INTRODUCTION

Education is the most powerful instrument of human development in the modern time. The function of education is to mould the character of individual in order to provide self and social consciousness. Education helps in transmitting as well as transforming culture and civilization of every society. In this way, it contributes for the integration, sustenance and reproduction of thought. Education acts as an integrative force in society by communicating value that unites different sections of society. The educational institutions can help the students, to learn new skills and the art of interacting with people of different social backgrounds. Islamic education is based on religion, particularly studying Qur'an and Hadith. The term ‘Ilm (knowledge in Arabic) can have a broader meaning, embracing knowledge in general in a framework where the teacher, the student, the school, and the syllabus all comply with Islamic values and thoughts. During the period of Abbasid Caliphates (8th Century A.D.) it added some other curriculum such as Geometry, Astronomy, Astrology, Alchemy, Logic, Islamic Law, Geography, Arithmetic, Literature, Philosophy, etc., This education was imparted through ‘Maktabs’ and ‘Madarasahs’.

The primary education was given in Maktabs while higher education was taught in Madarasahs. During the Muslim rule Islamic education received a great patronage of state. The Muslim rulers established Maktabs, Madarasahs, and libraries, adjacent to Masjids (mosques). In later years the religious education was accomplished by scientific learning. The religion based curriculum became prominent in teaching learning process. When the Sultanate rule was founded in the early thirteenth century A.D., number of Madarasahs and Maktabs were

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1 Literally meaning "the recitation", also romanised Qur'an or Koran is the central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God
2 Recorded sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad
3 Primary Education centre for Islamic education
4 Higher study center for Islamic education
5 Jafri Begum, Muslim Society in India, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 2002, p.93
6 Yogendra K. Sharma, History and Problems of India, Oscar Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.84
established and patronized by the rulers. They emerged as a religious learning centre. The Delhi Sultans and Mughal rulers adopted Urdu and Persian as official languages and they became the medium of instruction in the educational institutions of that period.

The colonial era saw huge differences of opinion among the colonialists themselves about education for Indians. This was divided into two schools - the orientalists, and utilitarians. The orientalists who believed that education should happen in Indian languages (of which they favoured classical or court languages like Sanskrit or Persian) or utilitarians like Thomas Babington Macaulay, who strongly believed that India had nothing to teach its own subjects and the best education for them should happen in English. Thomas Babington Macaulay was responsible to introduce English education in India, especially through his famous minute on February 1835. He called an educational system that would create a class of anglicised Indians who would serve as cultural intermediaries between the British and the Indians.

William Bentinck Resolution of 7th March 1835 declared the cutting of financial roots for oriental learning, paved the way for the emergence of English as the most powerful language in British India. The religious missionaries and Madarasahs popularized the vernacular languages along with English in their schools to propagate their religion.\(^7\)

There was a change in the attitude of Muslims in the matter of education during the nineteenth century A.D.\(^8\) The Muslim Community which was lagging behind in the field of western education and employment need an educational system which will cater their religious and economic needs. Such educational system was introduced by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. He had a broader vision and had put forward the need of the hour to get equipped with the modern education to

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\(^8\) A Journal of Indian of Indian Historical Studies, Tiruchirappalli, Vol. I., April 2005, p. 45
improve the social and economical conditions of Muslims of India. The British decision to replace the use of Persian in 1842 for government employment and as the language of Courts of Law caused deep anxiety among Muslims of the subcontinent. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan realized the need for Muslims to acquire proficiency in the English language and Western sciences to maintain its social and political clout, particularly in Northern India. He began to prepare the foundation for the formation of a Muslim University by starting schools at Moradabad in 1858 and Ghazipur in 1863. A Muslim school was established at Aligarh in May 1875, and after his retirement in 1876, Sir Syed dedicated himself to establish a college.

Through the tireless efforts of Sir Syed Ahmed, in January 1877, the Viceroy Lord Lytton laid the foundation stone of the college. It became Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. He organized Muhammadan (later Muslim\(^9\)) Educational Conferences all over the country for spreading the message of the importance of modern education. The first conference was held in Aligarh in 1886. The Muhammadan Educational Conference was responsible for bringing several changes in Muslim education not only in North India but also in the South. Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, the Association for the Service of Islam was founded in 1890, by the initiative of the then Prince of Arcot, M. Munawar Khan Bahadur.\(^{10}\) Subsequently the Muhammadan Literary Society of Madras and Salem Muhammadam Educational Association were established in 1896 in order to promote education among Muslims. In 1899 the Muslims of North Arcot established Anjuman-i-Ahle-Islam with the objective of enhancing the physical and intellectual advancement of its members. These associations functioned independently in different parts of the Presidency and their common objective is to promote education among the Muslim community.

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The 15th Annual session of Muhammadan Educational conference was held in Madras in December 1901 at Cathedral Garden, Teynampet. The success of this conference is reflected in the formation Muhammadan Educational Association of Southern India (MEASI). As a result, Muhammadan Educational Society of Vaniyambadi and Madarase-e-Mazharul Uloom Society of Ambur were established in the year 1903 and 1905.

During this period Muslims started realizing their poor educational accomplishments and this resulted in culmination of efforts towards providing education to their community. They realized the importance of united actions for promoting education among Muslims.

During the first half of the 20th century the Muslims started drifting towards the English education. The post independence period witnessed a great impetus towards modern education. The constitutional provision of India safeguards the religious and cultural practices of Muslims. According to the Indian Constitution, education is included in Union and a State list. Therefore, both the Centre and the States are responsible for its expansion and progress. Education being the catalytic agent of progress and promotion of the society, the Muslims had made sincere efforts towards its growth. The Muslim philanthropist and elites started community colleges to provide modern education to their brethren. The Indian government gave its support to start minority institutions and it made an impact in Tamil Nadu.

Tiruchirappalli is considered to be an early Islamic centre. Most of the mosques in this area have their own religious educational centres known as Madarasah. The Nawabs of Arcot patronized masjids and dargahs with their

12 A., Wassey, Education of Muslim Indian Muslims, Press India International Private Limited, New Delhi, 979, p. 67
13 Granville Austin, Indian constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 53
14 This institution especially started for particular community students.
adjacent learning centres. Later these religious institutions were converted into modern education centre, due to the less response from the Muslim community. The present study is an attempt to trace the contribution of Muslims to the higher education in Tiruchirappalli region, with special reference to higher educational institutions such as Jamal Mohamed College, M.I.E.T. Group of Institutions, AIMAN College for women and M.A.M. Institutions.

