

RESEARCH ARTICLE

History of Hadith Scholarship in Medieval Malabar of South India

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to contribute to the institutional, intellectual, and social history of hadith sciences in Malabar from the 10th to 18th centuries CE. At its most general level, it attempts to fill a gap in our knowledge of the development of hadith sciences in modern South Asia. In the modern period, the regional locus of the interpretive tradition of Sunni hadith collection and commentaries moved partly eastward from the Middle East to South Asia (Zaman, 2009), as evidenced by the rich production of hadith commentaries and related literature over the last two centuries from different places or regions in North India and Indonesia.¹ While the upsurge of hadith scholarship in the northern provinces of

1 While the core tradition of Ḥadīth literature remained in Arabic, this development saw the production of commentaries in different Asian Islamic languages such as Urdu, Farsi, Bahasa Indonesian, Malayalam, and Tamil.

Received 30 April 2023; accepted: 28 August 2023; published 15 December 2023

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Cite this article as: Cheerakkolil, M. R. (2023). History Of Ḥadīth Scholarship in Medieval Malabar of South India.

Astrolabe: A CIS Student Research Journal, (5)

<https://www.hbku.edu.qa/sites/default/files/hadithscholarshipindia.pdf>

British India—closely linked to a newly emerging milieu of madrasas (Zaman, 1999)²—has drawn the attention of many scholars; the history of South Indian Islamic scholars' engagement with the field of hadith studies is usually ignored.

Most academic studies on the history of hadith literature in the Indian subcontinent neglect southern India. Ishaq (1955) and Zaman (2020) focused on the hadith tradition of North India. In this study, I propose to partly address this regional knowledge gap by briefly examining different aspects of the medieval history of hadith sciences in Malabar and South India. This article focuses primarily on the history of the major Islamic scholars who contributed to or engaged in hadith scholarship from the 10th to the 18th centuries CE. This article discusses the larger history of hadith scholarship in the Malabar³ region of South India from the 10th century onwards to the revival of Islamic sciences under the Makhdooms of Ponnani in the 16th century. It interprets how hadith science grew in Malabar during the time of the Makhdooms and how it faced a decline along with other sciences after their time.

Keywords: Malabar, hadith scholarship, madrasahs, Islam in South India, Mappila Muslims, Islamic literature, Malabar 'ulama'

HADITH SCHOLARSHIP IN MALABAR UP TO THE 10TH CENTURY AH/16TH CENTURY CE

The historical records of the early stages of hadith sciences in Malabar are limited and sometimes fragmentary. There are no well-preserved hadith texts or related scholarly records written in the early centuries after the arrival of Islam in Kerala. However, based on some available historical sources such as travelogues of Ibn Battuta, textual records of the life and activities of some early Malabar scholars such as the *Mu'jam al-Buldān* of Shihābuddīn Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1228/626) and records of Shams al-dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH/1497 CE), we can make a number of assumptions about how Kerala 'ulama' (a body of Muslim scholars) treated hadith sciences in the early centuries and how it led to developments in the hadith field in the region.

Kerala's relationship with hadith sciences may have begun as early as the arrival of Arab Muslims on the shores of Malabar, since knowledge of ahadith (plural of hadith) is as vital and important to Muslims as the Quran. As the Shafī'ī scholar Najīb Maulavi⁴ of Kerala suggested, the oral mode of transmission may have been the way by which

2 Most world-renowned pre-modern Ḥadīth scholars from India, such as Shah Waliyullah al-Dihlawi (d.1762), Sheikh 'Abd al-Haq al-Dihlawi (d. 1642), and Sheikh Aḥmed al-Sirhindi (d. 1624), had their own madrasahs of muḥaddithūn for promoting Ḥadīth learning under their patronage.

3 Malabar is the ancient name for a particular territory in Kerala. It refers to the northern part of the state between the current Trichur and Kasaragod, where the Muslim population is higher compared to other parts of Kerala (Miller, 1976, pp. 18–19).

4 Moulana Najīb Maulavi is a famous scholar and author from Malabar and currently the acting general secretary of the *Kerala Samsthana Jamiyyat al-'Ulema* (an organization of Muslim scholars).

common people learned ahadith in early times, as written texts were not common (Najīb, 2018). After the emergence of Islam in the Arabian subcontinent, in addition to Arab merchants, Arab scholars and preachers were another important group of visitors to the coasts of Kerala. Māppila historian K.K Kareem argues that a group of scholars under the leadership of Mugheerat bin Shughba landed in Kozhikode in the seventh century. He was one of the most notable scholars among the followers of the Prophet, and the place where he and his group lived in Kozhikode is still known as Mugadhar, which means *Mugheerat al-Dar* and could be translated as the House of Mugheera (Ampotti, 2014; Koya, 2012).

