



Image by Author - The Begum Sahiba Masjid, Trichy. September 2025

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EFEO Report 2025
The Dynamics of Caste among Tamil Muslims

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Introduction

With the generous support from EFEO, the researcher was able to interview approximately 50 persons on themes ranging from reservation policy, marriage practices, mosque management committees, and daily pious practices in madrasahs or islamic schools. This report will outline key findings about all these by detailing specific interviews which highlight the nuances about caste and its presence among Muslims in Tamil Nadu.

This report is organised into 3 sections, each of which draws on findings already generated through fieldwork and analysis to complicate the commonly repeated claim that “Tamil Muslims do not practice caste.” Rather than treating caste as either present or absent, the report develops new vocabularies for understanding how caste is intermittently articulated, strategically invoked, or actively disavowed in Tamil Muslim social and political life.

Taken together, these findings show that caste among Tamil Muslims appears and disappears across different sites and interactions, rendering its presence more fragile and contingent than in many other Muslim contexts. It is precisely this instability—rather than an absence of caste—that characterises Tamil Muslim engagements with caste.

The report documents and analyses the following:

- The use of caste certificates by Muslim families in Tamil Nadu, based on material from Chennai, Pondicherry, and Keelakarai, showing how state categories are navigated, contested, and selectively mobilised.

- Everyday relationships between Tamil Muslim families and their domestic workers, revealing subtle but persistent sensibilities of caste and class difference in ostensibly non-caste idioms. This section will also be about marriage practices.
- Cases of genealogical contestation surrounding mosques in Madurai and Chennai, demonstrating how lineage, respectability, and claims to religious authority become sites where caste is indirectly articulated. This section will be elaborated through photographs and captions.

MARRIAGE PRACTICES AND LINEAGE

With Sadia Khan and Farah. I attended an event on parenting, organised by Ibadah Trust, a Muslim women's organisation for social welfare, in July 2025. Sadia and Farha were volunteers in that event and were managing the children and parents games and also being hosts for the speeches and didactic lectures on what good parenting is. After the event, I requested both Farha and Sadia for an interview to ask them about caste practices and also about their family histories. Farah's family are gem merchants and they are from Ramanathapuram, in southern Tamil Nadu. When she told me this, Sadia joked that "now I know what I want from you during my marriage/wedding". Sadia told me that her family's caste is "Pathan", and she had a lot of pride and clarity when she said that. Farha very interestingly said that her family's surname is "Marakkayar" but that their caste is "Lebbai". This statement warrants more investigation because this highlights the nuance and complicated nature of caste titles among Muslims in Tamil nadu.

Both of them told me that the matrilineal areas in Tamil Nadu are Keelakarai and even Adirampattinam. In both places, the husband stays with the wife's family after marriage. They said that Keelakarai and Kayalpattinam are both places where seafarers lived/live and have deep connections with southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia, Singapore, and Burma and were trading in timber and gems. In mentioning this, Farha made an interesting comment- that Marakkayars are not merchants, they are shipping people. This adds a further question- how do they differentiate between merchants and shipping?

Both of them also highlighted areas where lots of Muslims live, particularly Parrapatti, near Dindigul, and the Jamaliyah area in Chennai.

Both Farha and Sadia emphasized on the importance of "family" and not "caste". When asked what this means, they elaborated that in the coastal belt especially, people marry within the family, and not within the caste. However, they were both unhappy with this tradition, as it led to health disorders in the blood line. Farha said that her mother is married to her first cousin, adding that her mother had already lost a disabled brother. She added that her uncle and aunt were also cousins and they had 2 children, one of whom was deaf and the other blind. "But I'm saying enough. Haven't you seen enough?"

Both Farha and Sadia added that Tamil and Urdu people marry each other, and that it is more about culture than caste. However, they added that most of the Urdu Muslims have north Indian/Afghan lineage. It is important to note that a clear sense of lineage was present in both Farha and Sadia. When Farha asked her, "are you related to Arcot Nawab?" Sadia denied but narrated her lineage clearly, "I am a descendant from Ibrahim Khan Lodhi. My mother's side is from Uzbekistan and Bijapur. My Phuph's (uncle) nana (maternal grandfather) came from Uzbekistan to trade here and married women here. He has greyish blue eyes and he's very fair." Skin tone and features were often used by elite

families (including those from Keelakarai) to distinguish themselves from the local people of Tamil Nadu. In all probability this is a colourist, racist interpretation of lineage and genealogy.

Farha and Sadia elaborated more on marriage rituals, emphasizing on the “punctuality” of people during events. They said the nikaah or marriage ceremony usually happens after dinner, before the Isha or the night prayer. But in Hyderabad, the nikaah happens after midnight, they said in comparison. Weddings also became a way to talk about dress and sartorial choices. It was expected that everyone will wear chiffon or georgette so that it looks festive and doesn’t stand out.

COMBINATION OF TWO INQUIRIES- WITH DAWOOD MIAN KHAN, A LAWYER STUDYING RESERVATION OF MUSLIMS AND A TAHSILDAR INTERVIEW, near Pondicherry and Chennai

During an interview with the tahsildar in August 2025, several details emerged regarding the history and restructuring of reservation categories in Tamil Nadu. He noted that the exact year in which Muslims were granted Backward Class (BC) status is not clearly remembered, though it is commonly attributed to the period when the Kalaignar government was in power, tentatively around 2007, with implementation taking effect between 2007 and 2011. He explained that the introduction of internal reservation marked a significant shift in reservation policy in the state. Under this framework, within the overall 69 per cent reservation, 20 per cent was allocated to Most Backward Classes (MBCs), 18 per cent to Scheduled Castes (SCs), and 1 per cent to Scheduled Tribes (STs). Within the BC category, a separate 3 per cent sub-quota was created for



Muslims, which was later extended to include Scheduled Caste Muslims as well. He emphasised that Muslims were categorised exclusively under the BC category. Prior to the introduction of internal reservation, he explained, all communities—Hindu, Muslim, and Christian—were broadly classified under BC, with caste distinctions such as Thevar and Nadar operating primarily within Hindu society and giving shape to caste differentiation.

During the same interview with the tahsildar in August 2025, further clarification emerged regarding the administrative logic governing community classification and certification in Tamil Nadu. He explained that Muslims and Christians are both included within the Backward Class (BC) category, and that all Muslims in Tamil Nadu are administratively classified as BC. The process of issuing community certificates, he noted, relies on field verification, during which officials examine documentary evidence pertaining to parents—typically the father’s and mother’s certificates, as well as school records. In most cases, parents already possess caste or community certificates. Since the late 1940s, particularly following the expansion of policies aimed at promoting education, community certification has become widespread, such that nearly everyone now holds a community certificate. During verification, officials assess where an individual’s parents are from and where the applicant has studied. Crucially, he emphasised that for Muslims, religious identity itself functions as the marker of BC status—“*Muslim means BC,*” as he put it. In cases where parents possess caste certificates identifying them as Muslim—such as Labbai or other sub-classifications—this information is typically reflected in the individual’s school certificate, which then becomes the primary documentary basis for community classification.

In a separate interview conducted in August 2025 with a lawyer who had earlier been closely involved in questions of minority representation and state policy, these issues were framed in explicitly political and moral terms. He reflected on the historical rationale behind minority reservations, noting that

earlier political moments—including the Jayalalithaa period—treated such measures as necessary stabilising interventions. Referring to the roster system, he explained that reservations operate through a rotational logic in which, out of roughly 200 applicants, only a very small proportion—sometimes as low as one per cent—ultimately secure government employment. Muslim leaders, he suggested, have often justified continued support for these arrangements by invoking earlier periods of perceived “Muslim success,” particularly under previous regimes, which are retrospectively narrated as moments of collective advancement. He cited figures such as Abdul Wahab as emblematic of Muslim social and political visibility during these phases, alongside the emergence of Muslim public leaders whose authority rested less on formal office and more on moral judgement (*roth talaaq judgement*, as he phrased it). Strategically, he argued, Muslims have tended not to openly oppose dominant parties such as the DMK, reasoning that overt opposition would allow Hindu majoritarian forces to gain ground. Situating this within a broader constitutional frame, he observed that while minority rights once occupied a significant place within constitutional guarantees, their political force has gradually eroded. He concluded by pointing to contemporary shifts in recognition, citing the case of a Muslim diamond merchant who received one of the government’s highest civilian awards, suggesting that minority visibility is now increasingly mediated through symbolic recognition rather than structural redistribution.

In an interview conducted in August 2025, the lawyer articulated a sceptical and internally conflicted position on caste, religion, and political representation in India. He began by questioning the criteria through which Muslim identity is evaluated, asking how scholars could be considered Muslim if they did not speak Urdu, thereby suggesting that religious belonging itself is unevenly constituted. Referring to figures such as Mohammad Qasim, he described certain categories as “irrelevant,” particularly for South India, while simultaneously rejecting caste outright—“*I will not accept caste,*” he

stated—even as he continued to reason through caste-based demographics. He repeatedly returned to the problem of numerical fragmentation, noting that Muslims—at approximately 12 per cent—constitute the largest “undivided” group, and that this very lack of internal division generates political anxiety. By contrast, he pointed out that Dalits (around 19 per cent), Adivasis (7–8 per cent), and various Hindu castes—including Jats, Gujjars, and Yadavs—are internally segmented, even though no single caste exceeds eight per cent nationally. He argued that political power in India depends on managing fragmentation, suggesting that Muslims are repeatedly urged to divide in order to be governable. Throughout the interview, his insistence on rejecting caste sat uneasily alongside his detailed numerical reasoning, revealing a persistent tension between moral refusal and analytical reliance on caste-based logics.

