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Nafeesath Mala: Sufi Devotion and Representation of Female Sainthood in Malabar

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Abstract

Mala literature constitutes a significant component of the cultural and literary heritage of the Mappilas of Malabar, particularly within the broader tradition of Arabi Malayalam literature. The *mala* refers to a genre of devotional poetry that praises and commemorates the lives, virtues, spiritual qualities, and miraculous deeds (*Karamat*) of revered Islamic saints and spiritual personalities. Among such works, *Nafeesath mala,* composed by Nalakath kunjimoideen kutty, occupies a distinctive position by celebrating the life and spiritual legacy of Sayyidah Nafisah, an eminent female scholar, ascetic, and descendant of the prophet Muhammed. This study aims to examine the thematic structure of *Nafeesath mala* and analyse its cultural significance in the devotional life of the Muslims of Malabar. it specifically examines themes such as Sufi devotion, spiritual authority, piety, *Karamat*, tawassul, and the representation of Sayyidah Nafisah as a female saint. It also explores how these themes reflect the religious beliefs, devotional practices, and cultural traditions associated with *Mala* literature in Malabar. It's a qualitive research methodology based on library research, the study draws upon the primary text, relevant secondary literature, and interviews with scholars specializing in mala literature. The primary source is *Nafeesath mala* by Nalakath Kunjimoideen Kutty. Secondary sources include books, journals articles, and scholarly studies on Arabi Malayalam literature. Selected *Mala* texts are also used to comparatively to contextualise its themes and cultural functions. The findings reveal that Nafeesath mala faithfully follows the conventions of the mala genre while distinguishing itself through its exclusive focus on female religious scholar and saint. The poem combines devotional expression, biographical narration, historical episodes, and supplication within a harmonious poetic framework, thereby broadening the thematic scope of Arabi Malayalam mala literature. Furthermore, its continued recitation in Malabar, particularly in connection with prayers for safe child birth, demonstrates its enduring religious, literary, and cultural significance. This study contributes to the growing scholarship on Arabi-Malayalam literature by providing a thematic, literary, and cultural analysis of *nafeesath mala* and highlighting its importance within Malabar *Mala* literary heritage.

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INTRODUCTION

The Malabar region is located on the southwestern coast of Indian peninsula, between the western ghats and the Arabian sea, in present day Kerala[1].Geographically, it consists of three main zones: the mountainous highlands of the western ghats, the midland hills and plateaus, and the lowland coastal plains characterized by rivers and backwaters, because of its strategic coastal location, Malabar historically developed as an important center of maritime trade that connected south India with Arab world and other regions of Indian ocean. continuous contact with Arab merchants from the early centuries facilitated deep cultural and religious interactions[2]. these interactions played a significant role in spread of Islam in the region and contributed to the emergence of the distinctive cultural and literary traditions of the Mappila Muslim community.

The spread of Sufism in the Malabar region was closely connected with the same maritime trade networks that linked the Malabar coast with the Arabian Peninsula and other parts of the Islamic world[3]. through these long standing commercial and cultural contacts, Arab merchants, scholars, and Sufi missionaries gradually migrated to the region and contributed significantly to the dissemination of Islamic teachings and spiritual traditions among the local populations. As a result, a distinctive religious environment developed in Malabar in which Sufi spirituality, devotional practices, and religious scholarship became integral elements of the everyday religious life of Mappila Muslim community.[4]

Within this historical context, Arabi Malayalam literature occupies a unique and significant place in the cultural history of Muslim of Malabar. Arabi Malayalam refers to the practice of writings the Malayalam language using the Arabic script, a linguistic tradition that developed through the prolonged commercial and cultural interaction between Arab traders and the people of Malabar coast. over time, it emerged as an important medium for the transmission of religious knowledge, cultural memory, and literary expression among the Mappila Muslims. Linguistically, Arabi-Malayalam demonstrates remarkable diversity, incorporating vocabulary from Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, and Tulu, while also preserving several Arabic Malayalam expressions that later disappeared from common usage[5]. the literary corpus of Arabi Malayalam encompasses a wide range of genres, including devotional poetry, mala songs, historical narratives, and religious treatises[6] . among these forms, Sufi devotional compositions gained particular prominence and played an essential role in shaping the spiritual and cultural life of the Muslim community of Malabar.

