

**A. M. A. AZEEZ**

**A PROFILE**

***DR. A. M. A. AZEEZ FOUNDATION***



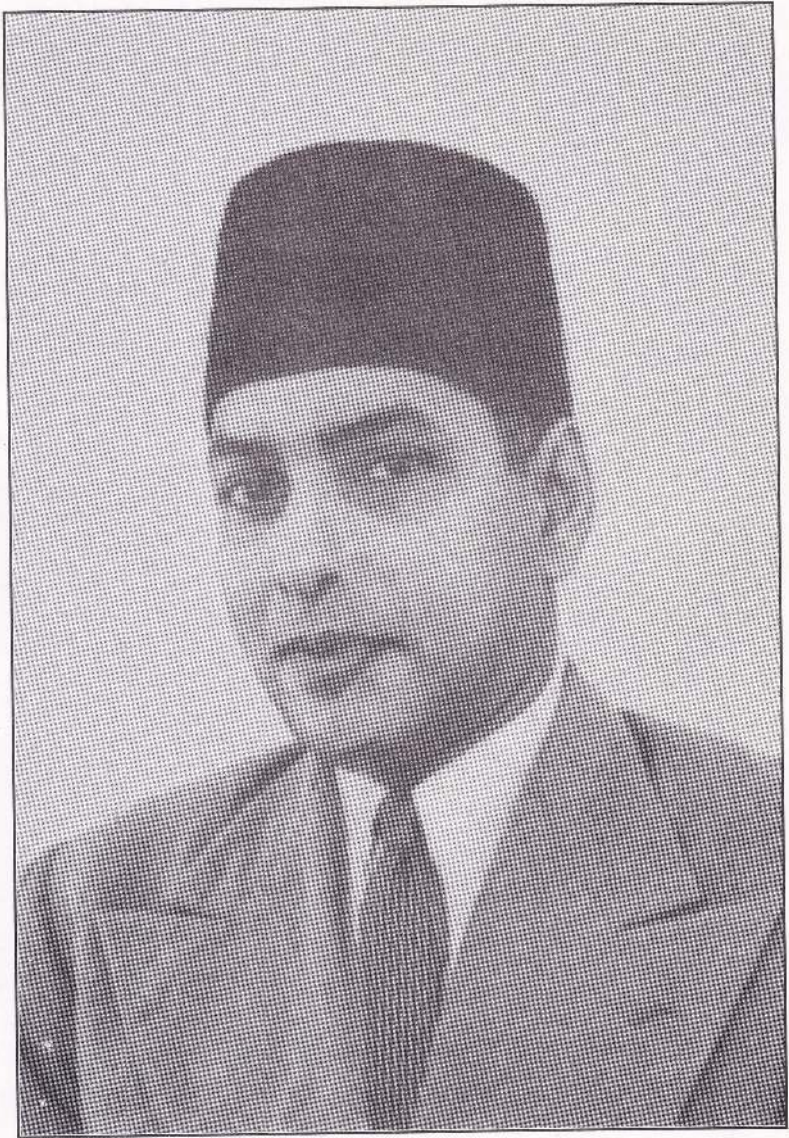
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**Commemoration of  
the 34th Death Anniversary  
on  
24th November, 2007**

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A.M.A. AZEEZ



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## SPONSORSHIP

This Publication has been sponsored by Mr. A.G.A. Barrie P. Eng. The Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Foundation thanks and appreciates the kind gesture of Mr. Barrie.

Mr. Barrie hails from Beruwela and was a student during Dr. A.M.A. Azeez's "Golden Era" as Principal of Zahira College, Colombo, and excelled in studies, sports and cadeting. He was Senior Prefect and was awarded the Ghaffoor Gold Medal in 1955 for the best all-round student.

After graduating with Honours in Civil Engineering from the University of Ceylon in 1960, he served in the Ceylon Government Railway as District Engineer, Project Manager in the Uda Walawe Scheme and Deputy Chief Engineer in the Ceylon Transport Board before emigrating to Canada in 1969. He has excelled internationally in the field of heavy construction and completed many prestigious projects in Canada, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. Presently he is a Project Management Consultant.

Mr. Barrie was one of the favourite students of Dr. Azeez, who encouraged him in his studies at Zahira and the University, even thereafter in his career. This resulted in Mr. Barrie becoming an ardent admirer, dedicated and ever grateful student of Dr. Azeez.

When the Foundation was looking for a sponsor, the first thought was to request Mr. Barrie. He promptly answered the request and agreed to sponsor the publication without any hesitation.



## PREFACE

Dr. A.M.A. Azeez expired on 24th November, 1973. Although he died at the comparatively young age of 62 years, he contributed immensely to the education and welfare of the community in general and the Muslim community in particular, which need no elaboration here.

The '**Haji A.M.A. Azeez Memorial Committee**' was formed in the year 1975 on the initiative of the All-Ceylon YMMA Conference. Mr. M.A.M. Hussain, former District Judge, was elected as the President. The first Azeez Memorial Lecture was delivered by Justice Dr. A.K. Brohi of Pakistan on 6th January, 1976. The meeting was presided by Al-Haj Badiudin Mahmud, Minister of Education, and held at the Zahira College Hall.

Since then the Committee in collaboration with the YMMA organised Memorial Lectures annually by prominent persons. Radio talks and newspaper articles were also arranged.

However, the activities of the Committee were minimal except for the annual lectures organized by the YMMA. Numerous requests were made by past students and well wishers of Haji Azeez to revive the Committee, and a meeting was held on 24th July, 1990 presided by Mr. M.A.M. Hussain. The name of the Committee was changed to '**Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Foundation**'. Mr. Hussain was elected as President and Mr. S.M. Kamaldeen as Secretary.

The activities of the Foundation were curtailed with Mr. Hussain moving to his home town of Kalmunai. At a meeting of the Foundation held in 1994, Prof. M.T.A. Furkhan was elected as President and Mr. A.M. Nahya as Secretary. The anniversary celebrations continued annually with orations by prominent persons, newspaper articles and radio talks. Few years ago appeals for funds were made through Ramazan Appeals, and scholarships to needy undergraduates continue to be granted. In early 2007 Prof. Furkhan requested that he be relieved of continuing as President and Mr. S.H.M. Jameel was elected to succeed him.

From the very inception it was the intention to publish the annual orations, speeches, writings and other academic and literary contributions of Dr. Azeez, which will be of great benefit to the academic and intellectual world as well as to the general readers locally and internationally. An attempt was made in 1989 which did not materialise fully. Mr. Jameel insisted that a start be made in this respect and the Ramazan Appeal 2007 conveyed this message. The response was encouraging and the publication of this book is the maiden attempt sponsored by a distinguished and ever grateful student of Dr. Azeez.

The main intention of this publication is to portray a Profile of Dr. Azeez from different perspectives for a start. .

Childhood Memories of Dr. Azeez are written by his daughter Mrs. Marina Ismail, which give an insight to his early life in Jaffna.

The efficient handling by Dr. Azeez in a short span of time of the accelerated food production programme of the Government in the Kalmunai District, to overcome food shortages and starvation during the war years was a great achievement, if not his greatest achievement. This needs to be recorded vis-à-vis the current "Eastern Resurgence" project and a comprehensive study is made by Mr. S.H.M. Jameel.

The tribute to Dr. Azeez in the form of a Poem in Tamil by the well known Poet from Kattankudy, Marhoom Abdul Cader Lebbe, is reproduced in this publication.

Another grateful student Prof. K. Sivathamby remembers Dr. Azeez in his article, portraying his contribution to the community in every sphere. In fact Prof. Sivathamby's publication "Being a Tamil and Sri Lankan" is dedicated to Dr. Azeez by the words, '*He more than any one else ensured the continuity of my academic career*'.

A great honour was bestowed on Dr. Azeez by the Institute of Objective Studies in India by including him in their publication in 2005, "100 Great Muslim Leaders of the 20th Century". The article is reproduced in this publication.

It is our intention to publish in the future all of Dr. Azeez's scholarly speeches in the Senate and other important academic and literary contributions.

**A.M. NAHIYA**

Secretary

**DR. A.M.A. AZEEZ FOUNDATION**

# CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

a daughter remembers

*Marina Ismail*

Childhood memories, especially those of a happy childhood, linger throughout one's life and bring moments of much joy and contentment. My father who had such a fortunate childhood spent in his hometown of Jaffna, often shared his reminiscences with us, his three children. He wished to impress on us that the simple way of life with love, affection and understanding among the family members which he had experienced, was far superior to all the wealth in the world. He also wanted to emphasise that life was not all a bed-of-roses for him and that he had to work hard to achieve his ideals which made his life meaningful.

One of my father's treasured memories of his early childhood was the happy atmosphere in his home at Mohideen Mosque Lane off Moor Street in Jaffna town. As was traditional and popular at that time the married daughters and their families lived with the parents, and this pattern was followed in my father's family.

The head of the family was 'Appa' (Mohamed Sultan Abdul Cader) a pleasant old 'gent' who owned a shop selling a variety of goods. His wife 'Ummamma' (Sultan Abdul Cader Nachchia) we remember as a petite lady with twinkling eyes and a ready wit. Their two daughters, I was told, were totally different from each other in looks and character, the older one (Mohamed Meera Mohideen Nachchia), who was my grandmother, was said to have been tall and fair while the younger was smaller and not so fair. When the elder daughter married, she and her husband, a budding young Proctor (Sultan Mohideen Mohamed Aboobucker), lived with her parents, and continued to do so after their son, my father, was born on the 4th October, 1911.

## **Pampered**

When my father was nine years old his mother passed away and changes took place in the household. His father re-married and went to live some distance away, but he regularly visited his son who continued to live with the grand-parents. Soon 'Ummachchi', (Meera Mohideen Nachchia) my father's aunt, married and she, her husband (Mohamed Meerasahib Mohamed Ibrahim Sahib) and later their three children (Shahul Hameed, Sithy Kathija and Noorul Zezeema) became part of the household. However, there was no lack of

affection towards my father. He was greatly pampered and therefore became a little self-willed. Any mischief or slight disobedience on his part was often excused and 'Ummamma' would emphatically state, 'after all he is only a small boy without a mother!'

