘UTHMĀNĪ AMONG ULAMĀS OF KERALA

Mohammed Sadik Kunnummal¹

Abstract

The debate over the Malabari script in Kerala reflects the region's linguistic, cultural, and religious complexities, especially among the Muslim community. The Malabari script, an Arabic script adapted for the Malayalam language, holds historical significance for spreading Islamic education and literature in Kerala. This script symbolizes the unique cultural and religious identity of Malabar Muslims, linking them to the broader Islamic world while maintaining regional distinctiveness. The debate centers on preserving this cultural heritage versus assimilating into broader linguistic trends, especially concerning religious education. The conflict between traditional religious education and modern educational needs is evident in the shift from Malabari to Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī script, driven by movements like the Samastha AP Faction after 1989. From 1980 to 2000, significant religious debates took place between the Sunnimovements in Kerala, focusing on texts like "*Īdāh al-Mufīdī ‘Ilm al-Tajwīd*" by KV Abdurrahman Musliyar. Musliyar's work emphasized the authenticity of the Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī Quran over the Malabari Quran. Prominent scholars like Najeeb Moulavi and NM Abdurrahman Musliyar played key roles in this discourse, each advocating for their respective scripts' authenticity and educational value. The debate extended to the Lakshadweep Islands, where the introduction of Naskhī texts faced resistance, leading to significant political and social tensions. The Malabari script and Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī debate highlights the challenges of balancing

¹ Writer with a keen interest in Islamic art and manuscript cultures including South Asian Muslim history.

tradition with modernity in religious education and cultural preservation.

Keywords: Malabari Script, Rasm Al-‘Uthmāni, Ulama, Lakshadweep, Debate, Sunni Factions.

INTRODUCTION

The debate over the Malabari script encompasses several dimensions, reflecting the linguistic, cultural, and religious complexities of Kerala, particularly among the Muslim community. The Malabari script is an Arabic script adapted to write the Malayalam language and Arabic texts, used primarily by the Muslim community in Kerala. It has historical significance, as it facilitated the spread of Islamic education and literature in the region. The script represents a unique cultural and linguistic heritage of the Malabar Muslims, linking them to the broader Islamic world while maintaining their regional identity.

The Malabari script has been a vehicle for preserving and transmitting Islamic knowledge, including religious texts², poetry,³ and historical documents. The debate often centers around the need to preserve this body of work. For many Malabari Muslims, the script is a symbol of their unique cultural and religious identity. The debate often touches on issues of cultural preservation versus assimilation into broader linguistic trends. The script has been utilized in lithographs for Qur'ans, Islamic texts, and Madrasa textbooks.

The debate encompasses discussions on balancing traditional religious education with contemporary educational demands. Specifically, the discourse on the Malabari Script versus Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī reflects this tension within the context of modern educational reforms. After 1989, the Samastha AP Faction initiated efforts to align their institutions with Gulf standards, a process referred to as "Gulfization."⁴ This involved transitioning their AP Samastha Malabari texts to the Naskhī script, which they presented as

² Islamic law texts and spiritual texts Etc.

³ Muhyiddin Mala and Nool Madh.

⁴ "Gulfization" is a term used to describe the process by which cultural, religious, educational, or social practices are modified or aligned to resemble those found in the Gulf Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. In the context of education or religious institutions, Gulfization often refers to the adoption of religious practices, architectural styles, and curricula that are influenced by the norms and standards prevalent in the Gulf region.

the Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī script used in the Qur’an, and restructuring Keralite mosques to resemble Gulf-style mosques.⁵

SCOPE OF THE DEBATE

The religious nature of the Kerala Ulema in the last two decades of the 20th century was marked by significant trends and transformations, navigating socio-political changes, global influences, and internal community dynamics. This period, from 1980 to 2000, saw the Sunni and Mujahid movements shaping the religious landscape with debates. The Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulamā focused on preserving traditional Islamic practices, while the AP faction parted and they advocated for reform text, emphasizing a return to the Quran to gulf models, promoting education, social reforms, and rational interpretation of Islamic teachings.

