



A.M.A. AZEEZ

Early Life and Tributes

Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Foundation

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Editors

S.H.M. Jameel

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Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Foundation

Colombo

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A.M.A. Azeez - Early Life and Tributes
Edited by S.H.M. Jameel and M. Ali Azeez

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Dr. A.M.A. Azeez

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UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA
SRI LANKA

This is to certify that

Aboubucker Mohamed Abdul Azeez

was admitted to the Degree of

Doctor of Letters

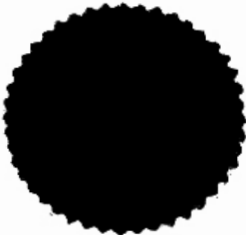
(honoris causa)

Posthumously

at a Convocation

holden in Jaffna on *13 September 1980*

Witness our hands this *Thirteenth day of September*
One Thousand Nine Hundred and Eighty



S. Withisumanthran

Vice-Chancellor

W. A. A.
Registrar

PREFACE

Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Foundation is privileged to release this book as part of its objective of publishing the Articles and Speeches of this great intellectual – Dr. A.M.A. Azeez and various writings and speeches on his contributions. The first such publication containing essays on his life and services to his community as well as the country was released in 2007. This was followed in 2008 by a volume containing all his speeches in the Senate – the Upper House of Parliament. Every speech is of great intellectual and historical value. This present book is the eighth in our series of such publications.

Every work of Dr. Azeez is scholarly, as there is much input of research into the relevant subject. He had deeply analysed the past, assessed the current situation in the correct perspective and attempted to guide the future course of action. When we read his pronouncements with an analytical mind, we will not fail to understand that he had attempted to guide the community and the nation in the correct path for a better future. His comments have relevance even today. Had we abided by the advice given to us by eminent personalities like Dr. A.M.A. Azeez during the middle of the 20th century, Sri Lanka would have emerged as the “Paradise on Earth” at the dawn of the 21st century.

Compilation of the works of Dr. Azeez becomes an easy task, because as a great scholar with far sightedness, he had left all his documents well arranged and indexed. All of them have been equally well preserved by his son Ali. Even in the hundreds of photographs left by Azeez, he had very clearly marked the occasion, date and time, and the personalities present. These could be accomplished only by a person with methodical habits and ability.

Colombo Zahira College of Azeez Era had produced a set of loyal students who are ever willing to perpetuate the memory of their Principal. Our publications are the results of their benevolence, Engineer A.G.A. Barrie being the main sponsor of all our books.

This book contains articles and commemoration orations of erudite scholars of repute, who have made indepth studies into the life and times of Dr. Azeez. We acknowledge their contributions with gratitude.

We also wish to thank Mr. Khalid, M. Farouk, a distinguished student of Zahira and a stalwart of Y.M.M.A. founded by Azeez for the profile of A.M.A. Azeez and to Ali for providing the rare documents and photographs. We earnestly expect all those who value the services of Dr. Azeez to extend their support and co-operation in continuing this Publication Project.

S.H.M. Jameel

Profile of Dr. A.M.A. Azeez

Eminent educationist, scholar and social worker, Aboobucker Mohamed Abdul Azeez, was born in Vannarponnai in Jaffna on 4th October, 1911. His father S.M. Aboobucker J.P. was a leading lawyer, Quazi, Vice-Chairman of the Jaffna Urban Council and the first outstation President of the All-Ceylon Muslim League. His mother died in 1918 and his father re-married. He was then petted and pampered by his maternal grandparents and aunt. They encouraged him in his studies and Azeez studied late into the night with the aid of a flickering oil lamp.

Azeez joined the Allapichchai Quran Madrasa in 1916 where he learnt to read the Quran. After passing the Standard III examination in Tamil medium in 1920 at the Mohammadiya Mixed School, he joined the Hindu school R.K.M. Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam in 1921 and Jaffna Hindu College in 1923 and studied there until 1928. It was at these schools that he gathered a good grounding in the Tamil language and nuances of Hinduism, and he had great respect for his teachers.

As a boy Azeez was a near prodigy, having been always one jump ahead of the age limits during his academic career, so much so that when it came to entering the University in 1928 he had to wait for a year as he was underage. So he spent this year at St. Joseph's College, Colombo.

On his days spent at Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam Azeez had stated, "I now feel thrice-blessed that I did go to Vidyalayam and nowhere else. My period of stay, February 1921 to June 1923, though pretty short quantitatively was extremely long qualitatively. It was at Vidyalayam 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". Azeez was

a scholar in Tamil and for a Muslim he had a deep knowledge of Tamil literature and he would quote the Kural, the masterpiece of the poet-philosopher Thiruvalluvar, with the best of the pundits. Azeez's speeches were fluent and in pure Tamil and were a treat to listen to. In later years his routine every morning was to listen to Hindu devotional songs (thevarams) over the radio. He relished the beauty of Tamil in these songs, and reading Tamil in ola leaves as well with a close friend and high ranking public officer. His admiration for Tamil activated the Tamil Sangam to greater heights at Zahira College, Colombo when he was Principal.

With his abiding interest and love for Tamil, Azeez put his elder son, Ali, in the Tamil medium from the kindergarten at Ladies' College in 1946 until he switched to Science subjects for the S.S.C. examination in 1957 at Royal College, which at that time were taught only in English. The other Muslim boys opted for the English medium from inception. On an amusing note, it was revealed by Marhoom Justice M. Jameel at a public meeting to remember Azeez, that when he was A.G.A. Kandy Azeez had requested his friends to avoid speaking to Ali in Tamil lest he spoils his speech in Tamil. Ali recollects that he spoke Tamil in three different accents at home, Jaffna Tamil with his father, Eastern style with driver Ibrahim from Kattankudy and 'sonaha' Tamil with his mother.

Having been a distinguished student and a respected old boy of the two Jaffna schools, Azeez 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.

Azeez was an Exhibitioner in History at the University College and graduated with Honours in History from the University of London in 1933. He joined the Colombo Zahira College hostel as a resident tutor and the Law College, but left shortly when he was awarded the Government Arts Scholarship in 1933, to proceed to St.

Catherine's College, Cambridge in 1934. Before leaving, he appeared for the Ceylon Civil Service Examination.

His sojourn at Cambridge was short-lived and he returned after one term on passing the C.C.S. examination. He was second in order of merit after K. Kanagasunderam, and nine were selected including C.P. de Silva. He was the first Muslim Civil Servant and preferred to follow a career in the public service. He joined as a young cadet at Matale as Office Assistant in 1935. Thereafter, he held the posts of Administrative Secretary, Department of Medical and Sanitary Services; Secretary to the Minister of Health (Hon. Dr. W.A. de Silva); Additional Landing Surveyor, H.M. Customs; Assistant Government Agent (Emergency), Kalmunai; Deputy Food Controller; Assistant Government Agent, Kandy; Information Officer; Additional Controller of Establishments, Treasury; Assistant Commissioner of Parliamentary Elections and Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Local Government (under Minister Hon. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike).

Azeez's great achievement, if not the greatest, was his contribution to food production while serving as A.G.A. in Kalmunai. During the Second World War a shortage of food was looming and the Government had to find ways and means of accelerating food production. One of the areas selected was the Southern region of the Batticaloa District from Paddiruppu to Kumana, the present Ampara District. For this purpose Azeez was specially selected by the Minister of Agriculture, Hon. D.S. Senanayake, and was transferred at short notice to set up the Emergency Kachcheri in Kalmunai.

During the short span of two years, from April 1942 to January 1944, Azeez travelled the length and breadth of the areas under his purview and worked long hours to put the district in the forefront as a leading producer of food and the granary of the East. At the successful Harvest Festival in Kalmunai in 1943, Hon. Senanayake

in his address, while commending Azeez and others of their achievements, said that “I felt that a Muslim in the Civil Service would be able to get the co-operation of the Tamils and Muslims”. Later as Prime Minister and Chief Guest at the Prize Day at Zahira College in 1949 he reiterated that, “During the war when there was a shortage of food, the present Principal, Mr. Azeez, was one of those who helped me considerably in the food drive. From that time I had developed a great affection for Mr. Azeez. He was then a member of the Ceylon Civil Service but he worked really as a citizen of the country”. It is significant that Azeez’s contribution to Eastern Development took place 70 years ago vis-à-vis the current “Eastern Resurgence” programme.

It was in Kalmunai that Azeez cultivated a close relationship with the renowned Tamil scholar and educationist Swami Vipulananda and the poet Abdul Cader Lebbe. Azeez had confessed that the formation of the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund and his accepting the post of Principal at Zahira College, Colombo were due to the encouragement given by Swami. In August 1948 Azeez retired from the Civil Service to succeed T.B. Jayah as Principal of Zahira College, Colombo sacrificing a brilliant career in order to serve his community. Zahira continued to excel in every field during his tenure until December 1961, which was referred to as the “Golden Era of Zahira”, and Zahira emerged as a leading public school. Over 100 Zahirians entered the University during this period. In 1962 Azeez was a visiting lecturer in History at the Vidyodaya University.

Azeez’s vision was to establish the Ceylon Muslim Cultural Centre and a Muslim Cultural University at Zahira College premises as proposed in the Throne Speech in 1961. Due to political changes these did not materialize, and he was disappointed. However, he had an opportunity to implement his ideas when his assistance was sought in the establishment of Jamiah Naleemiah in Beruwela in

1973. With great enthusiasm he embarked on this venture until his demise.

While at Kalmunai Azeez saw the plight of Muslim education. In order to assist needy Muslim students to pursue higher education, he founded the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund in 1945. Over 2,000 students have benefited to date some holding and held high positions in Sri Lanka and overseas.

He also founded the leading youth organization – the All-Ceylon Young Men’s Muslim Association Conference in 1950, which is rendering yeoman service today with over 100 branches.

Azeez was a member of the University Court, Council and Senate for over 10 years from 1953. He was President of the All-Ceylon Union of Teachers and the Headmasters’ Conference. He was awarded the title of Member of the British Empire in 1951, and was honoured as a National Hero and a stamp in his honour was issued in 1986. He was appointed as a Member of the Public Service Commission in March 1963.

Azeez was a voracious reader of English and Tamil. He has many English and Tamil books and publications to his credit, and received the Sahitiya Award in 1963 for his Tamil book “Islam in Ceylon”. His book “West Reappraised” is of interest to researchers, while his contributions to the Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Centenary Volume of Education in Ceylon contain in-depth information on Muslims of Sri Lanka. He had a special interest in Arabic-Tamil from his childhood influenced by his uncle Assena Lebbe Alim Pulavar, a Tamil scholar, poet and an expert in Arabic-Tamil.

Azeez was well respected by the Tamil community, the climax of which was that the University of Jaffna conferred a posthumous Doctorate of Letters at their first convocation in 1980.

Azeez was appointed as a Senator on 21st June, 1952, on the demise of Senator Sir Mohamed Macan Markar, and was re-appointed in 1953 and 1959. He resigned on 28th March, 1963 on being appointed as a Member of the Public Service Commission.

He travelled widely attending numerous Islamic and other conferences, including Parliamentary Conferences in Nairobi and Warsaw. In 1966 he presented a paper on “Some Aspects of the Muslim Society of Ceylon, with Special Reference to the 1880s” at the Conference on Tamil Studies held in Kuala Lumpur. In 1955 he presided at the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Tamil Poets’ Day organized by the Muslim Educational Association of South India. In 1973, a few months before his demise, he presided at the Tamil Nadu Muslim Educational Conference at Chennai and was honoured with the Golden Shawl.

Azeez has been honoured by his inclusion in the “100 Great Muslim Leaders of the 20th Century”, published by the Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi, India.

His sudden demise on 24th November, 1973 at the comparatively young age of 62 years no doubt left a vacuum not only in the Muslim leadership but in the country at large. His wife Ummu Kuluthum (grand daughter of M.I. Mohamed Alie J.P., first Persian Vice-Consul) pre-deceased him. His daughter is Marina and sons are Ali and Iqbal. Iqbal passed away in 2003.

There were many tributes paid to Azeez; one on his personality was “He is a Muslim, he is from Jaffna, he looks like a Burgher and acts like a Sinhalese”. He lived a true Muslim and a Sri Lankan.

Khalid M. Farouk

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

* Article in *A.M.A. Azeez - A Profile* - 2007

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 seven 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 Jezeema) 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 and 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-peek'. 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' 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 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 grandsons 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 Vidyalayam 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 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 exam. 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 exam 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 exam. 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.

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.

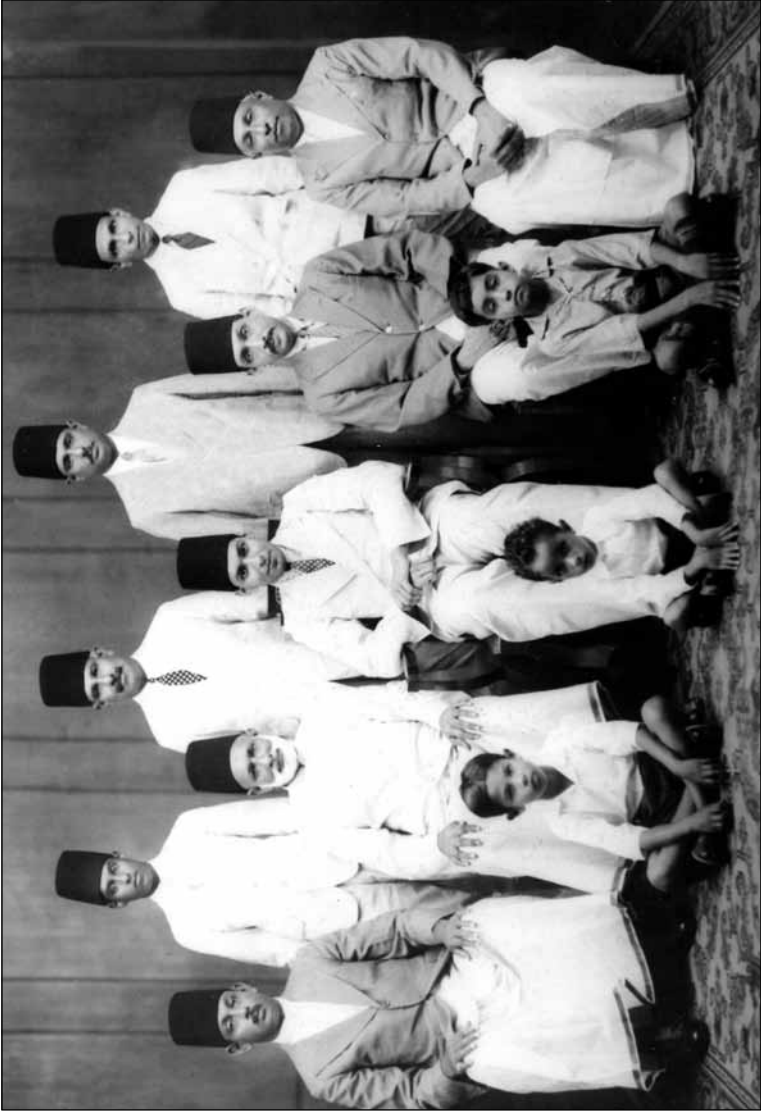
My mother may not have been academically qualified, but she stood alongside my father – she ran a beautiful home where anyone was welcome, entertained official guests, travelled to foreign countries with him – in short, she was the understanding companion that a wife, even a highly educated one, should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

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.



Standing: M.E. Shahul Hameed, A.M. Sultan, A.S. Abdul Cader & A.L. Idroos
Seated: S.M. Yoosuf, Sultan Abdul Cader, A.M.A. Azeez, S.M. Aboobucker & A.C. Mohideen
Ground: M.S. Amanullah, S.A. Zahir & M.A.A. Hassan
(Taken after Nikah ceremony of A.M.A Azeez with his Jaffna relatives on 4.10.1936)



Standing: Sithy, Shahul Hameed, Jezeema
Seated: 'Ummachchi', Azeez, Appa, 'Ummamma', Ummu, Ibrahim Sahib
Ground: Domestic Aides of Bungalow
(Taken at Office Assistant's Bungalow, Matale in 1937)



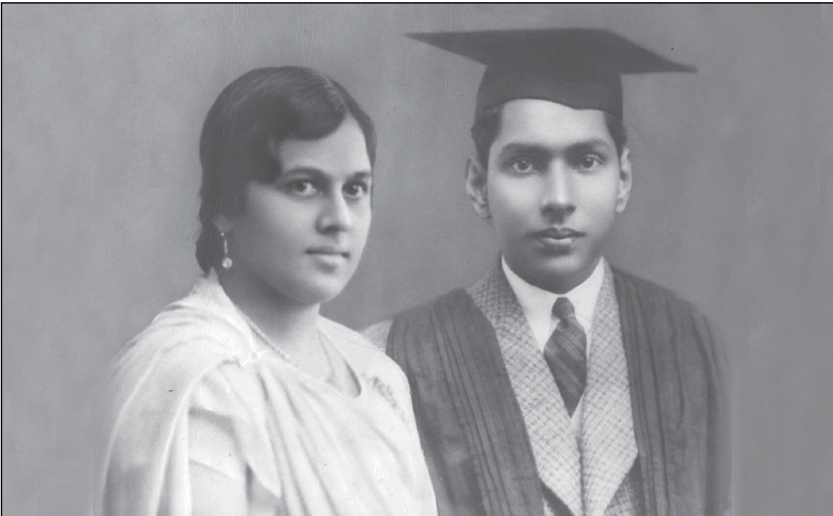
Standing: Sithi Kathija, Ummu, A.M.A. Azeez, S.M.M. Cassim & Noorul Jezeema
Seated: Ibrahim Sahib, Iqbal, Ummamma, Ummachchi, Marina & Ali
Ground: Domestic aides
(Family members taken at Puttalam in 1951)



S.M. Aboobucker J.P.



