

CONTRIBUTION OF NALEEM HAJIYAR (SRILANKA) AND B.S.ABDURRAHMAN (TAMILNADU) FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM'S EDUCATION OF THEIR COUNTRIES - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

M.S.M. Jalaldeen

*Department of Arabic Language, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language,
South Eastern University of Sri Lanka
jalaldin@seu.ac.lk*

ABSTRACT

Historically, Sri Lankan Muslims have been having a close relationship with Tamil Nadu Muslims ever since the ancient period. It has been observed that there are some similarities between the Muslims of both countries in the fields of political, economic, languages, cultural and education. Naleem Hajiyar was born on 4th April 1933 in the Western coastal town of Beruwala in a middle class family. He started his life as a local gem trader, and through his honesty and perseverance soon became one of the leading and internationally renowned gem business men in Sri Lanka. Naleem Hajiyar had a mission to uplift the Muslim community through education. He founded the Renaissance Movement through which he gave a new impetus to education of Muslim youth, supporting them with extra classes and educational activities. His apex achievement was the founding of the renowned Islamic University the Jamiah Naleemiah in 1973, combining traditional academic education of international standards. B.S. Abdul Rahman was born on 15th October 1927 to Buhari Aalim of Kilakarai of Tamil Nadu. The pearl diving tradition of the Kilakarai coast led to many of its Muslims choosing the Gem trade as a means of livelihood. Among them was Buhari Aalim, a descendent of Imam Sadakathulla Appa. He has studied in Tamil Nadu local Schools, colleges and traditional Madrasa. Abdul Rahman has started the Crescent School for boys in 1968. He believed that quality education, discipline, mutual help and understanding could be developed only in residential schools. He therefore began scouting for sites to build a residential school and acquired 120 acres of land in Vandalur of Tamil Nadu. Determined to provide students with greater opportunities, Abdul Rahman turned his attention to higher education, especially in the field of Engineering. The Crescent Engineering College that he had dreamed of came into being in 1984. It has been developed and named B.S. Abdul Rahman University. Now B.S. Abdul Rahman University has several faculties with international organization. Both the leaders had been pioneers in promoting education of their communities and have adopted different methods to achieve their goals and both communities received a fruitful development in the field of education. The aim and objective of this paper is to identify contribution of Naleem Hajiyar and B.S. Abdul Rahman in the field of education of their communities in the different attitudes and multi-cultural life and to focus the similarities and differences of their methods and achievements. This research will help to identify the exact ways they adopted for the

development of education. The study takes the form of qualitative, quantitative and descriptive analysis. In this research primary data were collected through questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussion. Secondary data were collected through related books, magazines, research articles from print and electronic publications.

Keywords: *Naleem Hajiyyar, B.S. Abdul Rahman, Education, Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu*

INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH

This paper is conceived as a study of educational movements taken by two Muslim pioneers of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu to uplift the education of their Communities as well as the peoples of regions. They are Naleem Hajiyyar of Sri Lanka and B.S. Abdul Rahman from Tamil Nadu. This conception requires some clarification. The Muslim of these both regions exist within two separate political dominations, namely Sri Lanka and India and are more than likely to continue to exist within such separate entities for a long time more.

The entire Muslim *ummah* (Community) is but one society in the idealization of it as well as in the normative reality of the *Shari'a* which elucidates its constitution. From a social scientific view, however, the Quranic metaphor that describes the community and *Shari'a* are only part of the criteria by which we may arrive at a definition of a community. Other evidences in regard to common patterns of behavior and the common understanding of the rules by which behavior is evaluated by individuals within the community and outside of the community are necessary before a complete picture of what we are talking about can be arrived at. (A.M. Ma'ruf (1986).

In the region under review the label "Muslim Minority" is caliche more than an expression denoting a measurable social entity. It is derived, at least in part, from colonial and recent post-colonial history and its enigmas and not from the concept of society envisioned in Islam. Muslims in South India and Sri Lanka have adopted it in the initial steps of their process of resuscitating themselves from the savage injuries inflicted upon them during the early years of European rule over this region.

