

## CHAPTER 8

### MUSLIM SCHOLARS

Sheikh Al-Amin bin Ali al-Mazrui (1891AD-1974 AD)

#### a) His birth and early life

His full name is Sheik Al-Amin bin Ali bin Abdallah Al-Mazrui from the Mazrui family. His grandfather, Abdallah al-Mazrui was an Islamic scholar belonging to the Shafi School of thought. He was born in Mombasa 1891 on 15<sup>th</sup> Jamadu-Thani 1380 A.H (27<sup>th</sup> January 1891). His father passed away when he was four years old and thus his paternal Uncle Sheikh Suleiman bin Ali Al-Mazrui took the responsibility of raising him who later married him off to his own daughter. He died on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1947 having left behind three children, among them two sons (Harith Al-Amin Al-Mazrui-former Liwali of Lamu and Professor Ali Mazrui-Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology) and a daughter.

#### b) His Educational background.

He started his elementary education under his Uncle Sheikh Suleiman bin Ali who was a great scholar of that time and had studied various branches of knowledge including Quran, Arabic language, Fiqh among others. His great thirst for knowledge made him travel to Zanzibar to further his education under the eminent scholars of Zanzibar like Sheikh Abdallah Mohammad bin Salim Bakathir and Sayyid Ahmed bin Abu Bakar bin Sumeyt. He later went to Lamu and graduated from Riyadh mosque under the supervision of re-known scholars of that time. He was a brilliant student and outstanding in all the subjects and he used to emerge top of the class. He was able to bring reforms in some of the Islamic scholarly works across the world.

c)

is works

1. He wrote Hidaayatul Atfaal (Guidance of children) which is an introductory book to Islam for the children.
2. He wrote a book entitled 'Masomo ya dini' (religious studies) is essential for the Swahili speakers.
3. He also wrote Majmaul Bahrayn (The meeting of two seas) is another essential publication in the study of Islamic religion.
4. He wrote a weekly paper known as Al-Islah which constituted both Islamic teachings and political issues in Kiswahili and Arabic using the Arabic script. The message in this paper was aimed at positively changing the societal way of thinking.
5. He translated part of the Quran into Kiswahili that is Sura al Fatiha, Al Baqara and a few verses of Al-Imran. It was later completed by his students.

#### d) Achievements and Contributions of Al-Amin Ali bin Abdallah al-Mazrui.

The following are some of the achievements and contributions made by Sheikh Al-amin Ali bin Abdallah towards the development of Islam:

- He authored many publications. Typical among them being, Hidaayatul Atfaal, Masomo ya dini, Majmaul Bahrayn as well.
- He was the first to write books in Kiswahili, for example Masomo ya Dini, to cater for the learning needs of his immediate community.
- He established Madrassatul Ghazali-Islamiyya, a learning institution in which he taught Islamic studies to students from all over East Africa.
- He donated most of his scholarly works to the libraries at the coast.
- Sheikh Al-amin became the Kadhi of Mombasa in 1932 up to 1937.
- He gave many Islamic lectures in the mosques and other Islamic institutions.
- He became the Chief Kadhi of Kenya in 1937 after the death of his uncle Suleiman bin Ali al-Mazrui.

- He is known for his efforts in propagating Islam all over East Africa. He used to move all around East Africa giving lectures. He also used papers such as **Sahifa** and **Islah** for the same purpose.
- He advocated for the rights of women such as education.
- He pioneered a weekly paper called Islah in Kiswahili to fight against retrogressive ideas, colonialism and negative-western ideas.
- He emphasized the necessity of learning Arabic as it is the key to understand Islam better.
- He wrote the first Kiswahili translation of Quran but was to be completed by his students later.
- He was a writer, poet and editor of Kiswahili and Arabic languages.

