

# JAMAL MOHAMED SAHIB - A STUDY

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## Introduction:

Thomas Carlyle declared that History is nothing but biography of great men. But the tragedy of History is that all great men are not treated equally, while certain less accomplished great men occupy a prominent position in History, the names of some well accomplished great men are less remembered in the pages of History. It is not the mistake of History but the preference of the Historians that has resulted in such an uneven outlook. Jamal Mohamed Sahib of Tamil Nadu is one such personality who inspite of being an upright political leader of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu for few decades, an ardent nationalist, a successful businessman, an intelligent economist, an educationist and a generous philanthropist has not secured the attention of historians. Except for the work of writer Nilkan Perumal on Jamal Mohammed and for few articles no attempts have been made to study the life and career of Jamal Mohamed Sahib. This paper is an attempt to make an introductory study of the life and career of such a great man who has been forgotten by the annals of History.

## Life and Career of Jamal Mohamed:

Haji Jamal Mohamed was born on 6 January 1882 in Chennai as the eldest son of Jamal Mohideen and Kiluru Beevi. His father Jamal Mohideen a native of Vembakudi village near Narikudi in Mudukulathur Taluk of Ramanathapuram district had migrated to Chennai in search of a prosperous career. Jamal Mohideen introduced into the leather business by his uncle Muthu Veera Rowther evolved as a one of the leaders in leather business of India. Born in an affluent family Jamal Mohamed was initially educated in Muthialpet High School and later in Christian College Higher Secondary School. He evolved himself as a multi - faceted personality to become a successful businessman, a concerned educationist, a seasoned politician, and a great Philanthropist. As a businessman he took charge of his father's concern Jamal Mohideen & Co at an incredibly young age and evolved as a businessman of eminence to be proudly called as the Prince of South Indian Commerce. As an educationist he took charge of the Jamalia Madrasa founded by his father and facilitated its development as a prominent institution of Islamic education and also assumed different roles to serve the cause of education. As a seasoned politician he was elected to be people's representative in the Madras legislature. As a humanist he has financially contributed for the development of various educational institutions. He after an accomplished life left this world on 7 November 1949 in his mansion at Jamalia, Perambur, Madras.

## Jamal Mohammed – A Seasoned Politician

Jamal Mohammed was successful in imbibing with - in himself different political identities and balancing well all his identities. He was a nationalist, leader of the Madras Provincial Muslim League but a secularist and a regionalist but with a national outlook. In spite of being the president of Madras Provincial Muslim League from 1930 to 1940 Jamal Mohammed opposed the All India Muslim League demand of Separate electorates. Defying the command of All India Muslim League Jamal Mohammed was able to pass a resolution favoring joint electorates with reservation in the Madras presidency Muslim League. A charismatic leader he was that the Madras Provincial Muslim league had backed him in this resolution inspite of high command wanting a resolution in favor of Separate electorates. In the 1937 Provincial elections it was matter of common sense that victory was sure if he had contested as Muslim League candidate from a Muslim constituency, but Jamal Mohamed had lost the election contesting from the commerce constituency. He was a true idealist and his opposition to separate electorates did not permit his conscience to contest from a Muslim constituency.

Like - wise the Anti Hindi agitation of 1938 -39 and the Dravidasthan demand of E. V. Ramasamy Naicker was supported by the All India Muslim League because of the pact entered in to between E. V. Ramaswami Naicker and Muhammad Ali Jinnah but Jamal Mohamed again defied the National High Command of the party and ensured that the Madras Provincial Muslim League kept aloof from these demands. Like - wise even during the Deliverance Day and Pakistan Day celebrations organised by Muslim league Jamal Mohamed stood by his own stand to oppose such celebrations due to his nationalist sentiment. Moreover, the Deliverance Day was celebrated by the Muslim League in response to the resignation of Provincial Congress Ministries opposing the British stand of involving India in the Second World War but Jamal Mohamed joined with Rajaji to persuade Gandhi to revoke his call for the resignation of Provincial Congress Ministries.

As president of the Madras Presidency Muslim League he ensured the party is strengthened in the province by establishing branches at grassroot levels. A Charismatic leader Jamal Mohamed was that inspite of the pressure of All India Muslim League and the support of mass leaders like E. V. Ramaswami Naicker and C. Rajagopalachari to the Muslim cause, Jamal Mohamed a sensitive leader of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu was able to uphold the nationalist cause without sacrificing the interests of the Muslims. As the president of Muslim League Jamal Mohamed had an integrationist approach and cordial relations with Congress.