According to Najīb Maulavi, several hadith scholars (*muḥaddithūn*) from Malabar undertook long-distance journeys to collect ahadith. While written records of many of these early scholars are missing, some sources provide information about them. The description of Malabar by Shihābuddīn Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1228 CE/626 AH) in Chapter *Mīm* of his historical masterpiece *Mu'ajam al-Buldan* supports this argument. Ḥamawī explains: “Malabar is famous for the spice trade. I have read in the history of Damascus that ‘Abd Allah bin ‘Abd al Raḥmān al-Malabari a scholar from the Malabar region was in Damascus learning ahadith from Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Shūrāzi who was a famous *muḥaddith* from the Adnūn port city near Damascus. Abu ‘Abd alla al-Suri from Basra reported ahadith from this ‘Abd Allah al-Malabari” (Ḥamawī, 1995, 5/196). Najīb Maulavi remarks that Damascus, Baghdad, and Basra were prominent cities known for hadith studies during this period. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammed b. ‘Abd al-Rraḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497/902), a reputable Shafi‘i historian and hadith scholar from Cairo, mentions another hadith scholar from Malabar, ‘Abd Allah bin Aḥmed al-Kālikūti, who was born in Kozhikode around 1472. At an unspecified date, he traveled with his brothers Qasim and Abubakr to Mecca, where he became a student of al-Sakhāwī and received an *ijāza* for transmitting ahadith from him (al-Sakhāwī, 2008).

Based on the stories of these two scholars, we know that hadith scholarship in Malabar has been an integral part of transregional circuits of knowledge since at least the seventh century. It is reasonable to assume that these *muḥaddithūn* operated in a broader institutional context in which Islamic sciences were taught and studied. This is indeed demonstrated by Mahmood Kooria, who presents evidence of “legalist links of South Asian terrains to the regions of the Eastern Mediterranean as well as to Southeast Asia as early as the thirteenth century” (Kooria, 2016, p. 105). Kooria notes that “a few South Asian scholars ... were active in the legalist, educational and intellectual circles of the Middle East and Southeast Asia well before the assumed ‘upsurge of Yemenis” (Ibid, p. 103). He concludes: “All these al-Hindīs and al-Malabaris tell us about a persistent historical awareness of ‘Indian’ scholarship holding a considerable but neglected position” (Ibid, p. 105; see also pp. 96 and 219).

This fact is also evidenced by the recurring references to ‘ulama’ in Ibn Battuta’s travelogue *Rihla*. Ibn Battuta writes: “After I visited Kalikūth in the Malabar, my next

destination was Juma Mosque of Ezhimala⁵ which voyagers and sailors make big vows and Muslims and Hindus paid homage alike. The mosque compound includes a grand madrasa that provides a scholarship for students and an eatery for travellers and poor people. I met with a Sufi scholar from Somalia who taught in that madrasa, he told me that he studied fourteen years each in Mecca and Medina and had been in touch with prominent scholars of the holy cities as well as with Amīrs of Mansur bin Jammaz in Medina (r 1330–1325) and Abu Numayy of Mecca (r 1254–1301). After that, he visited China and India for further research in Islamic studies.” (Battuta, 1987, p. 572). Ibn Battuta mentioned at least seven foreign Islamic scholars who taught at different madrasas in Malabar during his visit. He met a scholar from Oman who taught in the madrasa of Panthalayani (*Fantarina*), a coastal city in north Malabar, and another scholar from Qazwīn who taught in the mosque of Kollam. Battuta also reveals that he met many “ulema who came to make visits and ziyaras in the Malabar shore, for example, Ibrahim Shah Bandar from Bahrain whom he met during his Calicut visit” (Battuta, 1987, p. 573). Although we do not have enough evidence to claim the affiliation of these scholar with hadith scholarship, the probability is very high that at least some of these scholars taught or were engaged in hadith scholarship, as hadith studies have been an inevitable part of Islamic learning since its origin.

