

# Fountains of Islamic Education in Ancient Tamilnadu: A Historical Perspective

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**ABSTRACT** Education is considered as a most powerful medium for transferring the ideas, ethics and values for every religion. For this purpose it has developed its own education system. In Islam Madarash education system generally cater the need of education of their future citizens.

**Key Words:** : Madrasa, Quranic Studies.

## I. Introduction

Divine wisdom made it imperative on him that at every age an enlightened guide arrives to guide the destinies of the common man for his worldly and spiritual upliftment. It has also been made necessary that such a guide is an expert in his field. Islam has a broader meaning of education. It does not confine for reading of books but includes bringing up. The great educationists agree that education should not be confined to the four walls of school and Islam emphasised it 1500 years back. Jews ensure that all male children from the age of two years to ten receive only religious education. After ten, the brilliant scholars are sent to acquire common education to schools and colleges to choose a career. Let us take an appraisal of the set up of establishments and institutions where these religious specialists are prepared to serve the privileged cause assigned to them. These institutions where elementary and formal foundations of faith are laid are called “Jamia” or “Darul-ul-Uloom. In the ancient period these were called Madrasa. These used to cater knowledge of high quality. Residence for the teachers as well as hostels for the peoples were attached to these institutions. The modern day “Jamia” also provide facilities of this kind. However, the level of instruction is lower and these are called Madaris or Makatib. The above institution provide instructions upto graduation and post graduation stage. A few of them also provide research facilities upto M.Phil level. Madaris (singular Madrash) cater to the needs of the undergraduate (P.U.C.) aspirants whereas Makatib (singular Maktabah) are meant for elementary, secondary and higher secondary studies.

It is worthwhile to note these institutions follow a syllabus which is comprehensive in nature meeting the requirements of higher learning and also of specialized streams because in order to be a perfect master in various disciplines one has to acquire proficiency in 23 areas of skills and arts failing which he would remain an incompetent and semi qualified product. On few occasions their guidance will not be only inadequate but even misleading.

## II. The First Islamic Madrasa

The first institute of knowledge that the Prophet Muhammed established after his migration to Madina was Suffah. The number of disciples in this institution used to fluctuate from time to time. In word of ‘Allamah Shibli Nu’ mani (Seerat-un-Nabi Par I): the total strength comes to 400 approximately but it was not so all the time because Suffah was not spacious enough to accommodate many at a time.

## III. The First Modern Madrasa of ‘Aalam-e-Islam’

The First Madrasah in Islam was the Madrasah-e-Baihaqiah. Imam Ghazali’s teacher, Imam-ul-Haramain, received his education in this institution. Popular belief is that the First Madrasah of Islam is one at Baghdad known as Madrasah-e-Nizamiyah and even Ibn-e-Khalikan has attested the notion. The most famous and celebrated of all the Nizamiyyah schools was Al-Nizamiyya of Baghdad (established in A.D.1065), where Khwaja Nizam al-Mulk appointed the distinguished philosopher and theologian, al-Ghazali, as a professor. Persian poet Sa’di was a student of the Baghdad Nizamiyyah. Other Nizamiyyah schools were located in Nishapur, Amol, Balkh, Herat and Isfahan. But the actual fact is that this credit goes to Nishapur instead of Baghdad. The Nizamiyah Madrasah of Baghdad did not exist when there were several reputed Dar-ul-Uloom flourishing in Nishapur. The others to follow Baihaqiah include Asadia and Ansariah which were built by

Sultan Mahmud's brother, Nasr bin Subuktgin. Of course, Madrasah Nizamiah gained reputation because of its splendid and magnificent building, vast campus and efficient management in the world of Islam.

Firstly Islam as a religion came to India only in the down south of Malabar and Ma'abar before the Muslim conquest of Sind in the North and as such the expansion of the Muslim education was clearly discernible in the southern region even before the emergence of Muslim education in North.

Earlier Muslim Religious Institutions in Malabar and Ma'abar

Religious Institutions came into existence in India at the Malabar and Ma'abar regions of Southern India. Ma'abar means literally the passage. It was the name given by the early Arabian merchants to the portion of coromandal coast which was nearest Ceylon. It was afterwards taken to mean the whole coast from Quilon to Nellore, including both the Pandya and Chola Kingdom.