**Land and People-Tiruchirappalli**

The name of Tiruchirappalli is Tri-Sira-Pilly (Tri-Sira-Puram) or Place of the three headed demon and it is also called by European scholars –Cirutapalli or the holy Rock Town and Tirucinnapalli or the Holy Little Town. The anglicized form, ‘Trichinolopy’, is the modification of Tiruchinna-palli. At present, it is called as Tiruchirappalli instead of Trichinopoly.

The District is divided into two unequal parts by the River Cauvery, flowing from west to east. The two territorial divisions are traditionally called **Nirarambam** and **Kadarambam**. Rivers like Cauvery, Kollidam, Amaravathy and Nandiyar feed the places coming under **Nirarambam**. A well planned irrigation system provides water facilities not only on the banks of Cauvery but also in the interior too. Musiri, Lalgudi, Tiruchirappalli and Kulithalai Taluks on either side of Cauvery, contain alluvial deposits. They are the fertile regions of Tiruchirappalli. The concentration of the peasant proprietors and agricultural labourers in that area mark the mobility of the people. On the other hand, the **Kadarambam** consist of dry taluks like Udayarpalayam, Perambalur, part of Kulithalai and Musiri, the density of the population is limited. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. Tiruchirappalli had a large chunk of Muslim population living along with the Hindus and Christians. Though Muslims are predominantly a business community, many of them are iron merchants, menial labourers and beedi workers. Few elite groups are engaged leather tanning Industry. This rich merchants and elites of the Muslim community were
contributed large to the growth of education. Their pious thought, economic prosperity and social consciousness were all synchronized, for the establishment of educational institutions.

**Physical Features**

Tiruchirappalli is an inland district, without any coastal line and most centrally located District in the Tamil Nadu State. The District has no marked natural divisions. The Pachamalai Hill is situated partly in Perambalur District and Thuraiyur Taluk and is the important hill in the District. Cauvery and Coleroon are the major rivers, which contribute to the irrigation potential of the district. The presence of innumerable streams and rivulets in the region make drainage not a problem for the District, which is subjected to extremes of climates. The normal average rainfall is about 867.8 mm.

**Topography of Tiruchirappalli**

Tiruchirappalli District is bounded on the east by Thanjavur and Pudukkottai, on the south by Madurai, on the west by Coimbatore and parts of Salem and on the north by Salem and South Arcot Districts. Tiruchirappalli situated principally between $10^\circ 16'$ and $11^\circ 32'$ northern latitude and $78^\circ 8'$ and $79^\circ 30'$ eastern longitude, with an area of 4,500 square miles.

**Scope of the Study**

The area selected for the present study is Tiruchirappalli region and occasional reference would be made to other parts of India. The period chosen for the study is a span of fifty five years, starting from 1951, when Jamal Mohamed College was started which had a greater impact in the development of the education in this region. This study period ends with the year 2006, which marks the submission of Sachar Committee Report, that exposed the condition of Indian Muslims in general and their educational status in particular.
The present study is an attempt to examine how far the Muslim higher educational institutions helped the Muslims to meet the needs of emerging trends. The period between 1951 and 2006 witnesses the transformation of religious oriented education to secular education. The study also attempts to find out the condition of Muslim educational institutions of Tiruchirappalli in the stipulated period.

**Objectives**

- To trace the history of Muslims and their socio-religious condition in Tamil Nadu.
- To trace the origin and development of traditional educational institutions of Muslims in India with special reference to Madarasahs and Maktabs of Tamil Nadu.
- To bring out the formation of Islamic religious educational centres in Tiruchirappalli.
- To focus the growth of modern education in Tiruchirappalli region and its impact on traditional system of education.
- To trace the contribution of Muslim educational institutions towards the socio-economic upliftment of the people of Tiruchirappalli in general and the Muslim community in particular.
- To assess the result of Arts, Science and Technical education among the Muslim community in a changing global scenario.
- To emphasis the significance of Muslim Women education, its result and impact among the Muslim society.

**Hypotheses**

- The Muhammaden Educational conference made an impact on emergence of modern Muslim educational Institutions in India.
• Due to the introduction of western education, the Madarasahs adopted modern education.

• Muslim Philanthropists were responsible for the formation of higher educational institutions in Tamil Nadu as well as in Tiruchirappalli.

• Muslim Higher Educational Institutions of Tiruchirappalli is responsible for the socio-economic development of Muslims of Tiruchirappalli region.

• The introduction of modern education made a remarkable change in the life of Muslim Women.

**Review of Literature**

The study of South Indian Muslim history has been largely neglected for long time by the historians. The recent works of some scholars have concentrated with Socio-Economic and Political activities of Muslims of Tamil Nadu. Few scholars have concerned themselves with the educational condition of Muslim community in the pre-independence India. J. B. P. More has brought out a monograph on “The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamil Nadu and Madras 1930-1947”. It was a novel study on the Modern Muslim community and their Socio-Political identity. He also identified the Muslim response towards the Modern Education in Tamil Nadu.

Salamatullah’s study on “Education of Muslims in Secular India” has brought out some ideas on the transformation of Muslim traditional system of Education into Higher Educational System. He also highlighted the significance of Urdu school through the ages.

Besides these works some Ph.D., dissertations have worth mentioning here. Mr. M. Abdul Rahim’s Ph.D dissertation on “The Muslims of Tamil Nadu (1801-1900 A.D.), Mr. S.Abdul Razak’s “Muslim Education in Tamil Nadu (1850-1900 A.D.) and Mr. M. Howdh Mohideen’s “History of Muslim Education in Tamil Nadu (1854-1920)” are some notable research works. These works are mainly
concerned with the socio-economic history of Muslim of Colonial India with special reference to religious educational institutions.