After Mālik bin Dīnār came to Malabar with his nephew and some other Muslim preachers from Arabia in the second decade of the first Hijri century⁶, they settled in the port cities of Kerala and built ten mosques in different parts of Malabar, where King Zamorin allotted them land for construction (Sadasivan, 2000; Zainuddīn, 2014).⁷ These masjids may have been the first centers of hadith learning in Malabar as the founders of these mosques designated their descendants as the qadis (a Muslim judge who interprets and administers Islamic law) and teachers in each of these masjids. Thus, each of them functioned more than just masjids and also as learning centers of Islam. The descendants of the founders of these masjids are popularly known as “Qadis of Kozhikode,” as Kozhikode was the major center of Muslim settlements and Islamic learning with the support of King Zamorin of Kozhikode. The first qadi to be appointed as the chief qadi of Kozhikode was Zain al-dīn Madani, the grandson of Mālik bin Habīb, the nephew of Mālik bin Dīnār, based on one of the first built mosques of Malabar in Chaliyam (Koya,

5 Ezhimala is a coastal city in the northern part of Malabar, currently famous for the naval base of the Indian Naval Army.

6 The time period of Mālik bin Dīnār’s expedition to the Malabar is a controversial topic among historians. Some of the Malabar historians such as M.G.S Narayanan and Satish Kumar argued that it happened during the lifetime of the Prophet himself based on some assumptions, and others such as Zainuddin Makhdoom and Sadasivan believed that it took place only in later periods (Kumar, 2009; Narayanan, 2018; Sadasivan 2000; Zainuddīn, 2014).

7 Mālik bin Dīnār and his team built ten different masjids after arriving on the Malabar Coast in different parts of Zamorin’s kingdom such as Kollam, Kasaragod, Mangalore, Darmadam, Kodungallur, Ezhimala, Chaliyam, Panthalayani, and Barkur. All of them were built in the lands granted by the ruler Zamorin (William Logan, 1951, *Malabar Manual*).

2012, 42; Nadwi, 2017, 26–27).⁸ As the Qadis of Kozhikode took from their predecessors the responsibility for the rule of law in the Muslim community under them and also educated the Māppila Muslims of Malabar religiously, it could be said that they were the transmitters of hadith scholarship from their Arab ancestors to their Malabar descendants. The travelogue *Rihla* by the world-renowned traveler Ibn Battuta and the accounts of ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497) are among the earliest sources on the activities of the early Qadis of Kozhikode. Battuta visited Kozhikode in 1343 and met with the Qadi of Kozhikode, Sheikh Faqrudīn ‘Uthmān al-Shāliyāti. Although he made no specific comments on hadith learning under the qadis during that period, he explains how the qadis of different regions of Malabar influenced the religious life of their people, especially in the process of religious learning and practice (Battuta, 1987, p. 406; Dale, 1980, p. 158). Since they were officially appointed in each period by the order of King Zamorin, they were the first designated patrons of the Māppila Muslim community of Malabar and were obliged to advance the educational and social development of the Muslim community. They established madrasas and mosques for the religious enrichment of society. Some of the well-known earlier Qadis of Kozhikode were Faqrudīn ‘Uthmān, Muḥammed Zīāuddīn, Mūsa Ibrahīm, Ibrahīm bin Muḥammed, Abubakr bin Ramadān, Shihābuddīn Aḥmed, ‘Abd al Aziz, and ‘Ali al-Qādi al-Nashīri (Koya, 2012, p. 42; Nadwi, 2017, p. 35). Based on these premises, we can assume that the Qadis of Kozhikode have been the patrons of different Islamic sciences and scholarship, including that of ahadith in the Malabar, for long centuries since the establishment of early maṣjids across Malabar by Mālik bin Dīnār and his companions until the time of the Makhdooms of Ponnani in the 16th century.

MAKHDOOMS OF PONNANI AND THE 16TH-CENTURY REVIVAL

After the Qadis of Kozhikode, the Makhdoom family played an important role in the history of scientific and educational advancement in the medieval Muslim society of Malabar. Their intervention brought significant contributions to the educational system of Malabar Muslims as they adopted a new scientific and more efficient Islamic curriculum and introduced the Darsi education system (*Palli dars* in Malayalam). These changes resulted in numerous contributions by Makhdooms themselves and their students in different fields of knowledge, including that of hadith sciences. The Makhdooms who migrated to Malabar from Yemen described themselves as descendants of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the first caliph. According to early sources, one of the ancestors of Makhdooms traveled from southern Yemen to the Indian subcontinent and settled in the Coromandel coast of Tamil Nādu known as *Ma‘abar*, and some others settled in the coastal Kayalpattinam region of southern India (Raṅṭāṭāni, 2007, p. 418). The first Makhdoom to travel from Yemen to southern India was Zainuddīn, who settled in the Nagōre region of the Coromandel

8 For a list of the early Qadis of Kozhikode, see *Qissat Shakarwati Farmad* (Tale of the great Chera ruler), an early Arabic manuscript of anonymous authorship written in the Malabar, which lists the names of early qadis appointed in different maṣjids on the Malabar Coast (Prange, 2018, p. 98).