### Contribution of Al-Amin Ali Al-Mazrui in promoting education among Muslims in Kenya.

- i. He was one of the first generation of graduates in Islam. He became role model for the younger Muslims to emulate.
- ii. He was one of the pioneer reformers of Islam in East Africa. Believe in way of bringing reform was through education.
- iii. Founded and published newspapers through which he advocated education for Muslims.
- iv. He wrote books and articles in which he focused on the importance of education to the Muslims communities.
- v. He freely shared his knowledge with Muslim ummah and as a result shaped the lives of important local Muslims personalities.
- vi. He donated most of his books to the libraries in the Kenyan coast.

Sheikh Abdullah Swaleh al-Farsy (1912-1982)

#### a) Birth and early life

He was born on 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 1912 at Jongeani village in the Island of Zanzibar. He was the first born in his large and well-established family that was being respected for the services they used to provide in both educational and

civil life to the citizens of Zanzibar and Pemba. Sheikh Abdullah Swaleh al-Farsy passed on (died) on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1982, just eight months after he had left Kenya to join his family in Muscat, Oman.

#### b) Educational back ground

After completing the first phase of Islamic traditional education at Masjid Barza, Sheikh al-Farsy joined Central Primary School—the first government school in Zanzibar at the age of ten. He was so dedicated to attaining religious and secular education and he made use of both the afternoons and evenings to study. He was always seen engrossed in any new Islamic book and spent most times in his home library reading.

He learnt from intellectual scholars like Sheikh Abubakar bin Abdullah Bakathir, Sheikh Ahmed bin Muhammad Al-Mlomry who taught him twenty-five books and Sheikh Sayyid Alawy bin Abdul Wahab who taught him twelve books on Fiqh and Arabic. He then went to Kenya to seek more knowledge where he studied tafsir under Sheikh Al-Amin bin Ali. He also studied Risalatul Jamiaat, a book on basic principles of Fiqh from Sayyid Hamid Maasab.

While he was in the secular school, he always emerged ahead of the other students in every subject. His excellence led him to completing eight-year primary education in five years. He then joined a Teachers' Training College from which he graduated in 1932.

He became a primary school teacher between 1932 and 1947 and, following a series of promotions for his good work, he was appointed the Inspector General of primary schools in Zanzibar and Pemba between 1949 and 1952. He later became the principal of Muslim Academy between 1952 and 1956, before being appointed the head teacher of the Arabic Medium School.

In 1960, he went to perform Hajj after which he left the ministry of education in 1967 and became a teacher at the teacher's training college.

In 1960, he was appointed the chief Kadhi of Zanzibar, a post he held for seven years. It was after the bloody CRUSADE incident in the name of Zanzibar Revolution in 1964 that he migrated to Kenya. He was hosted by Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Al-Mazrui his former class mate in the class of Al-Amin Ali Mazrui.

Since his reputation as a scholar had reached far including Kenya, Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Al-Mazrui recommended him to the late Jomo Kenyatta for the post of Chief Kadhi of Kenya. He accepted the appointment and served for fourteen years until his retirement in 1980.

### c) His works

The following are some of the works that sheikh abdallah swaleh al-farsy did:

1. He translated the Qur'an in Kiswahili i.e. "Qurani Takatifu." Its first copy was published in 1969.
2. He wrote the biography of the prophet (seeratul-nabiy).
3. He also wrote the biography of Imam Shaffi.
4. His Kiswahili publication was sura za swala na tafsir izake.
5. He also authored ***upotofu wa tafsiri ya Makadiani***.
6. He used to write the translation of the Qur'an in the weekly *Mwongozo wa Zanzibar* Magazine.
7. He wrote a book entitled *Bid'a* in which he fought against innovations (Bid'a).
8. He wrote a book on mirath (inheritance).