This debate started from the texts of *Īdāh al-Mufīdī* · *Ilm al-Tajwīd* by KV Abdurrahman Musliyar stands as a seminal work within the field of Quranic recitation, offering comprehensive guidance tailored specifically for Madrasa teachers. Positioned as a resource for educators who have completed three *Hizb* classes, the book provides a deep dive into the rules and principles of Tajwid, essential for the proper recitation of the Quran. Musliyar's approach to the subject matter is meticulous, combining scholarly rigor with practical insights to enhance pedagogical techniques. Through clear explanations and illustrative examples, he empowers teachers to impart the nuances of Quranic recitation effectively to their students, ensuring accuracy and reverence in the sacred act of Quranic recitation. One of the distinguishing features of Musliyar's work is its emphasis on the authenticity of the Rasm Al-Uthmani Quran over the Malabar Quran. Musliyar engages with the debate surrounding the use of regional scripts, advocating for the primacy of the standardized Arabic script prescribed by Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī. By highlighting the importance of adhering to established orthographic conventions, he underscores the significance of preserving the integrity of the Quranic text and upholding traditional methods of recitation. This emphasis on authenticity resonates throughout the book, reflecting Musliyar's commitment to safeguarding the purity of Quranic recitation

⁵ MT Abdullah Musliyar, "RasmulUsmāni," *Sunni Afkar Weekly Magazine*, July 11, 2001.

inaccordance with classical Islamic scholarship. Some AP scholars argued that *Ayḍaḥ* stands to avoid Malabari Quran from Malabar, South Karnataka and Lakshadweep.⁶

Najeeb Moulavi, leader of the Kerala Samsthana Jami-yyathul Ulama contends that the fatwas issued by the AP faction deviate from the established principles of mainstream Sunni Islam, particularly in their interpretations of Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī and the Malabari Muṣḥaf (the Quran). Moulavi believes that the AP faction's interpretations of these religious concepts are incorrect and not in line with traditional Islamic jurisprudence.

He questions the legitimacy and authority of the religious scholars within the AP faction, implying that their rulings are not trustworthy or accurate. Moulavi emphasizes that the deviations promoted by the AP faction are harmful to the Muslim community. He highlights the potential for these divergent interpretations to cause confusion, division, and discord among the faithful, thereby undermining community unity and stability.

AP faction criticized Najeeb Moulavi, he contends that the Malabari script deviates from classical Arabic orthography and phonetics, which could lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of religious texts. He argues that the script's variations from traditional Arabic compromise its authenticity and authority within Islamic tradition. Musliyar provides a comparative analysis, highlighting the precise and rigorous standards of classical Arabic script (Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī) that have been preserved for centuries. He argues that the Malabari script does not meet these standards, thus questioning its legitimacy for religious use.

Musliyar argues that the use of the Malabari script in religious education can lead to a diluted understanding of Islamic teachings. He emphasizes the importance of learning classical Arabic to fully grasp the meanings and nuances of the Quran and Hadith. He suggests that reliance on the Malabari script might undermine the educational integrity of Islamic studies, as students might not be adequately equipped to engage with broader Islamic scholarship that predominantly uses classical Arabic. Musliyar stresses the need to preserve Islamic traditions and linguistic purity as a means of

⁶ KV Abdurrahman Musliyar, *Īdāḥ al-Muḥḍafī 'Ilm al-Tajwīd* (Chelari: Islamatha Vidyabasa Board, AH 1409), 73-75.

maintaining a cohesive religious identity. He argues that adopting scripts like Malabari could fragment the cultural and religious unity within the Muslim ummah. He views the promotion of the Malabari script as a compromise on cultural and religious authenticity, potentially leading to a loss of connection with the wider Islamic world that adheres to classical Arabic norms.

Musliyar questions the accuracy and fidelity of religious texts written in the Malabari script. He argues that any deviations or inaccuracies in script could lead to significant distortions in religious practice and beliefs. He asserts that the Malabari script might hinder the proper transmission of Islamic knowledge, as future generations might struggle to connect with the original texts and their interpretations. Musliyar critically evaluates the claims made by proponents of the Malabari script, addressing their arguments point by point. He challenges the notion that the script can serve as a valid alternative to classical Arabic, citing potential linguistic and theological issues.