Among the most significant cultural expressions that emerged from this interaction of language, religion, and society is the tradition of *Mappilappattu*(Mappila songs). *Mappilappattu* represents a significant literary and cultural form within the Mappila Muslim community of

[1] William Logan, *Malabar*, Facsim. ed. (Asian educational services, 1989), 3.
[2] Husain Raṇṭattāṇi, *Mappila Muslims: A Study on Society and Anti Colonial Struggles* (Other Books, 2007), 23.
[3] Ṭi.Ṭi Munavvar Hānih, *Sūphisaṃ Ādhunika Vyavahāraṅṅalil*, First edition (Book Plus, 2023), 53.
[4] Munavvar Hānih, *Sūphisaṃ Ādhunika Vyavahāraṅṅalil*, 55.
[5] C. N. Aḥmad Mawlawī and K. K. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Karīm, *Mahaththāya Māppiḷa Sāhithya Pāramparyam* (Kondotty: Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar Mappila Kala Academy, n.d., n.d.), 59.
[6] Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslimkal*, 2nd ed (Kozhikode: Other Books, 2017), n.d.), 277.

Malabar[7]. composed primarily in Arabi Malayalam, these songs reflect the historical and cultural connections between the Malabar coast and the wider Islamic world. Mappilappattu integrates Malayalam linguistic structures with Arabic vocabulary and Islamic cultural elements. The thematic range of these songs includes religious devotion, historical narratives, social experience, and moral instruction. Within this broader poetic tradition, certain specialized devotional forms developed, among which the mala genre occupies a distinctive position[8].

Mala literature forms an important component of the Arabi Malayalam literary tradition and has played a notable role in the religious and cultural life of the Mappila Muslims. These compositions are generally structured as poetic narratives that recount the lives, virtues, and miraculous deeds of revered Sufi saints and holy personalities[9].what distinguishes *Malappattu* from other forms of Arabi Malayalam literature is its poetic and musical character, which follows specific melodic frameworks known as *Ishal*[10]. Typically consisting of approximately 100 to 600 verses[11], these compositions usually begin with praise of God (Hamd) followed by blessings upon the prophet Muhammed and his companions (Salawat). The narrative then proceeds to describe the life and spiritual virtues of the saint being celebrated, and the work concludes with supplicatory prayers seeking the saint's intercession and blessing, particularly in the concluding section known as the *Iravu*[12]. Historical developments in *Mappila* literature indicate that mala compositions gained particular prominence during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Beyond their literary and devotional value, these works also served broader social functions by strengthening communal identity and guiding the moral and spiritual life of the Muslims community. Several mala compositions became widely popular among the Mappila Muslims of Malabar. Notable examples include *Muhyidheen mala*, B*adar mala*, *Rifa'i mala*, etc. each celebrating the spiritual virtues and miraculous lives of prominent Islamic personalities and Sufi saints. These works not only reflect deep devotional sentiments but also demonstrate the rich literary creativity that developed within Arabi Malayalam tradition.

Among the many works belonging to the *mala* genre, *Nafeesath mala* occupies a distinctive and significant place. The composition celebrates the piety, spiritual excellence, and miraculous life of Sayyidah Nafisah[13], one of the most revered female figures in Islamic history. Like other mala works, it combines devotional praise, narrative description, and supplicatory elements within a poetic framework guided by the principles of *ishal*. Through the portrayal of the saint's life and

[7] Vallikkunnu Balakrishnan & Taramel Umar, *Mappilappatu: Padavum Padanavum.* (: D.C. Books, 2006., n.d.).
[8] "Mappila Malayalam | Literature | Arabi Malayalam | Muhiyaddin Mala |," Islam in Kerala | Kerala Tourism, accessed August 1, 2026, https://www.keralatourism.org/islam-in-kerala.
[9] Vallikkunnu Balakrishnan & Taramel Umar, *Mappilappatu: Padavum Padanavum.*, 38.
[10] Muhammed Salman K Wayanad, "Muhyiddin Malas: Transition, Transplantation and Transformation," *HISTORICAL: Journal of History and Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2025): 106, https://doi.org/10.58355/historical.v4i1.172.
[11] ibid,.
[12] Vallikkunnu Balakrishnan & Taramel Umar, *Mappilappatu: Padavum Padanavum.*, 39.
[13] Mohamed Haseeb . N, "MAPPILAPATTU; AS A SOURCE TO REACH OUT TO THE LIFE OF MAPPILAS OF MALABAR," *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature (IMPACT: IJRHAL)*, n.d., 406.