Arab Muslims seem to have settled first on the Malabar Coast in the 7th century A. D. and thence to have spread to the eastern coast and Ceylon. Their principal settlement on the eastern Coast is Kayalpattanam in Tinnevely. The mixed race consisting of the descendants of those Arab merchants are called Mappillas on the Western Coast, Lebbais on the eastern. By the Tamil people they are generally styled Tulukar (Turks) or Jonagar (Yavanas). Their ordinary title is maraikan or Marakan, a word which means steersman, implying that they were first known as sailors. The Hindustani speaking (Urdu) Muhammedan-Patans and others came from Northern India and form a totally different class.

This area was frequented by Arab traders much before the advent of Islam. The rulers of the area witnessed the arrival of companions and Tabi'yeen, the tombs of the companions buried in the soil of Inchigode, District of Kasargod and also had the privilege to see the documents preserved there. In addition, historian Farishta reports that the Malabar Ruler, Zaymorhad, had the distinction of embracing Islam while the Prophet was alive. Muhammad Ali Athar states that the real name of the Malabar Ruler was Bhaskar Ravi Varma, with the title of "Cheraman Perumal", who after embracing Islam became Abdullah Samadari. He built Masjids for propagating the faith and made arrangements for imparting religious instructions in these Masjids. The arrangement survives from the period of the companions and Tabi'yeen to the present day. Renowned traveler, Ibn Batuta, had also mentioned this fact in his travelogue. These institutions are called "Palli" in the regional language of Malayalam. The areas of Kadangal, Ponani, Kollam, Kasargod, Trunjadi and Calicut of the State of Kerala ruins of Ancient Masjids can be seen. These places maintain the tradition of imparting religious education.

### **1. Madrash-e-Kalan, Madras:**

This magnificent Madrasah was established by Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajah who entrusted it to a scholar, Bahu-ul-Uloom, Abd-ul-Ali. After him his disciple and son-in-law 'Allamah' Ala-ud-Din Lukhnawi (d.12242 AH) was appointed its chief instructor. After his demise his son Maulana Jamal discharged the responsibility of teaching with great efficiency and competence. This Madrash rendered its services for a very long period. Quite a large number of scholars were the beneficiaries of this institute. Later on, the English authorities introduced secular and purely worldly syllabus into it. It survives as an English school even today under the present government. Maulana Bahr-ul-Uloom expired in 12225 AH at Madras. His tomb is in Masjid-e-Walajahi, Triplicane.

### **2. Al-Madrasatul Uroosiah, Keela Kare, Tamilnadu:**

The foundation of this religious Madrasa was laid by famous scholar and sufi saint Hadrat Shaikh-ul-Mashaikh Sulatan -Ul-Ulema Sadqatullah Appa Siddiqui (d.1115 AH) in 1082. (1671 AD). as a result of this the people of the far off territories of South India were benefitted quite a lot. Emperor Aurangzeb had a staunch faith in the Hazrath and he was his great admirer. The Hazrath was a great poet of Arabic language and wrote Tazmeen on Qaseeda "Banat Sa'ad and Qaseeda-e-Burda." After him a famous sufi Scholar Tika Shaikh Wajeehullah Keela Kare renovated this Madrasa in 1220 AH. After that his disciple and son-in-law, Poet Laureate Hadrat Allama Syed Muhammed Known as Mapie Labbe Alim (1232 AH. 1316 AH.) extended this Madrasa and made it to reach its climax. This Madrasa still exists and works on the basis of its old traditions. Owing to this the knowledge seekers of Tamilnadu have been benefitted. (Muslim in Tamilnadu pg:209-234).