EXCERPT FROM FIELD NOTES ABOUT KEELAKARAI WEDDING PRACTICES AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

I am currently residing in the home of Tayka Shoaib Alim, a scholar of Arwi and Arabic from Keelakarai, while his granddaughter’s wedding is underway. I am staying with the family in their ancestral house, which has also become a key site for understanding local social organisation.

Family members explained that Keelakarai is internally divided into what they call “sectors,” a term used in place of theru (street). Each sector is understood to have a distinct social character. The street on which this family lives is Melatheru (the “upper street”), described as the most “blessed.” Marriages, I was told, do not usually take place across sectors because “culture is different.” Streets closer to the sea were described as poorer, and families from Melatheru do not marry into them. “We marry within our own theru,” they explained. There are approximately ten such streets, including Vadakku Theru; I am still in the process of documenting the names and reputations of the others.



Shoaib Alim's daughter, now in her seventies, recalled that “andha kalathille” (in earlier times), people described as “lower caste” migrated from nearby towns in search of food and money. These families were employed as veetakara (domestic workers). She explained that when their own daughters married, they would sometimes arrange marriages for the daughters of these workers as well, providing them with a house and gold. Both she and her niece were careful to emphasise that this relationship was not akin to slavery—“not like the Arabs,” as they put it—underscoring a moral distinction they were keen to draw.

Everyday domestic arrangements in the household remain sharply differentiated. I sleep in a room on a bed inside the house, while the domestic workers—elderly women—sleep on straw mats. They use separate washrooms located outside the house. A significant part of their daily labour involves sitting near the entrance throughout the day to prevent people who come to beg from entering the home.

Family members also narrated the origins of matrilocality in Keelakarai, attributing it to Sadakatullah Vappa, whose shrine is at the Jamaiya Pallivasal. According to local accounts, after witnessing his daughter's suffering in her marital home, he decreed that daughters would no longer leave their natal homes; instead, sons-in-law would move in with their wives' families.

In conversations about marriage, I asked what happens when young people fall in love outside the community—particularly in cities like Chennai or in college. “This is why we are sent to girls' colleges,” they responded, “so we don't fall in love with anyone else.” At the same time, they spoke openly about the guilt associated with having had a prior relationship only to eventually marry within the community. Marrying outside Keelakarai, they said, results in social boycott.

THE MILAD PRACTICES OF KEELAKARAI AND KAYALPATTINAM (EXCERPTS FROM A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE, DECEMBER 2025)

“This sounds so much like an old Mohammad Rafi song, but I can’t remember which one,” I said to Nihra as I sang one of my favourite Tamil *mawlid nasbeeds* to her, asking if she knew where the melody came from. With one of her sister’s babies dangling from one arm and a plate of fruit she had just cut in the other, she half-jumped with excitement and said, “Yes! This is an old Hindi film song. These *nasbeeds* or *bayts* are all based on film songs, or Hindu devotional songs sung in temples or Christian hymns and gospels.”

Nihra and I had become friends during the *mawlid* in the month of Rabi al-Awwal in 2025. Belonging to the matrilocal Muslim community of Keelakarai, Nihra and her sisters attended the *mawlid* daily at their community mosque in Nungambakkam, an upscale neighbourhood in Chennai. Even after the *mawlid* month ended, I remained friends with Nihra and her cousin, Meena, visiting Sufi shrines with them across Chennai and going to their homes, where I continued to ask questions about what reciting the *mawlid* meant to them.

A large number of families from Keelakarai live in Nungambakkam, and this particular mosque was built using funds from the Seethakathi Trust, a trust formed in 1967 by the matrilocal community from Keelakarai. At the very beginning of my fieldwork in August 2025, while chasing one lead after another across Tamil Nadu, I stumbled upon this mosque. I first befriended Shaheen, Nihra’s second cousin, who told me, “It’s a mistake that people consider Arwi to be ‘dead’. We still sometimes recite it here at our mosque every

Friday during *rathib*.” The *mawlid*, celebrated on the 12th of the month of Rabi al-Awwal, commemorates the birth of the Prophet (SAW) through the recitation of *nasheeds*, *bayts*, and sections of the Qur’an, along with praise for the Prophet. The *rathib*, performed weekly on Fridays, is a form of *dhikr*, or remembrance of Allah.

This paper is an early reflection on the first two months of my PhD fieldwork in Tamil Nadu. My PhD project has a different topic from the current paper—it examines caste and castelessness among Tamil Muslims and explores myriad sites such as reservation policies, endowment genealogical claims, and endogamous/exogamous marriage practices. However, this paper, which focuses on *mawlid* recitation and experiences, emerges from a place of loyalty—loyalty to the ethnographic method and to letting the field take me where it shall. In making deeper friendships, and alongside discussions on questions of caste practices and distinctions, I began attending the *mawlid* and *rathib* regularly and taking notes and observations about the sonic and aesthetic dimensions of the *mawlid*, particularly because it deeply mattered to my friends and interlocutors and because the *mawlid* at the HCA mosque was where I met them so regularly, outside of interviews at their homes and offices.

This paper makes the case that the *mawlid*, as experienced and recited by women, is not only an expression of Islamic piety, Sufi devotion, and love for the Prophet (PBUH), but also an unexceptional yet generative part of the repertoire of the Tamil language itself. By attending to what it means to recite the *mawlid* in Tamil, I show how the practice enables the growth and elasticity of the language for those who inhabit it. Rather than offering a linguistic analysis, this paper focuses on the meanings the Tamil recitation of the *mawlid* holds for women. It allows us to see Tamil Muslims beyond merely ‘Muslims who just happen to speak Tamil’ (O’Sullivan 2023), but instead as people who are as Tamil as they are Muslim (Fakhri 2008). While this is not an entirely new

argument, I argue that the deeper meanings of inhabiting such multiplicities—of being simultaneously Tamil and Muslim—require renewed attention, both because socio-political realities are changing drastically and because the Indian ocean and its connections re-forge themselves in novel ways.

While there is substantial recognition of early Islamic texts composed in Tamil and their role in expanding the language’s linguistic and aesthetic capacities (Narayan 2000), reflections on contemporary Tamil-speaking Muslims and their contributions to Tamil remain limited. These have largely focused on Muslim participation in anti-Hindi agitations—such as that of P. Khalifullah in the mid-twentieth century—and on their role in broader Tamil and Dravidian nationalism. Extending this view, I foreground how seemingly “purely” Islamic acts, such as reading the *mawlid*, also expand the Tamil language, though these contributions often go unremarked.

SEQUENCE AND SWITCH: CONTENDING WITH ARABIC-TAMIL

On the first day of the *mawlid*, as we sat next to each other reciting with others, Meena mentioned to me, “Most people only read in Arabic. But we read first in Arabic and then in Tamil because the purpose is to understand what we are reading. We want to know what we are reading. The women sitting there at the front, Rizwana and her friend, lead the *mawlid*; they know what to read when and they guide us. You have to book them in advance because they go to 4–5 *mawlid* sessions daily.” Sure enough, the sequence of the *mawlid* was very organised—an Arabic *bayt* was read, following which the women chanted “ya nabi salaam alayka” while they changed books. They then picked up the Tamil text and began reading Tamil *nasheeds*. Meena assumed that I would have

understood what she meant when she told me, “We want to understand what we are reading; that is why we sing in Tamil also.” I had initially misunderstood it to mean that what they read are Tamil translations of the Arabic, but in the following days, as she, Nihra, and her mother showed me more books that they keep for *mawlid* at home, I understood that the sequencing of the Arabic and the Tamil is not based on translation but instead is based on tune and rhythm.

I asked, “So if these are not translations, how do you know which Tamil *nasheed* to sing after which Arabic one?” Nihra replied, “It’s all about the music. If the tune fits, we will read one after the other. We just use film songs, or songs from temples, or hymns, and whichever tune fits both Arabic and Tamil, we merge them.” Sure enough, as I observed, I heard many familiar tunes, those composed by veteran Bollywood music directors such as S. D. Burman, and one *nasheed* was based exactly on the tune of the song “Sita Sings the Blues.”

Curious to know whether this was a pattern outside of Chennai and Nungambakkam as well, the next time I visited Kayalpattinam, I asked Ayeza, another interlocutor and friend, “How do you know which Tamil *nasheed* to sing after a particular Arabic one, if they are not translations?” Ayeza then brought out the relevance of “*raga*” to me, stating, “Ovvoru *song-odu raaga* edhutittu, Tamil-lae padipaanga, andha *mettu*, andha tune edhutittu Arabi-lae padipaanga, Tamil song, Arabic song, Islamic song.” (Every song’s *raga* we take and will sing in Tamil, and that melody, that tune we take and sing in Arabic—Tamil song, Arabic song, Islamic song.)

