

The Story of the
Kataragama
Mosque and Shrine

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FOREWORD

The contents of this booklet are based on the past and recent history of the Kataragama Mosque and Shrine, how it came to find a place in the southern extremity of Ceylon, and its future. The author has gone to a great deal of trouble in finding facts and treating them in a readable form.

He has not confined himself only to Kataragama; he has also given a well-analyzed and accepted version connected with the Islamic sainthood. He has presented the order from its inception, the respect it commands and ought to command in Islamic belief and what is right and wrong in such belief.

As one who had been connected with this place from 1934, and as the legal Trustee of the place from the early nineteen fifties, I am convinced that he has made a genuine attempt to portray the true position that Kataragama holds. I have conveyed the same sentiments to thousands of devotees in very much less words annually.

As it is instructive, it is my hope that this booklet would serve as a reminder and a guide to many Muslims and they would glean from it some good points about a glorious tradition.

Al-Haj S.A.M. Thauoos
Trustee,
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CHAPTER I

THE HAGIOGRAPHY OF ISLAM

Many people ask why, in a scientific age, men should pay homage to saints. We must think dynamically and get away from such thoughts. The explanation is not simple, for sainthood is a highly personal matter. Yet many people have, I am sure, faced the same difficulties in an effort to find a satisfying explanation.

No intelligent man is happy if he is at a loose end. He constantly seeks comfort in a unified belief — call it sainthood, Sufism or hagiography — that explains his motives and actions.

For over a thousand years there has been a continuous chain of great men who constitute the noble spiritual hierarchy in Islam. These standard bearers and human links in the continuous chain of saints are the inheritors of a glorious heritage. It need not necessarily be attained by birth. One who accepts the spiritual leader as the guardian, may also be eligible to form a link in the chain.

The spiritual heritage of Islam starts from God, the owner of *Quadrat*, Who is the source of all knowledge, and the ultimate aim of all the instruments of wisdom.

The first man Allah created was Adam (Alai.) It was Allah who imparted knowledge to him. This knowledge was man's asset. It was something that even the angels could not get. For that reason Allah ordered the angels to bow before Adam (Alai.) Thus Allah made Adam (Alai.) His Khaleefa.

We all claim Allah's great love. It can come only through perfection. To achieve perfection, constancy in *ibadat* is a must. Without the possession of perfect spiritual knowledge none can claim Allah's great love. To gain such knowledge we turn to the *aarifeens*. The Holy Quran commands us to learn from the spiritual men (*ahaldh dikr*) that of which we have no knowledge.

This spiritual wisdom is passed on by the Creator through various methods. From the time of Adam (Alai.) the progenitor of the human family, down to the last of the prophets of Allah, the spiritual tradition

has come down to mankind on different occasions through powerful signs, through significant incidents, through His Messenger Jibreel (Alai.) and through his Servant Khizar (Alai.) to fulfill the needs of the ages.

After our own prophet (Muhammad-ur-Rasoolullah), this spiritual tradition is being continued by the saints who have attained the maturity of mind to interpret the word of God in a fitting manner. The unique honour of continuing this glorious heritage of *khilaafat* is attained by these great men through self-effacement in favour of their spiritual masters (*fana fis shaikh*). When the candle of Islam was flickering to die, that king of the saints, Hazarat Mohiyuddin Abdul Cader Jailani was born to revive it.

Regard and respect for *auliyas* and *khutbs* have been a living thing in Islam. Once some people asked Imam Yusof Hamadhani what they should do when the saints had passed away from the earth. Thereupon the learned and pious Imam Yusof told them to read eight pages of their sayings every day.

How it originated

A spiritual master, in life and in death, becomes one's mentor. It is from his life that his followers draw inspiration. They were *Sufis* who sought after solitude, people who belonged to a circle of devotees. There were also many isolated anchorites who appeared in various parts of the world. Anecdotes from their lives and conversations constitute the hagiography of Islam.

A strong tradition connects the growth of this movement with the prophet (Sal.) through his cousin and son-in-law Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Ral.), the fourth Caliph of Islam whose abdication led to the greatest schism in the history of the Faith, the separation between the *Sunni* and the *Shia'*. According to this version the prophet (Sal.) invested Ali (Ral.) with a cloak or *kherqa* on initiating him into the esoteric mysteries, imparting to him therewith the heavenly wisdom which transcends all formal learning. In his turn Ali (Ral.) invested his own initiates and through them the *selselas* or chains of affiliation passed on the inner lore of mystical truth to succeeding generations.

It is for this reason that down the ages reverence for *auliyas* has grown in increasing ardour and any man of profound spirituality, through long austerity and meditation reached a state of compelling awareness of the merging of his human individuality into the individuality of Allah.

It was a golden age in the history of Islam when such divines trod the earth like angels on the Night of Power. But, alas, such sayings and divines are now becoming as rare as the philosopher's stone. Today religion is taken for granted and Islam's holy men have been forgotten.

It has been hinted that it is *shirk* to take to a shrine. Does everyone who takes to a shrine necessarily commit irreligious acts? It is *shirk*, no doubt, to pay homage to a mortal, but taken in the correct perspective there is no gainsaying the fact that modern Muslims do not understand the importance of reverence to *auliyas*, nor do they understand fully what is proper and improper in such reverence.

It is unkind to hastily accuse them of doing worship to anyone other than Allah, without fully understanding their intentions. Certain wrong practices do take place in shrines, but the remedy is not in boycotting them but in correcting them. To many, lives of saints serve as a beacon and they repair thither to commune with Allah by drawing inspiration from the lives of the pious.

