



Mr Abdur Rahim
(Founder, TSSF)



Danish Reyaz
(Research Scholar)

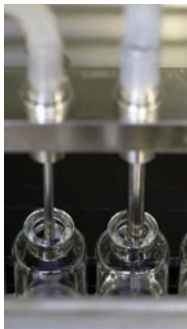
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From Dropout to Changemaker Mamoon Akhtar's

JOURNEY TO TRANSFORM
A SLUM IN HOWRAH



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Danish Reyaz

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Saif Alam Siddiqui

Web Editor:

Nazia Parveen

Advisory Board:

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Correspondent:

Md. Shakeeb Sayem (Kolkata)

Photographer: Sanjay Solanki

Art and Design: Zahid Shaikh

Legal Advisor : Advocate Shamim Ahsan

Marketing Executive: Gauhar Iqbal

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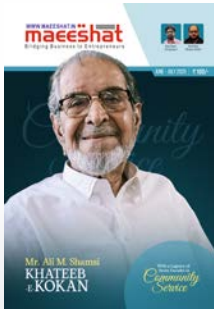
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From The Editor's Desk



By: Danish Reyaz

Tikiapara in Howrah, West Bengal, is a place marked by low literacy and high crime, where spreading education is no easy task. But for Mamoon Akhtar, it is a mission he pursues with passion and steadfast determination to educate underprivileged children.

Once a school dropout, he transformed himself into a social entrepreneur who now runs four English-medium schools in Tikiapara and Bankra, another nearby slum facing similar conditions. His goal is simple: no child should be kept out of school because of poverty or parental neglect.

Apart from education, Mamoon Akhtar focuses on healthcare and livelihoods of the poor with special to women who are either divorcees, widows or victims of difficult circumstances. These initiatives are part of Samaritan Help Mission, an NGO that he established early in his journey.

Mamoon's story is defined by clarity of his vision, tireless dedication and perseverance in the face of adversity. Rising above his own hardships, he has become a beacon of hope for his community—an inspiring leader whose journey deserves to be featured in our magazine as an in-depth and compelling cover story.

Alongside his story, this issue also features an insightful interview with Abdul Rahim, another Kolkata-based social entrepreneur and Chartered Accountant. He explains how his Sirri Saqti Foundation blends individual character and

spiritual development with broader community initiatives in healthcare, education, and livelihoods. His innovative Chapter Model, designed to nurture young leaders committed to social service, brings an added depth to the issue.

Together, these two stories capture the spirit of social entrepreneurship—two individuals with contrasting educational backgrounds who have risen above challenges and stereotypes to create extraordinary impact.

In addition, readers will find a selection of important news from around the globe, thought-provoking views and opinions, and diverse articles on topics of interest. As always, we hope this edition of Maeshat magazine proves both enriching and illuminating. So, what are you waiting for? Dive in—and don't forget to share your experiences, opinions, and suggestions with us.

Halal Beyond Boundaries: WHBC 2025 Kuala Lumpur to Advance Global Partnerships for the Halal Economy

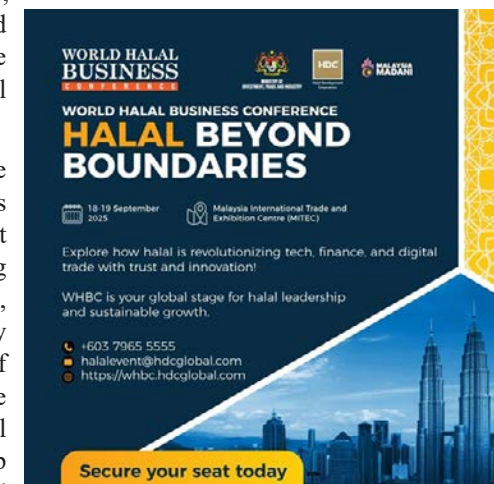
The highly anticipated World Halal Business Conference (WHBC 2025) 2025 Kuala Lumpur is set to take place from 18 to 19 September 2025 at the Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre (MITEC), Kuala Lumpur. Hosted by the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI) and organised by the Halal Development Corporation (HDC), WHBC 2025 will serve as a premier international platform where global policymakers, business leaders, industry players, scholars, and entrepreneurs converge to shape the future trajectory of the global Halal economy.

Since its inception in 2007, the WHBC has established itself as Malaysia's flagship Halal thought leadership avenue, featuring attendance by State Royalties, Prime Ministers, and key government leaders as Guest of Honor. Over the past 17 years, the conference has become a global nexus for thought-leadership knowledge sharing, innovation, and collaboration, fostering Malaysia's leadership position in the integrated Halal ecosystem. The conference's international reach has expanded with editions in Melbourne (2022), London (2023), Riyadh (2024), and Algeria (2025), culminating in the return to Kuala Lumpur for this landmark edition since 2024.

WHBC 2025 Kuala Lumpur with the theme **"Halal Beyond Boundaries"** aims to promote innovation,

sustainability, and inclusivity across industries in line with the Malaysia Halal Industry Master Plan 2030 (HIMP 2030). This edition focuses on transcending traditional borders and limitations, positioning Halal as a global movement unified by diplomacy, trust, innovation, and sustainable economic growth.

The conference is expected to attract around 1,000 guests, including ambassadors, government officials,



industry captains, academics, and civil society representatives.

This year's conference will present a special **Townhall Session** led by the Honourable Dato' Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Chairman of the Malaysia Halal Industry Development Council (MPIH) together with YB Senator Tengku Datuk Seri Utama Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, Minister of MITI. The session will

focus on national Halal strategies, key initiatives, and collaboration prospects with global stakeholders to amplify the industry's growth and sustainability.

The two-day programme will feature high-level keynote addresses, thematic panels, and insightful discussions. Industry leaders from Duopharma Biotech, Hong Leong Islamic Bank and Dutch Lady Milk Industries will share their perspectives on advancing global partnerships and scaling the Halal economy.

Additionally, sessions addressing the Halal meat supply chain, logistics integrity, and business networking will provide practical insights and opportunities for participants.

"We envision WHBC 2025 Kuala Lumpur as the heart for global collaboration and economic empowerment through the Halal economy," said, the chief executive officer of HDC, Hairil Ariffein Sahari. "This conference embodies Malaysia's commitment to innovation, strategic partnerships, and the successful implementation of the Halal Industry Master Plan 2030."

The World Halal Business Conference continues to advocate the advancement of the global Halal ecosystem, facilitating connections and fostering sustainable growth. Stakeholders are invited to join this pivotal gathering to explore opportunities and navigate challenges shaping the future of global Halal economy.

5th Intellectual Conference of IMPAC

The 5th Intellectual Conference of the Indian Muslim Public Affair Committee (IMPAC) convened on August 31, 2025, at Hotel The Caliph in Powai, Mumbai, drawing community leaders, intellectuals, activists, and representatives to address pressing issues facing minorities in India. Presided over by Maulana Obaidullah Khan Azmi, Vice President of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, and concluded by Mr. Mukhtar Hussain, Founder of the Janosa Foundation, the event underscored education, economic empowerment, and social upliftment as key pillars for community progress.

The one-day conference served as a dynamic platform for dialogue on social justice, minority rights, and democratic participation. Notable speakers, including Mr. Mohammad Shafi (National Vice President, Social Democratic Party of India), Dr. Asma Zehra, Advocate Zunaid Khalid, Mr. Shahnawaz Qadri, Maulana Qamaruzzaman, Mr. Mushtaq Malik, Mr. Pervez Alam, and Mr. Saalim Khan, delivered compelling insights. Discussions



spotlighted systemic marginalization, particularly in regions like Assam, where displacement and denial of citizenship rights remain critical concerns.

Education emerged as a cornerstone for empowerment, with speakers advocating for stronger institutions to equip youth with tools to combat marginalization and engage in democratic processes. Mr. Mohammad Shafi emphasized blending intellectual and grassroots efforts, stating, “Education fosters informed advocacy and unity.” Dr. Asma Zehra and others highlighted the need to amplify the community’s voice through youth education, ensuring national representation.

Economic empowerment was a focal point, with calls for strategic actions to address systemic inequalities. Speakers stressed the importance of robust institutions to support economic initiatives, particularly

for women and youth, to drive sustainable development. The conference underscored unity as vital for collective economic progress and defending constitutional rights, especially in marginalized regions.

Social upliftment was a central theme, with Mr. Mohammad Shafi urging, “The struggle for justice must be both intellectual and grassroots-based.” The conference emphasized empowering women and youth, fostering collective representation, and addressing social injustices like those in Assam.

The event concluded with an interactive Q&A session, engaging attendees in vibrant discussions on actionable solutions.

The 5th IMPAC Intellectual Conference at Hotel The Caliph marked a significant step in advocating for minority rights and community development. By fostering dialogue and unity, the event highlighted the power of intellectual forums to drive positive change. IMPAC’s commitment to building empowered institutions and addressing systemic challenges sets a strong foundation for future progress.

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Al-Ameen Educational Society Celebrates Founder's Day 2025 with Prestigious Awards

The Al-Ameen Educational Society, Bengaluru, marked a momentous occasion with the celebration of Founder's Day 2025, held in loving memory of the late Dr. Mumtaz Ahmed Khan Saheb, the visionary founder of the Al-Ameen Movement. The event, hosted at the Al-Ameen Campus near Lalbagh Main Gate, brought together esteemed academicians, students, and community leaders to honor a legacy of educational excellence and social empowerment.

The highlight of the ceremony was the conferment of the prestigious "Al-Ameen All India Community Leadership Award-2025" upon Mr. M Nurul Islam Middy, the esteemed founder of Al-Ameen Mission, West Bengal. Serving as the Chief Guest, Mr. Islam was recognized for his transformative contributions to education and the upliftment of underprivileged communities. Mr. Zackria Hashim, Chairman of the Al-Ameen Scholarship Trust, Bengaluru, graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour, while Mr. Umar Ismail Khan, Chairman of the Al-Ameen Educational Society, presided over the proceedings. Mr. Zubair Anwar Sait, the Honorary Secretary, oversaw the seamless organization of the event.

The day's proceedings were a heartfelt tribute to Mr. Islam's remarkable journey, which began in 1976 when, as a 10th-standard student, he established the Khalatpur Junior High Madrasa in Howrah, West Bengal. This modest initiative

has since blossomed into the Al-Ameen Mission, now encompassing 72 residential campuses across 23 districts, nurturing over 23,000 students. In his acceptance speech, Mr. Islam expressed deep gratitude to Al-Ameen College for the honor, reflecting on his mission's dual focus



on academic excellence and character development rooted in strong values.

Al-Ameen Arts, Science, and Commerce College, affiliated with Bengaluru City University and accredited with a 'B' Grade by NAAC, celebrated Mr. Islam's legacy, which includes mentoring over 4,500 doctors, 4,000 engineers, and numerous civil servants, professors, and lawyers. His leadership shone brightly with 472 students qualifying for free medical seats in government colleges through the NEET (UG) 2025 examination, underscoring the institution's commitment to

excellence.

Mr. Islam's contributions have previously been recognized with the prestigious Banga Bhushan Award from the West Bengal government in 2015 and the Sir Syed Award from the American Federation of Muslims of Indian Origin (AFMI), affirming his transformative impact on education. Dr. Nurul Haque, Principal of Al-Ameen Memorial Minority College, and other dignitaries lauded his vision, drawing parallels with the ethos of the Al-Ameen Movement initiated by Dr. Mumtaz Ahmed Khan to advance education among minority communities. The shared values of quality education and social equity between Al-Ameen College and Al-Ameen Mission were prominently highlighted.

The ceremony concluded with a renewed commitment to educational reform and community empowerment. Al-Ameen College reaffirmed its dedication to supporting such initiatives, announcing open admissions for the 2025-26 academic year across various undergraduate and integrated courses. Mr. Islam's recognition serves as both a celebration of his past achievements and a beacon of inspiration for future generations to harness education as a tool for nation-building.

Attendees, including the Al-Ameen College community, left the event inspired by Mr. Islam's enduring legacy, which continues to illuminate the path for thousands of students across India.



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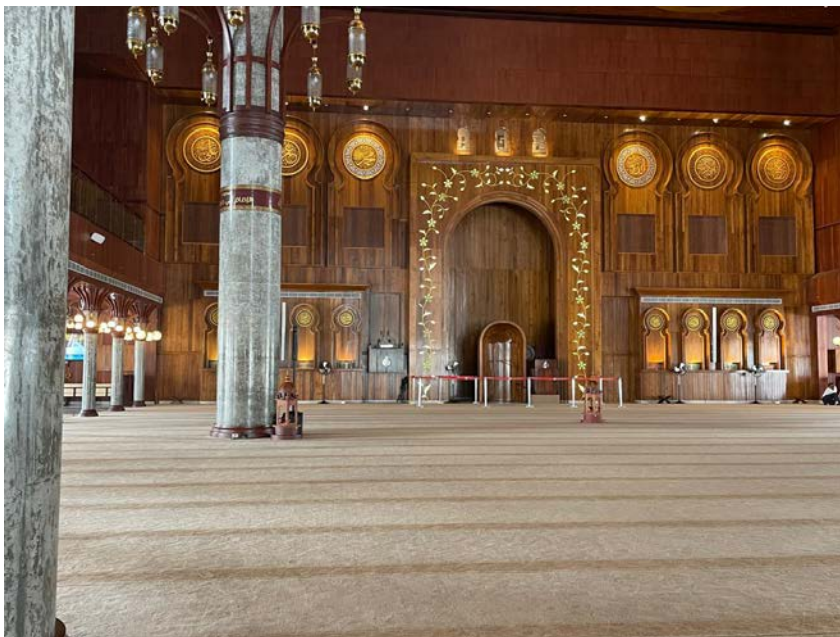
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Wake-Up Call from the East to the Present West



By: Dr Syed Khurshid Hussain

Dr Syed Khurshid Hussain is a senior Physician practicing in Mumbai, India for the last 65 years or so. He graduated as a Gold Medalist from the University of Baroda with an MBBS degree, and has trained in Psychiatry from the Killearn Institute of Neurological Sciences in Scotland, U.K. He also holds a Diploma in Psychiatric Medicine from Bombay University. Dr. Syed also has a keen interest in Social Work with key contributions in the field of education and healthcare especially for parts of the society who cannot afford mainstream education or have been left out of education due to several reasons.