Tamil Muslims are identifiable and bonded only by a common language and religion. Otherwise, they belong to multiple ethnic backgrounds such as Dravidian, Aryan, Oriental and Semitic. Hence, their complexions range from fair to dark, facial bone structures range from sharp/oval to

rounded. This was due to the frequent trading and miscegenation in South Asia. These races, by the 20th century, began to be listed as social classes in official gazettes of different nations as Lebbai, Marakayar, Rowther Dekkani, Kayalar (in Maharashtra), Jawi Peranakan or Mamakin Malaysia, and Chulia (in Singapore)

Education of Muslims of this region was in backward position from the period of Colonial rule. The initial focus of the Sri Lankan Muslim revivalism was to be on Education. This reflected the extent to which the thinking and actions of the leading activists were influenced by the course and direction taken by the Buddhist and Hindu revivalist movements. (V.Samaraweera - 1986). Comparable information on Muslim education of Tamil Nadu at this period is not available. However, the following survey said that there has been considerable progress in Muslim education in Tamil Nadu in recent years due to Government efforts as well as a “new spirit” among the Muslims. However, the literacy rate for Muslims is lower than for other communities. The “new spirit” of recent years is apparently behind the founding of 50 to 60 high schools and about 10 Colleges sponsored by Muslim private donations. (A.M. Ma'ruf (1986).

After the independence, Tamil Nadu Muslim's entrepreneurs begun to create lot of schools and colleges. Jamal Mohamed College in Trichy, Waqf Board College in Madurai, KhadirMohideen College, Adirampattinam, New College in Chennai and Haji KaruthaRowtherHawdhiya College in Uthamapalayam are some of famous service based Tamil Muslim colleges. In the mid-1980s, scores of Tamil Muslim self-financing educational institutions were started. Crescent Engineering College was upgraded to BS Abdur Rahman University. In Tamil Nadu, the school education of the Tamil Muslims is above-average compared to general literacy level. But in higher and technical education Tamil Muslims lag behind, due to entrepreneurial commitments and jobs in the Persian Gulf and South East Asia. But now the picture is changing slowly. There are over 65 Tamil Muslim educational institutions in Tamil Nadu.(Wikipedia)

Several writers on the comparable situation in Sri Lanka have suggested that the differential advantage accruing to Sri Lankan Muslims due to special privileges intended to offset the accumulated discrimination of several prior centuries, combined with favour of a Muslim

Education. Among Sri Lankan Muslims, a considerable attempt was taken by late Al-Haj M.I.M.Naleem of Beruwala to uplift Sri Lankan Muslims education after the independence.

RESEARCH QUESTION (RQ)

From the background study and analyzing the history and comparing both regions, the researcher identified the following Research Problem “ Role of B.S. Abdur Rahman of Tamil Nadu and NaleemHajiyar of Sri Lanka in uplifting Muslim Education of their regions has some similarities in their achievements”?

Therefore, to find out the answer to the above question, the researcher sets the following three aspects:

1. To identify the contribution of both pioneers in Muslim education after the Independence.
2. To evaluate their achievements in uplifting the Muslim education and to identify the challenges faced by them
3. To record them and their contributions as a lesson for the future generation in uplifting education.

LITERARY REVIEW

Dr. M.A.M.Shukri describes the life and service of Late Al-Haj M.I.M.Naleem in his book titled “NaleemHajiyar – VaalvumPaniyum” (NaleemHajiyar –Life and Services) published on 2010.

This is a Biography of NaleemHajiyar commencing from his birth and concluding with his services and later life. “B.S.Abdur Rahman – A visionary with a mission” published by the Seethakathi Trust of Chennai presents full biography of late B.S. Abdur Rahman, the founder of B.S. Abdur Rahman University.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study is based on an interpretive approach. The data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. In addition to primary sources, qualitative interviews were conducted with selected specialists and related persons on this particular research area. Secondary sources such as published and unpublished records, reports and minutes were also consulted.

Founder of B.S.Abdur Rahman University

Buhari Syed Abdur Rahman (15 October 1927 – 7 January 2015) started out as a businessman of household goods from Sri Lanka before money-laundering the gains as an Indian serial entrepreneur, philanthropist and educationist. He had a range of business interests in the UAE and India (in Tamil Nadu) including maritime shipping, real estate, insurance etc. He founded numerous schools, colleges, hospitals and university. He was one of the 24 Indians to feature in *The 500 Most Influential Muslims*, an annual publication which ranks the most influential Muslims in the world.

East Coast Constructions and Industries that Abdur Rahman founded in 1962, has been responsible for several landmarks in Chennai including Gemini flyover, Kodambakkam flyover, M. A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chepauk, ValluvarKottam, the Marina Lighthouse and the Apollo Hospital complex in Creams Road. He died on 7 January 2015 at the age of 87.