Learned men of Islam have affirmed that *auliyas* are the friends of Allah. When we revere such individuals their sayings become profitable to some of us even if we cannot put them into practice, inasmuch as they strengthen aspiration and destroy self-conceit. According to the prophet (Sal.), "Mercy descends at the mention of the pious." Peradventure if one spreads a table on which mercy falls like rain, he will not be turned away portionless.

CHAPTER II

KATARAGAMA MOSQUE AND SHRINE

Our little island is rich with shrines of famous *auliyas*. Places of religious worship have special significance for Muslims. In Ceylon Kataragama is a house-hold word. It is a point in the southern extremity of Ceylon to which many Muslims go. Often there is a seasonal influx. Muslims repair thither with a certain belief. People's beliefs when historically supported become well-founded. In the olden clays people held this place in such reverence that a Muslim traversing the wilds in the entire Eastern Province and parts of the Northern Province shuddered to refer to them by name. If one were to inquire from another as to where he was going the latter's answer often was, "to the Khizar Region." The Eastern Region was known thus basing Kataragama as the centre. The surrounding hamlets were listed as places receiving the patronage and blessings of Hazarat *Khizar*.

Kataragama is an open place in a thorny jungle between scantily wooded hills to the extreme South of Ceylon, twelve miles from the settlement of Tissamaha-rama. The history of this site is said to be older than the Sinhalese race. But those who had paid reverence have been the Hindus. Their activities in and around Katara-gama date back to the 5th Century and are recorded in the epic poems in Sanskrit known as *Skanda Purana*. A Tamil version of this was compiled in the 13th Century called *Kanda Puranam*.

The time and cause of its becoming a place of worship are legendary. But there is no doubt that this has become a destination of many and a scene of pilgrimages to the Buddhists, the Hindus and the Muslims.

In an enclosed area on the right side of the Valli -Amma Temple one finds the Mosque and Shrine. The identity of the land on which the Kataragama Mosque stands may be described as the land depicted as Lot 42 Kataragama TOPO P.P. 25, according to information furnished by Mr. D. J. Hordagoda, Proctor S. C. and Notary Public, Badulla, to the late Mr. M. T. Akbar, K. C. by his letter dated 29th January, 1941. It was declared a private land at that time which had not been settled on any particular person.

Past History

This mosque had been in existence for a long time, firstly in a most crude form, consisting of just one wattle and daub room called 'Khizar Room' hardly 15 feet by 15 feet. It is difficult to establish at this point of time as to when exactly this mosque was built. Those who occupied it preferred to lead quite an undisturbed life. They were recluses who kept aloof, practising austerity and prayers.

The Report of the Government Agent, Hambantota, Mr. Hudson, in 1870 states:

Mohammedans of the Village of Hamban-tota and the nearby villages come in vast numbers to Kataragama in search of a secret subterranean spring, the waters of which, if drunk, are said to endow a person with the blessings of perpetual immortality.

Yet another Assistant Government Agent, Mr. Steele, made the following remark in his Administration Report of 1873.

Singularly enough the Mussulmans of India also profess reverence for Kataragama and have built a mosque there, alleging that a *nabi* of great sanctity discovered in the neighbourhood the fountain of life, of which whoever drinks becomes immortal. The fountain is now sealed, and its site unknown, which is the more to be regretted, as no fountain or well of any kind is to be found for probably 20 miles round about. The hamlet is solely dependent for water in the river, and this, in July 1873, as occasionally in previous years, dried up completely.

It may be mentioned that the mosque is visited by Fakirs from India, but is not held in any reverence by Mohammedans of Ceylon.

The above two quotations are very illustrative. The first is an affirmation of the search; while the second is a subtle criticism of the effort. The latter may be justified in his criticism because he had gone largely on fictitious claims and fruitless searches of the Muslims

who took to this place of worship.

What is said to give the blessings of perpetual immortality? A good Muslim is well acquainted with the term *Maul Hayath* or the fountain of immortality. It is that the pilgrims were after. If at all any search for the fountain of immortality took place, it should be more than clear to an intelligent mind that it is idle for anyone to go about digging for the waters to drink it and attain immortality, because that blessing was not available even to the Holy prophet (Sal.).

Muslim divines lived in the premises and what they were after were not its physical contents, but a spiritual elixir to their thirsting souls. They were searching for solitude; an opportunity for undisturbed meditation and a yearning to mingle in the soul of Allah. That explains the reason why Kataragama became important firstly to the Indian Sufis who made this a temporary stop-over in the days of yore and an annual pilgrimage to Muslims of Ceylon today.

German View

From the time this first brought an impact on the lives of Sufis there has been a continuous flow of Muslims to Kataragama. Each year added a milestone to the history of the mosque and in each year the Muslims were able to exist quite independent of the other religionists. Some who went to this place may have strayed away from the path of Allah through ignorance, but the truly pious kept themselves occupied in religious practices and kept the *kalam* of Allah a living word in Kataragama through the years. This is most revealing in a passage written by a German, Paul Wirz, in his book *Kataragama, the Holiest Place in Ceylon*. He says at page 32:

At the time of the Esala Perahera many pious Islamites come to Kataragama, but they always stay within the area allotted to the Muslims. They obviously never visit the shrine of the Hindus and the Buddhists and they neither take part in the Peraheras. Every day they arrange for a procession around the mosque, inside which the usual services take place. Besides the high priest, there are several priests of lower status who bear the office of 'leader of the prayers'.

People go to Kataragama annually to seek spiritual experiences. There are many legends woven around this futile search for a Fountain of Immortality. It is a belief that stems from the story of Seyyidina Khizar (Alai.)