In an era of global interconnectedness, where cultures clash and ideologies vie for dominance, a profound message echoes from the East: it's time for the West to awaken. This wake-up call isn't born of animosity but of concern—a plea for spiritual renewal amid the chaos of materialism and moral decay. Drawing from the wisdom of thinkers like Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of the East, I am exploring the stark divide within Western society, the spiritual hunger of its people, and the potential

for transformation through embracing timeless truths.

At the heart of the West's troubles lies its ruling elite—often portrayed as rascals who prioritize power, profit, and control over the well-being of humanity. These leaders, entrenched in corridors of influence from Wall Street to Westminster, perpetuate systems of exploitation that widen inequality and erode ethical foundations. Their policies, driven by unchecked capitalism and geopolitical ambitions, have led to endless

Wars, environmental devastation, and social fragmentation. This elite class, disconnected from the spiritual essence of life, embodies a hollow pursuit of material dominance, often at the expense of global harmony.

Allama Iqbal, in his critiques, exposed the hollowness of Western ideology and philosophy, arguing that such materialism leads to a soulless existence. He viewed Western nationalism as a flawed construct that fosters division rather than unity, rejecting it outright in favour of a more holistic worldview. Iqbal's sharp analysis serves as a mirror, reflecting how the elite's rascal-like behaviour—marked by hypocrisy and self-interest—has steered the West toward a precipice.

Contrast this with the general masses of the West: ordinary people who embody decency, compassion, and a quiet yearning for something deeper. From the heartland farmers of America to the working-class communities of Europe, these individuals are fundamentally good-hearted, often extending kindness across borders and cultures. They volunteer, innovate for the common good, and seek meaning beyond the superficial.

Yet, they are breathing their last breaths of spirituality. In a world dominated by consumerism, secularism, and digital distractions, traditional values and inner peace are fading. The soul of the West is gasping, starved by a culture that prioritizes gadgets over God, entertainment over enlightenment. This spiritual void leaves many feelings unfulfilled, searching for purpose in an increasingly alienating society.

Iqbal foresaw this decline, envisioning the West's material triumph as a harbinger of its spiritual downfall. He believed the West had lost touch with the divine, leading to a civilization in decay, while Islam offered a path to

revival.^{79e4a3} His thoughts resonate today: the masses, exhausted by hollow pursuits, are on the cusp of a profound shift.

This spiritual exhaustion isn't a dead end—it's an opportunity. The general masses of the West, with their innate goodness, are ready to accept Islam as a revitalizing force. Islam, with its emphasis on unity, justice, and submission to a higher power, addresses the very voids plaguing Western society. It offers a framework for ethical living, community solidarity, and inner tranquillity that transcends materialism.

Conversions to Islam in the West are rising, driven by individuals seeking authenticity amid chaos. From environmental activists drawn to Islamic stewardship of the earth to those disillusioned by inequality finding solace in zakat (charity), the appeal is evident. The masses are not resistant; they are receptive, breathing their last spiritual sighs before embracing a faith that reignites the soul.

Iqbal championed this potential, positioning Islam not in opposition to the West but as its saviour from self-destruction. He critiqued Western democracy and secularism, seeing them as inadequate for true human flourishing, and urged Muslims to lead by example in awakening the world. In his view, the East could bridge the gap, teaching the West to integrate science and spirituality without succumbing to extremes.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal's thoughts on the West are pivotal to this wake-up call. A visionary who bridged Eastern mysticism and Western intellect, Iqbal studied in Europe but remained rooted in Islamic philosophy. He admired the West's scientific advancements and dynamism but lambasted its moral and spiritual shortcomings.

Iqbal argued that Muslims fell behind the West due to stagnation in thought and action, urging a revival of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to reclaim leadership.^{6e8922} Yet, he predicted the West's own decline, driven by excessive materialism and detachment from God. In works like *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he dissected Western philosophies, finding them lacking in holistic wisdom.

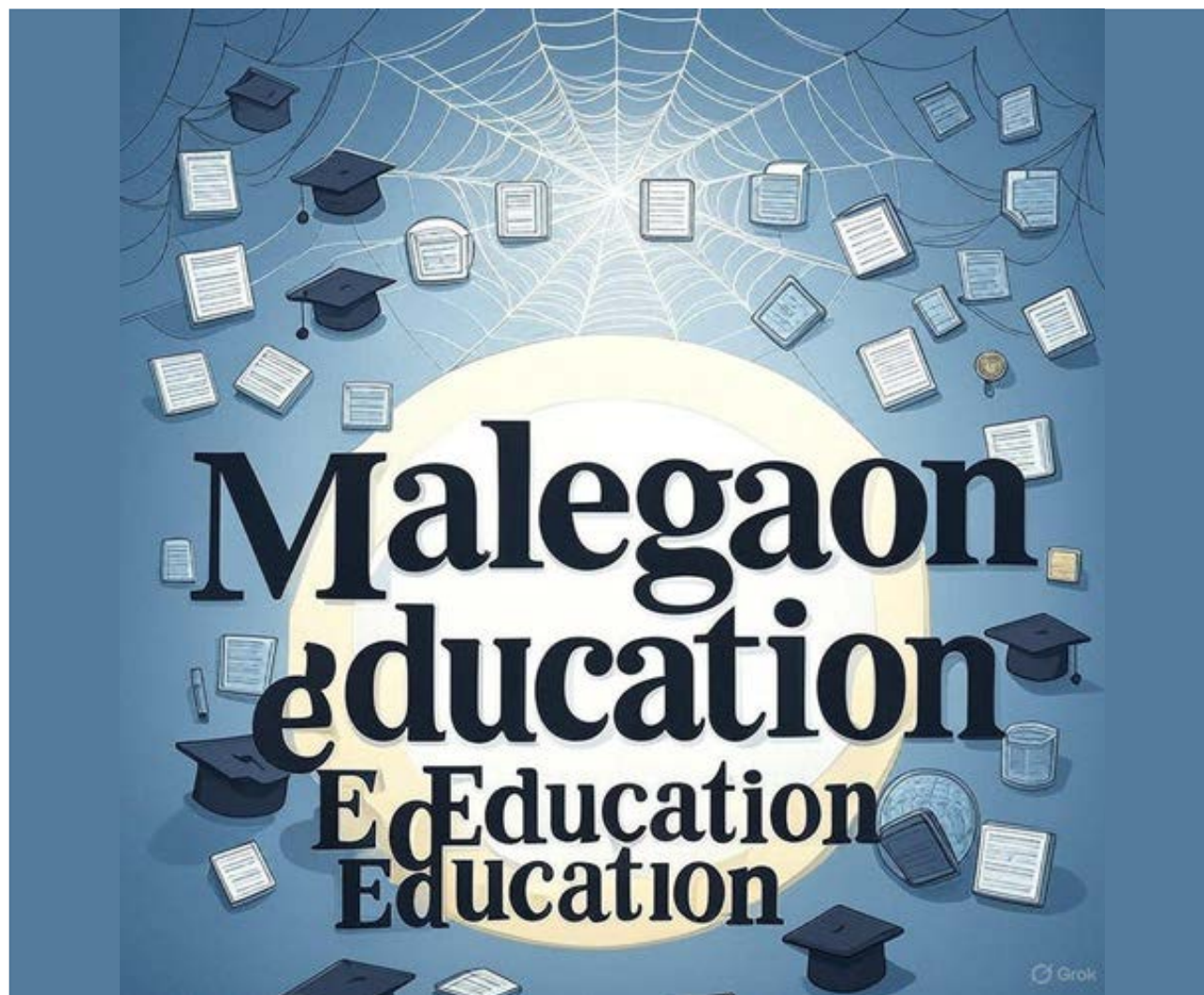
Far from outright rejection, Iqbal saw value in selective adoption: "Learn the good things of the West," he advised, but warned against blind imitation that erodes cultural identity.^{9cd0ab} His poetry, such as in *Bang-e-Dara*, paints the West as a glittering facade hiding inner emptiness, calling for a synthesis where Islam guides humanity forward.

Though his view was imperfect—shaped by limited time in the West—Iqbal's critique remains timeless, highlighting how the elite's rascality accelerates decline while the masses' goodness paves the way for renewal.

This wake-up call from the East isn't a condemnation but an invitation. The ruling elite must confront their rascal ways, while the masses, on their last spiritual breath, stand ready to embrace Islam's transformative light. Allama Iqbal's thoughts illuminate the path: a balanced fusion of East and West, where spirituality triumphs over materialism.

In heeding this call, the West can rediscover its soul, fostering a world of peace and purpose. The time is now—before the last breath fades into silence.

The Malegaon Education Scam: Bogus Appointments and a Web of Corruption



In the bustling town of Malegaon, Maharashtra—a hub of textile mills and diverse communities—a shocking education scam has unravelled, exposing deep-rooted corruption in the state’s public schooling system. What began as a whistleblower complaint about unqualified teachers drawing

salaries for over a decade has ballooned into a multi-crore fraud involving fake appointments, backdated records, and complicit officials. As of September 2025, arrests continue to mount, with the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Nashik Rural Police at the forefront of the probe. This case not only

highlights local malfeasance but also ties into a larger statewide scandal of “ghost teachers” siphoning off billions in public funds.

The Anatomy of the Fraud

At the heart of the Malegaon scam are two primary schools: Malegaon

High School & Junior College, managed by the Anjuman Moinut Tulba society, and Y N Jadhav School in Sangmeshwar. In a brazen scheme, school managements allegedly recruited 13 teachers in 2024 but doctored records to show their appointments dated back to 2012. This sleight of hand allowed them to claim government salaries retroactively—from 2012 to 2021—totalling over Rs 2.6 crore for the Anjuman school alone. Similar irregularities plagued Y N Jadhav School, where at least one junior clerk, Sandip Jadhav, was appointed in 2012 despite failing to pass his Class 10 exams. He pocketed Rs 45 lakh in salary until April 2024, contributing to a combined fraud exceeding Rs 1 crore across the cases.

The modus operandi was simple yet insidious: Proposals for these “appointments” were funnelled through the Nashik Zilla Parishad (ZP) education department, where officials rubber-stamped the documents without verification. Fake joining dates, forged qualifications, and even non-existent staff profiles were entered into the system, enabling the diversion of funds meant for genuine educators. Investigations revealed that unqualified individuals paid bribes—ranging from Rs 20-30 lakh—to secure these phantom positions, a tactic echoing the broader Maharashtra ghost teachers racket. In aided schools like those in Malegaon, lax oversight made such manipulations easier, as these institutions receive government grants with minimal on-ground scrutiny.

This local episode is symptomatic of a massive statewide crisis. In July 2025, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis revealed in the assembly that education officials had created thousands of bogus identities on the Shalarth portal—a digital platform for teacher salaries and records—to embezzle between Rs

2,000 and 3,000 crore. Fake Shalarth IDs, complete with fabricated bank accounts and photos, allowed salaries to be withdrawn for non-existent staff, with bribes demanded even from legitimate teachers for backdated promotions. While the Malegaon case isn’t explicitly linked in reports, its tactics mirror this epidemic, underscoring systemic vulnerabilities in the education bureaucracy.

Key Players and the Trail of Arrests

The scam’s exposure owes much to Zainab, daughter of teacher Mohammad, who filed a complaint on July 27, 2024, at Pawarwadi Police Station in Malegaon. Her allegations triggered a domino effect of revelations, implicating school managements, teachers, and high-ranking officials.

School Management: Ishaque Zariwala, Chairman of Anjuman Moinut Tulba, and other committee members face arrest warrants after their anticipatory bail pleas were rejected by lower courts. They have escalated the matter to the Bombay High Court.

Teachers Involved: On September 2, 2025, five teachers from Malegaon High School—Imtiaz Ahmed Riyaz Ahmed, Aafaque Anjum Ashfaq Ahmed, Faheem Ahmed Iqbal Ahmed, Shaikh Aarif Ibrahim, and Naeem Ahmed Sagheer Ahmed—were arrested following EOW interrogations. Statements from retired headmasters and existing staff corroborated the backdating fraud.

Education Officials: The noose tightened on September 10, 2025, when three senior Nashik ZP figures were nabbed, Praveen Patil (Deputy Director of Education), Uday Deore (Deputy Education Officer), and Sudhir Pagar (Office Superintendent). Patil and Pagar were tied to the

Anjuman school fraud, while Deore cleared the bogus junior clerk at Y N Jadhav School. Produced before a Malegaon court, they were remanded to police custody until September 13, 2025.

Politically, the scandal has roiled Malegaon, a constituency represented by Education Minister Dada Bhuse. Local MLA Mufti Ismail spotlighted the issue during the Maharashtra Assembly’s Monsoon Session in July 2025, accusing corruption of thriving “under the nose” of the minister and demanding accountability. Bhuse’s response led to the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT), headed by Nagpur’s Zone 2 Deputy Commissioner Nityanand Jha, broadening the probe to include Nagpur, Bhandara, Gondia, and Chandrapur districts—where 24 officers and principals have already been arrested.

