

Arabic Information Resources in Malappuram District of Kerala: Need for Bibliographic Control

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ABSTRACT

Today information resources in Arabic Language are very much useful to the researchers and community of the world. Resources in Arabic language in Kerala, is scattered in various places like libraries attached to Islamic Institutions, kuthb khanas, madrassas, masjids, personal libraries of scholars, and Arabic Colleges. It includes manuscripts, copper plates and digital resources. It should be bibliographically controlled, digitized and preserved for the benefit of future generation. Most of them are concentrated in Malappuram District where muslims are more populated. ALT and ICT will help us to complete this tedious task. It will open a new window to the wide area of information studies and research. The work will be a great help to research scholars, students at various levels, faculties of Arabic departments, academicians and the community as a whole.

Keywords: Information Resources, Arabic Language, Malappuram District, Kerala, Bibliographic Control

Introduction

The driving force for every intellectual growth of a community, of course it is Information Resources. These resources are scattered in varied media, in wide-ranging materials, wide spread in various regions, and in diversified languages. Arabic is one of these languages and it is the native tongue of more than 200 million people worldwide, ranks 6th among the major languages of the world. It is the official language of African counties like Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Sudan, Tunisia, Comoros, Somalia, and Djibouti and also the official language of Asian countries like Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, Bahrain, Qatar and Yemen as well as one of the six official languages of the United Nations. In addition to it, it is widely spoken in countries such as Somalia and is the language of the holy writings of Muslims throughout the world.

Arabic language has emerged in 5th century as a Semitic language. The Qur'an, widely regarded as the finest piece of literature work in the Arabic language, would have the greatest lasting effect on Arabic culture and its literature.

Arabic literature flourished during the Islamic Golden Age, but has remained vibrant to the present day, with poets and prose-writers across the Arab world achieving increasing success.

Now United Nations Organization declared December 18 as the World Day for Arabic Language. Every year on December 18 as World Arabic Language Day the world celebrates and works for the advancement of Arabic language and literature.

Information resources in Arabic Language contain literature pertaining to not only theology but also scientific studies. Subjects like philosophy, religion, sufism, sociology, mathematics, algebra, astronomy, physics, chemistry, medicine, philosophy of history, travelogue etc. have enormous research findings only in Arabic Language. Jabir bin Hayyan and his famous book 'Al Khawasul Kabeer' is the basic reference in Alchemy, Chemistry. Al Khawarazmy and his Book 'Al Jabar wal Muqabala' is famous in the field of Algebra, Mathematics. Kindi was a great philosopher and he wrote in various subjects like Maths, Engineering, Music, and Medicine.¹ Many of the other language classics are translated to Arabic language, and many of its original versions were not available and so these translations become very valuable to the research community. The development of Arabic language and literature is very fast as it becomes a major language in international business and politics.

¹ Joudah, Mohammed Gareeb (2004). Abaqarath Ulama Al Halara Al Arabiyya wal Islamiyya Fil Uloomi Thabeeyya wa Thibb. Maktabathul Usra

Arabic Information Resources in Malappuram

The Arabs had come directly to Kerala for spreading Islam with the leadership of Malik ibn Dinar in 6th century and Arabic language originated in its real form in Kerala. Kerala has contributed much to the development of Arabic language and literature. The advent of Islam in Kerala is a basic reason for the development of Arabic language in Kerala. Many Arab travelers and scholars have praised the Keralites way of pronunciation. Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur, Kerala is said to be the very first masjid in India, built in 629 AD by Malik Ibn Dinar. It is believed that this masjid was first renovated and reconstructed in 11th century AD. Many non-Muslims conduct initiation ceremonies to the world of letters of their children here. Arabic was given great prominence in the syllabus of the religious schools, madrasas, dars etc. Ponnani was an important center of learning in those days. A prescribed system of graduation was prevalent in Islamic institutions in the past. Vazhakkad was an important center of Madrasahs.

Malappuram is the only one district in Kerala which formed on the basis of community reserved for Muslims. This region is a treasure house of Information Resources in Arabic Language. Keralites developed a special script called 'Arabi Malayalam' as a mixture of Arabic scripts in Malayalam words.

Kerala has produced many famous writers. The most notable of them was Zainudhin Makhdam, the author of *Tuhfathul Mujahideen*². His treatise on Shafi'ite Jurisprudence, *Fath-hul Mueen*, became prescribed textbook in Egypt, Malaysia, Java, Singapore and Indonesia. Umar Qazi and Abdulla Noorani were excellent Arabic poets of Kerala.