virtues, the text seeks to inspire devotion and spiritual reflection among listeners and readers.[14] In the Malabar region, the recitation of Nafeesath mala became an important devotional practice among the Mappila Muslims, reflecting their deep reverence for Sufi saints and spiritually elevated personalities. the present study is significant because *Nafeesath mala* occupies an important place in the Arabi Malayalam *mala* tradition and continues to be widely recited as a devotional text among the Mappila Muslim community of Malabar. It aims to examine the thematic structure of *Nafeesath mala,* literary characteristics of the text, analyze the portrayal of Sayyidah Nafisah as a female spiritual model in Arabi Malayalam devotional literature, and evaluate the contribution of *Nafeesath mala* to the Sufi literary tradition and the cultural heritage of the Mappila Muslims in Malabar.

previous scholarship provides important but limited discussion of *Nafeesath mala*. Balakrishnan Vallikkunnu and Dr. Umar Tharamel**,** *in Mappilappattu:padavum padanavum,*examine the history, development, and generes of Mappila songs. The book briefly discusses *nafeesath mala* a part of mala tradition, however it doesn't provide a detailed literary or Sufi analysis of text. Ajmal Mueen M.A (2018), in Muslim women and traditional medicinal practices in Malabar, explore the traditional healthcare practice of Mappila Muslim community. The study briefly refers to the *Nafeesath Mala* as a devotional composition recited during pregnancy and child birth, emphasizing its cultural and religious significance. Mohamed Haseeb N. (2018), in *Mappilappattu: As a source of Reach out to the life of Mappilas of Malabar*, provide an overview of the history and classification of Mappila songs. the author briefly introduces *Nafeesath Mala* as a popular mala associated with women's devotional practices and childbirth. Although these studies acknowledge the existence and devotional importance of N*afeesath Mala*, none offers a comprehensive analysis of its thematic structure, narrative progression, literary characteristics, and distinctive place within the Arabi Malayalam Mala tradition. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the poem's thematic organization, literary features, and devotional significance, while highlighting its unique focus on the life of the female scholar and saint, Sayyidah Nafisah.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design centered on textual and thematic analysis of *Nafeesath Mala*, with particular attention to its representation of sufi devotion and female sainthood in Malabar. the primary source of the study is the 124-verse text of *Nafeesath Mala*, which is examined to identify its narrative structure, devotional themes, portrayal of Sayyidah Nafisah, representations of *karamah*(miracles), *tawassul*, honorific epithets, Arabic vocabulary, rhyme, and other literary features. Selected *mala* texts, including *Muhyiddin mala, Badr mala* and *Rifai mala*, are consulted for comparative and contextual purposes, particularly to examine differences in the representation of sainthood, devotional themes, narrative structure, and literary

[14] Muhammed Niyas Ashraf, "Saints Textualized: Pious Commemoration of 'Friends of God' and Vernacular Hagiographies in Nineteenth-Century Malabar," in *Media Technology and Cultures of Memory* (Routledge India, 2023); Philip Joseph Sarmiento, "Thematic Cultural Exegesis on Selected Filipino Catholic Youth's Perception of the Saints," *Religions* 12, no. 5 (2021): 286, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050286.

style. Secondary sources include books, scholarly articles, and other academic materials related to sufism, Arabi Malayalam literature, Mappila Muslim culture, *mala* literature, and Sayyidah Nafisah, collected through library research and academic databases. In addition, one qualitative telephone interview was conducted with a scholar who has extensive expertise in *mala* and *mawlid* literature. The interviewee was selected purposively based on his specialized knowledge of the literary, religious, and cultural traditions associated with *mala* literature in Malabar. the interview focused particularly on the cultural significance of *Nafeesath Mala*. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively through close reading, thematic categorization, and comparative interpretation to examine how *Nafeesath Mala* constructs the figure of Sayyidah Nafisah as a female scholar and saint and reflects the devotional and cultural traditions of Malabar.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sayyidah Nafisah bint al Hasan, the most remarkable female scholars, ascetics, and spiritual leaders of early Islam. As a direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad through imam al Hasan ibn Ali[15], she belonged to the Ahl al-Bayt, but her reputation was earned through her own deep learning, piety, and devotion. from a young age, Sayyidah Nafisah memorized the Quran and threw herself into studying the Islamic sciences, with a particular focus on hadith and Qur'anic exegesis[16]. When she moved to Cairo in 193 AH, her home quickly turned into a bustling hub of learning. scholars, jurists, spiritual seekers, and everyday people flocked to her for religious guidance, advice and prayers. the crowds grew so large that the governor of Egypt eventually helped set up designated public reception days, allowing her to balance teaching with her personal spiritual retreats and worship. Her dedication to an ascetic lifestyle was legendary. She was known for her continuous fasting, late night prayers, and intense devotion. even the most prominent scholars of her era held her in immense regard-who regularly sought her prayers, counsel, and spiritual insight. Through her rare mix of intellectual authority and deep personal piety, Sayyidah Nafisah left an indelible mark on Islamic history as a towering figure of female scholarship, her legacy forms the heart of *Nafeesath Mala*, a traditional devotional poem that uses her life as a backdrop to explore themes of faith, righteousness and lifelong learning[17].