Broader Implications and the Road Ahead

The Malegaon scam has inflicted lasting damage. Genuine teachers went underpaid while fraudsters siphoned funds, eroding trust in an already strained public education system. With over Rs 3 crore lost locally and billions statewide, it raises urgent questions about digital portals like Shalarth and the need for field-level audits, as urged by former official Ram Pawar.

As the SIT delves deeper—with more arrests likely—the case could reshape Maharashtra’s education governance. For Malegaon’s students, whose futures hang in the balance, swift reforms are not just desirable but essential. The arrests signal progress, but only rigorous oversight can prevent the next ghost from haunting the classroom.

From Dropout to Changemaker:
Mamoon Akhtar's
Journey to Transform a Slum in Howrah



By: Danish Reyaz



Two kilometers east of Howrah lies Tikiapara, a densely populated locality that is predominantly Muslim—about 80% of the total population. With the usual but disorganized chaos of a backward suburb, Tikiapara comes alive early in the morning. The streets buzz with people and vehicles jostling for space, moving side by side. The honking of horns, the screech of sudden brakes, the hurried thud of footsteps, and the loud chatter from roadside vendors and shops all rise in intensity as the day progresses. The air grows thick with smoke and the aroma wafting from hotels and street carts selling a flavorful mix of Muslim and Bengali delicacies.

The noisy, congested lanes are dotted with ramshackle houses, worn-out buildings, and piles of filth and squalor in between—underscoring the poverty and backwardness of the area. Here life is hard and full of struggle, as people live in perpetual financial want and deprivation.

Nevertheless, amidst all the humdrum and cacophony of the locality, under the roofs of Samaritan Mission School children from underprivileged

sections follow every word written on the blackboard and scribble diligently in their notebooks—learning with deep concentration and quietly weaving dreams of a better tomorrow and a world beyond the boundaries of Tikiapara.

Meet Mamoon Akhtar—the man behind this transformation in the heart of Tikiapara. With unwavering resolve, he has dedicated his life to uplifting the downtrodden, believing deeply that education alone holds the power to transform lives and generations. Through the establishment of Samaritan Mission School and a few others, he has opened doors of opportunity for countless children who once saw none.

His work has been acclaimed at the highest levels. Mamoon has twice been honored with the Amazing Indian Award in the education category by Times Now, and the story of his journey has been featured on NDTV and CNN-IBN, as well as in leading national dailies including The Times of India, The Indian Express, The Telegraph, and The Asian Age.

International recognition followed in 2022, when Samaritan Mission School was named among the Top 10 Most Inspirational Schools in the World by UK-based research body T4 Education—a moment that earned him personal congratulations from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Indeed, Mamoon has proven to be a beacon of hope, lighting up the horizon of education in one of the forgotten corners of Howrah district.

That said, Mamoon’s mission doesn’t end at the classroom door. His initiatives stretch further—into health care, livelihood support, and vocational training, with a particular focus on empowering women. In a locality long shadowed by poverty and neglect, he stands as a beacon of hope, proving that change doesn’t always come with noise—sometimes, it arrives quietly, with purpose and determination—and not from outside, but from within.

To better understand the story of Mamoon Akhtar and his initiatives in Tikiapara, it is important to first look at the brief history of this place where he was born and brought up—a place that provided the context for his mission.

A Migrant Community Hub

Tikiapara is not very ancient or modern, it emerged as a locality during the colonial era, when the British began developing Howrah as the twin city of Kolkata (then Calcutta). Owing to its strategic location on the banks of the Hooghly River, Howrah evolved into a major industrial and transportation hub. The establishment of Howrah Railway Station in 1854—one of India’s oldest and busiest—led to a surge in migrant workers, artisans, and daily wage labourers.

Many of these migrants settled in Tikiapara, not far from the station. Over time, the area developed into



a densely populated neighbourhood with a high concentration of Muslims, primarily migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and parts of rural Bengal. Inhabited largely by the poor, the locality remained neglected in terms of modern infrastructure and civic amenities. As a result, Tikiapara became an urban slum, marked by overcrowded ghettos, poor sanitation,

and inadequate access to healthcare and education.

Against this backdrop, Mamoon Akhtar was born in 19xx, gaining firsthand experience of the challenges and hardships of life in the area. As he grew up, this exposure prompted him to take matters into his own hands and work for the betterment of the people

living in Tikiapara.

When the School Gates Closed

Mamoon Akhtar’s family originally hailed from Bihar. It was his grandfather who migrated to Tikiapara in search of better livelihood opportunities. Both Mamoon’s father and Mamoon

himself were born in Tikiapara. His father, a man of limited income and resources—a local contractor—worked hard to support the family. Undeterred by their circumstances, he enrolled Mamoon in an English-medium school, hoping to provide his son with a quality education.

“I considered myself fortunate to

go to an English-medium school, considering most of my friends in the area could never even imagine going to school—let alone an English-medium one,” recalls Mamoon.

His father’s constant encouragement helped Mamoon achieve good grades, even as financial challenges loomed over his educational journey. But one fateful day, in seventh grade, Mamoon had to drop out, as his father could no longer afford the cost of his education. The incident was a stark reflection of how dire their financial situation truly was.

He recalls, “I was barred from sitting for the exams in my seventh class by one of my teachers due to nonpayment of fees. That unfortunate memory has stuck with me—I can’t shake it off. But on the other hand, that incident also fuelled my determination to do something about it.”

He continues, “Walking out of school that day felt like it took ages. I walked slowly and listlessly—my steps felt as heavy as tons, and the bag on my shoulder seemed heavier than ever.”

That day marked the end of Mamoon’s formal schooling—but not the end of his education. Refusing to let circumstances define his future, he continued studying on his own, eventually clearing his Class 12 exams. He bore the cost of his own education and supported his family by tutoring students—ranging from nursery to upper primary—often burning the candle at both ends.

What began as a means of survival soon grew into a calling. From that point on, Mamoon’s path started to shift—quietly but decisively—toward something larger: a lifelong journey in the service of education.

When Life’s Purpose Found Him

Deep down, Mamoon always carried



a quiet conviction—that he was meant to do something meaningful for the community living on the margins. But for a long time, he didn’t know where to begin. He lacked a clear roadmap, and resources were scarce. Still, those who carry a deep desire for change are often guided by providence. When the time is right, doors begin to open. The key lies in recognizing the moment—and having the courage to walk through it. One such moment eventually came his way.

It was just another muggy, chaotic day in the month of July 1999 on the untidy streets of Tikiapara. Mamoon Akhtar was walking along, wrapped in thought, when he suddenly heard the cries of a woman and a child. He explains that Tikiapara, with its high rates of illiteracy, was also plagued by mafias and criminals who preyed on the poverty of its residents—often forcing them into drug trafficking.

Those who resisted became victims of their brutality, like the woman whose cries he had just heard. She was being beaten by local goons while others stood by, watching helplessly.

As Mamoon approached, the child ran up to him and clung to his feet, begging him to save his mother. Mamoon confronted the goons and demanded they stop. A scuffle broke out. Mamoon sustained injuries but managed to rescue the woman.

Grateful, the mother and her son thanked him. Being curious, Mamoon then asked the boy what he did. The boy looked up and replied softly, “I want to study—but we’re too poor. I’ve never been to school.”

Struck by the boy’s honesty and hunger to learn, Mamoon told him, “Come to my house tomorrow. I’ll teach you.”

The next day, the boy showed up—carrying nothing but hope. Mamoon handed him a pen and a notebook. That small gesture opened a door. The next day, the boy returned—with three more children. The day after that, two more joined them. None of them had ever been to school, but all of them shared one thing: a burning desire to learn.

“I had only invited one,” Mamoon recalls, “but by the third day, six children sat in front of me. That’s when it hit me—this was God’s plan. His way of telling me something had to begin. Something meaningful for these forgotten children. And somehow, He had chosen me to start it.”

Recognizing the calling, Mamoon had now found his purpose in life—to educate the children of his locality who would otherwise never step into a



school, as their parents couldn’t afford it and no one truly cared about them.

Idea for a School Takes Root

Mamoon Akhtar was a man of extremely limited means. Besides tutoring children, he had taken a job as a librarian at a private school, but even then, it was difficult for him to keep the hearth burning. His father had passed away and he had four sisters and his mother to take care of. In such a situation, the arrival of a new set of children brought with it a fresh challenge.

Teaching them for free wasn’t an issue—he would have done it anyway, having firsthand experience of what it feels like to be turned away from school due to lack of money. The real challenge lay in taking care of the various needs of these children. Nevertheless, he embraced the responsibility, despite his trifling

income. Soon, the number of children from poverty-stricken backgrounds began to grow, overflowing the already cramped space of his home.

It didn’t take long for Mamoon to realize that merely helping and teaching these children wouldn’t be truly fruitful unless they went to school—which their poor parents could never afford. So, an idea began to take shape in his mind: What if I started a school for them myself? It was a bold idea—and daunting too—but somehow, it felt right.

“I wanted to give my initiative a shape—a real, tangible form,” Mamoon recalls. “A school that these children could call their own. It was hard to imagine, even harder to make happen—but I was clear in my heart and determined that it had to be done. My guide through it all was Allah Subhanahu wa Ta’ala. I told

myself, if I took a sincere step in the right direction, He would take care of the rest. And that seems to have happened.”

Mission Begins with a Humble School

In a place like Tikiapara, it was rare to see someone teaching children with such dedication and selflessness. Word of Mamoon’s efforts began to spread, and more children started showing up. As the number reached 25, Mamoon moved them to a small space beside his home—a patch of ground under a thatched roof that leaked whenever it rained. Just 600 square feet wide, it was an ordinary arrangement by any measure. But to the children, it felt like a palace—because within those walls, they found something priceless: the light of education. And thus, it was named: Light House—a beacon for those lost in the shadows of poverty. It



was the first school Mamoon built that marked the beginning of his lifelong mission to uplift the underprivileged through education.

To keep the school alive, Mamoon went around the neighborhood, collecting old newspapers, used objects—even broken odds and ends—anything he could trade for a few rupees at the kabadiwala’s. He added that to his own modest earnings and somehow kept things going. It was never enough, but he stretched every coin—because quitting was never part of the plan.

The education was essentially free, but to ensure that students valued it and didn’t feel guilty later in life for having received something without cost, Mamoon asked each child to pay

a nominal fee of five rupees. Even that was difficult for quite a few. Those who couldn’t afford it were asked to bring something of value—old newspapers, used notebooks, or any item that could be traded.

In his mission, Mamoon persuaded a few college-going girls to volunteer as part-time teachers. He could only afford to pay them 100 rupees a month for their service. “I will always remain indebted to those girls who helped me in the early days,” Mamoon says with gratitude. “Despite receiving just a pittance as salary, they stood by me. Without their support, I couldn’t have come this far.”

A Plea for Help That Worked

Gradually, with each passing day

difficulties kept mounting, and the lack of funds now were felt more acutely than ever. But where could Mamoon turn for help? The people around him were all poor and those who had a little held on tightly. And truth be told, Mamoon didn’t know how funds were even raised? He didn’t know how to ask for it. That world was unfamiliar to him.

Still, Mamoon held on to his faith and pressed forward, determined to make his initiative work. One day, while leafing through a newspaper, a photo caught his eye—a foreign woman, smiling warmly, surrounded by schoolchildren. “Something about that picture struck me,” Mamoon says. “She looked kind, compassionate. I thought to myself—if anyone could



help, maybe it’s her.”

A little further digging revealed she was the wife of US Consul General, and her name was Lee Alison Sibley. On impulse, Mamoon decided to write to her, inviting her to visit his school. It was a bold step—asking the wife of a top diplomat to step into a crumbling one-room school that too inside a slum. “Would she even consider it?” he wondered. But something told him it was worth a try.

A handwritten letter didn’t feel right, Mamoon thought. So, he borrowed a typewriter and typed it himself—carefully, word by word—hoping it would strike the right chord with Mrs. Sibley. Before posting it, he turned to his mother. “Touch it, Mother,” he said, “and pray over it.” She did, reciting quiet duas from the heart. Mamoon says he has always followed this ritual—every important letter,

every meaningful document must first pass through his mother’s hands. The practice continues to this day—an act of faith, rooted in love and belief in the unseen power of a mother’s prayer.

However, contrary to his expectations, Mrs. Sibley’s office replied, expressing her inability to visit the school—citing concerns about it being located in a Muslim-dominated area. It didn’t take Mamoon long to understand why. The horrific 9/11 attack had just taken place, leaving deep scars across America and beyond.

But Mamoon wasn’t one to give up. From the letterhead, he found Mrs. Sibley’s email address and decided to write to her directly. He wrote:

Dear Mrs. Sibley,

Thank you for taking the time to respond. I truly appreciate it—it means a lot to me. For your knowledge, I

would like to explain that my school is dedicated to underprivileged children without differentiating between caste, creed, and religion. Yes, it is located in predominantly Muslim area, but that also means that people here are mostly poor and illiterate, struggling to feed and educate their children.

What happened to your nation on 9/11 is painful, and as a Muslim I feel that pain just as deeply. It becomes even more concerning for us because such incidents cast shadows on the entire community. I sincerely hope you’ll agree that for the act of a few violent, misguided individuals the entire community shouldn’t be held responsible.

