The Man Who Walked Far Ahead of the Time

P. M. Sayeed

Hon'ble Minister Shri V.P. Ramakrishna Pillai, Janab Shahal Hassan Musaliar Sahib, Chairman, Reception Committee for Thangal Kunju Musaliar Birth Centenary Celebrations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to be here amidst you and to associate myself with this function today. The various programmes organised in connection with the Birth Centenary of Janab Thangal Kunju Musaliar stretching over more than an year, and the kind of public participation and response these programmes have attracted, go to prove the kind of impact that Musaliar had made on the socio-economic, educational, religious and political life of modern Kerala. As a deeply religious person, a social activist, an industrialist and entrepreneur, an educationalist, a man of letters, a publicist and above all, as a fine human being, Musaliar left an indelible imprint of his personality on every area he was associated within his life.

It is not given to every individual to leave behind him institutions of repute, industrial establishments, and above all, enormous admiration and good will in the minds of the people of all walks of life, particularly of the most ordinary men and women associated with all his activities. But Janab Thangal Kunju Musaliar was one of these, rarest of rare kind, who, braving all kinds of odds of the pre-independence India, established a large industrial empire and demonstrated the will and commitment to channelise his energy and resources into the development of the area around him. If today Kerala has taken a place of pride in the country and in the world at large and if this Southern part of the State has earned the reputation of being its industrial hub, men like Janab Musaliar can share a major part of the credit for it.

The kind of entrepreneurial skills, innovativeness, and the willingness to experiment with new ideas and initiatives, demonstrated by Musaliar Sahib was far ahead of the time in which he lived. For the District of Quilon, what he visualized was a completely self-sufficient existence, with industries that could employ the local labour utilising the locally produced raw materials, institutions of learning catering to the requirements of a developed State, and a well-cared population, Janab Musaliar did not stop visualising. He actually laboured for all these and the results of his labour are the numerous institutions bearing his name today and serving the needs of the people of this area.

In running all his industrial and business ventures, the newspaper and institutions of learning, what drove Janab Musaliar forward was not profit motive but an earnest desire to uplift the socially and economically deprived people, more particularly the women of the area. He had very strong and practical views about labour welfare, profit sharing, industrial and labour relations, organisational matters as also ideas for ensuring the maximum output from each employee. In all his organisations, merit and talents received recognition, encouragement and reward. He launched and implemented several laudable schemes for the welfare of his employees.

The cashew processing and export industries reached new heights under Musaliar Sahib's leadership. His own industrial units employed more than 25,000 workers, the single largest number in this industry and his own volume of export accounted for one third of the total export of cashew from India. As the leader of the export trade in cashew, Janab Musaliar took various steps for the consolidation of the industry.

Yet another remarkable idea launched by Musaliar Sahib was the establishment of the Janakshema Samajam with the objective of identifying the specific local needs and to ensure that the benefits of all his welfare schemes actually reached the target groups. All through his life, Janab Musaliar remained a philanthropist and social activist. All along, he championed the cause of co-existence between people of different faiths. He was also a strong Nationalist. The Muslim Majlis founded by him helped enormously in sustaining communal harmony and in promoting national integration. One of the primary objectives of the newspaper launched by him was also the promotion of communal harmony in the State. The educational institutions established by him stand out as a living testimony to the lofty values that Musaliar Sahib stood for. He accomplished all these for the good of the people with a larger vision of the world around him. What more could have been accomplished by an individual in the particular circumstances of the country and the State of Kerala ?

Today, when our Country is going through difficult times, facing various kinds of challenges from within and without, it is quite significant that we recall the messages that far-sighted men like Thangal Kunju Musaliar have left behind. The new generation should try to understand and appreciate the values and sacrifices of these great persons that have gone into the making of our Nation. The India that was visualised by our founding fathers was not the one constituted of people who would be fighting over frivolous issues, over issues of religion and caste and of region and language. Even after fifty years of independence, if we are still worried about issues affecting National integration, it only shows that there are aberrations in our approaches and attitudes and reflects our failure to draw inspiration from the lives and values of people like the Musaliar.

The great philosopher Hegel observed that 'man, incapable of learning lessons from history is bound to repeat the same mistake and then resourceful at what he unwittingly did, he again repeats the same'. On this occasion of Musaliar Birth Centenary Celebrations let us learn lessons and draw inspiration from the life and times of Musaliar without having to commit mistakes.

I wish the people associated with the Institutions established by the late leader, all success in their noble endeavours. I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Shahal Hassan Sahib and all others in this Centenary Celebrations committee for giving me this opportunity to pay my respectful tributes to the memory of Janab Thangal Kunju Musaliar. I wish and pray for the bright future of this institution becoming a deemed university in the near future.

Address delivered at the valedictory function of the T.K.M. Birth Centenary Celebrations.