Composition of *Nafeesath Mala*

Sayyida Nafeesah's spiritual legacy inspired *Nafeesath Mala*, most cherished devotional poems in the Arabi-Malayalam tradition. the work was composed by Nalakath Kunjimoideen Kutty , when his son, Abubakr, was suffering from a serve illness marked by high fever and breathing difficulties[18].in search of divine mercy and healing, the author turned to the spiritual blessing(barakah)of Sayyidah Nafeesah and composed the mala as an expression of faith and supplication. the circumstances surrounding its composition are also reflected in the verses of the

[15] "Luminaries VII- Sayyida Nafisa," *Healing Hearts*, March 16, 2014, 1, https://healing-hearts-blog.com/2014/03/16/luminaries-vii-sayyida-nafisa/.
[16] 31 July 2019 Dawud Walid, "Sayyidah Nafisah: The Saintly Lady of Egypt – Studio," 1, accessed August 3, 2026, https://www.almadina.org/studio/articles/sayyidah-nafisah-the-saintly-lady-of-egypt.
[17] Musthafal Falili Kareetiparaba, *Nafeesath Maala:Aashayam Aadarsham* (WADI SINAI PUBLICATIONS 2023, n.d.), 5.
[18] *"Nafeesath Mala: Janasahasrangalude Aashwaasa Kaavyam," Sunnivoice*, May 21, 2022, https://sunnivoice.net/

poem, offering valuable insight into its historical and devotional background. The poet explicitly states:

> *Tharular biviyin mel immalaya na utthe , sababaney makan abubakkarinil panitthe*
> *Aritham pin vay muttum nirathum tuduththe ,anthe rogam okkeyum I biviyal shamitthe*

Nalakath Kunjimoideen Kutty was a renowned poet, novelist, translator, and multilingual scholar, whose contributions significantly enriched the Arabi-Malayalam literary tradition[19] . His writings combined literary excellence with deep religious devotion, making them widely respected among the Muslim community. Among his many works, *Nafeesath Mala* occupies a distinctive place for its spiritual depth, literary quality, and enduring popularity.it continues to be recited in devotional gatherings and remains an important part of Kerala's Sufi and Arabi-Malayalam literary heritage. Among the Mappila Muslims of Malabar, it was customary to recite *Nafeesath Mala* during the time of hardship, illness, and distress[20]. The poem was widely believed to invoke the *barakah* (spiritual blessing) of Sayyidah Nafisah, providing spiritual protection, comfort, and divine assistance.[21]

Thematic and structural analysis of *Nafeesath Mala*

The opening of *Nafeesath Mala* follows the traditional pattern found in Arabi-Malayalam Mala literature.it begins with the invocation of *bismillah,* followed by *hamd* (praise of Allah)and *salawat* (blessing upon the prophet Muhammad)[22]. This opening is not merely a formal introduction; it establishes the devotional orientation of the entire poem. the next five verses are dedicated to praising the noble character and exalted status of the prophet, reflecting the deep reverence that characterizes Islamic devotional poetry. the seventh verse continues with salutations upon the prophet, while the eighth verse presents a supplication to Allah through the *tasawwul* of the prophet, seeking his mercy and assistance. This structure demonstrates an important feature of devotional poetry: praise, remembrance, and supplication are closely interconnected. The poem therefore moves from praise to supplication before beginning the narrative of Sayyidah Nafisah. The devotional structure prepares the reader or listener to approach the saint's life within a spiritual rather than merely historical framework.[23]

A notable feature of *Nafeesath Mala* is its expression of deep love and respect for the four rightly guided caliphs (*al-khulafa al-rashidin*).verses 9-12 are devoted to praising the four caliphs and offering supplication to Allah through *tasawwul,* invoking their honored status. The inclusion of the caliphs before the indroduction of Sayyidah Nafisah is structurally significant. The sequence-

[19] C. N. Aḥmad Mawlawī and K. K. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Karīm, *Mahaththāya Māppiḷa Sāhithya Pāramparyam*, 434.
[20] Islamic Speech, *Nafeesath Mala mahathwam manassilaakki chollal jeevithathil pathivakkuka| Nafeesath Mala | Islamic Speech*, 2023, 08:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-OFWpqhfxw.