I understand visiting my school might be difficult—it’s deep in the slums, and conditions aren’t ideal. Still, if you could help in any small way, perhaps by contributing for some basic



supplies—pens, pencils, books, and notebooks—it would mean the world to these children.

I hope I’m not asking for too much.

Warm regards,

Mamoon Akhtar

The email turned out to be a turning point—the content of the email struck a chord with Mrs. Sibley, who soon expressed her desire to visit the school. When she arrived, she was moved by the poor condition of the school and the children but deeply impressed by Mamoon’s dedication despite the challenges. She donated 10,000 rupees to support the school. The very next day, Mrs. Sibley invited Mamoon to the U.S. Consulate in Kolkata, where her mother generously contributed another 20,000 rupees

“In just three days,” Mamoon recalls, “I had 30,000 rupees in hand. It was a significant amount—and an even greater encouragement.” With that money, he built a toilet for the students, bought a few pieces of

furniture and some stationery, and took the first formal step—registering a society called ‘Samaritan Help Mission’ to manage the school and future initiatives.

In line with the name of the society, the school came to be known as Samaritan Mission School. Mamoon says he was drawn to the word Samaritan, which refers to someone who helps others in need or in danger.

“The word gained significance from a Biblical parable,” he explains, “where a man from Samaria stops to help a wounded traveler while others simply pass by. Because of that story, the term (Good) Samaritan has come to symbolize for compassion, mercy, and selfless help.”

A Headline That Caught Attention

Following the initial support from Mrs. Sibley, a second wave of funding came surprisingly soon—from a far-off and unexpected place: Mumbai. “Can you believe,” Mamoon says with

a smile, “a small school in a forgotten corner of Kolkata caught the attention of someone sitting in Mumbai?”

He considers this moment a turning point in his journey and credits it, once again, to Mrs. Sibley. “A few days after visiting the school, Mrs. Sibley sent a reporter from Asian Age to cover the story,” he narrates, his voice full of gratitude.

Mamoon recalls the reporter after spending time at school was hugely impressed. Before leaving, he asked Mamoon what headline he would prefer for the article. Mamoon instinctively suggested one. The next morning, the story appeared in the newspaper with the powerful headline:

“Our services are based on need, not on creed.”

“It captured the soul of our mission,” Mamoon reflects. “That one line told the whole story.” The Asian Age, had only a modest circulation at the time, but just enough for the story to reach a kind-hearted and generous



man—Ramesh Kacholia—all the way to Mumbai. The story touched him deeply.

Without delay, Ramesh Kacholia sent his son—Ashish Kacholia, now a well-known stock market investor—to visit Mamoon’s school. After seeing the school firsthand and witnessing Mamoon’s quiet determination, Ashish handed over 11,000 rupees on his father’s behalf.

“This was the second major support for the school,” Mamoon says. “It gave me real momentum. For the first time, I saw how my work was reaching people I had never known—people willing to stand with me in this mission.”

Donor Becomes Mentor

Ramesh Kacholia had founded Caring Friends, a Mumbai-based nonprofit organization that seek to support education and livelihood programs for the underprivileged. When he read about Mamoon’s school he was moved and impressed as the initiative aligned

with his vision, prompting him to send financial support.

“Ever since that first gesture, Ramesh Uncle—I call him uncle out of deep respect—has been more than just a donor,” Mamoon says. “He’s been a mentor, a guide, a steady hand-holder—and a constant source of encouragement throughout the years.”

He says that not only Ramesh Kacholia but also his son, Ashish Kacholia, and Ashish’s wife, Sushmita Kacholia, have continued to offer valuable support and guidance to Samaritan Help Mission.

Mamoon reflects for a moment before continuing, “I have several donors, but the bond I share with Ramesh Uncle is something special. Perhaps it’s because he truly believed in me—at a time when very few did.”

“That kind of faith doesn’t fade,” Mamoon adds quietly. “It fuels you. It reminds you that you’re not alone.”

At the heart of this trust lies an act of honesty on Mamoon’s part. Of

the 11,000 rupees he received from Ramesh Kacholia—meant for laying concrete flooring in the school—Mamoon completed the work using only 8,000 rupees and returned the remaining 3,000 rupees. This simple yet powerful gesture left a lasting impression on Ramesh Kacholia. For him, it wasn’t about the money—it was about Mamoon’s integrity. That one act created a bond of deep trust and respect, forming the bedrock of a relationship that would support Mamoon’s mission for years to come.

From One Room to Real School

Within Tikiapara, Mamoon managed to shift people’s mindset through his sincere efforts—remarkably, in just a couple of years. He wasn’t just running the school; he was also spending significant time counseling residents about the importance of education for their children and their future. These efforts had the desired effect. From being initially reluctant to listen, the residents gradually became more



receptive—especially after seeing children from his school reading and speaking English. It proved to be an eye-opener, encouraging more parents to send their children to Samaritan. As a result, the school witnessed a steady rise in enrollment, eventually necessitating the expansion of facilities to accommodate the growing numbers.

At the same time, Mamoon’s initiative began to gain recognition as a sincere effort toward educating the underprivileged. It attracted support from like-minded individuals, bringing in much-needed funds for his growing school. With their help, Mamoon purchased a nearby 50,000-square-foot plot in 2006. On this land, he constructed a new school building, and thus, Samaritan Mission School officially began operations on May 26, 2007. It received registration from the West Bengal Government the following year.

“For me, it was a watershed moment,” Mamoon recalls. “To see my dream finally take shape—students walking into real classrooms, sitting at proper desks and benches—was overwhelming. The sight of young minds engaged in learning, with books in hand and hope in their eyes, made every struggle feel worthwhile.”

Initially, the school offered classes from Nursery to Class IV, but since 2009 each year a new grade has been added. The school consistently improved its performance, with hundreds of students excelling academically, elevating the school’s reputation significantly. The school received WBBSE affiliation in 2016.

A Lost Campus Reborn

The year 2014 marked a defining turning point in Mamoon’s journey as a sprawling two-acre estate came into his fold, significantly expanding his mission. The property had been bequeathed by the Jewish couple

Rebecca and Isaac Raphael Belilious, who had died childless by 1910. It included a two-story school building, a football field, a basketball court, and a water body—all now in ruins. The school was defunct, the property was encroached upon and had become a haven for drug peddlers and anti-social elements, while the once-beautiful pond had turned into a garbage dump. The sight of the once-thriving educational space in ruins pained Mamoon deeply—especially since, as a child, he had swum in that very pond.

Mamoon took it upon himself to revive the place. Along with a few close friends, he began mobilizing the residents of Tikiapara—knocking on doors, building awareness, and gathering support. At the same time, he sought assistance from the Howrah police to clear the dilapidated land of illegal encroachments.

He recalls that his efforts culminated



in a large public meeting held on November 14, 2014—Children’s Day—where thousands of residents gathered at the site. Present at the meeting were the trustees of the Belilious Trust Estate, the local MLA, and the Howrah Police Commissioner. Mamoon says that various ideas were floated regarding the future of the place. He passionately advocated for reviving the school and proposed converting the erstwhile Urdu-medium institution into an English-medium one.

Some people proposed turning it into a madrasa. I told them, “We already have enough religious schools. What our children need is quality English-medium education that opens up real opportunities,” he recounts.

He shares that, after some debate, his proposal was accepted. A resolution was passed to hand over

the management of the property to Samaritan Help Mission, with a mandate to renovate it and run both an English-medium school and an evening school with the name of Rebecca Belilious English Institution.

Mamoon mentions, “Within just a few weeks, with the help of local residents, Samaritan volunteers, and the Howrah Municipal Corporation, the campus was cleaned up, repaired, and brought back to life. What had once been a derelict, crime-infested zone was now a thriving, vibrant educational space serving underprivileged children and the wider community.”

Since December 2014, the Rebecca Belilious English Institution, located on Belilious Road in Tikiapara, has been providing quality education and offering community welfare services. The institution runs both a pre-nursery and a primary school (from Class I

to IV), while another floor houses the Samaritan Mission School High, which, since 2021, has expanded up to the Class XII level.

More Schools Under the Wings

Bankra is another urban slum about 10 kilometers away from Tikiapara, and conditions there are no better. With illiteracy and poverty much like in Tikiapara, Bankra is also high on crime and unemployment. Samaritan has also extended its presence here. Under Samaritan Mission School umbrella two schools are operational in Bankra. The Samaritan Public School, established in 2016, has been serving underprivileged students from nursery up to Class VIII. In 2023, a new school was added to the same compound, offering education up to Class XII. Similar to their counterparts



in Tikiapara the schools in Bankra provide best quality education essential to transform the lives of children living in abject poverty.

Recognizing the Samaritan Mission’s expertise in running schools efficiently, the Howrah Municipal Corporation also approached Mamoon in 2019 to take over the then-closed Tikiapara Municipal School. Under Mamoon’s outstanding leadership, the school saw rapid transformation—within a year, enrollment grew to 400 students, and the numbers have continued to rise. Originally an Urdu-medium institution, it has since been converted into a fully functional, thriving English-medium school.

What began with just six students in a small room has now grown into a thriving network of schools with nearly 10,000 students across two sprawling campuses—Mamoon’s dream fructified in the most remarkable way.

What’s even more inspiring is that this quality, modern education is offered at a nominal fee which is to cover only a fraction of the operational cost. “This isn’t a business,” Mamoon emphasizes. “It’s a mission.”

Nurturing Minds and Bodies

At Samaritan, students receive a complete and comprehensive education focused on their psychological, intellectual, and physical growth. The curriculum is thoughtfully designed, and teachers are well-trained to implement the best teaching methods.

The school boasts smart classrooms, well-equipped science and computer labs, and libraries stocked with a wide range of books. While the academics are emphasized the sports are given equal importance.

A wide array of sports facilities—

including football, cricket, archery, swimming, and basketball—is available at Samaritan. However, the introduction of modern astro turfs for football and basketball has been a real game-changer.

“Sports can be a powerful driver of social change,” explains Mamoon. “When our Samaritan girls take to the football field in proper sports attire—boots and knickers—it breaks long-held social taboos. The community no longer sees them with conservative eyes; instead, people feel proud and happy for them. That pride becomes a catalyst for parents to give their daughters the freedom they deserve.”

He also mentions that, in addition to modern sports, regular physical training sessions and yoga classes are conducted at Samaritan to ensure the overall physical well-being of students.



Emphasis on English

English remains a major area of focus at Samaritan, serving as a psychological motivator for parents to enroll their children. “Many parents see English as a gateway to opportunities and success,” says Mamoon. “They want their children to speak the language fluently, but most cannot afford private English-medium schools—especially those living in slums.”

He adds that children of rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, daily wage workers, petty criminals, and even prisoners study at Samaritan. “Whenever I meet their parents,” he says, “I see a sense of pride on their faces—pride that their children can now speak in English. For many of them, who are themselves illiterate, this was once an unimaginable dream.”

“There is an English Access Micro-Scholarship Program—commonly known as ACCESS—aimed at bright students of 13 to 20 years old from economically disadvantaged

backgrounds,” Mamoon explains. “It helps them build a strong foundation in English, opening doors to better career and educational opportunities. Some even get the chance to train and study in the United States, which can be truly life-changing.”

Coaching and Counselling

Samaritan has taken another significant step forward. In addition to formal education, it has begun offering coaching for its own students as well as those from other institutions who aspire to succeed in competitive exams such as NEET, JEE, WBJEE, staff selection and civil service examinations at both the state and central levels.

Mamoon says, “Although we are new to this domain, the early results have been encouraging. Our expert faculty teaches in a goal-oriented manner, leaving no stone unturned. In addition to the courses, they guide students on adopting the right strategies to crack these exams. They also work to keep students highly motivated throughout

the program, helping them maintain consistent effort.”

We also provide career counselling to our students starting from the high school level, helping them choose the right career path early on based on their aptitude and interests. Mamoon says, “Career counselling is as important as coaching, because a wrong career choice—regardless of a student’s talent or merit—can derail their entire future.”

Broadening the Horizon

Samaritan Help Mission’s primary focus has been on education. Nevertheless, what began as an educational initiative also expanded to address some of Tikiapara’s immediate needs, including healthcare and livelihood support. Mamoon says that peace at home is essential for students to have a focused mind for their studies. A disturbed mind can’t concentrate.

He further says, “Initially, we started with free monthly health check-up



camps for our students and provided rations to their extremely poor families. But soon, our initiative scaled up to include health centers for the general public, along with vocational training and livelihood programs for women.”

Building a Healthier Tikiapara

Awareness about health and sanitation in Tikiapara was at its lowest, leading to widespread illness and disease. Further, poverty-stricken families often ignored ailments, allowing them to worsen without treatment. It was in this context that Samaritan Help Mission made its foray into healthcare by establishing the Samaritan Health Care and Awareness Center. The center provided residents of Tikiapara with primary healthcare services and medicines. It played a crucial role in detecting diseases at early stages and building general awareness about the

importance of staying healthy.

However, one center proved inadequate given the large population of Tikiapara, so a second health center—Rebecca Belilious Charitable Dispensary—was established within the campus, better equipped and more advanced than the first.

It houses dedicated rooms for ophthalmology, dentistry, cardiac care, gynaecology, and general medicine, along with facilities for an ICU, a surgery ward, and a well-equipped laboratory. “We have been treating around 1 lakh outpatients and 30,000 inpatients annually,” says Mamoon with pride.

In addition to the two health centers, Samaritan also operates Mobile Clinic service. The need for a Mobile Clinic arose during the COVID pandemic. Government and private hospitals were overwhelmed with

COVID patients, and many healthcare professionals themselves had fallen ill. Several private hospitals even shut down completely. During this time, non-COVID patients—especially the elderly, who were more vulnerable to infection—struggled to access treatment for general health issues.

