Introduction

The study and transmission of religious knowledge lay at the heart of Islamic civilization. Throughout the centuries Muslims around the world have founded a variety of ways for teaching Islam both at primary levels, to educate everybody in the community about the basic tenets of the religion, and at higher levels, to produce the 'Ulama class, the true religious scholars. There has been enough academic and journalistic attention of late towards the entire idea of Islamic education and institutions of Islamic learning. Most of the studies came up in the backdrop of post-9/11 allegations that Islamic learning centers are harboring radicalism, nurturing terrorism and fostering extremist tendencies as well as preparing grounds for Islamist political takeovers. Hundreds of books and articles have already come out trying to justify these allegations, mostly based on peripheral views and from-the-far assessments. This post-9/11 fascination over Islamic learning institutions, with a special obsession with Madrasa, a term widely used in South Asia to denote higher centers of Islamic learning, put under the scanner every system that deals with Islamic education, be it ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’. Prior to this fascination, the discourses on the Islamic education were revolving around the allegations that the traditional type of Islamic institutions are utterly redundant, a mere relic of the past, outdated, pre-modern and resistant to any change.

This dual-faced allegation against Islamic education systems - that it nurtures religious extremism, radicalism and intolerance, and that it is pre-modern and resistant to change - has been questioned by many scholars like Francis Robinson, Barbara Metcalf, Martin Van Bruinessen, Robert W Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman. Their studies have highlighted the strength and diversity of traditional Islamic learning and the functions it has been doing in the time-to-time transformation of Muslim societies. The increased attentions towards the role of religion in public life following the Iranian Revolution had already triggered a flood of researches on Islam and Muslim societies in the last three decades. It shed light on a number of individual Muslim communities in different parts of
the world and showed that despite having many basic characteristics unifying them as an international religious community, there are apparent differences in the social, economic, cultural, educational and religious features of individual Muslim societies. Scholars found that the diversity, cultural differences, and the depth and profundity of localization in each individual Muslim society depend on the nature of the arrival of the religion in an area, ways it adopted to grow and expand there, role it played in the social change of the host community and the character of its engagement with other religions and ideologies. The new researches on Islamic education are adding new dimensions in to the perception of this diversity, and it has opened new ways of explaining as well as understanding Muslim societies.

Introducing his path-breaking study on the *Farangi Mahal* scholar family, and the nature of transmission and reproduction of Islamic knowledge followed by generations of scholars descended or studied from them, Robinson tells about the frowned eyes he met, even from some Muslim academicians who did wonder on why an outdated and pre-modern group of Mullas should invoke academic interest. However, Robinson opened new ways to explore for those interested in understanding Indian Muslims and analyze the roots of their cultural responses. He shed light on a grand legacy of Islamic schooling that produced a number of scholars and promoted a well-coordinated syllabus that more or less designed the nature of Islamic religiosity in the sub-continent (Robinson, 2001).

Metcalf followed it with a painstaking study on the grand Islamic institute at Deoband, which has tremendously influenced the Islamic life in the entire Indian sub-continent since its inception in 1867. Metcalf showed that how the Deobandi *'Ulama*, in response to changes surrounded them and defending against the colonial rule, demonstrated that they do not need an exclusive adaptation to Western norms and institutions to be modern, but they can do it by a systematic recourse to facets of the Islamic religious tradition. The *'Ulama* were ready to implement important changes in their bid to affirm Muslim identity in a hostile and unfamiliar environment. For instance, they adopted the printing technology and founded new Madrasas utilizing the organizational model of colonial schools (Metcalf B. D., 2005). Yet another study in this way came from Usha Sanyal who explored the world of Barelwi movement, detailed about the career and influence of
its eponymous leader Ahmed Riza Khan Barelwi, and provided an idea of how to approach this traditional movement (Sanyal, 1999 & 2005). In fact, these and other studies in this way changed the mode of the oft-repeated discourse on the ‘stagnant traditionalists’ versus ‘progressive reformists’, and prompted discourses on ‘traditionalist revivalism’ versus ‘fundamentalist reformism’.

Zaman through his meticulous work heralded more attention towards understanding the contemporary ‘Ulama as he ‘placed them squarely into the debates over the rise and appeal of Islamist movements’. He argued that the ‘Ulama have appropriated and adapted medieval commentaries and authorities to the modern world, updating Islam’s message to contemporary necessities’. He stressed the need to make more explorative studies on this special category of Islamic scholars whose prolonged educational career is spent in pursuit of classical Islamic texts and subjects, dealing with the most difficult texts in each branch of inherited and rational or intellectual sciences, decoding complex and tough portions, and committing to memory most of the textual renderings as well as commentaries and glosses over it (Zaman, 2000).