### **3. Dar-ul-Uloom Latifah, Hadhrat Makan, Vellore:**

Vellore in the Southern state of Indian, Tamil Nadu, has a prestigious centre of learning which has a glorious record of three centuries. Its founder was esteemed Syed Shah Abd-ul-Latif Naqwi (d. 1150 AH) who was the son of Meeran Syed Waliyullah Bijapuri who left Bijapur at the decline of the ruling dynasty. He visited several places during course of this journey and arrived at Vellore in 1138 AH and on receiving Prophetic guidance (Pbuh) he settled in front of the fort. He began preaching about Divine Glory and the doctrines of faith and established a centre of learning for the aspirants of knowledge. After his demise, his son Arjuman Shah Ab-ul-Sahan Qarbi (d.1183 AH) continued the tradition of teaching. Hospice was built in

179 AH. In addition to Tazkiah, arrangements for religious teachings were also made. After Shah Qarbi his sincere and righteous successor Shah Abd-ul-Latif II (d. 1194 AH) not only carried on the family tradition but safeguarded it too. After his demise his son Shah Ab-ul-Hasan II Mahwi enlarged and embellished the existing hospice, got a beautiful mosque and Madrasah built. After Shah Mahwi's demise his son Syed Shah Abd-ul-Latif III popularly known as Qutub Vellorei (d.1289 AH) further continued with the family tradition. Later on Qutub Vellorei's son, Shams-ul-'Ulama Shah Rukn-ud-Din Qadri Vellorei (d.1325AH) undertook the task of renovating this building on a grand scale in view of the necessity caused by the circumstances of time. Hence in 1302 AH were constructed Darut-Tadris (Teaching Centre) and hostel and the new complex was named Dar-ul-'Uloom Latifah. By Allah's Grace this institute continues to serve the masses with its avowed mission of religious education.(Dar-ul-'Uloom Latifah ka Manzar Namah, p.31). The present principal of this institute is Dr. Maulana Syed Shah Uthman Pasha Qadri popularly known as Hadhrat Faseeh asha who is a versatile genius.

#### **4. Umm-ul-Madaris Baqiyat-us-Salihah, Vellore:**

During Hadhrat Qutub Vellorei's time his worthy successor Mujid-ud-Din Janub, Shah Abd-ul-Wahhab Qadri (1248 AH – 1337 AH) bin Hafiz Shah Abd-ul-Qadir Aturi (d.1251 AH) bin Shah Madar bin Shah Shams-ud-Din Qadri Maduravi on the command of his benefactor teacher Qutub Vellorei and also by a divine command laid the foundation of a Madrasah in 1279 AH. He named it on the Qur'anic verse as Madrasah-e-Baqiyat-us-Salihah (i.e. a Madrasah which would retain virtues/merits). True to its name the benefits from this Madrasah did not remain confined to southern state of India only. In addition to Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh of Deccan its fame spread to foreign lands as well. For the last 150 years disciples from Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Philippines have been availing themselves of the benefits that the Madrasah provides to people. Hence a three day centennial celebration on this ancient institute (in 1974 December) was organized. This Madrasah has acquired the status of a university. In view of pioneering role played by this institution in various foreign countries by teaching their citizens his seat of learning is rightly addressed as Islamic University and more appropriately as Umm-ul-Madaris. Though the syllabus followed here is the universally recognized Nizamiah syllabus: it also provides exposure to English language as well as to Urdu (for non-Urdu speakers) keeping in view the demands of the time. This Madrasah has courses of graduation (Maulvi 'Aalim) and post-graduation (Maulvi Fadhil) level. In addition, there are departments that offer specializations in Tasnif, Ta'lif, Tahqeeq and Tarjama (writing/editing/research and translation). Alumni of this institution have established hundreds of academic institutions not only within the country but also in alien lands. A few of them have acquired the status of universities.

#### **5. Jamiah Zawiah and Jamiah Muhdharah, Kayal Patnam:**

Among the earliest settlements of Muslims in India, Kayal Patnam is a corruption of the word Qahira Fatan (Qahira Fatnam). The port is on the Bay of Bengal side of coastal region of Southern India. It was a settlement by immigrants from Qahira (Cairo). According to Dr. Abd-ul-Latif during the Abbasid caliph Al-Mu'tasim's closing years (227 AH) and beginning of caliph Wathiq a group arrived under the leadership of Muhammad Khilji. He built a Jamiah Masjid in Kayal Patnam in 229 AH (843 AD). This historical city abounded with Madaris since ages but there are no historical documents to substantiate such claims. However two institutions Jamiah Zawiah and Jamiah Muhdharah, were established in 1248 AH and 1291 AH respectively, producing scholars in thousands since then.