Mamoon recalls that it was during this crisis that the Samaritan Mobile Clinic was launched—two units that traveled through both urban and rural areas of Howrah, delivering free medical care and medicines directly to people’s doorsteps.

The initiative proved to be a major relief for the people of Howrah and was so impactful that it has continued beyond the pandemic. So far, the Mobile Clinic has served approximately 2,000 patients.

That said, there is a water treatment plant inside the campus that provides



safe drinking water to the people of Tikiapara, helping to prevent waterborne diseases. In addition, regular health awareness campaigns are conducted in the locality. Together, these efforts reflect the seriousness of Samaritan’s interventions in improving the overall health conditions of Tikiapara.

Empowering Through Skills

The vocational training and livelihood program is another flagship initiative from Samaritan to bring about a tangible change in a society stricken with poverty. The program is aimed at making women—especially widowed and divorced women—equipped with some skills that enable them to earn and improve their lives.

“In the beginning,” Mamoon shares, “we introduced skill-based programs like sewing and embroidery, tailored for women. It received an enthusiastic

response. Not only widows and divorcees, but also other women, including college-going girls eager to become self-reliant enrolled in large numbers. We actively supported in their placement using our connections, and many of them found meaningful employment. Today, nearly 500 women work as dressmakers for leading brands, while several have gone on to establish their own stitching centers and boutiques, marking a significant step toward financial independence and dignity.”

Over time, Samaritan Vocational Training has expanded with multiple diploma and certificate courses offered in various vocations for both men and women. The courses include Optometry, Medical Lab Technician, Nursing & Midwifery, Pre Primary Teachers Training, Rehabilitation Therapy, Computerized Financial Management, and Fashion Design

Beautician.

“The main idea behind our vocational training program is to turn dependents into income earners, equipping them with practical, job-ready skills so they earn a respectable livelihood. And I am proud to say that we have made meaningful progress toward that mission,” states Mamoon.

As part of its broader vision of financial empowerment, Samaritan has actively worked to protect vulnerable residents from fraudulent schemes while guiding them toward secure and sustainable financial practices. “At one time,” Mamoon says, “fake chit fund schemes were rampant in our slum. Many people lost their hard-earned money because they were desperate for high returns. We knew we had to intervene.”

Samaritan launched a financial inclusion drive, educating residents



about the risks of unregulated schemes and encouraging them to enter the formal banking system. As a result, a State Bank of India kiosk was set up right within the Samaritan Help Mission campus.

Today, over 7,500 women with Aadhaar registration hold accounts there. For the first time, many of them have a safe place to keep their income, access to savings tools and schemes, and eligibility for government welfare schemes aimed at the poor and marginalized.

Besides all that, for those who are extremely poor, Samaritan Help Mission provides rations and offers financial assistance in special circumstances. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Samaritan rose to the occasion by distributing ration kits and extending financial support to the most vulnerable families, including

migrant workers affected by the prolonged lockdowns. Mamoon shares that nearly 16,000 families benefited from this initiative.

A Feminist in Action

The focus of Mamoon's community service from the very beginning has been rooted in deep compassion and strong commitment to serving the needy and underprivileged. However, an equally important aspect of his mission has been the empowerment of women.

"In every society—whether advanced or backward—it is women who have always faced discrimination," Mamoon observes. "In poorer and more marginalized communities, their plight is even worse. They're the ones who bear the brunt of poverty, often left to care for their families with very little, while the men around them

neglect responsibilities and squander their meager earnings on harmful habits like alcoholism, drug abuse, and gambling."

Moved by their struggles, Mamoon firmly believes that empowering women is essential—and a shared responsibility. "It's our duty," he says, "to open doors for women, to remove the barriers that hold them back, so they can claim their rightful place in society."

"I'm no great figure in the world of feminism and women's rights," he adds humbly, "but I'm proud to say that today, more than half of the students in our schools are girls." This, he explains, is the result of years of patient work—speaking to families, building trust, and advocating for the importance of educating the girl child. "I'm truly grateful to my community," he says, "for embracing this change



and allowing their daughters to dream."

Beyond education, Mamoon's work in vocational training, livelihood initiatives, and financial inclusion stems from his deep desire to empower women. "It's incredibly fulfilling," he says, "to see young girls learning in school while their mothers gain skills in our vocational centers—skills that help them earn and support their families."

For Mamoon, the mission isn't just about economic empowerment—it's about restoring dignity and respect to women within their homes and communities. "Many of these women once faced domestic abuse from their husbands," he shares. "But today, those same husbands who once beat them now bring them lunch at work. That's the kind of transformation we've witnessed. A single step toward

empowering women has brought peace and stability to entire families."

Mamoon also uses his respect and influence within the community to safeguard the rights of women, often stepping in as a mediator in domestic disputes. More often than not, local families approach him for help, trusting his judgment and fairness.

Working closely with the local police station, Mamoon has helped resolve numerous cases amicably—especially in situations where couples cannot afford lengthy court battles. "I've always kept a woman's dignity at the center of my efforts," he says. "We've managed to resolve many cases involving dowry, desertion, and divorce—preventing them from becoming long, painful legal entanglements."

In most instances, it's the men who are at fault. Mamoon and his team work

patiently with them—helping them see their mistakes and encouraging them to make amends. At the same time, they strive to make women more self-reliant so that their rights are protected and respected.

A Secular Individual to the Core

Mamoon is a deeply secular individual who does not believe in discrimination based on caste, creed, religion, or any other grounds. Inspired by the teachings of prophet Muhammed and Swami Vivekanand, he embodies values of love, compassion, and inclusivity. He firmly emphasizes that no race is superior to another—all human beings are equal.

"Though I was raised in a backward locality and didn't have the opportunity to pursue higher education at a university that promotes liberal



and secular values,” he says, “I’ve still grown into a staunch secularist with an independent, unprejudiced mind.”

He points to his school as a living example of this belief. “About 30% of the children enrolled here are from the Hindu community, which itself constitutes just 20% of the population in Tikiapara. This clearly shows that Hindu families trust our school, because they’ve seen there is absolutely no bias or discrimination.”

Then, with passionate conviction, he adds, “What’s the point of looking at a child’s religion when they’re seeking education? Isn’t education itself a kind of religion for these children?”

For a child, being discriminated against because of religion is one of the worst things that can happen at such an innocent age. Mamoon recalls an incident at his school where a Hindu child was standing in

line with Muslim children to fill out a government-run scholarship form meant for minority students. When it was the Hindu boy’s turn, the clerk told him he wasn’t eligible since the scholarship was only for minority communities. The confused and dejected child approached Mamoon to ask why he had been excluded.

Mamoon immediately took the boy to the counter, helped him fill out the form, and assured him he was also eligible. Quietly, he gestured to the clerk to set the form aside, knowing the child wasn’t technically eligible. Later, Mamoon personally deposited the scholarship amount into the boy’s account so that he would believe he had received the same support as his peers.

“If I hadn’t done that,” Mamoon says, “the boy might have grown up feeling discriminated against because

of religion—and could have ended up resenting those he thought had denied him something. I couldn’t let that happen.”

Mamoon also recalls that in the early days of the Samaritan school, when he was struggling financially, a few Islamic religious seminaries offered to help. However, their support came with a condition—they wanted the school to adopt an Islamic character and include religious education in its curriculum.

“I had to decline their offer,” says Mamoon, “because I was determined not to dilute the school’s focus on modern education.”

At the same time, he is careful not to dismiss the value of religious education. “It has its place,” he adds. “Religious teachings can instill discipline and moral values, but I believe that kind of learning should



be pursued privately, not at the cost of inclusive, secular education.”

He also shared an important piece of information with a smile, first asking, “Do you know what religion Mrs. Sibley, the first donor to Samaritan, belonged to? Well, she was Jewish.” Interestingly, the original owners of the Rebecca Belilious Institutions—where Mamoon’s school later took root—were also Jewish. This highlights a subtle yet meaningful Jewish connection to Mamoon’s educational journey and institutions.

Given the long-standing tensions between Jewish and Muslim communities due to the Israel-Palestine conflict, Mamoon finds this connection particularly striking. “It just goes to show,” he reflects, “that when it comes to service and compassion, humanity can transcend politics and prejudice.”

He also mentions Ramesh Kacholia, the first major Indian donor to Samaritan, noting, “Uncle never once asked me about the religion of my students or the religious identity of Tikiapara. The fact that I was

dedicated to educating poor children in a slum area was enough for him to extend his helping hand. And I take great satisfaction in knowing that I have not let down his trust.”

Today, he continues, the students of Samaritan—whether Muslim, Hindu, or from any other community—embody a secular ethos and a liberal outlook, showing empathy and respect for others regardless of religion, caste, creed, or class. Much of the credit goes to the teachers and staff, who themselves are treated with equal respect. For instance, when gifts are given to Muslim staff during Eid, Hindu teachers and staff also receive the same gesture—and the same happens in reverse during Diwali. Spirit of inclusion and equality define the culture of Samaritan.

A Man of Humility and Heart

For all his achievements, qualities, and values, Mamoon remains a remarkably grounded man. He is simple, modest, and amiable—with no trace of arrogance or pretension. The ever-present flicker of a smile on his face puts everyone at ease. His

honesty, both in thought and action, is evident in his demeanor. As he puts it, “You must have heard the saying—simple living and high thinking—I am that kind of person.”

Mamoon leads an unassuming life, residing in a modest two-room house within the school compound and drawing a monthly emolument of 25,000 rupees from the trust. “I’m not a man of lavish means, so this amount is enough for my family’s needs,” he says. His family includes his wife, who also works at Samaritan as a volunteer, and their four children—three of whom have studied at Samaritan themselves, rather than attending bigger, more prestigious private schools. “I always believed my children should study at Samaritan. It was important for me to lead by example,” he adds.

Dream of Tikiapara as Shikshapara

As we often say, Mamoon is a modest man—and so are his ambitions: grounded and realistic. More often than not, people who taste early success set inflated and impractical

goals in the hope of taking their work to the next level. Mamoon, however, remained rooted. He could have easily been swayed by the recognition he received in the early stages of his journey, only to find such ambitions unsustainable later on.

“I come from the grassroots—I know my limitations,” he says candidly. “There’s no point dreaming of replicating my school model on a national scale.” What he wants, he says, is simple: to continue working in Tikiapara—the place where he was born, and to which he owes what he calls an unpayable debt.

According to Mamoon, his ambition is to make Tikiapara a Shikshapara a hub for education where everybody has access to learning so that the area, once neglected and left out, makes progress and people there live a dignified life, free of crimes, disorder, and nefarious activities. “Certainly, it’s a long-drawn effort,” he says, “but one day it will bear fruit. I truly believe we can achieve 100% literacy in the locality.”

Plans Afoot to Consolidate

As per Mamoon, they aim to establish more schools in the area and eventually scale up the healthcare, vocational training, and livelihood programs. However, these plans depend on the grants and donations they receive in the future. “For now, our focus is on firmly consolidating the work we are already doing,” he emphasizes.

That said, there is a plan underway to establish a residential hostel for aspirants of competitive examinations. This initiative is important as it will allow students to prepare in a focused, encouraging, and supportive environment—especially as competition continues to grow tougher by the day. Alongside this, a girls’ hostel is also in the pipeline. Mamoon notes, “The slum is not yet

Mamoon in the Eye of the Media



safe for girls to commute on a daily basis.”

Education is the Only Way

Essentially, Mamoon is a non-political man, not aligned with any group or political ideology. As a result, his understanding of community dynamics remains unbiased and balanced. While he is deeply concerned about the marginalization of Muslims, he partly blames politicians for exploiting communal polarization for electoral gains—and partly the community itself, for having long neglected modern education, thereby sidelining itself from the mainstream.

“There is no quick-fix solution to this,” he argues. “In an age of the internet, where propaganda and disinformation about our community spread rapidly, it is unwise to fight these battles online.”

Instead, he urges Muslims to work on the ground. “We must focus on education with utmost zeal—it is the only way to fight discrimination. Nobody else will fight our battles. It’s up to us to rise to the occasion and equip ourselves with the best education available.”

A community that is educated is also empowered and prosperous. So, he urges, “There is no time to waste. Channel your energy into learning—and don’t get distracted by things beyond your control.” This is not just advice—it’s a call to action. And if taken seriously, it can turn the tide for an entire generation.

From Vision to Visible Impact

In over two decades of community service, Mamoon has left a lasting impact on Tikiapara—the most significant being a growing awareness about the value of education. Over the years, children’s enrollment in schools has steadily increased, and even school dropouts are being encouraged



to resume their education. To support this, Samaritan has partnered with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). “The oldest student to have taken admission in our school is 65 years old,” Mamoon shares with a quiet pride. “We must be doing something truly meaningful if someone of that age is inspired to return to education. It’s deeply satisfying.”

Students from poor and struggling backgrounds have become doctors, engineers, and have joined various state and national-level services—this is a collective source of pride for the people of Tikiapara. The success stories emerging from Samaritan have inspired thousands of students to excel in their lives as well. “Tikiapara has awakened to the transformative power of education,” avers Mamoon.

Growing levels of education—coupled with livelihood opportunities provided through Samaritan’s

vocational training and livelihood programs, along with consistent societal sensitization efforts—have played a key role in minimizing criminal activity in the area. During the 1980s and 90s, police presence was a regular sight in Tikiapara, as officers frequently chased and apprehended criminals. Today, however, police records show a significant drop in such cases—a sign of imminent normalcy in the area.

