

Contributions of Muslims To Peace Building in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract:

This paper tends to unfold the rich heritage of the Muslim society in Tamil Nadu and the immense contributions offered to the state by this society ultimately aiming to build peaceful coexistence among the people of Tamil Nadu. Our country India holds unity through diversities of many kinds, the state of Tamil Nadu exhibits this motto in many ways especially the Muslims of this state have their origin and originality both imbibed within this state where we come to know that the people of Tamil Nadu have accepted the religion of Islam and they continue to be Tamil people in their culture and Muslims by religion. The cause for embracing Islam was the trade contact which was strong between the Arabs and Tamil people even before the Prophethood of Muhammed (s). Throughout the ages, the Muslims began to multiply and started to cover almost most of the southern part of Tamil Nadu. The religion did not stop them from their ethnicity, instead, the pluralistic mindset of the Tamil people brought more gain in knowledge and other aspects through the contributions which were made by the Muslims of this land. There came many Muslim Tamil scholars who played their role in contributing huge number of books to Tamil literature, many philanthropists contributed to build educational institutions and many 'Darghas' were also built to maintain peace and harmony which also promoted spiritual healing in the Tamil people.

These contributions are explored in this research work to disclose the higher intentions of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu to live with the people of their own land in peace and Harmony.

Key words: peace, harmony, contribution, Darghas, Maraikayar.

Introduction:

Tamil Nadu is one of the 29 states of India which lies in southern tip of Indian Peninsula. Its official language is Tamil, which is one of longest surviving classical languages in the world. About 4.5 million Muslims live in Tamil Nadu, it is close to 6% of total population of the state.

The Muslims of Tamil Nadu are known for their religious tolerance and peace-loving nature. They contribute a lot to the economy and social development of TN, through the culture, language, education and a wide range of social activities.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore statesman said: "In our pluralistic society people belonging to different religions and communities and speaking different languages must each preserve and protect their religion, culture and language".

We can unite the people through the language, literature, education, religious tolerance and other social services.

On this way the Muslims made a great contribution to peace building in Tamil Nadu.

This paper is focusing on five important areas:

- Muslims' relationship with Tamil
- Muslims' contribution to Tamil literature
- Muslims' contribution to Education
- Contribution of Darghas to Peace building
- Contribution of Muslim Jama'at to Peace building

1. Muslim's relationship with Tamil

Since 2500 years there has been trade and cultural relationships between Tamil Nadu and Arab countries. Their spices and condiments attracted Arab traders as it did to Chinese and other European traders in the past.¹

It was the simple lifestyle, pleasant communication, integrity, straight-forwardness and brotherly attitude of the Sufi's that attracted the ordinary people towards Islam. It is this basic awareness that eventually resulted in the rapid propagation of Islam.

There are several reasons for Tamil community to embrace Islam; those days, Tamil community was embedded with caste quarrels, social degradation, superstitions, untouchability and all sorts of social evils.

¹ S.M. Kamal, Muslims in Tamil Nadu Page: 1

Despite all this, Tamil community always had the lofty ideal of 'xd; Nw Fyk; xUtNd Njtd;' - One God, One Humanity', 'ahJk; CNU ahtUk; Nfspu; - The world is mine. All are my kinsmen'.¹

"O Mankind! We created you from a sing pair of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that, ye may know each other..." (Al Quran, Suratul Hujurat, 49:13)

On seeing Muslims actually practicing this high philosophy in their day-to-day life the Tamil got fascinated and welcomed themselves to this Islamic lifestyle. Before the of 12th century AC Arab traders and Sufi's made modern day Tamil Nadu as their base, made matrimonial relationships here and integrated themselves in to the broader Tamil Society.

The mosque established by Haji Abdullah Bin Muhammed Anvar in a place called Uraiyoor near Trichy in Hijri 116 (AC 734) is the very first mosque constructed in Tamil Nadu. The stone inscription in this mosque is the first in Tamil Nadu.²

Shaikh Abul Kadir Maraikayar (alais) Keezhakkarai Seedaskkaathi, who lived in the 17th century was one of the wealthiest of that time. Because he gave away his wealth for Indian Independence fight and always helped people irrespective of their religion or caste, he was kindly called as 'Seethakkathi the Philanthropist' by everyone.³

The 18th century warrior Muhammed Yusuf Ali Khan (alais) Kammanthaan Khan Sahib is well known for this patriotism, humane nature, unselfish attitude and integrity. All historians praise his heroics.⁴

Just like the above, there were hundreds of thousands of Muslims all around India that worked for social empowerment, independence and communal development.