He has been part of the national movement an actively participated in the Khilafat and Non – Cooperation Movement. He had made financial contribution to the Smyrna Ankora relief fund and then to Gandhiji during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

**Round Table Conference:**

Jamal Mohamed was a lover of Communal Harmony as he considered it to be the basis for national progress. During the Second Round Table Congress for which Jamal Mohamed was invited as a representative of the commercial interest along with his friends Gyan Shyam Das Birla and Shri Purushotamdas Das Thakur, in his speech he referred to the communal quarrels in India as small tiffs between brothers and today's quarrel between them may not exist at all tomorrow and these disturbances were merely due to the creation of mischief mongers and notoriety seekers. During his stay, his suite in Savoy Hotel was the scene of several gatherings. He accompanied Mahatma Gandhi to Ritz Hotel in London and arranged for a meeting with Agha Khan to discuss about bringing communal Harmony between Muslims and Hindus. After the meeting Gandhiji said "I am ready to accept the suggestions of Jamal Mohammed and Agha Khan to bring peace between Hindus and Muslims". Such was the confidence of Gandhi on Jamal Mohamed's ability.

**A Curious Intellectual:**

Jamal Mohamed was a man of knowledge with a deep sense of curiosity to know things of different fields like Zoology, Physics, Astronomy, and Medicine. Even from his young age he was interested in reading. He had learnt the complete recitation of the Quran in an incredibly young age. He was proficient in reading and writing Arabic and likewise though his mother tongue was Tamil he had learnt Urdu as majority of the Muslims of Madras those days were speaking Urdu. However, his mastery of Economics had earned him great reputation. In 1927 the British government altered the Rupee Pound ratio to the detriment of India. Jamal Mohamed proved his caliber in economics by effectively explaining the disadvantages of this alteration. When he was in London, he did his best to make British statesmen understand about this question and how it affected the Indian masses in general and the commerce and industry in particular. In spite of his organizing several meetings against this alteration of currency ratio the British government did not withdraw the move. However, Jamal Mohamed's arguments proved his efficiency in economics in spite of his limited education. The soundness of his arguments stunned several British Officials, Ministers, and economic experts. His authority on Currency and Exchange questions made college and university professors consult him on economic issues. He had published a book on this subject entitled "The Tragedy of Eighteen Pence" and as a result of his expertise in economics he was made a member of the Board of Studies in Economics in Madras University.

**An Excellent Educationist:**

Jamal Mohamed's father who had migrated from Ramanathapuram district to Chennai (then Madras) had economically elevated himself from an exceptionally low position to a position of enormous wealth. He had cultivated a sense of philanthropy and generosity. One of the significant acts of generosity of Jamal Mohideen was the establishment of the Madrasa Jamalia in Perambur in Chennai in 1898, the earliest Madrasa in Chennai. Only Islamic Subjects were taught here, Jamal Mohammed in 1910 had undertaken a world tour in which he visited several European, Asian and African Countries. One important objective of this tour was to get the opinion from international scholars to upgrade the syllabus of Madrasa Jamalia. Jamal Mohamed wanted to include secular subjects in the curriculum of Madrasa Jamalia. To assure his opinion he visited Constantinople in Turkey and met Sheikh Ul Islam, the Grand Mufti of Turkey. Sheikh Ul Islam saw no harm in secular subjects being taught in an Arabic Madrasa. Further Jamal Mohamed proceeded to Cairo to assure his opinion from the religious institutions existing in Cairo. In Cairo he witnessed Islamic institutions teaching secular subjects. Hence on his return he revised the syllabus of Madrasa Jamalia to include secular subjects.

Around 1927 the youth of Muslim community who had ventured into higher studies in different branches were facing severe difficulties. The higher educational institutions were in Chennai City and the students from mofussil districts did not have proper boarding and lodging facilities and were also facing financial difficulties. Jamal Mohamed had organized a 'Jamal Hostel' ensuring free boarding and lodging facilities for these students. To mould the character of the students Holy Quran and Islamic ethics was taught to them in the Hostel. Moreover, Jamal Mohamed provided a scholarship of seven to Ten rupees to each student and it must be recollected that the cost of one sovereign of gold at that time was Two rupees. He was habituated to meet the students in the hostel regularly and have scholarly discussions with them on national and international affairs. Jamal Mohammed was a man of simplicity for in spite of his economic affluence he had requested his eldest son Jamal Mohideen to stay in the hostel along with the other students.

He had invited many scholars of national and international repute and arranged for their meetings with the basic objective of empowering the youth with high morals, values, and ideals. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. M. A. Ansari, Dr. Zakir Hussain, Allama Iqbal, Moulana Sulaiman Nadwi have been his guests in Chennai and have addressed meetings in Chennai. In 1928 the Nizam of Hyderabad had visited Madrasa Jamalia and was given a red - carpet welcome. Hiralal son of Gandhiji was a guest of Jamal Mohamed saheb during his visit to Chennai (then Madras).