Khawaja Khizar

In Islamic History the story of Hazarat Khizar bears some importance. He is said to be Allah's Servant. Musa (Alai.) was blessed with the great honour of conversing with Allah on this earth. Nevertheless, Allah Himself ordered him to go to Khizar (Alai.) to seek knowledge. This was because Allah had blessed Khizar (Alai.) out of His Own Knowledge (*'min ladunni ilma*). In this command of Allah lies hidden a lesson for us: Man should get spiritually trained under the *murshid*—a spiritual Master.

Musa (Alai.) is the most frequently mentioned of all prophets spoken of in the Quran. The details of his life and works are dwelt upon at length. No other prophet has so much said about his life. The story goes that once prophet Musa was on a journey with his servant. He was on a mission to find a servant of Allah who would give him instructions as he had not so far had on the paradoxes of life. He was to find this servant of Allah at a point where two rivers met and merged into the sea. This point was known as ***Majmaul-Bahrain.***

Musa (Alai.) went on this journey and after a long walk, he tarried a while. He called out to his servant to bring his breakfast. The servant replied that the fish escaped and found its freedom when they came to the point of the meeting of the two rivers. He begged pardon for his forgetfulness in not informing him then.

On hearing that, Musa (Alai.) said, "Why, that was the place I am to find my Master." He retraced his footsteps. When he went to the spot he found the servant of Allah, an old sage, and offered to follow him on condition that he taught him (Musa Alai.) something of the higher truths of life. The identity of this servant of Allah first came to be known following this incident on the life of Musa (Alai.)

In Surah XVIII-70-82 the Holy Quran makes the following reference

to this historical incident:

Then they found one of Our servants on whom we had bestowed mercy from Us and whom We had given knowledge from Our presence.

Moses said to him: May I follow thee on condition that thou teach me something of the higher truth which thou has been taught?

The answer this servant of Allah gave and Moses' insistence on following him and the three paradoxes, viz, (i) the scuttling of the boat; (ii) the slaying of the young man; (iii) the repairing of a wall on the point of falling are well-known.

The story ended after the showing of the third paradox of life. There was no mention of the name of the servant of Allah who was endowed with mercy and knowledge from Him. But in the traditions of the Holy prophet (Sal.) he is called *Khizar*, which means green, signifying that his knowledge is fresh and green and drawn out of the living sources of life, for, it is drawn from Allah's own presence. He is a mysterious being who is sought after. He holds the secrets of the paradoxes of life which ordinary people do not understand.

It is this yearning to share in Hazarat Khizar's close relation to the wonders of the creations of Allah that took many a pious Muslim to various places. Rightly or wrongly, Kataragama is heir to such a belief. The sanctity attached to Kataragama revolves fairly and squarely on the mysterious presence of the servant of Allah who administers all worldly problems on the express bidding from Him.

Why Indian Sufis?

Kanzul Karamath, a Tamil booklet compiled by the trustee of the shrine of Shahul Hameed, popularly known as Cader Wali, situated in Nagoor, South India, claims that when Shahul Hameed Waliullah was conferred the title of *Kutbul Akhtab*, he was mysteriously brought to Ceylon by Hazarat Khizar and placed on the banks of the Menik Ganga. There, in the company of the angels the robe of honour of Kutbul Akhtab was conferred on him.

The above narration may not appeal to a person who places over emphasis on rationality. One cannot discount the possibility of a friend of Allah being in the company of the servant of Allah. Nevertheless, this sounds purely mythological. What is the proved fact? There is definite historical reference to Shahul Bameed Waliullah having come to Ceylon. He led a roving life, preaching Islam in his peregrination. When in Colombo he stayed at the Grand Mosque.

In the book called *Mahan Shahul Hameed* written in Tamil by A. M. Yusuf, Editor. "Marumalarchi", it is stated at page 68 that in 1552 Shahul Hameed Waliullah travelled to Ponnani in Malabar, from there to Maldiv Islands and thence to Ceylon. He toured the whole of Ceylon before returning to South India. Even though the earlier claim is not supported by authority, the latter one is acceptable and a belief that he might have gone to Kataragama is justifiable.

Another historical reference to the visit of un-named Indian Sufis appears in the book *Kataragama – A Historical Sketch* written by Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam, J. P. He says that during the reign of the Portuguese 1505-1602, many Indian Sufis came over to Kataragama. Before the advent of the Portuguese, the beaten track to Kataragama was through Jaffna. Even the Indian Sufis followed this road. But when the Portuguese were at war with the Kandyan King, they suspected that the King of Kandy was using a subterfuge to send soldiers to attack them, and they used their puppet king in Jaffna to stop the influx of pilgrims to Kataragama *via* Jaffna.

After the Portuguese, right through the Dutch rule and for seventy years of British rule nothing was known of any large-scale Muslim activity. As is evident from the reports both of T. Steele and Hudson, there had been activity, though not on a very large-scale, yet large enough to attract attention.

Recent History

A pious Sufi of whom very little was known was destined to come to Ceylon and make his home at Katara-gama. He is said to have come from Bukhara, the soil that gave birth to the famed Imam, Shafie Rahmatullahi Alaihi. He made his trek overland from Bukhara to

Afghanistan, down the road built by Sher Shah onto Lahore; from Lahore to Lucknow, Delhi and *via* South India to Ceylon. His destination was Kataragama where he intended to live the life of a recluse.

This Sufi was known as Seyed Jabbar Ali Shah. It is generally believed that he made the mosque area of Kataragama his home round about the year 1845. It is possible because this was a place where every pilgrim is respected and all religionists mingled freely. We have it from the authority of his kinsman and the last of the Indian Sufis in Kataragama, the late Meer Seyed Ali Shah, that his ancestor died at Kataragama in the year 1872 and lies interred within the mosque premises. He lived a very pious, orderly life and practised the religion quite undisturbed. He also vouched that the grounds of the mosque premises is held sacred because there are spread out, un-named and unmarked, sixty graves of pious Muslims who died there.