Mr. A. Asraf Ali has produced a research work focuses on, “Services of Muslims to Higher Education in Tamil Nadu (1902-1984)”. This research work focuses the development of Muslim Higher Education with special reference to Muhammadan Educational Association of South India (MEASI) and its contribution. He also highlights the development of Muslim Women Education in Tamil Nadu.

The dissertation submitted to Universities by research scholars provide very good pieces of information about the Socio-Economic conditions of Tamil Nadu. However, these works are identified as a macro level study on Pre Independent Muslim communities and their Educational condition. No work has so far done on this subject and the present study fulfill the gaps of the history of Muslim education.

**Sources of Information**

Primary and secondary sources were consulted for the preparation of the thesis. The primary sources which were consulted to carry out this study are mainly from Tamilnadu State Archives and Adyar Theosophical Society Library, Chennai. Major records are the official documents such as Public Department Records of 1885-2007, Education Department Records of 1947-2007, and Government Orders of Public (General) Department.

Besides that, the primary sources were also collected from Jamal Mohamed College, Tiruchirappalli, Jamia Anwarul Uloom Arabic College M.I.E.T. Group of Institutions, AIMAN College for women and M.A.M. Institutions and other related institutions. The annual reports, special souvenirs, Alumni reports Volume, Magazines and Journals were collected from these colleges.

Methodology

The methods adopted in this present research work are analytical, historical and descriptive. To fulfill the study the statistical tools and the personal interviews were also conducted during the field visit. The sources were collected from the documents as well as field visits.

Chapter Plan

This Study is divided into six chapters, excluding Introduction and Conclusion. The introduction reveals the objectives and scope of the study, sources of information, hypothesis, review of literature, methodology and plan of chapters.

It also deals with the evolution of Muslim education in India with special reference to Tamil Nadu. The colonial policy on education and the growth of Muslim educational institutions in Tamil Nadu are enumerated.

The *First Chapter* is entitled as the historical background of Muslims in Tamil Nadu. It traces the introduction of Islam along with Arab traders in Tamil
Nadu. It also deals with the socio-economic and religious status of early Muslim community of Tamil country.

The **Second Chapter** is entitled as An Islamic Perspective of Education, its genesis and growth. This chapter analyses the history of traditional education in India from ancient times and different transformation that took place with the political changes in the epoch of history. It also examines the Muslim educational traditions in north India during the medieval period and traces the condition of education in Tamil Nadu. It outlines the response of Muslims towards the modern education.

The **Third Chapter** is Education in Tiruchirappalli. This chapter examines the factors responsible for the formation of Islamic Religious Education in general and establishment of the Arabic Colleges and the organization of the Religious Institutions of Tiruchirappalli in particular. It also highlights the British and missionary efforts towards the growth of modern education in Tiruchirappalli. Further it traces the impact of western system of education on traditional educational system of Muslims.

The **Fourth Chapter** is Arts and Science Higher Educational Institutions of Muslims in Tiruchirappalli. It brings out the history of the establishment of Arts and Science Colleges in Tiruchirappalli like Jamal Mohamed College, M.I.E.T. Arts and Science College. This chapter deals with the administration, functioning and academic achievements of the institutions of study area. This chapter gives more priority to the Jamal Mohamed College which was started in the year 1951 and also consider as one of the leading Muslim Higher educational institutions of this region.

The **Fifth Chapter** is Technical Educational Institutions of Muslims in Tiruchirappalli. It highlights the foundation of Technical Educational institutions in Tiruchirappalli during the last decades of 20th century. Further it discusses the administration, functions and achievements Muslim technical institutions such as
M.I.E.T., M.A.M. and Al-Ameen ITI. This chapter deals with the Muslim elite’s realization of the changing tides in the field of education and founding of M.I.E.T., M.A.M., and Al-Ameen ITI. It also converse about the role of Muslim Educationalists and their contribution towards the establishment of the Technical Institutions.

The **Sixth Chapter** is Muslim Educational Institutions for Women in Tiruchirappalli. It traces the origin and development of women’s education in India with reference to the educational conditions of Muslim women in Tiruchirappalli. It traces the origin and growth of Muslim women educational centres of Tamil Nadu with special reference to Tiruchirappalli. It also focuses on the women educational institutions like Jamal Mohamed College for Women and AIMAN Arts and Science College for women.

The major findings and suggestions are enumerated in the concluding part of the thesis.
CHAPTER I
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MUSLIMS IN TAMIL NADU

The major source for the study of South Indian Muslim Society, culture and religion is collected from various forms like historical accounts, poetry, literature and biography, dating from at least the Sixteenth Century onwards. This literature served as a mirror, in which is reflected the lives of the Muslims, their central concerns and pre-occupations, their beliefs, traditions and values. It may also shed light on their origin and evolution in a predominantly Hindu milieu. Islam took root in South India well before the waves of invasions from Central Asia which gave rise to medieval Muslim Sultanate in North India. The early spread of Islam was associated with the expansion of South India’s wide ranging maritime trade network. A chain of Muslim trading settlements grew up along the east from Pulicat to Colochel in Kanyakumari. Many of these Muslim settlements were located in the coastal towns of Thanjavur, Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli districts.¹

The beginning of the Muslim contact with South India was not an accident but a continuation of the ancient commercial intercourse between the Arab and the people of South India and the Arabs were the captains of Indian commerce. They came as traders and not as conquerors and they accommodated themselves readily to the condition of the localities where profitable trade could be pursued. The Arabs were versatile in many skills and knowledgeable in many spheres of learning-as traders, manufactures, navigators, warriors, geographers and also scholars.

The Arab merchants who came to the coastal region of peninsular India for the purpose of trade either contracted marriages or settled in their places of adoption and married local women temporarily or permanently. The Arab mariners must have practiced a sort of ‘muta marriage’² while they were in the ports of South India.