A.M.A. Azeez



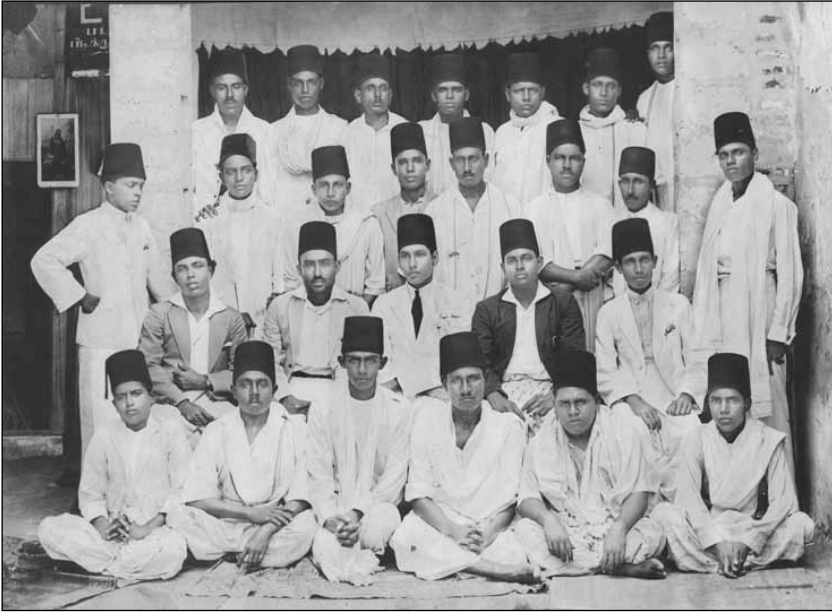
Ummu Kuluthum and A.M.A. Azeez



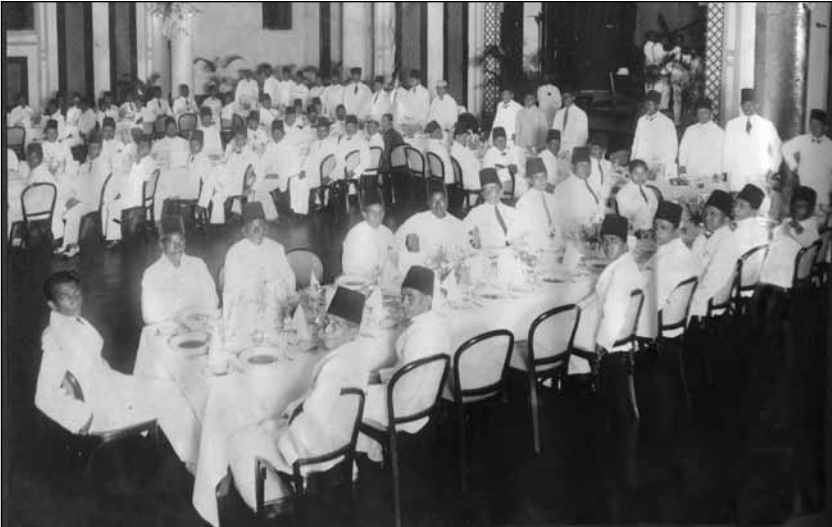
Azeez as Chief Guest at the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Vaidyeshwara Vidyalyayam, Jaffna in 1963



A.M.A. Azeez (standing last row seventh from left) at Hindu Students' Movement at Matale in 1931



At the reception given to Azeez (seated in centre) by the Jaffna Muslim Brotherhood on his departure to Cambridge University in 1934



Ceylon Muslim League Complimentary Dinner to Azeez on becoming the first Muslim Civil Servant at the Galle Face Hotel in 1935. Dr. M.C.M. Kaleel and T.B. Jayah were also present at the head table.



'Ummamma' and Marina



'Ummachchi'



Azeez on a visit home at
Mohideen Mosque Lane, Jaffna



Azeez addressing YMMA meeting at
Kahatowita in 1973, few months before
his demise



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 that 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

* Article in *A.M.A. Azeez - A Profile* - 2007

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. 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 2½ 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:

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

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. Kumarasamy. D.S. Senanayake was conducted on a 5 mile procession along bumpy agricultural 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 Vanniyar 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 Vanniyar divisions from Panamai 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 (Village Headman) 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 Vanniyah 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 his Jumma 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, Yoonus 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 Kirupananthan, 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 later 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, folklore 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 S.M. Kamaldeen. Pulawarmani A.M. Sheriffdeen of Maruthamunai studied under the Swami at Kalmunai in his special classes for Pandit and Vidwan courses. Muthalib 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 renounced the world, 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 in 1930 and joined the Annamalai University in India as Professor of Tamil. In 1933 he relinquished this post and settled down in Batticaloa to look after the educational activities of the Ramakrishna Mission and Shivananda Vidyalaya).

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. Kathiraveluppillai.

All these occasions 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.

In 1949 the Prime Minister Hon. D.S. Senanayake was the Chief Guest at the Prize Day of Zahira College, Colombo. He commenced his address by stating, "During the war, when there was a shortage of food, the present Principal, Mr. A.M.A. Azeez, was one of those who helped me considerably in the food drive.

From that time I had developed a great affection for Mr. Azeez. He was then a member of the Ceylon Civil Service but he worked really as a citizen of this country.”

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.

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Souvenir of the Harvest Festival, Kalmunai, 1943.

S.H.M. Jameel

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 அப்துல் காதர் லெப்பை

1. வேத மோதிப் பொருளை யுணர்ந்திடல்
வேளை யைந்து தொழுகையைப் பேணிடல்,
ஆதரவற்ற வர்களுக் கீந்திடல்
ஆண்டவன் பேரில் நோன்புகள் நோற்றிடல்,
காதம் போயரு ஹஜ்ஜை 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.

* Poem in A.M.A. Azeez - A Profile, 2007

3. நேர்மை யென்பது நீதிக் கிலக்கணம் நிறைவு காணல் மனத்துறு பொற்குணம் சீர்மையோடு பழகுதல் யாவர்க்கும் சிறந்த பண்பெனச் சீரியர் காண்பரால் கார் மிகுந்த இவ் வீழ நன்னாட்டிலே கல்வி கற்ற முதற் சிவில் சேவகன் யாராவர் முஸ்லீம்களின் மத்தியில் ஏஎம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
4. தந்தை தாயரைப் பேணுதல் மூத்தவர் தங்கள் வாய்மொழி யேற்று நடந்திடல், வந்தனை செய்யு மஸ்ஜித் தலங்களில் வம்பு சண்டைகள் நிக்கீடல், ஏழையை நிந்தனை யின்றிக் காத்திடல், பண்பென நினைவுறுத்துவ ரான்றோர் எமக்குள்ளே எந்த நேரமும் சேவைக்கு முந்துறும் ஏஎம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
5. ஆதி நாயனின் தூதரின் பேரிலே அருமை யாம்ஸல வாத்துக ளோதுதல், வேத மோதுதல், ஆண்டவன் கட்டளை விலகிடாமற் தக்கு வாவினில் நின்றிடல் நிதீயாமுஸு லீம்களின் பண்பதாம்; நிலையென முஸு லீம்கல்விக் காய்நிதி ஈதி லங்கையிற் தோன்றிடச் செய்தவன் ஏஎம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.

6. கூடி வாழும் சகோதர மக்களைக்
கோளினாற் பிள வாக்கி மகிழுவோர்
கேடு செய்பவராம் குடும்பத்திலே
கிளைகள் தாங்குதல் நாயனின் கூற்றதாம்,
பேறு பெற்ற நம்ஸாகிறா கல்லூரி
பேரெடுக்க உழைத்த பெருமகள்
ஈடி ணையற்ற சேவை புரிந்தவன்
ஏஎம் 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
ஏஎம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.
8. ஒற்றுமை யுடன் வாழுநன் மக்களை
ஓரஞ் சொல்லிப் பிரிக்கு முனாபிக்கு
பற்றறுந்த னென்று நபி மொழி
பகரு மேயிறை சாபமு முண்டுமால்;
கற்றவர் கண்டு மெச்ச மரங்குகள்
கடல் கடந்து சென்றங்கும் புகழினை
இற்றை நாள்வரை ஈட்டி வருமெங்கள்
ஏஎம் ஏஅஸீஸ் என்னுந் தயாளனே.

9. பொறுமை யாள ருடனிறை தங்குமே
 பொங்கு வாருடன் ஷைத்தா னுறங்குமே,
 சிறுமை பேசுவார் கண்டு விலகுமின்
 செப்பினார் நபி நாயகமன்றுதான்,
 உறும் வற்றுணற் பண்புக ளோம்புவீர்
 ஓதினாரொலி 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 அஸீஸு தயாளனின்
 நாம மென்றும் விளங்கிட வேயருள்
 எல் லையின்றியே தாஇறை வாவென
 இறைஞ்சி னேனப்துல் காதிர் கவிஞனே.

தோழர் அஸீஸ் – இரங்கற்பா*

கவிஞர் அப்துல் காதர் லெப்பை

எத்தனையோ அறிஞர்களை கவிஞர்களை
என்வாழ்வில் கண்டு விட்டேன்
அத்தனைக்கும் சிகரமாய் நீ நின்றாய்
கல்முனையி லென்னைக் கண்டு
மெத்தவுமே ஒருநட்பை வளர்த்துவிட்டாய்
முப்பத்தி னாலாண்டு காலம்
ஒத்தவுணர் லூட்டி விட்டாய்
ஊற்றெடுத்த தென்கவிதை அன்றுதொட்டே.

ஒருநூலை உனக்காக அர்ப்பணித்தேன்
ஒருபதிகம் பாடி யன்று
தருதல்செய்தேன் அதன்பிரதி இன்னுமுன்
பெருநாமம் தாங்கி நிற்கும்
பெருமகனே உன்நிருபம் தொடராக
வருவதும் பேருணர்வி னோட்டம்
தருவதுவும் கடைசிவரை தடைப்பட்ட
தில்லையொரு புதுமை என்பேன்.

நான்மட்டும் உயர் கல்வி
பெற்றதனாற் பயனில்லை நம்சமூகம்
தான்பெறவே சகாயநிதி ஆக்கிவைத்தாய்
வளருகின்ற இளஞ் சமூகம்
தான்உயர் வைஎம்எம் ஏஇயக்கம்
ஒன்றை நீகண்டு மங்கா
வான்புகழைப் பெற்றுவிட்டாய் வரலாறே
உன்நாமம் போற்றி நிற்கும்.
இக்பாலைப் பாடுகின்ற என்கவியை
முதல்நயந்து கண்ட நட்பு

* தினகரன், 1973 டிசம்பர் 13

அப்பாலே ஊற்றெடுக்க ஆக்கிவிட்டாய்
 முப்பத்தி னாலாண்டு காலம்
 ஒப்பாரு மில்லாத சேவையினை
 மக்களுக்காய் உவந் தளித்த
 விற்பனனே உன் நாமம்
 வியனூலகம் போற்றுவதில் வியப்பொன்றில்லை.

இரங்கற்பா பாடிடவா எனைவிட்டாய்
 இனியவன் நிருப மெல்லாம்
 இரங்குகின்ற எனைப்பார்த்துச் சென்றிரு
 திங்களின் முன்னே வந்து
 கரங்கிடைத்த கடிதந்தான் கடைசியுள்
 கடிதமதில் கண்ட செய்தி
 உரந்திணிந்த உன்பேச்சே இன்னுந்தான்
 என்காதில் ஒலிக்கு தம்மா.

வேறு

கல்விக் கொருதந்தை காளையருக் கொருவிளக்குத்
 தொல்சிறக்கத் தோன்றி மறைந்ததே - பல்சிறப்புப்
 பெற்ற பெருமகனார் பேரேளம்மே அனீஸ்
 கற்ற வொருபண்டிதனாம் காண்.

தினகரன், 1973 டிசம்பர் 13

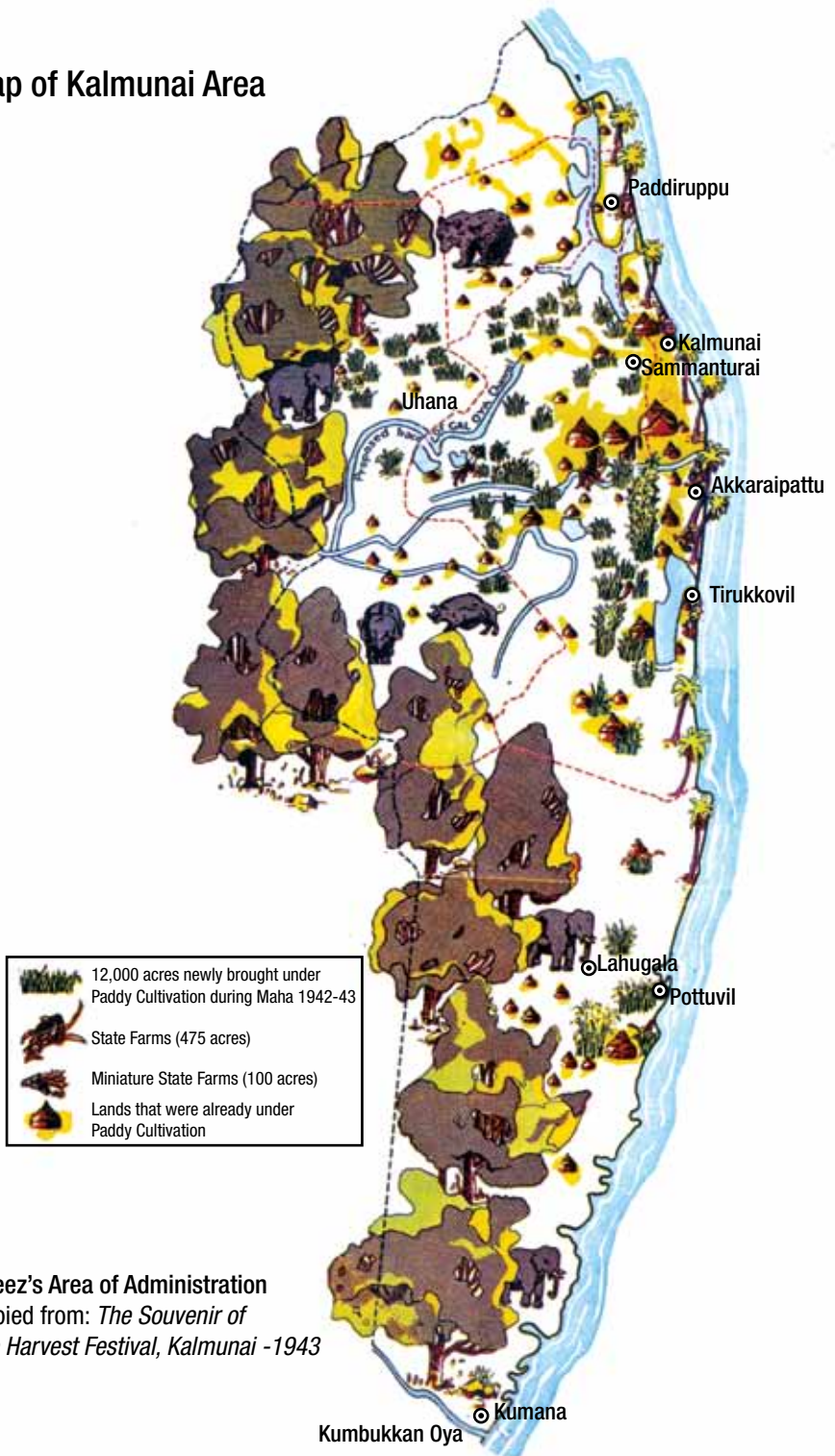
Abdul Cader Lebbe

Abdul Cader Lebbe (1913 - 1984) was a reputed poet of Kattankudy. He had 15 books to his credit. His life-long association with A.M.A. Azeez began when Azeez was the Assistant Government Agent in Kalmunai.

The poems and philosophical writings of Abdul Cader Lebbe focussed mainly on social reforms. His book 'Rubaiyat' won the National Sahithya Award in 1965.

Abdul Cader Lebbe retired as a Principal after quarter-century of service. He mentions in the above poem that he received the last letter from Azeez only two weeks before his demise.

