

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN CHENNAI – A STUDY

Dr. T. SHAFEEQUE AHMED*
B. NIKHATH YASMEEN**

Abstract

Islam means submission to God, and the one who submits himself to Almighty is a Muslim. Islam has been spread across South India much earlier than it has reached the Northern parts of India. The Muslim Arab merchants who came to India through sea route for trading purpose, brought the principles of Islam to the Southern part especially Tamil Nadu which resulted in the acceptance of Islam by the local inhabitants with their self conviction and literally they were not enforced to get converted. It is the simplicity of this faith, not the power of sword which attracted the local people and a number of people accepted Islam by reciting "La' Ilaaha Illallah" whole heartedly. Later on the missionary activities of Muslims and the invasion of Muslim armies down to the South flourished the popularity of Islam which enabled the spreading of its principles and concepts in different parts of Tamil Nadu. As a result a number of Muslim communities spread almost in all the districts of Tamil Nadu and settled everywhere finding their means of living. In this paper a sincere attempt has been made to elaborate the different social groups of Muslims in Chennai and a brief description of each group, their intra-group relationship, historical background commercial status, occupations, etc. is presented.

Copyright © 20120 International Journals of Multidisciplinary Research Academy. All rights reserved.

Keywords:

Chennai Muslim,
Social groups,
Communities,
Muslim cultures.

Author correspondence:

Dr. T. Shafeeque Ahmed,
Graduate Asst.,
The Muslim Hr. Sec. School,
Triplicane High Road,
Triplicane, Chennai 600 005.

1. Introduction

Islam is an egalitarian religion which treats every man equal in status and privilege. There is no bias of social ranking, discrimination and distinction on the basis of birth, lineage, wealth, occupation and other material gain which are made by man. Islamic principles never entertain such inequalities. Approximately 12% of India's population is comprised of Muslims from different communities. The influx of large number of Hindu convertees has brought along with them some of their traditional practices into Muslim society. Due to this influence different communities aroused among Muslims. Hutton most appropriately observed that the culture impact of Hindu society was so great that even Non-Hindus were influenced by it in different degrees. Caste system and its restrictions play a vital role not only on Muslims but also on Jews and Christians of this country. He also stated, "Even the change of religion doesn't destroy the caste system for Muslims who do not recognize it as a valid reason, and at times it is found that a community which converts to any other religion, repudiates certain practices and at the end it becomes something like a new caste of its own. Similarly Jews and Christians in India also form some caste system based upon their previous practices.

* Graduate Asst., The Muslim Hr. Sec. School, Triplicane High Road, Triplicane, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

** Educationist, Kodungaiyur, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

2. SPREAD OF ISLAM IN TAMIL NADU:

The Gospel of Islam spread its wings into southern parts before the Muslims conquered the North. The emergence of Muslim communities in the south west coast of India can be attributed to the Arabs who came for trading purpose. Apart from trade contracts they started getting married with the local women which resulted in the conversion to Islam. Missionary works were also undertaken by **Shaik Sharaf Malik**, **Malik Dinar** and **Malik Habib**. There was no chaos when Islam spread in Tamil Nadu. The Rawthers, the Tamil speaking Muslim community ascribe their conversion to **Syed Nathar Shah** (969 AD – 1039 AD), **Syed Ibrahim Shahid** and **Shahul Hameed** (1532 AD – 1600 AD). Their tombs are located at Trichy, Eruvadi and Nagore, and most of Tamil speaking Muslims visit their tombs occasionally to offer flowers over their tombs. The later part of the 20th century witnessed the conversion of low caste people to Islam; in particular the scheduled castes accepted Islam protesting against the discriminations and inequalities prevailing in the Hindu Society. The mass conversion of low caste Hindus of Meenakshipuram on 19th February, 1981 is a distinct example of protest against discrimination. In fact many Christians from SC origin converted to Islam in order to seek self respect as there too prevailed domination of superior castes over low caste people.