He maintains that classical Arabic should remain the primary medium for religious texts and education, as it ensures consistency, accuracy, and a direct link to the sources of Islamic knowledge. Musliyar underscores the importance of integrating Kerala's Muslim community with global Islamic scholarship, which predominantly uses classical Arabic. He argues that maintaining a separate script could isolate the community and limit its scholarly contributions and interactions. He emphasizes the need for consistency in religious practices and education, suggesting that adhering to classical Arabic is essential for preserving the unity and integrity of Islamic teachings.

Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī refers to the specific orthographic system used in the earliest copies of the Quran commissioned by the third Caliph, Uthmān bn ‘Affān. It is named after him, and it includes unique spelling conventions and orthographic rules that were employed to preserve the Quranic text as it was revealed. It includes specific ways of writing certain letters and words, sometimes omitting letters or using different forms than what is found in modern standard Arabic. This script aimed to capture the oral recitation of the Quran as closely as possible, maintaining the authenticity and accuracy of the recited text. This law agreed by a ijma⁷The Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī script has

⁷ Ijma is an Arabic term referring to the consensus or agreement of the Islamic community on a point of Islamic law. Sunni Muslims regard ijma' as one of the secondary sources of Sharia law, after the Qur'an, and the Sunnah. Exactly what group should represent the Muslim community

been meticulously preserved through centuries, ensuring that the Quran read today is identical to the one compiled under Uthman. Some unique characteristics of this script include variations in spelling and the absence of diacritical marks (dots and vowel signs), which were added later to aid non-native Arabic speakers.

While the Quran can be written using various scripts, including Naskhī and Malabari, it is essential to maintain the orthographic principles of Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī to preserve the text's authenticity and integrity. This balance between accessibility and authenticity is at the heart of debates such as those engaged in by scholars like Ashraf bin Imbichali Musliyar and Najeeb Moulavi. This debate ended in the early 21st century.

ULAMĀ NETWORKS IN THE DEBATE

The debate over the Malabari script and Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī within the Muslim community in Kerala has involved three religious organization and their scholars, each bringing its perspectives, historical context, and cultural considerations into the discussion. These Ulamā networks play a crucial role in shaping this religious discourse, educational practices, and cultural identity among Kerala's Muslims.

The EK and AP Factions: Perspectives within the Debate

The debate over the authenticity of Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī versus the Malabari Quran has deeply involved various factions and leaders within the Samastha Kerala Jam’iyyathul Ulama. Notably, leaders such as Najeeb Moulavi from Samstana Jam’iyyattul Ulama and MT Abdullah Musliyar, from the EK faction, have expressed strong support for the Malabari Quran. They, along with speakers like Nattika V Moosa Musliyar⁸ and Swalahuddin Faizy Venniyoor,⁹ have detailed how Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī can be implemented in the Malabari script, highlighting its historical and cultural significance. This

in reaching the consensus is not agreed on by the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence. (Jam' al-Jawami' fi Usul al-Fiqh, V-2)

⁸ Nattika Moosa Musliyar is the prominent scholar and leader of Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama, was renowned personality in southern Indian state of Kerala for his writing, oration and organizing skill. He was prime campaigner against novelty among the Muslims in Kerala and a crusader against dissidents of Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama.

⁹ He is a scholar from Venniyoor, south Malabar. He is teaching in Chembra, Tirur.

support underscores the regional attachment to the Malabari script, which is seen as an integral part of local Islamic heritage.