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 & 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



Azeez pinning the medal on Poet Abdul Cader Lebbe awarding him the title 'Kavignar Thilakam' (Poet par Excellence) at the meeting to felicitate him on his birthday on 7.10.1970 at Usmaniya MV, Katukelle, Kandy



Staff at the Emergency Kachcheri, Kalmunai in 1943



Ummu and Marina in the vegetable plot at 'Gems'



D.S. Senanayake on arrival at Chengatpadai Farm



Workers at Chengatpadai Farm



D.S. Senanayake harvesting paddy at Chengatpadai Farm



Azeez and others at Chengatpadai Farm



Hon.D.S. Senanayake carrying a 'pingo' of paddy, curd, ghee and banana produced in the Chengatpadai Farm, at the Harvest Festival, 1943



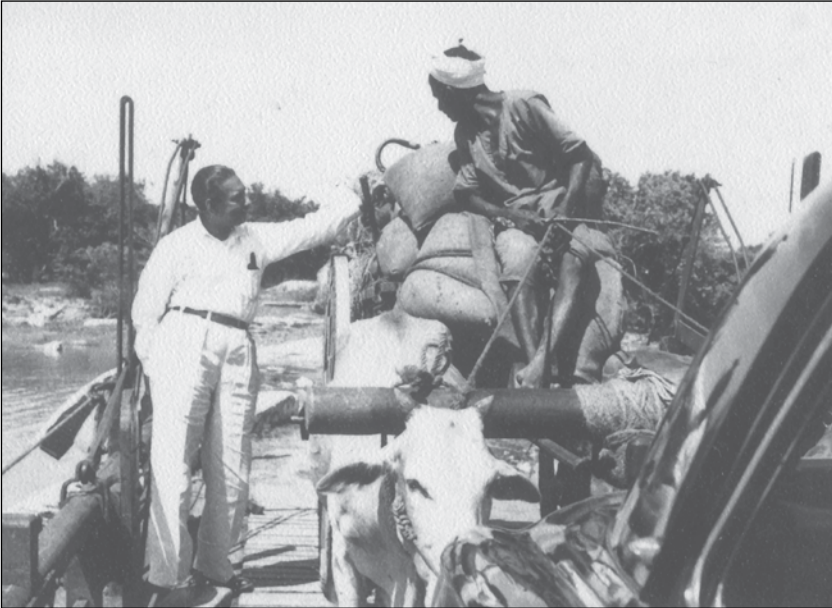
Azeez with the Digavapi Priest at the Harvest Festival



Paddy in the Akkaraipattu Mosque Grounds



Swami Vipulananda Day at Tamil Sangam in 1961.
Prof. S. Vithianathan speaking at the meeting



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



Azeez and Prime Minister D.S. Senananyake, 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,

* 25th Commemoration Article - 1998

Abeyesinghe, 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 universities expansion 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 university.

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, Tamil writing 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 the thirty four 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

Prof. Sivathamby was a student of Zahira College, Colombo (1949-1952) 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.

DR. A.M.A. Azeez – A Muslim Legend*

Desamanya M.T.A. Furkhan

The lives of Great men all remind us
 We can make our lives sublime
 And departing leave behind us
 Footprints on the sands of Time

Henry Wordsworth Longfellow

Whereas every year the Death Anniversary of Dr. A.M.A. Azeez was commemorated on the date of his death, namely 24th November, this year the Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Foundation has decided to commemorate Dr. Azeez's centenary year by timing the commemoration on his birthday, 4th October. I consider it a privilege to write this article about a person who was my Principal and in several respects a legend in my time.

Having spent my first five years of primary education in the Sinhala language at Siddhartha College, Balapitiya, my parents took me for English education to Zahira College Colombo in September 1946 and lodged me in the Hostel. The timing was perfect for many reasons in that Ceylon, as it was called then, had survived World War II which ended in 1945 with little damage. In 1946 Dr. T.B.

*Article on Birth Centenary of Dr. A.M.A. Azeez - 2011.

Jayah was still the Principal of Zahira College Colombo. So, I was at the College in the post Primary Classes for two years before Dr. Azeez assumed duties as Principal in 1948.

I had, therefore, the good fortune of being a student of the College both at the tail end of the Jayah period and also in the first five years of the Dr. Azeez's Golden era, which for me ended in 1953. Although I was only a teenager at that time, I still recall distinctly the enormous fanfare that accompanied the changeover of the Principals at the College when Dr. Azeez took over from Dr. T.B. Jayah. The event is recorded in beautiful photographs displayed at the Zahira College Principal's Office, when the first Prime Minister of newly independent Ceylon, Hon. Don Stephen Senanayake visited the College for the event.

Whereas Dr. T.B. Jayah enjoyed enormous bonhomie of the Students, Teachers and Parents of the College, Dr. Azeez from day one, by virtue of his height, personality and charisma cut an awesome figure that commanded everybody's attention and respect. We as Zahirians of that time just loved to look at him, to watch him step down from his big American limousine when he arrived at the College portico and walk erect with so much confidence, enthusiasm and earnestness. It was indeed a joy for us young men at that time to behold a man whose every move, every look and every word attracted so much attention. He was very fair in complexion, dapper, always upright and immaculately dressed in light coloured suits. To us up and coming young lads at the College he was the total embodiment of a charming ever smiling leader under whose leadership we were ready to follow. His excellence which was radiating wherever he went was like a fever that affected the audience. The boys simply adored the electric atmosphere and there was an all round feeling of expectations of things going to happen. In the early Jayah to Azeez period we witnessed "Luther hatching the Erasmian egg".

Born in 1911 in Jaffna, Dr. Azeez joined the Allapichchai Quran Madrasa in 1916 where he learnt to read the Quran. He passed the Standard III examinations in the Tamil medium in 1920 at the Mohammadiya Mixed School. He joined the Hindu School, R.K.M. Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam in 1921 and the Jaffna Hindu College in 1923 and studied there until 1928. Dr. Azeez was a child prodigy having always been one year ahead of the age limits during his academic career, so much so that when he came to entering University in 1928, he had to wait for a year as he was underage. He spent that excess year at St. Joseph's College, Colombo. In the formative years of his life, the socio culturally religious mixed education moulded the future of the young man who learnt a great deal from his Maulavis at the Madrasa, and the Teachers at the predominantly Hindu Schools. It was during that time that the foundations were laid for a good upbringing and education in the Tamil language which was one of his strongest suits in his later years. Dr. Azeez as a matter of routine every morning listened to Hindu devotional songs (Thevarams) over the radio as a result of which he relished the beauty of the Tamil language in those songs. He had an abiding interest and love for the Tamil language.

Dr. Azeez completed the 1933 examinations of the University of London which were conducted in Ceylon finally achieving a Degree with Honors in the subject of History. The excellent performance at University Degree level won him a Government Scholarship to the Cambridge University in England to pursue a Post Graduate Degree. However, just before he left Ceylon, he sat for the competitive Ceylon Civil Service Examination in an attempt to embark on a solid career in Government Service.

While Dr. Azeez was at Cambridge, the Civil Service Examination results were announced in Ceylon with Dr. Azeez being second out of the chosen nine in the order of merit in the Island, whilst at the same time being the first Muslim to successfully

complete the Ceylon Civil Service examinations. That was indeed quite an achievement in that day and age and a prized one at that. He then had to make a choice between terminating his post graduate studies prematurely and returning to Ceylon immediately to take up the appointment in the Civil Service or alternatively to give up the Civil Service career and get on with his Post Graduate Studies at Cambridge. He opted for the first choice and never regretted it.

Having started as a Cadet in 1935 Dr. Azeez was recognized as a very capable Administrator and a relentless worker whose ability to get things done were soon spotted and rewarded. From Matale where he started he was transferred to the AGA's Office in Kandy and thereafter he held the post of Administrative Secretary, Department of Medical and Sanitary Services, Secretary to the Minister of Health (Hon. Dr. W.A. De Silva), Additional Landing Surveyor, H M Customs, AGA (Emergency), Kalmunai, Deputy Food Controller, AGA Kandy, Information Officer, Additional Controller of Establishments in the Treasury, Assistant Commissioner of Parliamentary Elections and Additional Secretary to the Minister of Health and Local Government (Hon. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike), all in a short space of 13 years - an exemplary record for any Government Servant.

It was in Kalmunai in the early forties while working as the AGA during World War II under the Emergency Regulations that Dr. Azeez realized the utter hopelessness of the poor Muslims of Kalmunai, which in a way inspired him to dedicate his life to help the needy and the poor. Kalmunai stood to benefit from his period there, and today the people of Kalmunai stand grateful to Dr. Azeez for his relentless efforts to turn that part of the country into the "Granary of the East" which people of those days remember as "Azeez Thurai Kandam". It was indeed a brilliant career in the Government which he sacrificed when the call came to take up the post of Principal of Zahira College, Colombo in 1948.

When one studies Dr. Azeez's history, one factor that becomes very self evident is his outstanding ability to plan, re-plan and execute. It is more than conceivable that Dr. Azeez was guided by the famous saying "failing to plan is planning to fail:" (which incidentally helped the author of this article too significantly in his life). He seems to have had simple plans, medium term plans and grandiose long term plans such as setting up Zahira as the "Radiating Centre of Islamic Culture"

History also tells us that although there were Muslims who had excelled in various fields, by the beginning of the twentieth century in Ceylon there were virtually no intellectual giants in the Muslim community to match the calibre of Dr. Azeez. In addition to God given intelligence, Dr. Azeez also was endowed with rare talents and the ability to communicate in the written and spoken medium in both Tamil and English. His senior students in the College had always looked forward to the weekly Assembly, especially to listen to the articulate deliveries. He was not only a handsome leader to behold but he was also a great speaker who kept the audience spellbound. For us as young men at that time his rhetoric was a treat.

The pursuit of excellence in all spheres was more than evident to all of us HSC students at College during that time, as the visible efforts of Dr. Azeez our Principal spread like wildfire. His mere presence inspired in the students a promise of hope, faith and confidence.

Even in the Zahira College Hostel where I was boarded for six years, under the tutelage of the very capable Warden, Sheikh Abdul Cader Issadeen (nicknamed Bulldog), we had a very unforgettable upbringing under strict disciplinary rules which benefited us for the rest of our lives. In all those years the visits of the Principal, Dr. Azeez to the Hostel was an event to look forward to. His customs

and mannerisms at table, where we had to partake in a Dinner in his presence and his speeches left indelible marks in our minds. Dr. Azeez always led from the front. For us it was an unforgettable experience.

Being a man who had enormous vision, Dr. Azeez set himself targets that automatically established his missions in life which were to improve the education of Muslim children (a hitherto neglected subject at that time), setting up the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund in 1945 to offer financial assistance to needy brilliant up and coming Muslim youth whose parents could not afford their higher education, achieving hitherto unprecedented levels of success at Zahira and widening the scope for employment of young Muslims in the Island by setting up youth organizations such as the Y.M.M.A in 1950. These were all simultaneous efforts, well thought through, meticulously planned and painstakingly set up so that each institution flourished on its own. That was the brilliance of the man - a master planner, a master achiever.

Dr. A.M.A. Azeez having served the Civil Service for thirteen years retired prematurely to accept the post of Principal of Zahira College at a time when the total College student population did not exceed 1,500. Dr. Azeez quickly realized that one of the biggest drawbacks of the Muslim community was the very little attention paid by the leadership to educate the future generations in appropriate ways to meet the challenges that were ahead after the end of World War II in 1945. So, Dr. Azeez took the challenge in 1948 to succeed Dr. T.B. Jayah who left the School to take up an appointment as a Minister in the first Cabinet of Independent Ceylon. Being a man with tremendous capacity for administration, Dr. Azeez quickly set up the plans for the improvement of education standards starting with Zahira College Colombo. At Zahira the results of examination passes and Sports achievements in Cricket,

Rugby, Soccer, Boxing and Wrestling were indeed legendary. Zahira during Dr. Azeez's time gained an overnight reputation for excellence and I experienced that in my time as an HSC student. The demand for school admissions from both Muslim and non Muslim children from Colombo and all parts of the Island were to say the least unprecedented

A man of erudite scholarship with matching capacity to perform and deliver, Dr. Azeez was also a great team builder who having identified a goal, was equally dexterous to build a team of players under him to fulfill selectively the human resources needs to achieve success. At Zahira, he soon had a brilliant team consisting of individuals like the Deputy Principal Mr D.T. Wijeratne, MA Oxon, Vice Principals Caldera and Shuhaib, Head Master Anif Doray, , Administrator par excellence Mr. Awoof and Sportsmen in charge of games of the calibre of Bahar (Snr) (Cricket), David (Boxing), Yesudian (Wrestling & TT) , Muhular (Cadeting & Rifle Shooting) Samad (Rugby and Soccer). Equally noteworthy were some of the unforgettable teachers that we were blessed with including the late Hon. Stanley Thilakaratne, Speaker and MP for Kotte, who actually taught us the subject of Government at the HSC level.

On the occasion of the thirty fourth Dr. A.M.A. Azeez commemoration when my good friend the late Prof. Sivathamby wrote the commemoration article, he recalled the names of some thirty three old boys of Dr. Azeez's era at Zahira who had achieved name and fame in the academe. Siva guardedly did say they were only a few. Perhaps a hundred entered the portals of the academic world. There are yet another twenty such as E. Pararajasingham, M.Y Mohamed, Dharmadasa Banda, Farook Saleem, A.C.M Thassim, Late M. Ajward Hashim, Hussain Hashim, M.Azhar, Vaas Gunawardene, M.Bakir, Late M.S. M. Nalim, M. Zackariya,

Razik Zarook, M.R Thassim, S.B.C Thassim, Jauffer, Kanaka, M.T. M. Hamza, Rishard, Irshard, Mowjood and political heavy weights such as A.H.M Fowzie, Alavi Moulana, Azwer and Hussain Baila of the same vintage that I can recall. I hope those whose names were not mentioned will forgive Siva and I. In addition to that, many of the products of the Azeez era who did not pursue the academe entered the world of business and also politics and achieved tremendous success. All in all in the thirteen years from 1948 to 1961 - the Golden Era of Zahira where Dr. Azeez set the pace and gave encouragement to each and every one who appeared to be promising at that time, Zahira's countless heavyweights in the fields of Education, Sports, Enterprise, Politics and Leadership are ample testimony to his greatness.

The awesome records will show beyond doubt that over a hundred Scholars, not to mention the numerous top class Business Entrepreneurs, Politicians and Sportsmen were generated from the Azeez era - all in a space of thirteen years. That should, once and for all put an end to the debate as to which exactly was the Golden Era of Zahira.

In the immortal words of Shakespeare "some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them", Dr. Azeez certainly fell into the second category in that by virtue of his intellect, his enormous contributions to mankind - the Food Programme in the Eastern Province during World War II, setting up of the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund, the Y.M.M.A and a host of other institutions, his period as a Senator in the first Parliament of Ceylon and the greatest contribution of all being the multiplier effect educational developments that he contributed at Zahira and elsewhere are lasting monuments to a great man who has left his footprints on the sands of time. His story for generations to come will always recall him for the remarkable record he has left behind.

*Heights by Great men achieved and kept
 Were not attained by sudden flight
 They, while the companions slept,
 Were toiling upwards in the night*

The Ceylon Government and the British Empire awarded Dr. Azeez the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1951. Surely, Allah will have a special place for him in the Jennath. Ameen.

Desamanya M.T.A. Furkhan

Desamanya M.T.A. Furkhan hails from Balapitiya and was a student at Zahira College, Colombo during the Principalships of Dr. T.B. Jayah and Dr. A.M.A. Azeez. He qualified as a Chartered Management Accountant and he is the Founder of the Confifi Group of Companies. He is the Chairman of the Confifi and the Bairaha Groups of Companies and is a leading personality in the hospitality trade. He was at one time Professor of Management Accounting at the University of Sri Jayawardenapura. He was also a Member of the Finance Commission of Sri Lanka and the National Police Commission of Sri Lanka. He was awarded the title Deshabandu in 1987 and elevated to Desamanya in 2005 by the Presidents of Sri Lanka.

A.M.A. Azeez at Zahira – Glorious Era*

A.G.A. Barrie, P.Eng.

The 24th of November, 2006 marks the 33rd death anniversary of Al Haj Dr. A.M.A. Azeez, an eminent scholar, educationist and visionary, who worked wholeheartedly towards the betterment of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. His work, especially in the sphere of Muslim education, has indeed been beneficial to the community and will no doubt be continued in the future, Inshah Allah.

Azeez was born in Jaffna on 4th October 1911. He was from a well respected and educated family. His father, S.M. Aboobucker J.P., was a leading lawyer, Vice Chairman of the Jaffna Urban Council, Quazi and the first outstation President of the All Ceylon Muslim League. After his early education in Allapichai Quran Madrasa, Vaidyeshwara Vidyalayam and Jaffna Hindu College, Azeez entered his post-secondary studies in 1929 and graduated with honours in History from the University of London in 1933. Even though he proceeded to Cambridge on a Government scholarship to pursue post-graduate studies, he opted to join the prestigious Ceylon Civil Service and returned. He was the first Muslim Civil Servant in this country. He never forgot his roots in Jaffna, the education he received made him a scholar in Tamil and a versatile exponent of both Islamic and Hindu philosophies. These gave him a broad

*33rd Commemoration Article - 2006

outlook and the University of Jaffna conferred a posthumus Doctorate of Letters at their first convocation. It is just as well that Azeez did not live to see the senseless and cruel dismembering of the Jaffna Muslim community.

He held many important positions within the Ceylon Civil Service, excelling in each and every one of them. He is best known for dedicated work in his efforts to raise the living standards of the Sri Lankan Muslim community in particular. In 1942, as Assistant Government Agent in Kalmunai, he transformed the landless Muslim farmers of the Eastern province to land owners. The district soon became the granary of the East and continues to be so. Farmers of this area praised his relentless dedication and unparalleled vision for the future and they preserved and honoured his memory with an area of land designated as “**Azeez Thurai Kandam**”. By virtue of his in-depth and hands-on experience within the Muslim community, he was able to identify the pressing needs and resolved them in the most appropriate manner.

His main concern was with the accessibility to education for Muslim youth. He believed that education was the key to the progress of the community. Having realized the importance of education, he founded the Kalmunai Muslim Educational Society in 1942. Poverty was identified as one of the main factors which prevented many eligible and intelligent students from furthering their education. This prompted Azeez, the visionary, to initiate The Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund in May 1945. As of today more than 2000 deserving students have benefited. Many scholars have received national honours and have held eminent positions in their respective fields both locally and internationally. The writer of this article was himself a beneficiary.

To keep the youth occupied and to enhance their contribution towards the community and to train them in leadership and social service, Azeez inaugurated the Young Men’s Muslim Association

Conference in 1950, which has numerous branches in all areas of the Island.