During recent years, Muslims in India have been classified into various caste groups and settled in various parts of the country. Each group is regarded peculiar and distinct without claiming the superiority over other groups. As per study there are 391 Muslim social groups hail from India out of which only 9 groups belong to the state of Tamil Nadu. The population of the metropolitan city-Chennai comprises of people from all religions, castes, sects and creed. Among this 8.69% of total population belongs to Muslim communities and most of them are found settled in Chennai.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF THE MUSLIM SECTS IN CHENNAI:

Presently the Muslims can be divided into two major groups i.e. *Sunni* and *Shia*.

The Sunni sect is the division of the Orthodox Muslims who accept the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) words as Islamic Law and way of life for Muslim. They are further divided into four legal schools in terms of Islamic Theology, namely – *Hanafi*, *Shafi*, *Hambali* and *Maliki*, out of which only *Hanafi* and *Shafi* schools of Islamic teaching are widely acknowledged in Chennai.

The *Shias* are those who reject the first three Sunni Caliphs, Hazrath Abubakker Siddique, Hazrath Umar Farooque and Hazrath Usman and believe that Hazrath Ali – the Prophet's son-in-law as his successor and attach exceptional significance to Hazrath Ali, his wife Hazrath Fathima and their sons Hassan and Hussain.

The supreme focus of this paper is to throw light on the different Sunni Muslim Communities settled in Chennai. Almost all communities are obligated to offer minimum five times prayer (Namaz) in a day, hold fasting during the month of *Ramadhan*, pay charity (*zakath*) and perform *Hajj* pilgrimage (if they are capable of affording). *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Azha* are two important festivals among them. The sub sectors of Sunni Muslims are further classified into Ahmadiyahs, Baigs, Dayares, Kayalars, Labbai, Madari, Marakkayar, Navayats, Rowther, Bohras, Khojas, Halai Memons, Kutchi Memons, etc.

Vast variations are noticeable in the customs and traditions of Urdu speaking and Tamil speaking Muslims. Tamil Muslims are sub-divided into Rawthers, Marakkayar, Kayalar and Labbai, where as the other mentioned communities speak Urdu as their mother tongue. Only a selective sect in Labbai belongs to Urdu speaking group. Though this cannot be distinguished in larger cities like Chennai, these sub divisions are mainly segregated based upon the territorial distinctions of the state.

Basically the Kayalars and Marakkayars are found along side of Coromandal coast, the Rawthers live to the South and Labbais hail from North of the state.

RAWTHER:

Tamil is the mother tongue of a majority of Muslims in Tamil Nadu and Chennai city and Rawthers come under Tamil speaking Muslims. The term '*Rawther*' is mainly connected with horse trade. The sole occupation of Rawthers was to import horses from Arabia and sell them to Chola, Pandiya and Pallava Kings. The history of Muslim assimilated into Tamil society until the arrival of Europeans and revolved around the horse trade and some of them were in-charge of cavalry in the military forces of these kingdoms. In other words the trainers of horses and men in cavalry were being called as 'Rawthers'. They were also known as 'Guthirai Chettigal' which means horse traders. They also held the other occupations like mat weaving and agriculture apart from horse trading.

MARAKKAYARS:

Marakkayar is yet another wing of Tamil speaking Muslims. This words is derived from the origin of Arabic word 'Markab' which means 'boat' and the Tamil word 'Rayar' – the King. By blending these words 'Markab' and 'Rayar', the term Marakkayar is derived. It is also said that this word is derived from Tamil term 'Marakkalam' which means 'Ship' and the ship owners were regarded as 'Marakkayars'. The

Marakkayars are well talented maritime traders and said to be the inheritors of Arabian traders who married the local women. In due course of time they were converted to Islam and proclaimed themselves Marakkayars and most of them spoke Tamil as mother tongue. Since they deal with maritime business most of them settled in the coastal towns of Tamil Nadu such as Kilakarai, Kayalpattinam, Nagore, Karaikal, Nagapattinam, etc. We can witness a South-East Asian influence in their culture and way of dressing. Some of them are the owners of ships and promoted their business with Ceylon (Sri Lanka). They deal with expensive commodities like pearls, rubies and chinks. The Marakkayars soon extended their business and made Chennai as the centre of their business. They started exporting foodstuffs to the pilgrims of Hajj and Umrah. Rao Sahib M. Raghava Iyer rightly points out that Marakkayars had the trade dealings with Chennai merchants just fifty years after the foundation of Fort St. George. So their presence in Chennai is prevalent in almost all parts of the city. They maintain a cordial relationship in receiving and rendering services with the neighboring communities.