### d) His achievements and contributions

The following are some of the achievements and contributions made by Sheikh Al-amin Ali bin Abdallah towards the development of Islam:

1. He served in the field of education as a head teacher in Muslim Academy, Secondary School and Arabic Medium School.

2. He was appointed the Inspector General of primary schools in Zanzibar and Pemba to spearhead the quality of education in these states.
3. He proposed that community schools be staffed with Islamic teachers who should be paid by the government.
4. He travelled to Nyasaland (Malawi) and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) to give lectures on Islamic Religious Education.
5. In his position as a Chief Kadhi of both Zanzibar and Kenya he lodged defense against all accusations directed to Islam and Muslims.
6. He called for the establishment of separate schools for the Muslims.
7. He wrote books strongly supporting provision of education and saw illiteracy as a menace to both the government and its citizen.
8. He urged the East African Muslims to adhere to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. As a result, a number of young men became interested in studying Islam.
9. He used the voice of Kenya radio to air educative programs about Islam.
10. He wrote several religious books in both Arabic and Kiswahili that enlightened Muslims about their religion.
11. He travelled throughout East Africa giving public speeches and lectures about Islam which resulted in many embracing Islam.
12. He volunteered free services to the Radio of Zanzibar to propagate Islam.
13. He started campaigns against Bid'a (innovations) and refused Qadianism.
14. In Kenya, he was exposed to public debate where he criticized some of the traditional beliefs including shirk and traditional dances.
15. He became a catalyst to the young men by giving mosque seminars.

## **The Lessons that a Muslim can learn from Sheikh Abdallah Swaleh Al-Farsy**

- 1) A Muslim should dedicate his time and energy to the course of Islam. Sheikh Abdallah used whole of his time and energy to learn Islam and propagate it as if it was his main core reason for his existence.
- 2) Bad health and old age should not prevent one from serving Allah. Sheikh Abdallah dedicated his whole life to serve Allah even when old and sick.
- 3) In order for Muslims to truly worship Allah, they have to obey Him and eradicate innovations. Sheikh Abdallah Al-Farsy fought against innovations; he also wrote a book called bidaa.
- 4) With sincerity, Allah will bless one's work to benefit humanity; he was able to translate the quran into Kiswahili which benefited many muslims, and still in use up to date.
- 5) Muslims should dedicate their lives in the propagation of islam. Sheikh abdallah fasry visited all parts of east Africa for the purpose of daawa.
- 6) The way to reforms is through education, he taught and authored many books, e.g utukufu wa swalah na namna ya kuisali. He spent most of his life as a teacher.
- 7) Offering service to islam is not restricted to one's place of birth. He served as a chief kadhi of Kenya even though he was a Zanzibar by origin.
- 8) Muslims should be firm, steadfast and courageous in promotion of Islamic affairs. He fought bidaa practices and even wrote a book on the same.
- 9) Muslims should support women education bearing in mind that his first quran teacher was a muslim female educationist, fatma bint Hamid Said.
- 10) Muslims should seek both Islamic and secular education. Sheikh abdallah farsy undertook the study of religion from many muslim ulamas and also went upto primary teacher's training college.

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### **The challenges encouted by the Muslim scholars**

The following are some of the problems encountered by the Muslim scholars:

1. Lack of financial support that made them to have no means for some of their duties such as printing of their work, travelling for lectures and propagating of Islam.
2. Majority of the Muslims scholars were not well acquainted with the modern technological experience.
3. Some people especially leaders and governmental officials go out to speak ill of them because they see them as threat to their positions. Some of them were harassed and tortured.
4. They faced cultural barriers especially the ones that touching on traditions of the people yet they are against the Islamic code of life. For example, FGM, corruption and music. Thus once they opposed such activities they lack acceptance by the society.
5. Some have been discriminated on bases of tribe lines, age, family background and even skin color.
6. Poor infrastructures such as roads and limited communication network, making their movement and dissemination of their knowledge difficult.
7. Some were forced to work in some difficult areas which are unsuitable for their health and conditions.
8. Their verdicts (fatwa) were often challenged by those whom the fatwa went against them.
9. Some mosques are being run by incompetent committee members whose religious knowledge is limited.