The house where my father spent his happy childhood he always remembered with great feeling. We would often talk of the yard spread with white sand kept spotlessly clean by Ummachchi. Around this was stone-paved verandah into which the surrounding rooms opened out. On our frequent visits to this house, my father would never fail to show us the room where he was born. In the compound was the famous woodapple tree. I have never as yet tasted sweeter woodapples. We were informed that when my father was young, the fruits of this tree were never plucked. Ummachchi would wait until the ripe fruits dropped off the tree and then give them to her young nephew.

Recollections of a girl-cousin portray my father as having a strong personality who always had his own way and had others follow him. She related an incident which we found very entertaining. She said that in this home there was a large bed with a kind of railing similar to a baby's cot. My father would shove his three cousins into it and shout, 'I am the keeper and you are the animals in the zoo; now do as I command you!' He would wave a stick and order them to sit, stand, crawl or sleep. These cousins loved him and looked to him as their chosen leader and helped greatly to dispel any kind of loneliness felt by an only child. They called him 'Ponnik Kakka' (Golden brother).

The children who lived down Mohideen Mosque Lane played, learnt their lessons and prayed at the nearby mosque. The boys regularly attended prayers dressed in checked sarongs, white shirts and the distinctive white skull-cap. Much time was spent in religious instruction at the Allapichai Madrasa which later became the Muhammadiya Mixed School, and it was at this early stage that my father began to have a deep respect for religion, a respect he instilled into us.

In the cool evenings after a hard day at school and at the mosque, my father recollected how his cousins and he gathered with other children and played 'catches' and 'hide-and-seek'. The lane was their playground. During the rainy seasons they had a wonderful time just running about in the rain and feeling the refreshing raindrops on their faces. The puddles that formed in the middle of the lane were grand to splash in and they had mock battles. The thick, slimy mud churned up by many passing feet was ideal to 'down' one's enemy who was then covered with the sticky mud.

The rains also brought the 'thumbi' (dragon fly) and these insects provided another form of amusement. The boys would try to catch them with a 'thondu' and then dissect them limb by limb. This sport was repulsive to my father and he shied away from it.

He also mentioned that the rainy season was the time when some type of worm known as 'rathe' appeared in plenty. They would be found curled up in dry corners inside the house. My father could not bear to see cooked prawns at table for he said that they reminded of those ugly worms.

My father was exceptionally fond of Ummachchi. He often spoke of what an expert she was in the culinary art. As she was also very fond of him she was ever willing to prepare any dish he wanted. His favourite food which he requested often was 'paladai'. He described it to us as a kind of 'roti' made of rice-flour and coconut milk, but had to be thin and paper-like to be really tasty. According to him this simple meal of paladai together with Ummachchi's tasty meat curry outdid all the elaborate dishes served at any famous hotel!

### **School Days**

Recollections of school days were as happy as those of home. My father began schooling in 1921 at Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam and then proceeded to Jaffna Hindu College. He learnt his lessons in Tamil and did not learn a word of English until he was in Standard III. He remembered his teachers with great affection, appreciation and respect.

The grandfather was well-to-do and could have afforded to send his grandson to school by buggy cart, but my father had to walk the one-and-half miles to and fro from school every day. This was indeed an enjoyable trip for all the boys walked together laughing and chatting.

One contemporary of my father recollected that these boys on their way to school was a sight worth seeing – there was Azeez in his typical Muslim attire complete with white skull-cap in the midst of his Hindu friends.

During his schooldays my father's very close friends were Senathirajah and Subramaniam. Senathirajah, who joined the Income Tax Department later, and my father were lifelong friends. The Founder of Vaidyeshwara Vidyalaya T. Nagamuthu's son Manicka Idaikkadar and my father were colleagues in the Ceylon Civil Service and close friends.

Having been a distinguished student and a respected old boy of the two Jaffna schools, my father was honoured to declare open the Diamond Jubilee Carnival at Jaffna Hindu College in 1951 and deliver the Golden Jubilee Address at Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam in 1963.

On his days spent at Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam my father has stated, "I now feel thrice-blessed that I did go to Vidyalaya and nowhere else. My period of stay, February 1921 to June 1923, though pretty short quantitatively was extremely long qualitatively. It was at Vidyalaya that I became first acquainted with the devotional hymns of exquisite beauty and exceeding piety for which Tamil is so famed through the ages and throughout the world."

Regarding studies, owing to his early introduction to the Holy Quran, the importance of knowledge and education, which Islam advocates was deeply ingrained in him. It was his mother who was a strict disciplinarian, he would say, who first instilled the strong faith in Allah and the necessity of having a good education. He would remember her powerful voice relating stories of the Prophets to him. It was her encouragement that made it possible for him to read fluently works in Arabic-Tamil. Of an evening he recollected reading extracts from 'Noor Masala', Abbas Nadagam' and 'Seera Puranam' in addition to extracts from the Holy Quran and the 'Asma-ul-Husna' the Ninety-nine Glorious Names of Allah. The grown-ups sat around and listened attentively.

'Seek knowledge from cradle to grave' (The sayings of Prophet Muhammad) and 'Knowledge is Power' (Bacon) were two of my father's favourite quotations. He would tell us, 'Intelligence is not enough to get you to pass exams, you must burn the midnight oil'. He would study late into the night with the aid of a flickering oil lamp, while Ummamma feeling concerned about him and wishing to keep company, sat nodding away in a corner.

My father's cousin, Sithy Kathija, mentioned how he made her promise that she would sit the London Matriculation examination. She had solemnly promised not fully aware of what it implied, for it was a time when Muslim girls did not attend school or at most studied only up to Standard III. She continued her studies at Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam and later at Holy Family Convent, Jaffna. It must have indeed been a grand occasion for my father when this cousin did sit the examination and became one of the very first Muslim girls to pass.

Another amusing recollection, though not strictly a childhood one, concerns the marriage broker who began to plague my father during his student days, everytime he came to Jaffna for his holidays. They were of all types from old hags to 'lebbes' and distant relatives. They offered brides with handsome dowries. He would have nothing of this, so one day in order to stop them worrying him, he had stood on a table, danced a kind of jig and shouted, 'Can

the bride dance like this? If so I will marry her at once.' The marriage brokers did not trouble him any more.

Although my father lived the greater part of his life in Colombo he never forgot Jaffna and the happy times he spent there. Nor did he forget the many teachers and friends of his childhood. Recollections of his childhood and his life in Jaffna had a special place in his heart and he wanted to share with us these happy memories. The Palmyrah palm at our house "Meadow Sweet" at Barnes Place in Colombo was a memorable symbol.

Reflecting on what my father told us about his happy childhood and early upbringing within a close-knit family, it appears that in later years his ideas on the necessity of education for the advancement and well-being of the community, the importance of female education, his deep respect for Islam and for other religions and his liberal views grew from these early days.

### **An Advocate of Women's Rights to Education**

As a scholar and educationist, much has been discussed, debated and written about my father's education policies and his ideas for the advancement of Muslim education. However, nothing, or rather very little, is mentioned about what he felt about the education of Muslim girls and the much talked of status of Muslim women.

Having benefited from his ideas concerning these two themes, let me share a few thoughts – interesting because they were far, far advanced for those times.

The education of girls was something he was very interested in; even at a time when Muslim girls did not have any form of schooling. In the 1920s, he encouraged my aunt (his cousin) to sit her London Matriculation Examination. It was a happy day for him when she became the first Muslim girl in Jaffna (possibly in the whole Island) to pass this examination. Needless to say I was also encouraged in the pursuit of knowledge.

To my father, reading was the first step towards gaining knowledge and he felt that the reading habit must be fostered among children from a very young age. My brothers and I were encouraged to read books, to buy those which we particularly liked and taught to look after books. I am ever grateful to him for instilling in me the love and respect for books and for the wonderful library of books that he helped me to collect.

At a time when Muslim girls, especially those of well-to-do families, stopped attending school when they attained age, my father would not hear of me staying at home and learning to sew and to cook. At this stage there was no problem – my mother was also keen to allow me to continue my schooling. The real problem arose when it was time to decide whether I should go to University. I must admit that my mother was in favour of a university education, but was reluctant to encourage me because of what the family elders would have to say.

I was keen to follow a varsity career and thanks to my father's insistence I was able to enter the University Campus at Peradeniya.

When I was leaving home for the first time to follow this much desired varsity career, my father gave me a piece of advice which I will never forget. I should be happy with my studies; one should not think in terms of material benefits, but read the subjects one liked and try to do one's best.

My mother complemented these sentiments – she told me to enjoy myself and not to study too hard! I did just that and my years spent at the Peradeniya Campus were the happiest of my student life, especially because I was given the freedom to choose my friends and take part in campus activities.

Both my parents advised me not to become (in my words) an Intellectual Snob! I should not look down on those who were less educated than myself – in short, to keep my head. I should also learn those feminine arts of good home-making. Thus during the holidays I attended sewing classes, cookery and cake-decorating courses, which were my hobbies.

The time I entered my teens was one when the Purdah system was rigidly followed. Young girls led secluded lives until they were married off. I remember the married Muslim ladies wearing long black coats, often made of rich velvet, black head-dresses and black face-veil when they attended weddings and other functions; even the cars had curtained windows.

My father did not approve of this "purdah garb". I remember my mother always in favour of compromise, wore the black coat but discarded the head-dress and merely covered her head with the saree. Many Muslim ladies in those



days followed this style. As for me, I did not have to wear the coat or cover my face.

I may have broken this “Purdah” rule in the Muslim society of that time, but had to dress modestly and simply. No sleeveless blouses or short skirts for me. At a very young age I wore the Salwar/kameez, Punjabi, as it was termed then. Islam, after all stresses that one must dress decently and modestly and there is no need to go to extremes.

My parents had very definite ideas about the dowry system which was prevalent to a very high degree among the Muslims. This system, where the bride’s parents must give a dowry of cash, jewellery and property to the bridegroom before the marriage took place, is not mentioned in the Holy Quran or the Hadiths (Traditions). My parents disapproved of it. In fact, a statement made by my father stressing his views on the dowry system is recorded in Hansard of the late ‘50s. Fortunately for me, the young man I decided to marry came from a family who equally disapproved this system.

Islam gave women a rightful place in society; even today much discussion and argument takes place regarding the status of women in Islam. What my father said to me when we were leaving for Scotland where my husband was to read for his Ph.D. at St. Andrew’s University, comes vividly to my mind when I hear these discussions. He said that my place was not to compete academically or career-wise with my husband, but to help him to do well in his career, so much for Women’s Lib! Needless to say, this was the relationship that my parents had.