KAYALARS:

The Kayalars are none other than a division of the Marakkayars. Though they are widely found in and around the Kayalpattinam District, some of them have become the inhabitants of Chennai, by developing their business here. Their main occupation is to travel from one place to other for selling clothes, brass vessels and other articles. In spite of being an endogamous group, now they intermarry with other Muslim sub-groups. Most of them are found to be landowners and businessmen while some of them are educated and hold white collar prestigious jobs in the society. They generally deal with raw materials and salted hides, but well known for holding scraps collecting business. They are presently settled in and around Pallavaram areas of Chennai.

LABBAIS:

Star Witch has recorded that during the 8th century AD, Hajjaj Ibn Yousuff, the Governor of Syria persecuted the members of Hashimite Family, the relatives of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) due to which there was an exodus of that family towards South India. Those who settled in and around Chennai came to be known as Labbais. Though this term is now being used officially to denote the Tamil Muslims, there are Urdu Muslims too who belong to this community. Those who migrated to South India and settled were eminent scholars who took interest in teaching the Islamic convictions to the people with highly dedicated spirit. The Labbais maintained their distinct identity from the Muslims of the North and of the Deccan. Many of them were the descendants of the original Arab traders and the rest were the local convertees speaking native language. In appearance and habits they seem to be as similar as the local inhabitants but were independent upon any ruling class for their livelihood. Hence they were least affected by any sort of political change in the state. Literally, they were rich businessmen who had overseas commercial contacts and possessed political influence. The Labbais were never proud of their traditional background and many learned scholars emerged from this community whose contributions to Tamil Literature and scholarships are appreciable even today.

The main reason to claim their lineage to Arabia is due to their trade contacts to import swords and musk from India. It had been observed by eminent scholars that Arab merchants had brought along with them some helpers to assist them. These helpers used to respond to the call of their masters uttering a word 'Labbaik' which means 'Here I am'. In course of time they and their off-springs were popularly known as 'Labbais'. The Arab migrants who came and settled and the children born through their Indian wives are also known as 'Labbais'. The convertees from Hinduism are also regarded as 'Labbais'.

There are vast differences found in the practices of Tamil and Urdu Muslims. Except religion nothing is common between them. The Tamil Muslims develop a more cordial relationship with Hindu due to their cultural background and mother tongue. Caste and creed system has been the barricade of separation in Indian society from the time immemorial; Muslims have not been an exception. Though fundamental principles of Islam propagate universal brotherhood and equality, the Tamil and Urdu Muslims claim superiority over each other. But we cannot deny this fact that Hindus never make any distinction between these two groups and retain the same love and affection and share joy and sorrow considering them their close associates.

SYEDS:

The term 'Syed' means 'Lord' or 'Master'. They are said to be the descendants of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Study shows that Syed are sub-divided into three categories. They are as follows:

- The descendants of Imam Hassan are called Hassani Syed.
- The descendants of Imam Hussain are known as Hussaini Syed; and
- Those who hail from Hazrath Ali and his wives are regarded as Ali Syed.

They came to India to spread Islam and its teachings. Men of this community use 'Syed' as their surname. Presently their mother tongue is Urdu but prior to migration they spoke Arabic and Persian. Formerly they never allow marriages with other communities but now they seek alliances with other

Muslim communities. Syeds visit various saints and offer 'Fathiha' (Prayer) as far to pass on the credit or virtue of the prayer to them.

MADARIS:

Madaris belong to Syed but they lead a semi-nomadic life in most parts of Tamil Nadu. They are a similar sect like *Pambatti* or Snake charmers and *Modi Vittaikarar* (People engaged in black magic). Though their population is less and they are found in some parts of Chennai, Trichy and Tanjore. They speak Urdu as well as Tamil. They claim to be the emigrants of Pune and modern Maharashtra. They too follow fundamental Islamic principles, but contrarily every first Thursday of Arabic month visit the Dargah of Abdul Rahim Auliya in Guindy, Chennai. Maarkka Kalvi (Religious Education) plays a significant role in their lives. In spite of having the lowest rank in the categorization of communities, they maintain a unique identity.