It was their practice to name a kinsman as successor. When the life in one ebbs out, a message is sent for the successor to arrive. He arrives and carries on the work of looking after the mosque premises and collecting the offerings given by devotees and making a living thereby.

It is not known as to who was solely in charge of the mosque premises from the death of Seyed Jabbar Ali Shah, but the person who stayed and who brought the premises to some standard and which drew the attention of local Muslims was the late Meer Seyed Ali Shah. He too died in Kataragama in the 1940s and lies interred by the side of Seyed Jabbar Ali Shah.

The late Meer Seyed Ali Shah was a personal friend of the late M. T. Akbar, K. C. and many of the leading Muslims and Hindus who were present at Kataragama when they went on a hunting trip. They would never return to Colombo without going to the mosque premises and paying their respects to him.

It has been clearly established that Meer Seyed All Shah had been the incumbent and the man who had prescriptive title by virtue of his undisturbed possession of the mosque and its surrounding premises for over 35 years from 1910 to 1945.

Helpful Contact

From 1934 to 1945 a later Trustee of the Katara-gama Mosque and Shrine, Mr. S. A. M. Thauoos, had constant contact and enjoyed the late Meer Seyed Ali Shah's confidence. Mr. Thauoos recalled vividly the circumstances under which he established contact with him.

Towards the end of the 19th Century every morning he used to listen to a *baith* recited by his mother. However, he was not enthused by it, neither did he know the importance. That *baith* was composed by Abdul Rahman Alim Sahib, Khaleefa of the *Alaviya Thariqa* and the religious adviser to the Sultan of the Maldive Islands.

In 1902 Colombo was enveloped by a major flood. Most of the low-lying areas got inundated. His sister lived in the flood area of Maligawatta. When the flood waters carried most of the goods, she was able to save only one wooden box, which strangely enough contained among other *kitabs*, the *baith*.

During the year 1915 Mr. Thauoos was employed as a broker at the firm of Messrs. J. L. Ross. He was the only Ceylon Moor broker at that time. During this period he discovered this *baith* among his mother's belongings. He was curious to know its significance and why his mother recited it with such devotion. He took it to Mohamed Ali Alim of Messenger Street, who told Mr. Thauoos that it was a composition eulogising the holy name of Khizar Nabi. He also informed him that if one were to recite it daily, with Allah's help, he would get the assistance of Khizar (Alai.) in all worldly affairs. He did try it out and the benefits that accrued to him are immense.

Illness

Once his wife fell ill. She had fainted at the back of the house, after which she remained unconscious. A religious man who treated her prescribed certain acts. Should she come round in seven days he wanted him to take a vow to take her to four places, viz., Baghdad, Shareef, Ajmeer, Nagoor and Kataragama. Mr. Thauoos accepted the first three, but was rather sceptical about the fourth. At that time it was well known that Kataragama was a place of worship for Tamils.

Nevertheless, as advised, he wished to fulfill the vow closer home first.

In 1934 he went to Kataragama. Once within the precincts, he did not know where the mosque was, or whether, in fact, there was a mosque. He went up to the Maha Deyale and inquired for it. He was directed to the spot. He crossed a stile and when he got over to the compound there was hardly any activity, but he espied one flag flying on an improvised mast. When he inquired from those about who was in charge of the place, he was told that there was a Sufi who kept to his room all day long and made his appearance only at night.

That evening by about 8:30 the Sufi appeared and after exchanging salutations the two of them talked till well past 11:30. At the end of the conversation Mr. Thauoos asked him permission to leave for Colombo, as he had fulfilled his vow, but the Sufi informed him that they could not leave without obtaining 'Dada's permission'. By *Dada* he inferred that the reference really was to Khizar (Alai.) The name of this Sufi was Meer Syed Ali Shah.

The next day too he met him at the same time. In their conversation Meer Seyed Ali Shah informed him about the circumstances under which he came to Kataragama. He came to Kataragama in 1910. Before that he had been at Daftar Jailani and at Meera Maqaam Mosque in Kandy. When his predecessor was about to die he received a message and he went over to Kataragama and took charge. That night too Mr. Thauoos was informed he could not leave as '*Dada's*' permission had not been received.

On the third day after his arrival he met Meer Seyed Ali Shah once more, and asked him whether he could leave for Colombo and he was informed that '*Dada*' had given permission and since he arrived at *Subh* time he should leave the premises as well at *Subh* time.

When leaving his wife asked for a recital in her daily devotions based on the *Ma'rifa* order, but Meer Seyed Ali Shah informed her that the effect of such a recital would be too hard on her. Nevertheless, he gave it to her. She has taken it out and recited very regularly and till today, she vouches, she had not suffered from any severe illness.

Yearly Visit

Since Mr. Thauoos had some material benefits for his efforts and got for his friend, a holy man, he, as an act of gratitude, offered to build up the place, including a house for the comfort of the pious man. But money did not lure him. He told Mr. Thauoos that he is forbidden to accept any donation for the improvement of the place without permission from *Dada*.

This offer to build up the place was renewed at every subsequent visit and Mr. Thauoos met with the same polite reply. However, in 1938 he informed him that should Hazarat Khizar grant him permission to accept the offer, he would contact him by letter. In 1939 he told him that he had at long last received permission. It was to be a joint venture. But alas, it was not to be! The offer came in the beginning of August, 1939 but war was declared at the end of August, 1939. Mr. Thauoos was asked not to send the money as the military authorities had gone into occupation, no building work could be undertaken for want of cement and workmen too were scarce, for, they had forsaken their usual occupation for the lure of the army uniform.