On the other hand, the AP faction of Samastha Kerala Jam'iyyathul Ulama has seen significant opposition to the Malabari Quran, with figures like NM Abdurrahman Musliyar¹⁰ playing a central role. As the vice president of the Kasargod District for the AP faction, NM Abdurrahman Musliyar faced local resistance and restrictions from Qadi authorities, which sparked a wider debate on the authenticity of Rasm Al-'Uthmānī in North Malabar. His disciple, Muhyiddin Saqafi, continued this debate, emphasizing the importance of adhering to Rasm Al-'Uthmānī, believed to be closer to the original Quranic script.¹¹

Debate in North Malabar

The controversy gained further momentum at Al Madrathul Azhariyya in Mangalapuram, where NM Abdurrahman Musliyar worked and influenced both Kerala and South Karnataka. The debate spread to the Kerala-Karnataka border areas, notably Kattatadika and other Mahalls. During this period, the AP faction began incorporating Naskhī text into their teaching texts and Quran, which further fuelled the debate.¹² The scholars from these regions engaged in rigorous discussions, defending their respective stances on the authenticity of the scripts, with each side presenting scholarly arguments and textual evidence.

Perode Abdurrahman Musliyar,¹³ a leader from the AP faction, met with NM Abdurrahman Saqafi at Jami'thul Sa'adiyya,¹⁴ furthering the discussion on the Malabari Quran. They referenced "Īdāhfi' Ilm al-

¹⁰N.M. Ustad graduated from Vellore Bakhiat in 1969 with first rank. He was a long-time mudaris in places like Ullal, Mangalore Ashariyya College, Putta Muhimmath, Mavilakadappuram, Kuniya, Bendichal, Pallikkere, Mukkood, Poochakkad, and Manjanadi Juma Masjid. He was a member of the Delhi Jamia Saadia Committee and was the leader of those classes.

¹¹Interview with Nm Aburrahman Musliyar's son from Dubai.

¹²Interview with Nm Aburrahman Musliyar's son from Dubai

¹³Perode Abdurrahman Saqafi, popularly known as Perode Ustad, is a public speaker, entrepreneur, philanthropist, Islamic Scholar and community builder hailing from Perode, the suburb of Calicut, Kerala. He is the founder of the well known educational initiative, Sirajul Huda Educational Complex, Kuttiady, Kerala.

¹⁴Jamia Sa-adiya Arabiya was established in April 1971 under the adept supervision of the late Kallatra Abdul Khadir Haji, a benevolent gentleman who was well-known for his generosity. In 1979 it was merged with Samastha Kerala Jamiyathul Ulama, Kannur District Committee. Situated on a lovely hillock near Chandragiri River, (6 KM. South of Kasaragod Town, 10 KM. North of Bekal Fort, and 70 KM off Mangalore International Airport) at Sa-adabad, Deli.

Tajwīd" by KV Abdurrahman Musliyar to support their arguments. This work provided a scholarly basis for their claims, adding weight to their stance against the Malabari Quran. The meeting at Jami'thul Sa'adiyya was pivotal, as it brought together influential scholars to discuss and debate the issue in-depth, reflecting the scholarly rigor and seriousness of the matter.¹⁵

Supporters of the Malabari Quran, such as Jabbar Musliyar and Kotta Abdul Khader Musliyar,¹⁶ also known as *Melparambil Khatibicha*, stood firmly with the Ap faction to support Nm Abdurrahman Musliyar. They emphasized the historical and regional importance of the Malabari script, arguing that it should be preserved as part of the local Islamic tradition. These scholars highlighted the unique features of the Malabari Quran, which they believed were integral to maintaining the cultural identity and religious heritage of the Muslim community in Kerala.

Debate in South Karnataka

Conversely, AP faction leader and disciple of NM Abdurrahman Musliyar, Abubaker Madani voiced strong opposition to the Malabari Quran from South Karnataka.¹⁷ He argued that Rasm Al-'Uthmānī represented a more authentic and standardized version of the Quranic script after giving Fatwa from Nm Abdurrahman Musliyar. Madani's speeches criticized the Malabari Quran, calling for a return to what he considered the more legitimate script. His arguments were rooted in a desire for uniformity in Quranic recitation and writing, which he believed was crucial for preserving the purity and consistency of the Islamic holy text. The debate from Malabar and Karnataka ended in joint ideological meeting by Kanhangad Qazi UK Attakkoya Thangal,¹⁸ Fakhruddin Thangal, Najeeb Moulavi, Jabbar Musliyar, Sainul Abideen Thangal,

¹⁵ Interview with NM Abdurrahman Musliyar's son from Dubai.