It’s not only Samaritan that has brought about change in Tikiapara,” says Mamoon. “Several other organizations have emerged, and they are carrying forward the mission we started. We’ve created a ripple effect—one that will continue to push Tikiapara toward progress in the long run.”

What’s most heartening is seeing young people step forward, genuinely concerned about the society they belong to. Many of my former

students—young, fresh, and brimming with ideas—have taken up the mantle to transform Tikiapara. I feel proud when they tell me they’re trying to carry forward Samaritan’s ideals in whatever small way they can.

These college-going students or newly employed professionals are taking time out of their schedules to help underprivileged children with their studies. A few of them have opened schools, ensuring that no child in Tikiapara goes without education—whether due to poverty or any other reason. The signs of change in Tikiapara are unmistakable.

Indeed, what began as a small initiative by Mamoon has now grown into a movement rooted in shared responsibility. The journey is far from over, though. With every child who returns to school, every woman who earns a livelihood, every man who turns away from unlawful activities,

and every life that finds direction, the dream of a better Tikiapara edges closer to reality.

Conclusion

The story of Tikiapara is now a story of change. It is no longer defined by crime, neglect, and hopelessness. The tireless efforts of Mamoon Akhtar and his Samaritan Help Mission have transformed the narrative. A once-forgotten slum of despair has become a symbol of hope, reflecting what vision, integrity, and selfless service can achieve. From one man teaching a handful of students in a tiny room it has grown into a community-wide movement—impacting not just education, but also health, livelihood, mindsets, and social attitudes.

Mamoon’s journey wasn’t easy. He began with no money, little support, and only a firm belief that change was possible. Through sincerity and dedication, he gradually won the trust of the people. His unique ability to connect with both the underprivileged and the resourceful allowed him to bridge two worlds—bringing support to his mission.

Starting with a modest gathering of just six



children, the initiative has now blossomed into a mission, serving nearly 10,000 students across two sprawling, modern campuses. His mission has expanded in both scale and purpose.

Most importantly, Mamoon succeeded in changing mindsets in a once-notorious locality. Education is now valued. Girls can be seen playing sports. Parents who were once unwilling to send their children to school now feel proud to hear them speak English. Women are earning a livelihood, crime has declined, and hope has returned.

What sets Mamoon’s model apart is that it’s not just about infrastructure—it’s about people. It’s about dignity, opportunity, and faith in the power of transformation. His story proves that even in the darkest corners, light can be kindled.

Mamoon’s journey is still unravelling, but the direction is clear. The ripples have spread, a quite revolution is underway. Indeed, his journey is living proof that real change happens with belief—and the courage to act on it.

Shadows of Excellence:

The Struggle of Muslim Institutions in NIRF 2025 Rankings

In the heart of New Delhi, the Ministry of Education unveiled the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2025 rankings on September 4, 2025. The air was thick with anticipation as academics, policymakers, and students awaited the results. For three of India's most storied Muslim institutions—Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), and Jamia Hamdard—the outcome was a bittersweet moment. Once shining beacons in the 2024 rankings, they had slipped in the 2025 standings, sparking a quiet but urgent conversation about their challenges and resilience.

A Legacy Under Pressure

JMI, AMU, and Jamia Hamdard were not just universities; they were symbols of a community's fight for educational empowerment. Founded in the crucible of India's independence movement, JMI (1920) and AMU (1875, as Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College) had defied colonial oppression to nurture scholars, leaders, and change-makers. Jamia Hamdard, established in 1989, carried forward this legacy with its focus on pharmacy and medical sciences. Yet, the NIRF 2025 rankings told a sobering story: JMI fell from 3rd to 4th, AMU from 8th to 10th, and Jamia Hamdard from 40th to 47th among Indian universities. In the overall category, JMI held steady at 13th, but AMU slipped from 16th to 19th, and Jamia Hamdard plummeted from 62nd to 74th.

Despite these setbacks, there were glimmers of hope. Jamia Hamdard retained its crown as India's top pharmacy college, outshining Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS) Pilani and Panjab University. JMI also excelled in specific domains, securing 5th in Architecture and Planning, 8th in Law, 17th in Dental, 20th in Research, 24th in Engineering, and 28th in Management. These achievements underscored their enduring strengths, but the question lingered: why were these institutions faltering in the broader rankings?

The Weight of Expectations

The NIRF rankings, launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Education, evaluate institutions on five parameters: Teaching, Learning, and Resources (TLR); Research and Professional Practices (RP); Graduation Outcomes (GO); Outreach and Inclusivity (OI); and Perception (PR). For JMI, AMU, and Jamia Hamdard, each parameter revealed both triumphs and trials.

In a quiet corner of JMI's campus, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Mazhar Asif reflected on the results. "Our drop from 3rd to 4th is a call to introspect," he said, his voice steady but resolute. "We've excelled in sustainability, ranking 3rd in the new SDG category, but resource constraints and perception challenges hold us back." JMI's sprawling campus, home to 284 courses and a research-intensive environment with an h-index of 129, faced funding shortages that limited infrastructure upgrades and faculty

recruitment. The university's storied history—founded by nationalist leaders like Muhammad Ali Jauhar and supported by Mahatma Gandhi—could not fully shield it from modern financial pressures.

At AMU, Dr. Khalid Mahmood, a professor of political science, stood before students in the iconic Kennedy Auditorium. "We're still in the top 10, but 10th feels like a wake-up call," he admitted. AMU's slide from 8th to 10th was partly due to a dip in research output and perception scores, often clouded by political controversies. "We are unfairly labelled as 'separate' or 'anti-national,'" Khalid said, echoing sentiments from a Clarion India report. "Our students and faculty work tirelessly, but external biases affect how we're perceived."

Jamia Hamdard's Chancellor, Hammad Ahmed, took pride in the pharmacy ranking but acknowledged the broader decline. "Our focus on specialized fields like pharmacy is unmatched, but scaling research across disciplines requires investment we struggle to secure," he said. The university's drop to 47th reflected challenges in graduation outcomes and outreach, despite its innovative contributions to healthcare.

The Roots of the Struggle

The reasons for the slide were complex, woven into systemic and societal threads. Funding was a persistent hurdle. Muslim institutions, often serving marginalized communities, relied heavily on government grants,



which were stretched thin across India's vast higher education system. Unlike IITs or IISc Bengaluru, which topped the 2025 rankings with robust budgets and global partnerships, JMI, AMU, and Jamia Hamdard faced resource gaps that hampered lab upgrades, international collaborations, and faculty expansion.

Perception, the most subjective NIRF parameter, was another battleground. JMI and AMU, in particular, had faced political scrutiny, from protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 to accusations of fostering separatism. These narratives, though refuted by their diverse alumni—including Shah Rukh Khan, Virender Sehwag, and countless public servants—tainted their public image. "Perception isn't just about academic output; it's about how the world sees us," said a JMI professor, requesting anonymity. "We're judged not just as universities but as Muslim institutions."

Research output, another critical metric, lagged due to limited access

to cutting-edge facilities and fewer industry tie-ups. While IISc Bengaluru and JNU, ranked 1st and 2nd, boasted global research networks, Muslim institutions struggled to match their scale. Jamia Hamdard's pharmacy program thrived, but its broader research portfolio needed bolstering. AMU's rich legacy in humanities and sciences was undeniable, yet its STEM research output trailed newer players like Manipal Academy (3rd) and BITS Pilani (7th).

A Path Forward

The story was not one of defeat but of resilience. At JMI, Prof. Asif rallied faculty to double down on research grants and international partnerships. The university's Internal Quality Assurance Cell, established in 2010, was already driving quality improvements, earning an A++ NAAC accreditation. AMU launched initiatives to boost STEM research, with plans to collaborate with tech giants. Jamia Hamdard, leveraging its pharmacy success, aimed to expand

interdisciplinary programs, eyeing a return to the top 40.

The 2025 rankings, while a setback, were a clarion call. These institutions, born from struggle, had faced greater odds before. JMI's move from Aligarh to Delhi in 1925, AMU's rise from the ashes of 1857, and Jamia Hamdard's ascent in pharmacy proved their tenacity. As Dr. Khalid told his students, "Our history is long, our struggles real, but our contributions undeniable. These rankings are a moment, not our destiny."

Across India, the NIRF 2025 rankings celebrated excellence, with IISc Bengaluru, JNU, and IITs leading the charge. Yet, for JMI, AMU, and Jamia Hamdard, the journey was about more than numbers. It was about carrying the dreams of a community, defying prejudice, and building a future where knowledge transcended barriers. As the sun set over JMI's Okhla campus, AMU's sprawling lawns, and Jamia Hamdard's labs, their students studied on, undeterred, knowing their institutions' legacy would endure.

The Race to the Top: Africa's Business Heroes 2025



In the vibrant heart of Dakar, Senegal, the air buzzed with anticipation. It was September 10, 2025, and the Semifinals of the Africa's Business Heroes (ABH) Prize Competition were about to begin. From a staggering 32,000 applications across all 54 African nations, 20 exceptional entrepreneurs had emerged, each a beacon of innovation, resilience, and hope. They had battled through rigorous rounds of interviews and due diligence to stand on the cusp of greatness, one step away from the Grand Finale in Kigali, where the Top 10 would share a \$1.5 million prize pool and global

recognition.

The venue, a sleek conference center overlooking Dakar's bustling coastline, hummed with energy. The stage was set for these visionaries to pitch their transformative businesses to a panel of judges: Hasan Haidar, a venture capital titan from PlusVC; Moulaye Taboure, a former ABH Top 10 Hero and founder of ANKA, now a judge in a historic first; and Jason Pau, the Jack Ma Foundation's international director, whose vision had fueled ABH's mission to uplift Africa's entrepreneurial spirit.

The Entrepreneurs

The 20 semifinalists were a tapestry of Africa's diversity, hailing from nine countries and spanning 10 sectors—healthtech, fintech, agritech, sustainability, and more. Among them were:

Adriaan Kruger from South Africa, whose HealthTech startup, nuvoteQ, was revolutionizing digital solutions for healthcare access in underserved communities. His platform connected rural clinics to specialists via AI-driven diagnostics, slashing wait times and saving lives.



Baraka Chijenga from Tanzania, founder of Kilimo Fresh Foods Africa Limited, an agritech venture ensuring food security by linking smallholder farmers to markets through a subscription-based model. Her app empowered farmers with real-time data on crop prices and weather patterns.

Blandine Umuziranenge from Rwanda, whose Kosmotive was a beacon for women's empowerment, providing affordable maternal health products and education to combat maternal mortality in remote areas.

Bundi Mbuthia from Kenya, whose Uzapoint Technologies offered digital tools for SMEs, streamlining operations for small businesses that powered local economies.

Each entrepreneur carried a story of grit. Adriaan had bootstrapped nuvoteQ from a garage, coding late

into the night while juggling a day job. Baraka, a farmer's daughter, had seen hunger firsthand and vowed to build a system that ensured no harvest went to waste. Blandine, a mother herself, had turned personal loss into a mission to save others. Bundi, once a street vendor, now enabled thousands of vendors like him to thrive in a digital age.

The Semifinals

The first day of the Semifinals was electric. The entrepreneurs, dressed in a mix of vibrant African prints and sharp business attire, mingled in the lobby, exchanging ideas and dreams. Senegal's 8.6% GDP growth and its role as host of the upcoming 2026 Youth Olympic Games made it a fitting backdrop—a symbol of Africa's rising tide of innovation.

Inside the auditorium, the judges sat poised, their expertise a formidable

gate to the Grand Finale. The rules were clear: each entrepreneur had 10 minutes to pitch, followed by a grueling Q&A. The criteria—innovation, impact, scalability, and leadership—would determine who advanced.

Adriaan took the stage first, his voice steady as he described nuvoteQ's impact: "In one year, we've connected 50,000 patients to care they'd never have accessed otherwise." Hasan Haidar leaned forward, asking about scalability. Adriaan's response was crisp: "Our AI is cloud-based, deployable anywhere with internet. We're already piloting in three countries."

Baraka followed, her passion palpable. "Food security isn't just about growing crops—it's about ensuring farmers profit." She showcased her app's dashboard, where farmers tracked demand in real time. Moulaye

Taboure, drawing from his own journey, pressed her on sustainability. Baraka smiled: “Our subscription model reinvests profits into training farmers on climate-smart techniques.”

Blandine’s pitch was deeply personal. “I lost my sister to childbirth complications. Kosmotive exists so no woman faces that fate.” Her low-cost birthing kits, distributed via women-led cooperatives, had reached 10,000 mothers. Jason Pau asked about funding gaps; Blandine’s plan to partner with NGOs for scale impressed him.

Bundi’s pitch was a masterclass in clarity. “SMEs are Africa’s backbone, but they lack tools. Uzapoint gives them affordable software to compete.” His demo showed a vendor managing inventory on a smartphone. The judges nodded, seeing the potential to digitize millions of businesses.

The Stakes

As the pitches continued, the room felt the weight of what was at stake. Beyond the \$100,000–\$300,000 grants, the Top 10 would gain mentorship, global networks, and media exposure. ABH wasn’t just a competition; it was a launchpad. Past Heroes had raised millions, expanded across borders,

and created thousands of jobs. The 2024 winner, Henri Ousmane Gueye from Senegal, had turned his third attempt into a \$300,000 triumph, proving persistence paid off.

The diversity of the 2025 cohort shone through. Nine countries—South Africa, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, and more—were represented, with 40% female finalists and 20% from Francophone regions. Sectors like fintech tackled financial inclusion, while sustainability ventures addressed climate challenges. Zahra Baitie-Boateng, ABH’s Africa MD, had called it a “dynamic innovation landscape,” and the pitches proved her right.

