

***Role Of Muslims As Legislators In The Upliftment Of The Marginalised In Tamil Nadu
1957-2001***

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Abstract

This paper brings out the role of Muslim Legislators in the empowerment of the marginalised sections in Tamil Nadu. It sums up the part played by Muslims as M.L.As, M.L.Cs and as Ministers in their involvement on the larger interests for the wellbeing of the State and its people. It analyses their activities towards striving for the common good of the people. It also assays the efforts, involvement and contribution of these Legislators towards the empowerment of the marginalised, irrespective of caste, creed or community. Further it explains the efforts they had taken in bringing about a change towards the development among the marginalised sections of the state.

Key Words: 1. Muslims 2. Tamil Nadu 3. Marginalised 4. Muslim Ministers.

Introduction

After Independence the Muslims actively participated in Nation Building by participating in the legislative Bodies of the state. They were nominated to Legislative council and elected to the state's Legislative Assembly. They played an important role in the empowering the marginalised sections of the society by representing their issues in the legislative bodies. The Muslims as members of the council represented the cause of the people before the government and pressed them to change in peoples favour.

On the floor of the council, the government was insisted to venture into new methods of irrigation for agriculture and stressed on the importance of bringing Krishna and Godaveri waters for the betterment of Agriculture to the state¹. The government undertook measures to bring these waters into the state. Subsequently an agreement was signed on 14th April 1976 after an agreement was reached between Tamil Nadu and the states located around the Krishna River, which are Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka. On 17th October 1977, it was agreed that a 330 km long open canal would carry 15TMCFT (thousand million cubic feet) with a series of interlinked canals to the Poondi reservoir at Madras. Its now famously known as the Krishna water supply project or Telegu Ganga project².

The government was briefed upon the importance of the reconstruction of Kudakanaru dam. It was further pointed out that the reservoir was badly affected during the floods in 1979 and its canals were badly affected by it. Even though a G.O was passed in its regard on 7th June 1982, there was an inordinate delay in its execution. It was requested that the government may do the needful to rectify it as soon as possible³. Similarly the government took steps to rectify this issue. The government decided to reconstruct the dam by December 1984 and work was undertaken on the damaged parts⁴. The work was completed successfully by 1993 and it was commissioned soon thereafter⁵. This greatly benefitted the agriculturists by irrigating 9000 acres of land⁶.

The government was asked to undertake new methods and new projects in the generation of electricity in the state. The usage of Kalpakkam Atomic power station was stressed for the said purpose and it was emphasised that the government may advocate it for the usage of Agriculture⁷. The importance of the usage of nuclear power was realised and it led to the establishment of the Indira Gandhi Atomic Research in 1985. It has been giving out an increased output of 470 Mega Watts of electricity till now and benefits the agriculture sector by providing free power⁸. The energy is now being used for production of improved varieties of seeds in agriculture, radiation processing of food items like spices, onions, potatoes and mangoes⁹.

The Royapettah government hospital was one that was sought often for treatment by the people in and around that area. It was requested to the government to increase its complex and increase the bed strength of the hospital. It was a matter of concern that due to lack of space the people were made to stand on the road and the hospital was greatly understaffed¹⁰. The government increased the strength of the staffs were increased with 2 nursing superintendents, one nursing tutor, 13 head nurses, 106 nurses and 46 auxiliary nurse midwives¹¹. It undertook measures to extend the compound yard and started to build three storeyed building at the government Royapettah hospital at a cost of 6.25 lakhs¹². Later in 1970 the hospital was further added with a five storeyed building¹³.