² Temporary marriage with a woman for stipulated period.
The Arab inscription of Tiruchirappalli, 734 A.D. and the inscription of the Ninth century A.D. at Kayalpattanam about endowments given to the mosque by Pandya rulers are conclusive evidence about the presence of Muslims in Tamil Nadu right from Eighth century A.D. The tombs of the early missionaries such as that of Kassim (Wali\(^3\)) 624 A.D., and Abdul Rahman (Wali) 628 A.D., are found in Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli Districts respectively are living monuments of Muslim existence in Tamil Country. Islam slowly penetrated into the hinterland also. At the Chola capital Uraiyyur, (modern Tiruchirappalli) the earliest mosque in Tamil Nadu can be seen. It is near the Fort Railway Station in Tiruchirappalli town in the form of a small mandapa mandapam and the Arabic inscription here inform us that it was built by Abdulla bin Mohamed Anwar in 734 A.D.\(^4\) So Islam had got a firm footing on the Coromandel Coast and its hinterland even in the early years of the Hijra.\(^5\) It is significant to note that the Muslims of Madura and the adjoining regions claim to have been converted by early Muslim Sufis in the Tamil Country like Nathar Wali.\(^6\)

The native Hindu rulers of South India like Rastrakutas, Kakathyas, Hoysalas, Pandyas and Cholas encouraged the settlements of the Muslim traders in their dominion offering special concessions and inducements because of the profitable foreign trade. Further, the Arabs were favoured because they supplied horses to the South Indian states, cavalry and men for manning their ships. The rulers assured safety to their merchandise by providing manpower.

**Ethnicity of Muslims of Tamil Nadu**

In the old Tamil literature, the word ‘Yavana’ has been used to denote Greeks and Romans. But in medieval and modern Tamil literature, the word seems to have been generally used to denote Arabs. More than ‘Yavana’, the word ‘Sonagan’ is commonly used to designate the Muslims and the Arabs. It is interesting to note that the commentator of *Pattupatu, Naccinarkkiniyar*, uses the

\(^3\) The term Wali denotes a divinely inspired leader; saint.


\(^5\) A transvestite or eunuch.

\(^6\) Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Indian Press, Allahabad, 1936, p. 40
word ‘Sonagan’ wherever the word ‘Yavana’ occurs. The word Sonagam actually signifies Arabia in Tamil literature. Therefore, ‘Sonagan’ seems to be the earliest term used to signify Arab Muslim traders. This term was also gradually extended to refer the Tamil Muslim Communities which came into existence later.

Generally it seems that during the medieval period, horsemen serving under Hindu kings were known by the term ‘Ravat’ or ‘Ravuta’. The term ‘Ravuttan’ seems to have been in use in Tamil literature at least from the Eighth Century onwards. In the Fourteenth Century, Amir Khusro himself uses the word ‘Ravut’ to describe Hindu horsemen who made an unsuccessful attack on the Delhi Sultan’s army in the Telugu country. It is quite possible that the word ‘Ravuta’ was retained by Tamil Muslim military men and their descendants in the Madura Country as a title from this period onwards.

The word “Tulukar”, derived from the original ‘Rurk’ or ‘Turki’ came into use in the Tamil country to refer to the Muslims. Tamil-speaking Muslims also were referred to as ‘Tulukars’. In Tamil literature and in temple inscriptions too, the word ‘Turukar’ was utilized extensively. Thus ‘Sonag’, ‘Ravuttar’ and ‘Tulukar’ were the three terms in vogue to denote Tamil Muslims at least until about the Sixteenth Century A.D.

While the word ‘Sonagar’ was losing its importance, two other words ‘Marakkayar’ and ‘Labbai’ seemed to be gradually taking its place during the Seventeenth century. Thurston applies the word ‘Sonagan’ to ‘Labbais’ who were sea-fishermen and boatmen while the more prosperous traders were called ‘Marakkayars’.

The term ‘Marakkayar’ is probably derived from ‘Marakalarayar’ which may mean those who controlled or owned boats. In Tamil, ‘Marakalam’ signifies

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7. A. K.Rifayee, Tamizhakathil Islamiyar Varalaru (Tamil), Tenkasi, 1988, pp.131-132
wooden boat and ‘rayar’ means king. Thus the term ‘Marakkayar’ which literally means ‘boat people’.

The term ‘Labbai’ is usually taken to mean people who are religious or follow religious occupations. The resemblance to the Hebrew ‘Levi’ is interesting. Anyhow, it should be noted that many Marakkayars have always used the term ‘Labbai’ along with their names. This could very well mean that the Marakkayars never considered the term ‘Labbai’ for all Tamil Muslims including the Marakkayars.

Labbais were not only found on the coast but also in interior lands like Thanjavur and Madurai. Many Labbais of these hinterlands have adopted the old prestigious title of ‘Ravuttar’. Generally it seems that Tamil Muslims of the interior lands were Hanafites, while the Marakkayars were Shafites.

But unlike the Madras Urdu-speaking Muslims and their counterparts in the Deccan and North India and also the Mappillas of Malabar, Tamil Muslim sub-divisions were not hierarchically ranked but were of approximately equal status. Among the Madras Urdu-speaking Muslims, as in the Deccan and North India, it is claimed that there is a division between the Ashraf and Ajlaf. Ashrafs, who are generally of foreign origin, are considered to be superior to the Ajlafs who are indigenous converts to Islam. Among the Ashraf, the Sayyids are ranked first because of their close ties with the Prophet while the Sheikhs, Mughals and Pathans follow the Sayyids. A similar situation prevails in the Malabar where the Tangals who claim to have blood relation with the Prophet, are of the highest rank while the other groups, Arabis, Malabaris, Pusalars and Ossans, are ranked below them. Among Tamil Muslims, however, such notions of caste hierarchies are absent. This gives on them a distinct identity in the Indian religious landscape and distinguishes them from the Madras Urdu-speaking Muslims. Anyhow Tamil Muslim literature seems to treat all Muslim sub-divisions on an equal footing.

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10 W. Francis, Madras District Gazetteer-South Arcot, Madras, 1906, pp. 86-87
11 The Hanafi School is one of the four Madhahabs in jurisprudence within the Sunni Islam.
12 The Shafi School is one of the four Madhahabs in jurisprudence within the Sunni Islam.
13 Mines, Mattison, Social Stratification among Muslims Tamils in Tamilnadu, Delhi, 1978, p.34.
According to Arasaratnam they were socially equal, though there may have been economic disparities between them. However, Bayly seems to hold a contrary view. She claims that the Marakkayars were the first Tamil Muslims having Arab ancestry while the rest, that is, the Labbais and Rawthers were all later converts. But in Tamil literature, there seems to be clear reference to the Muslims as ‘Sonagars’ and ‘Ravuttars’ from at least the Eighth Century. Neither Marakkayars nor Labbais figure in the literature of this period or even much later upto at least the Seventeenth Century. Further, there is no evidence in the literature of this period marking the Marakkayars as superior to other Tamil Muslims.