In various parts of Tamil Nadu, Muslims live with other communities so much in harmony like brothers and cousins. They live as kith and kin and never practice or approve any form of untouchability.

It might even surprise you that there is a Tamil community called 'Piramalai kallar' who even performed circumcision as a rite.⁵

¹ Kaniyan Poonkundran, Purananooru 192

² Kavikko Abdul Rahman, Contribution of Muslims to Tamil culture, Proceedings of International Islamic Tamil Conference, Malaysia 2011, Page: 243

³ S.M. Kamal, Muslims in Tamil Nadu, Page: 85

⁴ S.M. Kamal, Muslims in Tamil Nadu, Page: 91

⁵ Kombai S. Anwar, Yaadum, Documentary film.

Even before the advent of Prophet Mohamed, for over 20 centuries, Tamil had trade and commerce with Arabs. A lot of this information is found in the transcripts of Persian, Spanish and Arab travelers.

Some of those leading travelers are, Ibn Kurthabe (844 – 848), Ibn Rustha (903), Ibn Bakshi (902) Abu Said (950) Mas'vudi (943 – 955) Yaakath (179) Marco Polo (1200) Ibn Badhudha (1355).¹

2. Contribution to Literature

Language and literature bridge people from different walks of life. Realising this, Islamic Scholars served Tamil language and its literature immensely. More than 2,000 great literary works were compiled by Muslim scholars alone.

Because no major literary works were produced from 14th to 17th century, this period is generally called as the dark ages for Tamil literature.²

Even during this dark period, just in 19th century alone, 12 literary epics were produced by Muslim scholars. This is an unparalleled contribution that we can be ever so proud of.³

Vama Devar from Sadhuragiri Mountains, a great scholar and one among the 'padhinen sidhar' embraced Islam and named himself Yakoub Sidhar. Muslim scholars have contributed in 96 different type of Tamil literature.⁴

Apart from this, they introduced new forms of literature in Tamil, like kissaa, munajaath, masaala, naamaa, padaippoor, nondi naadakam,

Important Books of Muslim scholars produced in Tamil:

- Aayiram Masaala (Vannamarila Pulavar 1672)
- Mih'raaj Maalai (Aalim pulavar Sheihu Ali 1690)
- Sirappuraanam (Umar Pppulavar 17th Century)
- Chinna Seeraa (Bani Ahmed Maraikayar)

¹ S.M. Kamal, Muslims in Tamil Nadu, Page: 97

² Kavikko Abdul Rahman, Contribution of Muslims to Tamil culture, Proceedings of International Islamic Tamil Conference, Malaysia 2011, Page: 252

³ Pazha Nedumaran, Contribution of Muslim to the development of Tamil, Dinamani Eidul fitr Souvenir 2016, Page: 61.

⁴ Pazha Nedumaran, Contribution of Muslim to the development of Tamil, Dinamani Eidul fitr Souvenir 2016, Page: 60-61.

Books like Sirappuraanam are included in the syllabus of graduate and post-graduate studies. Tamil Nadu Government facilitates the greatest contributions to Tamil Islamic Literature every year in the name of Umar Pulavar.

Justice M M Ismail was a noted authority in Kamba Ramayan. His contributions both in speeches and writings are really note worthy. In appreciation of his scholarship in Ramayan he got the nick name 'Kampa Ramayana Sahib'. Many Muslim scholars used Tamil as the bridge to build equanimity and tranquility between communities.¹

To list a few more worth noted scholars: Kjottar Njaniyaar Sahib, Varakavi Kasim Pulavar (1763), Sekanaar Pulavar, Kunagkudi Masthan (1881), Nagoor Gulaam Kadhar (1883), Sadhavadhani Seihi Thampi Pavalar, Kayidhe Millath, K M Sherif, M R Abdul Raheem, K. Abdul Gafoor, Manavai Musthafa, Kavikkoo Abdul Rtehman, M Metha, Ingulaab, Abi.

Manavai Musthafa worked as the Editor of UNESCO Tamil Science Publications for 36 years. He was the pioneer for the 'Dictionary of Scientific Terminology'

M R M Abdul Raheem has written over 40 books in Tamil. The first Tamil poet to get Sahidhya Academy award is Kavikkoo Andul Rehman. First Muslim novelist to get the same award is Thooppil Muhammed Meeraan.²

Rahmat Publications founded by Singapore M.A. Musthafa with the intention of spreading peace through Tamil is actively involved in translation and publication of Islamic Literary works in Tamil.