Coast in the early 15th century, where he became a student of the Sufi scholar Abubakr Sādiq Maʿbāri. Sheikh Zainuddīn al-Awwal's (b. 1467) grandfather, Sheikh Aḥmed al Maʿbāri, later migrated from Kayalpatinam to Cochin in central Kerala around the 15th century. Kochi was the primary center of Makhdoom's missionary activities in Kerala. In 1481 CE, Qādi al-Maʿabāri and the entire Makhdoom family shifted their center from Kochi to the Ponnani region of central Malabar, accepting the invitation of Muslim leaders there (Kooria, 2016). Ponnani was called the "Mecca of South India" (*Daksinentiyade Makka*) or "little Mecca" (*Cerumakka*) after it became a center of Islamic knowledge production under the Makhdooms. According to Maḥmūd Kooria, due to the Ponnani-centered activism of the Makhdoom family, there was a partial translocation of Muslim families from the port cities of Malabar to the newly emerged knowledge city of Ponnani (Kooria, 2016, p. 209).⁹ After settling in Ponnani, Qadi Ibrahim al-Maʿabāri began his educational activities at the Thottungal Masjid in Ponnani. Zainuddīn Makhdoom al-Kabīr (the Senior) and Zainuddīn Makhdoom al-Saghīr (the Junior) were two remarkable and revolutionary figures from the Makhdoom family who tremendously influenced the educational and social resurgence of Māppila Muslim society in 16th-century Malabar. Both played an important role in the spread of Shafī'ism in Malabar and the larger Indian Ocean world in the 16th century (Kooria, 2016; Raṅattāṇi, 2010).

Qadi Ibrahim was the first teacher of Sheikh Zainuddīn al-Kabīr, who, together with Zainuddīn Makhdoom al-Saghīr (the Junior), influenced the educational and social resurgence of Māppila Muslim society in the 16th century. After studying in Ponnani and Calicut, Sheikh Zainuddīn set off for Mecca to pursue higher studies in various Islamic fields. In Mecca, he studied hadith sciences and *fiqh* under Aḥmed Shihābuddīn Yemīni. After his education in Mecca, he went to Cairo, Egypt, to study at al-Azhar Islamic University. He was the first person from Kerala to study at al-Azhar. In al-Azhar, Zainuddīn al-Kabir studied under outstanding Islamic scholars such as Imām Jamāluddīn al-Suyūti (d. 1506), Imām Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammed al-Sakhāwī (d. 1496), Qadi ʿAbd alraḥmān al-Adāmi al-Makki, and Imām Sayyid Muḥammed al-Sumhūdi (d. 1508). During his studies in Mecca and Cairo, he acquired advanced knowledge in almost every important Islamic and non-Islamic field of knowledge of his time, such as logic and philosophy. His specialization was in *fiqh* and hadith. His return to Malabar in 1510 marked the beginning of a new era in his career and the religious history of Malabar. He built the renowned Ponnani Grand Juma Masjid, which became a center of excellence and higher studies from then until the 18th century.¹⁰ He began his teaching career in this masjid and hundreds of 'ulama' graduated from there each year. The Ponnani Mosque College gave scholars confidence

9 The context of the ongoing Portuguese attack and atrocities in the coastal regions of Malabar in the 16th century may also have influenced this migratory tendency of the Muslim public at the time. For a more detailed reading of Portuguese atrocities in that century, see Panikkar, K. M. (1929). *Malabar and the Portuguese*, Salahudheen, O. P. (2006). *Anti-European struggle by the Māppilas of Malabar 1498–1921 AD*, also Zainuddīn Aḥmed. *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn. Other books Calicut, 2005*.

10 Vellore became the locus of Islamic education and learning during this period under madrasas such as Bāqiyāt and Lateefiyya. Discussion forthcoming.

and encouragement to travel to international knowledge hubs of the 16th-century Islamic world such as Cairo and Mecca. It also made important changes in the local religious education landscape. The Muslim public began to learn new sciences of Islamic knowledge such as hadith, *tafsīr* (commentary of the Qur'an), and *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism), and also to engage in more sophisticated sources of knowledge that Zainuddīn al-Kabir popularized (Kooria, 2016, p. 211).