His glorious service in the Civil Service did not last long. When the opportunity arose to serve the community through education, he never gave a second thought to sacrifice his own bright future, so as to benefit the Muslim community. After the general election in 1947, T.B. Jayah tendered his resignation as Principal of Zahira College to join the Cabinet of Ministers. The mantle fell on A.M.A. Azeez and he accepted the challenge to become the Principal of Zahira with hope and enthusiasm. **Azeez has left indelible footprints on the sands of time, and Zahira College is one among many.**

I was a fifth standard student at Zahira and watched with awe when two stalwarts, T.B. Jayah and A.M.A. Azeez were walking the school grounds in the morning of 23rd August, 1948, when Azeez ceremoniously accepted the Principalship of Zahira. In the evening the first major event presided by the new Principal was the unveiling of the portrait of Jayah by the Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake at the Ghaffoor Hall. This was truly a historic day for Zahira.

Azeez, having accomplished remarkable achievements in the Public service at the tender age of 36, exhibited his efficient administration and outstanding leadership qualities by grooming Zahira into one of the leading schools in the country. The achievements in a very short spell of his career are unparalleled. Zahira excelled in education, sports and other extra-curricular activities such as music and drama. In his own words, “Zahira was the radiating centre of Muslim culture, thought and activities”. He had a clear vision to achieve this goal and a master plan which he implemented in stages. He surprised everyone around him with an innovative approach to achieving his goals, an approach that no one could have even fathomed. His criteria for excellence was

based among others on, the hand picked dedicated teachers; establishment of a well equipped science laboratory and library; encouraging the involvement of parents and old boys. The students and staff were encouraged and to adopt a God fearing attitude while maintaining good relations with other schools. He also personally overlooked studies, advised and even trained the students in the University entrance classes.

It was a treat to watch the students assemble in Ghaffoor Hall every Monday morning in an orderly and organised fashion, leaving a corridor in the centre for the teachers and the Principal to walk and take their places on the stage. A verse from Quran would be beautifully recited by Azhar University qualified Zubair Alim and the translation would be given by the Principal in pin drop silence. Special assemblies were held for important foreign visitors. The annual Prize Days were well organised memorable events with dignitaries as chief guests, and the excellent reports and speeches delivered by Principal Azeez.

When I gained a First Division pass at the S.S.C. examination, I applied to join the Navy in 1954 due to financial constraints. Looking at my record, Azeez refused to sign and tore my application, insisting that I keep on track with my studies. He arranged for assistance from the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund and I joined the hostel. Azeez kept a vigilant eye on my progress until I entered University in 1956 and qualified as an engineer, and followed my professional career until I left the country in 1969.

Students from all provinces of the country, Muslims as well as non Muslims, joined Zahira while the highly qualified, experienced and dedicated teachers did their part, taking a personal interest in the students especially those in the higher grades. The hostel was ably and regimentally managed by the warden Issadeen, fondly known as “Bulldog”, guided by Azeez, and was a place for

maintaining discipline and camaraderie. Even though Zahira was a premier Muslim school, it catered to all communities, as Azeez believed in living together in peace and harmony and interaction was essential in our multi-racial and multi-religious land. Both the staff and the students hailed from the many communities. This also created a level of tolerance and respect for each other, no matter what community we originated from.

Zahira's remarkable academic achievements were mostly during Azeez's stewardship. In 1950 for the first time 10 Zahirians entered the University of Ceylon and the number increased every year . In 1956 a record number of 13 students entered, two for engineering, five for science, one for medicine and five for Arts. I entered for engineering while the other declined and joined the Navy to become a naval engineer and retired as Rear Admiral. The others held top posts after graduation including a University Don and a high ranking Army officer. The momentum was maintained, reaching even higher numbers in the late fifties and early sixties. At Peradeniya campus, in the late fifties and early sixties the ever popular large group of Zahirians held sway in all activities, winning twice the first ever "Mr. Campus" contests, and they were referred to affectionately as the "Arab League". A total of well over 100 students entered during Azeez's glorious period as Principal and many became University Dons and leading academics in Sri Lanka and abroad, while the others became professionals and administrators. It was creditable that at the G.A.Q. exams in 1961 and 1962 the prizes for Tamil were won by three Muslim Zahirians, the marks obtained in 1961 have yet to be surpassed. The entire community was proud of the achievements and coined the term "**The Golden Era of Zahira**" for Azeez's thirteen year period, one which has yet to be matched.

Zahira excelled in all fields, academic and non-academic. In target shooting Zahira attained the peak in the "Golden Era".

As school boys they beat the regular Ceylon Army and M.H.M. Ameen and A.K.M. Mohideen snatched the coveted Queens Cup in 1957 and 1960 respectively beating all the crack shots of the Army, Navy and the Police. In Cadeting Zahira was invincible. The Senior and Junior Cadets won the Herman Loos Cup and the Whiteway Laidlaw Cup for the first places, and other individual awards year after year. Many cadets joined the four services and rose to high ranks. These were possible with the dedication and interest taken by Capt. Muhlar ably guided and encouraged by the Principal. When rugger was reintroduced in 1956, Zahira beat some of the leading schools in the first year itself. They also won the Tarbat shield for soccer. They also excelled in cricket, wrestling, boxing, athletics, table tennis, badminton, volley ball, swimming and scouting. Zahira was the first school to establish an Indoor Cricket School and a Dental Clinic.

Keeping in line with the tradition of celebrating when winning any award, a grand and enjoyable banquet was given at the spacious “Meadow Sweet” with Mrs. Azeez’s culinary expertise. This happened ever so often. The functions for cadets ended with performances by cadet Rufin Saldin, later the well known dancer. At the function for winning the Herman Loos Cup, the words of appreciation and advice given by Azeez made an impression on my career. He stressed the importance of team effort coupled with lasting hard work saying, “Easy to attain but difficult to maintain”. I use this phrase almost everyday among my colleagues to maintain high standards wherever I work. This reflects the unique motivational power and leadership qualities possessed by Azeez. He not only rewarded the achievements but directed and guided us to be successful in our lives.

Azeez is the perfect example of an able, honest, wise and understanding leader. He was able to see through to my future, understand my difficulties and hardships and offer the apt

solution to transform the future of this poor student into a bright one. I am ever indebted to him for being a true mentor. There are many here and abroad who will no doubt agree with me.

For the benefit of the students, various associations were formed such as the Science Club, Curia Historica, Iqbal Society, Sinhalese Society, Dramatic Society, Art Club etc. creating interest and enthusiasm for these students. Being a Tamil scholar Azeez encouraged the Tamil Manram resulting in a fine crop of Zahirians to dominate later in Literature and other fields in Tamil. Fresh ideas applicable to Zahira such as the Students' Council were introduced soon after his tour of the USA on a Smith-Mundt scholarship in 1952. The Cultural Centre too was built in the College premises which accommodated Islamic library, publication bureau and an Islamic research centre. All these were formulated towards achieving Azeez's final goal of establishing at Zahira a Muslim Cultural University in the lines of the Vidyodaya, Vidyalkara and Hindu Cultural Universities. Those around him were able to see his mission but unfortunately the dream was shattered when the foolhardy among the community failed to follow through with this great leader's vision, resulting in the state Zahira is in today. Though his dream was not fulfilled and denied to him in his country, Azeez's contribution to education was recognized in neighbouring India. Just two months before his death he was invited to inaugurate the Tamil Nadu Muslim Educational Conference in Madras and was honoured with a "Golden Shawl". Being a visionary the disappointment did not stop him from imparting his knowledge and experience in founding the Jamiah Naleemiah. He gave his expertise to this Institute until Allah called him back from this world prematurely. Inna Lillahi Wainnah Ilaahi Rajioon.

Dr. A.M.A. Azeez has set an unparalleled record and will be remembered in history as a distinguished scholar, a competent

administrator, renowned educationist and above all as a man of unquestionable honesty and integrity. He was a modest, unassuming and humble gentleman approachable at any time by anyone. His achievements, deeds and dedication will be an example to present day leaders of all communities. He is the only Sri Lankan to be honoured by his inclusion in the “**100 Great Muslim Leaders of the 20th Century**” published by the Institute of Objective Studies in India.

A.G.A. Barrie

A.G.A. Barrie hails from Beruwela and excelled in studies, sports and cadeting during the Azeez era at Zahira. He was Senior Prefect and was awarded the Ghaffoor Gold Medal in 1955 for the best student. After graduating from the Faculty of Engineering of 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.

A.M.A. Azeez's Contribution to Education and Scholarship*

Dr. M.A.M. Shukri

I consider it felicitous to be at this assembly, gathered to honour the memory of one who made a significant contribution to the educational upliftment of the Muslims of this country in recent times. The image of Mr. Azeez is neither dim nor distant to most of us present here, as in diverse ways we came under his sway and influence. As an educationist he kept ablaze the relentless struggle carried on before him of his intellectual forebears from Siddie Lebbe to T.B. Jayah. And he was never weary of acknowledging the services of those who preceded him in the field of Muslim education. Personally, most of us who came in contact with him were moved by his obvious sincerity and were caught up in educational, cultural and social activities relating to our community. Much more than all these, he correctly oriented the Muslim elite and youth to grow in the amulence of an Islamic ethos in this baffling and abrasive world of entrancing material culture and non-transcendental humanist values of the Euro-centred civilization. In other words he taught us how to live in this cosmopolitan society of conflicting ideologies and seductive charm, yet retain the singularity of being Muslims oscillating between the Quran and the Traditions.

* Seventeenth Marhoom Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Oration - 1990

Human societies, always remember their heroes and heroines by erecting memorials, inaugurating commemorative events and founding institutions to perpetuate their lingering memories. But unlike the strident trend for man-worship in the anthropocentric tradition of Europe which is dissonant with the spirit of Islam, it is our bounded duty to activate the youths to serve the community of holding aloft the examples of our illustrious leaders of the past. But we find the conspicuous absence of such glorification in the early social history of Islam as none but Allah alone is to be glorified. Nevertheless, in the dynamic and homogeneous world of cultural values it has been found necessary in order to motivate youths that we recall and remember our past. We envisage the future by interpreting the present with reference to the past. In fact, well over twenty five years ago, Mr. Azeez himself, while addressing the MICH, on the occasion of I.L.M. Abdul Azeez Memorial Day observed thus: "It has been rightly stated, and I believe it has proved true, that a community which fails to honour its heroes tends to lose its capacity to nurture heroes in its midst".

So in cherishing the memory of Mr. Azeez and thereby honouring him, we do not wish to eulogise him. To do so would be to deprive him of his humanity. So let us bleach him of the prefixes and suffixes of the honorific titles of academic and social distinction which enshroud him and evaluate his role in the recent cultural history of this country. Much has been written about Azeez the man, Azeez the humanist and Azeez the educationist of this multi-faceted personality. We propose in this paper to narrow down the focus of our portrayal of him in his distinct contribution to Muslim Education in particular, and his contribution to learning and scholarship. In doing this, I crave the indulgence of the audience for any unavoidable digressions which needless to say would exemplify the main theme of this paper.

Azeez the youth, who entered the University College in 1929, read History for the Degree obtaining Honours, maintained a brilliant academic record, passing out with a class and was appointed to the Department of History of the University College, which he declined on being awarded the Government Scholarship to Cambridge. But under the British Raj the Civil Service had its seductive charm of power, prestige and influence. Hence Azeez had a fling at the civil service examination and set sail for Cambridge. But he was not destined to stride along the Gothic vestibules of Cambridge for long. On his successful entry into the administrative elite - the C.C.S., he turned back from Britain. He not only went on record as the first Muslim to enter the civil service in 1935, but a decade later he turned out to be the first civil servant to relinquish his prestigious post to become the Principal of a school. Such was his concern for Muslim education. During his seventeen years of intellectual odyssey of academic pursuit and professional duties his mind appears to have settled on what we may call his vocation or inner calling – to dedicate himself to the service of his community in the sphere of education. Hitherto, he might have put his talents into his profession, but by the time this country was achieving its independence he had resolved to place his genius at the disposal of his community. And that marked the end of a phase and the beginning of another in his life.

His Contribution to Learning and Scholarship

Azeez in his zeal to serve the community realized the importance of education as the rudimentary stage of learning which would eventually lead man to Quranic Wisdom. In the early stage of the learning process, a child is taught the alphabet and the numerals, both of which are acquired and not inherited. Apparently these two vital elements in the formative period are taken for granted. A teacher who fails to evoke in the growing child a feeling for

words and numerals is a decided failure. A child should be made aware that these two elements are the result of millions of human effort and constitute the keys that unlock the secrets of man, the world and Allah. Once a child has mastered the alphabet and the numerals and moved on from there to the traditional “THREE R’s”, the child feels the awesome beauty and splendour when education itself develops to learning. Learning and philosophy which are treasured as the ultimate end of Euro-centered education was, to Azeez and our Intellectual predecessors in the Islamic tradition the beginning of education. To Muslims, unless education and learning, painfully acquired over the ages lead him to the wisdom of the Quran in the footsteps of the Messenger would be a tragedy. We can observe this tragedy all around in this world despite the tremendous achievement in learning by way of science and technology. Despite his amazing knowledge, man has not arrived at wisdom. These three phases in the enlightenment and illumination of man as Education, Learning and Wisdom were grasped in their clear cut demarcation and Interdependence by the Muslim educationists. And the first stage in this sequence, that is education, due to reasons of history was discovered to be Achilles’ heel of the Muslim community of this country from I.L.M. Abdul Azeez to A.M.A. Azeez.

The founding of the Colombo Muslim Education Society in 1891 and of the precursors of Zahira College, namely the Anglo Muhammadan School 1884 and Al-Madrasathul Khairiyathul Islamiah – a name chosen by Arabi Pasha mark the initial beginnings. Upshot of the educational Society’s activities was the founding of Al-Madrasathul Zahira in 1892 – which institution during our time came to be inextricably linked with the twin names of Jayah and Azeez. The subsequent developments of Muslim schools for boys and girls and the agitation of the Muslim legislators for a better deal to the Muslims in educational matters and the subsequent activities of such organization as the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund to sustain the education of those who could ill-afford education at

higher levels was an acknowledgement of the realization of Muslim educationists upto A.M.A. Azeez.

Azeez admirably succeeded in evolving a rapport with the Muslim youths. During his stewardship at Zahira, he would, in between work, pinch time, to enter into informal colloquium with the students aspiring to enter higher educational institutions. In the course of these talks, we sometimes observed the sudden quivering of his lips and knitting of eye-brows, then he would lament the dissipations of present day youths in alcoholism, gambling and many forms of vices; and almost instantly with a gentle and cheerful countenance, he would harangue us about the rich heritage of Islam and of the unlimited possibilities that await the educated Muslim youth. With those who were at thirst for knowledge and understanding, he established a meaningful resonance bringing about a catharsis of self transcendent emotions.

He would thus, in passing give us a resume of the intellectual and cultural achievements of Islam in a stylistic verve which was precise, clear and touching. He would give us a profile of the pre-Renaissance Islamic Encyclopaedist such as Al Kindi, Al Farabi, Al Biruni and Ibn Sina; and of the great moments in the history of medicine with Al Rhazes, Ibn Al Nafeez and Abulcasis. He would narrate movingly the life of Jabir Ibn Nayan, the great chemist, whom the latest researches in the United States have established him as the "Father of Modern Chemistry".¹ He would within the brief intervals he could pick up unveil to us a pageantry of Muslim heroes who made specific contributions to physics, mathematics and astronomy; navigation shipping and geography; to historiography or the art of writing history; to the compilation and composition of the Law and the Hadhis and the exposition of the Quran (Tafsir). Almost with a gracious sense of piety he excited us to the aesthetic delights of Saracenic architecture, calligraphy, Arabesque and of

1 The Golden Path – Richard B. Lyttle 1983. New York p.74 - 77

Indo-Persian poetry from Ghalib to Allama Iqbal. He would go into raptures over the lyrical beauty of Persian Heroic poetry from Firdowsi to Omar Khayyam. And he would recite his own selections (in English Translation) from the dynamic poetry of one, whom he admired most, namely Iqbal (1873–1938). Iqbal being a contemporaneous poet, with the eloquence of a Mayakovsky, dynamism of Hristo Botey and the faith of a Rumi had a histrionic impact on his sensibility. Though Iqbal was not unknown to the Muslim elite in this country, it may be said that Azeez went a long way to popularize Iqbal the poet, the philosopher and concept giver of Pakistan. His ideas, perhaps with such informal discussions, veered away the Muslim youths in a purposive direction in a cultural milieu of their own. Most of us in different walks of life in different parts of this country and world are beholden to Azeez to this initial intellectual situation.

Though the Muslims constitute a significant segment of the world population, since the commencement of European activities in the sixteenth century Dar-ul-Islam had been destabilized politically and under its tendentious system of education we have been even besieged culturally and the growing Muslim youth was in a state of indecision and dilemma. It is in this context that Azeez's formal writings and informal speeches restrained us, and imparted to our intellectual strivings and Islamic orientation. Most of his students, who pursued studies in the humanities and the sciences are today engaged in various occupations and following different professions find themselves on the terra firma of an Islamic ethos.