BAIGS:

The term 'Baig' means 'Lord' or 'Master', and it's a title of courtesy. They feel privileged to call themselves Mughals while others address them 'Saheb'. It is customary for men to include 'Baig' after their names and women's name is followed by 'Begum'. This surname is attached to most of the female names that belong to Deccan though they don't belong to the Baig community. The Baigs of Tamil Nadu and Chennai are Urdu speaking Muslims. They are an endogamous group and belong to high standards of financial status. Formerly they were engaged in business and money lending but today they have entered in almost all economic sectors and jewel business. They also hold posts of engineers, doctors, teachers and administrators in the present society. As per census report they are very few in numbers and live in different parts of Chennai city.

NAVAYATS:

According to Edgar Thurston the term 'Navayat' is a corrupt form of Hindustani and Marathi term for 'New Comer'. In Tamil Nadu this community is wide spread across the city of Chennai, Madurai and Trichy. This endogamous community belongs to the origin of Nadirban Kanana – the Supreme ancestor of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They are sub-divided into groups like Qureshi, Mekkari, Chida, Gheas, Mohajir, etc. They are considered to possess high ranking among other Muslim communities and so they never prefer inter-caste marriages. Since ancient times they have been the erudite scholars who held the religious knowledge in depth and some of them were traders. But now they are seen in almost all the branches of economic sectors. Primarily their main focus was at Madras city but they fled from the city during 1746 during the French occupancy. Most of them in this community are fairly rich and highly respectable. The Sunni Qazis who are appointed by the Government of Tamil Nadu mostly belong to Navayat community. Mufti Qazi Ubaidullah, Mufti Qazi Mohammed Habibullah, Sha Mohammed Mufti Mohammed Azizuddin and the present Chief Qazi Dr. Salahuddin Mohammed Ayub belong to this community. They are highly learned scholars of Arabic, Persian and Urdu and they maintain Madarsa-e-Muhammadi Library in Chennai that contains an abundant collection of Arabic, Persian and Urdu books. It is a great deal of this prestigious family that it had been serving for the cause of education and religious teaching since seventeen generations. No other community had ever served like this as Navayats rendered their service for education. Justice Basheer Ahmed Sayeed, the great educationist and the patron of women's education is yet another Hallmark of this community. He is the founder of South Indian Educational Trust (SIET) and established Justice Basheer Ahmed Sayeed School and College for Women in 1955.

AHMADDIYAS:

The Ahmaddiyas are also known as Qadiyanis. This movement was pioneered by Hazrath Mirza Ghulam Ahmed in 1890 and his disciples are called Ahmaddiyas. The initiation of this movement was undertaken to protest against Christian Missionary activists and later on they were framed as a separate sect. Its founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmed claimed the messiahship (Prophecy). The promised of messiah of God according to Christian and Islamic belief which brought the wrath of the world Muslim community which declared Ahmaddiyas to be Non-Muslims. Their principles were considered Un-Islamic and were against the basic tenets of Islam. Though this movement was greatly opposed and persecuted, it clutched its roots in almost all countries of the world. In India they are settled in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In Chennai their growing population is located in Kodambakkam, Adambakkam, Alandoor, Perambur, Pudupet, Mannady, Maduraivoil, Anna Nagar, Mogappair, Choolaimedu, Chromepet, Tambaram and Royapettah. Ahmaddiyas are not allowed inside the mosques, commonly visited by other Muslim communities. So they gather for prayer in their own mosques in Kodambakkam, St. Thomas Mount and Adambakkam. Their financial status in the society is fairly high as they deal with Hardware, textile and Electronics business. Mr. Mohammed Ahmed, The retired Director of Archaeological Survey of India belongs to this community.