Zainuddīn al-Kabir contributed to many fields of Islamic law but made no direct contribution to hadith scholarship. He delved into the field of hadith studies to enrich his works on *akhlak* (behavioral science) and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the self). His works *Siraj al-Quloob* and *Shua'b al-Iman*, which largely consists of ahadith in different chapters, is a great example of this approach in the field of hadith. He quotes almost a thousand ahadith in these works (Nellikuth, 1997). Another kind of literature that he contributed to and which is more directly related to hadith scholarship is the *Sīra* literature. He had two works in this field: a commentary on Qadi Iyad's famous *al-Shifa* entitled *al-Swifa min al-Shifa li al-Qādi Iyal fi al-Sīrat al-nabawiyya* and the second entitled *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyya*.

Zainuddīn Makhdoom al-Saghīr (the Junior), also known as Makhdoom al-Thani (the Second), was the most important member of the Makhdoom family in 16th-century Malabar. We have no contemporary references or biographies about the career of Makhdoom al-Saghīr, as in the case of his grandfather Makhdoom al-Kabir, which was written in the form of a detailed biography by his son 'Abd al-Aziz. However, Malabar historians have written a vast amount of scholarship on his life in later periods (Kooria, 2016). Although we can find extensive details of each step in Makhdoom the Second's life in the different accounts of Malabar historians, they provide few references from the primary sources for these claims. Their accounts are marred by contradicting dates, confusing explanations, and sometimes exaggerations. Although many studies have dealt with the history of Makhdoom in general or the life of Makhdoom the Second in particular, the truth about his life remains partly proven and partly a myth, as we have no scientific evidence that indisputably confirms the exact dates of his birth, travels to Mecca and other destinations, and the date of his death, apart from some narrations by him about the date of completion of some of his works (Kooria, 2016, p. 195).¹¹ Despite the issue of historical accuracy, we rely on what is available to us now without neglecting how weak it is.

11 See example of doctoral dissertations: Muḥammed Kunju, P. (2004). *The Makdooms of Ponnani* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Kerala; Rafiq 'Abd al-Barr al-Wafī. (2014). *al-Juhud al-fiqhiyyat li al-Imām Aḥmed Zayn al-dīn al-Makhdoom al-Malibāri wa duwaruhu fi nashr al-Madhab al-Shafi'i fi al-Hind* (Doctoral dissertation). al-Azhar University; Mayankutty, O. P. (2007). *Role of Makdooms in the anti-colonial struggles of 16th-century Malabar* (Doctoral dissertation). Calicut University. Hagiographical type of works is another kind of literature about Makhdooms. For example, Birqankutti Fayzi, M. A. (1994). *Sheikh Zain al-dīn Makdumum Ponnani Jumu'attu palliyum* (Ponnani: Ponnani Juma Masjid paripalana Committee); Hussain Rantattani. (2010). *Makhdumum Ponnaniyum* (Ponnani: Juma Masjid Paripalana Committee).

Like his grandfather, Makhdoom the Second received his primary education from his father, Muḥammed al-Ghazali, in his homeland of Chombal, near the French-occupied Mahe. He then moved to Ponnani Mosque-college *dars* (a religious lecture), where he studied under Allāma Ismail al-Sukri (d. 1005 AH/1597 CE) and his uncle Abd al-Aziz, who was the chief instructor and professor there. He memorized the Quran and some hadith texts, and studied various sciences. After graduating from Ponnani, he went to Mecca for further studies. After spending almost a decade of academic life under prominent scholars, he returned to Malabar, took up the position of chief mentor at Ponnani Mosque College, and taught there for three decades. Towards the end of his life, he moved from his father's house in north Malabar to a small village called Kunjippally, where he spent the last years of his life and was buried in the Juma Masjid of Kunjippally (Nellikuth, 1997; Raṅṭattāni, 2010).