My mother may not have been academically qualified, but she stood alongside my father – she ran a beautiful home where anyone was welcome, entertained official guests, travelled to foreign countries with him – in short, she was the understanding companion that a wife, even a highly educated one, should be.

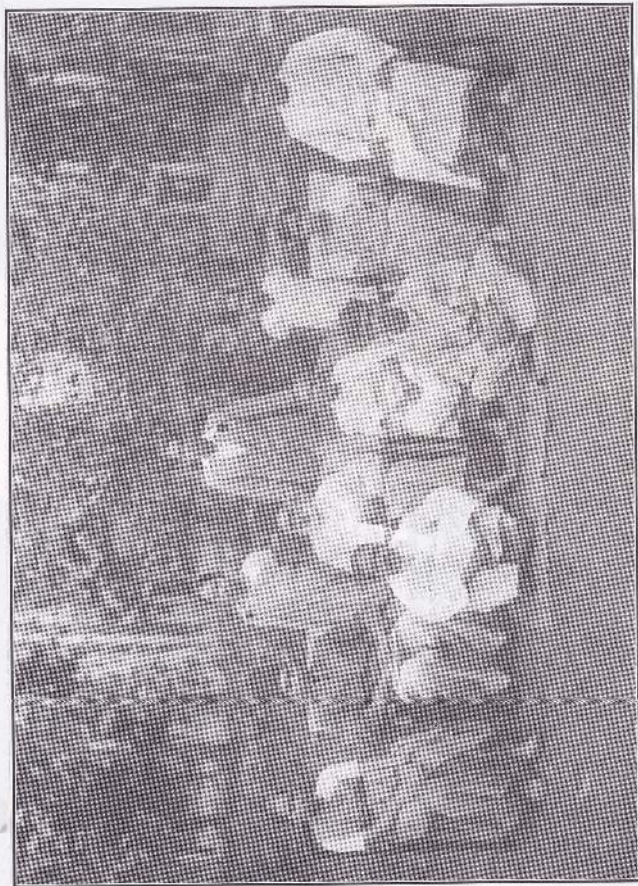
My parents instilled in me that one must live according to the teachings of Islam, however, they were broad-minded and did not over-do this. A favourite comment of my father was that we should live according to our religious traditions, but at the same time we must also understand and respect the religious and cultural traditions of other communities in this country. Maintaining a frog-in-the-well mentality would be disastrous.

Throughout the centuries the Muslims have contributed to the welfare of this country whilst upholding their religion and culture – in the future too they can work towards the prosperity of their country while preserving and maintaining their religious and age-old traditions.

*(Marina started schooling at Carmel Girls' English School, Kalmunai and St. Scholastica's Convent, Kandy when her father served as AGA in Kalmunai and Kandy respectively. She completed her education at Ladies' College, Colombo, graduated with Honours in Geography from the University of Ceylon in 1960 and obtained a M.Phil. from the Colombo University)*

## FAMILY MEMBERS

(taken at Office Assistant's Bungalow, Matale in 1937)



Standing:

Sithy, Shahul Hameed, Jezeema

Seated:

'Ummachchi', Azeez, 'Appa', 'Ummamma', Ummu,  
Ibrahim Sahib

Ground:

Domestic Aides of Bungalow



S.M. Aboobucker J.P.



A.M.A. Azeez



'Ummamma' and Marina



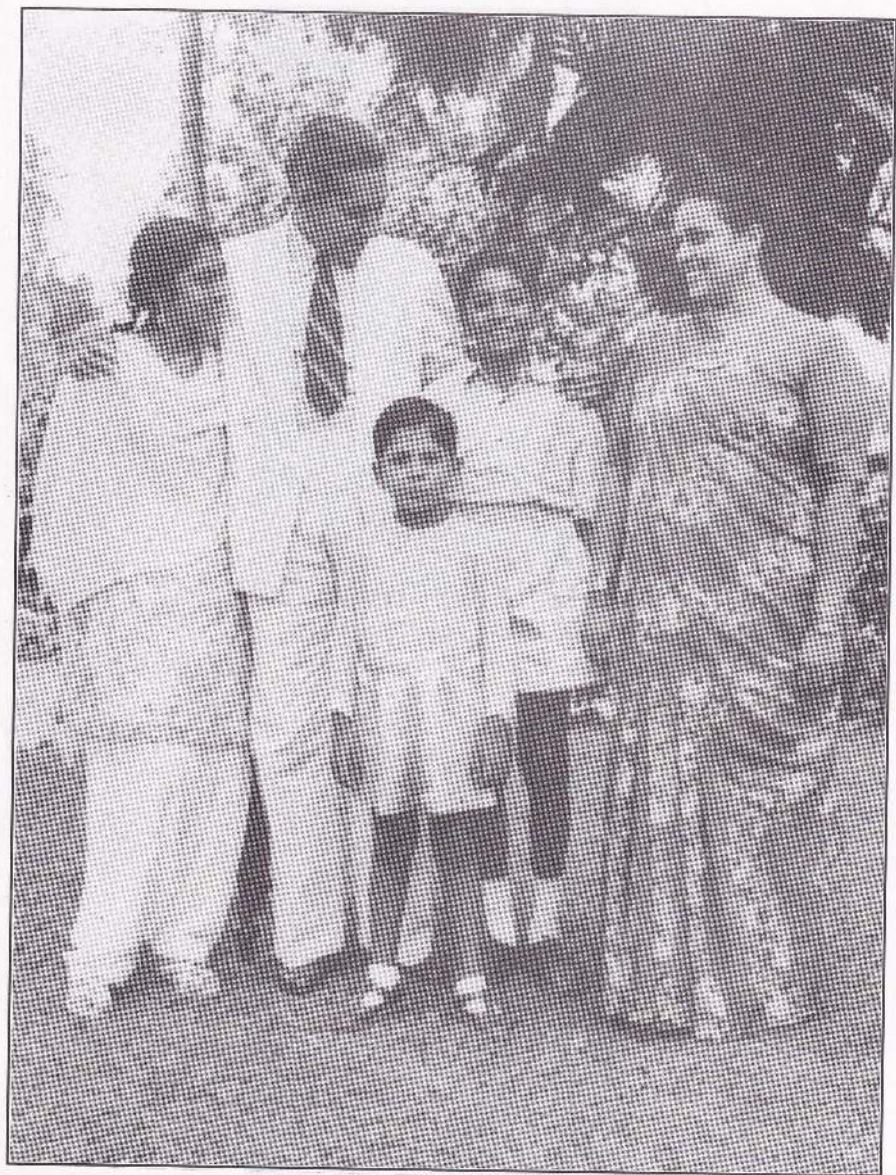
'Ummachchi'



**Azeez on a visit home at  
Mohideen Mosque Lane,  
Jaffna**



**Azeez addressing a meeting  
in 1973**



Azeez with family Marina, Iqbal, Ali and Ummu

# KALMUNAI ERA

## CONTRIBUTION TO EASTERN DEVELOPMENT

### 65 YEARS AGO

*S.H.M. Jameel*

The recent capture of Thoppigala and other areas in the East of Sri Lanka by the security forces, has liberated many areas affected by the ethnic fighting. The Government is endeavouring to develop the East under the "Eastern Resurgence" programme. The East which was considered backward in the distant past underwent almost a similar development programme 65 years ago, particularly in agriculture, also triggered by a war - the Second World War. With the ethnic conflict of the last twenty five years the progress of the East was badly affected. The people of the East, therefore, look forward to the new resurgence.

It is significant to record that the erudite scholar and renowned educationist Marhoom Dr. A.M.A. Azeez, contributed immensely and played a prominent role in the Eastern development in the early 1940s.

Dr. A.M.A. Azeez was the first Muslim officer of the prestigious Ceylon Civil Service. He was born in Jaffna, married in Colombo and lived at "Meadow Sweet", 81, Barnes Place, Colombo 7. He had pronounced on several occasions that the urge to contribute his mite to the educational uplift of his community, which culminated in relinquishing his position in the Civil Service and assuming duties as Principal of Colombo Zahira College, took deep root in his mind during his days as Assistant Government Agent, Kalmunai.

Azeez arrived in Kalmunai and assumed duties as A.G.A. (Emergency Kachcheri) on 16th April, 1942. It was the period of the Second World War. All foreign supply lines of rice and other foodstuffs faced blockades, and the Japanese attack on Easter Sunday, 5th April aggravated the situation. The Japanese armada was spotted heading towards Ceylon. The Army headquarters was alerted and immediate action was taken to clear the Colombo harbour of ships that were berthed there and to hide them. The Japanese bombed various parts of Colombo and the suburbs lasting 20 minutes. (Azeez, who was attached to the Customs, had to sleep the nights in the Port with his driver Caldera by his side). On 7th April the same armada attacked the Trincomalee harbour. The colonial Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott placed the country on a war footing. There was a shortage of food and the AGAs were made responsible for food drives.

The Government of the day had to find ways and means of accelerating local food production. The Southern region of Batticaloa District was chosen as one of the areas to boost local food production.

The Batticaloa District at that time extended from Verugal Ganga in the North to Kumbukkan Oya in the South and the boundaries of Badulla District in the West - fairly a vast extent of area and a long terrain to manage. The area was administered by the Kachcheri situated in the Dutch Fort in Puliyantheevu in the town of Batticaloa, and the Government Agent in 1942 was an Englishman M.K.T. Sandys. To activate and accelerate the Food Production Drive, it was necessary to open an Emergency Kachcheri in Kalmunai. Azeez who at that time was holding the onerous and responsible position of Additional Landing Surveyor of Customs was chosen to be the AGA, specially selected by Hon. D.S. Senanayake, Minister of Agriculture and transferred at short notice with specific orders of accelerating food production. His dedication to service was very explicit when he readily agreed to relinquish his prestigious post and comforts of Colombo in order to travel the long way to Kalmunai.