The government was insisted upon the importance of allocation of funds for the development of the College of Integrated Medicine. It was pleaded that the indigenous systems of medicine should be given proper encouragement and also requested that degrees may be issued for them¹⁴. From the year 1968, the government started a 1st year integrated M.B.B.S course at Stanley medical colleges, Tirunelveli medical college, Kilpauk medical college, Chingleput medical college and Coimbatore medical college¹⁵. The government started a separate college of Indian

Medicine to teach pure Indian systems of medicine like Siddha, Unani and Ayurveda without any subjects of modern medicine was started at palayamcottah in 1964. This college offers a five year duration of bachelor of medicine degree course including one year in hospital practice as house surgeons recognised by the University of Madras¹⁶. Post graduate training on MD (Siddha) commenced at Government College of Indian Medicine from December 1972¹⁷. The opinions so laid before the government had resulted in bringing their attention towards development and progress of Indian Indigenous medicine in the state. The people who chose to be treated naturally were greatly benefited by it.

the social evil of betting on horse race was affecting the society badly It was pointed out that as a lot of people were involved in betting on horse races, it was felt that the women folk back home are the real sufferers when their husbands lose money due to this. This was a game that attracted a lot of people especially from the poorer sections of community towards earning more money. It was argued that the betting on horse race has to be banned completely in the state and become an example for other states in the country¹⁸. The government later on considered this and passed the Tamil Nadu Horse Race (Abolition of Turf Agencies) Act 1979, which the government abolished the turf agencies involved in the business of horse races or in respect of riders¹⁹.

The Muslims in the Legislative Assembly had played an important role in representing the various issues of the people in the Assembly. Unlike the Muslims in the council the members here were able to play a more effective and prolonged role in representing the grievances of the people. They were able to bring to the attention of the government regarding the various shortcomings in the administration.

The government was asked to improve the basic requirements that were needed for the development of agriculture in the state. It was stressed upon the government to speed up the production of chemical fertilisers for the farmers through the Neyveli Project, so that the government's target to get increased production gets materialised²⁰. It was requested that the government should concentrate more on the increased production of electricity, and it was hoped that it may involve in such activities that would give electricity connection to remote villages in the state²¹. The government undertook steps at later years for the proper usage of the Neyveli Lignite Corporation for Agriculture. The corporation had provided wind power project at kaluneerkulam in Tirunelveli district and solar power project at various other parts in the state at Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram. It also provides electricity from a coal based thermal power

station at thoothukudi through NTPL. It has signed a joint venture with TANGEDCO for the use of thermal power energy developed by the corporation²². The NLC had ventured into the production of Humic Acid, is an organic water soluble used for agriculture and horticulture in the state. It acts as a good plant growth stimulant and improves soil fertility²³. Further the corporation also treats the water through the water treatment plant and provides it for utilisation for the people living in that area. Further the soil of the lands that lost its fertility due to dumping of waste, is now being reclaimed by the corporation and is being made ready for cultivation again²⁴.

The government was stressed upon the importance of implementing the Noyyal river plan. It was pointed out even after repeated requests the government had failed to take any step on this regard for the past 20 years. It has been a worrying factor that the plan was dropped immediately after marking 29 mile long canal way. Therefore it was requested that the government must implement this plan with no further delay²⁵. The government was pressed to undertake schemes and it resorted to build dams across the river. The orathuplayam dam was constructed in 1992 to store flood waters of Noyyal²⁶. The athupalayam dam was constructed in 1992 and it irrigates 29,600 acres of land and also irrigates Tirupur and karur lands²⁷.

Prohibition is a social evil which ails the development and progress of the society. It affects the welfare of the people of the state and ruins the happiness of a family. The government during the year 1971 passed the Tamil Nadu Prohibition (suspension of operation) act 1971, which lifted prohibition on consumption of alcohol²⁸. The government's stand whatsoever it may be was vehemently criticised for lifting the ban on liquor. It was suggested that the government must reconsider such an action because liquor was not only injurious to health but also to society and culture²⁹. It was explained that it was the responsibility of the government to prevent the younger generation becoming exposed to liquor³⁰. The government after much deliberations and oppositions from the legislators passed the Tamil Nadu Prohibition (Revival of operation and Amendment) Act 1974³¹. This act revived the prohibition on the consumption of liquor.