Makhdoom the Second was also fortunate to meet and study under the greatest scholars of his time, like his grandfather. He learned under 16th-century Shafi'i theologian Ibn ḥajar al-Ḥaytamī (d. 1566), Izzuddīn bin 'Abd al 'Azīz al-Zumari, Wajīhuddīn 'Abd alrrahmān bin Ziyād, Sheikh al-Islam 'Abd al Raḥmān al-Sufawi, and Sufi scholar Abul Ḥasan Siddīq al-Bakari (d. 1585/993) in Mecca. Renowned hadith scholar and author of *Mirqat al-Mafatih alā Mishkāt al-Masabih* Mulla 'Ali al-Qāri (d. 1605), famous Shafi'i jurist and author of *Nihāyat al-Muḥtaḥ ila Sharḥ al-Minḥāj* Imām Shihābuddīn al-Ramli (d. 1595/1001), Abubakr bin Sālim al-Ḥadhrami (d. 1584/992), and Allāma Sayyid 'Abd alrrahmān bin Shihābuddīn al-Ḥadhrami (d. 1606/1014) were his classmates during his Meccan years. He gained much expertise in hadith studies, to the level where many Meccan scholars called him al-Muḥaddith (*Raṅṭattāni, 2007*).

Although Makhdoom the Second had much expertise in hadith, we cannot find any major literary contributions to hadith literature from his side. His most important works were on the Islamic law and history of Malabar.¹² His magnum opus is *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn*, written in 1583 to mobilize the Muslim community of Māppila to fight against the Portuguese invaders. This work is considered to be the first authentic historical account of Kerala's history.¹³ His major contributions concerned Islamic law, especially Shafi'i law. *Fath al-Muīn*, which he wrote as a commentary on his own text *Qurraṭ al-ain*, was a revolutionary contribution to the field of Shafi'i fiqh (Husain, 2004).

Although there are no exclusive hadith studies of Makhdoom the Second, as was the case with his grandfather Makhdoom the Senior, he did engage in hadith extensively in his different dogmatic texts written in the field of *tasawwuf* or *tazkiyat al-naḥs*. For example, his work *Irshād al-'Ibād ilā sabīl al-rashād* includes more than 900 ahadith with its *isnād* (a list of authorities who have transmitted a hadith) and deals with many ethical and legal issues ranging from alcohol consumption, apostasy, and stealing to the practice of different rituals and character cultivation. His works such as *al-Jawāhir fi 'Uqūbat Ahl al-Kabāi'r*

12 For a detailed description and list of Makhdoom Junior's works, see Nellikuth Muḥammed Ali's *Malayalathile Maharadanmar* (pp. 22–31) and Raṅṭattāni, *Makhdoomum Ponnaniyum* (pp. 124–125).

13 It was translated into different European languages such as English, Portuguese, and French, followed by multiple Indian translations (Kooria, 2016).

(on major sins and its penalties in Islam) and *Sharḥ al-Sudūr fi ahwāl al-mawtā wa al-Qubūr* (on the life in graves and hereafter) also included hundreds of hadith, but only as a supporting source for the actual content of these works. In short, in the pre-modern period, Malabar scholars such as the Makhdooms of Ponnani and qadis as well as teachers of different Mahals did not make significant scholarly hadith contributions, apart from *tasawwuf* and *akhlaq* texts, which extensively use ahadith for the purpose of preaching to people (Aḥmed Maulavi, & Muhammad ‘Abd alKarim, 1978).

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE LACK OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO HADITH SCIENCES IN MEDIEVAL MALABAR

Both Makhdoom the Senior and the Junior have composed texts that contain a large number of ahadith throughout their careers. Analyzing these texts and other *tasawwuf* and *akhlaq* works containing ahadith written in the 16th century, we may argue that Malabar scholars in this period considered the field of hadith as a mature field of study that does not require further scholastic research contributions as other disciplines of Islamic studies such as *fiqh*, *‘ilm al-Kalām* (a science that studies fundamental beliefs and doctrines of Islam), *tasawwuf*, and *akhlaq*. Both Makhdooms, who learned the hadith discipline from its heartlands and were known as muḥaddithūn even among Arab scholars, made no literary contributions to hadith scholarship throughout their careers. Their contribution to all other major fields of Islamic studies of their time supports this argument.

According to Malabar hadith scholar Mukhtar Ḥaḍrat,¹⁴ one of the main reasons for the relative lack of hadith literature production by South Indian Shafi‘i scholars in the medieval centuries could be due to the legalistic orientation of Shafi‘i scholars in that period. Shafi‘i ‘ulama’'s literary contributions to subjects such as hadith and *tafsir* in the medieval centuries are very rare worldwide, while they produced many legal accounts and conducted research on *fiqh*-related subjects. In addition, the influence of Ibn Ḥajar al-Ḥaytamī (d. 1566), the author of *Tuḥfat al-Minhāj*, a groundbreaking Shafi‘i *fiqh* text, and who was the chief teacher of Shafi‘i law in 16th-century Mecca, also inspired Shafi‘i scholars around the world, including Makhdoom the Second, to concentrate more on legal subjects in that period. Legal contributions of Ibn-Ḥajar al-Ḥaytamī’s other Shafi‘i disciples such as Imām Shihābuddīn al-Ramli (d. 1595) (author of *Nihāyat al-Muḥtāj ila Sharḥ al-Minhāj*), Abubakr bin Sālim al-Ḥadhrami (d. 1584/992), and ‘Allama Sayyid ‘Abd alrahmān bin Shihābuddīn al-Ḥadhrami also reinforce this argument (Ḥaḍrat, 2013).