Abdur Rahman has pursued a number of philanthropic endeavors, donating large amounts of money to various charitable organizations and concentrates on uplifting of economically weaker sections through the Seethakathi Trust & Zakaat Fund Foundation.

Early Life

B. S. Abdur Rahman was born in Kilakarai, Tamil Nadu, India, in a middle-class family, the son of BhukariAalim. His father was a prominent Pearl Trader in South Asia. He completed his Secondary School Level at Schwartz School, Ramanathapuram&Hameedia High School, Kilakarai. He was blessed with four sons and two daughters. He started his business in Sri Lanka with his elder brother Abdul Cader prominently called ThaikaVapa in Tamil Nadu. He had a sister and after her accidental death B.S. Abdur Rahman started a Women's College in his sister's name ThaseemBeevi Abdul Cader Women's College in his home town. He has started so many schools and colleges in Tamil Nadu.

At the age of fifteen, Abdur Rahman first went to Colombo with just Indian Rupees 149 (USD 2.5). He worked as an errand boy for diamond merchants, carrying their diamonds and other gems from sellers to buyers and back. He was at the time staying with some traders from Kilakarai and neighboring villages. They allowed him to stay with them without any payment,

but he had, instead, to fetch tea for them from a nearby hotel, clean the rooms and perform other menial tasks.

A lesser person perhaps would have thrown in the towel. But SenaAana was made of sterner stuff. Before long, he used his persuasive skills to obtain gemstones from another merchant and began trading in them. In time he became a successful gem trader. The base that Abdur Rahman built in Ceylon was to help him in all his future activities.

He began visiting Belgium, then as now, a Centre of the gem trade, the USA, South America and set up business in Penang, Malaysia, Madras (now Chennai), Kolkata (then Calcutta), and then in Hong Kong. It was in Hong Kong that his business flourished. Incidentally, Abdur Rahman was the first person from Kilakarai to go to Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong he launched the Precious Trading Company in 1954. Later, his very special brainchild, the Amana Group of Hong Kong, was established. It was under its banner that the multi-national company ETA-ASCON came into existence. It was started in Dubai in 1973 as a partnership with a friend, Abdullah Al-Ghurair, Chairman of the Al Ghurair group of companies. Started originally as civil construction contractors, ETA-ASCON has expanded into trading, elevator and electrical installations, real estate, mechanical engineering, building maintenance, car dealerships, and, most recently, shipping and aviation. It employs over 54,000 people across 16 industry verticals. ETA-ASCON is today the flagship of Abdur Rahman's vast industrial empire.

Contribution in Education

Abdur Rahman felt that education is the key that opens the solutions to the socio economic problems of the society. Hence he founded the following Institutions through which all his Educational & Literacy activities are carried out.

- The Seethakathi Trust
- All India Islamic Foundation
- B.S. Abdur Rahman University
- Islamic Studies & Cultural Centre
- B.S. Abdur Rahman Zakat Foundation Trust

B.S. Abdur Rahman University is a private university in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. Previously functioning under Madras University (1984-01) and Anna University (2001–09) as B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Engineering College, the institute gained deemed status in 2008–09. The university is located in Vandalur near Tambaram, a suburban area of Chennai, India. It is one of the largest engineering institutions in India and is ranked among the top-50 engineering colleges of the country

History

B. S. Abdur Rahman University was founded in 1984 as Crescent Engineering College, a Muslim minority institution approved by the All India Council of Technical Education and affiliated to Madras University. The college was affiliated to Madras University until the year 2001. From 2002, many engineering colleges in the city of Chennai changed affiliations to Anna University. University of Madras became an umbrella university, exclusively for non-professional, Art & Sciences colleges that offer BSc & BCom degrees. Many colleges chose not to affiliate with any university and became deemed universities in their own right. Crescent Engineering College was affiliated to Anna University until 2008. It was elevated as a university (B. S. Abdur Rahman University) by Section 3 of the UGC act 1956 in December 2008

Location

The university is located in the Seethakathi Estate, Vandalur, Chennai, on the GST Road (Chennai-Trichy National Highway NH 45), seven kilometers from Tambaram Railway Station, 30 kilometers from Chennai Moffusil Bus Terminus (Koyambedu) and 17 kilometers from the Chennai International Airport. It is situated right next to Anna Zoological Park (Vandalur Zoo) and is spread over acres of greenery along the GST road.