End of an Epoch

The Second World War was over in 1945. Mr. Thauoos wished to fulfill his promise. He went with the cash but when he reached Kataragama he found to his surprise the pious man ailing. He was prevented from having any contact with him, as he was ill and did not wish to see anybody.

There was no immediate successor to him. On an earlier occasion the late Meer Seyed Ali Shah had informed Mr. Thauoos that he had written to his kinsmen in India. They were to come over to Ceylon and take over from him. The specific words he used were: "*Dada* will send them."

He is said to have had two nephews, Seyed Darbar Ali Shah and Inayath Ali Shah. On 4-11-1940 he had executed a deed of gift bearing No. 1325 in the name of these two persons, reserving to himself life interest. It is noteworthy that he had signed this deed of gift in Arabic.

However, Mr. Thauoos asserted his right to meet Meer Seyed Ali Shah and succeeded in seeing him. At that time he was having high fever. Mr. Thauoos inquired after his needs, and asked him whether he could summon medical assistance from Colombo. He was unwilling to put him into any inconvenience, he requested him to send only the usual requirements like petro-max pins and pomegranates. As Mr. Thauoos was in a hurry he left with a request to send for him should the necessity arise. Even though Meer Seyed Ali Shah begged of him to stay, Mr. Thauoos could not stay, he left promising to return as soon as he was free to do so. But that was not to be, no sooner he went than Meer Seyed Ali Shah was called to Allah.

Last Act

The last act of this man was to call ten trusted people of the area, including the village headman, bid them take him out of the room as his period on earth was over, and seal the room and hand the key over to one Ram Giri Bawa. He called those ten and made them write out a document in which he named three persons to be tempo-rary trustees, till his successors arrived from India. They were: (1) Bha Ali Sha; (2) a person from the Meera Maqaam Mosque in Kandy whose name he did not know; and (3) one Dauoos from Colombo.

On his death real confusion started. Everybody was covetous of the supposed wealth. However, they could not hide the fact that the late Meer Seyed Ali Shah had expressed a desire to convey this news to those concerned. Wide publicity was given in the newspapers, spending a large sum of Rs. 600 on advertisement in the *Times of Ceylon*, *The Ceylon Daily News*, *Thinakaran* and *Virakesari* calling upon these persons to come forward. The first two could not be traced, only the last named was available.

Immediately, there were many claimants to the trusteeship of the Mosque and Shrine. The first to get to the scene were the members of the Qadiriya Association, Hambantota; they obtained the key from Ram Giri Bawa, broke open the seals and removed all valuables to the Kachcheri at Hambantota for safe-keeping. It was Ram Giri Bawa who came down to Colombo and informed Mr. Thauoos of the real

situation and the document that was executed in their presence wherein the ten persons present attested their signature. He also asked him to take over as trustee and promised to produce documents should the necessity arise.

Litigation

Then there followed a spate of litigation among those interested. In this tussle for possession, the mosque premises was sorely neglected. There was a fear lurking in the minds of the Muslims that it would be lost to them.

At first there was one Gnana Pandithar who used a Muslim to stake a claim to this property claiming right by lineage. That did not succeed as it was found, in the words of the judge, that he was an imposter, and the case failed.

Then there was an application made by the Qadiriya Association to be the trustees both of Kataragama Mosque and Shrine and the Qadiriya Thakkiya at Hambantota, At first, after preliminary inquiry, they were authorized to be trustees in Case No, D. C. Tangalla (Spl.) 198. But the order of the court was contested and the Supreme Court in appeal declared it null and void. The order of the Supreme Court was signed on 21.9.1949 by Justice C. Nagalingam and Justice A. R. H. Canekeratne.

After the death of Meer Seyed Ali Shah there was no responsible person in charge of the mosque. Under the circumstances seven persons from Colombo, one of whom was the present trustee, claiming to be regular worshippers at the Mosque and Shrine at Kataragama filed a preliminary petition in D. C. Badulla (Spl.) No. 100 dated 16th June, 1948, praying that under Section 15 of the Wakf Ordinance (Chapter 50) the seventh respondent, Mr. Thauoos, or any other suitable person be appointed trustee of Kataragama. To this application all concerned were made respondents. The trial lasted three years and six months mainly due to the difficulty in serving summons on respondents. After a valid inquiry the court made order on 4-12-1951 appointing Mr. S A. M. Thauoos as trustee of the Kataragama Mosque and Shrine vesting the properties of the said trust of Wakf in him and

giving him certain directions for its management thereof. The terms of the Order delivered by the learned Judge, Mr. A. L. S Sirimanne, are most revealing and require reproduction.

In his Order he said:

On the evidence led I am of opinion that the relief claimed by the Petitioners in their petition should be granted, and that the First Respondent is a fit and proper person to be appointed trustee.

I appoint the First Respondent trustee and order that the premises described in the schedule to the petition dated 16-6-1948 be vested in him as trustee.

He is empowered to recover all properties and assets belonging to the shrine and file in court within three months of this Order, an inventory of the property taken over by him. He is empowered to make suitable arrangements for the management of the shrine...to be in charge of the offerings, and collections, and do all things necessary to maintain and perpetuate the trust.

I direct him to deposit in the Badulla Kachcheri to the credit of this case all moneys collected or realised from the offerings at the shrine and any other income for the maintenance and improvement of the property...

I am of opinion that the application has been for the benefit of the place of worship, and the petitioners are entitled to costs of this application to be paid out of the assets of the shrine.

Litigation did not end with that. After this Order was delivered, as a time limit was placed for intervenients to come in, the members of the Qadiriya Association claiming to be *de jure de facto* Trustees moved court to intervene in the above action. An inquiry was initiated on 9-4-1952. After inquiry, the learned judge refused the application with costs by an order made on 17-6-1952.