It was my curiosity about this sequencing that I wanted to understand further, and so on the second day of the *mawlid*, Nihra and Meena, with admirable dedication to help me, brought the old *mawlid* texts that they no longer used but had kept preserved in their home. Curious about Shaheen’s comment that “we still read Arwi during *rathib* in our mosque,” I asked, “what about *mawlid*, do you read that in Arwi as well?” Nihra showed me this (image 1) old

text, within which the majority of the *nasheeds* were in Arwi and Arabic (no Tamil), and which was published in 1860. Its new version (image 2), which is used now, has only Arabic and Tamil but no Arwi sections. This text, the *Thalai Fatiha* (literally meaning the head *Fatiba*, or the main *Fatiba*, as it is about the Prophet PBUH), which was used on occasions other than *mawlid* as well, had two versions.

I then began asking them about authorship and how they understood it. I asked them whether they discussed who had written these *nasheeds*: how old are they? Where did these Tamil *nasheeds* come from? How did they end up in these books? I received varying answers to these questions. Nihra's cousin, Sabiha, told me, "Our ancestors, the saints in Kayalpattinam, have written these. They had to get permission from Rasul-Allah SAW himself. They said to him, 'Look, I wrote this about you,' and then had to wait for approval." I asked her, "Who were these saints? Where are they buried?" She wasn't sure.

From the books themselves, several important names emerge recurrently. For instance, Syed Muhammad Mappilai Lebbai Alim, who is accredited as the author of the *Thalai Fatiba*, and whom Nihra's mother acknowledged as one of the important writers of Arwi *nasheeds*. Other important scholars mentioned were Meena's grandfather, Tayka Shoaib Alim, a descendant of Lebbai Alim.

On my visits to Kayalpattinam, I approached the waqf *mutavalli*, Ashraf, wanting to know more about both the authorship of the Tamil *nasheeds* and about the sequencing of Arabic and Tamil in the *mawlid* and what reasoning underpinned that order. Ashraf had other authors to add. Describing himself as a direct descendant of Sadakatullah Vappa (the saint buried in Keelakarai's *Palaiya Jumma Palli* adjacent to Seethakathi Marakayar), he said that

Sadakatullah Vappa's lesser-known brother, Sham Shahabuddin, is the author of many of these Tamil *nasheeds*, as Sadakatullah himself wrote mainly in Arabic and Arwi and also authored the *Wittriya Shareef*. The *Wittriya* was also mentioned by Rizwana, who leads the *mawlid* and *rathib* in Nungambakkam, and who noted that they have recently translated the *Wittriya* into Tamil and now recite the translation as well.

Hearing about the *Wittriya* and the recitation of its Tamil translations, I once again pressed the question of why, if the *Wittriya* is read in an alternating sequence of Arabic and Tamil translations, the *mawlid* is not followed in a similar manner. Why is the sequencing of the *mawlid* more arbitrary and less direct? Ashraf, too, directed me toward the importance of *mettu* and tunes, stating that many of these tunes are drawn from film songs and that sometimes only the melody is retained. He also drew my attention to songs by the famous singer Nagore Hanifa, who was known as the “voice of the DMK” because he sang at conferences and in propaganda cassettes for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Hanifa, who was also a prominent singer of Tamil Islamic devotional music, sang *mawlids* as well, and many of those tunes were borrowed from film songs. For example, the famous Hindi song *Aaja Sanam Madhur Chandni Mein Hum* (“Come, beloved, in the melodious moonlight”) was remade as *Palaivanam Thaandi Pogalame Naam* (“Let us go and cross the desert”). A composer of many *nasheeds* and *naats* himself, Ashraf often began singing every *nasheed* we talked about.

The question of arbitrary sequencing, however, continued to trouble me. During one of my regular visits to Nihra's home, I sat with her mother as she explained to me the meanings of different *nasheeds*. I was eager to understand more about the seemingly arbitrary sequencing of the Arabic and the Tamil, and although *mettu* and *raga* as the basis of these choices had been explained to me, I remained confused, as the melody of the Tamil and the Arabic did not always match and often differed in rhythm and melody. I therefore wanted to

know who made these choices and how this particular sequencing became paradigmatic or standardised.

In this paper, I present the case that the Tamil *nasheed* offers us a way to look at Meena, Nihra, Ashraf, and others beyond Muslims who merely “happen to be Tamil” and who simply translate Arabic into Tamil and read it. Instead, it posits the *mawlid* as a very Tamil practice as well—as something that contributes to the language rather than the language serving as a mere tool. This is not just Islam in the Tamil context, but a particular technique of expression through Tamil. This becomes even clearer when one takes into account the fact that Arabic and Tamil sequences are not direct translations at all: one is not using Tamil to make Arabic intelligible. Instead, musicality, tonality, and rhythm take precedence in that choice, making the relation between the Arabic and the Tamil far more complex. How precisely is the Tamil following the Arabic? What determines the choice to sing that particular Tamil *nasheed* or *bayt* after a given Arabic one? What does it mean for one language to follow another in loops in the absence of translation? What logics and forms of meaning-making emerge from this?

These are the questions that my ongoing work is now pursuing, and which I pose to everyone I speak to about the *mawlid* as well—what determines the choice of singing one particular Tamil *nasheed* after an Arabic *bayt*? The apparent arbitrariness of the sequencing suggests that there is an ongoing making and unmaking of Tamil and its relation to Arabic. This resonates with the question that Torsten Tscacher (2018) puts forward about how what constitutes Arwi is still not fully understood, and how multiple ways of thinking about it coexist. The *mawlid* becomes another site through which the relationship between Tamil and Arabic is being maintained and constantly reworked. The arbitrariness of the sequence thus opens up newer questions about how the categories of “Tamil” and “Arabic” relate to one another—it is not necessarily Arwi, and does not need to be attached solely to the question of

“what is a language,” (something which would take us to deeper questions of linguistic and semiotic analysis) yet it certainly reinvents the elasticity through which these scripts and language systems have been imagined.

The focus on thinking of the *mawlid* as a Tamil practice, as much as something that is about piety and the commemoration of prophets and saints, is also shaped by the fact that the older women in the mosque repeatedly mentioned their anxieties about their children losing Tamil—those who grew up in the Gulf or in North America, or those who did not pursue it properly in school in the way they did English. Nihra herself told me, “The only time I really read Tamil is in the *mawlid*—otherwise I’m good with both Arabic and Arwi. I am very comfortable with Arwi but not with Tamil. Growing up in Dubai, my mother forced me to read Tamil magazines, but where I eventually read Tamil was in the *mawlid*.” Other women I spoke to, more than anywhere else—in their homes over lunch or in their offices—expressed similar worries that their children will not read Tamil. As they put it, “We abandoned reading Arwi and now read Tamil and Arabic separately; now we are worried our kids won’t read Tamil.” In one of our walks to the mosque, I asked Meena, what is the precise difference between reciting in Tamil and reciting in Arabic? She replied, “reciting in Arabic is very fun, but reading the Tamil nasheeds feels very wholesome because you actually understand the meaning and you agree with the lines and it feels very spiritual” I again pressed her about the sequencing of Tamil and Arabic, given the absence of the logic of translation. She replied, “Basically, what they do is they take tunes of the Tamil Nasheed and they use that tune to recite the Arabic one. So the only thing in common between them is the tune”

In seeing the women’s worries about their children losing Tamil, one can see that the *mawlid* is a space where tensions about language are ordinarily expressed—it is a space that actively shapes women’s relation to language. The *mawlid* is a place where people think about Tamil; they reflect on the language.



There is increasing out-migration from Tamil Nadu now, as older women told me, which, unlike the past millennia when migration occurred for trade, work, and pilgrimage, is now also happening because of a sense of being unsafe under Indian ethno-nationalism. The *mawlid* thus becomes a place where vulnerabilities of language are continuously brought to the fore as well. It allows women to express other fears and insecurities that extend beyond the domain of religious practice alone.

My fieldwork is now grappling with the question of sequencing, because while everyone insisted on the *mettu*, I observed that the tunes did not always match thus returning me to the question of what shapes the logic of sequence? Several possibilities open up here: first, that interpretations of rhythm and tonality differ, and what is perceived as sameness is not yet clear; second, that perhaps something arbitrary is simply that, it's just arbitrary, and one should abandon the quest to discern, down to the last detail, why one particular Tamil recitation follows a particular Arabic one. Yet, amid these many residues—of remembering Arwi through books unearthed from cupboards, through assertions that Arwi is not yet dead—I remain motivated to pursue this connection further. Doing so allows me to return more robustly to the question of how the *mawlid* is more than an act of piety or an exercise in reciting Arabic *bayts*, but rather something through which Muslims claim Tamil, extend its capacities, and rework their relationship to it. In mirroring Tamil to Arabic, certain aesthetic, artistic, and sacred logics emerge that are not immediately discernible and that open up possibilities for studying the relations people forge, knowingly or unknowingly, between Tamil and Arabic in more contemporary contexts. It presents a poetic logic of superimposing the two languages and how they blend together as a collective exercise.