[21] A. K. Muneer, "Devotional Contextures: The Māla Songs and Muslim Ethical Formation in Contemporary Kerala," *Contemporary South Asia* 30, no. 4 (2022): 551–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2022.2086968.
[22] Musthafal Falili Kareetiparaba, *Nafeesath Maala:Aashayam Aadarsham*, 9.
[23] Yonsoo Kim, "The Female Body as Sacred Space: Materiality and Sanctity in Late Medieval Castile," *Religions* 17, no. 9 (2026): 1072, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17091072; Lalu Turjiman Ahmad et al., "Opposed Yet Embraced: Authenticity, Aesthetics, and Reception of I'tirâf Poem among Traditional Muslims in Indonesia," *Arabi : Journal of Arabic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2025): 233–44, https://doi.org/10.24865/ajas.v10i2.1031.

Allah,, the prophet, the four caliphs, and then the lineage of Nafisah, creates a movement from central Islamic sacred figures towards the female saint who becomes the principal subject of the poem. In this way, the poem establishes the spiritual legitimacy of its subject before narrating her life. The following verses introduce the lineage of Sayyida Nafisah ,tracing her ancestry back to the prophet muhammed.in verse 16,the poet briefly introduces her birth, stating that she was born in 154 AH(771CE)in the blessed city of Makkah. The emphasis on genealogy is significant because descent from the prophet provides an important dimension of her sacred identity within the poem . her lineage , however, is not presented as the only basis of her elevated status. As the narrative develops , her scholarship, piety, asceticism, and *karamat* become equally important elements in the construction of her saintly identity.

The most significant narrative strategies in *Nafeesath Mala* is the representation of *karamt,* or extraordinary events associated with a saint. The poem narrates the famous *karamah* (miracle)attributed to Sayyidah Nafisah ,in which the Nile resumed its flow after she instructed the distressed people to cast her face veil(*khimar*) into the river. this episode is presented as sign of her exceptional spiritual status and closeness to Allah. the narrative also recalls an earlier tradition from the caliphate of status and closeness to Allah. The narrative also recalls an earlier tradition from the caliphate of Umar ibn al Khattab, when the Nile is said to have ceased flowing until a letter written by him was cast into the river, after which its waters began to flow again.The literary significance of placing these two narratives in relation to one another extends beyond the narration of miracles. The comparison therefore functions as a literary mechanism for constructing spiritual authority. .in addition to this well-known miracle, The poet recounts several other *Karamat*(miracles)attributed to Sayyidah Nafisah. these accounts further emphasize her piety, spiritual authority, and the divine favour bestowed upon her, reinforcing her position as an exemplary saintly figure within the Islamic devotional tradition. From the perspective of devotional literature, these narratives serve not simply to entertain the audience but to cultivate reverence and encourage the remembrance of the saint. The miraculous therefore performs both a literary and devotional function.

The poem then turns to one of the most significant episodes in the life of Sayyidah Nafisah, Her association with imam al Shafi. across ten verses, the poet portrays her as a renowned scholar and a woman of exceptional piety whose knowledge, wisdom, and sincere supplications earned the respect of imam al Shafi. This portrayal is consistent with historical accounts, which describe Sayyidah Nafisah as a distinguished scholar and ascetic whose learning attracted many seekers of knowledge, including imam al Shafi. Her relationship with imam al-shafi consequently contributes to the poem's construction of female scholarly authority within a devotional framework. The account of his visits, his request for her supplications during illness, and the bringing of his funeral bier before her residence further intensify this representation. Thus, the Imam al-shafi episode performs a dual function. Historically and devotionally, it associates Nafisah with an important Islamic scholar; literarily, it provides a narrative device through which her intellectual and spiritual authority is emphasized. This makes the episode central to the poem's construction of female sainthood.