Azeez came to Kalmunai in his Standard Fourteen car CE-1085 with his wife Ummu Kuluthum and their four year old daughter Marina Zulficar, together with his driver Caldera, housemaid Elisa and gardener Packianathan. Their son Mohamed Ali, who was four months old, could not be taken along and was left in the care of Mrs. Sithy Jabir A. Cader who was the younger sister of Mrs. Azeez (This developed a special affection to Ali by Jabir A. Cader until his demise). Their residence opposite the Kalmunai Carmel Girls' English School was called "Gems" owned by Mudaliyar M.M. Ibrahim of Nintavur. A building in Market Road belonging to Dr. Osman of Sainthamaruthu housed the A.G.A.'s Office. Marina commenced her primary education at the Carmel Girls' English School. She recalls with gratitude even today, the love and affection showered on her by the Reverend Sisters of the staff and Rev. Father Melican.

On his maiden experience Azeez states: "The best way to understand the nature of life of the people living in a particular region is to reside amongst them. Being accustomed to only the urban style of living in Colombo, living among the cultivators of Kalmunai was a new, rich and rewarding experience. I understood their pattern of living, habits, customs, traditions and also constraints in their economic development. I began to realize the importance of farmers in the economy of this country. Earlier I was unaware of the importance of the role played by the villagers in the political, social and cultural life of the Muslim community".

### **Food Production**

The main objective of setting up the Emergency Kachcheri was to accelerate the food production and Azeez handled this task very efficiently. His area of administration was Karavahupattu (Vanniah: M.S. Kariapper); Sammanthuraipattu (M.M. Abdul Majeed); Akkaraipattu (W.H. Kanagaratnam); Panamapattu (A. Sinnalebbe) and Wewagampattu (L.B. Madurawa). This is



the entirety of the present Amparai District. His area included also the present Paddiruppu electorate of the Batticaloa District. The post of 'Vanniah' was equivalent to the present Divisional Secretary, but had wider powers and more responsibility. The Chief Irrigation Officer was M.M. Ibrahim.

The first meeting convened by the AGA was held at the Kalmunai Rest House on May 6, 1942. At the meeting that began at 9 a.m. and lasted till 5.30 p.m., it was resolved as follows:

- State land to be distributed for clearance and cultivation
- Grant of Rs. 20 per acre to be paid for clearance and 2 1/2 bushels of seed-paddy per acre
- Rehabilitate abandoned village tanks and channels
- Encourage systematic paddy cultivation in already existing vast extent of fallow paddy fields
- Establishing Government-run goat farms in Malwatta, Nintavur and Thirukkivil
- Establishing poultry farms in Maruthamunai, Sainthamaruthu and Palamunai
- Assistance to the private sector to start goat and poultry farms
- Subsidies for cultivating highland crops
- Establishing a model agriculture farm

A week after this meeting, Land Kachcheries commenced, and at the first Land Kachcheri held, state lands were distributed as follows:

Pottanaveli, Irakkamam	130 Acres
Usaraveli, Irakkamam	50
Anaivilunthan, Sammanthurai	100
Mottaiyandaveli, Sammanthurai	60
Pooranpuri, Karaivahu	200
Kayattiyadi, Nintavur	100
Pallaveli	<u>50</u>
	690 Acres

The allocation of land in this manner exceeded 12,000 acres in one year. The *Daily News* of 29.3.1943 reported that 12,270 acres of land had been distributed in the district for paddy cultivation, which included 4,000 acres given to farmers of Akkaraipattu, Kolavil, Thambiluvil and Thirukkivil. 1,520 acres were allocated for highland crops and 30,000 acres of hitherto uncultivated paddy fields were brought under the plough. **The District was soon emerging as the granary of the East, which was accomplished with the completion of the Gal-Oya Development Scheme in late 1940s and early '50s.** Today the Amparai district contributes to 62% of paddy production from the Eastern province.

A Model Farm of 475 acres in extent was established at Chengatpadai in Nintavurpattu to train farmers in modern methods of cultivation. Crops cultivated in this farm included paddy, sugar cane, banana, kurakkan, maize, ground nuts and a variety of vegetables. The labour force was 1,000. A separate division to introduce the methods of irrigation adopted by the Jaffna farmers also functioned here.

## Harvest Festival

In order to celebrate the accelerated production in agriculture, a Harvest Festival was organized in this farm. Azeez was the Chairman and M.S. Kariapper (who later became an M.P. and Cabinet Minister) the Secretary of the organizing committee. The Kalmunai District Harvest Festival and the Agricultural Exhibition were held from 27.3.1943 to 2.4.1943. The harvesting was at the Chengatpadai Farm and the exhibition was at Kalmunai Esplanade. The Agricultural Exhibition continued for a week and displayed agricultural and handicraft products.

The occasion was graced by the Minister of Agriculture and Lands D.S. Senanayake; Home Minister A. Mahadeva; State Councillors D.H. Kotelawela, A.R.A. Razik and A.S. Dharmaratnam; Director of Agriculture E. Rodrigo and GA Batticaloa V. Coomaraswamy. D.S. Senanayake was conducted on a 5 mile procession along bumpy roads in a cart drawn by an elephant owned and used by A.S. Dharmaratnam, MSC for Batticaloa South, from Akkaraipattu to Chengatpadai Farm. It was used in the course of inspecting cultivated acres in the Akkaraipattu Division, which was followed by hundreds of gaily decorated bullock carts carrying a large number of people. The Minister said that he would never forget the memorable drive and that he had thoroughly enjoyed it.

"Ceremonial scythes specially made for the occasion by expert Kandyan craftsmen were used to reap the first ears of paddy at the Harvest Festival. At the auspicious hour of 10.45 in the morning on 27.3.1943 the AGA Azeez handed over scythes to each of the distinguished guests. The ceremonial reaping of the first ears of paddy in the Wellankuda plot of the Chengatpadai Farm took place before a large gathering. The visitors reaped the first ears of paddy and they handed over the sheaves to Azeez. Afterwards Senanayake and Mahadeva pounded paddy as the grain was collected and put into the mortars by Muslim women. D.S. Senanayake, mounted on an elephant, was taken in procession through the Farm to the reception shed nearly a mile away. A field lunch prepared from rice and other produce grown on the farm was served." This was the first ever such festival held in the Eastern Province and this event received glowing wide publicity in all the leading newspapers of the day.

"A very shining example as to how careful planning, encouraging guidance and consistent efforts could contribute to the success of accelerated growth of food production in the country is the Harvest Festival and Agricultural Exhibition taking place now at Kalmunai" was an editorial comment in the *Observer* of 29.3.1943.

In the afternoon the visitors were taken from the Kachcheri, the extensive premises of which were planted with yams, pulses, vegetables, chillies and onions, to the Kalmunai Show, where they were received by Vanniah Mudaliyar M.S. Kariapper, who invited the Minister to declare it open.

The products of the Department of Agriculture and Department of Commerce & Industry were also exhibited. In the Agriculture Stall were livestock exhibits from the Akkaraipattu Animal Breeding Centre and various exhibits from the Karadianaru Farm School.

D.S. Senanayake in his address said that after the panic of the Japanese raid it was felt that they should look for food in the Eastern Province, and appealed to the people of Batticaloa. He wished to draw the attention of the visitors from Colombo to the great achievement of Azeez and others. When there was a possibility of starvation he felt that they could not do better than appeal to Kalmunai. He further stated that he had also felt that if they could utilize one of the Muslims in the Civil Service the people would co-operate and do their best. When Azeez came here he was able to get the co-operation of the Tamils and the Muslims, and he hoped that the co-operation would continue.

A. Mahadeva said that he was glad to note the complete harmony between the Tamils and the Muslims, and hoped that these friendly feelings would continue.

The Governor, Sir Andrew Caldecott, in a message congratulated the cultivators of Kalmunai and thanked for the rich harvest reaped (Message reproduced in this publication).

As the war ended this Farm was closed down and the land was returned to the owners. I am overwhelmed with emotional joy, when I now find that the harvest festival took place in the plot of land called Wellankuda which was for a very long time cultivated by my father and today owned by my sisters.

The mission of Azeez in realizing the objective of the Kalmunai Emergency Kachcheri was very successful. The southern part of the Batticaloa District began the march of becoming a supplier of rice to other parts of the country. The grateful farmers named a mass of paddy lands of about 500 acres in Sagamam situated 5 miles away from Akkaraipattu as "*Azeez Thurai Kandam*"

which perpetuates his memory to this day. M.M. Hussain Vidanayar (Village Headman) (father of Marhoom M.H.M. Ashraff) was in the forefront in encouraging cultivation in this 'Azeez Thurai Kandam' and in the distribution of land thereof. In the process of distributing this land, he was bitten by a snake and was confined to bed for six months. The whole hearted support given and sacrifices made by persons of such calibre to Azeez, made the region boast of being the granary of the East. This enabled the poor landless farmers to become owners of paddy lands.

## Education

The Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund that has helped thousands of students during the last six decades to pursue their higher studies was inaugurated by Azeez in 1945. This Fund was in one way the culmination of a process that he started while serving as AGA at Kalmunai. Azeez was convinced that a community which suffered due to poverty and illiteracy could only be uplifted through providing educational opportunities backed by financial assistance. With this in view he formed the Kalmunai Muslim Educational Society in 1942.

The well known poet Abdul Cader Lebbe in his book titled "My Biography" writes as follows:-

"I taught at Natpiddimunai a village near Kalmunai. Azeez and I moved closely with each other. On many evenings we met in his residence at Kalmunai and exchanged ideas and views. Once during the course of our discussion, Azeez declared: *'There is nothing to be proud of about me alone being a Civil Servant. More Civil Servants should appear in our society. The only way to achieve this goal is to develop our children through higher education. We do not now need a separate University to achieve this. Our students should gain entry to the present University. The only way to achieve this is to encourage the students by setting up a Muslim Scholarship Fund'*.

We both deliberated and resolved to set up in Kalmunai an organization called Muslim Educational Society to achieve this objective. Dr. M.M. Meeralebbe from Sammanthurai and Mr. M.M. Mohamed from Kattankudy, owner of the textile shop, Mohamed Sons at Kalmunai (father of Prof. M.A. Kareem of Peradeniya University) were selected as Secretaries to this Society.

Monthly meetings of this Society were held in each of the Vanniah divisions from Panama to Kattankudy. One such meeting was summoned to inaugurate the Muslim Scholarship Fund. This meeting was attended by many including M.S. Kariapper and was held at the residence of Sheriff Vidanayar in Kalmunai Kudy. Dinner too was served at this meeting. Azeez explained the objectives of the day's forum. He called upon me to explain the objectives in detail, which I did. The resolution was unanimously adopted. The Muslim Scholarship Fund was inaugurated on this very day".