Considering the Arab origin of the Moorish community in this country in the light of literary evidence² which is conclusively

2 Vide I.L.M. Abdul Azeez's reply to Ponnambalam Ramanathan's in the *Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon*, and the introduction to the *Muslims of Sri Lanka* 1986, Colombo.

confirmed today by epigraphic evidence,³ Muslim education in this country goes back to the early centuries of Islam. Education and learning, among the Muslims should be as old as Islam. More than any other religion, Islam almost in unequivocal terms calls upon its votaries to pursue learning. In fact the very first revelation that rent asunder the silence of the night in the case of Hira called upon men to Read and refers to human ability to write :

*“Read in the name of thy Lord to createth,
Read : And thy Lord is the most bounteous
Who teacheth by the pen
Teacheth men that which he knew not.”*

Thus the Madrasah system of education goes back to the Medinite community, and the Prophet is acknowledged as our first teacher. Islamic education commenced in the Masjids even in this country. It was at the request of the early Arab settlers – the ancestors of the Moors that the Caliph of Baghdad dispatched Abu Bakya, an eminent savant and divine in the ninth century, as the Arabic epigraphic evidence (1) conclusively confirms. But then, the life of the early Muslims and their system of education were disastrously affected from the beginning of the fifteenth century with the commencement of Portuguese rule in 1505 right upto 1796 when the Dutch rule came to an end. The travails that the Muslims endured under the Portuguese rule may be clearly perceived from the detached observation of Prof. Malalasekera: “Every stage of their progress was marked by a rapacity, bigotry, cruelty and inhumanity unparalleled in the annals of any other European powers” This persecution followed by Dutch cruelty of another century and a half incapacitated the Muslims educationally

3 The Dept. of Archaeology has undertaken to make an official publication of Arabic Inscriptions discovered in different parts of the Country.

so much so that, when enlightened British rule began in 1815 under unified rule, the Muslim community appeared to be the most backward educationally. Accordingly, they were unable to take advantage of the many opportunities that were offered at the decisive levels of socio-political and economic life of this country. We are still not free from the traumatic shock of the Portuguese and Dutch misrule in this country. Muslim educational landscape in this country however, bleak and dreary during the gruesome centuries begins to pick up its bearings towards the last decades of the last century. Hence, in retrospect, Azeez's contribution to Muslim education in particular to be intelligible should be viewed against the background of educational development in this country during the previous 100 years stretching from 1890 to 1990. The pioneers of Educational Reforms commenced their activities towards the end of the last century not altogether uninfluenced by similar reformist movements on the sub-continent and activated by the arrival of Arabi Pasha in the Island. Since all the Muslim Leaders, educationists, reformers and politicians began to direct all their activities with a singleness of purpose at educational regeneration of the Muslims, it was clear that education was our deficiency. Following in the footsteps of Siddi Lebbe and I.L.M. Abdul Azeez and subsequently Jayah, A.M.A. Azeez bemoaned the plight of the Muslim youths and education.

With perceptual speed, Azeez grasped the significance of modern education as the *sine-qua-non* towards the advancement of the Muslim community in modern Sri Lanka and soon after the assumption of duties following Jayah as Principal of Zahira College, he crystallized all his energies towards education and youth activities of the Muslims. With acumen and acuteness he set out to meet the challenges posed by the times and began his educational experiment at Zahira.

Zahira College and Azeez's contribution to Education

Let us take our minds to the year 1891, when at the request of Wappichi Marrikar, Siddi Lebbe returned from the hills to address a jumma gathering at the Maradana mosque to urge the Muslims of Colombo of the imperative need for modern English education. Among the audience was the youthful I.L.M. Abdul Azeez, who was subsequently to carry on the crusading spirit of Siddi Lebbe in the sphere of education. The latter's Address was a resounding success. Unclouded by passion and prejudice, yet with persuasive eloquence he appealed to the reason of those present. The audience was captivated by his plea for English education for Muslims. I.L.M. Abdul Azeez was elected Secretary of the Colombo Muslim Educational Society. Due to the effort of this new society, in the following year – 1892 Al Madarasathul Zahira was founded. Since then, the Muslims of this land continued to follow the growth and development of this institution with great solicitude as it draws nigh towards its centenary.

Zahira is, to us redolent of many things. It is reminiscent of the heroic rule of those early pioneers nearly a 100 years ago, who against all odds dedicated themselves to the cause of education of generations to come, thereby rescuing us from the educational and cultural lag to which we had fallen, especially from 1505 to 1796, under Portuguese and Dutch rule. A.M.A. Azeez, in remembrance of whom, we are holding this commemorative event was inspired by these pioneers. They were not sunk in romantic delusions of a "Golden Age" of the past, but they had the vigour of mind to come into accord with the reality of a changed world which is continuing to change in a dynamic way. Looking around for a philosophy of education, they sought inspiration from the strident revivalism of Jamaldeen Afghani – the stormy petrel of Islamic revivalism in the 19th century, to his disciple Sheikhu Abdu and to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan of the Aligarh movement on the sub-continent. Azeez, to

steer his educational zeal in the modern direction added something vibrant. In addition to others, he was inspired by Iqbal.

Of his lifetime collection of books and manuscripts a substantial number has reached the Jamiah Naleemiah library. He seems to have paid special consideration in the choice of the books presented to the Jamiah, as they belong to philosophy, history and Islamic culture; and a significant number on educational philosophy, theories and methodology. We have found that most of the books relating to education he appears to have come to possess belong to a period before he relinquished his administrative post. From this any discerning mind should be able, not only to follow his intellectual odyssey, but his relentless quest for his vocation to serve his community. Having resolved to serve his community in the footsteps of Jayah at Zahira, he linked himself into that strand of reformists, revivalists and educationists to serve his community.

For nearly a decade before he assumed his duties he had scanned the educational philosophies of the East and West to incorporate whatever was useful and necessary within the Islamic tradition. Educational theories from Plato to Bertrand Russell studied by him as the profusion of annotations and marginal comments on the pages of these books show how persistent he was. He did not mind the pragmatic approach and judicious utilization from any educational system so long as the Islamic values remained unimpaired. He appears to have avidly followed the educational experiment from the Academy of Plato to the experimental school run by Bertrand Russell and Dora Black twenty three centuries later at Beacon Hill in Sussex. That this experiment of Russell which proved to be an abysmal failure⁴ should have come as a relief to Azeez as the Russellian system of education was based on a non-transcendental vision of life. Nevertheless, he was able to

4 Against the Faith – Jim Herrick 1985. London. P.224-225

incorporate some of the useful elements in the Western system of education. He soon discovered all Western systems of education, despite their remarkable appeal lacked the bifocal Islamic vision of the Muslim educational system which links our existence in this world (Dunya) to the world beyond (Aakhir), as a consequence of which education in Islam becomes an act of worship (Ibadah) as in no other system.

When Azeez took over from T.B. Jayah as helmsman of the premier Muslim educational institution, it was a little over fifty years old. Many men of dedication and scholarship had contributed to make Zahira what it was. T.B. Jayah, during his period from 1921-1948, almost with religious ardour applied himself to make it as it came to be – the pride of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. To Azeez it was something more than a school; it was indeed a “radiating centre of Muslim thought and activity”. With distinction and charm, beauty and imaginative power, Azeez infused Zahira with a new style of world to command the education of other communities, loyalty of the parents and set ablaze the student’s imagination to struggle at all levels of life from scholastic pursuit to sports and athletics, elocution, oratory and debating. True to the Islamic spirit of internationalism and cosmopolitanism, Zahira both at the level of alumni and tutors were composed of members of all the communities of the island. Many were those belonging to different faiths, ethnicities and speaking different languages who distinguished themselves both in studies and extra-mural activities and are today, holding responsible positions in this country. It would smack less urbane at this auspicious moment to mention the names of those fine specimens who made Zahira a colourful institution. This communal harmony as it obtained at Zahira, especially during the time of Azeez, is we should consider, of particular significance today, as people seem to have lost their sangfroid and life at all levels has become more abrasive among the many communities that make the Sri Lankan nation.

In his meandering quest to impart substantially to the Islamic educational philosophy, as adverted to, he had even probed the Soviet system as some of his books reveal. Besides perusing the Madrasah system of India, he had also followed the educational experiment of Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan. Eventually, his intellectual kinship with the Aligarh movement on the sub-continent and the satiety he gained from the lyrical ghazals of Indo-Persian poetry of Iqbal, and from his Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam and from most of his Essays he gleaned, Azeez arrived at the unequivocal direction that the Muslim world in general and Muslim education in particular should take.

All theories of education from the East and West reflect the given stage of socio-economic development of those societies. Slave societies as in ancient Greece considered manual labour the insolence and the theories of Plato aimed at “Philosopher Kings” whose main preoccupation was to create a symmetrical harmony of brains and brawns to contemplate the idea. Feudal ages aimed at producing men and women who would enjoy the refined delights of a patrician society living on the toil and travail of the serfs. Modern society’s educational philosophy has been, through their public schools and universities to produce gentlefolk who were admired for their refined behaviour and accomplishments in the arts, music and the sciences.

While not denying the relative reality of the aims of the many theories of education, Azeez’s discernment went beyond to the Islamic convention and desired education to relate human life of this world to the life beyond. In his own words: “Education of a child should enable him to unfold all the faculties he is endowed with such as physical, moral, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual.” In fact this concept of “unfolding”, has a meaningful propinquity to one of Allah’s attributes, namely, Al-Taththahu - The Opener – one who unfolds the hidden potentialities.

To Azeez modernity in education, if by that is meant, science and technology and all that is implied by them, was not something we should recall from in horror, because it comes from the materialistic West. As Iqbal maintains in the Reconstruction, present day science that is coming from the West is our rightful inheritance which is coming back to us. Europe inherited its sciences and philosophy from the Muslims, as we inherited them from the Greeks. In the Islamic vision of things, as Iqbal viewed and Azeez imbibed, Science has no nationality. It is outright chauvinism and bigotry to speak of Muslim science; though undoubtedly Muslims have made and continue to make significant contributions to Science. "In this matter of science and civilization Europe has not always been the master and we, the pupils."

The sum of human knowledge and the complexity of human problems are perpetually increasing; therefore, every generation must overhaul its educational methods to grapple with the dynamics of change. Following as it were, the tradition of the Messenger: "Go even unto China in search of knowledge", Azeez travelled vicariously through different times and climes to enrich Islamic education. The humanistic elements in education incorporated into ours should remain, but they must be sufficiently simplified to be sublimated and made subservient to the main categories of Islamic thought. Without those peripheral elements which the modernist in our education incorporated it would not be possible for our growing youths to render possible the world which science and technology have unleashed. We do not wish to suggest that the humanistic elements in education, which Jayah, and Azeez after him incorporated on to our inherited Madrasah system based on the study of the Quran, Hadith and Arabic are of less importance and could be dispensed with. To know something of great literature, something of world history, something of music, painting and architecture, and of the antiquity of man and the world of intergalactic space is essential if the life of imagination of our children

is to be fully developed. Let us not forget the ever recurring these of the Quran, which calls upon man to 'ponder, reflect and think'. And it is only through imagination based on facts that man would become aware of his lowly origin and high destiny, which the Quran refers to.

Over the 100 years of recent educational history of the Muslims of this country, we observe broadly three periods, during which, by way of stimuli, the educational process in the country exerted a pressure to which we have been and are contriving to respond with adjustments and compromises. In the last quarter of the 19th century under British rule we resolved to give our children an English education to enable them to make the best advantage of colonial rule. Secondly, towards the middle of the 20th century, commencing at Zahira with Jayah and Azeez, we imparted a scientific and modern basis to our education. By the year 1958, since the passing of the Official Language Act, which made Sinhala the official language, it was a matter of time that Swabasha would replace English from its officially entrenched position. So once again, this stimuli is a challenge to which we are called upon to respond. As to how we are responding and in what ways we should evolve our educational strategy is a matter for Muslim educationists of today and we, presently prefer to leave it at that.

When our posterity nostalgically look back to their recent past they will not fail to acknowledge the specific contribution of Siddi Lebbe and Azeez to Muslim education in this country, as they will not also fail to record the ardour with which I.L.M. Abdul Azeez and Sir Razik Fareed battled for the identity of the Moors of this country and of their Arab ancestry. We should also recall at this moment the munificence and magnanimity of many men, specially Wappichi Markkar and N.D.H. Abdul Ghaffoor which encouraged and sustained the efforts of the pioneers of Muslim education. With the passage of time, the frills and trappings that go to make a

personality are forgotten. The most remarkable element of human personality is the individual's voice, and we do not hear the voices of the heroes and heroines of the past. But their respective virtues persist in our lingering thoughts.

As we recollect our reminiscences of Azeez, his virtue turns out to be Muslim Education, which in his mature years became his forte, was really, an implication and reflection of his scholarship. It is well for us to remember, his studies, speeches before the Upper House of the Parliament (Senate); his speeches before many learned assemblies and the University of Ceylon and before many international gatherings and conferences of academic distinction. His contribution to the Encyclopaedia of Islam is indeed a monumental achievement. His research findings as they appear in the Proceedings of the International Seminar on Tamil Studies⁵ would continue to stimulate the future researchers of our community in various aspects of their cultural history and ethnic origins. His 'The West Reappraised' (1964 Colombo) is really a compendium of the catholicity of his taste. Devoid of sectarianism it discloses a breadth of vision and depth of understanding of the revivalism and resurgence of this country. The contents of this book, of men who belong to a wide spectrum of cultural and religious background, epitomizes the Islamic WELTANSCHAUUNG or outlook which goes beyond the narrow confines of linguistic, racial and national ethnicities which are the bane of the world today. When the government of this country called upon him to contribute to the 'Centenary Volume on Education' of this country in 1965⁶ it came as a recognition of his scholarship. Most of us who are present here would remember his affable charm and debonaire ways which would be denied to posterity. To them he would be

5 Proceedings of International Conference – Seminar. 1968. Kuala Lumpur. pp. 746 - 762

6 Education in Ceylon. A Centenary Volume. 1. 1969 pp. 1145 - 1167

silhouetted in the cultural landscape of the Muslims of this country as a scholar and educationist. This profile, we hope considering his immense contribution on record, would be delineated in bolder relief with time.

The Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund

About half a century after pioneering efforts in English education, it was discovered that despite the notable advancement at the primary and secondary levels of education made by the Muslims, they had not still obviated the cultural and educational snags imposed on them by colonial oppression and were not on par with the other communities of the country at the higher levels of education. Consequently, they were remarkably unrepresented at the decisive levels of administration, judiciary services, banking and finance and the key professions of law, medicine and engineering. Hence higher education now appeared to be the weak point of the Muslims. Quite contrary to the customary belief of Muslim opulence, the bulk of the Muslims were penurious – another relic of colonial oppression. In the course of his investigations Azeez ruefully observed that most of the poorer parents did not have the resources to sustain a 4 to 6 year period expenditure which higher education entailed.

“He who leaves his home in quest of knowledge, walks the path of Allah.” So Azeez, almost with religious zeal, set out to speak, plead, write and even to badger the affluent individuals of the community to an awareness of this educational lag and limitation and to consider it a social responsibility to confront and surmount them. When he was crusading for the cause of the poorer students of our community even before he took over responsibilities at Zahira, he reiterated that it is a behest of the prophet to help our unfortunate students. Thus the year 1945, saw the realization of another of his cherished dreams – the inauguration of the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship fund (C.M.S.F.). During the last 45 years of

its existence, the C.M.S.F. has helped over one thousand scholars during the most crucial moments of their educational career. Today, we take great pride in the fact that this Fund did produce members of the Civil Service and of the Sri Lanka Administrative Service, the Judicial Service and members of the key professions, university dons and many graduates who work in different capacities in this country and abroad.

We are thus beholden to Azeez and all our leaders of the past, who dedicated themselves to serve the community in many ways. If we have in the course of this review looked back, it was only to look forward. We will have no clarity in our understanding of the present without a knowledge of the past. Even if future generations disagree about the achievements of our past leaders, we are sanguine, that they would admire them for what they attempted. They were motivated by the noblest spirit of Islam to follow the Prophet for the greater glory of the Lord. So in all seriousness, on a day such as today, when we remember them, let us emulate their virtuous conduct in relating thought to deed and word to action.

Young Men's Muslim Association

Another concern of Azeez was the problem of Muslim youth, especially of those who were gainfully employed and the early school leavers. He was contemplating to channel their energies in a purposive direction and to find satisfaction for their inner urge for social contact, intellectual discourse, cultural activities and to be of service to their community. After all, the Quran always refers to "Those who believe and do good deeds." In Islam service to mankind is not a mere pastime to break the tedium and drudgery of life, but an integral part of our Faith. The Y.M.M.A.s have been existing even before he stepped into this field. Around 1950, on his initiative a convention of the existing Y.M.M.A.s was held in Colombo. He institutionalized it, gave it definite configuration

by way of a meaningful constitution and infused into it a vigour and a flair for organized activities. And its motto, 'Faith, Unity and Discipline', with semantic valency symbolizes the thought and aspiration of all Muslims. Today, the Y.M.M.A. is an island-wide organization. This is the age of nuclear fission, so in keeping with the times the Y.M.M.A. we knew fissioned. But unlike in nuclear fissioning it leaves no nuclear waste. The two streams of the Y.M.M.A. may at times march separately, but is delightful indeed to note, that they are marching in the same direction activating and stimulating each other. Very much analogous to the fusion process on the basis of $E=MC^2$, which releases more energy than fission process, the Y.M.M.A. should generate more results, as I am told that they arrived at some sort of fusion and accord.