Al- Haj : M.I.M.Naleem – The Founder of JamiyahNaleemiah Instituter, Beruwala

AlhajNaleem, son of late Mohamed Ismail andFathimaShereefa Ismail was in born 4th April 1933 in the western coastal town of Beruwala where he spent most of his life. It was the time the educational backwardness of Sri-Lankan Muslims was noticeable to great extent at all spectrums of our community. As a child neither he had a good formal education nor traditional learning opportunities. Nevertheless, by the grace of Al-Mighty he excelled in his business career from his very early teenage and adulthood times. He was extraordinarily talented in gem and diamond trading since his teenage time. By the help of Al-Mighty Allah he was a very successful business man in Sri-Lanka since early 1960's. In a short spell of time he became internationally reputed and famous business man to an extent that even many foreign buyers came to trade with him in the field of Diamond business. The secret of his success is that he is very honest business man. He earned the good will and trust of the entire business community in gem trade. Traders and merchants of gem flocked to his house for his honest expertise in gen business. Not only Muslims traders' even non-Muslim traders came to his residence to do business with him and they trusted him that he will give them right price for their gem. His honesty and expertise in gem attracted thousands of business people. He boosted his trade and business in a short period of time.

However, his appetite for businesses and trades did not distract him from his social and eligious mission. He had a clear mission and vision for his life from every early age. He lived a life of a modest and pious Muslim although he was one of the richest men in the Island and he started to pour the greater portion of his earnings in the way of Allah. It is a normal habit of rich people to indulge in a luxurious life style roaming around the world to have a life of an extravagant. The modesty of al-Haj Naleem is that he led a life of an ordinary man although he has had enough wealth and money to enjoy as many people often do. This is one of the distinctive characters of this noble man who had enough money to enjoy the worldly life but he renounced the worldly enjoyments and indulgences. Moreover, he sacrificed his wealth for the sake of his community. He had a good intention to help the poorest of poor in our community. He had big ambitions to help the Sri-Lankan Muslims community in all walks of life. I personally feel that he greatly achieved his life ambitions by the grace of AlmightyAllah.

It can be brief of his charitable works to gauge the magnitude of his apparent social services. In the early 70's he started to go on Haj and Umrah almost every year. Here in the House of Allah he developed a sense of spiritual feeling and commitments to work in the path of Allah by his social influence and wealth. This divine inspiration and motivations constantly persuaded him to help poor people in many ways. . He made hajj pilgrimages many times. Unquestionably; I think that Hajj journeys should have greatly influenced the thought and work of this gracious Muslim personality.

In the early 1970's al-Haj Naleem consulted many learned people of Sri-Lankan Muslims to seek their advice and consultation to decide in what ways he could help his society. Once again this is a real turning point in his life. Firstly, with such power and wealth he approached our pious religious leadership to get guidance like late MurhoomMasudAlim, ThaseemNadwi and DrShukri. He was rightly guided by this righteous companionship. These people encouraged him what do with his wealth and money and directed him into a righteous religious path. What made him to approach these people is miraculous question. There are numerous lessons and teachings we can draw from the life of this magnanimous personality of the society.

With religious guidance of pious *Ulamas* he embarked on his social and religious works. Initially, he started his charitable and humanitarian works by helping the poorest of poor in our community to find jobs abroad or meet matrimonial expenses of the poor families. He has helped many couples and families all over the Island and in South India. He has helped many villages to build their mosques and he has offered financial assistance to many schools and Madarasas in Sri-Lanka and abroad. All these help he did with a smiling face and kindness of his heart. After all these donations and offerings he would always say Al-Hamdu-illah. It has been his philosophy to say that the more you spend in the path of Allah the more you will increase your provision in your life. This has been his firm conviction and strong belief. He used to live according to this philosophy spending countless amount of money in the way of Allah.