Azeez as the President and Treasurer of the Kalmunai Muslim Educational Society, sent out printed appeals for assistance. He mentioned the following in the appeals sent:

“This Society was inaugurated recently to develop the educational needs of the Muslims in Ceylon in general and Kalmunai in particular. Funds are now needed for:-

1. To set up a Secretariat
2. To establish an English medium High School in Kalmunai with sections for Arabic and Tamil.
3. To offer scholarships free or on the basis of loans to students in the Kalmunai district for their secondary and higher education.
4. To devise ways and means to achieve the objective of the society on receipt of sufficient funds, the Executive Committee would decide as to the disbursement of this fund.”

However, the continuation of this programme was interrupted due to the transfer of Azeez back to Colombo. When Azeez was transferred back to Colombo and the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund was started in 1945, the Kalmunai Muslim Educational Society decided to merge with the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund as it had a wider perspective covering the whole country. The first donation to the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund was therefore the transfer of Rs. 2,306.70 from the Kalmunai Society.

### **Comradeship**

Azeez lived in Kalmunai only for a short period from 16th April, 1942 to 10th January, 1944, after which he was transferred back to Colombo as Deputy Food Controller and again within a month to Kandy as AGA. During this short period he transformed the attitude of the people towards a Government Agent to the surprise of the people. This was an era, when the GA was looked upon as a petty king. No one dared to sit in the presence of a GA and everyone respectfully moved to the edges of the road whenever his vehicle or even the vehicle of a Vanniah passed by. The ‘Residency’ was out of bounds to the people. Azeez was entirely a different man. He spoke very politely to every person coming to meet him; accepted and honoured the invitations for weddings and attended many funerals. Every Friday he attended for his Jummah prayers at mosques in different villages. An illustration would be his driver Ibrahim, who was from Kattankudy and joined Azeez three months after his arrival in Kalmunai to replace Caldera. He served with loyalty and dedication until Azeez’s demise. Even thereafter, he lived with Azeez’s elder son Ali, and died in 1996 at Ali’s home in Bolgoda at the age of 80 years.

Although they had known and worked with Azeez in the Kachcheri only for a short span of two years, the Administrative Officer Subramaniam, Office Assistants Razak, Yonus and Ponnuthurai cherished their relationship until his demise. So was his neighbour Rajadurai of the Public Works Department and his wife Daisy. Similarly Maruthamunai Vellaikutty Kakka, Palamunai Vidanayar, Palamunai Pulavar and others with their families made it a tradition until their deaths to visit "Meadow Sweet" in Colombo and enjoyed the hospitality extended by Azeez and his family members. (Subramaniam's son Kirupanathan, an eye surgeon, met Azeez's son Ali in Jeddah in 1985 and they became very close friends, the former is now working in a hospital in Nigeria).

Azeez had very close connections with some families in Kalmunai. Among them was the family of M.M. Abdul Majeed widely known as Sammanthurai Vanniyar. The preliminary meetings to establish the Kalmunai Muslim Educational Society were held at his residence. He was the uncle (father's brother) of Marhoom M.H.M. Ashraff. Another family was that of Mudaliyar M.M. Ibrahim who later represented Pottuvil in Parliament, and served as a Deputy Minister.

### **Blooming of Life Long Friendships**

There were two personalities with whom Azeez was very close and cherished their friendship. One was the poet Abdul Cader Lebbe of Kattankudy (father of Dr. A.C.L. Ameer Ali of Murdoch University, Western Australia, a student at Zahira College during the Azeez era and my contemporary). The poet himself says:-

"My poem appeared in *Dharul Islam*, a monthly magazine from South India under the pen-name Athan. An avid reader Mr. Azeez was wondering who this Athan was.

It was an era when Mr. Azeez was kept at a high pedestal by the Muslims of Kalmunai because he was the first Muslim Civil Servant, who was an educationist well versed in Tamil and also social service minded. I casually visited his residence one day when he was serving as the A.G.A. On seeing me, he inquired from me who I was with a smile. I replied that I was a teacher at the Natpiddimunai Tamil School and lived in Kalmunai. There was a copy of the *Dharul Islam* on his table. That magazine carried a poem written by me in the first page. I had spoken out to him that I was writing poems in that magazine under the pen-name Athan. On hearing this he was overwhelmed with joy, embraced and hugged me. Tears are pouring from my eyes when I write this. From this incident our friendship started growing. We continued to exchange our thoughts. Just two weeks prior to his demise, he had written a letter to me". (A tribute by Abdul Cader Lebbe appears in this publication).

The other was the relationship with Swami Vipulananda which bloomed at Kalmunai. Azeez had met the Swami once in Jaffna in 1939. After this, he met the Swami together with the State Council Member V. Nalliah at Sinna Muhathuwaram in Akkaraipattu in 1943. Azeez used to meet the Swami either at Karaitivu, his birth place or at Shivananda Vidyalaya, Batticaloa. This school at Kalladi Uppodai provided education to all sans caste, creed and religious differences. They used to have lengthy discussions on matters of education, literature, folk lore etc. Sometimes one would observe two chairs placed under the margosa tree opposite the Swami's room around 5.00 p.m.. That was an indication that the A.G.A. was visiting the Swami that day. Azeez delivered a lecture to the students of Shivananda Vidyalaya on the invitation of the School Science Union on 24.9.1943. Mr. K. Kanapathipillai (later Principal) presided at this meeting.

Azeez had stated in many of his later writings that the discussions with Swami Vipulananda made him to realize more and more the importance of education to his community. He in course of time left the Civil Service to become the Principal of Colombo Zahira College succeeding Dr. T.B. Jayah in 1948. Azeez had confessed that the inauguration of the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund and his decision later to accept the post of Principal of Zahira College were encouraged by the Swami. Azeez states as follows:-

"I received the opportunity of moving very closely with Swami Vipulananda during my stay at Kalmunai as the A.G.A. from 1942 to 1943 for a short time. He lived in his own village of Karaitivu a few miles away from Kalmunai. Later in 1944, he stayed with me for 12 days at my official residence 'Mount Airy' in Kandy. During this period he had resigned his Professorship at the Annamalai University in India and taken up an appointment as Professor of Tamil at the University of Ceylon. I closely understood the Swami during these 12 days. We had discussions on many subjects. The ideas I brought forth at these discussions helped me a great deal in my later stages to inaugurate the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund and to accept and discharge the duties of Principal, Zahira College, Colombo. He emphasized the importance of an Arabic-Tamil Dictionary and assured he could help in writing one. He told me all about the fame and praises of the folk-lore of the Muslim Community in the Eastern Region. He with his wide experience and great knowledge of the Eastern Province felt that assistance was very urgently needed for the socio-religious and educational uplift of the people irrespective of religious creed and communal differences. For this he believed leadership could come only from those with sound education, religious minded and with purity in heart and action".

Among the students of the Swami at the University of Ceylon were Professor Allama M.M. Uwise and the renowned educationist and Librarian S.M. Kamaldeen. Pulawarmani A.M. Sheriffdeen of Maruthamunai studied under the Swami at Kalmunai in his special classes for Pandit and Vidwan courses. Muthaliph Vaithiyar from Sainthamaruthu was a close friend of the Swami.

(It is significant to note that Pandit T. Mailvaganam, who was the Principal of Manipay Hindu College, resigned from his post and joined the Ramakrishna Mission as Swami Vipulananda. He was appointed as the Manager of Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam which was the first school attended by Azeez in Jaffna. The Swami gave up this post and joined the Annamalai University in India as Professor of Tamil. He relinquished this post and settled down in Batticaloa, his native area, to look after the educational activities of the Ramakrishna Mission and founded Shivananda Vidyalaya. He was also Professor of Tamil at the Ceylon University.)

### **Communal Harmony**

The farewell functions accorded to Azeez for his selfless service manifest the cordial and close relationship among all communities in Eastern Sri Lanka half a century ago. Functions were organized at Kalmunai, Sammanturai, Akkaraipattu, Kaluwanchikudy and Kattankudy. The main function was held at Kalmunai Rest House presided by State Councillor V. Nalliah and the farewell oration was by E. Rasiah, Attorney-at-Law and Vice-President of the Hindu-Muslim League. A separate function was organized for his wife at Methodist Girls Boarding School presided by Mrs. S.J.W. Alagiah and the oration was by Mrs. P. Kathiravelupillai.

All these incidents depict clearly the cordial relationship that existed between the Tamils and Muslims of this region during those days. Azeez if lived today would be heart-broken to witness the ethnic divide between these two communities. He would never have dreamt of Muslims being slaughtered in their places of worship. It is perhaps just as well that he never lived to see the senseless and cruel dismembering of the Jaffna and Northern Muslim community, the community he was born into which helped shape the personality that he was to become.

**During the short span of two years Azeez travelled the length and breadth of the areas under the purview of the Kalmunai Emergency Kachcheri, and worked long hours to put the district in the forefront as a leading producer of food. There are many who attribute this achievement as one of Azeez's greatest, surpassing his successes in the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund, Zahira College, Colombo and the All-Ceylon YMMA Conference.**



Azeez continued to visit the East many times which he loved. In May 1960 with his family Azeez spent an extensive holiday travelling from Valaichenai to Arugam Bay. He met many old friends and colleagues and was seen reminiscing with cultivators and villagers with immense happiness.

Dr. Azeez developed an in-depth everlasting affection towards the people of the Eastern region despite his short stay there. This was well manifest in his enormous affection and love shown to his students from the East like myself at Zahira College, Colombo.