He has made generous financial donations to many secular and Islamic educational institutions. After the death of Hakim Ajmal Khan one of the founders of Jamia Milia Islamia in 1927 the university was facing a grave financial crisis. At this juncture Dr. Zakir Hussain another founder of Jamia Milia Islamia had come to Chennai to mobilize funds for the university. Jamal Mohamed had received him as his guest and ensured he returned with contentment through his own personal contribution and mobilizing funds from his friends. Similarly, Aligarh Muslim University, Deoband Madrasa and Nadwatul Uloom have also received his generous financial contributions. In Nadwatul Ulema Madrasa in Lucknow a hall called Jamalia Hall has been constructed to commemorate his financial contribution. Marmaduke Muhammad Picket Hall from England an Islamic Scholar was one of his distinguished guests. He gave few lectures in Chennai on Islam. These lectures were compiled and published under the title "Cultural Side of Islam". Likewise, Allama Iqbal another versatile Islamic Scholar from North India was also invited as a guest for delivering a series of lectures. These lectures were published under the title "Reconstruction of Religious thoughts in Islam".

He was elected as President of Muslim Educational Association of Southern India (MEASI) and served in this position for an exceptionally long time. Just before his death he had plans to establish an educational institution in Trichy along with his friend and another Muslim Philanthropist Khaja Mian Rowther. But because of his death in 1949 he could not witness this aspiration of his becoming a reality. But however, in 1951 Jamal Mohideen, eldest son of Jamal Mohamed made it a reality with the generous contribution from his father's firm and the contribution of Khaja Mian Rowther. The educational institution named as Jamal Mohamed College to commemorate the efforts of Jamal Mohamed is a leading higher education institution in Tamil Nadu.

### **An Enterprising Entrepreneur**

Jamal Mohideen, Jamal Mohamed's father established the Jamal Mohideen & Co in Chennai at Thambu Chetty street which was involved in leather business. By the First World War this concern had become the leading exporter of raw skin in India. Jamal Mohamed involved himself in his father's concern from a young age of 13. By 1910 this concern had started exporting to major European countries. In 1910 his travel to several European, Asian, and African countries had a business motive and to study the opportunities to expand their export business. Jamal Mohideen & Co. emerged as a popular and leading firm in leather business to the extent that 60% of the total exports of leather from Madras was controlled by this firm.

Jamal Mohamed emerged as a leader of the Commercial interests and worked for the betterment and improvement of commerce by coordinating the industrialists and entrepreneurs. Even by 1901 Jamal Mohamed had taken the lead of mobilizing the Skin and Hide Merchants for in that under his leadership the merchants petitioned the government to control the export of Skins and Hides to the United States as they were concerned that Indian tanners would not have adequate supplies to and the existence of the Industry would be threatened. Later Jamal Mohamed played a vital role in the establishment of The Skin and Hide merchants Association in 1917 along with Yakub Hasan and Ahmed Thambi Marakkayar to influence the government policy to favour the Skin and Hide Merchants. This Association renamed as All India Skin, Hide Tanners and Merchants Association in 1978 is till to date serving as leader association of leather merchants in representing their grievances to the government and coordinating the leather business activities. Jamal Mohamed himself served as its President for a very long time. He has played vital role as part of this organisation in addressing the grievances of the Skin Merchants. In January 1917, the Government prohibited tanning of Skins and export of raw hides and skins. In January 1918, a deputation of the Skin and Hide Merchants Association consisting of Haji Moulvi Ziauddin, Yakub Hasan Sait and Jamal Mohamed presented a petition to the viceroy and secured relaxation for some of the export prohibitions.

Another important organisation representing the Commercial Interests of South India is The Southern India Chamber of Commerce founded in 1909. Jamal Mohamed served as the President of this organisation from 1920 to 1922 and later from 1929 to 1934. His expertise in commercial affairs had got him elected as the President of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in 1931, an organisation formed by the initiative of his close friends Gyan Shyam Das Birla and Purushotamdas Thakurdas. He is one of the two Muslims to hold this position till to date.

### **Conclusion:**

Jamal Mohamed was a multi – faceted dynamic personality who with his balanced approach had contributed to healthy communal relations in Tamil Nadu, through his enterprising nature had contributed to the development of Commerce and Industry in India, through his humane approach had facilitated the growth of several educational institutions. It is unfortunate that such a historic personality has not received the much-needed attraction of the historians. Though history has forgotten him he is alive through his philanthropic contributions.

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