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Mosque in Devipattinam. Photo by Author

Periya Pallivasal Mosque in Devipattinam. Photo by Author

**Photo of Shajrah (genealogy and lineage list) in Ervadi, Ramanathapuram.
Photo by Author**

Kannadi Waliullah Dargah, Keelkarai, Photo by Author

**Hazrath Syed Noorshah Qadiri Waliullah Dargah, Ramanathapuram. Photo by
Author**

Jamal Mohammed College, Islamic Culture Department, Photo by Author

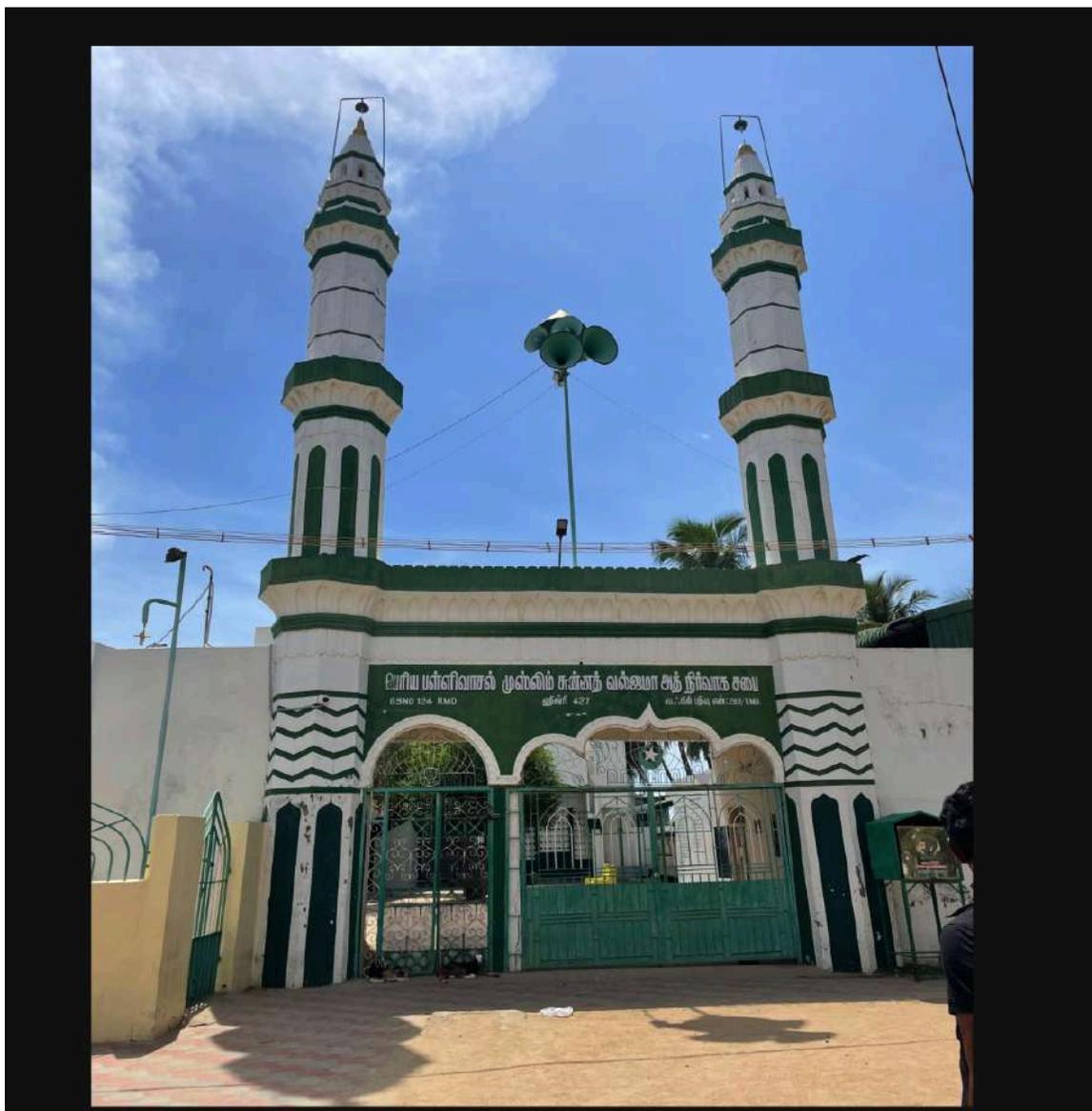
Jamal Mohammed College, Trichy

Makkah Masjid, Trichy (the oldest mosque in Tamil Nadu)

Nathar Wali Dargah Trichy, Photo by Author

Nagore Dargah (book stalls, smaller shrines, main shrine). Photo by Author

**Photographs of Keelakarai family histories, their mosque in Nungambakkam,
and a shrine in Devipattinam. Photos by Author**







بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 الْقَسْبُ الشَّرِيفُ لِشَيْدِ تَأْقِطِ الْأَقْطَابِ السُّلْطَانِ الشَّيْخِ الْبَيْهَمِ الشَّهِيدِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ
 وَأَسْمَاءُ الْوَالِدِيَّةِ إِلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ ابْنِ أَبِي قُرَيْبٍ الْمَشْهُورِ بِالْمَجَازِ وَالْأَيْدِيَةِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ
 سَيِّدِ الْأَرْبَابِ وَالْأَجْرَيْنِ وَرَوْحَةِ الْعَالَمِينَ سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ الْمُصْطَفَى صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
 سَيِّدِنَا فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءُ التُّوَلُّوا رَبِّي اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
 سَيِّدِنَا أَبِي بَكْرٍ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا الْأَمَامُ أَحْسَنُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ	سَيِّدِنَا ذَا أَوْدٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ
سَيِّدِنَا زَيْنُ الْعَابِدِينَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ	سَيِّدِنَا جَمَالُ الْكُرُومِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ
سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدُ الْبَاقِرُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ	سَيِّدِنَا أَبُو الْحَسَنِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ
سَيِّدِنَا جَعْفَرُ الصَّادِقُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ	سَيِّدِنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ الْكُرُومِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ
سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٌ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ	سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٌ تَصِيْبُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ
سَيِّدِنَا سَيِّدُ جَلَالِ الدِّينِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ	سَيِّدِنَا أَبُو سُوَيْبَةَ الْجَمَالِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدُ الْكَمَالِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا الشَّيْخُ أَحْمَدُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا قَطِبُ الْأَقْطَابِ السُّلْطَانُ السُّلْطَانُ الشَّهِيدُ الشَّهِيدُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا سَيِّدَةُ الرَّحْمَةِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا

سَيِّدِنَا قَطِبُ الشَّيْخِ أَبُو طَاهِرٍ الشَّهِيدُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا الشَّيْخُ إِسْمَاعِيلُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا الشَّيْخُ الشَّافِعِيُّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا الشَّيْخُ أَبُو هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا الشَّيْخُ أَحْمَدُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا الشَّيْخُ الْبَاقِرُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدُ ابْنِ أَبِي قُرَيْبٍ الْمَشْهُورِ بِالْمَجَازِ وَالْأَيْدِيَةِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدُ ابْنِ أَبِي قُرَيْبٍ الْمَشْهُورِ بِالْمَجَازِ وَالْأَيْدِيَةِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ





CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC TAMIL CULTURAL RESEARCH
JAMAL MOHAMED COLLEGE (Autonomous)
ON GOING PROJECTS

S. No.	Project Name	Principal Investigator	Co-Principal Investigator	Institutions	Research Assistant	Funding Agency	Duration	Amount
1.	Mathematical Practices of the Indian Ocean world in coastal Islamic communities of the Coromandel and Malabar, South India.	Dr. J. Raja Mohamed Director, CITCR	Prof. Dr. M. H. Elias (Merata)	1. Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Tiruppur 2. Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam 3. British Library, London	Mr. A. Jawahar Rafoa	Endangered Archives Programme, British Library, London	1 Year (Ongoing) 2022-2023	£ 84926
2.	Jamal Mohamed College History	Dr. J. Raja Mohamed Director, CITCR	Dr. A. Syed Zahir Hussain (Department of Islam (Head of the Dept.)) Mr. K. Mohamed Ismail Co-ordinator CITCR Dr. K. Sripadasa Deputy Co-ordinator CITCR	Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Tiruppur	Mr. P.A. Mohamed Achi Murshid	Management	2 Year (Ongoing) 2022-2024	INR 7.50,000



CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC TAMIL CULTURAL RESEARCH
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BOOKS AND RESEARCH JOURNALS PUBLISHED