His work calls for not making analysis of the ‘Ulama and the ‘new Muslim intellectuals/religious modernists/Islamists/secularists’ on an equal footing, as there are much differences between their schooling, career, interests, public acceptance and roles in the society. The modernist intellectuals often lack theological and philosophical sophistication, and they fail to get the widespread respect from the community, whereas the ‘Ulama have since long been attracting immense respect as the guardians of the Islamic religious tradition. Zaman successfully assesses the vital, albeit changing, role played by the ‘Ulama in the society they belong to. He shows how ‘Islamic tradition in general, and interpretations of Islamic law, the Shari’a, in particular, are a process shaped through ongoing discussion and debate, rather than a fixed content. He says, “In general terms, it is a combination of their intellectual formation, their vocation, and, crucially, their orientation viz., a certain sense of continuity with the Islamic tradition that defines the ‘Ulama as ‘Ulama; and it is this sense of continuity that constitutes the most significant difference between them and their modernist and Islamist detractors. What makes the ‘Ulama of the modern world worth studying is not merely that they have
continued to lay claim to and self-consciously represent a millennium-old tradition of Islamic learning, however. Their larger claim on our attention lies in the ways in which they have mobilized this tradition to define issues of religious identity and authority in the public sphere and to articulate changing roles for themselves in contemporary Muslim politics. The 'Ulama’s tradition is not a mere inheritance from the past, even though they often argue that that is precisely what it is. It is a tradition that has had to be constantly imagined, reconstructed, argued over, defended, and modified" (Zaman, 2000).

Now there is an increasing acknowledgement that in order to understand some crucial facets of contemporary Islam and the cultural and political life of Muslims, it is necessary to have extensive studies on 'Ulama, the nature and scope of their educational career, their discourses, their transformations, and their religious, cultural and political activism. All individual Muslim societies around the world have developed through centuries of their existence systems and institutions to 'produce’ their own 'Ulama ‘who often define their identity and stake out their claims to authority’. These systems should be studied taking into consideration both the local contexts as well as the larger, global contexts.

Hefner and Zaman have tried to present a broad picture of this diversity in the education career of 'Ulama around the world, and to portray the scale of the changes taking place in Islamic learning, and their implications for public culture and politics, through an excellent volume of edited works involving some key scholars of Islamic education like Jonathan Berkey, Barbara Metcalf, and Malika Zeghal. Dealing with institutions charged with transmitting Islamic knowledge and disciplines, the contributors have tried to shed light on the culture, practices, and politics of Madrasas and Islamic higher education. They show that ‘Islamic education is characterized, not by lock-step uniformity, but by a teeming plurality of actors, institutions, and ideas.’ They argue that ‘whatever the roots in Islamic tradition, the Islamic education is now thoroughly embedded in the modern world. The authors present case studies from as various regions as South Asia, Morocco, Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, Mali and Britain. However, the focus of the study is Madrasas in the Indian sub-continent. Another edited volume portraying the diversity of traditional systems of Islamic learning has also been written in the Indian context. Editing 12 original essays based on recent fieldworks, Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld are
trying to address a number of important questions regarding Islamic education. The contributors are trying to deal the subject from historical and regional perspective, as they examine current developments. ‘The volume concludes that Dini Madaris, contrary to their public image, are not essentially opposed to change, even though the framework for change appears to be limited’.

Yoginder Sikand has time and again tried to understand the traditionally-trained religious scholars from close, and to shed light on discourses they make, issues they are concerned with, views and perspectives they carry as well as propagate, and the manners and dealings one can expect from them. Throughout his studies, he has tried to emphasis that the Ulama or ‘Mulla’, as he prefers to call them, can be anything but the promoters of terrorism and advocators of hate against non-Muslims. His notable work in this regard, Bastion of Believers, has detailed the diversities of, and complex social roles being played by, traditional Islamic educational institutions in India, critiquing the sensationalist and stereotypical images created by the frenzied media. However, he severely criticizes most of the traditional Madrasas in north India for its obscurantism, and claims that what they teach is ill-suited to a modern, pluralistic society, but he emphasizes that ‘obscurantism need not necessarily lead to militancy and hostility against others (Sikand, 2005). Ali Riaz has added his inputs to the ongoing debate on the nature of Madrasa education as he wrote a quality book on Islamic education after making an in-depth examination of the Madrasas in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India (Riaz, 2008).