Like all men of ideas, Azeez began to dream dreams. But he was a dreamer whose dreams were in fact realized during his lifetime. During the final stage of his life he was toying with the idea of a Muslim Cultural Centre. His mind sizzling with ideas, envisaged to centralize all books, manuscripts, maps and charts and illustrations and even family genealogies; all relating to Muslim culture and civilization for the convenience of the scholar, the student and the general reader. Keeping close to the Islamic tradition, he hoped that such a cultural centre as Bait-ul-Hikmah – the House of Wisdom would harmoniously stand with a masjid and merge into a Madrasah to become a higher centre of learning. A masjid always flanked by a Library (Maktab) and a school (Madrasah) was his persistent image. Creation of anything *ex nihilo* is a privilege of Allah. His purse was too thin to relate word to deed. The take-over of Zahira College by the Government in 1961, and the subsequent controversy that ensued reduced his dream to impressionist fuzziness. But then Allah is all merciful. The vision which remained an empty reverie like an uncut stone in the hand of a lapidarist was made entrancingly beautiful *La Cabochon* when it caught the discriminating eye of Al Haj M.I.M.

Naleem. This transaction proved to be the greatest encounter in the history of Muslim Education in the Island. Thus was born, the Jamiah Naleemiah at Beruwela in 1973.

Jamiah Naleemiah

Jamiah Naleemiah which is nearly seventeen years young and growing vigorously is, we should say one of the enduring manifestations of Azeez's anxious thoughts about his community. And it is undoubtedly an ideological, much more than institutional patrimony that we have inherited as his cultural progeny, as he had inherited Zahira from Siddi Lebbe, Wappichi Marikkar and I.L.M. Abdul Azeez. Hence a brief reconnaissance of this institution may be considered to be in keeping with today's commemoration to recall and recount Azeez's contribution to Muslim education and scholarship.

The genesis of the idea of Jamiah Naleemiah owes its origin to the interaction of two trends of thought in the field of education all over the Muslim world, consequent primarily, to the impact of European activities in Afro-Asian countries. The learned (Ulema) among the traditionalist, resisted all modern influence from Europe and contemplated a return to the Islamic past; while some of the modernists among Muslim educationists opted for an uncritical emulation of the West. This bifurcation in the Muslim educational thought impaired the progress of the Muslim community. In any case the Muslim educationists could not remain in a state of ambivalence for long. Azeez arrived at a harmonious blend of these two trends. Jamiah Naleemiah which he helped to set in motion is a reflection of this blend in our educational outlook. Here we are trying to bring about a balanced integration of the rich cultural heritage of Islam with the modern disciplines and methodologies in education. The progress this Institution has made justifies the speculations and anticipations of Azeez.

I do not wish to expunge the gracefulness of the gathering by demographic details about the Jamiah. But be it noted that, successively for many years this Institute has produced 100% results in the degree finals conducted by the University of Ceylon. Some of them entered the administrative service and still others obtained scholarships to foreign universities to continue their post graduate studies. Following the pattern of Islamic learning, today, by Allah's grace the Jamiah has one of the finest collections of books to keep upto our great tradition of intellectual pursuit. In addition to all the possible rendition of Tafsir and Hadith literature and books in the science and the humanities in English, Tamil and Sinhala, we have been accumulating literature in the Islamic languages besides Arabic, namely in Urdu, Persian and Turkish, the last of which is still in English translations as we have the least familiarity and contact with that language in this country. The Naleemiah library as an integral part of the Jamiah has been growing attuned to the intellectual rhythm of Islamic passion for knowledge. Here too we have been guided by the monographs: "Islam has many claims upon the admiration and gratitude of mankind. Much has been written of the contribution made by the Muslim peoples to art, literature, science and politics. None of these achievements would have been possible but for that devotion to learning and education which has characterized these people throughout their history; men and women who obeyed implicitly their Prophet's command, to seek knowledge even if it be in China." (*The Muslim Tradition*. A.M.A. Azeez. 1965. Colombo).

As a researcher with academic distinction, his plea for original research on the part of the new generation to meet the challenges of the times from other communities remained a strangled cry. His attempts to establish some sort of communication at this higher stage of learning in intellectual investigation found fulfillment in the Naleemiah Institute of Islamic Research. It has too, grown up in faithfulness to the sprit of Azeez. At an International seminar

held on the Muslims of Sri Lanka and South and South East Asia in January 1984, under the aegis of the Research Institute of the Jamiah in collaboration with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, twenty five well researched papers were taken for discussion. These papers being produced by men and women of academic distinction, belonging to different religious and cultural background and hailing from different universities of this country, Malaysia, Australia and the United States turned out to be the comprehensive, detached and objective investigation of the very many segments of the Muslims of this country. Of those papers fourteen, relating to the Muslims of this island were edited by the Jamiah Research Institute, and published by the Bureau of Publications of the Jamiah as a 500 page volume.⁷

Azeez took an acute interest in the growth of Arabic-Tamil an ingenuity of the Moors, which when philologically viewed commences as a dialect to evolve into a language in its own right. It continued to be the language of the Moors – a language which was broadly Tamil with a profusion of Arabic conceptual terms, which were indispensable to have the Islamic thoughts and feelings. It was indeed a dialectical synthesis of Semitic Arabic and Dravidian Tamil, written in Arabic script. It remained the tool of Moorish intellectual discourse right upto the end of the 19th century. Azeez even suggests in his research paper⁸ that, even in the east coast of Africa, a combination of Swahili and Arabic and the native language led to analogous development. These are indeed fine themes to stimulate our young men and women, to stimulate them in their researches. In fact with this in view, the Research Institute at the Jamiah Naleemiah has an organized collection of Arabic-Tamil manuscript and are making a systematic effort to retrieve

7 Vide Proceedings of International conference on Tamil Studies. Vol. 1.

8 Vide Proceedings of International conference on Tamil Studies. Vol. 1.

many of these valuable manuscripts which should be falling into disintegration, through neglect in many homes.

Initially under Azeez's intellectual impulse the Naleemiah Institute of Research began a hesitant, yet a steady growth and we should say, monitored its presence among other such institutions in this country, when the Government of Ceylon in connection with the Centenary Celebrations of Archaeology in this country (1890–1990) published the two research treatises the Jamiah produced as (i) *Islamic Perspectives on Archaeology*, and (ii) *Sri Lankan Archaeology and its Contribution to Humanism and Culture*, in their official publication *ANCIENT CEYLON* (Volume One and Three) which has been reviewed by British archaeology. Azeez's wish as it were, for the Muslim elite to drive a dent into research, was once again fulfilled when the Archaeological Department of this country called upon the Naleemiah Research Institute, to edit nearly 27 Arabic Inscriptions in this Island on the pattern of Edward Muller's Vols. I and II (1883) and of Paranavitana's Volumes I and II of the Inscriptions of Ceylon (1970). These two volumes are in the final stages of preparation at our Research Centre and would be published by the Department of Archaeology.

We crave the indulgence of the audience for our unavoidable digression. It is neither desirable or necessary at this stage to delve into the very many facets of Islamic culture and civilization to which we focused his insatiable curiosity nor to review his services at length. May I venture to state at this juncture, that a worthy epitaph to his memory should be, for us to continue the quest of his ideals - service to our community, pursuit of scholarship and learning and finally the engendering of that understanding with other communities in the midst of whom we live.

The word humanism, whatever its etymological roots and lexicographical connotation may be, is as elusive as the words, democracy and socialism. But for a moment if we concur, with E.M.

Foster's definition⁹ that humanism is compounded of intellectual curiosity, good taste, free thought and love of mankind, then Azeez was undoubtedly one of the finest humanists of this Island home of ours.

Learning and Scholarship was his penchant – his natural inclination. From this rises his clear perception of his community's imperative need – EDUCATION and Youth Leadership. When he was nominated to the Senate – the Upper House of the then Legislature and the University Court, he utilised his position in these two institutions, to advance the cause of his community with the goodwill of the members of the other communities. His four primary behests which we have inherited, by which he aspired to evolve a *modus vivendi* is an Islamic ethos for our growing generation are the CMSE, the YMMA, Zahira College and Jamiah Naleemiah – all of which have been, and are being directed with undeviating determination to promote education, learning and scholarship, which would finally guide them to the austere simplicity and divine wisdom, as contained in the Word (Quran) and the Deed (the Prophet). If Muhammed Mustapha bin Al-Abdullah was his worthy master, then Abdul Azeez bin Aboobucker has not proved to be an unworthy pupil. His corporeal self has ceased in keeping with "Mullu Nafsin Zayakathul Mouwth" but his unostentatious and virtuous ways by which he served his compatriots, his literary productions and scholarship are more edifying than the evanescence of wealth, power and ephemeral glory of this Dunya.

"Verily, we are from Allah, and unto Him we return."

9 Two cheers for Democracy – an autobiographical tract. 1965 London.

Dr. M.A.M. Shukri

Dr.M.A.M.Shukri hails from Matara and was a student at Zahira College, Colombo during the Azeez era. He entered the University of Ceylon in 1961 and graduated with First Class Honours in Arabic in 1965. In 1973 he was awarded the Commonwealth Scholarship and obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh in 1976. He is the Director of Jamiah Naleemiah, Beruwela since 1981. He is a well known leading Islamic scholar and has contributed immensely in this field.



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



Muslim Parliamentarians, M.M. Ibrahim, A.M. Merza, M.E.H. Mohamed Ali, A.M.A. Azeez, Sir Razik Fareed, H.S. Ismail and Dr.M.C.M. Kaleel after meeting Hon. C.W.W. Kannangara on the meat stall question and ahimsa agitation



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, Sheikh Mustapha Abdel Razak, in Cairo, Egypt in 1947



Azeez welcoming Dr.K.G. Saiyadain, Advisor on Education to the Govt. of India, at a special assembly at Zahira College in 1953



Azeez receiving the Sahitya 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

* Reproduced with grateful thanks from *100 Great Muslim Leaders of the 20th Century*, Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Mohamed Manzoor Alam, Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi, India, 2005, p: 365-369

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 services 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 19th 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.

T.B. Jayah and A.M.A. Azeez, were responsible for transforming Zahira College into a leading national school. In the school magazine *Crescent*, of March 1923 Jayah stated, "The problem before us then is to evolve a system of education which would be in harmony with the tradition of our religion and at the same time respond to modern conditions." Azeez who concurred with Jayah, was willing to borrow from any other educational system to improve the existing system so long as it did not undermine Islamic values. Zahira College became known as an institution where one could receive a good education in an Islamic environment. It could be said that Jayah laid the foundation (from 1921 to 1948), and Azeez built on that. Azeez's tenure as principal (1948-1961) was known as the 'golden age of Zahira College'. During this period it was not only a leading school in the country but also the foremost Muslim educational institution, which drew students from Maldives, India, Pakistan, Singapore and even from Kenya. Zahira College excelled in studies, sports, scouting and other extra-curricular activities.

Dr A.M.A. Azeez's efforts to uplift and improve Zahira College could be considered to a great extent as his contribution to Muslim education. Many of the changes he introduced in the school were followed in other schools. One of his first tasks was to establish a good library, followed by expanding his staff to include many young graduates and trained teachers. The teachers were from all communities and professed various ideologies. The students were also drawn from all communities. Many school societies were formed, notably the Iqbal society, where students were introduced to the world of poet-philosopher, Dr Iqbal and other Islamic writers, philosophers and poets. He encouraged students to follow university education; for those not so fortunate, provisions were made for vocational training. Noting the importance of trade and

business for the Muslim community, he established a commerce section for those who wished to follow a career in business, a very significant move as many of today's businessmen benefited from this.

Dr Azeez noted with concern the general lack of interest of Muslim education. He felt that only higher education could transform this 'community of traders' into one with professionals and other educated people. He tried to change things through his speeches and writings. During his principalship many students entered university and were qualified as accountants, administrators, doctors, lawyers, engineers and scientists, while many others became journalists and academics. In 1952, Azeez visited the USA on a Smith-Mundt scholarship for six months. As president of the All-Ceylon union of teachers and of the All-Ceylon headmasters' conference (1951 to 1953), Azeez made significant contributions to school curricula and teacher training.

He believed that women should have equal right to education. At a time when Muslim girls were not allowed to follow higher studies, he encouraged parents to educate their daughters. Setting the example in his own family, he convinced them that it was as important to educate girls as boys. He was also critical of the prevailing dowry system and suggested if girls were educated, this degrading situation would be overcome. His efforts met with success.

As an educationist and a man of vision, he established in 1945 the Ceylon Muslim scholarship fund. The aim of the fund 'was to see that no Muslim scholar, capable and deserving in any part of the island is deprived of the education he or she deserves for want of money'. Assistance was given as interest-free loans, which the students must pay back when they are in a position to do so. With repayments and annual donations from past scholars as a gesture of gratitude, the CMSF could continue forever as a revolving

fund, with the charity of the donor lasting forever as donations are recycled over and over again. This organization was supported by leading Muslims at the time, and was one of the earliest charitable organizations to be incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1946.

In 1948, Dr Azeez arranged for four scholars to attend al-Azhar university in Cairo to obtain a religious education. The CMSF has helped over 2,000 poor students to pursue higher education, While on a visit to Egypt in 1947, Dr Azeez studied the youth organizations there and on his return formed the All-Ceylon Y.M.M.A. Conference. He also tried to develop the capabilities of Muslim school dropouts.

Along with a few interested people, he initiated a convention of the existing Y.M.M.A's in Colombo and formed the Young Men's Muslim Association Conference. He gave it proper constitution and a meaningful motto, 'Faith, Unity, Discipline'. Today, the All-Ceylon Y.M.M.A. Conference is one of the respected NGOs in the country with a wide network of branches and an impressive record of work, at the same time helping to promote inter-communal amity.

While at Zahira College, it was his dream to set up the Muslim cultural centre in the premises. However, with political changes and the takeover of Zahira College in 1961, this was not to be. He then proposed a Muslim cultural university, which too did not materialize. Ultimately, he was presented with the idea of establishing Jamiah Naleemiah at Beruwela. He was now able to channelise his ideas into this institution, which he did with enthusiasm. Inaugurated in 1973, it is a balanced integration of the rich cultural heritage of Islam with the modern disciplines and methodologies in education. Many students have since graduated from here, obtaining university degrees, joined the administrative service and obtained scholarships to foreign universities. The Naleemiah Institute of Research has also made great progress, one of the more note-worthy being the collection of Arabic-Tamil literature.

Even during his civil service, Dr A.M.A. Azeez remained in touch with learning and research. He was a voracious reader, good orator in both English and Tamil, which talent he used to further his ideals of education for Muslims. He wrote extensively on the Muslims of Sri Lanka, history of education and the educational and cultural problems that concerned the Muslims of Sri Lanka. These writings were read and discussed widely. He also made known the valuable contributions to the Muslim heritage by Siddi Lebbe.

A true scholar interested in research and academic work, in 1966 he attended the conference on Tamil Studies at Kuala Lumpur, where he presented a paper titled *Some Aspects of the Muslim Society of Ceylon, With Special Reference to the 1880s*. His book *The West Reappraised* (1964) is of interest to researchers, while his contributions to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* published by E.J. Brill of Netherlands (1965) and to *Education in Ceylon – Centenary Volume* contain in-depth information on Muslims of Sri Lanka.

His Tamil book *Islam in Sri Lanka* won him the Sahithya award in 1963. He wrote several articles in Tamil on education, Muslims and Islam. He wrote three books in Tamil, namely, *Spell of Egypt*, *East African Scene* and *Tamil Travelogue*, which are considered to be outstanding specimens of works on travel writing.

He had a special interest in Arabic-Tamil, which began in his childhood when he listened to Islamic readings in Arabic-Tamil by his uncle, Assena Lebbe, who was a Tamil scholar, poet and an expert in Arabic-Tamil. Arabic-Tamil is Tamil written in the Arabic script and include many Arabic words. It was used in Islamic discourses up to the end of the 19th century, some of which were read even during the 1950s. Dr Azeez found a similarity between Arabic-Tamil and Swahili. He advocated more research on it as it was very important to Muslims as part of their heritage. He wrote a booklet, *Arabic-Tamil our Beloved Tamil*, in Tamil. He also advised

the compilation of an Arabic-Tamil dictionary. Today such research in Arabic-Tamil is being conducted at Jamiah Naleemiah.

As a scholar and educationist he was recognized in India and Pakistan. In 1955, he presided at the golden jubilee celebrations of the Tamil Muslim poets' day organized by the Muslim educational association of southern India. In 1973, he presided at the Tamil Nadu Muslim education conference at Chennai. He also participated in various other seminars and workshops, such as international Quranic conference in Lahore and the international Muslim youths' conference in Trichi (India). Dr A.M.A. Azeez was appointed to the court, council and senate of the University of Ceylon in the 1950s where his suggestions and comments were greatly appreciated. In 1980, the university of Jaffna at its convocation awarded posthumously the Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).¹

In 1952, while he was principal at Zahira College, he was appointed by the United National Party to the Senate (Upper House of Parliament) 'in recognition of outstanding service to the welfare of the Muslim community'. His main objective in entering politics was to serve the community. In 1956 he disagreed with the UNP over the official language bill. He felt that the rights of minorities were not recognized, and resigned in protest. Later he was appointed to the public service commission, which he served with great distinction.

With regard to his views on the official language bill, he was concerned as an educationist about the repercussions it would have on the Muslim community. He stated, "Unfortunately for our country and the minorities this question (the language question) has been treated as if it were a conflict between two races. The forestage, status and race aspects have been highlighted to the detriment of other aspects."

Dr A.M.A. Azeez believed fervently that all communities in Sri Lanka could and should live in amity. This was possible through understanding and tolerance. “We best serve Sri Lanka not by the abandonment or neglect of our culture, but by its preservation, protection and promotion,” he observed. A devout Muslim, he practiced his religion without being a fanatic. He worked towards the betterment of the Muslim community and the country with sincerity and dedication. He passed away on November 24, 1973 and was hailed posthumously as a national hero of Sri Lanka in 1986. A commemorative stamp was also issued in his memory.