Books			
S.No.	Book Name	Edition / Year	ISBN Number
1.	Tamizhagathil Islam Vanthathum, Valarnthathum, Vaazhvathum Part-1	First Edition 2019	-
		Second Edition 2020	978-81-944322-4-1
2.	Muslims of Tamilnadu In the Indian Freedom Struggle (Tamil)	First Edition December 2019	978-81-944322-1-0
3.	Muslims of Tamilnadu In the Indian Freedom Struggle (English)	First Edition December 2019	978-81-944322-2-7
4.	Tamizhagathil Maalikkapur Varalarum Thiribugalum	Second Edition December 2019	978-81-944322-3-4
5.	Founders of Jamal Mohamed College (Tamil)	First Edition 2020	978-81-944322-6-5
6.	Jamal Mohamed Indian Merchant Prince and Nationalist (English)	First Edition 2022	978-93-5636-141-6
7.	Tamil Muslimkalin Varalarum Vazhviyalum (Ka.PI. 19 nam Noorrandu Varal - Part. II)	First Edition 2022	978-93-5915-779-5
8.	Maritime History of the Coromandel Muslims A Socio - Historical Study on the Tamil Muslims 1750-1900	Second Edition 2022	978-93-5917-149-4
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10.	Jamal Mohamed Indian Merchant Prince and Nationalist (Tamil)	First Edition July 2023	978-93-5914-865-6
Research Journals			
S.No.	Journal Name	Year	ISSN / ISBN Number
1.	History, Culture and Literature of Muslims of Tamilnadu	May 2022	ISSN (P) : 0973-6303, ISSN (O) : 2582-5941 www.jmrcj.org
2.	Arabu Tamil Literature	March 2023	ISSN (P) : 0973-6303, ISSN (O) : 2582-5941 www.jmrcj.org
Special Issue			
1.	Founders Day Special Issue -2018	July 2018	-



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Faith burns bright at this ancient mosque near Tiruchi's Fort Station

Makkah Masjid is among the oldest Islamic shrines in Tamil Nadu. An inscribed tablet dates the mosque back to the year 116 of the AH Hijri calendar, corresponding to 734 A.D. The family of a cloth merchant has been taking care of the mosque for generations

By Rajesh Kumar

Tucked away next to a carpentry workshop on Tiruchi's Fort Station Road is what is considered to be one of the oldest Islamic places of worship in Tamil Nadu: the Makkah Masjid that dates back to the year 116 of the AH Hijri calendar, corresponding to 734 A.D.

The family of M.C.A. Abdul Rahman, a cloth merchant in Tiruchi, has been taking care of the property for several generations. The mosque's age is validated by an inscribed stone tablet in Arabic above the 'mihrab' (the niche that indicates the 'qibla' or direction of prayer). The graves of Muhammad Ibrahim, Hassan Haji, Abdullah, Hassan Haji, Muhammad Anwar, Ahmad Kabir and Tabira Bani, thought to be pious Muslims of yore, are also to be found here. Two recently added minarets indicate the mosque's presence in this quiet part of town.



Heritage site: A.R. Mohamed Ghous, trustee of the mosque, at the prayer hall of the Makkah Masjid. In the background is the stone inscription in Arabic, believed to be from the 8th Century AD. (A. K. Srinivasan)

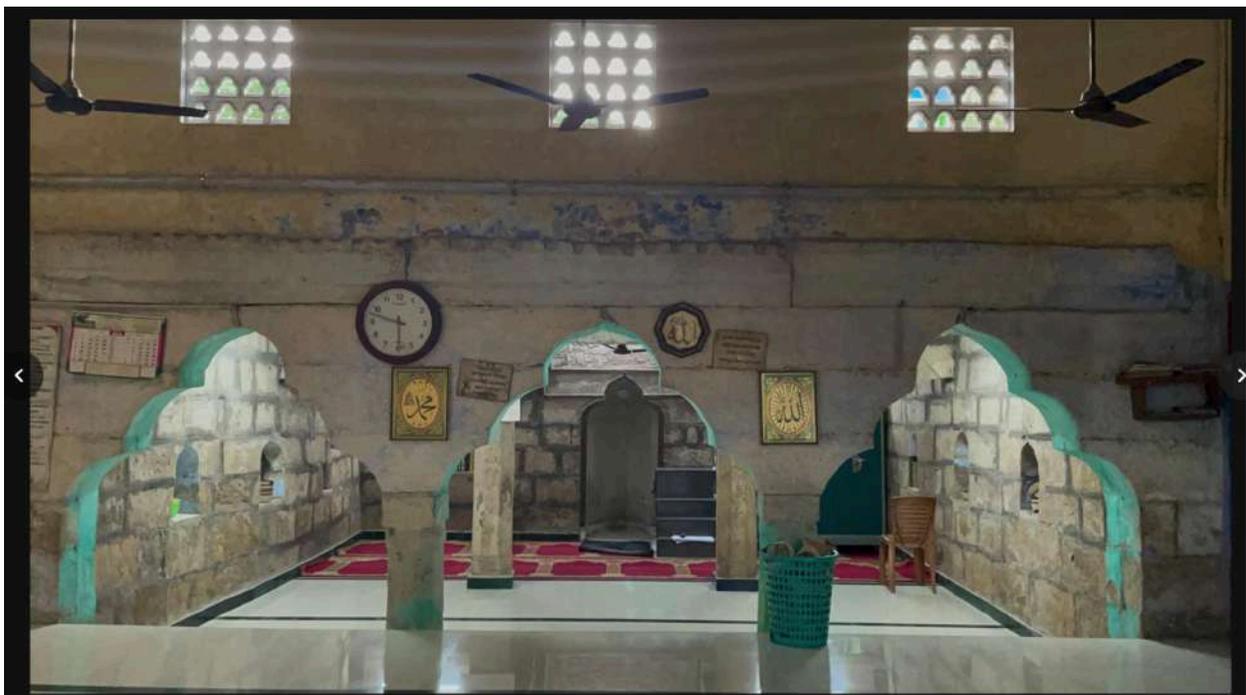
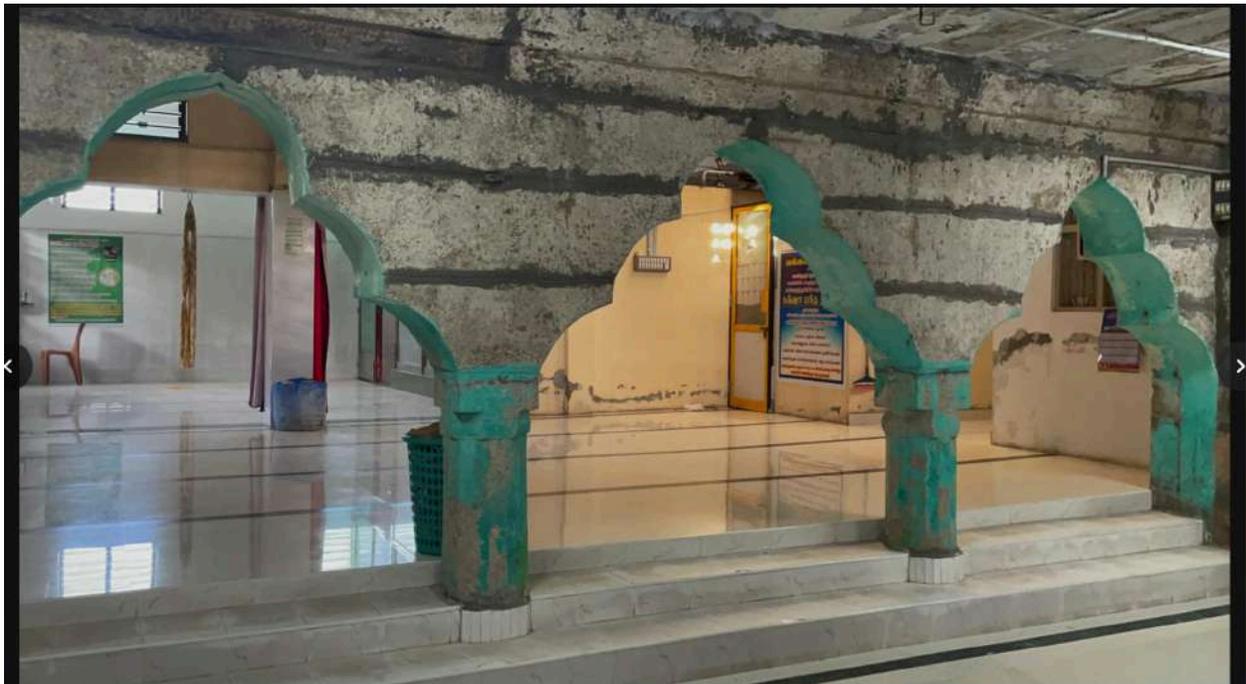
surrounded by trees and bushes. "Until the 1980s, the mosque was very different from what you see today," A.R. Mohamed Ghous, hereditary trustee, and one of Mr. Rahman's 12 children, told *The Hindu*. "When my father was bequeathed this shrine, it was surrounded by thorny bushes and palm trees. There was no road access; people would walk single file on a narrow pathway to reach the premises. Since this is a low-lying area, the building would be flooded during the rainy season. Before we got electricity connection in the 1980s, the place used to be lit up with oil lamps and hurricane lanterns. We have been