Further, it has been recorded by Thurston that the Marakkayars were actually admitting converts from the untouchable groups into their ranks. During the last century, many Mukkuwa fishermen were converted to Islam in Karikal. They have mixed and mingled with the Marakkayars to such an extent that there is no trace of them now. This seems to be more in conformity with the Islamic ideology of egalitarianism than with any social hierarchy.

Muslim Literary Tradition of Tamil Country

Further, Muslim literature contains valuable details regarding the religious, cultural and social lives of Muslims. Though there is no Tamil Muslim literature dating to before the Sixteenth Century, recently some Tamil Muslim scholars have claimed with some confidence that there were literary works by Tamil Muslims even earlier. They cite as proof a small work of eight stanzas called ‘Palsanthamalai’, probably of the Fourteenth Century. Whatever be the truth, the work itself contains some interesting details. It actually refers to ‘Sonagars’ who praise Allah and also refers to a king of the ‘Sonagars’ who was a great philanthropist.

‘Aayiram Masala’ and ‘Mikurasu Malai’ are the oldest examples of Tamil Muslim literature of the Sixteenth Century. The former was sung by Seyku Issaaku Pulavar, inspired by the philanthropy of a certain ‘Karuparu Kavalar’

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14 S. Arasaratnam, Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, pp. 117-118.
alias Mahumudu Naina Marakkayar. The latter was sung by Aali Pulavar, depicting the ascension to heaven of Mohammed.\textsuperscript{15} During the Seventeenth Century, Umaru Pulavar composed the ‘Sira Puranam’ which is hailed as the crowning achievement of Tamil Muslim literature. It contains a vivid description of the Prophet Mohammad’s life. Umaru seems to be very much indebted to the generosity of Abul Kasim Marakkayar, without whose help he probably could never have sung this song. Some hold that Seyed Abdul Qadir Marakkayar, known popularly as ‘Seethakathi’ also helped him in his venture.\textsuperscript{16} Seethakathi, is regarded by Tamil Muslims as the greatest philanthropist in Tamil Muslim history.\textsuperscript{17}

Three other poets, prompted by the generosity of another great philanthropist, Lebbai Naina Marakkayar, completed the Sira Puranam, by writing the Sinna Sira. Other important Tamil Muslim works, probably belonging to the Seventeenth Century are, Thiruneri Neetham’, ‘Kanakabisheka Maalai’ and ‘Tirumana Katchi’. Works like ‘Rajanayagam’, ‘Kutbunayagam’, ‘Thirumani Maalai’, ‘Pudukusham’ and ‘Navamani Maalai’ seem to have been created during the Nineteenth Century.

On the basis of evidence available in the libraries in Tamil Nadu, Paris and London, it appears certain that hundreds of Tamil Muslim poets were involved in the creation of more than a thousand literary works. A larger number of these are in praise of Allah and the Prophet Mohammed while sizeable portions of the rest sing the praises of the Prophet and saintly men of Islam. Many other works deal with Islamic theology, morals and jurisprudence. Generally, Tamil Muslim poets have adopted Tamil literary forms in the creation of their works. Some poets also wrote poems using the Arabic script.

As far as the Sira Puranam of Umaru is concerned, “main sources are undoubtedly drawn from the classical Islamic traditions; the borrowed Tamil or

\textsuperscript{16} Ameer, Ali, Vallal Seethakathiyan Vazhvum Kaalamum (Tamil), Madras, 1983, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{17} K.M. Sheriff, Vallal Seethakathiyan Varalaru (Tamil), Madras, 1985, p. 67.
Hindu features merely colour a work in the Muslim mainstream”. In fact, it seems that whereas Umaru expounds true Islamic principles, in many other places, he stresses the central belief of Islam in the oneness of God.

This shows that the fundamental concern of Umaru was Islam, though now and then he makes use of Tamil Hindu features to drive home his message among predominantly non-Muslim populations. This was the case with other Tamil Muslim poets and authors too, who adopted Tamil Hindu forms and ways to express Islamic traditions and values. In other words, the central concern of the works of these poets was Islam, its principal beliefs, traditions and values while the Tamil Hindu features found in their works were purely an adjustment they had to make in a predominantly non-Islamic Hindu milieu. This adjustment does not seem to compromise their central Islamic beliefs and identity. Actually, through this adjustment, Tamil Muslims seem to have asserted themselves as a distinct group in South Indian Muslim Society. Such an adjustment seems to have existed well into the Nineteenth Century. It should also be noted that the central inspiration of the works of Tamil Muslim poets springs from Arab-Islamic sources. All these factors constitute an important dimension in the understanding of Tamil Muslim psyche and culture. Moreover, one should not fail to note the profound linguistic dimension in Tamil Muslims’ historical evolution, as reflected in their literature.

Unlike Tamil Muslim literature, Muslim literature in Arabic, Persian and Urdu created by South Indian Urdu-speakers from the Eighteenth Century onwards, drew its inspiration not only from Arab-Islamic Sources but also from Persian Sources. Here too it can be find that very much like in Tamil Muslim literature, affirmation of the centrality of Islam, its fundamental beliefs and values. But on the whole it would seem that Hindu influences are much less in these literatures than in Tamil Muslim literature. On the other hand, a high dose of Persian influence is to be found in them.


In her study of Muslims of South India, Susan Bayly has asserted that the Muslims share with the Hindus many common features, especially regarding the State and divine power. She has also viewed the masculine Sufi saint, the embodiment of both male and female energy, as the fundamental concept of divine power in Hinduism. But the Sufis of south India never seem to have stood for such a concept of divine power. In their biographies, it has been stated repeatedly that the supernatural and healing power of the Sufis and their punishing and rewarding capabilities are due to the Grace of Allah.