The Turning Point

On day two, tensions rose. The judges deliberated behind closed doors, weighing each pitch. The entrepreneurs waited in the lounge, some pacing, others laughing over coffee, their camaraderie a testament to ABH’s community spirit. Local partners like Wave, Sonatel, and InTouch Group had sponsored the event, their presence reinforcing Senegal’s role as an entrepreneurial hub.

When the judges emerged, the room

fell silent. Hasan Haidar spoke first: “Your businesses are not just ventures—they’re movements.” Moulaye Taboure added, “I have been where you are. Your resilience inspires me.” Jason Pau closed with, “You’re building Africa’s future.”

The Top 10 would be announced later, but the 20 semi-finalists had already won something greater: a platform to amplify their impact. As they left Dakar, bound for Kigali’s Grand Finale in December, they carried a shared conviction: Africa’s challenges were vast, but its entrepreneurs were unstoppable.

Epilogue

Back in their communities, the 20 Heroes continued their work. Adriaan’s clinics saved more lives. Baraka’s farmers fed more families. Blandine’s kits reached more mothers. Bundi’s tools empowered more vendors. The ABH journey had transformed them, not just as entrepreneurs, but as catalysts for a continent on the rise.

In Dakar, the echoes of their pitches lingered, a promise of what Africa could achieve when its boldest dreamers were given a chance to soar.



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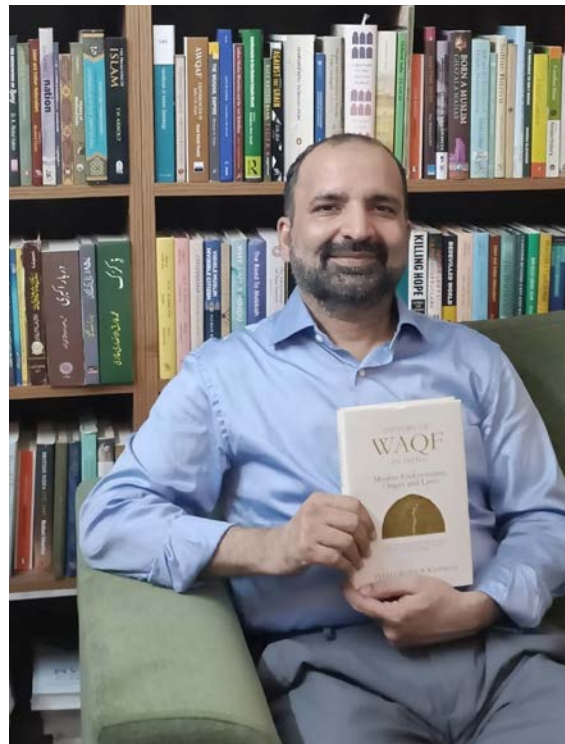
Muslim Endowments, Origin and Laws

Syed Ubaidur Rahman's *History of Waqf in India: Muslim Endowments, Origin and Laws* is a monumental contribution to the study of waqf, the Islamic institution of charitable endowments, in the Indian context. Published in a robust 382-page hardbound edition, priced at Rs 895 in India, this book is a comprehensive and meticulously researched exploration of waqf's theological, historical, and legal evolution over fourteen centuries. Rahman, a distinguished historian and author, delivers a work that is both a scholarly triumph and an accessible resource, appealing to a diverse audience, including students, researchers, legal scholars, policymakers, and general readers interested in India's socio-religious and legal history.

The book opens with a detailed examination of the theological foundations of waqf in Islamic law, providing a clear and engaging introduction to the principles that underpin Muslim charitable endowments. Rahman explains how waqf, rooted in the Quranic emphasis on charity and community welfare, emerged as a mechanism to dedicate property for religious, educational, or social purposes. This foundational section is particularly valuable for readers unfamiliar with Islamic jurisprudence, as it sets the stage for understanding waqf's broader historical and legal significance. Rahman's ability to distill complex theological concepts into accessible prose ensures that both

novices and experts can appreciate the subject's depth.

From its theological origins, the book transitions into a chronological exploration of waqf's development in India, spanning from the early Islamic period to the modern era. Rahman traces the institution's growth under various dynasties, including the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire, where



waqf properties played a central role in supporting mosques, madrasas, and public welfare initiatives. He also examines the challenges faced by waqf during colonial rule, when British legal frameworks disrupted traditional systems of endowment management. This historical narrative is enriched by Rahman's attention

to the socio-political contexts that shaped waqf's evolution, offering readers a nuanced understanding of its adaptability and resilience.

A significant strength of the book lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which seamlessly integrates historical analysis with legal scholarship. As Prof. Faizan Mustafa, Vice-Chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, aptly notes, the book is a "useful addition to the Indian awqaf scholarship" due to its comprehensive coverage of over fourteen hundred years, from waqf's theological roots to the recently enacted Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025. This dual focus makes the book an essential resource for students of both history and law. Similarly, Prof. Nandini Chatterjee of Oxford University praises it as a "comprehensive study" that examines waqf from the perspectives of Islamic law, Indian history, and contemporary legal developments, underscoring its relevance to a global academic audience.

The book's treatment of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, is particularly noteworthy, given the legislation's significance in reshaping the governance of waqf properties in India. Rahman provides a balanced analysis of the Act, detailing its provisions, implications, and the debates surrounding its passage. This section is timely and relevant, as it addresses ongoing discussions about waqf management, transparency, and modernization. By



connecting historical precedents with contemporary legal reforms, Rahman ensures that the book is not only a historical account but also a practical guide for understanding current policy challenges.

Rahman's writing is a standout feature of the book. His prose is clear, engaging, and well-structured, making dense subject matter accessible without sacrificing academic rigor. The book is organized into logically sequenced chapters that guide readers through waqf's multifaceted history, from its origins to its modern-day implications. Each chapter builds on the previous one, creating a cohesive narrative that is easy to follow yet rich in detail. Rahman's ability to contextualize complex legal and historical developments ensures that the book appeals to a broad readership, from academic scholars to curious laypersons.

At Rs 895, the hardbound edition is reasonably priced for its depth and scope, making it an excellent investment for libraries, academic

institutions, and individual readers. The production quality is commendable, with a sturdy binding and clear typography that enhance the reading experience. However, the book could benefit from a more detailed index or glossary to assist readers unfamiliar with waqf-related terminology, particularly those new to Islamic law or Indian legal history. Additionally, while Rahman's historical and legal analyses are thorough, the inclusion of more case studies or real-world examples could further illustrate the practical impact of waqf in contemporary India, making the book even more relatable to readers outside academic circles.

One of the book's most significant achievements is its ability to fill a critical gap in the scholarship on Muslim endowments in India. While waqf has been studied in various contexts, few works offer the comprehensive, interdisciplinary perspective that Rahman provides. His meticulous research, drawing on primary sources, legal texts,

and historical records, ensures that the book is both authoritative and insightful. Furthermore, the inclusion of perspectives from both Indian and international scholars, as evidenced by the endorsements from Prof. Mustafa and Prof. Chatterjee, underscores the book's global relevance.

In conclusion, *History of Waqf in India: Muslim Endowments, Origin and Laws* is a definitive work that stands as a testament to Syed Ubaidur Rahman's expertise as a historian and author. It is a scholarly achievement that bridges the gap between history, law, and theology, offering valuable insights into one of India's most enduring socio-religious institutions. Whether you are a student of history, a legal scholar, a policymaker, or simply someone curious about the role of waqf in shaping Indian society, this book is a must-read. Its comprehensive scope, engaging prose, and timely relevance make it a vital addition to the literature on Indian history and Islamic endowments, destined to inform and inspire readers for years to come.

“A Life Lived for Others is the True Life”: CA Abdul Rahim on the Mission of TSSF



In present-day world, discussions of progress revolve mainly around economic growth and technological innovation. Nevertheless, the voices that call us back to compassion, service, and responsibility towards the less fortunate carry a timeless significance. One such important voice is that of Mr Abdul Rahim, the Founder Trustee of The Sirri Saqti Foundation (TSSF), a Kolkata-based NGO that has steadily built its identity as a catalyst for social development over the past decade and a half.

What started as a simple breakfast initiative in 2009 has since blossomed into a comprehensive movement. Today, TSSF addresses a spectrum of pressing human needs—including hunger, healthcare, education, and livelihood—while also tending to spiritual development. The distinction of TSSF lies not only in the diversity of its programs but also in the philosophy that underpins them: service without judgment, compassion without conditions, and growth rooted in both material and spiritual well-being.

At the heart of this journey is Mr Abdul Rahim, a determined man who changed a moment of deep inspiration into a mission that continues to impact lives. His professional experience (he is a Chartered Accountant) and leadership skills have led to the birth of various programs known for their sustainability and long-term impact. Under his guidance, TSSF has pioneered innovative models such as the Chapter Model, which decentralizes leadership, empowers local members, and creates social leaders who can drive meaningful change in their neighbourhoods. This unique structure has nurtured a new generation of leaders equipped with skills, values, and resilience required for social transformation.

In a detailed, exclusive interview with Danish Reyaz, Founder Editor of Maeeshat Media, Abdul Rahim opens up about the inspiration that shaped his mission of founding TSSF. From the first hesitant step to his subsequent initiatives, and the philosophy that continues to drive his work and the organization, he speaks at length. He reveals the reason behind the name of his NGO, advocates for the need to nurture local leadership, and emphasizes human development alongside the broader aim of social development.

More than an interview, it is a reminder that in a world often overshadowed by indifference, small acts of service, when pursued with sincerity, can blossom into powerful movements of change.



Before we begin, could you please share a brief overview of your professional background and qualifications?

I am a Chartered Accountant with expertise in Accounting, Law, and Finance, and I hold an MBA in Finance and HR from XLRI. I began my career as a partner at AVD Associates before joining IPE Global Pvt. Ltd., where I was promoted in 2010 and have since been serving as Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO).

Beyond my corporate role, I am the Founder Trustee of the Kolkata-based NGO, The Sirri Saqti Foundation (TSSF), and Director of Pearlwood Ventures Pvt. Ltd. I also hold a diploma in Arabic Language and Literature.

Your academic credentials are quite strong and it seems you have a successful career

as a Chartered Accountant, then how did you gravitate towards social service?

While my professional journey as a Chartered Accountant brought me financial stability, respect, and recognition in society, I always felt something was missing. Deep down, I knew that personal success alone does not define a meaningful life. I kept searching for a deeper purpose and soon realized that a life lived for others is the true life. This understanding inclined me toward social work quite early in my career. However, despite my earnest desire, I didn't initially know how to begin in a specific manner.

So, was there a particular moment when you recognized your true calling, which prompted you to start your own initiative in this regard?

This happened in 2009. My firm used to work with the government of India's developmental schemes. So, I was sent to Odisha to oversee the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) on the ground. I was working in a remote, poverty-stricken village when an old man approached and enquired me what we were doing.

Accordingly, I explained to him about the government scheme of providing employment to the rural people to improve their economic condition. To this, he replied with something for which I didn't have an answer.

He said, "Look, I am an old man. I can't do physical work. So, what is the use of this scheme (NREGS) to an old person like me?" It was a fact, I realized. Nevertheless, I asked him how he thought the government should help him. He replied that all he wanted was for the government to provide him with two goats, which



he could rear and, in the future, earn profit from them.

I didn't know how to answer him, so I turned to one of the government officers there to enquire if there was any scheme that could address the old man's need. The officer replied that there was, in fact, a government scheme called the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), but it had just been passed and would take a long time before being implemented at the ground level. On hearing this, the old man responded, "Don't you think I will be dead by that time?" There were signs of frustration and derision in his voice. His hopeless words struck me deeply, making me think that I should personally help this man. This moment marked the first step towards my social initiative.

How did this incident impact your thoughts about the needs of the poor?

The impact of this incident shaped my understanding of the immediate needs of poor people, which are often overlooked in the light of grand schemes and bigger goals. Often, the needs of the people are quite ordinary, and if addressed at the right time, they can be of immense help to them. Many people fall through the cracks of much-hyped policies and schemes. The need is to reach out to them with timely help, however small, to alleviate their problems.

How did your organization begin its journey, and what was the first social initiative it undertook?

At first, we started with breakfast distribution in 2009. People around me had hesitation doing it in the beginning, but I convinced them. Although we were only a few, we began with full sincerity and dedication. We carried it out through our own contributions,

and after a while, small funds from here and there trickled in, keeping us afloat and helping us continue our mission.

People were initially dismissive of our effort, saying it was a waste of money since it wouldn't make any real difference for the beneficiaries. Perhaps they were right in a narrow sense, but I knew that despite numerous schemes and policies at both government and private levels aimed at improving the economic conditions of the poor, the most basic problem such as hunger remained unaddressed. To many of us, hunger may seem unimaginable in modern times, yet it continues to persist across the country. The reality is quite stark: the Global Hunger Index 2024 ranks India 105 out of 125 countries, classifying its hunger level as "serious." This shows that hunger is not a distant issue—it is here, and it demands urgent attention.

Let me explain it with an example.



Once, a Chennai-based chef friend of mine went to visit his village ahead of his planned departure to the UAE for a lucrative job offer. But something happened that made him abort his plan. He saw an extremely poor old man by the roadside, so consumed by hunger pangs that he ate his own excreta. When my friend told me this, it shook me to the core. He felt ashamed that while he was serving delicious food in five-star hotels, people in his own village were sleeping hungry—and worse, someone like that old man was forced to eat his own excreta. My friend decided to cancel his plan of working as a chef in hotels and instead started preparing and distributing food to the needy in his village and adjoining areas. My motivation to start my own breakfast distribution program stemmed directly from this unfortunate incident that my friend narrated to me.