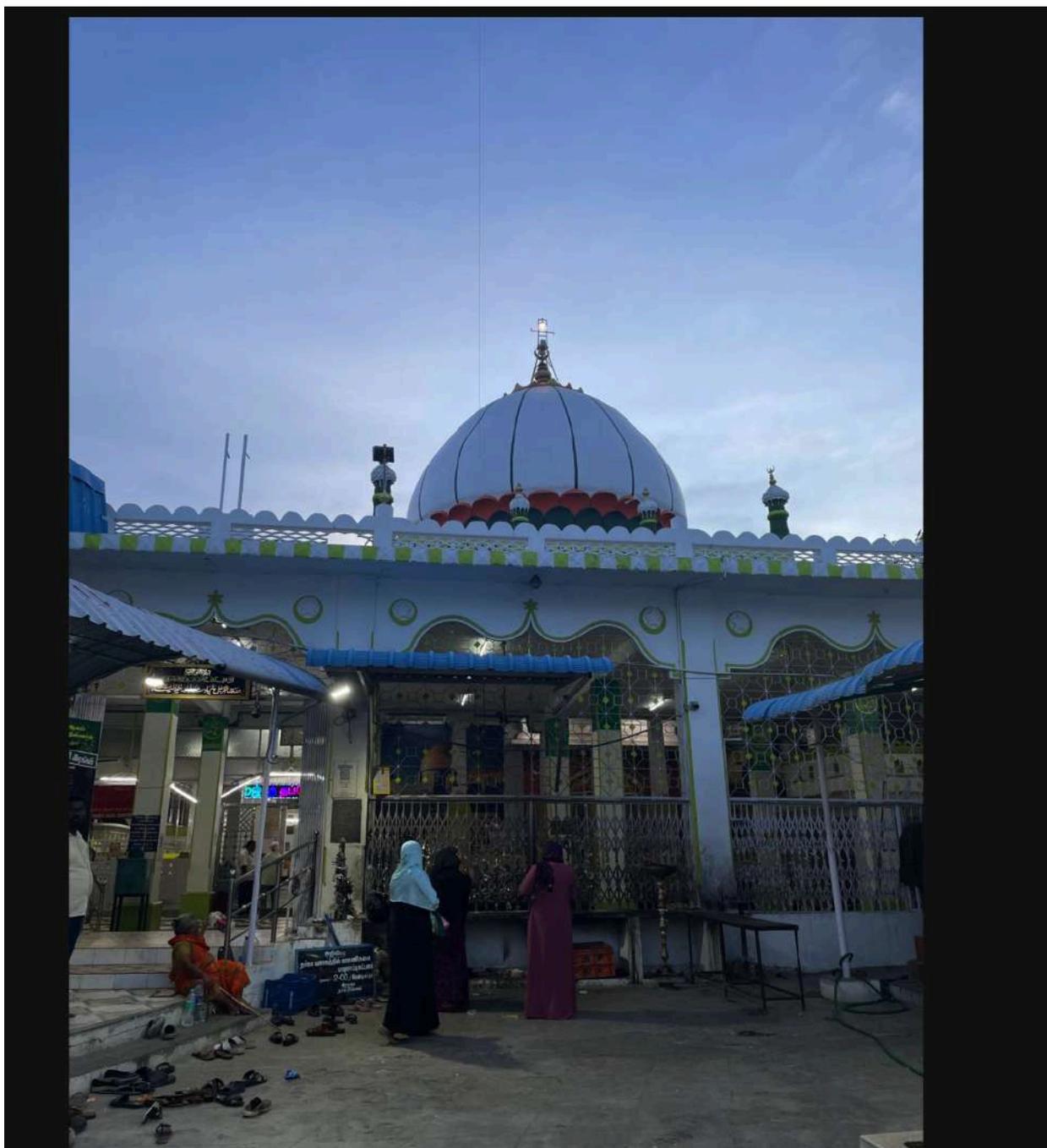
maintaining the buildings with the help of generous donors from all faiths," he said. The Muslim community has had a long and harmonious presence in Tiruchi since ancient times. The Makkah Masjid is a stone's throw away from Hazrat Thakib Alam Badshah (father of Hazrat Shikhan Badshah) a nobleman of Turkish-Syrian lineage born as Sultan Muhammad bin 927 A.D. in Biharward, near Samarkand, who gave up his privileged life to spread the message of Islam in southern Asia. It is said the saint stayed on the Makkah Masjid

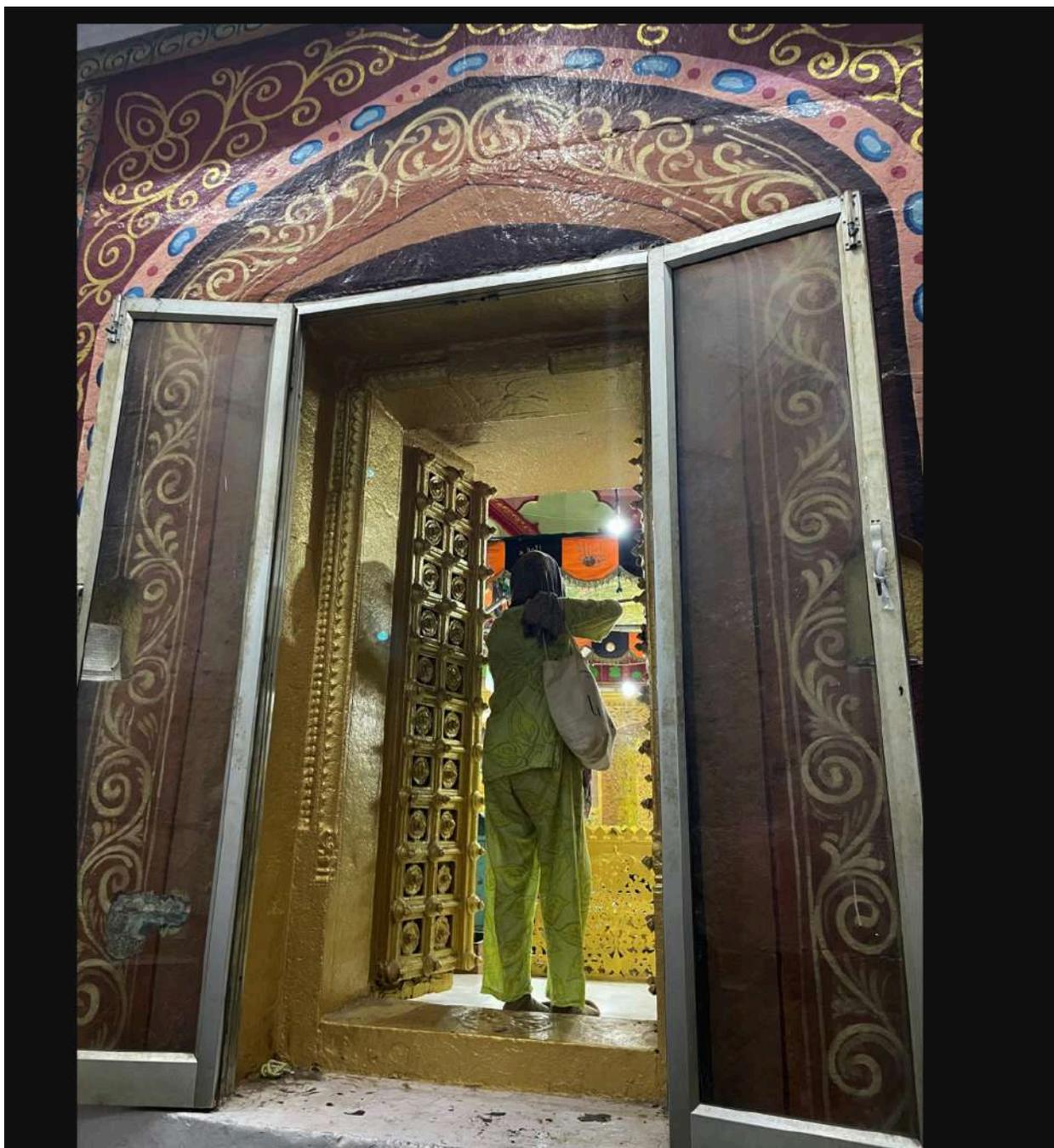
premises before he settled in the present site. Mosques endowed by the erstwhile Nawabs of Arcot are also an indelible part of Tiruchi's landscape. Worayur, the capital of the Chola dynasty from the 2nd Century, was a suburb of Tiruchi, was already known to Arab traders. After the birth of Islam, Arab-Muslim missionaries began travelling to the region. Biographies of Muslim saints and the local traditions of the period reveal that Islam spread in the southern part of India in a largely peaceful and voluntary manner.