SHAIKHS:

The Arabic word 'Shaikh' means 'Chief' or 'Leader' or 'Elderly man'. It is a prestigious title for the head of a community. 'Shaikh' is the surname of the group of people descending from the tribe of

Quraish in Arabia. Even Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) belonged to the tribe Quraish. Their enthusiasm in religious teaching and interest in trade urged them to emigrate in India. They developed trade contacts with the south-west coast. They were not much endogamous and started marrying the local women and adapted local customs, culture and language but retained their religion i.e. Islam.

When Mohammed Bin Qasim conquered Sindh in 710 AD, they settled in Northern India. During those days they considered themselves to be superior to others since they were the ruling class and also they never compromised in any change in retaining their culture and tradition. Though their mother tongue is Urdu they are fluent in Tamil too. Based upon their origin and descent they are subdivided into Siddiqui, Modi, Haq, Umar and Makku and each sub groups has the surnames such as Farooqi, Ansari and Kidwai. They are found in almost all parts of Chennai, without belonging to any specific part of city.

PATHANS:

Pathans migrated from Baluchistan and settled in various parts of India. Basically they were great warriors. They are also known as 'Pattan' or 'Pattani' in Tamil Nadu. Their names are suffixed with the title 'Khan' for men 'Khanum' for women. The word 'Khan' mean 'Lord' or 'Master'. Being in Chennai they became well versed in Tamil, but their mother tongue is Urdu. They lived in extended family and their business was money lending, but now-a-days they are well educated and employ in different sectors.

MEMONS AND THEIR SUB DIVISIONS:

A majority of 'Memons' population is found in Gujarat and Sindh provinces. They are said to be the descendants of Lohana community and ascribe their conversion to their Saint Yousufuddin during 5th century. They have five sub-divisions.

- Halai Memons
- Jalwadi Memons
- Surtic Memons
- Sindhi Memons, and
- Kutchi Memons

We can find a record in Bombay Gazetteer about the prosperity of Kutchi Memons who are wide spread in Karachi, Mumbai, Malabar Coast, Hyderabad, Chennai and Calcutta. But within Chennai only Halai Memons and Kutchi Memons are found in considerable numbers.

HALAI MEMONS:

The Halai Memons are Sunnis and belong to Gujarat from where they spread to different parts of the country. Most of them are settled in Anderson Street and George Town and have established their business in the city. Traditionally they are great merchants but at present they are found in services of private as well as Government departments.

The significance of women's education is valued by the members of this community and they contribute towards to welfare schemes of education. They also provide scholarship and pay full fees up to graduation through their association located at Thana Street, Purasaiwakkam in Chennai. They also undertake medical Aid and Widow Pension. They are an endogamous community and marry within their own community, since they believe that they flourish and succeed despite being a small community. Many of them deal with textile business and food grain. They suffix their name with the word 'Sait'.

The eminent persons like Adamji Sait who has rendered a great contribution to education, business, and welfare of community services hail from this community. He was conferred with the title 'SIR' from the British Government. He received the support of Haji Shakoor Mohammed Sait, Ahmed Sait, Mohammed Sait, Ebrahim Sait, Adam Abdul Sait, Usman Haji Ayub Sait and Ismail Noor Mohammed Sait. These are the Gems of this community who had constantly endeavored for the welfare and upliftment of their community. In general their services are worth admiring.

KUTCHI MEMONS:

The traces of Kutchi Memon's history could be viewed from second half of the 19th century with rise of Zakaria Abdul Rahim Sait, the eldest son of Abdur Rahim Patel in 1884, the patel of Chennai, Mysore and Bangalore. During that period many members of this community emigrated and settled in Anderson Street and George Town in Chennai. Originally Kutchi Memons belonged to Rathod Rajputs of Lahanpur in Multan, who ascribe their conversion to Islam to Syed Shahabuddin Khadri. Initially they were regarded as 'Mo'mins' which means 'a faithful Muslim'. In due course of time it was changed as 'Memons'. Most of the men of this community suffix 'Sait' and women's name is followed by 'Bai'. From their native they are said to have migrated to Kutch, Kathiawad and Halan and later on to Bangalore, Nilgris, Chennai, Mumbai, Kerala and other parts of India. They were successful business magnets and established a vast empire of their business in South India. They commenced their business from Godown Street and laid the foundation of coastal shipping company by Hajee Abubakker Sait which resulted in the emigration of more Kutchi Memons to Chennai city.