Besides the inspiration, what philosophy drove your breakfast distribution program?

We never judged people based on their needs—our program was open to all, irrespective of their religious affiliation. We went wherever we could find the poor and destitute and offered them food. Some accepted it with gratitude, while a few, out of self-respect, chose to refuse—and we respected that too. What mattered to us was the satisfaction of knowing that we were able to fill the stomachs of those who were hungry, without getting caught up in debates about whether such help made a big difference or not. For us, even that small act was a blessing, a way to express our gratitude to the Almighty for giving us the ability and opportunity to help others. It was the barkat of our maiden program that enabled us to expand our social work in other directions as well.

Following the breakfast distribution initiative, what was the next program of your organization?

At the Sirri Saqti Foundation, we believe that true development is incomplete without spiritual growth. With this aim, our next step was to organize a Hajj training camp, so that those embarking on this sacred journey with their hard-earned money could experience complete islah through it. What began in 2010 has, by Allah's grace, continued every year, with people now eagerly awaiting the opportunity. Yet, the beginning was far from encouraging. In our very first camp, only 7 or 8 people turned up, even though we had set out 200 chairs in expectation. I was disheartened, but a mentor I had invited from Hyderabad reminded me of a powerful truth. He said, "Throughout history, thousands of prophets have come—many were never listened to, let alone followed—



but that never lessened the value of their efforts or their noble status. Our duty is only to work with sincerity, leaving the results to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala."

His words struck me deeply and gave me the strength to persevere. Over time, the program grew steadily, and today it draws hundreds of pilgrims who wish to understand the true essence of Hajj—not just its rituals, but its spirit of piety, humility, and contentment that can transform one's life long after the pilgrimage ends.

To many, the name of your NGO may not sound familiar. How did you decide on naming it The Sirri Saqti Foundation (TSSF)?

Sirri Saqti was an early Sufi saint and mystic of 9th-century Baghdad. He was the maternal uncle and

spiritual mentor of Junayd Baghdadi (Rahmatullah alaihi). While Junayd is widely celebrated as one of the great exponents of Sufi thought, Sirri Saqti has remained a relatively lesser-known figure.

Frankly, I too did not know much about him. Perhaps I had come across his name in passing, or maybe not at all—at least, my mind had never consciously retained it. Then, one night, quite unexpectedly, I saw a dream about him. I could recall only fragments of it, yet when I woke up the next morning, the pious name Sirri Saqti was fresh on my lips and vivid in my mind. Curious, I searched the internet to learn more, and was astonished by what I discovered about his life and legacy.

He was among the earliest pioneers of Sufism, illuminating the spiritual path of love, asceticism (zuhd), and

trust in Allah (tawakkul). He strongly emphasized giving alms to the poor and taught that sincerity (ikhlas) must be reflected not only in worship but also in service to humanity. His life was a true embodiment of love, compassion, and humility. One can know more about him visiting our website, saqti.org. I would like to add that initially the name of our organization used to be Saqti Foundation. We adopted the full name, The Sirri Saqti Foundation (TSSF) in 2012.

No doubt, the name of your organization signifies its religio-spiritual dimension. What other programs have you undertaken in this direction?

While the name reflects the religio-spiritual ethos of our organization, I would like to clarify that we function



like any other NGO, with programs in education, health, livelihood, and more. At the same time, we place special focus on character building and nurturing a morally guided life in line with Islamic values. Importantly, all of our programs are open to everyone, regardless of religious identity, as our mission is to serve humanity as a whole. Only the religious nature programs are specifically meant for Muslims.

The need for these specific nature programs emerged from our observation that the youth in their quest for Duniya are seemingly drifting away from Deen, which often leaves them feeling unhappy and unfulfilled despite material gains.

Alongside our Hajj training, we also started a program on zakat to address the need for simple and accessible calculation methods, as zakat calculation often remains a

complicated and confusing exercise. Different fiqas follow different approaches when it comes to determining the zakat amount. We studied the matter comprehensively with an open mind, consulted various ulema, and then, through the use of technology, made it clear and easy for people to understand. Those who attend our program often admit that, for years, they had been calculating zakat incorrectly, but now they are able to pay the correct amount, which is usually more than before.

Then we started a program on the Seerat of Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) to familiarize people, especially the youth, with his character, actions, and teachings. We also organized a workshop called The Way of the Prophet, in which we taught about the noble practices of the Prophet (Sunnah), emphasizing not only their zahiri (apparent) aspects but also their batini (inner) meanings.

Another salient initiative was the launch of Heart in Bloom, a systematic program in collaboration with Islamic Voice aimed at cleansing the heart, based on the belief that all teachings, religious or modern, are meaningless unless our hearts are tender and compassionate. In the modern world, despite all kinds of progress, the lack of peace of mind has left us increasingly bitter, with hearts hardened and deprived of humility and empathy for others.

For the last 10 years, this program has been conducted regularly, both online and offline. While earlier such programs in the city were sporadic in nature, we have institutionalized it since the beginning to ensure that it is organized without fail.



As you mentioned, apart from these spiritually oriented programs, TSSF is also engaged in areas like health and education. Could you throw some light on these initiatives?

Our health initiative began in 2013 with the launch of RAAHAT Clinic, aimed at providing affordable healthcare to the poor through a nominal consultation fee and free or subsidized medicines. What started with a fee of just Rs. 10—now Rs. 70—has grown into a lifeline for the community, serving nearly 1.5 lakh patients so far.

To extend support beyond the clinic, we established a Medical Bank that lends essential medical equipment to patients in need. We also introduced a Blood Card service to make blood available during emergencies, supported by our regular blood donation camps. Going a step further,

we created a Medical Support system that provides direct financial assistance for critical treatments, ensuring that no deserving patient is left without care simply because of money.

In conjunction with our medical initiatives, we are deeply committed to supporting the education of deserving students. This includes financial assistance for school fees, admission costs, and essential books. Beyond scholarships, we extend mentorship through career guidance and counseling. To prepare them for future pursuits, we also coach students in public speaking and personality development, helping them build the confidence and skills needed for long-term success.

In response to your current question, I would also like to add that as part of our social development program, we actively support livelihood initiatives. Through our Micro Business Support Program, we provide small, zero-interest investments to encourage

entrepreneurship within the community. Similarly, under Zariya, we equip individuals, especially women, with skills and tools to achieve financial independence. For example, we provide training in tailoring and other essential skills, and if someone cannot afford a sewing machine, we help them purchase one.

Additionally, we extend pensions to families in dire need through our General Pension Support, and to those who are financially struggling but unable to receive zakat, we provide assistance under our Sadat Support Scheme. These efforts aim not only to provide immediate relief but also to restore dignity and ensure long-term stability for vulnerable households.

How would you describe the current reach and scale of TSSF's work?

Today, TSSF has grown into a vibrant community with over 300 committed members and more than 50 generous



donors who support our mission. While our direct beneficiaries exceed 300 individuals, the true impact of our work is much wider. We have touched the lives of lakhs of people through our health services, food distribution drives, livelihood programs, and training workshops. We currently have three active chapters in Kolkata: TSSF Kolkata Cares (TKC), TSSF Kolkata South (TKS), and TSSF Kolkata East (TKE). All of them are doing commendable work, and we are working to expand our presence in other regions, with new chapters likely to be created soon.

What is the idea behind the Chapter Model?

Around 2018, we realized that many of our members had to commute long distances across the city to attend our programs and participate in activities. To address this, we decided to create leaders from within our members who could take responsibility for

conducting TSSF's activities in their own parts of the city. This need led to the introduction of the Chapter Model, which enabled them to focus on their immediate neighbourhoods, thereby creating greater impact and more meaningful outcomes.

To open a chapter, at least 20 members must come together, each contributing a nominal fee of Rs. 8,000 to TSSF. From among themselves, they elect a serving board of 5 members who will lead and manage the chapter. TSSF then registers the chapter, issues an affiliation certificate, and manages the funds contributed by the members, which remain accessible to the chapter for developmental work as needed. It works somewhat like a franchise model, providing ample flexibility for each chapter to implement its own ideas while staying aligned with TSSF's core programs and activities.

How has the Chapter Model impacted your organization

and its members?

The Chapter Model has helped us nurture social entrepreneurs and leaders at the local level who are driving meaningful change by engaging members and communities through Chapters. The Model has not only expanded our reach but also freed us to focus on designing new policies and programs, while the chapters carry out a wide range of activities on the ground. At the same time, this approach has helped strengthen TSSF's brand value, something every organization needs for long-term sustainability. After all, we will not be here forever, but if TSSF grows into a strong brand with deep roots, it will continue to inspire action and remain a force for positive change long after us.

The model has also done a world of good to our members by giving them hands-on opportunities to learn and grow. With real responsibilities on their shoulders, they gain experience in managing social projects, handling

legal aspects like accounts and returns, exploring innovative ways of fundraising, and executing a variety of activities.

TSSF is dedicated to building the abilities of its members by offering targeted training, workshops, and resources that prepare them for leadership in social development. Through SPEAK, members gain confidence in public speaking and learn the art of engaging storytelling—essential for creating lasting impact. At the same time, our Discover Yourself program, guided by renowned life coach and spiritual mentor Sadath Khan, helps them practice self-introspection, nurture inner peace, and align personal growth with spiritual values. By combining professional skills with personal transformation, we ensure that our members are equipped to serve society with both competence and compassion.

What are your future plans for your NGO?

To be honest, in an ideal world where every individual took responsibility for caring for those less fortunate, the very need for NGOs would disappear.



But I know that is a utopian thought. The reality is that NGOs are essential—and so we continue to run ours. I don't have any unrealistic or grandiose vision, but we take pride in the impact our efforts, however small, have made on people and society.

At present, we have no immediate plans to expand our work to other parts of the country. Going forward, we aim to strengthen and grow through the Chapter Model, deepening our presence in Kolkata and gradually beyond. Only after consolidating our foundation here, will we consider expanding into other regions.

That said, if individuals or institutions are inspired to adopt our model, we will gladly encourage it. With its minimal administrative costs and well-structured programs, the model we have developed is practical, scalable, and worthy of replication. Ultimately, our hope is that the spirit behind TSSF lives on through our members, through the communities we serve, and through anyone who chooses compassion over indifference.

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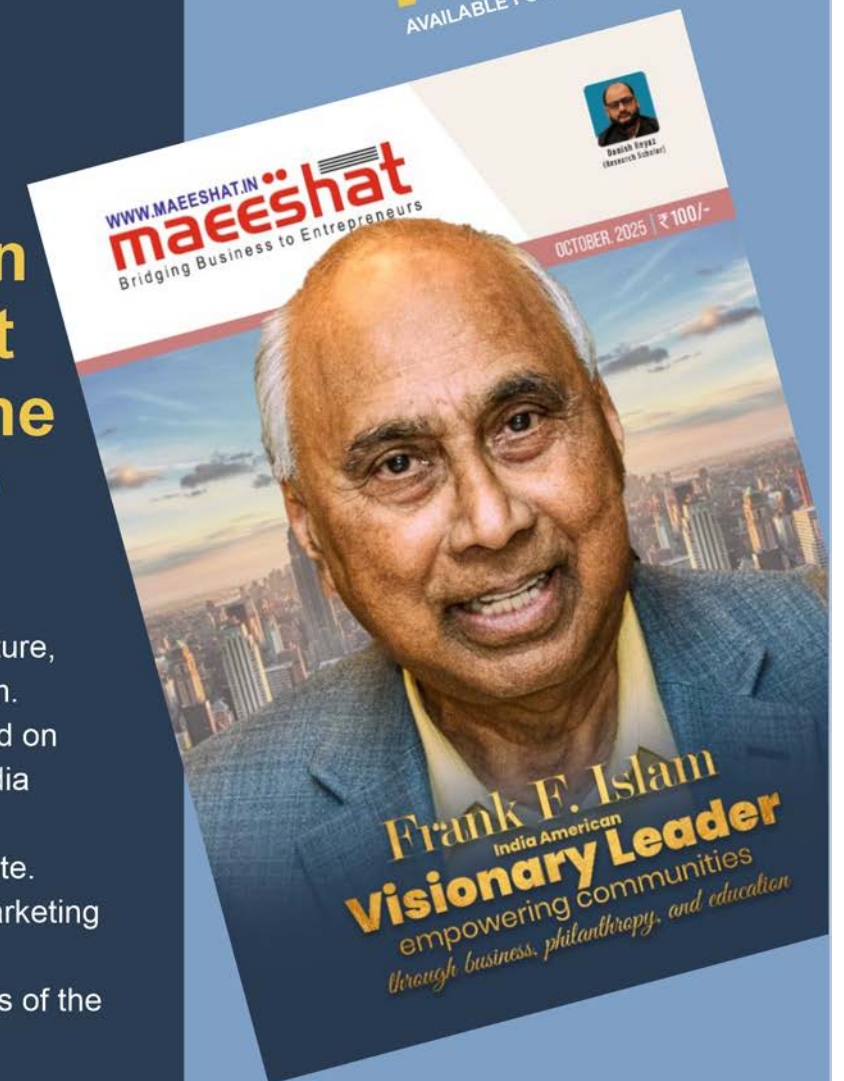
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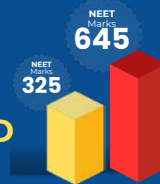
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