Dr. A.M.A.Azeez – The Iconic Nation Builder*

Susil Sirivardana

A.M.A.Azeez was born in Jaffna in 1911 and died in Colombo in 1973. His comparatively short life of 62 years forms a captivating swathe in modern Sri Lankan history. Viewed as a whole, perhaps its greatest lesson is as a metaphor for Nation Building. Juxtaposing Azeez's lifework besides the needlepoint in time that we are poised today, we thought it appropriate to explicate this theme for our collective reeducation. Azeez is a superb role model at a time when authentic Nation Builders are rare. It is here that Azeez emerges as An Iconic Nation Builder. He merits the studious attention of every single Sri Lankan.

There is a difference between this analysis of Azeez and the numerous appreciations of his life and work written by many hands over the years. We find that since Azeez's achievement is so diverse and multi-faceted, there is quite an understandable propensity for writings about him to selectively deal with one or two prominent aspects of his vast achievement. While paying homage to this great son of Sri Lanka, such an approach seems to miss out on a unique quality of his significance. That is to approach his lifework as one tightly interwoven narrative. Azeez brought an integrated moral and spiritual integrity, a rigorous intellectual acuity and a total

* Thirty sixth Marhoom Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Oration - 2009

commitment to every single phase of his career. The metaphor of Nation Building lies in this sum total viewed in its holism.

History placed Azeez's career in the most strategic of times. The first thirty six years of his life, were deeply entrenched in the first four decades *before* Independence, when Sri Lanka was negotiating the first phase of its Nation Building trajectory from fully-fledged colonialism through modern nationalism to independence. As we shall see later, he was caught in its tension as a colonial Civil Servant. The last twenty five years were spent *after* Independence. Both these phases may be said to have posed 'cruel' challenges to him in the sense that he was called upon to make decisions that either furthered or undermined Nation Building. This is where he excelled – every single decision he made, eloquently underwrote the pre-eminent *Nation Building* compulsion.

Further, there is an unenviable symmetry to his career. It seamlessly divides itself into four phases which facilitate critical evaluation. Phase one, from birth to 1933, is a period of growth and preparation for national service. The second phase from 1935 to 1948 is in the Ceylon Civil Service. The next thirteen years from 1948 to 1961, involves two parallel roles as Principal of Zahira College, Colombo, as well as a member of the Senate. The last years or fourth phase was as a member of the then prestigious Public Service Commission from 1963 to 1970 and the period of his greatest literary output in Tamil and English during 1962 and 1973. The spirit and substance of Nation Building runs through all phases. Each phase marks a deepening and consolidation of the phase before. Symmetry is indeed the right word for such a trajectory.

The Journey of the Self

Azeez's life is one of continuously scaling heights. How did he do it? It is that method and process that we refer to in the title, The

Journey of the Self. His growth into adulthood was marked by a process of inner growth. The term Self, connotes this particular experience of personhood which is a holistic concept. It works through a process of critical dialogue with one's Self. The benefit is in internalizing particular capacities. It is a process of psychological maturing. He acquired these capacities throughout his childhood, and later, through family and human relationships. The result was enrichment in intellectual perspicacity and self-confidence.

Also The Journey of the Self applies in two complementary senses. The first is the journey of the Self in the early years of childhood, boyhood, university and adulthood. The second sense is larger and bigger. It refers to the journey of enhancing the inner person and its capacities, throughout his life. It is this second process which enables him to successfully address newer and bigger challenges as he plays multiple roles in complex circumstances.

Marina Ismail recreates for us this touching early period of childhood and boyhood.¹ "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" He lost his mother when he was seven, but this loss was compensated in ample measure by the love showered on him by his maternal grandparents and aunt who really brought him up. There is absolutely no doubt that he enjoyed a childhood with an abundance of emotional bonding. Azeez "would study late into the night with the aid of a flickering oil lamp, while Ummamma (The grandmother) feeling concerned about him and wishing to keep company, sat nodding away in a corner". Again she says "The children who lived down

1 All quotations in this section are from *Childhood Memories – A Daughter Remembers in 'A.M.A. Azeez- A Profile'*.

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 distinctive white skull-caps. Much time was spent in religious instruction at the Allapichai Madrasa which later became 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 in us.” Or ”The lane was their playground”. Though the grandfather could have afforded to send him to school in a buggy cart “my father had to walk the one-and-a-half miles to and from from school every day. This was indeed an enjoyable trip, for all the boys walked together laughing and chatting”. The boys were Muslim and Hindu. Not even a whiff of present day segregation.

As Prof. Ryhana Raheem perceptively observes, when he returned to his boyhood school in 1963 for its Golden Jubilee Address, he did not talk about Cambridge or University College but about his first school.”I now feel thrice-blessed that I did go to Vaidyeshwara 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.” After Vaidyeshwara, he went to Jaffna Hindu College. He often quoted Prophet Muhammad’s “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave “ and Francis Bacon who said “Knowledge is Power”.

Azeez’s was a modern mind .His attitude to women’s education is significant. He believed that girls must receive modern education upto the highest levels. He strongly advocated his daughter going to Peradeniya University and on the eve of her departure told her: ”I should be happy with my studies; should not think of material benefits, but read the subjects one liked and try to do one’s best.”

Enlightenment rings through these words. He set further examples with girls in his extended family. He did not believe in Purdah, though he stood for modesty in women's dress. He disapproved of the conventional dowry system for girls .

Azeez was an Exhibitioner in the University College in Colombo, having entered it in 1929. He did History Honours and passed out with an Upper Second class. In his homage to his dear friend and colleague, C. Vanniasingam, he reveals that the intention while at university was to become a lawyer. Additionally, he won that year's (1933) one and only Government Arts Scholarship to continue his studies in England, where he proceeded to St. Catherine's College, Cambridge in 1934. However before sailing for England, he had sat for his Ceylon Civil Service examination. Within a month of being at Cambridge, he heard that he had passed the Ceylon Civil Service and decided to take up that appointment and immediately returned to the island. He was the first Muslim to enter that Service.

In tracking his personal journey, we should be mindful of the nature of these times. These were the inter-war years when revolutionary change was reverberating in the world at large, especially in the colonial societies. The Russian Revolution and its inspiration, the Great Depression and the conflicts in Germany, the awakening in China and Japan, and the Indian Independence Struggle were all revolutionary events. Within Sri Lanka too, there were historic changes happening. Particularly the effects of the Donoughmore Commission and the granting of universal franchise, with the consequential election of the first and second State Councils. This period of the two Councils, from 1932 to 1947, saw the determined unfolding of a process of countrywide change in all aspects of governance and development. *However, there was one very significant gap – a structural gap – in these propitious change processes, and that was Nation Building. That was missed*

out and submerged in the rhetoric and realpolitik of the lead-up to Independence. We have analysed this elsewhere in detail and called it “the absent fundamental” in our polity.² This is what makes Azeez’s achievement, together with a few other exceptional persons ahead of his times, very special. Azeez, who was very much in the mainstream of intellectual and policy making in his society, due to the strength and tenacity of his vision for Sri Lanka, succeeded in manoeuvring his way in the polity, consciously and deftly avoiding the pitfalls in the path of Nation Building. In fact that is the narrative that we are celebrating today.

This is where Azeez’s intellect towers above the mainstream. It is facile to say that his study of history had armed him against these dangers. It was, as we are striving to show, something much larger and more whole. His whole make-up was different and composed to produce a very different kind of outlook. To put it simply, *he saw Sri Lanka – and himself -in a very different way*. It is that we have to understand. Let us now move to the next important transition, which will reveal a lot more.

Touching the Base (1935 to 1948)

Touching The Base is our metaphor for the second highly formative period in Azeez’s career. The metaphor connotes his permanent engagement with *the base of Sri Lankan society, especially with the base of Muslim society*. But clearly it was not limited to a single community. It was a much larger and countrywide engagement. It coincides with his thirteen years in the Ceylon Civil Service. Basically its highlights are twofold. A term of duty in Kalmunai, which has been called one of his greatest achievements. The other is another key experience in the Ministry of Health.

2 See the author’s article “The Absent Fundamental in Dialogue”, Special Issue on Fifty Years of Sinhala Only, New Series Vol.xxxiv 2007, pages 135-147. A radically different analysis in some respects is forthcoming in 2010 in an article in a book on NATION BUILDING.

Azeez went through a two and a half year period as a Civil Service Cadet and thereafter was attached to a number of shorter and longer assignments in the Service as was the pattern. His attachment to Kandy Kachcheri as a cadet in Matale during 1935-37, was an important interlude. That was the time of the Malaria Epidemic. Azeez had to travel to the affected Kandyan villages and make payments to destitute rural families. That brought home to him in all its tragedy and pathos the wretched conditions of the rural poor. The highly sensitive and ethical Azeez would have begun to feel strongly about the pro poor role of the elite public servant. We may note this sentence about Civil Servants."New Entrant Civil Servants in particular would regard their offices as avenues to serve the people of Ceylon and not as steps to climb the ladder of success."³

The Kalmunai sojourn was necessitated by a food crisis. The Second World War was on and food ships to Sri Lanka were blocked by the Japanese. Therefore an Emergency Food Drive was declared and high potential areas were identified for intense food production. The person in charge was none other than D.S.Senanayake the Minister of Agriculture. When Kalmunai was identified under this programme D.S.Senanayake handpicked Azeez to go immediately to Kalmunai as Assistant Government Agent and open an Emergency Kachcheri. Azeez arrived there in April 1942 and stayed till January 1944.

During this short period Azeez literally transformed the agriculture of the whole area comprising Karavahupattu, Sammanthuraipattu, Akkaraipattu, Panamapattu and Wewagam-pattu (comprising the entirety of the present Ampara district from Paddirippu to Kumana), through a massive and rapid programme of farmer mobilization, land distribution of both highland and paddy land, special seed and livestock production farms, and most

3 *The West Reappraised*, page 44.

importantly, organizing an effective support system to meet all the varied input and output needs of the farmers. The motivation resulting from his intense labours resulted in Kalmunai registering massive increases in food production and becoming the cynosure in the eyes of the whole country. This we know when it was celebrated in a famous Harvest Festival in 1943, attended personally by D.S.Senanayake and State Councillors with a large team of the top officials from the Ministry. One upshot of this success story was a unique gesture by the grateful farmers of Akkaraipattu of naming a stretch of 500 acres of paddy land at Sagamam as *Azeez Thurai Kandam*.

Azeez could not rest content with only a transformation in the economic sphere. He had to tackle another root cause of underdevelopment, which was ignorance and the culture of silence. He moved strategically on the educational front too. "The Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund" was inaugurated by Azeez in 1945. This Fund was in one way the culmination of a process that he started while serving as AGA in 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 1942.⁴ Azeez continued to nurse and support these initiatives throughout his life. He cleverly made linking arrangements to improve their viability and sustainability.

This enduring bond with Kalmunai was deepened hundredfold by the myriads of long lasting and inspiring human relationships he formed with the people of Kalmunai and Batticaloa. They varied from the poorest of farmer families to others in the bureaucracy and to distinguished individuals like Abdul Cader Lebbe of Kattankudy and Swami Vipulananda, once again documented in Mr Jameel's essay.

4 S.H.M.Jameel in *Kalmunai Essay*.

The other success case was in the field of Health, where he functioned under Dr W.A.de Silva, the Minister of Health, as his Secretary. Once again Azeez got the opportunity to found a countrywide scheme of rural health for primary health needs with the distinctive political commitment and acuity of Dr de Silva. Dr de Silva had a great passion and a clear understanding of rural health problems professionally and as a humane person. Azeez found that the opening for him to make a breakthrough and innovate must be used to its maximum. This is exactly what he did. The improvement of primary health care and quality of life of which we are very proud today, derive from the groundwork initiated under this programme.

Practical Idealist (1948 to 1961)

The change from top level Civil Servant to becoming the Principal of Zahira College, Colombo, came somewhat suddenly. The negotiations for the transfer of power and Independence was on in full motion and D.S.Senanayake was in the process of forming his Cabinet. He chose T.B.Jayah to be one of his Ministers. At the time, Jayah had been Principal of Zahira for 26 years and had built up the school. It was then that Jayah chose Azeez as his obvious choice and Azeez had no regrets about responding to the call. It was directly complementary to his vision of service to his community at a historic juncture in the modern history of the country. Additionally education was a subject he was deeply interested and committed to. It has been also said, that he welcomed the greater freedom the new post offered, as he would be his own boss. Further, for the Nation Builder in Azeez, what better opportunity than that of directly fashioning young men, imbued with idealism to achieve great things.

The new role meant that he could play a more impactful intellectual role to raise the sights and consciousness of both the

elite and the citizenry. His new position gave him the eminence to invite statespersons from all sources, domestic and foreign, to add lustre and dignity to the school. In other words, his access to both intellectuals and policy makers increased significantly. The large panel of distinguished visitors to Zahira has everyone from Gandhi, Nehru and Sarojini Naidu to all of Sri Lanka's Prime Ministers and more of his life.

His vision for Zahira was most exceptional. It was a complex structure of several interconnected institutions. First there was the school or college. If Jayah had laid the foundation of the school, Azeez consolidated it manifold. He transformed and upgraded the kind of product that came out of it. They were all potential professionals, who enriched by extra-curricular and sports activities, invariably after university joined the professions. Thus he linked the school to the mainstream of the national working environment. That is how the Azeez era came to be known as the Golden Era of Zahira.

The second layer was the Muslim Cultural Centre, which was conceived as a multi-faceted research centre with a library and archives, an exhibition hall, an audio-visual lecture hall and a Saracenic garden. It would have provision for the study of Arabic-Tamil which was a unique branch of Islamic studies originating in Sri Lanka and South India.

Some of the other pieces of the edifice were the Muslim Scholarship Fund and the YMMAs. Azeez was the Chairman of the Muslim Scholarship Fund and there were regular annual reviews with all the donors and well wishers at which the Chairman's detailed report was read out. He practiced transparency and accountability fully. The All Ceylon YMMA Conference started in 1950 by bringing the disparate independent YMMAs under its umbrella. Now it has grown to over one hundred branches. They have been providing vital vocational training for youth and,

equipping them for employment. How wonderfully holistic Azeez's vision for Zahira was!

He saw Zahira as a microcosm of Ceylon."...we the Muslims of Ceylon best serve Sri Lanka not by the abandonment, dethronement or dilution of our culture but by its protection, preservation and promotion and on Zahira devolves this sacred obligation to foster the distinctive culture that is ours".⁵ Indeed this is idealism of a rare order!

While playing the role of intellectual at large as Principal of Zahira, let us not forget the other complementary role he was playing within the chambers of the Senate. He was addressing issues of national policy directly. Hence he was in the centre of the storm in the newly independent Sri Lanka. Every challenge, big and small, found Azeez to be most receptive to. The book of his Senate Speeches proves that.

The intellectual, thinker and writer in Azeez is what we have to savour here. Let us not forget that he created two parallel intellectual discourses in English and Tamil. They are yet waiting to be researched in depth. Here was a person who had done, and was doing, his intellectual homework. Many are his close associates who talk of his impressive private library. The sweep of his intellectual range is impressive. While he clarified the policy and societal options for the country in the Senate, he was implementing them on a daily basis in the school as well as his multiple roles in civil society. We cannot but see the historian and historiographer in Azeez in his writings. At one point, talking of the so called White Man's Burden, he speaks of how Swami Vivekananda had to disillusion Indians who had mistaken the "iron collar of domination, intended to throttle the gold chain of civilization".⁶

5 Foundation Ceremony of Ceylon Muslim Cultural Centre Address of Thanks, March 18, 1958.

6 *The West Reappraised*, page 68.

He had fully analysed the historical mission of modern Muslim education from both its Islamic legacy as well as more recent history. For example of Siddi Lebbe he says “Having deftly diagnosed the dreadfully debilitating disease, he prescribed the sovereign remedy of Modern Education in a Muslim environment.” We need to note the gravitas in the language. Once again “of this, the educational aspect is the most significant. In this sphere there was during the closing quarter of the nineteenth century a clear awakening among the Muslims of Ceylon brought about by the cumulative influences traceable to sources Islamic, Indian and Indigenous – the Aligarh Movement started by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the religious and educational renaissance resulting from the efforts of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, the Hindu Counter-reformation headed by Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar and the Stay in Ceylon for nearly two decades, of Arabi Pasha, the father of the Egyptian Independence Movement, officially a rebel and exile, but dearly beloved of the local Muslims. From the activities and writings of M.C.Siddi Lebbe, the then leader among the Muslims of Ceylon, it is clear that the Aligarh Movement made a substantial contribution to this reawakening.”⁷

Azeez is credited with having introduced Muhammad Iqbal into the Sri Lankan horizon. Iqbal was a powerful force, dubbed the poet-philosopher. This is how Azeez comments on him. “Iqbal thus belongs to our century; he has a special message for our time and a solution for the cultural conflicts of our period. He asks us to achieve a synthesis of the cultures of the east and the west, gaining new vitality from the healthy sources of our past culture. He has given us a glimpse of Islam, pristine and pure and has exhorted us to go in quest of it, trusting in the Almighty and placing reliance on ourselves and without being oppressed or overwhelmed by the extremes of either scholasticism or Sufism. Iqbal thus becomes our

7 *The West Reappraised*, page 117.

modern guide of Islam, who has shown us the old path, having himself cleared it of the dead leaves and fallen trees that were impeding the progress of the travelers. And to Humanity in general Iqbal has given a dynamic message of a life of striving and courage motivated by the fear of God with dread of Nought.”⁸

We would like to assert that Azeez had raised himself to the level of being a sub-continental level thinker and visionary in Islamic culture. Hence his inclusion in the book *100 Great Muslim Leaders of the 20th Century*.

