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Topic of Research: **Visual Media Engagements with Islam and Changing**

Narratives: A Study of the Politics and Dynamic of Visual Media Culture among Sunni Muslims in Malabar

Findings

1. **Traditional Sunni Muslims in Malabar did not merely resist modern visual media but appropriated it through their own religious logic and jurisprudential framework.** Rather than representing a delayed or anti-modern response, their engagement with photography, videography, television, and digital media demonstrates an autonomous process of negotiating modernity based on Islamic legal reasoning, religious authority, and the objective of *da'wa* (religious propagation).
2. **The evolution of Sunni visual media culture represents a gradual transition from sonic to visual mediation, without abandoning the centrality of oral religious traditions.** Audio media such as sermons and devotional cassettes laid the foundation for later visual media practices, while new technologies were integrated into existing religious mediation rather than replacing earlier forms.
3. **Socio-economic transformations, particularly Gulf migration and changes in Kerala's public sphere, were the most significant catalysts for the acceptance and expansion of visual media among Sunni Muslims.** Exposure to transnational Islamic networks, increased economic resources, organisational competition, and practical religious needs collectively accelerated the adoption of photography, videography, and new media technologies.
4. **The visual media practices of ordinary Sunni devotees often evolved beyond formal religious regulations while remaining rooted in religious identity and piety.** Family photography, personal archives, and everyday

media practices reveal a negotiated relationship between institutional religious authority and lived religious experience, where devotees balanced organisational norms with personal and social realities rather than openly contesting religious leadership.

5. **New media has transformed religious participation, particularly for Sunni women, and redefined religious mediation without fundamentally altering traditional structures of authority.** Digital platforms have expanded women's participation, visibility, and collective religious engagement, while contemporary media practices—including CD culture, LCD debates, Islamic theatre, and digital productions—have reshaped Sunni religious communication, knowledge production, and public representation.

Summary of Abstract

This study explores the visual media culture of traditional Sunni Muslims in Malabar by examining how religious beliefs, theological debates, and socio-political contexts have shaped their engagement with visual media technologies. Using qualitative ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews, archival materials, religious literature, and discourse analysis, the research investigates the relationship between media, piety, and religious authority.

The study traces the transition from sonic to visual mediation, highlighting how cassette culture prepared the ground for later visual media practices. It analyses the debates among the Ulema on the permissibility of visual media and situates these within broader discussions on religion, modernity, and colonial experience. The research further examines how ordinary Sunni devotees negotiated religious regulations while adapting to emerging technologies, revealing tensions between institutional authority and everyday religious practice. It also explores how new media has simultaneously expanded and constrained the agency of Sunni women in pursuing piety. Finally, the study demonstrates that social transformations, particularly Gulf migration, and the political experiences of Muslims as a minority community in India have significantly influenced the evolution of Sunni visual media culture and religious mediation in Malabar.