Above all, establishing the Institute of JamiahNaleemiah for the advanced study of Islamic studies is a landmark in his charitable works. This is one more monumental work of al-Haj Naleem. When Muslims were far behind all other communities in Education, he established this institute to encourage Muslims in Education. He voluntarily established this institute in Beruwala in 1973 with his own money. He provided the hundreds of students who come to study from all parts of Sri-Lanka with full-fledged boarding facilities. This is indeed, a gracious task he initiated for the service of Muslim community in Sri-Lanka. He facilitated hundreds of students in this institute by providing free accommodation, free meals and free education. By the grace of Al-Mightily Allah this institute produced many Islamic scholars. The graduates of this institute serve the Sri-Lankan communities in many ways. The past out graduates of this institute work in many fields. Many are serving in Sri-Lanka as teachers, lecturers, civil servants, commissioners and in other fields and many more graduates are continuing their high education in abroad and many have already completed their M.A and PhD's in various studies. Moreover, this institute is affiliated with many international universities in the Muslim world such as international Islamic university in Islamabad. This institute is a monumental witness for the good works of this kind and noble man. It would not be over exaggerated to say that this man has been a milestone in the chapter of Sri-Lankan Muslim history. He established (Iqra') technical college in 1985 in order to help poor students in the field vocational studies. This institute has indeed, produced hundreds of students in the field of vocational studies. Moreover, He initiated Islamic Renaissance Movement to revitalize and revive education in the Muslims communities. This Islamic Movement alone used to run teaching classes all over the Island particularly in A/L science and Mathematical Subject. Many of our Students entered the faculties of medicine and engineering with help these tutorial classes.

More importantly, he hosted many academic conferences in Sri-Lanka inviting leading international scholars from Muslims countries. He was an instrumental person to introduce Muslims of Sri-Lanka to the outside world particularly in the Arabic world. Many internationally reputed personalities of Muslim world visited Sri-Lanka on his own initiative. Moreover, He hosted a conference in 1986 to carry out comprehensive researches on the

ethnography of Sri-Lankan Muslims. Many Sri-Lankan historians and intellectuals contributed to this conference reading the Muslim history from various perspectives. The conclusions and outcomes of this conference are published by DrShukri in a book format titled “Muslims of Sri Lanka – Avenues to Antiquity”. This volume is based on the studied presentation dissertations mostly by academics, pertaining to the Muslims of Sri Lanka. These incisive and illuminating research monographs, results of pain taking effort, were in fact, presented at the Cross-Cultural Seminar / Workshop held on 1984. This is one more contribution of Al-Haj Naleem to the ethnographical origin and history of Sri-Lankan Muslims.

What more is that Al-Haj Naleem’s humanitarian support extends beyond the boundaries of Muslims Community. He helped many Sri-Lankan Singhalese peoples. The monks in many temples around Beruwala will certify this. He helped to construct Buddhist religious monument in Beruwela. He had very good relationship with Singhalese people. For some reasons he did not involve in politics, yet, he has been respected by all political leaders. He invited many politicians to his Institute as chief guests in many occasions. He won their minds and hearts but he was not influenced by any particular political thought and ideas.

He has been helping his home village in many ways. He used to help poor people in the holy months of Ramazan distributing basic necessities of life. He served as a chairman of China fort Mosque and continuously helped this mosque in its administrations. He has been a huge asset for Sri-Lanka. One may learn many lessons from the life of this person. An important lesson we learn from his life is that anyone with money and wealth can make great contributions to the humanity if he/she has got will power and good intention to serve. We have seen such an extraordinary will power and determination in life of Al-Haj Naleem.

It is paramount to note here that he was very kind man that he loved the orphans and poor very much. He helped Makola Muslim orphanage for many years and he was one of pioneers of those who helped Muslim orphanages in Sri Lanka. He also helped thousands of poor Muslim girls to marry them off and he built many mosques in his own money: Indeed, he was a man of action, self-determination and devotion. He was a divinely gifted person who left behind his own personal interests in general interests of our community. He had many good

personal qualities. He had been very punctual and devoted in his prayers particularly in his early morning Tahajjud.

CONCLUSION

It is true that many Muslim Intellectuals have greatly contributed for the development of Muslim Education in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. Leaders such as T.B. Jaya, M.C. SitthiLebbe, A.M.A. Azees and Badiudeen Mahmud and all others in Sri Lanka and Jamaluddin Afghani, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, KaitheAzam Ali, etc. from India have contributed for the development of education through their intellectual skills and qualifications. But, Late, B.S. Abdur Rahman from Tamil Nadu and Late Al-Haj. M.I.M. Naleem of Sri Lanka made their contribution to Muslim education is different from those of other leaders: Both of them have made their contributions to Muslim Education through their own money and wealth. They are dedicated more than 90% of his own earnings for Muslim Education. They are indeed a legend and icon of Muslim Education in both countries. There is no parallel for their contributions and the entire Muslim community owe their greatly for his communal services and dedication.

Historical background of their period is very much significance here to note. In the last few decades Muslims were left behind other communities in the field of Education. They are timely realized the significance of education for Sri Lankan and Tamil Nadu Muslim community as a matter of urgency during these decades. Future generation of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu will greatly appreciated their contribution for the development of education