There is a hauntingly resonant mention in Professor Sivathamby’s essay on the folklore of Azeez.. That is what people, especially Muslims from all over, used to say when they met and discussed matters. ”After all the boy is studying under Azeez – what better do you need”.Doesn’t that simple heartfelt statement say it all. What public trust! How rare the fund of trust he had accumulated through his labours. It is not only Muslims who felt like that. Everyone, irrespective of ethnicity, felt like that. What an invaluable acknowledgement and endorsement of the Nation Building value frame of Azeez this single expression marks! No wonder Professor Sivathamby expresses another profound truth: ”Azeez was more than a man, he was an institution.” He simply astounds .

The Last Phase (1963 to 1973)

The last phase of his career was a further scaling of heights. For example, this was his most distinctive period as far as serious writing went. In 1963, he was appointed to the prestigious Public Service Commission. He served in the Commission till 1970. What he did there was to sustain the high moral standards of enlightened social justice in the deliberations of this high appellate and grievance hearing body.

8 *The West Reappraised*, page 161.

But his real achievement was in the writing that he did. For once, he had the luxury of more leisure than in his busy life before. He was also more detached from the fray and trivia of day to day affairs. He could be reflective and spend time on his literary tasks. In this attempt the lucid thinker, the writer with conceptualization skills and the rooted visionary who transcended all the divisions and exclusions in a subtly divided society, was able to give us a distilled wisdom which this society has yet to come to terms with. *For one, Azeez has never been situated as an individual of the highest order.* Hence he has not been in the public eye, except by a small segment of his admirers and loyalists. But this is not Azeez's real place in Sri Lankan society. His place is right up in the heights.

In 1964 he produced the only small English paperback he published under the Saman Press label, called *The West Reappraised*. Its 172 pages is fascinating reading. The range is interesting. The essays had their origins as addresses or articles. The theme of the book is the metamorphosing interface of Eastern and Western culture in the context of a decolonizing South Asia. He distinguishes between the old epoch or the “age of Dazzlement” and the new, “the Age of Discernment.” He often refers to the corrosive Macaulayan educational order and its more liberative counter-order. A recurring word in this book is ‘awakening and reawakening.’ That is what this phase of South Asian history was about. The book has fourteen short essays. All except for three are about inspirational figures of direct relevance to Sri Lanka, and three general essays. The general essays are on the Buddha Jayanthi celebrations, Vaidyeshwara Vidyalaya, an institution dedicated to liberating young scholars and on Pan Islam, which was a highly debated issue of the times.

Upto 1960, all his writing was in English. Thereafter he started writing in Tamil. Proactively he saw that the greatest need of the times ahead was to strengthen the foundations of local language literatures. His Tamil book on Islam In Sri Lanka is a classic of 224

pages, which won the Sahithya Award in 1963. Then he started a new genre of writing in Tamil, namely travelogues, where the confluence of a creative imagination in combination with organic thinking, produces a delightful quality of writing. He wrote four such Tamil books : Spell of Egypt, East African Scene, African Experiences and Tamil Travelogue on a visit to Malaysia. Professor Sivathamby calls them “ outstanding pieces of travel writing in Tamil in Sri Lanka.” A grateful University of Jaffna posthumously honoured Azeez with a D.Litt in 1980.

Apart from this, he has left us an invaluable collection of 75 carefully edited Addresses and Articles in English in three volumes. When all these essays are republished after careful editing by modern scholars, they will form a most challenging resource for modern researchers. Azeez’s contribution to Sri Lankan historiography is yet to be written. He was his own meticulous archivist and hence the tasks of editing his papers should not be too daunting.

While at Zahira ,he came up with the idea of forming a Muslim Cultural Centre within its premises. However the political changes such as the Schools takeover intervened and it had to be given up. Then he revived this, in keeping with the thinking of the times (e.g. Vidyodaya and Vidyalkara Pirivenas were converted into Universities), into setting up a Muslim Cultural University, which was even mentioned in the Throne Speech of that year. But that too got aborted. He did not give up. Finally this seminal idea found the light of day in Jamiah Naleemiah at Beruwela in 1973. The great part of his inestimable library is there.

Metaphor of Nation Building

The thesis of this oration is that Azeez’s whole life’s work was a metaphor of Nation Building. Let us note that this noble term is not used in the trite and reductive use it has been put to today.

Nation Building implies a long and arduous process of struggle and creative learning by a collective people, in cases like ours of people emerging from colonialism, in their authentic attempt to raise their collective sights, to reconstruct a new Sri Lankan Nation. It is a highly complex and morally demanding process of renegotiating history and rebuilding it, brick by brick. The sclerosed part of the past is excised and a new living, modern, democratic, and free idiom and spirit is internalized within all people. Like all narratives of Nation Building, Sri Lanka's own is a grand narrative that has been, we are sorry to say, sadly neglected. Hence the tragedies of civil war, massive distrust and anomie that has been sown so hugely.

Azeez was one exceptional mind that saw this fundamental historical challenge totally and in depth. He made it his lifework to build the new Sri Lankan Nation, which was, and is very much now, a Nation-In-The-Making. The career we have sketched above was his way of negotiating the pitfalls, choosing the right and more difficult alternative over the facile and the expedient, thinking long term, rooting it within spiritual and valuational armour, and courageously and confidently moving ahead with his head held high and enjoying the confidence of all contesting forces. These were the challenges he faced and which he accomplished so substantially. That is the metaphor of Nation Building we have in mind.

Let us now dissect the metaphor and explain explicitly the how of Azeez's labour.

Azeez produced his own discourse on the Language Question and its related issues like Medium of Instruction. Many of his addresses and articles are devoted to this subject which was a burning issue of debate. The interesting point is that *he saw Language through the prism of Nation Building*. They are closely interlinked. He entered the fray fearlessly and prolifically because he was so clear and convinced of his stand. He was a confirmed

bilingualist. "I would recommend to the Government to give all possible encouragement to the growing generation to be bilingual, in the sense that they will know both Sinhalese and Tamil. I would recommend to the Government that the education Department should encourage schools to introduce Sinhalese, at least at Standard 6, to the Tamil-speaking children and Tamil, at a similar stage to the Sinhalese-speaking children".⁹

Actually he was a trilingualist. "And yet Sinhalese cannot be neglected in the present context of affairs in Ceylon. This problem has received my attention in reference to Zahira College, Colombo, and the solution arrived at is to make Sinhalese compulsory from Standard 6 upwards, so that a boy who leaves Zahira College, Colombo, will have a knowledge of English and Tamil as well as Sinhalese. This seems the best solution of our problems".¹⁰

He ties this explicit position on Language, with this foundational belief in *one nation*. "As a matter of fact, there is only one nation at present and it is my prayer and hope that there shall be only one nation, although Ceylon may be a multi-lingual and multi-religious nation State."¹¹ Azeez's speech in the Senate on 3rd July 1956 on the Official Language Bill is one of his longest and most brilliant. He submits it to a comprehensive and detailed analysis and shows the inexcusable flaws in the Bill, and makes a passionate last minute plea for it to be amended to make it acceptable to the minorities. But the Senate steamrolls it through. Shortly before that, Azeez had resigned from the United National Party to which he belonged, on the language issue. Thereafter, he remained as an Independent in the Senate.

9 *Senate Speeches*, Speech on Appropriation Bill 1953-54 Second Reading, page 29-30.

10 "Muslims and Medium of Instruction", article in *Ceylon Daily News*, 12 March 1953.

11 *Senate Speeches*, Address of Thanks to the Throne Speech, page 77.

To sum up there lies the totally integrated and interwoven praxis of Azeez. No part of it lay in isolation from the rest of its parts. That was the quality of his mind and intellect. It penetrated a problem to its depth and saw it wholly and in its complexity. In his thoroughly cross-cutting personal journey, he intuitively understood the path to be taken. His expertise in history, deftly guided him through the oft met faultlines. He saw the task as one of reweaving the tapestry drawing out the commonality from her uniquely rich confluence of cultures. Azeez was an inclusivist through and through. He had ample intellectual resources of criticality to sift the grain from the chaff and reinterpret it into a higher synthesis at a higher level of consciousness. This was his methodology of Nation Building.

Further, he played multiple roles at one and the same time. He was a highly trusted Muslim political and intellectual confidant of the whole spectrum of political camps. He made a lasting impact during his thirteen years as a Civil Servant, enhancing his credibility. Then he strode the corridors of academe as one of the most informed and far-seeing educationists in the South Asia of his time. He fashioned and inspired the people who came within his penumbra and prepared them with strong ethical and intellectual powers to go out into the world of work. He served as the conscience of a community and the nation in the Senate. He was a *public intellectual* in the finest sense of that epithet. He was a regular participant in and contributor to all the English and Tamil newspapers of his time. The classic three volume collection of 75 Addresses and Articles had their origin in the newspapers. He silently and laboriously read file upon file in performing the adjudicating functions as a Public Service Commissioner. He was a founder of many a fund and institution and a great catalyst of projects. He served dedicatedly in the Court, Council and the Senate of the University of Ceylon. He was a leader of teacher unions. He was a wonderful family man and beloved mentor, elder and friend.

He could be humble and frank to a fault. In the Senate talking on the Report of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry he is self-critical. "I was surprised that a community so numerically strong should be so disadvantageously placed with regard to education. I was not so fully aware of this fact, though I have been a student of history, till I read this".¹² His impact was equally felt in the periphery as much as the centre.

Permit us to interject a relevant diversion at this point. In the course of this oration, we have been using the concept of 'enlightenment' for Azeez's quality of mind and intellect. The diversion relates to this dimension. Did the time span of Azeez's career coincide with an "indigenous Enlightenment" which has not yet been adequately investigated? Our hypothesis is that there is rudimentary evidence to show that during the four decades basically between 1914 and 1947, there was a distinctive and sustained outburst of endogenous intellectual self-probing and inventing new ideas by a galaxy of yet inadequately evaluated intellectual leaders, who form in their foundational ideas a body of new thinking which would justifiably earn them the name of being members of an indigenous Enlightenment. We have in mind the constellation consisting of Ananda Coomaraswamy, Anagarika Dharmapala, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, M.C.Siddi Lebbe, Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar, Dr.W.A.De Silva, A.P.de Zoysa, Polwatte Buddhadhatta Thero, Weliwitiye Soratha Thero, C.W.W.Kannangara, C.L.Wickremasinghe, Paul Pieris, Munidasa Cumaratunga and A.M.A.Azeez. The list is yet incomplete. Basically it is the period comprising the Gampola Case Judgement of Paul Pieris in 1914 to the end of the second State Council in 1947. Perhaps, it was a potential Enlightenment -in-the-making, which did not reach mature crystallisation.

12 *Senate Speeches*, speech on Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Bill, 11th November 1960, page 366-367.

Perhaps the greatest need arising from this exploration is for a solid programme of research on the Thought and Life of Dr.Azeez. The work done so far by the Azeez Foundation is admirable. But he deserves much more. Perhaps the most important and urgent single research need is a carefully annotated bibliography of his writings and sources. That would be a first step in attracting scholars from here and abroad.

The beauty of Azeez's mind was that there is not the slightest tinge of manichaenism or small-mindedness or populism or dogmatism in it. It was so consistently large-minded, because it was so firmly founded on liberative values and the plural roots of a civilizational endowment. Its moral and spiritual roots run deep. As Dr. Ameer Ali says, it was Azeez's Iqbalian Vision which raised its level to such noble heights. With ample access to power, he was not tempted by it in the least. He was so moderate and chaste as an intellectual. Obviously his inspiration was drawn from deeper spiritual and cosmic forces as is the norm in a select band of eminent people.

Dr. A.M.A.Azeez's legacy is more important for us today than ever before. His example can instruct us immensely.

Mr. Susil Sirivardana

Mr. Susil Sirivardana has been an independent community worker and social scientist from 1994; an administrator from 1965-1993; a school teacher from 1962-1965.

Since voluntary retirement from public service in 1993, he has been working with community organizations and learning about our own and South Asia's civilizational inheritance.

As a public servant, he played a significant role in two pivotal Participatory Development Programmes – the Million Houses Programme (1984-92) and the Janasaviya National Poverty Alleviation Programme (1989-93).

He has co-edited two books with Ponna Wignaraja. The latest, 'Economic Democracy through Pro Poor Growth', SAGE India, 2009, and earlier, 'Pro Poor Growth and Governance in South Asia – Decentralisation and Participatory Development', SAGE India, 2004. He has written important papers on C.W.W. Kannangara and Nation Building. Since 2009, he has been re-editing Samskriti the well known Sinhala critical quarterly.

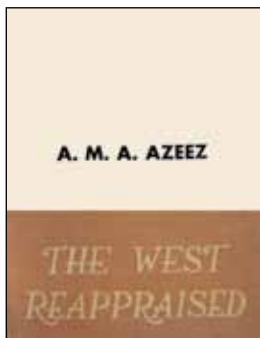
He got his B.A. in Eng Lang. & Lit. from Oxford University and schooled at St. Thomas College, Mt. Lavinia.

Publications

- Books - authored by Dr. A.M.A. Azeez
 - on Dr. A.M.A. Azeez by others
 - published by Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Foundation



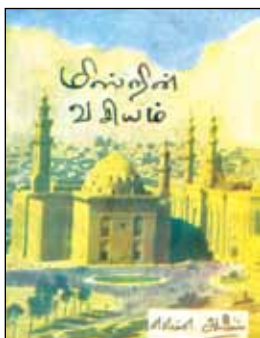
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The West Reappraised



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மிஸ்ரின் வசியம்



கிழக்காபிரிக்கக் காட்சிகள்



ஆபிரிக்க அனுபவங்கள்



Some Aspects of Muslim Society in Ceylon



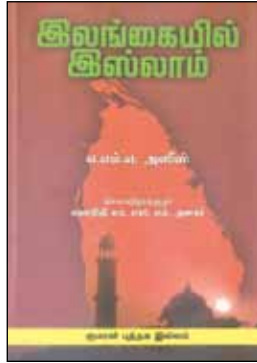
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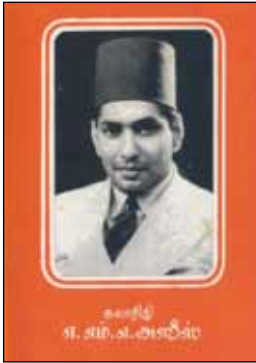
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இலங்கையில் இஸ்லாம் (இரண்டாம் பதிப்பு)



A.M.A. Azeez - Muslim Leader



கலாநிதி எ.எம்.எ. அஸீஸ்



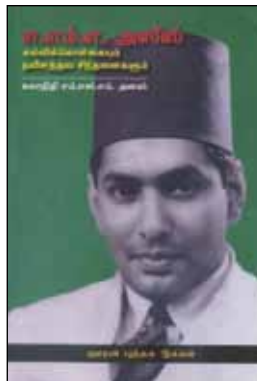
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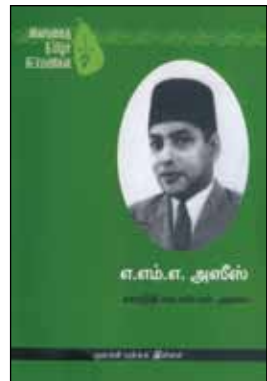
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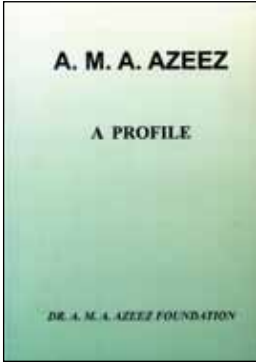
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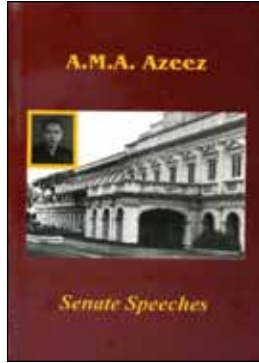
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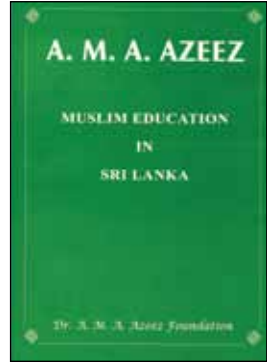
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A.M.A. Azeez - A Profile



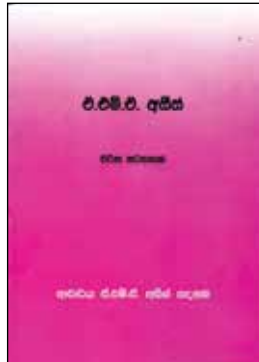
Senate Speeches



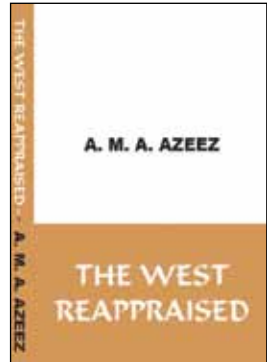
Muslim Education in Sri Lanka



எ.எம்.எ. அஸீஸ் - பன்முகப் பார்வை



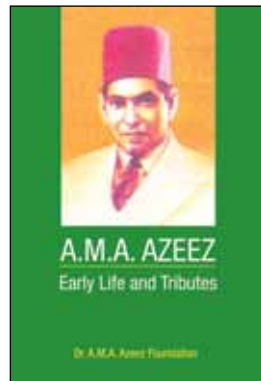
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The West Reappraised (2nd Edition)



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A.M.A. Azeez - Early Life and Tributes

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