Possession

Although the order appointing him trustee was delivered on 4-12-1951, there was a big hurdle to cross. Physical possession had to be delivered. The writs of the fiscal met with stiff resistance from within. Some persons claiming to be the agents of the intervenients obstructed the fiscal from discharging his legal obligations.

On the 15th of July, 1952 a writ of ejectment was filed. The fiscal reported to court on 18-7-52 stating that possession could not be delivered as the doors of the mosque and shrine were closed and padlocked. A subsequent writ was filed on 21-7-52 and Mr. A. L. S. Sirimanne said in his Order:

I think the application for writ of ejectment against the eight persons referred in para 3 of the petition bearing today's date is a reasonable one.

To allow them to remain in possession would render the Orders of the court relating to the management of this trust meaningless, and to permit those eight persons (against whom there is an order) to set at nought the directions given by Court. The application for writ against the eight persons as prayed for in para (a) of the petition is allowed.

On 21-7-52, on the court ordering the use of armed guard to take possession, the fiscal and a posse of armed constables forcibly ejected the intervenients, who, according to the learned judge's view always acted as usurpers.

After peaceful possession was restored the mosque area was managed by the legal trustee. On 19-2-63 he had to meet yet another legal duel. This time it was the Wakfs Commissioner who filed D. C. Badulla (Spl.) 100 for ratification under Muslim Mosques and Charitable Trusts Act No. 51 of 1956 and 21 of 1962. The Wakf Board wished to know whether the trustee should submit his accounts to the court as already directed or to the Wakf Commissioner as required by the Acts of 1956 and 1962. The argument was that the trustee appointed by Court order of 5-12-1951 ceased to be trustee by virtue

of the provisions of the Act No. 51 of 1956. However, after inquiry, the trustee was ordered to submit his accounts to court and not to the Wakf Commissioner.

Orderliness

Since then Kataragama Mosque and Shrine have assumed a semblance of orderliness. A tomb was constructed by Mr. Thauoos over the grave of the late Meer Seyed Ali Shah. The mosque has been renovated and named “Khizar Thakkiya.”

CHAPTER III

MIRACLES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Many contend today that the age of miracles has passed. Man has to be dynamic and think to himself. Yet, there is a coterie of believers who think and know that miracles among *auliyas* are an every day occurrence; they cannot be brushed aside as fairy stories.

In Islamic history various prophets have been known to have performed miracles. However, our beloved prophet (Sal.) never claimed to perform any. For, his purpose was to establish *Din-ul-Islam*. To this end, when-ever he was asked to perform a miracle, he claimed the Holy Quran as his only miracle.

If the Holy Quran was a miracle, then those who adhered to its requirements were bound to share in its miracles. To that category fall many *kutbs* and *walis* who have and are performing miracles.

There is an anecdote connected with Hasan of Basra whose full name was Al-Hasan Ibn Abi'l Hasan al-Basri who was born at Medina. Hasan had a neighbour named Simeon who was a fire-worshipper. Simeon fell ill and was at death's door. Friends begged Hasan to visit him; he called to find him in bed, blackened with fire and smoke.

“Fear God,” Hasan counselled him. “You have passed all your life amid fire and smoke. Accept Islam, that God may have mercy on you.”

“Three things hold me back from becoming a Muslim,” the fire-worshipper replied. “The first is, that you speak ill of the world, yet night and day you pursue worldly things. Secondly, you say that death is a fact to be faced, yet you make no preparation for death. In the third place, you say that God's face shall be seen, yet today you do everything contrary to His good pleasure.”

“This is the token of those who know truly,” Hasan commented. “Now if believers act as you describe, what have you to say? They acknowledge the unity of God; whereas you have spent your life in the worship of fire. You who have

worshipped fire for seventy years, and I who never worshipped fire — we are both carried off to Hell. Hell will consume you and me. God will pay no regard to you. But if God so wills, the fire will not dare so much as to burn one hair of my body. For fire is a thing created by God: and the creature is subject to the Creator's command. Come now let us put our hands into the fire, then you will see with your own eyes the impotence of fire and the omnipotence of God."

So saying, Hasan thrust his hand into the fire and held it there. Not a particle of his body was affected or burnt. When Simeon saw this he was amazed. The dawn of true knowledge began to break.

"For seventy years I have worshipped fire," he groaned. Now only a breath or two remains to me. What am I to do?"

"Become a Muslim," was Hasan's reply.

"If you give it me in writing that God will not punish me," said Simeon, "then I will believe. But until I have it in writing, I will not believe."

Hasan wrote it down.

"Now order just witnesses of Basra to append their testimony."

The witnesses endorsed the document. Then Simeon wept many tears and proclaimed the faith. He spoke his last testament to Hasan.

"When I die bid them wash me, then commit me to the earth with your own hands, and place this document in my hand. This document will be my proof."

Having charged Hasan thus, he spoke the attestation of faith and died. They washed his body, said the prayer over him, and buried him with the document in his hand. That night Hasan went to sleep pondering what he had done.

"How could I help a drowning man, seeing that I am drowning myself? Since I have no control over my own fate, why did I venture to prescribe how God should act?"

With this thought he fell asleep. He saw Simeon in a dream glowing like a candle; on his head a crown, robed in fine raiment, he was walking with a smile in the garden of Paradise.

“How are you, Simeon?” Hasan enquired.

“Why do you ask? You can see for yourself,” Simeon answered. “God Almighty of His bounty brought me nigh His presence and graciously showed me His face. The favours He showered upon me surpass all description. You have honoured your guarantee; so take your document I have no further need of it.”