Many scholars have attempted to reconstruct the structure of Islamic education systems in the early and medieval periods of Islam. JP Berkey’s (1992) study provided much of the insight on how to look into the medieval period and how one can reconstruct the past, especially in terms of transmission of religious Knowledge. He has detailed ‘the social and cultural consequences of Islam's regard for knowledge, showing how education in the middle ages played a central part in the religious experience of nearly all Muslims’. According to him, the transmission of religious knowledge was a highly personal process, depending on the relationships between individual scholars and students, it was not locked into formal channels, and it was never exclusively for the elite but was open to all. Other works on history of Islamic education include Arthur Stanley Tritton’s ‘Materials
on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages’ (1957), Michael Chamberlain’s, Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus 1190-1350’ (1994 & 2002), Charles Stanton’s ‘Higher Learning In Islam, the classical period, AD 700-1300’, George Makdisi’s ‘The Rise of Colleges; Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West’ (1981), and Bayard Dodge’s ‘Muslim Education in Medieval Times’ (1962). In a latest book, Claude Gilliot has edited well-informed articles on education and Learning in the formative period of Islam, presenting a broad picture of the beginnings and evolution of education and learning in the Islamic world. These and many other studies inform us the schooling career of yesteryear ‘Ulamas who actually defined and designed the majority of the contents of the syllabus followed by the contemporary ‘Ulama while they undergo schooling.

In this backdrop, the present study aims at adding some new dimensions into the increasing interest on traditional Islamic higher education. In any standard account of Islam and Muslim communities in the Indian subcontinent, the South India, especially the Malayalam-speaking Kerala, receive scant attention. Muslims in Kerala has been considered peripheral to Muslim history in South Asia. The coastal landscape of Kerala, historically known as Malabar¹, was for long cut off from the mainland India due to many reasons including geographical isolation. However, the place of this beautiful tiny landscape was high on the global arena as its coastal towns actively participated in the seaborne trade and commerce since very early period. The map of Indian Ocean’s geographical locations clearly shows that these places fall right in the middle of sea route from West to East. ‘Kerala lies on the most direct route from Makkah to Southeast Asia, making it a logical stopping point for both pilgrims and traders. Kerala was an important entrepot in the trade linking Arabia with India, Southeast Asia and China, and often the first landfall in India for merchants from South Arabia.’ (Woodward, 1989). Until as late as 20th century, more precisely, until the air becomes more popular as a mode of

¹ The state of Kerala as it is now was formed in 1956 incorporating three regions Malabar, which was under Madras presidency during British rule, and kingly principalities of Cochin and Travancore. Six northern districts – Palakkad, Malappuram, Koshikkod, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasargod - were considered as British Malabar. However, historically, the entire coastal regions extended between Mangalore and southern coastal cities of present day Tamil Nadu were termed as Malabar.
transport, Malabar remained busy as a major hub of sea trade linking Arabia to Southeast Asia and China. It was part of the active international trade network throughout the known history. This global outreach also made Kerala the first place in the entire Indian sub-continent to receive the missionaries of its two major religions, Islam and Christianity. This global exposure can amply explain contemporary Kerala’s characteristic features - anthropological, demographic, ecological, economic, educational, historical, political, religious, etc. The Malayalam language, the life style of the Malayali, the arts and the literature, the faiths and the political consciousness make Kerala a different cultural region that sets itself apart as much from the north Indian cultures as from the other south Indian cultures.

Kerala Muslims also felt this isolation from their counterpart elsewhere in India. They got Islam through sea, and their entire pre-20th century contacts were with the Arabian lands. They rarely got in touch with the Persian-Urdu-Islamic culture spread in the sub-continent. Sources say about contacts Ponnani Makhdum scholars kept with Chishti Qadiriyya Sufi orders and with Bijapur Sultans. However, these all were seaborne contacts, and, as the first chapter shows, it was connected through the Arabia-based scholar-Sufi networks. Kerala Muslims’ first impression with a ‘North Indian’ Muslim rule was during a brief reign of Mysore rulers, Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan, in the second half of the 18th century. Their first introduction with the north Indian scholastic legacy and Hanafi-oriented Islamic culture was when knowledge-seekers from Malabar flocked since 1880s to Vellore’s (Tamil Nadu) Baqiyat al-Swalihat Arabic College which adopted a mix of Nizami-Deobandi-Dahlawi syllabuses (see Chapter 5).