¹⁶ Kotta Abdul Khader Musliyar the prominent Islamic scholar hailing from Mogral, Kasaragod, district of Indian state Kerala and an active member of Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama, Ap Faction.

¹⁷ Especially in Mangalore.

¹⁸ UK Atakoya Thangal, who led the codification of the changing prayer times in different seasons, collaborated with 40 students of the same Dars and conducted solar observation for two years to compile the complete prayer time table that is seen in all mosques today. The handwritten schedule of that day is on the west wall of the Kannur City mosque.

KC Abdul Qadar Saqafi,¹⁹ the Qazi of Agathi Island, started the controversy by harshly criticizing the Malabari Quran and advocating for its burning. His stance created significant divisions within the Muslim community, with some supporting his call for action and others vehemently opposing it. This radical approach highlighted the deep-seated tensions and differing perspectives within the community regarding the authenticity and use of different Quranic scripts. The call for burning the Malabari Quran was particularly controversial, reflecting the intensity of the debate.²⁰

The debate also brought to light the significant influence of regional religious leaders in shaping theological and cultural discussions. Figures like NM Abdurrahman Musliyar and his supporters played crucial roles in mobilizing their communities and sparking broader discussions on script authenticity. The impact of their teachings extended beyond Kerala to South Karnataka, illustrating how local issues can resonate across larger geographical areas. The involvement of prominent scholars and leaders underscored the importance of this debate in the religious life of the community.

The use of textual references, such as "*Īdāḥfī'Ilm al-Tajwīd*," provided scholarly backing to the arguments against the Malabari Quran. These references demonstrated the depth of knowledge and scholarship involved in the debate, with both sides drawing on historical texts and religious scholarship to support their positions. The scholarly nature of the debate emphasized the importance of academic rigor and religious scholarship in resolving theological disputes and maintaining the integrity of religious texts and practices.²¹

This controversy over the authenticity of Rasm Al-ʿUthmānī versus the Malabari Quran is a multifaceted issue involving theological, regional, and sectarian dimensions. The involvement of influential scholars and leaders from different factions within the Samastha Kerala Jam'iyyathul Ulama highlights the significance of this debate. The strong support for the Malabari Quran from some quarters, contrasted with vehement opposition from others, underscores the complexity of balancing tradition, regional identity, and religious authority. This ongoing debate continues to shape the

¹⁹ He is a resident of Kavaratti Island, and he supports AP Faction.

²⁰ Interview with Ismath Hussain from Kiltan Island.

²¹ KV Abdurrahman Musliyar, *Īdāḥ al-Muḥīdī'Ilm al-Tajwīd* (Chelari: Islamatha Vidyabasa Board, AH 1409), 73-75.

religious and cultural landscape of the Muslim community in South India, reflecting broader themes of authenticity, preservation, and adaptation within Islamic scholarship.

MALABARI SCRIPT IN RASM AL-‘UTHMĀNĪ

Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī, or the Uthmanic script, refers to the orthographic conventions used in the writing of the Quran, traditionally attributed to the Caliph Uthmān bn ‘Affān. This script diverges significantly from the standard Arabic script, known as Rasm al-‘Arabī, in various ways. One of the primary distinctions lies in orthographic variations. For instance, certain words in Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī are written without the alif, such as "مالك" (malik) appearing as "ملك". Additionally, the usage of the hamza (ء) is less frequent and sometimes entirely omitted in the Uthmanic. These deviations underscore the unique historical and linguistic evolution of Quranic orthography, aimed at preserving the oral tradition of the Quran during its early compilation.²²

Another key difference between Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī and the standard Arabic script is the application of diacritical marks. Modern Arabic script relies heavily on diacritics, or Ḥarakāt, to indicate vowel sounds and ensure proper pronunciation. In contrast, Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī often omits these marks, relying on the reader’s familiarity with the text for accurate recitation. The Sukūn and Shaddah, which indicate the absence of a vowel and gemination of consonants respectively, are also used less consistently in Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī. This practice reflects the oral-centric nature of early Quranic recitation, where memorization and vocal transmission were paramount.²³

Despite these differences, Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī shares several fundamental similarities with the standard Arabic script. Both scripts utilize the same base set of Arabic letters and adhere to the same directional flow, written from right to left. The connection of letters within words follows identical rules, maintaining a cohesive structural integrity. These similarities underscore the shared linguistic heritage

²² Arthur Jeffrey, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’an* (Brill Archive, 1937), 45-46.