Moreover, the Sufis never contest the superiority of the Prophet. They recite their prayers and even go to Mecca. Their supposed transcendence is just a subject of philosophical and scholarly speculation rather than popular belief. On the other hand, the biographies of the Sufis have always portrayed them as more powerful than Hindu yogis, images and even kings.

In short, it should be noted that Muslim religious life in South India or Tamil Nadu has two orientations; mosques and Dargahs. While the mosque-based traditions are deeply Islamic, the dargah-oriented traditions certainly contain many un-Islamic features. But once again it has to be recognized that these features do not deny the centrality of Allah and the superiority of the Prophet or other Islamic principles like brotherhood and equality. This can be easily ascertained by a perusal of Muslim biographical literature of South India in Tamil, Urdu, Arabic and Persian.

The *Nagore Puranam*, sung in early Eighteenth Century by Seyku Abdul Qadir Nayinar Pulavar, portrays the life of the most prominent Sufi saint of South India, Shahul Hameed, whose tomb is at Nagore. Actually, the poet borrowed the material for his song from one Ahmed Labbai Alim. Shahul Hameed is shown as visiting Islamic countries like Iraq and Turkey and

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21 Tombs of saints.
performing Haj\textsuperscript{23} before entering South India where he inspired the conversion of many Hindus to Islam.

About a century later, Gulam Kadir Navalar of Nagore sang his own Nagore Puranam. He was actually requested by a wealthy philanthropist, Sikkandar Ravuttar, who patronized the poet for compiling this work. Even an Arabic biography on Shahul Hameed, known as \textit{Mawaki Ful Majid-bi-Manahi Ful Shahul Hameed}, was written by Allama Mappilai Labbai Alim. This was rendered into Tamil in 1961. A perusal of this biography shows the centrality of Islam’s fundamental principles in it. It proves the superiority of Shahul Hameed who by the Grace of Allah performed many feats and miracles that no other non-Islamic saint could equal or surpass.

The above traits can also be found in poems and biographies on the Sufis of South India. \textit{Theen Vilakkam}, written around 1815, portrays the life and feats of Ibrahim Shahid, a Twelfth Century Sufi of Ervadi in Tinnevely. The material for writing this poem was obtained from one Seyed Ibrahim Labbai. Here too, the centrality of Allah and the Prophet is stressed. Actually, Ibrahim Shahid submits himself to them, while undertaking his ventures.\textsuperscript{24}

Similarly the \textit{Bahar-i-azam Jahi}, written during the rule of the Nawab of Arcot, Walajah IV, describes the Sufi shrines visited by him in 1823.\textsuperscript{25} Any casual reader will note in this work too, the centrality of Islam and its fundamental principles. This characteristic can also be seen in Sayyid Shah Abdul Hasan Qurbi, a prominent Sufi of Vellore of the eighteenth century. He is credited with many miracles, which he was able to perform due to the favour shown to him by Allah. Another Sufi of the Eighteenth Century, Shaikh Abdul Haqq Savi, is credited by the poet Muhammad Najib as the author of one hundred books. Najib claims that all these compilation reflect the subjection of the Sufis to Allah and His Prophet, though many characteristics of their lives may betray Hindu influences. There may be exceptions to this rule. But the

\textsuperscript{23} The annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.
intention here is to underline the general characteristics, trends and tendencies of the majority of the Sufis of South India.

It has also been generally admitted that the Sufis attract devotees from all religions, castes and classes. This again is in conformity with the central principle of Islamic egalitarianism. The respect and veneration in which they are generally held by people of various faiths, has created in course of time a feeling that they did not face much resistance or opposition from the predominantly Hindu Society. Though there was certainly a syncretic element represented by the Sufis and their dargahs, given the fact that their tombs are visited by many Hindus and Christians too, yet the majority of Sufis are subject to Allah and the Prophet and the fundamental Islamic Principles. Besides, whatever may be the nature of the syncretism\textsuperscript{26} in operation it certainly did not overwhelm or overshadow the Islamic identity of the Sufis. As a matter of fact, Sufis have always appeared to be the principal agents of conversion to Islam in South India.

But the indubitable Islamic Identity of Sufis, contrary to all popular or scholarly notions and feelings, seems to have attracted towards them not only devotees but also considerable opposition, at least as far as the Tamil Country is concerned. For instance, it is generally believed by Muslims that the Twelfth Century Sufi Saint Ibrahim Shahid, whose tomb is at Ervadi in Ramnathapuram, came from Arabia to South India to spread Islam. It seems that he wanted to preach Islam in Madurai against the wishes of the Hindu Pandya King.\textsuperscript{27} He is actually believed to have defeated the Hindu King and seems to have spread Islam in Madurai region. But subsequently he had to wage wars with the Pandya Kings. Though he was finally vanquished and killed by one of the Pandya Kings, he is nevertheless hailed as the foremost of the Islamic Martyrs of South India.

Similar opposition to Sufi Saints seems to have prevailed in other areas of the Tamil Country. For instance, in the Karaikal region on the southern Coromandel Coast, there lived during the first half of the Nineteenth Century, a

\textsuperscript{26} The amalgamation of different religion, Culture.
\textsuperscript{27} J. M. Sali, \textit{Tamizhakathu Tarkakkal, op.cit., p. 183.}
prominent Sufi Saint known as Masthan Sahib, hailing from Bukhara. Though the saint seems to prove his superior power by making Hindu yogis bow down to him and Hindu idols to obey his orders, yet the fact remains that he did face opposition from Hindus. They actually resented his preaching Islam in Karaikal. A local Hindu priest seems to have even convinced some rich Hindus that Masthan Sahib and the Muslims who came to see him, were talking ill of the Hindus. This fact is amply attested by the French archival records. From them we know of the frequent clashes of interests between Hindus and Muslims.

While the core of Muslim life are, observance of the five pillar of Islam, that is, belief in one God, performance of Haj, and Zakat\(^{28}\), Fasting and Daily Prayers, other fundamentals are celebration of Muslim festivals, belief in the Resurrection and the Last Judgment and in the principles of Islamic Brotherhood and Equality. Islam asserts its centrality through the observance of Nikkah\(^{29}\), Muslims actually manage to retain many of the Hindu customs in marriage ceremonies by modifying them so as not to create fundamental contradictions in their lives as Muslims. It should be noted that these Islamic core values directly contradict the core values of Hinduism as it came to be practised like belief in the theory of karma and rebirth and the social inequality of human beings. On the whole, it seems that Islam in the course of its expansion in South Asia, had the capacity to adapt to the local environment and geography, in a way that did not jeopardize the purity of its central tenets while being as flexible as possible in the non-central or peripheral areas to accommodate those indigenous customs and traditions that did not challenge the core tenets.