The poem then continues with a detailed account of the later years of Sayyidah Nafisah. up to verse 99, the poet narrates her final illness her passing on Friday night in Ramadan 208AH, and the events surroundings her funeral, burial, and grave. These verses provide a chronological account of the closing phase of her life, highlighting the reverence and devotion associated with her memory. After verse 100, the poet turns to the events following the passing of Sayyidah Nafisah. He describes the reverence shown to her and the blessings traditionally associated with *Nercha* (votive offerings) performed in her memory, while also explaining the purpose behind composing the mala. The poem therefore does not treat Nafisah's death as the end of her significance. Rather, her death marks the beginning of her continuing remembrance through the text and the devotional practices of the Muslim community. The concluding prayers, salawat, and salutations upon the prophet further return the poem to the devotional framework established at its beginning. The circular movement from praise and supplication at the opening to prayer and salawat at the conclusion reinforces the devotional character of the composition. The poem consequently functions at two interconnected levels: it narrates the life of a saint and simultaneously performs devotion through its recitation.

In addition to its thematic organization, *Nafeesath Mala* displays several literary characteristics, one of its notable Feature is the use of rhyme, which give the poem a smooth rhythmic flow and a melodious quality, making it well suited for oral recitation. this can be seen in the opening verses, where successive lines end with expressions such as *Nur Allah, Habib Allah, Kalim Allah, Safiyy Allah, Karim Allah, and Rasul Allah* and another rhyme is *Utthe, Panitthe, Tuduththe,* and *Shamitthe* which all ends with '*the'*. These rhyming patterns are not merely decorative literary devices. In an orally transmitted devotional tradition, sound and repetition contribute to memorability and collective participation. Another prominent feature is the enumeration of honorific epithet, instead of describing the prophet Muhammad through lengthy narrative passages, the poet presents a series of honorificitles, including *Mushaffi, Mufaddil, Musil, Muhaymin, Mubaligh, Mustafa, Musaddiq,* and *Mujib*. This stylish Technique intensifies the expression of praise while emphasizing the prophet's exalted status.

From a structural perspective, *Nafeesath Mala* consists of 124 verses, each divided into two balanced half lines(hemistiches). This balanced arrangement contributes to the poem's rhythm and makes it particularly suitable for communal recitation and memorization. the poem also reflects the distinctive linguistic character of the Arabi Malayalam mala tradition through its rich use of Arabic religious vocabulary within an Arabi Malayalam framework.it is a devotional composition crafted in melodious meters suitable for oral performance. Together, these literary and structural features enhance the aesthetic beauty of *Nafeesath Mala* and reinforce its enduring significance as a devotional work cherished by generations of Muslims.

Among the mala compositions written after *Muhyuddin Mala*, *Nafeesath Mala* is distinguished by its remarkable literary elegance[24].compared to other mala text, it contains a much

[24] Dr. P.A. Aboobaker, *Arabi-Malayalam: Malayalathinte Classical Bhavangal*, 01 ed. (Kondotty: Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar Mappila Kala Academy, 2018, n.d.), 140.

greater abundance of Arabic vocabulary[25],reflecting its strong Islamic scholarly orientation. while this extensive use of Arabic terms enhances the poem's literary richness and devotional tone, it also makes the text less accessible to ordinary readers. consequently, such works contributed to a gradual shift in Mappila literature from a largely popular literary tradition towards one that increasingly appealed to learned and scholarly audiences.in this sense, *Nafeesath Mala* occupies a significant transitional position in the evolution of Mappila literary culture, representing a bridge between popular devotional literature and a more intellectually oriented literary tradition.