²³ Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Grundzüge des Arabischen Schriftwesens* (De Gruyter, 1935), 112-115.

and foundational principles of Arabic script while highlighting the specialized function of Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī in the Quranic context.²⁴

The Malabari script offers a fascinating comparative study when examined alongside Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī. Arabi Malayalam is a modified Arabic script used for writing the Malayalam language, primarily by the Muslim community in Kerala, India. This script shares a common foundation with Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī in its use of Arabic letters and right-to-left writing direction. Both scripts also adapt Arabic letters to represent non-Arabic sounds, demonstrating the versatility of the Arabic script in accommodating different phonetic systems.²⁵

However, the differences between Malabari script and Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī are pronounced. The Malabari script incorporates additional letters to represent sounds specific to the Malayalam language, such as "ڤ" (ḍa) and "ڤ" (ra), which are absent in both Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī and standard Arabic script. Furthermore, the orthographic rules and use of diacritics in Malabari script are tailored to suit Malayalam phonology, resulting in distinct practices in vowel representation and letter combination. These differences highlight the adaptive nature of Arabic script when applied to different linguistic contexts, while also illustrating the unique historical and cultural trajectories of each script.²⁶ such as "ملك" (malik) appearing as "مالك" in Malabari Quran. But we can write the Malabari Quran in Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī.

Writing the Quran in the Malabari script using Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī is a feasible endeavor, but it necessitates several important considerations. The first aspect to address is the adaptation of characters. The Malabari script, derived from the Arabic scripts and used in the Malabar region, must be capable of accurately representing all the phonetic nuances of the Quranic text. This process might require modifications or the introduction of additional characters to ensure

²⁴ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *The Origins of Writing in Early Arabia and Its Development* (Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986), 67-70.

²⁵ Daniel Miller, "Arabi Malayalam: A Study of the Transcription of Malayalam into Arabic Script," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 48, no. 1 (2003): 45-48.

²⁶ Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 123-125.

the precise articulation of Arabic sounds, thereby preserving the integrity of the recitation and meaning.²⁷

The second consideration involves strict adherence to Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī, the orthographic system traditionally used for writing the Quran in its classical form. Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī has specific conventions regarding the omission and addition of certain letters.²⁸ Any transcription into the Malabari script would need to rigorously follow these conventions to maintain the text's authenticity and to ensure that it conforms to the accepted standards of Quranic writing.

Scholarly approval is the third critical factor in this endeavor. The adaptation of the Quran into the Malabari script would require the endorsement of Islamic scholars to ensure that the sacredness and intended meaning of the text are preserved.²⁹ Scholarly oversight is essential to avoid potential misinterpretations or errors that could arise from transliteration or adaptation processes, thereby maintaining the religious and linguistic integrity of the Quran. Technical implementation constitutes the fourth consideration. Given that the Malabari script may not be widely supported in existing digital typesetting systems, creating a Quran in this script might necessitate the development of custom fonts and specialized software.³⁰ This would ensure proper rendering and readability, both in print and digital formats. Such technical advancements would be crucial for the widespread dissemination and acceptance of the Quran in the Malabari script.

The acceptance of this adaptation by the local Muslim community is a vital component. The introduction of the Quran in the Malabari script would require community engagement and possibly educational efforts to familiarize people with the new script.³¹ Ensuring community buy-in is essential for the successful implementation and sustained use of the Quran in the Malabari script, as community

²⁷ Nile Green, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 78.

²⁸ Shady Hekmat Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān: The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādh* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 54.

²⁹ Akbar S. Ahmad, *The Qur'an in Different Languages: Challenges of Translation and Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 2009), 102.