As far as music is concerned, the great musicians Nannu miyaan, Gows miyaan, Dhawoodh miyaan have contributed immensely.

Kalaanidhi Sheikh Sinna Mowlaana was invited many times to perform his 'naadhaswara music' in famous Hindu temples.

Two sons of Kalaanidhi Sheikh Sinna Mowlaana Playing 'Nathaswaram in Tirupathi temple festival – Tamil Hindu.

Nahoor Haneefa by his songs and Oscar Award winner A R Rahman by his music has melted many a Tamil heart and brought people together.

¹ Pazha Nedumaran, Contribution of Muslim to the development of Tamil, Dinamani Eidul fitr Souvenir 2016, Page: 64.

² Pazha Nedumaran, Contribution of Muslim to the development of Tamil, Dinamani Eidul fitr Souvenir 2016, Page: 62-64

And nobody can forget the contribution of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, the former President of India to the growth of country, students' community and integrity.

Apart from literature, Muslims have made giant contributions in architecture, traditional medicine, martial arts, varma and many other disciplines of life. Thus, they live in the hearts and minds of Tamil community for ever.

Translation

Translation is not just exchanging the meanings of words from one language to another. It is an art whereby the culture, life-style, civilization, emotions and intelligence of one language are introduced to people of another language. In that aspect, literary works translated from Persian and Arabic into Tamil made a huge impact on our people and increased their respect and reverence towards Islam. Some of such note worthy works are Mowlaana Rumi's Masnavi, Umar Gayaam's works, Imaam Gassali's writings, Khalil Gibran's literatures, Mahmood Dharwesh's works. etc.

Recently, Tamil Nadu Government took efforts to translate ancient and great Tamil literary works in world languages with the earnest intention of bringing in communal harmony and peace. By the order of the Government of Tamil Nadu, Dr. A. Jahir Husain translated Thirukkural, the greatest Tamil literature written over 2,000 years ago and Avvaiyar's Aathichoodi into Arabic. He also translated the selected poems of Subramania Bharati and Erode Tamilanban into Arabic.

3. Service through Education

The greatest educational reformist of India Sir Syed Ahmed Khan founded the Mohamedan Educational Conference in 1886. Thereafter throughout India, Muslims started charities and trust organisation with the main motto of promoting education to the public.

These organisations helped and supported not only Muslims but also all people from all walks of life, all religion and all castes. Some of the note-worthy organisations are:

- Muslim Educational Association of South India (MEASI), Chennai – 1901
- Vaniampadi Muslim Educational Society – 1903
- South Indian Educational Trust (SIET) – 1951
- Sathak Trust – 1973
- Seethakkathi Trust -1967

- Organisation of Muslim Educational Institutions and Association of Tamil Nadu (OMEIAT) - 1973

There are more than 150 educational Institutions in Tamil Nadu started and run by Muslims which provides modern education to everyone irrespective of their religion, caste and economic situation. Some of these institutions are over 50 years old.

These institutions eradicate all forms of discrimination and create equal opportunity in education and multi cultural environment that promote peace in this country. Some of these institutions are over 50 years old.

They never impose Islamic studies on Non-Muslim students. In most cases, majority of the students would be Non-Muslims especially from socially suppressed and economically depressed classes.

In 2005, Karuttha Rowther college was awarded the best by Madurai Kamaraj University in promoting peace and harmony.

Some of the important educational institutions in Tamil Nadu run by Muslims are:

- Melvisaaram, Abdul Hakeem College (1919)
- Vaniampaadi, Islamia College (1921)
- Thiruchy, Jamal Mohamed College (1951)
- The New College, Chennai (1951)
- Adhiraampattinam, Kader Mohideen College (1955)
- Uthamapalayam, Haji Karutharawuththar College (1956)
- Ilayaankudi, Jahir Hussain College, (1970)
- Palaymkottai, Sadakathullah Appa College (1971)

As early as 1914 when education was so scarce even among the affluent society, Karutha Rawuthar started a middle school in Uthama Palayam with the noble intention of providing schooling for all.¹

During the 1950's all the colleges were governed by University of Madras which did not necessarily have Tamil scholars as their head. During this time, Karutha Rawuthar fought tooth and nail to bring a Tamil Scholar as College Principal and succeeded in making Prof. Abdul Gafoor as one.² For many miles in all directions, the college found by Karutha Rawuthar was

¹ M. Gowth Muhideen, Prof. M. Abdul Samad, Haji Karuttha Rowther – 125, Page: 9-10

² M. Gowth Muhideen, Prof. M. Abdul Samad, Haji Karuttha Rowther – 125, Page:26

the only one. He was respected for his service to education by everyone irrespective of their religion. In fact, during the annual celebrations in the local temple there, the temple committee goes to Karutha Rawuthar's house and pays him first respect before even starting the celebrations.¹

In 2005, this college was awarded the best by Madurai Kamaraj University in promoting peace and harmony.