At the same time, Ibn-Ḥajar’s Ḥanafī interlocutors made some important hadith contributions such as Imām Mulla ‘Ali al-Qāri, who composed *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ*, a detailed eleven-volume commentary on *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* (Mukhtar, 2020, interview). Before Ibn Ḥajar influenced Makhdoom the Second, his grandfather Makhdoom the Senior also might have had the same influence from his teacher Faqrudīn Abū Bakr

14 Sheikh Mukhtar Ḥaḍrat is the head of the Ḥadīth Department in Jamia Markaz al-Saqafat al-Sunniyya.

al-Kālikūti (d. 1489), who was said to have studied under Jalāluddīn al-Mahalli (d. 1459), the renowned Shafī‘ī jurist and commentator of Minhāj al-Ābidīn of Imām al-Nawawī (Nasīr, 2012).

Although the medieval Malabar ‘ulama’ did not make significant contributions to hadith literature, this does not mean that they excluded hadith studies from their madrasa curriculum. When it comes to the madrasa curriculum in the 16th-century Ponnani Mosque College and the wider Malabar region, Mahmood Kooria notes that it could be said to be more adherent to the syllabi that existed in Hijāz and Mecca in the 16th century more than any other syllabi in the contemporary Islamic world such as the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal domains. Kooria developed his argument by analyzing contemporary trends in texts and debates in Mecca and Hijāz, which focused significantly on legalistic, theological, and mystical areas. He says that the curriculum of Mecca and Hijāz in the 16th century focused primarily on *fiqh*, and included *tafsir*, hadith, and *tasawwuf* as complementary studies. The same curriculum was probably used in Ponnani as well, since Meccan influence is visible in almost all areas of Makhdoom’s life¹⁵ (Kooria, 2016). Moreover, after graduating from the college of Ponnani, several Malabar students began to pursue further studies in Mecca after Makhdoom the Second (Anuzsiya, 2004).

HADITH SCIENCES IN MALABAR FROM THE 16TH TO THE 18TH CENTURIES CE

According to some modern Malabari ‘ulama’ and historians, after the rise of Islamic knowledge in the 16th century led by the Makhdooms, there was a decline in Islamic literary production in Malabar. The time of this decline in literary production may have begun after the period of Qadi Muḥammed al-Kalikūti (d. 1616), who contributed valuable works in *fiqh*, *tasawwuf*, and Arabic grammar. According to Kunji Aḥmed,¹⁶ this period of decline lasted until the second-half of the 19th century when Islamic institutional reform took place in Tamil Nādu, triggering a revival of Islamic education in South India at large (Kunji Aḥmed, 2004). The works of Malabar historian Nellikkuth Muḥammed Ali and ‘Abd al Nasir on the biographies of Malabar scholars and authors,¹⁷ which list all available Islamic literature produced in Malabar since the pre-modern period, support this argument. Their list of authors and works shows a notable gap in the production of Islamic literature between the early 17th and 19th centuries (Nasīr, 2012; Nellikkuth, 1997). Although the history and biographies of the scholars among the successors of the Makhdoom family and the Qadi family of Kozhikode in this period of decline are well documented as well as

15 According to later indigenous narratives, Ibn Ḥajar came to Malabar and visited the Makhdoom College of Ponnani, accepting the invitation of Makhdoom al-Saghīr (Kooria, 2016, p. 196).

16 Vellyyath Kunji Aḥmed (d. Hijri 1331) was a northern Malabar scholar, poet, and author who contributed to different Islamic disciplines, including Ḥadīth scholarship. His thousand-line poem on Ḥadīth “*Alfiya fi istilāhat al-Ḥadīth*” is his masterpiece.