Nafeesath Mala within the Arabi Malayalam *Mala* Tradition

The Arabi Malayalam mala tradition is an important part of Kerala's Islamic literary heritage. Over the centuries, many *Mala* poems, such as *Muhyuddin Mala, Badr Mala,* and *Rifai Mala* have been composed to honor the lives and spiritual achievements of revered Islamic figures. *Muhyuddin Mala* is one of the most influential devotional works in Kerala's Islamic literary tradition.it was composed by Qadi Muhammed of Kozhikode, a distinguished seventeenth century jurist, theologian, and poet in honor of shaykh Abd al Qadir al Jilani[26]. more than a devotional poem, it reflects a unique blending of Islamic theology, poetic expression, and Mappila cultural identity. written in a simple and accessible style, it became an important medium for religious instruction and spiritual devotion among Kerala Muslims. its widespread popularity laid the foundation for the flourishing of the Arabi Malayalam mala tradition and inspired the composition of many later mala works dedicated to other revered Islamic personalities. *Badr Mala* is composed by Kanjirala Kunjirayin of Mampad,is a devotional poem dedicated to the 313 companions who participated in the battle of Badr[27], the first major battle in Islamic history. The poem open by highlighting the exalted status of the participants of Badr, describing them as the most virtuous believers after the prophets, and praises the angels who witnessed the battle.it then celebrates the spiritual merits of the Badriyyun and the blessing associated with reciting the poem. structurally, the poem is divided into two sections: the first, consisting of 52 verses, extols the virtues of the participants of Badr, while the second presents the names of all 313 companions in a poetic and devotional manner. *Rifai Mala* is a devotional poem composed in the praise of life, spiritual excellence, and miraculous deeds of shaykh Ahmad al Kabir al Rifai, the founder of the Rifaiyya Sufi order. Composed in 1812 CE, the work closely follows the poetic style (*ishal*) and linguistic features of the Arabi Malayalam mala tradition. The poem continues to hold an important place in the religious life of Malabar Muslims and its traditionally recited during *kuthurathib*[28], a devotional ritual performed in honor of shaykh al Rifai. it's also associated with certain local religious practices, including the recitation of the poem as a means of seeking divine protection from snake related dangers.

[25]Ibid,.
[26] Muhammed Salman K Wayanad, "Muhyiddin Malas," 107.
[27] Mohamed Haseeb . N, "MAPPILAPATTU; AS A SOURCE TO REACH OUT TO THE LIFE OF MAPPILAS OF MALABAR," 405.
[28] Ibid,406.

Within the Arabi Malayalam mala tradition, different mala compositions are traditionally recited for different devotional purposes and occasions. *Nafeesath Mala* is particularly associated with recitation during pregnancy and childbirth, when it is recited to seek Allah's blessings for protection, strength, and a safe delivery. While *Nafeesath Mala* shares the devotional purpose and poetic conventions of the Arabi Malayalam mala tradition, it differs from many other mala compositions its thematic focus, Most mala work commemorate the lives and miracles of male saints*, Nafeesath Mala* celebrates the life of Sayyidah Nafisah, a distinguished female scholar, ascetic, and direct descendant of the prophet Muhammed through Imam al Hasan ibn Ali rather than focusing solely on miraculous episodes, the poem presents a chronological account of her life, highlighting her noble lineage, scholarship, piety, relationship with imam al Shafi, spiritual authority, and enduring devotional legacy. Through this distinctive focus, *Nafeesath Mala* broadens the thematic scope of the Arabi Malayalam Mala tradition by preserving the memory of one of the most influential female figures in Islamic intellectual and spiritual history.

Cultural significance of *Nafeesath Mala*

The multilingual richness and distinctive poetic style of the Sufi *mala* tradition made it an integral part of the cultural and devotional life of Kerala Muslim households[29].nightly recitations of mala poems, performed with the hope of attaining Allah's pleasure and the blessing associated with revered saints, reflected the spiritual and cultural vitality of the Muslim community. These devotional gatherings strengthened communal identity and fostered an atmosphere of peace, prosperity, and spiritual well-being. its continued recitation in religious gatherings and homes reflects its lasting spiritual, literary, and cultural significance among the Muslims of Malabar. its widely known in Kerala as a devotional poem recited to seek Allah's blessing for protection during pregnancy and for safe child birth. Beyond its religious significance, the recitation of *Nafeesath Mala* also functioned as a form of psychological support for expectant mothers, instilling confidence, emotional strength, and hope during child birth[30]. among Malabar Muslims, the recitation of the poem and the making of *Nercha* (votive offerings) in the name of Sayyidah Nafisah have long been regarded as an effective devotional practice for overcoming the difficulties of pregnancy and the dangers associated with labor[31]. the poet provides an account from his personal experience that a woman from his village endured prolonged and severe labor, yet the child was not delivered despite intense pain. At that point a member of her family took two coins and dedicated them as a *Nercha* (votive offering) in the name of Sayyidah Nafisah, trying them to the pregnant women's hand. According to the poet, soon after this act of devotion, she experienced a safe and successful delivery. this incident is narrated in the poem as follows:

> *Nichame pettin novathiyil kutti thala atitte , Natte duhkham pukku rantu naniyam etutte,..*
> *Majamude bi peril nercha kuri kaimal , ketti,Velayil firad nalle yogitattil kutti..*

[29] D. R. Muhammed Naqeeb, "*Malappattukal: Arabi-Malayalam Sahithyathil Ozhichukoodan Pattatha Sthanamaan Charithra Purushanmar*," Facebook, accessed August 18, 2026. Facebook post

[30] Ajmal Mueen M. A, "MUSLIM WOMEN AND TRADITIONAL MEDICINAL PRACTICES IN MALABAR," *JETIR* Volume 5, no. Issue 2 (2018): 1409.