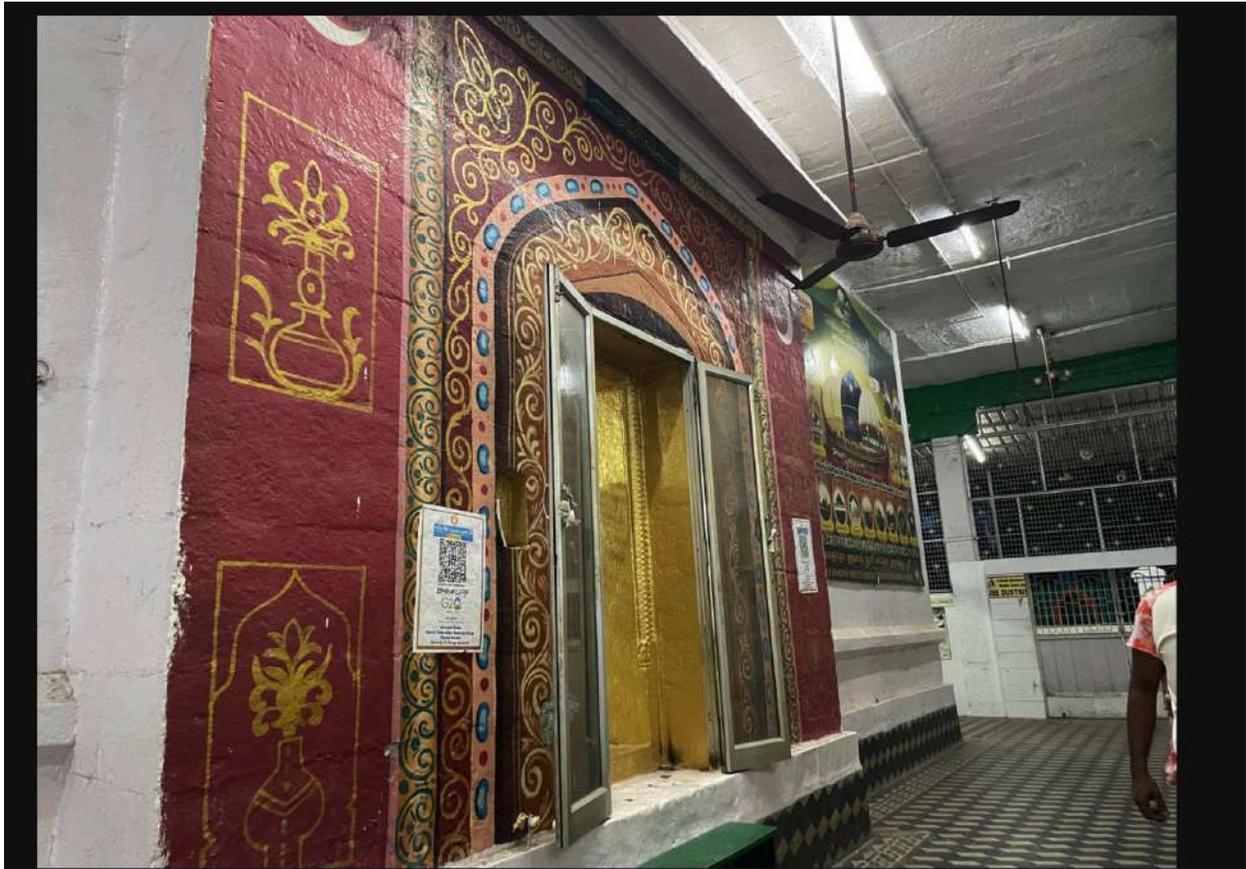
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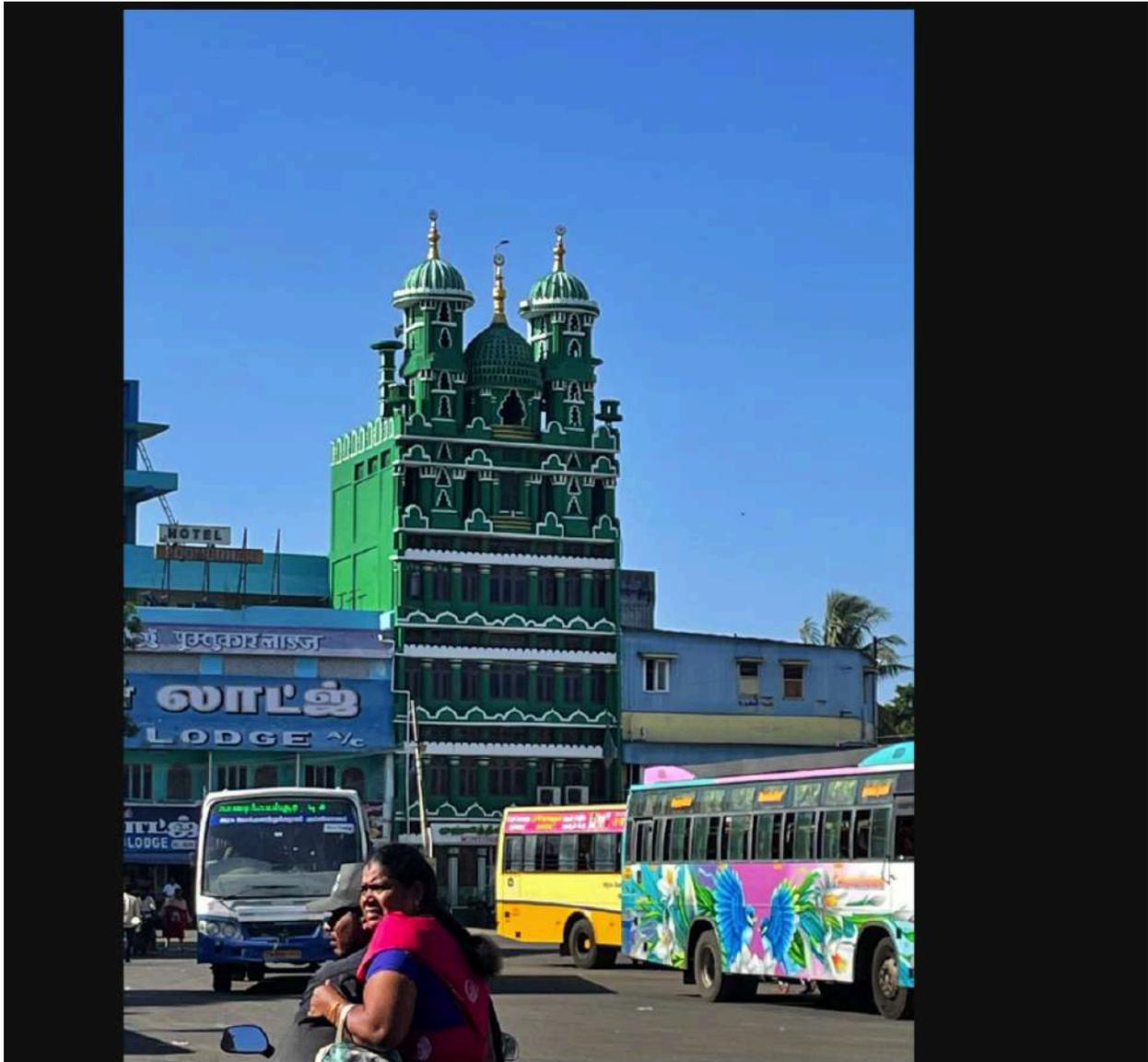








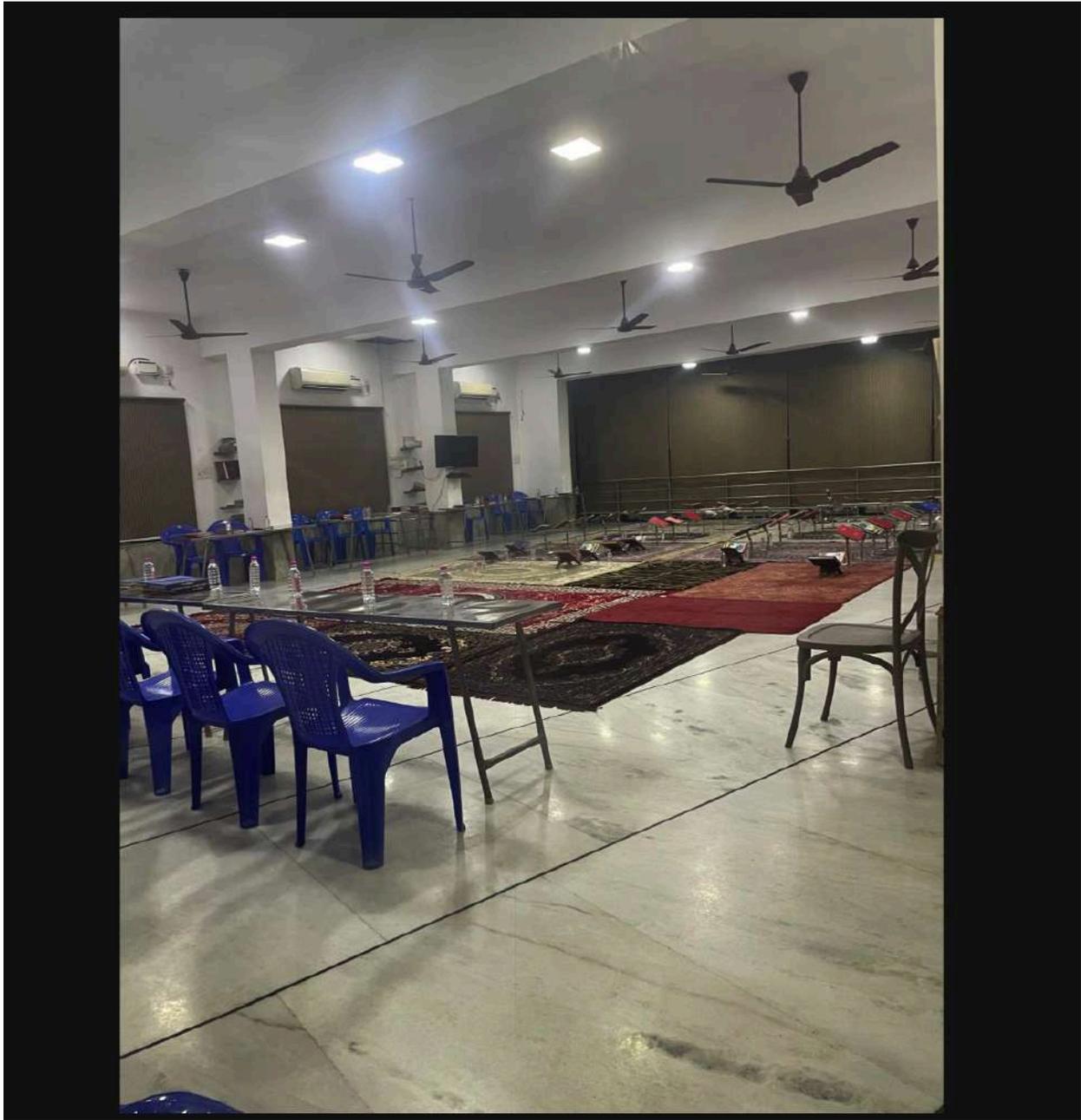








President of Indian Muslim Association, Hong Kong, M.S. HAMEED & Hon Secretary K.A.J. MEERA SAHIB
with His Excellency, Shri K.R. NARAYANAN Vice President of India, during his visit to Hong Kong