In the modern era, Arabic is taught at university levels including post graduation. Different organizations run colleges and schools for the promotion of Arabic language. It was mainly due to the efforts of C.H. Mohammed Koya that Arabic began to enjoy an academic status at state level. The spiritual head of Malabar, honorable Panakkad Syed Muhammad Ali Shihab Thangal, was himself well versed in Arabic. There are associations formed by Arabic teachers and lecturers for the promotion of the language.

There are many Islamic institutions flourished in Kerala. It includes 9 Government aided and 11 self financing Arabic colleges affiliated to University of Calicut³ and 2 aided Arabic Colleges affiliated to Kannur University. Additionally there are 250 private Muslim management Arabic Colleges, Arabic departments in 8 Arts and Science Colleges 38 Arts Colleges having Arabic as second language, 2 Training Colleges, several central universities, autonomous deemed universities, and other institutions offering different courses⁴. In Malappuram district itself 6 universities. The need of an Arabic University itself is discussing seriously at Government level. All these institutions are equipped with good libraries and information centers. Islamic Universities like Jamia Markaz at Karanthur, Kozhikode, and Darul Huda Islamic University, Chemmad, Malappuram, Kerala⁵ are the best examples of such archives and oriental centers. The resources available in these centers of learning are not known to anybody other than the patrons of respective institutions.

Resources in Arabic Language are valuable and fruitful to humanity. Very valuable and rare information resources in Arabic language are available in Islamic Institutions, kuthb khana, madrasahs, masjids, personal libraries of scholars, and Arabic Colleges. It includes manuscripts,

² Zainudheen Al Ma'ebari Al Malaibari, Ahmed. *Tuhfathul Mujahideen fi Ahwali Al Burthugaliyeen*. Bairut, Labnan: Muassasath Al Wafa.

³ <http://www.universityofcalicut.info/> (accessed on 19-11-2012).

⁴ <http://www.keralaislamicinstitutes.com/> (accessed on 19-11-2012).

⁵ <http://www.markazonline.com/> (accessed on 19-11-2012)

sacred texts, digital information sources and e-resources. These treasures of information resources are to be located, recorded, preserved and made available to the research community round the globe.

Need for the Bibliographic Control

Bibliographic control of information resources in Arabic language and literature is the need of the hour. Due to lack of organized resource mobilization policy, these treasures of information resources are not well recorded and known to the community. It is remaining untouched, and unreachable to them. The manuscripts may contain very valuable information, which should be digitized and preserved for our children. If mishandled by untrained humans, it may cause lose of these rare and valuable information. Documents in Arabic language includes sacred texts, Books on theological literature, philosophy, jurisprudence, commentaries on the sacred texts, linguistic studies, scientific documents, engineering supporting materials, literary works, speeches, interviews, history etc. Additionally, there are some historical documents like edicts and copper plates in Arabic language. These are also known as Cheppeds, Royal Grants, Sasanam etc. The contents of Tarisapalli Sasanam in Quilon, Kerala dates back to 9th century includes Arabic language. These are also remain unorganized in this technologically advanced era.

There should be serious attempts to locate, record, organize and preserve these treasures of knowledge. A centralized bibliographical database is to be developed and make operational to boost the research in Arabic language and literature. Use of these materials, scripts, and media, with the help of an expert will ensure the effective use of these resources even for a non Arabic reader. A pool of experts in various regions is also to be identified and compiled for the help of such researchers. A database of Arabic language and literatures, experts and institutions are to be developed, maintained and published online to assist the research and development in this area.

Upcoming Trends and Issues

To the extent of the investigator's research experience of last four years, compiling a comprehensive bibliography or database of information resources in Arabic language in Malappuram District of Kerala is a tedious task. It needs human resource, financial resource, technical resources and time to make it complete and functional. Rare and valuable resources should be digitized and preserved for the benefit of our youngsters. Development of Arabic Language Technology will help to digitize and interact with computer in the script itself. The work should begin with a survey of availability, which needs a location chart for it. The data about the location, resources and ownership has to be collected, recorded, organized and published.

Conclusion

Most of the information resources available in original Arabic script, and in 'Arabi Malayalam' script are very rich in content and worthy for preservation. Some documents only be reproduced with the help of digitization. The Arabic Language Technology and Information and Communication Technology will extend their help in doing the task. It will open a new window to the wide area of information studies and research. The work will be a great help to research scholars, students at various levels, faculties of Arabic departments, academicians and the community as a whole.

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