A philanthropist and textile Entrepreneur Hajee Essa Abba Sait's migration to Chennai was a boon to Memons and his immeasurable contribution has raised their position in Chennai to a great extent. In 1911, Hajee Sait donated a mosque known as 'Memon Masjid' and in 1916 'Memon Jamath Khana' was built at Chinnathambi Street in Chennai. In 1919, he established an educational trust through which the foundation of Hajee Essa Abba Sait School was laid to improve the standard of education, and it was raised incredibly. He donated generously towards the welfare of his community. Later on his mission was carried forward by Zakaria Ebrahim Sait, Moosa Khan Bahadur Sait and Adam Hajee Mohammed Sait – the tobacco merchant – and the first Memon of Chennai to be conferred with the honorary title of 'Khan Bahadur' by British. Apart from their family business the younger generations took part in politics, became poets and writers and some joined professional courses like engineering, medicine and other departments. Some of them run textile, food grains, steel and glass business and those belonged to Cochin and other coastal localities are engaged in sea food business. They give utmost importance to education and the literacy rate of Kutchi women is 85% and men are 100% literate and found their way to enter different fields and professions.

BOHRAS:

The Bohras of India ascribe their conversion to Moulana Ahmed and Moulana Abdullah who took the initiatives to spread Islam at Cambay which resulted in the emergence of Bohra Community during 5th century. Till date reverence and homage is offered to the founders of this community at their tombs located in Cambay. The term 'Bohra' is derived from the Arabic word 'Baweer' means 'traders'. Basically they belong to Shia sect of Islam, but some of them follow Sunni convictions. The Bohras are sub divided into Alia, Dawoodi, Jaafari, Nagoshi and Sulaimani segments. The Bohras show their adherence to Dayi-Al-Muthallaque who is regarded as the Imam and protector of Bohra sect. Initially the first 23 Dayis were from Yemen who had migrated to India. But from Syedna Yusuf Najmuddin, the 24th Dayi belonged to India, and all the other Dayis thereafter were Indians. Presently Syedna Abu Jafarus Sadiq Aliqadar Mufaddal Saifuddin is the 53rd Dayi of this community and stays at Mumbai.

The Bohra communities also belong to the higher Hindu caste who flourished in Gujarat and its adjoining places. They moved towards Chennai in Bullocks and Horse Carts and settled in Vadapalani and when the British invaded the southern parts they moved to Triplicane area. Very soon they started spreading near the port trust of Chennai and engaged in export and import of merchandise goods. A majority of Bohra Muslims are found in Moore Street, Lingi Street, Thambu Chetty Street of Broadway in Chennai.

Most of Bohras who reside in Chennai belong to Dawoodi sub-sect and they speak 'Dabat-ki-Jaban' which is similar to Gujarathi. Both men and women of this community can be easily identified by their outfits. Women do not wear a normal black Burkha as worn by other Muslim community women. They wear 'Rida' which is colourful Burkha with embroidery of various designs. The men of this community wear 'Libasul Anwaar' which is Kurtha Pyjama and an overcoat with Topi (cap). This is an endogamous sect which never entertains any inter-caste marriage with other Muslim groups. Though they feel privileged to belong to Brahmin high caste ancestry they don't follow any caste based hierarchy among themselves. Their social and religious get together take place in their mosque at Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin Sahib Street near Chennai Port in George Town area. They also share a common Sehri and Ifthaar throughout the month of Ramadhan in their community mosque by contributing an amount of their convenience. This highlights the sense of unity among the members in this community.

Their Association is known as Anjuman-e-Burhani which is an administrative unit of Dawoodi Bohra. Other welfare boards come under the guidance and control of this unit. The Bohra community is a well organized sect who ensures the growth and well being of every individual of this community.

Though 'Dayi' is the Head of all Bohras, his Governor (the Aamil) works as his representative at Bohra centre. The duty of Aamil is to carry forward the instructions and teachings of Dayi to the community members. Formerly they were great business men engaged in Machinery and Hardware business, but in modern days most of them acquire higher education and held official posts in the various Government and Private sectors.