³⁰ Salim Abu-Rabia, "The Role of Vowels in Reading Semitic Scripts: Data from Arabic and Hebrew," *Reading and Writing* 14, no. 1-2 (2001): 39-59.

³¹ Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999), 63.

acceptance plays a key role in the preservation and propagation of religious texts.

IMPACTS, CONSEQUENCES AND SOCIO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN LAKSHADWEEP

The consequences and impacts of the Malabari script and Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī were notably significant in Lakshadweep. Leaders from the AP faction sought to introduce Naskhīi texts at BakiyathuSwalihath Arabic College in Kavaratti, under the presidency of KC Abdul Qadir Saqafi. This initiative faced resistance from the local Muslim community. Despite support from the Indian National Congress (INC) and its leader Padanatha Mohammed Sayeed known as Pm Sayeed, the plan was contentious. The AP faction aimed to create a rift within the INC by advocating for Naskhīi texts. They initially garnered support from the Janata Dal (United) and the Nationalist Congress Party. This effort aimed to divide the INC's influence. The movement sought to undermine the prominence of the Malabari script. It resulted in significant political and social tensions. The local community's resistance was strong and persistent.³²

Initiation of the Rebellion

The anti-Malabari script movement extended to Agatti Island. Here, the AP faction attempted to incorporate Naskhīi texts into the curriculum of Tanveerul Islam Madrasa. Sirajul Huda Madrasa also faced similar pressures under Qadi Abdul Qadir Saqafi's presidency. The Malabari texts were staunchly defended by Qadi Cheriya Koya Musliyar Darimi. The debate in Lakshadweep, particularly in Agatti, was intense. It reached its zenith in 1999 during the opening ceremony of Tanveerul Islam Madrasa. The Lakshadweep police disrupted the event, barring teachers from entering. This intervention heightened tensions. The local community's response was strong. The AP faction's efforts were met with considerable resistance. The situation remained highly charged and contentious.

On the second day, a revolt erupted in Agatti. The AP faction launched an attack on the Shamsul Ulama Islamic Complex. They buried Malabari Kitabs and the Malabari Quran. The violence

³² Interview with the witness of the revolt era, he didn't want to reveal his name.

targeted leaders, teachers, and followers of the EK faction. Qadi Mohammed Haneefa Darimi, a disciple of EK faction founder Shamsul Ulama EK Abubakar Musliyar, was assaulted. Qadi Haneefa Darimi was rescued by a coconut tree climber. This individual threatened the assailants with a knife against revolters. The aftermath left the Shamsul Ulama Islamic Complex in ruins. Only the institution's nameboard remained intact. The community was left in turmoil. The event marked a significant escalation in the conflict.³³

Post-rebellion transformation

Half-buried Malabari Qurans and Malabari Kitabs were discovered in the forest a month later. Numerous significant local historical manuscripts were also found. During this period, the AP faction was constructing the Marakaz College. Hindu workers from Kerala reported the use of Malabari Quran pages in the concrete mix. This was to prevent leakage, leading to significant controversy. Agatti locals locked the college, preventing its opening. The college remained unopened due to the conflict in today. This period was marked by intense community tensions. The AP faction's actions had far-reaching consequences. The discovery of the buried texts highlighted the depth of the conflict.

Following the revolt, PM Sayeed allocated two madrassas to each faction. AP Abubakar Musliyar visited Agatti Island to regroup AP followers. He pursued a legal case in the Supreme Court. Sayeed had won ten consecutive Lok Sabha elections from 1967 until his defeat in 2004.³⁴ His defeat was largely due to the Muslim partition in Lakshwadeep Island. He later served as a Rajya Sabha member until he died in 2005. The Tanveerul Islam Madrasa reopened after ten years. The EK faction established three mosques in Agatti.³⁵ This led to a peaceful coexistence between the factions. The community eventually found a way to reconcile and move forward.

In an interview, an occult performer from Agatti recounted an incident. A heart patient and former revolter sought treatment from his father, another occult performer. The revolter was advised to pray for forgiveness at the tombs of VarakkalMullakkoyaThangal and Shamsul Ulama EK Abubakar Musliyar. After following this advice

³³ Interview with a Muslim scholar from Agathi Island, He didn't want to reveal his name.