#### **6. Madrasah-e-Manba-ul-Anwar Lalpet, Tamil Nadu:**

This Arabic College was established by Haji Ahamad a pious and wealthy person in 1281 AH (1865 AD). However, it became reputed when eminent polyglot in western languages men of letters popular as Shaikh-ul-Millat 'Allamah Zia-ud-Din Amani Baqwi (1386 AH) transformed it into a madrasah (Baqiyat ke'llmi wa Adabi Karnamay, P. 83).

#### **7. Marasah-e-Ma'adin-ul-'Uloom, Vaniyambadi:**

This institution was established in thickly populated southern Arcot region of Tamil Nadu in 1315 AH (1888 AD) by a wealthy and righteous trader Madykar Muhammad Gauth and Haji Abd-ul-Samad. A large number of scholars received education here. The present principal is Qadhi Shariat Maulan Hafiz Qari Muhammad Waliyallah Rashadi whose untiring efforts contributed immensely to its development and popularity.

#### **8. Rahmania Arabic College, Adi Ram Patnam, Tamilnadu:**

This Arabic college was established by Allama Ahmed bin Hasan Quddus Markayer (1858-1945 AD.) on the command of his tutor Muhaddis of Makkah Shaikh Ahmed Dehlan and as a wish of his mother. He was related to the chain of Naqshbandiya, Shazliya, Rifaiyah. He was the first to start the

congregation of Khatm-e-Bukhari Shreef in this region. By the grace of Allah Almighty this Madrasa is still in progress. (Muslim in Tamilnadu pg:208-308)

#### 9. Madrasa-e-Muhammadi, Madras:

This highly reputed institution was established in 1890 AD. According to Dr Desai it was on its pinnacle of glory at the beginning of the twentieth century and was regarded as a prominent centre of learning in southern India. Persians of international repute had served on its faculty (Also, P. 62). The Library attached to this institution enjoys international recognition of Arabic and Persian texts. The administration and supervision of the Madrasah and its library is being quite efficiently managed by the family of Qadhi Bad-ud-Daulah's son Qadhi of madras Dr Muhammad Salah-ud-Din Ayyub Azhari and muahmmad Ubaidullah, Its centenniaal celebration was held on a lavish scale in 1409 AH.

#### 10. Jamaliyah Arabic College, Madras:

This reputed Arabic college was established by one of the generous traders of hide and skin Jamal Muhiuddin (D.1924 AD.) in 1898c. This madrasa is still running with its all dignity and prosperity. Jamal Mohiuddin's son Jamal Muhammed Saheb was the member of Indian Assembly prior to independence. He was even very close to Mahatma Gandhi and had a great influence in British government. Besides these he remained president of State Muslim League from 1928 to 1940. AD (Muslim in Tamilnadu pg. 189-190, compiled by Mukhtar Badri. Published 2009 c. Majeediyah Press, Madras-5).

### IV. Conclusion

It is rightly pointed out by Prophet Muhammad; "The soul of Islam is Education "is kept in the Dogmas and Policies. It is rightly called the Moral Education. If the dogmas and moral education were not preserved by the society, Islam would have become a dead one. Madrasa are the real foundation of Muslim education in India. But in the absence of clarity of vision about the present day economic and social needs of Indian Muslims, Madrasah Managers failed to play a positive role. The scheme of their education preferred to keep the community subjugated under medieval psyche for their vested political interests.

The main role of Madrasah is imparting religious education and to showing the right path to the Muslim Society. In Tiruchirappalli, Madrasah rendered a yeoman service to the Muslim Society. Thanks to Madrasah, many social evils like, superstitions, money lending etc have disappeared. Apart from that, the Madrasah propagates cultural value among the people, even though very few of Muslims know the value of Madrasah. It is high time people realized the importance of Madrasah and the way religious values are preserved.

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