17 ‘Abd al Nasir. (2009). *Tarājim ulamāi al-Shafi‘iyyati fidiyāri al-Hindiyyati* and Nellikkuth Muḥammed Ali. (1997). *Malayalathile Maharadanmar*.

demonstrate their role in community building and religious teaching and preaching in the Malabar, we cannot find many notable intellectual contributions to major Islamic disciplines. Thus, hadith scholarship in Malabar also witnessed a decline during this period as all other sciences of Islamic knowledge witnessed a relative decline (‘Ālim, 1993).

This does not mean that scholars of this period did not produce any literary works at all. One of the most notable scholars who made intellectual contributions during this period was al-Sayyid Muḥammed al-Jifri al-Ḥadhrami, who came to Kozhikode from Yemen in 1746 and settled there. According to records, he has three works: *Kanz al-Barāhīn*, which is on Sufi doctrines and spiritual paths; *al-‘Alawiyya*, *al-Irshādat al-Jifriyyam* which is on refuting fundamentalist ideologies; and *Dīwān al-Makhtūt*, which is on *tasawwuf*. Qadi ‘Umer Veliyankod, born in Malabar in 1765, was another important figure and a famous poet. He has nearly a dozen collections of poetry in different Islamic disciplines such as *sīra*, *shamāil al-nabawiyya*, and *usūl al-dīn* (a compilation of hadith or reports of the sayings and actions of the Prophet), and *fiqh*. *Al-Qasīdat al-Umariyya* and *Qasīdat Nafāis al-Durar* are his major poetry collections (Nasīr 2012; Nellikkuth, 1997). During this period, there were many prominent scholars in Malabar who taught in different madrasas in Ponnani and other parts of Malabar but did not make any significant literary contributions. Qadi Ramadān al-Shāliyāti al-Kalikūti (d. 1747), who taught for several years at a notable college in Kuttichira Juma Masjid; Sheikh Nūruddīn al-Makhdoom (d. 1740); his disciple Khaja al-Makhdūm bin Muḥammed Labba al-Makhdoomi (d. 1747), who taught in Ponaani; and Aḥmed al-Makhdoom al-Awwal (d. 1765) were all taught in madrasas of Ponnani and were each referred to as Makhdooms of their time; and Sheikh Qadi Muḥammed al-Ghazali (d. 1747) is also amongst list of prominent scholars from Malabar who made no literary contributions (Shāliyāti, 1987; Nasīr 2012).

CONCLUSION

The Muslim scholars of Malabar were interested in establishing scholarly cosmopolitan connections even before the advance of modernity, including through sources such as travelogues of Ibn Battuta, textual records of the life and activities of some early Malabar scholars such as the *Mu‘jam al-Buldān* of Shihābuddīn Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1228), and records of Shams al-dīn Muḥammed ibn ‘Abd al-Rraḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497). The biography of the pre-modern Malabar ‘ulama’, such as Makhdoom the Senior and the Second, supports this statement. The presence of Malabar Muslim scholars in some of the major Islamic knowledge hubs such as Damascus, Basra, and Egypt during the canonization of hadith and in subsequent periods, as well as their involvement in the process of transmission and teaching of hadith, indicate the Malabar affiliation and interconnectedness with the hadith scholars of the larger Muslim world even in the pre-modern era (Koya, 2012).

Although we cannot find any significant contributions to hadith literature by medieval Malabar ‘ulama’ of that period, this does not mean that they excluded hadith studies from their madrasa curriculum. As Mahmood Kooria noted, the madrasa syllabus designed by

Makhdooms could be said to be more in line with the syllabi that existed in the Hijaz and Mecca, which gave an important place to hadith learning. Most of the Makhdooms were Meccan graduates (Anuzsiya, 2004; Kooria, 2016). Moreover, as mentioned above, the expertise of medieval Malabar scholars in the field of hadith is very evident in their works in the fields of *tasawwuf*, *fiqh*, and *akhlaq*, since they quoted ahadith extensively in these works.

Although the hadith contributions of Malabar scholars over the centuries were very small compared to other regions, especially northern India, this fact needs to be contextualized. Southern India did not have a similarly diverse landscape of traditional or modernist and reformist religious movements such as the Deobandi, Ahl-i-Hadith, and Bareli that northern India witnessed in the context of colonial India. As scholars such as Mukhtar Ḥaḍrat argued, the *madhhab* (a school of thought within Islamic jurisprudence) disparity between the scholars in southern and northern India could possibly play a role in these differences, as Shafi'i scholars were less engaged in hadith scholarship. Also worth noting is the socio-economic context of the Malabar Muslim community, which was unfavorable for producing major research in this field (Ḥaḍrat, 2013).

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