#### References:

1. Diaries of A.M.A. Azeez – 1942, 1943 and 1944
2. Copies of Minutes of Meetings, Notes, and Photographs with Index maintained by him during this period
3. *Daily News, Observer, Times* – News items of this period
4. Souvenir of the Harvest Festival, Kalmunai, 1943

*(S.H.M. Jameel hails from Sainthamaruthu and was a student of Zahira College, Colombo during the Azeez era. He graduated in Economics from the University of Ceylon in 1964 and later obtained the Diploma in Education from the same University and M.A. from the Jaffna University. He was Principal of Zahira College, Kalmunai and Addalachenai Training College. He was the first Registrar of the Eastern University and left due to unstable situation in the area. He retired as Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Cultural and Religious Affairs)*

## அஸீஸ் என்னும் தயாளனே!

கவிஞர் சிந்துல் காதர் லெவ்வை

### நீதிப் பதிகம்

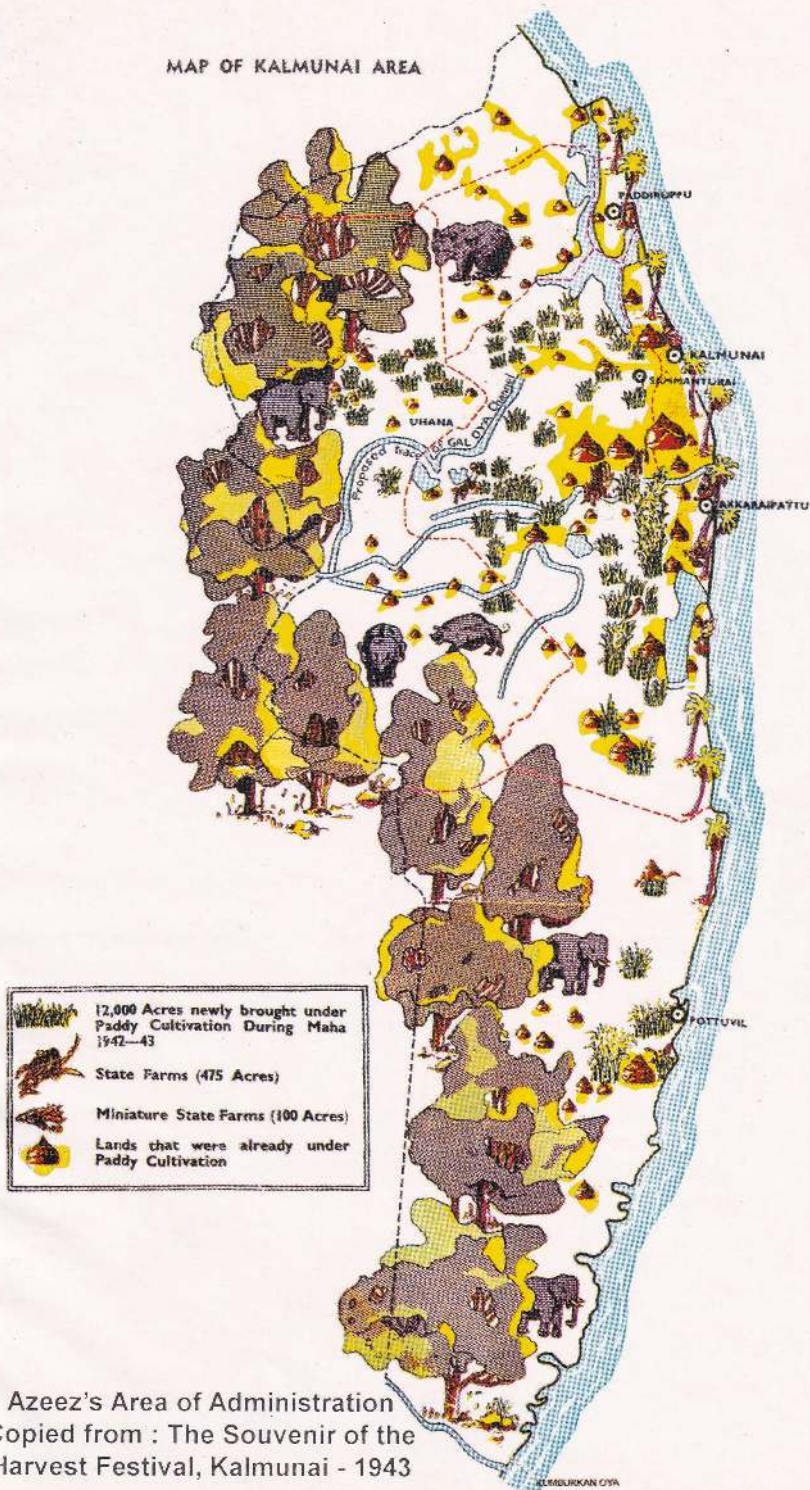
1. வேத மோதிப் பொருளை யுணர்ந்திடல்  
வேளை யைந்து தொழுகையைப் பேணிடல்,  
ஆதரவற்ற வர்களுக் கீந்திடல்  
ஆண்டவன் பேரில் நோன்புகள் நோற்றிடல்,  
காதம் போயரு உறஜ்ஜை முடித்திடல்  
கர்த்தன் காட்டிய முக்கிய பாதையாம்;  
ஈதலம்புகழ் லங்கையின் புத்திரன்  
ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
2. கர்த்தனை நம்பி வாழ்பவர் வேறொரு  
காவலைத் தேடி யெங்கு மலைவரோ!  
மெய்த் தவஞானி செல்வம் பெருக்குவோர்  
மேட்டிமை கண்டு தாள்பணிவான் கொலோ!  
உய்த்துணர்பவ ரில் லையென்றாகிலும்  
உலகில் உண்மைக் கழிவிலை யென்பரால்  
எத்திசையிலும் மக்கள் விரும்பிடும்  
ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
3. நேர்மை யென்பது நீதிக் கிலக்கணம்  
நிறைவு காணல் மனத்தறு பொற்குணம்  
சீர்மையோடு பழகதல் யாவர்க்கும்  
சிறந்த பண்பெனச் சீரியர் காண்பரால்  
கார் மிகுந்த இவ் வீழ நன்னாட்டிலே  
கல்வி கற்ற முதற் சிவில் சேவகன்  
யாராவர் முஸ்லீம்களின் மத்தியில்  
ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே

4. தந்தை தாயரைப் பேணுதல் மூத்தவர் தங்கள் வாய்மொழி யேற்று நடந்திடல், வந்தனை செய்யு மஸ்ஜித் தலங்களில் வம்பு சன்டைகள் நீக்கிடல், ஏழையை நிந்தனை யின்றிக் காத்திடல் பண்பென நினைவுறுத்துவ ரான்றோர் எமக்குள்ளே எந்த நேரமும் சேவைக்கு முந்துறும் ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
5. ஆதி நாயனின் தூதரின் பேரிலே அருமை யாம்ஸல வாத்துக ளோதுதல், வேத மோதுதல், ஆண்டவன் கட்டளை விலகிடாமற் தக்கு வாவினில் நின்றிடல் நீதியாமுஸ் லீம்களின் பண்பதாம்; நிலையென முஸ் லீம்கல்விக் காய்ந்தி ஈதி லங்கையிற் தோன்றிடச் செய்தவன் ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
6. கூடி வாழும் சகோதர மக்களைக் கோளினாற் பிள வாக்கி மகிழுவோர் கேடு செய்பவராம் குடும்பத்திலே கிளைகள் தாங்குதல் நாயனின் கூற்றதாம், பேறு பெற்ற நம்ஸாகிரா கல்லூரி பேரெடுக்க உழைத்த பெருமகன் ஈடி ணையற்ற சேவை புரிந்தவன் ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
7. ஆண்டவன் பேரிற் சேவை புரிந்தவர் ஆகி றத்திற் சுவனம் புகுவரால், வேண்டுங் கல்வியைத் தேடி யலைந்தவர் வீரன் வாளிலுந் தீரம் பெறுவரால், மாண்டு போன நம் தாதையர் செல்வங்கள் மண்ணிற் காப்பவரே மக்களென்பரால் ஈண்டு சேவைக் கணிகலமாமெங்கள் ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.

8. ஒற்றுமை யுடன் வாழுநன் மக்களை  
 ஓரஞ் சொல்லிப் பிரிக்கு முனாபிக்கு  
 பற்றுறுந்த னென்று நபி மொழி  
 பகரு மேயிறை சாபமு முண்டுமால்;  
 கற்றவர் கண்டு மெச்சு மரங்குகள்  
 கடல் கடந்து சென்றங்கும் புகழினை  
 இற்றை நாவ்வரை ஈட்டி வருமெங்கள்  
 ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
9. பொறாமை யாள ருடனிறை தங்குமே  
 பொங்கு வாருடன் ஷைத்தா னுறங்குமே,  
 சிறுமை பேசுவார் கண்டு விலகுமின்  
 செப்பினார் நபி நாயகமன்றுதான்,  
 உறும் வற்றுணற் பண்புக ளோம்புவீர்  
 ஒதினாரொலி மார்களு மென்றுமே  
 இறுதி நாளினை நம்புவோர் கொள்கையாம்  
 ஏளம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
10. கல்வி கேள்வி சிறந்த நற் பண்டிதன்  
 கவியி னாற்புகழ்ப் பாவணி பாடியோன்  
 செல்வ னாகச னாலெப்பை ஆலிமு  
 செய்தவப் பேறால் வந்த நற்பேரனும்  
 நல்ல னெங்கள் அஸீஸ்\* தயாளனின்  
 நாம மென்றும் விளங்கிட வேயருள்  
 எல் லையின்றியே தாஇறை வாவென  
 இறைஞ்சி னேனப்துல் காதிர் கவிஞனே.

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MAP OF KALMUNAI AREA



Azeez's Area of Administration  
 Copied from : The Souvenir of the  
 Harvest Festival, Kalmunai - 1943



Message from the Governor  
Sir. Andrew Caldecott



QUEEN'S HOUSE,  
CEYLON.

I congratulate the people of Kalmunai on their revival of the ancient festival of Harvest-Home which, I am informed, was once as generally observed in Ceylon as of yore in the English countryside. In both cases its gradual discontinuance was symptomatic of an atrophy in the national genius for agriculture. Both countries have been brought widely back to their agricultural senses by the present war: and in both the reclamation of land for food supply, and its scientific or progressive improvement therefor, must be rendered permanent and assured for future generations. It is thus most appropriate and laudable that Kalmunai's Harvest-Home of 1943 should be in the nature not only of a celebration but also of an education; an occasion for resolve as well as thanksgiving. The booklet for which I send this message will, I trust, long be treasured and read - both as a call to agricultural effort and as a guide to its success.

A. Caldecott  
Governor

March 1943.