The government was insisted to extend various concessions for the upliftment of the Harijans in the state, as they are ones who are socially economically and educationally backward. It was insisted that the government takes vigorous steps to uplift them and provide reservation of seats for them in all the institutions as well. It was emphasised that the government should show more interest towards the progress of that community³². In an attempt to improve the education of the Harijans, the welfare department related welfare hostels and schools for the welfare of the

students³³. In 1972 the age limit for direct recruitment to all posts for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was increased to 31 years³⁴. Further the government decided to raise the quantum of reservation for SC's 18% and ST's 1%. As per its provisions the scheduled castes would be able to get reservations in any college or other educational institutions, maintained by the state, or receiving aid out of state funds, or affiliated to any university established by law including an university college and a constituent college or any institute or training centre recognised or approved by the government³⁵.

Muslims as ministers played a role of empowering and uplifting the marginalised sections of the society through the various ministries they held. They used their own machineries towards empowering the marginalised sections of the society by uplifting them through employment or ensuring basic facilities or schemes for the betterment.

SMA Majid was the first Muslim minister in the cabinet. He was the minister for Municipal administration in the cabinet in 1962. A government girl's high school was established at kadayanallur during his term as a minister. Further he was also instrumental in upgrading the Kadayanallur local board dispensary into a 40 bed modernised government hospital as well³⁶.

Majid understood that for the development and rehabilitation of villages was by the use of traditional skills to get the people full employment. Steps were taken by Majid to entrust the Panchayat unions with the responsibility to give these artisans proper training with the use of improved tools and machineries and organise them into Co-operatives. Artisans involved in works like pottery weaving industry, brick works, earthenware, cottage industry and others were greatly benefitted by it. it was undertaken at areas likeVadakarukurichi,thanjore, nanguneri ambasamudram, valiyur, Kadayan, Tenkasi, viravanallu, shencottah, and chernmadevi etc. There was an increase in the production of these type of goods and the people were very happy as they were dispersed off with good wages too. The happiest occasion was when they were able to buy dresses slate and books required for them for a year³⁷. This in a way had benefitted the skilled workers and had also resulted in the development of the villages.

One of the schemes introduced by Majid for providing employment for the people, was the 'idle man power utilisation'. The idea behind was to solve the problem of unemployment that was prevailing across the state. Famine relief works were executed by digging up of community wells for irrigation, repairing tank bunds and also for formation of link roads to hamlets, construction of Harijan quarters etc. irrigation facilities were undertaken for irrigation in arid tracts³⁸. In order to relieve the struggling poor pattadars, a scheme was introduced where about

10 to 15 small pattadars could join together to dig a well. This was very much welcomed by the farmers³⁹.

The next minister was Sadiq Pasha who held the portfolio of health in 1967. There was an increase in population in the state. The minister appealed to the public on various aspects of family planning. It was observed that the increase in the per capita income earlier in 1960-61 was not allowed to invest in the growth factors, instead the rise in the income was neutralised by the excess rate in the population growth⁴⁰. The economic benefits were getting diluted due to the increased population as the excess amount was being used for providing basic amenities for them. In this view the ministry of health introduced the method of utilising lippe's loop to control births. It was made available free of cost to every woman in the country⁴¹.

The Family Planning Programme was implemented in the State in 125 Blocks. The Corporation of Madras also organised 24 Urban Family Welfare Training Centres and there were 22 centres run by 9 municipalities and 8 centres run by 7 voluntary organizations. A total of 499 institutions were recognized so far for conducting Family Planning operations and 176 institutions have been recognized as I.U.C.D. Centres⁴². Due to continuous efforts the Birth rate was reduced from 24.21% in 1967 to 23.7% in 1969⁴³. This was a great achievement of that time.