4. Contribution of Darghas

There are more than 50 distinguished Darghas (grave yards of Muslim Sufis) in Tamil Nadu. They stand as symbols of religious harmony and peace. They have some credits for spreading peace and communal harmony in TN. These are centers where people congregate and spread the message to confront the peace breaking the barriers of caste and religion.

In Kottar, Kanyakumari District, there is a shrine for Kassim Waliyulla. The inscriptions therein say Hijri 4 (AC 624)

In Kotharisa mountains of Thirunelveli district, Abdul Rehman Waliulla is buried and therein is written Hijri 8 .

- Nathar Baba in Trichy
- Aliyar Sha in Madurai
- Sulthan Syed Ibrahim in Keezakkarai
- Syed Muhamed Buhari in Anumanthakudi

Above are some of the Arab immigrants that travelled to Tamil Nadu to spread the message of Islam.²

Thackalay Peer Mohammed Waliyulla's songs were compiled and recognised under the greatest of Tamil Sidhas Songs.

It may be true that some of the Darghas exhibit Non-Islamic activities. However, it must be noted that they are symbols of religious tolerance and social harmony.

The right to maintenance of Muhamed Buhari Dargha in Kunagudi is traditionally given to a Hindu family called Thaduppur Ambalakkaarar. We cannot see such religious harmony and peace anywhere else in the world.

¹ M. Gowth Muhideen, Prof. M. Abdul Samad, Haji Karuttha Rowther – 125, Page:14

² S.M. Kamal, Muslims in Tamil Nadu, Page: 12

Darghas do not discriminate people by religion or caste. Feeding people indiscriminately attracted the poorest of the poor who literally lived on these offerings. Till date, entry to dargas is open to everyone.

5. Contribution of Muslim Jama'ath

There are over 1000 Jam'ath in Tamil Nadu. Every Muslim will be a member of anyone of this Jama'ath. This is the administrative set-up of Muslims and these bodies maintain a very good and harmonious relationship with non-Muslim community. Very often they indulge in medical camps, food courts, annual celebrations, student scholarships and such social activities. Very often their services are open to people from all faith and beliefs.

Whenever some fringe elements try to create hatred and problems within and among the community, these Jam'ath bodies work closely with police and maintain peace and harmony.

In 2015, when Chennai was flooded and many thousands of people were affected, the contributions of Muslim Jama'ath in providing, food, clothing, medicine and shelter were applauded by people from all over the state.

Volunteers from Jamath-e-Islami Hind cleaned the Hindu Temples, thus, they were praised and appreciated by top journals including The Hindu.

A man by name Mohamed Yunus rescued 2,100 people during this catastrophic disaster and he was awarded the Anna Award in 2016 by Tamil Nadu Government.

Conclusion:

What can we do to improve peace and harmony among the communities?

- One of the main reasons for the spread of Islam across the world is the honesty of the Arab Muslim trader's, as well as their integrity and straight-forwardness. It is a shame to see that such high praise of our ancestors is fast fading these days. We must inculcate these noble values in our younger generation.
- Quite lately, there is growing trend in sending children to schools run by their caste or community. Giving young children a multi-cultural exposure and being able to interact with people from all walks of life right from young age will greatly help them shape their personality in embracing everyone.

- The principle of 'unity in diversity' will grow deep in to their mind from their tender age. Such multi-cultural schools must be made available for everyone.
- The noble and great literatures from Arab world must be translated into local languages and vice versa.
- Every Muslim must respect the culture and traditions of their neighbors. Islam never promoted hatred and discrimination.
- Muslim Jam'ath must always strive to promote social and communal peace and harmony.
- Social charity works including medical, educational and economical must be made open to everyone irrespective of their faith and belief. Humanity must be served in general.
- Muslims should not isolate themselves. Muslims must take active steps in interacting and integrating with people from other religions and invite them to their home and family functions. The more we isolate ourselves, the harder it will be to build friendship and trust.

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