Azeez as Additional Landing Surveyor  
of Customs, 1942 – The post he  
relinquished on transfer to Kalmunai

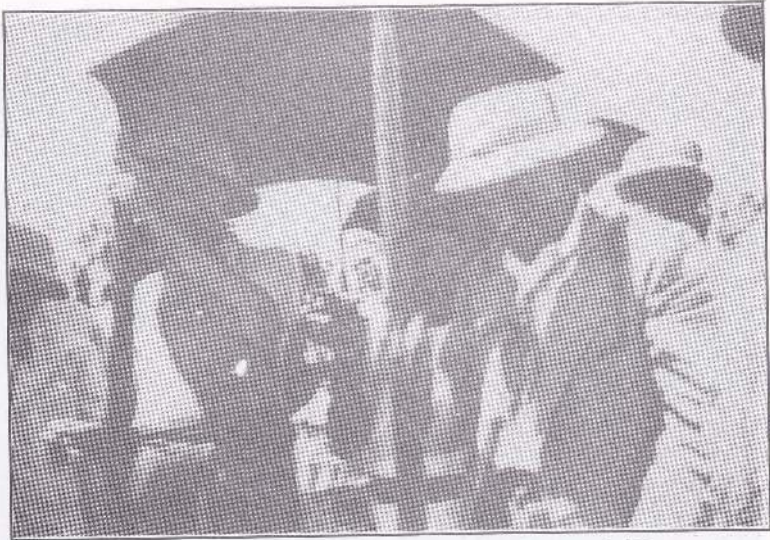


Azeez, Marina and Ummu at  
Kalladi Bridge



Azeez at Kalmunai Emergency Kachcheri Office with Staff, Razak,  
Ponnuthurai and Yoonus





D.S. Senanayake on arrival at Chengatpadai Farm



Distribution of Harrows and Ploughs at Kalmunai Kachcheri



**Workers at Chengatpadai Farm**



**D.S. Senanayake harvesting paddy at Chengatpadai Farm**



**Internal Purchasing Scheme, Kalmunai District**



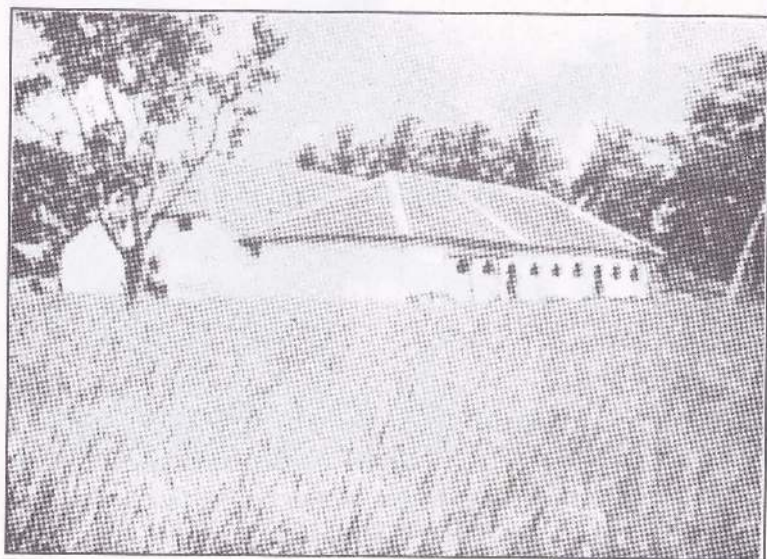
**Azeez and others at Chengatpadai Farm**



D.S. Senanayake carrying a 'pingo' with produce of Chengatpadai Farm



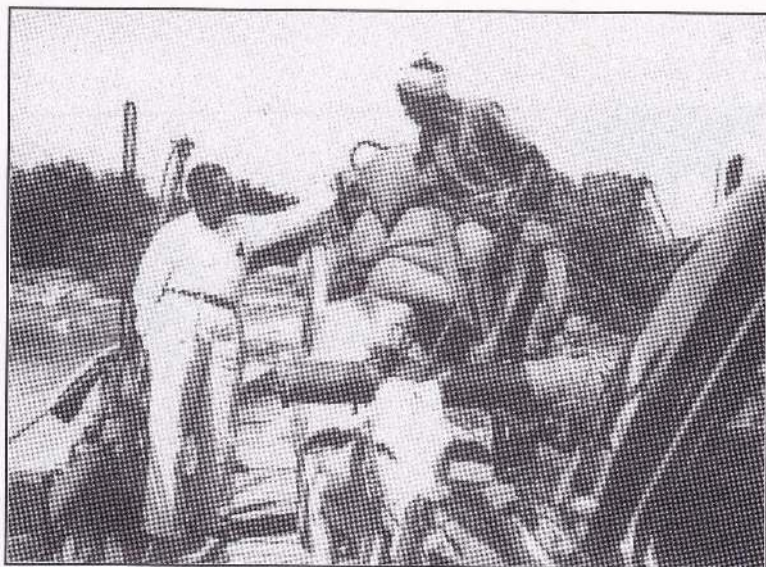
Azeez and the Digavapi Priest at the Harvest Festival



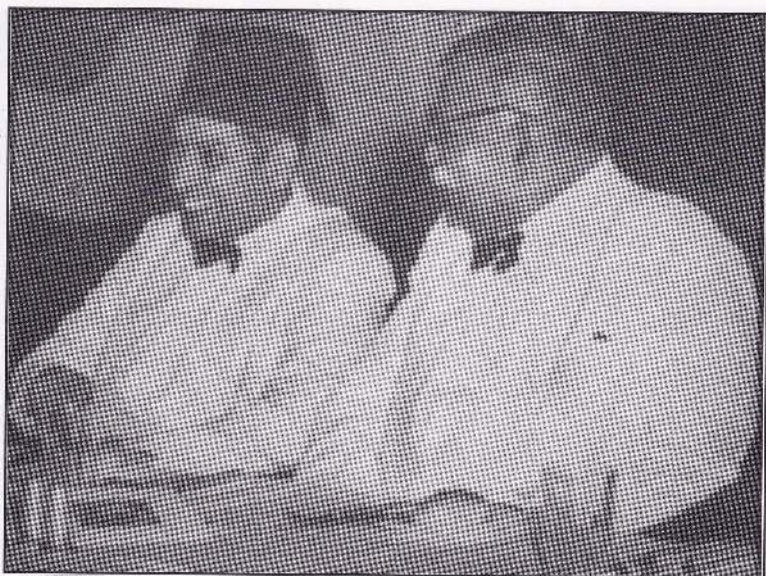
Paddy on the Akkaraipattu Mosque Grounds



Ummu and Marina in the vegetable plot at 'Gems'



**Azeez reminiscing with a farmer on the ferry near  
Panama, May 1960**



**Azeez and Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake, 1951 –  
Reminiscing the Kalmunai Days!**

## REMEMBERING A.M.A. AZEEZ

*Prof Karthigesu Sivathamby*

In spite of this lapse of a quarter century, A.M.A. Azeez lives on, his memory untainted, with an increasing realization of his historical role – what he had done for Zahira College, Colombo, for Muslim education in general, for the role he played in the public life of his times, and above all, for the intellectual enrichment of this country through his writings in both English and Tamil.

For those of us of that generation of students who studied at Zahira (and a very few had the opportunity of teaching there too) during his Principalship (1948-1961), it was a time of unforgettable intellectual guidance and opening up of new intellectual vistas. Zahira, under Azeez, especially in the mid and late fifties realized its full potential as an educational institution, the foundation for which was laid by T.B. Jayah.

Many of the teachers who worked during that time and a substantial number of students who passed through Zahira rose to be quite important figures in the intellectual and public life of this country – Kamaldeen, Wijeratne, Bahar, Roy de Mel, Stanley Tillakaratne, Mahroof, Sivagnanam, Uwise, Shibly Cassim, H.M.P. Mohideen, Sameem, Furkhan, Sivagurunathan, Sivarajah, Ameer Ali, Jameel, Thalifdeen, Wesumperuma, Sivasubramaniam, Saldin, Abeysinghe, Barrie, Tuley de Silva, Ishaq, Shukri, Cader, Neville Edirisinghe, Macky Hashim, Selvanayagam, Balasingham, Suhaib, Gaffoor, Hamza Haniffa – to mention a few, in fact a very few.

In the late fifties there was a time when expansion of universities beyond Peradeniya and Colombo was thought in terms of cultural universities. At that time Azeez was grooming Zahira to be the Cultural University for the Muslims; Zahira, in his own words, was to be the “radiating centre of Islam”. He had even thought of bringing down students from the sub-sahara region of Africa to this institution.

Even without that promise of a cultural university – which never worked out – Zahira was the premier institution for Muslim education. In those days, in the eyes of an average Muslim villager being a student at Zahira mattered even more than being an undergraduate. “After all the boy is studying under Azeez – what better do you need”.

His lasting contribution to the education of the Muslims of this country should be seen in the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund he created in 1945. Many of

the young Muslim intellectuals, who came up in the late fifties to seventies, owe their position to that Fund, which saw them through the university. A full list of the beneficiaries will be very revealing. Azeez widened the base of higher education for Muslims in Sri Lanka.

If the Muslim Scholarship Fund catered to the needs of the growing number of promising young Muslim students from villages and towns, the YMMA movement he started (The Young Men's Muslim Association – 1950) created a new socio-political awareness among the Muslim youth. In a way it was a fore-runner to the Islamic Socialist Front (ISF) started later by Badiudin Mahmud. With YMMAs in action throughout the Muslim areas of the country, the changing needs and priority of the post 1956 era brought forth the ISF. It lay in the logic of expanding Muslim education and changing political loyalties. To us, his non-Muslim students it was his intellectual earnestness, and sincere concern in our development, that drew us very close to him.

With his basic training in history, Azeez was interested in the history of the Muslims in Sri Lanka from a national perspective. His contribution on Islam in Sri Lanka to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, and his work "The West Reappraised" are known to all the scholars working in these fields.

In my opinion, Azeez's contribution to Sri Lankan historiography lies in that he highlighted the Muslim response to British colonialist domination. He discovered Siddi Lebbe as the Muslim counterpart of the Hindu Arumuga Navalar and the Buddhist Anagarika Dharmapala.

Azeez was trying to orient the consciousness of the emerging Muslim youth towards a nation wide participation but firmly rooted within their religio-cultural identity. He was solely responsible for the introduction of Iqbal to Sri Lankan Muslims. This led to the discovery of Nazrul Islam and other important Muslim poets by his students.

It was during his post-Zahira days that he emerged as a Tamil writer of significance. With time in hand, and reawakened interest in his cultural roots, Azeez began to write in Tamil.