Sadiq Pasha during his tenure as Minister In charge of Public Works, saw that the issues ailing the agricultural sector were addressed very seriously. Steps were taken by him to ascertain the areas which needed irrigation projects and expansion of irrigation facilities to aid agriculture across the state. At North Arcot district a department was established for the development of small agricultural land holders in 1971 at North Arcot district. 50,000 small time agriculturists came under its purview department was functioning in 12 Panchayat unions in the state and there were 9,618 small time agriculturists who had benefitted due to this. It was also executed to all other Panchayat unions in 1972-73. The department helped the farmers in digging up of new wells, maintenance of the existing ones, installation and maintenance of oil machines, electric motors, laying of pipes, executing land reforms wherever necessary, buying of agricultural equipment's, buying of bullocks, seeds, fertilisers etc. and also involved in extending short term loans and long term loans to the farmers for buying seeds fertilisers. The farmers were trained on how to increase their yield, to use fertilisers in their farms and also on how to protect their seeds⁴⁴.

Maintenance and expansion of Irrigation projects were undertaken by Sadiq Pasha in this period. During his period the Janaparuralli or Parur irrigation scheme was combined with the

Krishna dam project by irrigating 4000 acres of land in the Parur area⁴⁵. Another achievement made was the canal built between kaniyakkavinai to Madichal to irrigate 431 acres of lands in kanyakumari district that was built by seerani corps (youth brigade)⁴⁶. In the works carried out to Perambikulam Aliyar project for the Upper Nirar scheme, nearly 4000 people were employed in it. The project was completed in his period at the cost of 68 crores of rupees⁴⁷. These projects had resulted in helping the farmers in getting increased production. The expansion works, the maintenance works and the new irrigation projects had resulted in getting better yield and also increase their scope for production by providing irrigation to water scarce areas in the state.

The construction of a flyover at the Gemini junction in Chennai, was another construction project undertaken by Sadiq Pasha as minister for PWD. The flyover has benefitted by helping in the commutation of 7,500 vehicles every day and traffic was reduced considerably due to this flyover⁴⁸. Another Important initiative taken by him as Minister for revenue was the steps taken for the inclusion of Dekkani Muslims in the Backward Class Category, that helped these sections of Muslims greatly⁴⁹. Further the minister was concerned on the welfare of the electricity employees in the department who had to work round the clock for serving the people. Steps were taken to absorb temporary workers as regular employees of the Board, with a view to have contended labour with job satisfaction dialogues were also held with labour representatives⁵⁰. This scheme provided for the well-being of the employees in the electricity department.

Raja Mohamed took charge as a minister for Handlooms and agro service cooperatives, textiles in 1977. Small time industries which were run by the poor people in villages and towns were encouraged by him. The Agro Service Corporation set up a Pesticide Unit at Ambattur for the farmers. These products were distributed to the farmers through the Regional Centres and Agricultural Depots, by thus benefitting the poor farmers for their cultivation. A Macaroni project was inaugurated in the month of October 1977, as a small industry to employ local people to engage them in employment⁵¹.

In the handloom industry, steps were taken to create permanent employment opportunities for weavers belonging to the Podaturpet of Chennai district, a new branch of the Kanchipuram intensive handloom development unit was opened there on 30.10.1977. About 300 handloom weavers were benefited by getting high wages and permanent employment due to this step. The government established medical testing centres at Coimbatore, Madurai Salem districts to conduct medical check-ups upon the weavers and give treatment for those who were affected by Tuberculosis⁵². Further under the production of handlooms for export scheme, two intensive

handloom development units were established at Karur that employed 2000 weavers. It was ascertained to include 2500 additional 2500 weavers under the intensive handloom development units and the production of handlooms for export scheme⁵³.

Raja Mohamed as the minister for irrigation wanted to improve the irrigation facilities in the state. he understood the importance of maintain and improving the irrigation facilities in the state, as the state had to depend on its rivers waters dams due to the lack of water resources. Raja Mohamed considered that the only solution that can be accorded to this problem is the interlinking of rivers in the country to face the scarcity of water in the future⁵⁴. The kesarigulihalla reservoir was started during his period in 1981-82, at a cost of 27.9 lakhs. This plan was helpful in irrigating 1,620 hectares of land. Periyar Vaigai modernisation project was undertaken resulting in irrigation of 39,400 acres of new and 17,000 acres of existing ayacut under this scheme⁵⁵. Steps were taken for the construction of an Anaikuttam reservoir across Arjunanadhito give irrigation benefits to 1,04,500 acres of new dry ayacut (I crop 1, 500 acres and II crop 3,000 acres). Sothuparai dam was built across Varahanandhi River in 1983, benefitting 1187 hectares of land⁵⁶.