When Hasan awoke he saw that parchment in his hand.

“Lord God,” he cried, “I know well that what Thou doest is without cause, save of Thy bounty. Who shall suffer loss at Thy door? Thou grantest a Guebre of seventy years to come into Thy near presence because of a single utterance. How then wilt Thou exclude a believer of seventy years? “

This story has one moral. It emphasizes the unity of God (tauheed) and His Mercy. While we affirm the reality of Wilayat we cannot forget Allah nor deviate from his commandments. But that does not forbid us from keeping up the remembrance of a pious man nor prevent us from remembering those who strove to reach spiritually sublime heights.

Our own Example

Coming home, Shaikh Hassan Bin Osman Magh-doomy was a very revered and pious Muslim born in Galle. He was one who shunned all publicity and ran away from people to escape undue publicity of his spiritual prowess. The story goes that once in Galle a Malay woman asked him to cure her of a dreadful disease, which many physicians had failed to do. If he would not, she would cut her throat with the knife she had in her hand. The saint told her: “All remedies are in the hands of Allah” and left her. When the saint proceeded later to the mosque for prayers he found the woman had carried out her threat and was lying dead in a pool of blood near his house. Unperturbed he

went his way but when suspicion fell on the saint he boldly told the inquiring officer, “Ask the corpse.”

The officer was puzzled. But the saint went up to the corpse and exclaimed, “By the help of Allah I will get the answer.” Whereupon the corpse spoke. “I cut my neck with this very knife of my husband” and again resumed its dead state. This miraculous happening was the talk of the town and the people of Galle and suburbs called on the saint and asked for his blessings.

Whatever any one may say, saints are the specially chosen representatives of Allah who keep the torch of Islam ever alight. When they reach a high stage of spirituality Allah speaks through them and they indeed stand out as the guiding light of the Ummat.

CHAPTER IV

VISITS TO SHRINES AND VOWS

In Islamic history the Battle of Uhad bears pride of place. One of the martyrs in this battle was Hamza (Ran.) It was the practice of the prophet (Sal.) to repair to his grave at Uhad very regularly and pay his respects. If the prophet (Sal.) visited graves in this manner, it is sunnat for his followers to adopt that practice. When such a practice is adopted, it should be within bounds and no abuse of any kind is permitted.

There is a doubt as to whether women could visit shrines in this way. We have it again in history that when the Holy Prophet died he was buried in the house of Ayesha Siddeeqa (Rai.) She used to enter his mausoleum with her face bared. When Abu Bakr Siddeeq (Ral.) died, she used to visit his grave too in the same manner. But when Umar Kattab (Ral.) died, she covered her face and entered his mausoleum. When she was asked why she did so, her reply was: "I am permitted to have my face bare before my husband and my father but my religion did not permit me to bare my face before Umar Kattab (Ral.) Two reasons arise from this action, (i) The Holy Prophet (Sal.) permitted visits to graves of Muslims; and (ii) Ayesha Siddeeqa (Ral.) taught its propriety.

That is the ideal one expects from any woman of Islam. But today, with these vast changes in the social structure and the economic necessity, it may be difficult for many to attain that ideal. Nevertheless, there is what is known as modesty in dress. We have it on the authority of the Holy Prophet that the dead see everything. Therefore any action contrary to the Shariat should be discouraged.

Vows

What are they? Can vows be made? Making of vows is in itself an act of devotion. A vow becomes valid only when it is pronounced orally. Therefore, whenever a person makes a vow, his fulfilling it immediately becomes *farl*. But there must be a clear differentiation in the types of vows made. If a person has a desire to be fulfilled and he takes a vow to pray five times a day, it is no vow, because prayer is

a compulsory duty enjoined on him by Islam.

The importance and validity or the propriety of making vows is best given in the words of Allama Shaikh Seyed Muhammad, popularly known as ‘Mapillai Alim’ as given by Mr. Doray in his English translation of Fath-hud-Dayyan at pages 399-401. He says:

“It will be proper for a person to make a vow like the following.

If Allah will free me from such catastrophe I shall recite a Fatiha in such and such a saint,” or such and such things to the guardians of such and such a saint.”

“When a person makes such a vow it in the manner vowed is *wajib*.

“Vowing is *ibada* (an act of devotion), and *ibada* is due only to Allah, the Most Majestic and to none else. Therefore, it becomes *haram* to make vows in matters or ways that are sinful.

“It will be improper for a person to make a vow such as :

“ If.....I shall give the saint buried in such and such a place, such and such things,” unless the person making such a vow has the intention of paying the guardians of that shrine a part of the expenses required to maintain that shrine.

“Entertaining the thought that our affairs can be attended to, and that our desires can be fulfilled, by any other than Allah, whether he be a prophet or saint, and appealing to him saying: “O my master! grant me a child! or, “Relieve me of my stoma-chache!” and thus ascribing to him the power of action that is Allah’s according to the proper understanding of the truth of *Fa’il Haqiqiya* (the Doer of all actions)”, are all characteristics of polytheism. Therefore, in seeking the favours of Allah through a saint, treat him as your intercessor.

“However, it is stated that, whether we address Allah Himself or whether we address His prophets or His Saints, it is Allah who answers. When we say: “O Messenger of Allah! Take

hold of my hand” or, “O Muhiyyiddin Save me!”, what we really intend is only a plea to Allah to take hold of our hands or to save us. We make our appeal through the prophet (Sal.) or through Muhiyyiddin (Radh.) and there is nothing beside. He who is truly the Doer of all actions goes into existence in Him, He becomes to them their life and their power and responds to our call. What really happens is nothing more than this. Those who say that by our appeal to them they are raised to divinity, or that we who make the appeal have become polytheists, are people of no knowledge, and are people who look upon Muslims very lightly assigning to them wrong motives.