It was then, I became very close to him by assisting as a scribe. It was a journey to great intellectual depths and to broadening of vision and vistas. It was during that period of inter-action with him, he enabled me to become a Professional Academic. It was the association with him that led me on to the Assistant Lecturership at the then Vidyodaya University. Mr. Azeez was more confident about my knowledge of Tamil than me myself!



In spite of long years of life as a Colombo-based Muslim leader, his basic flair for language, the way he could tap the idiom of the language within which he grew up in Jaffna in early twenties was marvellous. During the early sixties, writing in Tamil provided a cathartic release for him from the many harrowing problems which some of his erstwhile friends and beneficiaries created for him.

In Tamil writing Azeez made a name for himself as a travel writer.

His travelogues on his visits to Malaysia (First International Tamil Conference – 1966) and to Egypt are two outstanding pieces of travel writing in Tamil in Sri Lanka. The historian in him widened the focus and enriched the contents of his writing. He was not made to be a politician. But the pressure of Muslim public life in Colombo and perhaps that of his own family demanded that he be more than an educationist. Perhaps Jayah's career as educationist cum politician was too enticing. Azeez was made a Senator in 1952 and continued on till 1963.

It is unfortunate that much is not said today about his speeches in the Senate. Some of them were really outstanding. I remember his speech on Sinhala Only bill. He argued very effectively for a definite place for Tamil which he did not specify earlier, and the continued use of English. He was a much respected member of the second chamber serving in many of the important committees. It is high time that a select collection of his Senate speeches are brought out.

Remembering Azeez is remembering the human being in him, and with some of us who were his students, he opened his mind and heart and shared with us his joys and sorrows.

The Azeez we knew thus, was a man of great warmth, vision and sensitivity.

To a few of us, an early morning visit to 'Meadow Sweet', Barnes Place, where he lived was a must, to speak to him, to listen to him and quite often to work with him.

He had a wonderful library. As students we used to admire his calligraphic signature.

Mr. Azeez loved his family. His life was woven round his wife – a great lady. And when his wife passed away, he could not live much longer after that. It was a case of the proverbial Anril bird in Tamil literature pining for the lost partner.

Azeez was more than a man, he was an institution. We lovingly remember the way he used to walk up to his office with his driver Ibrahim Nana walking behind with his wooden box of the civil service days.

In spite of many years that have passed by, to us his students, friends and student-friends, remembering Azeez is an act of gratitude and of rediscovering our own past – a past in which he had a significant role to play.

May His Soul rest in Peace.

*(Prof. Karthigesu Sivathamby was a student of Zahira College, Colombo (1948-1952) during the Azeez era. He graduated from the University of Ceylon and was a teacher at Zahira (1956-1961). He obtained a M.A. from the University of Ceylon and Ph.D. from the University of Birmingham, England. Later he was on the academic staff of Vidyodaya, Jaffna and Eastern Universities).*



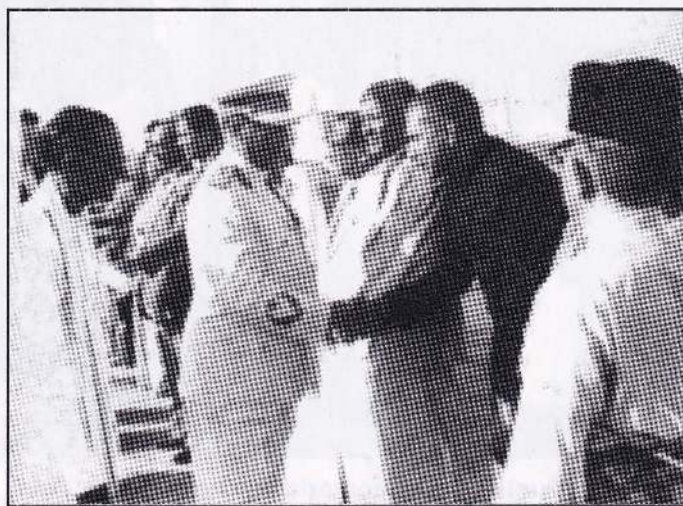
**D.S. Senanayake, Azeez and T.B. Jayah at the unveiling of the portrait of Jayah at Zahira College, August 1948**



**Azeez with Muslim Parliamentarians M.M. Ibrahim, A.M. Merza, M.E.H. Mohamed Ali, Sir Razik Fareed, H.S. Ismail and Dr. M.C.M. Kaleel**



**Azeez greets Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India**



**Azeez greets Joseph Broz Tito, President of Yugoslavia**



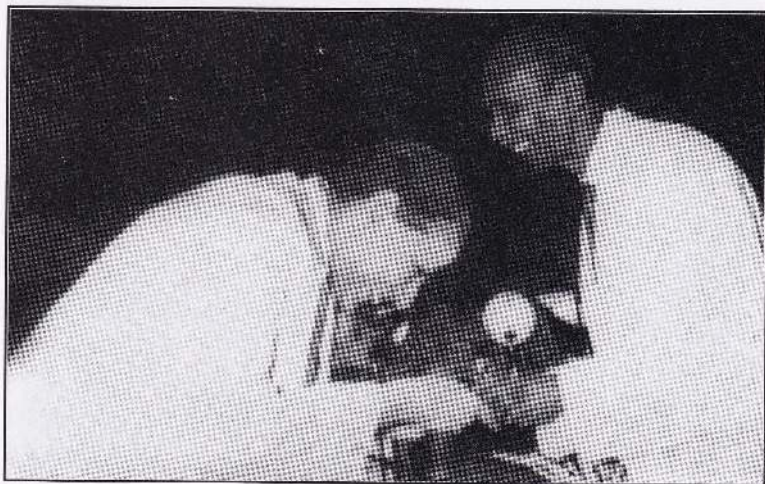
Azeez greets Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt



Azeez with the Rector of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt



Azeez welcoming Dr. K.G. Saiyadain, Advisor on Education to the Govt. of India, at a Special Assembly at Zahira College



Azeez receiving the Sahitiya Award from D.S. Goonesekera, Minister of Cultural Affairs, for his Tamil book "*Islam in Ceylon*", 1963

## DR. A.M.A. AZEEZ - Sri Lanka (1911-1973)

*“A civil servant and dedicated educationist, he brought Muslim education and welfare to the centre-stage of national life to uplift the condition of his weaker brethren”*

Eminent educationist, scholar and social worker, Aboobucker Mohamed Abdul Azeez was born in Vannarponnai in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka in 1911 in a well-to-do family. He had his early education at Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam and Jaffna Hindu College. Although he spent the major part of his life outside Jaffna, he was proud of his birthplace and the two schools he had attended. In fact, the childhood years spent in Jaffna had a great influence in his later life.

His maternal grandfather was a successful businessman, his father a leading lawyer, a qadi, member of the Jaffna urban council and the first outstation president of the All Ceylon Muslim League. His family was deeply religious and the young Azeez learnt the tenets of Islam from his grand-parents and his maternal aunt and attended the nearby Allapichchai Quran Madrasa where he learnt to read the Quran. Schooling at the Quran school and Hadith college gave the young Azeez a liberal outlook in life. At a later date he stated, “One must follow one’s religion and customs strictly, and at the same time understand and appreciate the religion and customs of others.” It was at the Hindu College that he gathered a good grounding in the Tamil language and nuances of Hinduism.

He entered University College, Colombo in 1929 and graduated with honours in history. He was awarded a government scholarship to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of Cambridge. Before leaving for Cambridge he appeared for the Ceylon civil service Examination. His sojourn at Cambridge was short-lived as he had passed the civil service examination and preferred to return home in 1936 to begin a career as a civil servant. Azeez had the distinction of being the first Muslim civil servant of his country, a great achievement for a person from the backward minority community.

A.M.A. Azeez began his career in the civil service as a young cadet at Matale. In 1937, he married Ummu Kuluthum Ismail from the distinguished J.P. family in Colombo. She was the granddaughter of M.I. Mohamed Alie J.P., the first Vice-Consul for Persia.

During World War II, Azeez was attached to the customs department as Additional landing surveyor. In 1942 he was selected by Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake and transferred to Kalmunai as assistant government agent to set up the 'Emergency Kachcheri', for accelerating food production. It was in Kalmunai that Azeez first saw the plight of poor, landless Muslims. He gave them grants of jungle land for cultivation. To this day, there is a section of land in the southern part of the Batticaloa district called 'Azeez Thurai Kandam'. Grateful farmers named it to perpetuate Azeez's memory. It was also here that he realized that education was a great need for the uplift of Muslims.

He had a stint in Kandy as assistant government agent in the mid 1940s. Here he was able to obtain information regarding Muslims of the Central Province. His final assignments as a civil servant were as information officer and secretary to the minister of health (in the state council), where he was responsible for the establishment of rural hospitals. While in the civil service, frequent visits to remote areas helped him to gather information regarding Muslims. He became convinced that the backwardness and poverty of many Muslims could be remedied with education. He noted that the Muslim community "due to educational backwardness was handicapped not merely in the educational sphere but in all spheres of life, and any attempt to improve the situation must give priority to education." This was the reason why he gave up a promising career in the civil service to take up the post of Principal of Zahira College in 1948.

Muslims began to develop interest in education only in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Leaders like Siddie Lebbe, the Egyptian exile Arabi Pasha, Wappichi Marikar and I.L.M. Abdul Azeez founded the Colombo Muslim Educational Society in 1891. In 1892, al-Madrasathul Zahira was established on the campus of Colombo's Maradana Mosque; this was later to become the Zahira College where Dr A.M.A. Azeez became the principal. Dr Azeez put Muslims on the track of modern education. He argued that the Muslim community should acquire knowledge of four languages: without Arabic the Muslims of Sri Lanka would become culturally isolated and lose their rich heritage; Tamil the mother tongue, had to be mastered, so also Sinhala, the language of the majority of the population; and English the world language, too, had to be learnt. The curriculum of Muslim schools should include all these languages, he asserted.

While at Kalmunai, Dr Azeez developed friendship with Swami Vipulananda, an eminent scholar, educationist and the founder of Shivananda Vidyalaya. This friendship continued even after Azeez left the Eastern Province and Swami Vipulananda became professor of Tamil at the university of Ceylon. Swami Vipulananda also encouraged Azeez to accept the post of principal of Zahira College.







**Dr. A.M.A. Azeez was Honoured as a National Hero.  
A Commemorative Stamp  
was issued on 22nd May, 1986**