KHOJAS:

The Khoja is a corrupt form of the Turkish word 'Khawajah' which means 'the lord', equivalent to the position of a 'Thakur'. They are said to be the convertees of Hindu Lohana Trading caste of Sindh. The Kohjas are the disciples of Ismailiah branch of Shia sect and they are popularly known as 'Shia Ismailies'. They have migrated from Gujarat and settled in different parts of India. Before migration Khojas of Gujarat were engaged in agriculture but moved towards Chennai in the mid of 19th century dealt with trade and commerce. The most popular establishment of Khojas is Currim Bhoj & Sons in Flower Market area near Broadway, who are main dealers and manufacturers of STAG umbrellas. This was established around 150 years ago. The Popat Jamaals Departmental Store, Jamaal's corner, Zinmo & Sons are their other business concerns. This community had been economically strong and was engaged in business in Parys, George Town, Broadway and its adjoining places. Presently they are involved in Tannery Business (Ladha & Co.) and Sewing Machine Business (Jaffo & Co.). Until 1980 they were exclusively traders, but later on they

started taking interest in higher and professional education and some of them obtained the degrees of doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc. They have also shown interest in Insurance and management fields. They pay more significance to women's education. That's why we see Khoja women as Diabetic specialists, Chartered Accountants, teachers, food scientists, nutritionist, etc. The Khojas have different surnames with their names, such as Valji, Dossani, Parpiya, Currim Bhoy, Hussaini and Jamal.

4. CONCLUSION:

The Muslims of Chennai despite their ethics, linguistic and sect differences maintain a cordial relationship and rapport with each other. Most of them do not develop any hierarchical divisions among themselves. But some communities restrict the inter-caste marriages. This is mainly due to their concern regarding the life partners, so that they too should possess the same cultural practices and religious tradition. As per Islamic Law, there is no difference among sects and no priority or superiority is applicable to any sect, and there is no restriction for inter-sect marriages among any community of Muslim. At the times of crises or any challenging state affair they take pride in being 'Tamizhan' as their supreme identity. This was most evident in many social issues; the Muslims of Chennai are not much influenced by the caste system. As per the view of Dr. Ambedkar, the great opposer of untouchability, "Casteism prevail among both Hindus and Muslim with contrast in practice and religious sanctions. Muslims practice it without any religious consecration". There may be several caste divisions and differences, but when it comes to offering a prayer at mosque every individual Momin (Muslim) stands in the same row. No matter to which caste or community he belongs or how much wealth he possesses, 'All are same unto God'.

References

01. Ahmed Z., 'The System of Castes and the Muslims of India', in FR Faridi, Siddiqi M.M. (Ed), **The Social Structure of Indian Muslims**, Delhi, 1992.
02. Hutton J.H., **Caste in India**, Bombay, 1961.
03. S.D. Victor D'Souza, 'Status Groups Among the Moplahs on the South-West Coast India' in Imtiaz Ahamed (Ed), **Caste and Social Stratification Among the Muslims**, Delhi, 1973.
04. Arnold J, **The Preaching of Islam**, Delhi, 1997.
05. Tony Hilton, **Muslims in India**, Chennai, 1999.
06. E. Thurston, **Caste and Tribes of Southern India**, (Volume 4), Chennai, 1993.
07. Manoharan S, 'Kayalar', in K.S. Singh (Ed.), **People of India**, 2001.
08. **Egai Perunal Malar** of Dinamani, Tamil Newspaper, Chennai, 2001.
09. M. Abdul Rahim, **The Muslims of Tamil Nadu**, (Ph.D thesis), Chennai, 1980.
10. Platinum Jubilee Souvenir of the Hajee Essa Abba Sait Endowments School and Musafir Khana, Chennai, 1996.
11. Shibani Roy, **The Dawoodi Bohras – An Anthropological Perspective**, Delhi, 1984.
12. Shariff, J., **Islam in India**, Oriental Book, New Delhi, 1972.
13. Francis, W., **Census of India 1901, Caste, Tribe or Race**, Government Press, Madras, 1902.
14. Samadhana Vazhi, 25th year Magazine, Chennai, 1995.