The cultural isolation of Kerala Muslims from their counterparts in other parts of India is amply evident in their religious life. Their case can be taken as an individual Muslim community having a lot of indigenous culture and localised traditions, and at the same time showcasing all the essential characteristics a global Islamic community. Here, Islamic civilization developed, as Sayyid Husain Nasr views it, into a distinct cultural zone without destroying the local culture, but transforming it into an Islamic reality and rejecting elements of a clearly un-Islamic nature. Its global Islamic nature fits into the religious culture spread in the entire Indian Ocean realms from East African coasts and
South Arabia to South Indian coastal regions and Southeast Asian nations. Kerala Muslims’ exposure to, and influence by, the Islamic culture of Indian Ocean littoral is evident from the prevailing Hadhrami scholastic and intellectual legacy revealed through Shafi’i school of law, Ash’arite theology, Shari’a-oriented Tasawwuf and Sufi orders.

The last two decades have witnessed an increasing attention in the Indian Ocean as a field of study, in disciplines as varied as social anthropology, history, cultural studies and linguistics, with a common assumption that the Indian Ocean over a very long period has been a field of intense cultural exchange between the coastal regions of East Africa, South Arabia, India and the archipelagos of Southeast Asia. Studies on Hadhrami Arabs, patterns of their migration, the depth and breadth of their influence across the Indian Ocean littoral have been a major sub-section of these studies. However, the historical legacy of Kerala coasts, the Malabar and its Muslim community in particular, have got only scant attention in these academic and other explorations too. Scholars like William Logan (1940), Rolland E Miller (1976) and Stephen Frederic Dale (1981) have tried to capture the social and historical picture of Kerala Muslims, but their attempts were more or less concerned with exploring the background of Mappila Muslims’ fierce opposition to the colonial rule and locating the dynamic spirit behind their staunch anti-colonial resistance that sustained for almost four centuries. Dale has made a brief attempt to link the Sayyids of Kerala with Hadhramout (Dale S., 1997), as did Bang in her meticulous study about one of the most influential Hadhrami-East African scholars of the period, Ahmad b Abi Bakr b Sumayt (1861-1925) (Bang A., 2003).

Trying to fill many of the gaps explained above, this study makes an analytical study of the religious higher education systems of Muslims in Kerala and Java of Indonesia, another Indian Ocean realm, followed by a comparative analysis of both the systems. What is meant by religious educational system in this study is the traditional institutions developed by Muslim communities around the world in order to prepare their ‘Ulama for the reproduction and dissemination of religious knowledge. In this study, the researcher specially focuses on two similarly-looking systems existing in Kerala and Java. Pallidarss in Kerala is the embodiment of global Islam’s great tradition of Mosque-college transformed into an indigenous cultural reality. The educational career – both
learning and teaching – of traditionalist scholars in Kerala is totally formulated by the Pallidarss milieu. The organizational structures, curriculum, syllabus and characteristic features of this traditional Islamic education system that has been vibrant for around 1000 years are the subject of the 5th chapter, in addition to the transformation this system is being undergoing in the era of rapid modernization and globalization. This chapter is succeeded by a similar discussion of Pesantren education system in Java. The sixth chapter tries to make a comparative analysis of the culture and Islamic religiosity of both Kerala and Java with a special treatment of Kerala’s Pallidarss tradition and Java’s Pesantren tradition.

The first three chapters are a prelude for this comparative analysis of Pallidarss and Pesantren. The first chapter tries to locate the intellectual legacy and scholastic background, which shaped the mode and undercurrents of Islamic Higher Education both in Kerala and in Java, and which tie together the two non-Arab Muslim communities in the peripheral. In the second and third chapters the researcher would try to show that how a common scholastic intellectualism as well as a shared cultural legacy caused resemblances in the unfolding of religious life and thoughts in successive centuries. Exploring the observance of Islam and the discourses surrounding it in both these places, these two chapters make a bid to clarify how the Islamic life and religious discourses in both Kerala and Java resemble to one another and where all the differences come from. It is more or less a survey of the present scenario, precisely the transformations happened in these two communities since the onset of the 20th century. The researcher hopes this study in its totality would open doors for more studies.