As noted earlier, the same sort of accommodation seems to have operated in Muslim literature and Sufi lives and traditions, where the centrality of Islam and its core principles are maintained invariably. Actually all this forms a major part of the historical conditioning which contributed to the social and cultural

\(^{28}\) The obligatory tax that every Muslim must give it. It is one of the five pillars of Islam.

\(^{29}\) A word which, in its literal sense signifies conjunction, but which in the language of the law implies the marriage contract.
evolution of the Muslims of South India. This conditioning gave birth to certain attachments which would have implications at the political level during the first half of the Twentieth Century. Unless we recognize this, we cannot logically explain these implications.

**Emergence of Tamil Muslims and their Political Revival**

All India Muhammaden Educational Conference at Dhaka, which laid the foundation of Muslim League in 1906 under Nawab Wiqar-ul-Mulk. He was one of the founders of the Muslim League. In December 1906, the quartet Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk, Sir Agha Khan, Sir Shafi of Lahore and Nawab Salimullah Khan of Dhaka organized an All India Muhammaden Educational Conference in Dacca and on the same occasion, they also launched a new party called *Muslim League*. Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk became the First General Secretary of the Party. It protested against the partition of Bengal in 1905. Its original political goal was to define and advance the Indian Muslim's civil rights and to provide protection to upper and gentry class of Indian Muslims. From 1906–1930, the party worked on its organizational structure, its credibility in all over the Muslim communities of British Indian Empire.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah, earlier a prominent Muslim member of the Congress, assumed leadership of the league in later period. In 1906 he joined the congress himself. In 1912, Jinnah attended a meeting of the All India Muslim League, prompting him to join the league the following year. Jinnah would later join yet another political party, the Home Rule League, which was dedicated to the cause of a state’s right to self-government. As a member of Congress, Jinnah at first collaborated with Hindu leaders as their Ambassador of Hindu Muslim Unity, while working with the Muslim League simultaneously. Gradually, Jinnah realized that the Hindu leaders of Congress held a political agenda that was incongruent with his own. Earlier he had been aligned with their opposition to separate electorates meant to guarantee a fixed percentage of legislative

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representation for Muslims and Hindus. But in 1926, Jinnah shifted to the opposite view and began supporting separate electorates. Still, overall, he retained the belief that the rights of Muslims could be protected in a united India. At that stage of his political career, Jinnah left Congress and dedicated himself more fully to the Muslim League. During the 1930s Jinnah attended the Anglo-Indian Round Table Conferences in London, and led the reorganization of the All India Muslim League.\textsuperscript{31}

Towards the end of 1920s Muslims were divided themselves in political and organizational levels. The main organizations were the All India \textit{Khilafat}\textsuperscript{32} Committee, the All India Muslim Conference, the All India Muslim League led by Shafi and the other by Jinnah. In Madras Presidency Muslims were generally split between the provincial branches of above Muslim organizations, that is Madras Presidency \textit{Khilafat} Committee, the Madras Presidency Muslim Conference and the factions of Madras Presidency Muslim League\textsuperscript{33}, one led by Abdul Latif Farooki\textsuperscript{34} and S.M.Pasha and other being the official Muslim League. In 1928 Syed Murtuza\textsuperscript{35} of Tiruchirappalli became the President of Official MPML. During the 20\textsuperscript{th} century a wealthy class of merchant of Muslim had emerged in politics, holding monopolies in certain industries like Leather, Hides, Skins and Beedi. In 1900, the Jamalia Arabic College was at Perambur, near Madras by the rich Muslim merchant Jamal Mohideen Rowthar. The founding of this college was the first sign of Muslim assertiveness in the Capital as far as the educational field was concerned. Two years later Muhammadan Educational Association of South India (MESAI) was founded by a group of Muslims which became a prominent educational organization in the Presidency

\textsuperscript{31} Ian Bryant Wells, \textit{Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity: Jinnah’s Early Politics}, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 206-211.

\textsuperscript{32} The chief spiritual authority of Islam as exercised by the Turkish sultans

\textsuperscript{33} The Madras Presidency Muslim League (Hereafter MPML) was founded in the year 1908.

\textsuperscript{34} Abdul Latif Farooki (1893-1982) belonging to the princely family of Arcot; Participated in the Khilafat agitation; editor of the Urdu journal Azad Hind, Mussalman; became member of MPML in 1940; elected council of Madras in 1946 as League candidate.

\textsuperscript{35} Born in 1880; participated in the Khilafat agitation; President of the Muslim League of Madras 1928-29; member of the Muslim parliamentary board of Madras, 1936.
The revived All India Muslim League (AIML) under Jinnah seems to have been very inclined to avoid a confrontation with the Congress. Consequently an informal understanding was reached with the Congress to form coalition governments after the 1937 elections.\(^{36}\) The main parties of the Madras Presidency, which were the Congress, the Justice party and the Muslim League, set about to woo the Muslims in view of the forthcoming elections. As far as the Justice party was concerned, Sir Mohammed Usman, the only prominent Muslim member in Justice Party. But he failed to get the support of Muslim for that party. Attempts were also made by the Justice Party members to get the support of Nawab C. Abdul Hakim, the foremost Muslim leader of North Arcot for the election of 1937. But generally the prospects of the Justice party in the forthcoming elections were not bright at all. Sir Mohamed Usman\(^ {37}\) (a member of Justice Party) elected as a president of MEASI in 1930 and among the four vice-presidents were also Nawab C. Abdul Hakim, Jamal Mohamed, Son of Jamal Mohideen and both prominent Muslim merchants. These elites were responsible to the establishment of early Muslim educational institutions in the Presidency. These political background and sound financial condition played a vital role in social and educational upliftment of the Muslim society.