Take the following example:

When you are thirsty, you call out to your servant, ‘O Marjan! Get me some water to drink.’

When an elephant chases you, you shout: ‘O Panikkar ! O Panikkar!’

“How can anyone say that by making this call to Marjan who is your servant, and by making this appeal to the panikkar, who looks after the elephant, you have become a polytheist? Allah has, according to the attainments of His creatures, placed in them that assistance and help which you need, and, whenever you need that assistance or help, He creates in you the urge to call them, and He gives them the power to assist or to save you. Therefore, how can that fool, who does not see polytheism in the calls you make of ‘O Marjan!’ and ‘O Panikkar!’ see polytheism in the calls you make of ‘O prophet of Allah!’, ‘O Muhiyyiddin!’ It may be argued that the prophet (Sal.) and Muhiyyiddin (Radh.) are both dead personages, while Marjan and the Panikkar are living beings. We know that not a thing can move anywhere without the wish of Allah. If the help that can be rendered by Marjan and the Panikkar is according to the power invested in them, then the help that can be rendered by prophets and saints, who are the friends of Allah, is greater. That their help can be gained in the invisible world (*Alamul Ghaib*) in the world of testimony (*Alamul Shahadah*), in the world of stayings (*Alamul Barzakh*), in this World

(*Dunya*) and in the world to come (*Kiyamah*) is a certainty. Allah knows best.

Dos and Don'ts at a shrine

The prophet (Sal.) has said, "An age will dawn upon my followers when they will love five things and forget five things:

- (i) They will love life and forget death;
- (ii) They will love wealth and forget the Day of Judgment
- (iii) They will love palaces and forget the grave
- (iv) They will love the world and forget the Here-after,
- (v) They will love the creature (*khalq*) and forget the Creator (*Khaliq*).

(1) When you enter a shrine of an auliya treat him as your intercessor.

(2) Remember you are only drawing inspiration from his example of success in religious practices.

(3) Repent for your sins. It has been stated that the person who does *tauba* becomes a friend of Allah, that he becomes as innocent as a new born babe, that in addition to his sins being forgiven, all his past sins will be converted into good acts (*amal*.)

(4) Indulge in prayer. Repentance without prayers is not going to bring any benefit. Whatever anyone may say, to a Muslim the best form of prayer is the prayer that Jibreel (Alai.) first taught the prophet (Sal.) and the prayer he performed without a stop all through his life and with which he ended a few seconds before his death. No other prayer will suffice. Allah hath stated in the Quran: "This path (of Islam) is the right path, therefore follow it." (Quran: VI: 153)

A Few Don'ts

- Do not vow to let tufts of hair grown on the heads of children and to gift them to shrines of saints after a specified period of time.
- Do not visit the graves of saints in order to fulfill such vows.

- Do not consume the ash falling from joss-sticks.
- Do not perform *thoppu karanam* before a saint.
- Do not roll on the ground as an act of penance.
- No saint either in his lifetime or at the time of his death, has approved of a forbidden act.
- Therefore do not enter his mausoleum and, as if in mockery, indulge in vain jokes, vain songs or look at sights that are forbidden.
- Do not miss obligatory prayers, sleeping at those sacred places, discarding all modesty.

“On the Day of Judgment, when you stand before Allah, the Judge of Judges, and the saints bear witness against you in regard to your actions beside their tombs, how can I describe your agitation?” asks Allama Shaikh Mapillai Alim. “You take off your foot-wear in order to enter the site made sacred by the burial of the saint, you recite *duos* and passages from the Holy Quran on his behalf in great awe, and you stand before him most respectfully with folded arms and beg for Allah’s favours, but the moment you turn your head away from him you indulge in *haram* acts in the very precincts where you were so humble and god-fearing before.”

May Allah protect us from falling into sinful acts and may He help us to do actions that are good.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This booklet has dealt with the past history of Kataragama Mosque and Shrine, its recent history, its origin and import, and above all, the idea of making vows as an act of devotion and what to avoid when making vows. It is hoped that this will serve as a reminder to all Muslims and herein they will draw an example not to stray away from the path of Allah.

This deals with those who strove hard to preserve this place for the Muslims. Even today large numbers of Muslims repair to this place for inspiration and solitude. Then, what of the future?

The Kataragama Mosque and Shrine occupies an enviable position in the present day context. It has had its share of criticism as well. Differences of opinion are an inevitable happening. Healthy criticism is a sign of faith. But one cannot do away with certain ideals and beliefs easily, less so by destructive criticism. As long as the world exists and as long as people inhabit it they will hold tenaciously to their beliefs. What form one's belief takes is inexplicable.

Formation of groups too is inevitable. If that could be stopped, then what the prophet (Sal.) said:

“There will come an age upon my followers when they will get divided into seventy-two divisions. Only one of these divisions will gain Paradise, all the rest will fall into Hell,” would be incorrect.

So, it is for each individual to join this one group by constant and unbroken insistence on prayer and an honest vigil not to stray away from the path of the Shariat.

Whatever may be the argument for and against this form of devotion, there is one reality every Muslim must face. That is, passing Hambantota, on the way to the Eastern Province, the only mosque one can call over for his prayer or even to spend a night is the Kataragama Mosque and Shrine

Besides, the Government has now declared Katara-gama a Sacred

City. There are plans afoot to make this a pilot city. A housing scheme and land settlement programme are in the offing. Every Muslim must be proud and happy that he has equality of worship in a sacred city and as this is the only mosque furthest South which commands so much attention, it behooves every Muslim, whether male or female, to nurture and preserve it for posterity.