ராமநாதபுரம் மாவட்ட தொழுகை, நொன்பு கால அட்டவணை

الْأَوْقَاتُ الشَّرْعِيَّةُ لِلْإِسْكَانِ وَالْإِفْطَارِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْخَمِيْسَةِ

இது மாவட்டம் முழுவதும் உள்ள தொழுகை நொன்பு கால அட்டவணை ஆகும். இது 1947ஆம் ஆண்டு முதல் பயன்பாட்டில் உள்ளது. இது மாவட்டம் முழுவதும் உள்ள தொழுகை நொன்பு கால அட்டவணை ஆகும்.



இது மாவட்டம் முழுவதும் உள்ள தொழுகை நொன்பு கால அட்டவணை ஆகும். இது 1947ஆம் ஆண்டு முதல் பயன்பாட்டில் உள்ளது.

இது மாவட்டம் முழுவதும் உள்ள தொழுகை நொன்பு கால அட்டவணை ஆகும். இது 1947ஆம் ஆண்டு முதல் பயன்பாட்டில் உள்ளது.

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ஜனவரி

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:25	3:44	6:21	8:11	9:30	5:30	5:27	6:31	6:32	6:47	12:26						
6	12:22	3:46	6:24	8:16	9:32	5:29	5:29	6:34	6:34	6:50	12:23						
12	12:19	3:48	6:27	8:21	9:37	5:28	5:28	6:40	6:40	7:07	12:24						
18	12:16	3:50	6:30	8:26	9:42	5:27	5:27	6:53	6:53	7:31	12:25						
24	12:13	3:52	6:33	8:31	9:47	5:26	5:26	7:00	7:00	7:49	12:26						

பிப்ரவரி

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:24	3:46	6:21	8:11	9:30	5:30	5:25	6:35	6:32	6:52	12:25						
6	12:21	3:48	6:24	8:16	9:32	5:29	5:25	6:40	6:34	7:07	12:26						
12	12:18	3:50	6:27	8:21	9:37	5:28	5:24	6:45	6:34	7:25	12:27						
18	12:15	3:52	6:30	8:26	9:42	5:27	5:21	6:50	6:34	7:31	12:28						
24	12:12	3:54	6:33	8:31	9:47	5:26	5:19	6:55	6:34	7:49	12:29						

செப்டம்பர்

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:21	3:28	6:17	8:07	9:26	5:30	6:12	6:32	6:48	6:56	12:18						
6	12:18	3:30	6:20	8:11	9:30	5:29	6:15	6:32	6:48	6:56	12:19						
12	12:15	3:32	6:23	8:14	9:33	5:28	6:16	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:20						
18	12:12	3:34	6:26	8:17	9:36	5:27	6:18	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:21						
24	12:09	3:36	6:29	8:21	9:39	5:26	6:20	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:22						

மார்ச்சு

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:24	3:52	6:33	8:31	9:47	5:26	5:19	6:55	6:34	7:49	12:29						
6	12:21	3:54	6:36	8:34	9:52	5:25	5:19	7:00	6:34	7:59	12:30						
12	12:18	3:56	6:39	8:37	9:55	5:24	5:19	7:05	6:34	8:00	12:31						
18	12:15	3:58	6:42	8:41	9:58	5:23	5:19	7:10	6:34	8:07	12:32						
24	12:12	4:00	6:45	8:44	10:01	5:22	5:19	7:15	6:34	8:12	12:33						

ஏப்ரல்

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:29	3:44	6:29	8:19	9:38	5:30	6:04	6:31	6:41	6:53	12:14						
6	12:26	3:46	6:32	8:22	9:41	5:29	6:06	6:31	6:41	6:54	12:15						
12	12:23	3:48	6:35	8:25	9:44	5:28	6:08	6:31	6:41	6:57	12:16						
18	12:20	3:50	6:38	8:28	9:47	5:27	6:10	6:31	6:41	6:55	12:17						
24	12:17	3:52	6:41	8:31	9:50	5:26	6:12	6:31	6:41	6:57	12:18						

அக்டோபர்

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:21	3:28	6:17	8:07	9:26	5:30	6:12	6:32	6:48	6:56	12:18						
6	12:18	3:30	6:20	8:11	9:30	5:29	6:15	6:32	6:48	6:56	12:19						
12	12:15	3:32	6:23	8:14	9:33	5:28	6:16	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:20						
18	12:12	3:34	6:26	8:17	9:36	5:27	6:18	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:21						
24	12:09	3:36	6:29	8:21	9:39	5:26	6:20	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:22						

மார்ச்சு

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:24	3:52	6:33	8:31	9:47	5:26	5:19	6:55	6:34	7:49	12:29						
6	12:21	3:54	6:36	8:34	9:52	5:25	5:19	7:00	6:34	7:59	12:30						
12	12:18	3:56	6:39	8:37	9:55	5:24	5:19	7:05	6:34	8:00	12:31						
18	12:15	3:58	6:42	8:41	9:58	5:23	5:19	7:10	6:34	8:07	12:32						
24	12:12	4:00	6:45	8:44	10:01	5:22	5:19	7:15	6:34	8:12	12:33						

ஏப்ரல்

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:29	3:44	6:29	8:19	9:38	5:30	6:04	6:31	6:41	6:53	12:14						
6	12:26	3:46	6:32	8:22	9:41	5:29	6:06	6:31	6:41	6:54	12:15						
12	12:23	3:48	6:35	8:25	9:44	5:28	6:08	6:31	6:41	6:57	12:16						
18	12:20	3:50	6:38	8:28	9:47	5:27	6:10	6:31	6:41	6:55	12:17						
24	12:17	3:52	6:41	8:31	9:50	5:26	6:12	6:31	6:41	6:57	12:18						

நவம்பர்

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:21	3:28	6:17	8:07	9:26	5:30	6:12	6:32	6:48	6:56	12:18						
6	12:18	3:30	6:20	8:11	9:30	5:29	6:15	6:32	6:48	6:56	12:19						
12	12:15	3:32	6:23	8:14	9:33	5:28	6:16	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:20						
18	12:12	3:34	6:26	8:17	9:36	5:27	6:18	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:21						
24	12:09	3:36	6:29	8:21	9:39	5:26	6:20	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:22						

ஏப்ரல்

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:29	3:44	6:29	8:19	9:38	5:30	6:04	6:31	6:41	6:53	12:14						
6	12:26	3:46	6:32	8:22	9:41	5:29	6:06	6:31	6:41	6:54	12:15						
12	12:23	3:48	6:35	8:25	9:44	5:28	6:08	6:31	6:41	6:57	12:16						
18	12:20	3:50	6:38	8:28	9:47	5:27	6:10	6:31	6:41	6:55	12:17						
24	12:17	3:52	6:41	8:31	9:50	5:26	6:12	6:31	6:41	6:57	12:18						

ஆகஸ்ட்

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:27	3:47	6:37	8:27	9:46	5:28	6:07	6:43	6:21	6:05	6:40	12:22					
6	12:24	3:49	6:40	8:30	9:49	5:27	6:09	6:49	6:29	6:02	6:39	12:23					
12	12:21	3:51	6:43	8:33	9:52	5:26	6:11	6:51	6:21	6:01	6:42	12:24					
18	12:18	3:53	6:46	8:36	9:55	5:25	6:13	6:54	6:21	6:01	6:42	12:25					
24	12:15	3:55	6:49	8:39	9:58	5:24	6:15	6:57	6:21	6:01	6:42	12:26					

டிசம்பர்

நாள்	சுப	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச	சு	அ	ப	ச
1	12:20	3:30	6:20	8:11	9:30	5:29	6:15	6:32	6:48	6:56	12:19						
6	12:17	3:32	6:23	8:14	9:33	5:28	6:16	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:20						
12	12:14	3:34	6:26	8:17	9:36	5:27	6:18	6:30	6:48	6:56	12:21						