Yakub Hasan Sait\(^ {38}\), the erstwhile Khilafatist, threw an unassailable position within the party which could not be challenged by any other political leader. He strongly condemned Sir Mohammed Iqbal’s idea of a separate Muslim state and came out strongly in favour of a common Indian nationality comprising Hindus and Muslims.\(^ {39}\)

During this period, many leading Muslim of the Presidency like Yakub Khan Sait, Abdul Hakim, Syed Murtaza and Abdul Hameed Khan were sympathetic to both the League and the Congress. The revival of the League was

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\(^{37}\) Born in 1884; first secretary of Justice Party; Governor of Madras for a brief period in 1934; nominated member of the Legislative Council of Madras in 1937.

\(^{38}\) Born in 1875; Participated in Khilafat agitation; one of the founder-members of All India Muslim League and the Madras Presidency Muslim League; elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly as a Congress candidate; minister of Public Works, 1937-39.

\(^{39}\) Madras Mail, 3rd January, 1936; Sunday Chronicle 14th May 1933.
quite a tough test of their political loyalties. Though they were mostly Congress-minded, they could not be unsympathetic to the Muslim League.

In spite of the dual loyalty of many Muslims, Yakub Khan Sait was represented the Congress Muslims. Here is an example of a Muslims, so committed to Islam and the Caliphate in the past, suddenly realizing the impracticability of such an attachment and becoming a staunch nationalist and supporter of the Congress. Many other Muslims during this period were in a similar position as Yakub Khan Sait.

The revival of the Madras Presidency Muslim League (MPML) was accompanied by an acute intra-party struggle for party power. In 1930 Jamal Mohammed, who actually took over presidency of the party from Syed Murturza, had gradually brought the party under his control.

Four leading Muslims of the Presidency were included as members of the League central parliamentary board, constituted in view of the 1937 elections. They were Jamal Mohamed, President of the MPML, Abdul Hameed Khan, Mayor of Madras, Syed Murtuza, member of Central Legislative Assembly and B.Pocker of Malabar.

Nawab C.Abdul Hakim an influential merchant with strong local support among Muslims in his home district of North Arcot, realizing the implications of recent developments in Muslim politics for his political future, decided rapidly to strike an independent course by founding the Muslim Progressive party on 24th July 1936. This party was willing to work on reforms and cooperate with any party in the Assembly which had liberal views and which would at the same time advance the cause of the Muslims. Nawab C.Abdul Hakim was elected as party

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40 Born in 1894; Supported of the Khilafat agitation; first Muslim Mayor of Madras in 1935-36; elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly as League Candidate in 1937 and 1946; served as Diwan for the Prince of Arcot till his death.
41 One of the founding members of the Madras Presidency Muslim League in 1908; He founded The Melvisharam Muslim Educational Society in 1919. He was, a leading Business Magnate, Philanthropist and Founder President of the Melvisharam Muslim Educational Society.
42 Madras Mail, 25th July 1936.
president, with S.M. Pasha as deputy leader and Abdul Latif Farookhi as general secretary.

The provincial board of MPML was constituted during the 2nd August meeting itself with Jamal Mohamed as President, Abdul Hakim, Syed Murtuza, Abdul Kareem, Uppi Saheb and Umarali Shah as vice-presidents, Abdul Hameed Khan, Pocker Saheb and K.T.M. Ahmed Ibrahim as secretaries and Kaka Mohamed Ismail as treasurer. The working committee members were Packdeem Abdul Khader, Shifa-ul-Mulk, Hakim Syed Maqdoom Ashraf, A.G. Abdul Rahim, Yakub Hasan Sait, P.Khalifullah, K.P.V.S. Mohamed Meera Rowther, M.Mohamed Ismail, Abdul Sattar Khan of Kurnool and Mohamed Rahamatullah of Anantapur. The election performance of the League was noteworthy; they had won eleven seats in the Legislative Assembly of Madras Presidency in the 1937 election.

These Muslim merchants were also generally known for their philanthropic and religious activities. Nawab C.Abdul Hakim was liberal supporter of number of educational, charitable, and religious institutions. He had donated liberally to Arabic Madarasahs, for the building of Mosques, etc. Jamal Mohamed was also a great philanthropist and had taken interest in religious activities. In fact the prime Muslim Madarasah of Presidency, Madarasah Jamalia was under his management. The Principal of this Madarasah, Abdul Wahab Buhari was elected to the Madras council in 1937.

On the whole the philanthropic and religious activities of Muslim leaders of South India were in total conformity with their historical traditions and moorings from at least the fourteenth century. They were also in conformity with the high principles of Islam and Islamic model of social relations between the

43 Born in Bellary in 1886; President of Madras Presidency Muslim League 1941-45;
44 He was born in Tiruchirappalli in 1888; he was elected to Madras Legislative Assembly as League candidate in 1937; Interim Minster in 1937; supporter of Self-Respect Movement; Administrator of the Principality of Pudukkottai.
45 M.Sadakathullah, Vallal Perumagan, Melvisharam, 1980, p. 49.
46 Ibid., p. 15; see also K. Mc Pherson, Political Development of Urdu and Tamil speaking Muslims of Madras Presidency, 1901-1937, M.A. dissertation, University of Western Australia, 1968, p. 262.
wealthy and the others. These pioneer merchant who were religiously
disciplined, whether belonging to the Congress or the Muslim parities, never
really wanted any abrupt change in the existing political, social and economical
system. By their participation in the politics of presidency, they seem to have
accepted the inevitability of the constitutional evolution towards freedom. All
that they seem to have wanted was what they considered as their legitimate share
in the political process and in the educational, employment and economic feels.

Generally the Muslims of Tamil Nadu were not just bound
psychologically to the wider Islamic world, centralized around *Quran* and
*Hadith*. They were also bound to their respective languages, cultural and
historical backgrounds. Their class of distinction was based on their economic
background. Further the Muslim cultural factor involved in Muslim elite interest.
Every society has its elites. Likewise Muslim society also had its elites. These
elites became mobilizing force in the socio-economic and cultural life of the
Muslims of Tamil Nadu. The elites and merchants were initially started religious
educational centres such as *Madarasahs* and Arabic Colleges which paved the
way for the establishment of modern institutions like schools and colleges in
their premises.