[31] Musthafal Falili Kareetiparaba, *Nafeesath Maala:Aashayam Aadarsham*, 136.

The continued recitation of *Nafeesath Mala* in Malabar is closely associated with the ritual and devotional practices of the *Sunni* Muslim community. Among the various Muslim group in the region, *Sunni* organizations have played the principal role in prpeserving and promoting the tradition of reciting mala poems as part of their religious life[32]. rooted in the Sufi devotional heritage of Kerala, these communities regard the recitation of *Malas* as a legitimate expression of Islamic piety and a means of seeking Allah's blessing through the remembrance of righteous saints. As an Arabi-Malayalam composition, it was widely read and appreciated, including by women who possessed literacy in Arabi Malayalam despite not receiving formal English education during the colonial period[33]. thus, the poem functioned not only as a source of spiritual inspiration, but also a medium for preserving and transmitting religious knowledge, literary appreciation, and the Arabi Malayalam literary heritage across generations. consequently, *Nafeesath Mala* continues to occupy an importance place in religious gatherings, and domestic devotional practices, contributing to the preservations of Kerala's distinctive Arabi Malayalam literary and spiritual tradition.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined *Nafeesath Mala* as an important work of *Mala* literature within the Arabi Malayalam literary tradition of Malabar. The findings that the poem is not merely a devotional composition but also a significant literary text that reflects the close relationship between Sufism, Mappila culture, and the religious heritage of Malabar. By analyzing its thematic structure, literary characteristics, and devotional significance, this study shows that *Nafeesath Mala* faithfully follows the conventional features of the mala genre while possessing distinctive qualities that set it apart from other Arabi Malayalam mala compositions.

Unlike most mala works, which commemorate the lives of male saints, *Nafeesath Mala* celebrates the life, scholarship, piety, and spiritual excellence of Sayyidah Nafisah, thereby expanding the thematic scope of the mala tradition and highlighting the important place of female religious figures in Islamic intellectual and spiritual history. The analysis further reveals that the poem is carefully structured, combining praise, biographical narration, historical episodes, supplication, and devotional expression within a harmonious poetic framework. Its literary characteristics contribute to its aesthetic elegance while facilitating oral recitation and memorization. The study also demonstrates that the significance of *Nafeesath Mala*, its continued recitation in religious gatherings and homes, particularly in connection with prayers for safe childbirth and the seeking of divine blessing.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of sufi sainthood and gender representation in Arabi Malayalam devotional literature. By examining the representation of Sayyidah Nafisah in *Nafeesath Mala*, the study extends the discussion of sainthood beyond

[32] ABDUL FATHAH AK, "AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON MALABAR LOCAL MUSLIMS SPIRITUAL CUSTOMS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO"*NERCHAS*"" (DARUL HUDA ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY CHEMMAD KERALA,INDIA 2022, n.d.), 29.

[33] *Mullaachi ithamaarum muslim pouro hithyavum*(shukkoor ugrapuram)Emalayalee, September 25, 2024, https://emalayalee.com/news/324441.

predominantly male centred narratives and demonstrates how female spiritual authority can be represented through themes of religious knowledge, piety, devotion, and *Karamat*. However, the study has certain limitations. first, although selected mala texts such as *Muhyiddin mala*, *Badr mala*, and *Rifai Mala* are discussed for comparative purposes, the comparison focuses mainly on their thematic and devotional dimensions and does not examine their literary features, such as linguistic characteristics, poetic structure, and stylish elements, in detail. Second, the limited number of literary sources and interviews restricts the range of perspectives incorporated into the study. Future researchers may investigate the reception of *Nafeesath Mala* among contemporary Muslim communities in Malabar through a broader range of interviews and field based studies. They may also examine other *mala* texts in Arabi Malayalam literature to explore their representations of sainthood, devotion, gender, and religious authority. Comparative studies of these texts could provide a broader understanding of the literary, religious, and cultural significance of the *mala* tradition in Malabar.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with literature organization, manuscript drafting, academic language refinement, and editorial revision. All AI-assisted content and references should be reviewed and verified by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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