Y.S.M. Yusuf was the minister in charge of irrigation and cooperatives from 1983 to 1984. Y.S.M Yusuf was re allotted with the same portfolios as Minister in 1985. The ayacuts under the Perambikulam Aliyar projects was extended. It helped in benefiting an additional extent of 14,170 acres apart from 56,660 hectares in the Coimbatore and Periyar districts. Sothupurai Reservoir with a capacity of 100 M.cft capacity across the Varadanadhi River was built benefitting of 405 hectares of new dry land besides bridging a gap of 27 hectares and stabilizing 739 hectares of wet ayacut⁵⁷. The various projects started during the earlier period, the extension works and the maintenance of the same had later benefitted in providing increased production. The foundation laid by the ministers in their office as a minister had resulted in the progress and development of agriculture in the state. These projects and schemes are a clear evidence as it stands to this day and are found very helpful for the progress of agriculture even now.

In 1989, Sadiq pasha was accorded the portfolio of Law, Courts and prisons. He was the first Muslim minister who was given that responsibility and it stands to this very day. A step was taken to remove the discrimination shown against them on the basis of gender on 13.4.1989, by the presentation of a bill on the floor of the Assembly by S.J.Sadiq Pasha as Minister for Law. The Hindu Succession Act 1956, (Central Act 30 of 1956), sought to amend and codify the Hindu Law relating to intestate succession. Daughters were not members of the co-parcenary under the Hindu Mitakshara Law and therefore they were not entitled to claim partition in Co-parcenary property,

amendments were made to it⁵⁸. The Hindu Succession (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act 1989 came into force with effect from 25th May 1989. Accordingly the women in Hindu society today were entitled to claim the same rights as a son has in Hindu Joint Family⁵⁹. The Hindu succession (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act 1989 (Tamil Nadu Act 1 of 1990) - this act has been enacted in order to confer the same rights on a Hindu daughter as a son has in a Hindu joint Family, so as to achieve the constitutional mandate of equality.

S. Nagoor Meeran was designated as Minister for Rural Industries in February 1992. Under his tenure as minister the Tamil Nadu Kadar village Employment Corporation board provided job opportunities to at least 83000 people. In the handloom sector 3 lakh people have been employed at 60000 acres of mulberry production. Employment opportunities were extended to women in the production of mulberry and growing silk worms at Dharmapuri, Salem and South Arcot. So far 1074 women have been benefitted for 1991-92. It was planned employ 1520 more women and expand this scheme in 1992-93 to Madurai and Ramanathapuram at an estimated cost of rs 28.23 lakhs. The government had planned to spend 5 lakh rupees to employ 30% women employees in order to develop job opportunities for women. Further it was also decided to give away awards for women entrepreneurs in order to encourage them⁶⁰. A sum of rs 1.19 lakhs was sanctioned training for providing employment in Gem cutting, especially for women⁶¹.

Under his ministry the Small Industries Development Corporation had given a lot of impetus to the industries in the state. Thirupur cotton industry had employed 10000 workers directly and 1500 people indirectly, among which 3000 were women. A 12 crore plan was generated to establish 30 business center's at Kakkalur under which 10000 people will be employed among which 75% will be women⁶². Steps were taken to give training to women on women entrepreneurship, based on which training was provided to 765 women at a cost of 10 lakh rupees, out of which 212 women emerged as entrepreneurs. A further 10 lakh rupees was allocated towards giving training to 792 women in that field⁶³.