³⁴ Election Commission of India. "Statistical Report on General Elections, 2004 to the Fourteenth Lok Sabha." PDF. Page 361.

³⁵ Masjidulnoor and Masjidul Arafa.

and receiving medical treatment, the patient reportedly recovered from his heart disease. This story illustrates the deep cultural and spiritual dimensions of the conflict. It also highlights the enduring legacy of the historical figures involved. The incident underscores the complex interplay of faith, tradition, and healing. The community's path to reconciliation involved both spiritual and practical elements.³⁶

CONCLUSION

The debate over the Malabari script and Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī in Kerala is a reflection of the region's rich cultural and religious tapestry. It underscores the complexity of balancing traditional practices with modern influences, as seen in the passionate arguments from various factions within the Muslim community. The Malabari script, with its deep historical roots, has been a cornerstone of Islamic education and culture in the region. It represents a unique fusion of local and Islamic traditions, facilitating the spread of religious knowledge while preserving regional identity.

The arguments for the Malabari script emphasize its role in maintaining cultural heritage and regional distinctiveness. Proponents argue that it is a crucial part of the local Muslim identity, linking the community to its historical roots. This script has been instrumental in religious education, poetry, and historical documentation, forming a significant part of the region's Islamic tradition. However, the push for modernity and integration with global Islamic practices has fueled the debate, with some scholars advocating for the adoption of Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī to ensure consistency and authenticity in Quranic texts.

Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī, named after the third Caliph, Uthmān bn ‘Affān, is seen by its proponents as the gold standard for Quranic text preservation. This script aims to capture the oral tradition of the Quran, maintaining its authenticity through specific orthographic conventions. Critics of the Malabari script argue that deviations from classical Arabic orthography could lead to misinterpretations and a diluted understanding of Islamic teachings. They stress the importance of learning classical Arabic to fully grasp the meanings and nuances of the Quran and Hadith.

³⁶ Interview with an occult performer.

The debate has significant educational implications. Balancing traditional religious education with modern needs is a challenge. The integration of Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī in educational institutions is seen by some as a way to align with global Islamic scholarship, ensuring that students are well-equipped to engage with broader Islamic teachings. However, this transition is met with resistance from those who view the Malabari script as an integral part of their educational heritage.

In Lakshadweep, the debate took on a more contentious tone, leading to political and social tensions. Efforts by the AP faction to introduce Naskhī texts met with strong local resistance, highlighting the deep-rooted attachment to the Malabari script. The community's response was a testament to the script's cultural significance and the complexities involved in altering long-standing educational practices. The intense conflict, including incidents of violence and the destruction of religious texts, underscores the emotional and ideological stakes involved.

The resolution of the conflict in Lakshadweep, marked by efforts to find a peaceful coexistence between factions, is a hopeful sign. The eventual reopening of the Tanveerul Islam Madrasa and the establishment of new mosques reflect a community's resilience and ability to reconcile differences. This period of turmoil and subsequent reconciliation illustrates the profound impact of script debates on social cohesion and community identity.

The scholarly discussions around the Malabari script and Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī highlight the importance of academic rigor in religious debates. Texts like "Īdāḥfī‘Ilm al-Tajwīd" provide a scholarly basis for arguments, emphasizing the need for accuracy and fidelity in religious education. The engagement of prominent scholars in this debate underscores the significant role of academic scholarship in shaping religious and cultural discourse. The debate over the Malabari script and Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī is likely to continue influencing the cultural and educational landscape of Kerala's Muslim community. The challenge remains to find a balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing modern educational practices. The resolution of these debates will shape the future of Islamic education and community identity in the region. The Malabari script versus Rasm Al-‘Uthmānī debate is more than just a discussion about orthographic preferences. It reflects broader themes of tradition versus modernity, cultural preservation versus integration, and the role of religious education in a rapidly changing world. The

passionate arguments and intense conflicts highlight the deep-seated values and identities at stake, making this an enduring and significant issue within Kerala's Muslim community.

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