Rahman Khan as the minister in charge of labour was instrumental in passing orders for the benefit of the labourers involved in various industries. The Industrial Accidents distress relief fund was reconstituted under his tenure as a minister. Under this fund, it was intended to provide relief to the workmen who are permanently disabled by injury or the dependants of those who are fatally injured in the course of employment in stone breaking, blasting, digging wells or other industries.⁶⁴

Rahman Khan took steps to regulate the minimum rates of wages for those employed in Agriculture. So amendments were made to the minimum wages act of 1948 which revised the Minimum rates of wages for the employment in agriculture and works ancillary to agriculture. As per the changes, the wages fixed for the Employees engaged in ploughing with bullocks and ploughs supplied by him was fixed at 100 rs per day and those who were employed without the ploughs being supplied were to be paid 54 rs. Employees engaged in harvest of paddy reaping, carrying to thrashing floor, thrashing, winnowing, measuring, bagging sowing, plucking of seedlings replanting of seedling namely trimming bunds and fields, bee-keeping poultry farming, dairy farming and climbing trees for six hours were paid Rs.54/- per day for men and 45 for women, if they work for five hours⁶⁵.

Similar orders were passed for the betterment and welfare of the Palm Tree workers, a Tamilnadu Palm Tree Workers Welfare Board” was established to provide Social Security and Welfare Measures for the Manual Workers engaged in the employments mentioned under Item 6, 36 and 52 of the Schedules Employments under the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act 1982⁶⁶. Taking into consideration on the welfare of the Handicraft Workers, the government established a Tamilnadu Handicrafts Workers Welfare Board to provide Social Security and Welfare Measures for the Manual Workers engaged in the employments mentioned under Item 32, 43, 54 and 59 of the Schedules Employments under the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act 1982⁶⁷.

One of the evils of the society was involving the child in labour and the deprivation of the children from getting education. A survey was conducted in all industries, establishments, shops, work places in urban and semi-urban catchment areas covering both hazardous and non-hazardous occupations and full survey of hazardous establishments in rural areas in all the 29 districts in this State by the respective Collectors in April, 1997. It was found that children were employed in hazardous occupations in urban and rural areas in 20 districts and engaged in non-hazardous occupations in urban areas in 27 districts. This necessitated the creation of a ‘District Child Labour Rehabilitation-cum-Welfare Fund’ in each of the 20 those districts where they were employed in hazardous occupations⁶⁸. The collector was ordered to draw the offending employers’ contribution of Rs.20,000/- per child and get it deposited in the concerned District Child Labour Rehabilitation-cum Welfare Fund⁶⁹. It can be said that Rahman Khan was able to control this evil practice of Child Labour.

It was first time in Tamil Nadu that all the construction workers in Tamil nadu were extended accident, medical aid, which was previously available only at Chennai, Madurai and Coimbatore. Housing loans were also provided to Beedi workers through HUDCO (Housing and Urban development) and this amount has been increased by the government. During his period housing plans for Beedi workers were also continued at Mukkoodal and Melapalayam along with regions in Vellore. The minimum wages so fixed for the employees in the state for every two years and not as five years as followed by the other states in the country. The minimum wage limit was comparatively high at Tamil Nadu compared to other Indian states during his tenure as minister⁷⁰.

The Muslim legislators in their role as members of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly had played a part in the upliftment of the marginalised sections of the society. They did not show any discrimination on the basis of caste creed or class. They represented the various issues of the people and voiced their concerns as their representatives before the government. They shared their ideas and concerns for the betterment of the people. They had pressed the government to make necessary changes or frame policies that would benefit the people and their future generations. The Muslim ministers were accorded portfolios of local administration, health, irrigation, revenue, electricity, transport, handlooms, rural industries, tourism and Labour department. These ministers did their best to provide welfare to the people through the portfolios accorded to them. They also framed policies and schemes that would benefit the people for the future as well. This chapter records those activities of the legislators which had benefitted the people and had resulted in empowering the marginalised.

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