

TABARUKU



A BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE SHEIKH MOHAMED BURHANI MKELLE (1920-1999)

Our beloved brother Sheikh Mohamed Burhani Mkelle passed away on 14th February, 1999. His family, relatives and friends are all in grief and we all join them in their great mourning for the loss of their beloved.

The Sheikh, Mohamed Mkelle, was born at Malindi in Zanzibar on 3 November, 1920. The late Sheikh Mohamed has left a widow with 7 children and about 14 grandchildren.

The late Sheikh Mohamed Burhani was the first born to his father and mother. He received his primary and secondary education in Zanzibar. It was in the year 1937 that the late Sheikh Mohamed was placed the first on the list of 27 successful candidates in Upper Middle School Certificate Examination; he obtained distinction in Arabic, English and Arithmetic in Zanzibar that year. He successfully completed his secondary education in 1940.

On top of his secondary education the Sheikh also studied Islamic knowledge and Arabic. He learnt what his father had learnt in his life time. The level of achievement of his religious studies was very high indeed. In his studies he did two foreign languages — English and Arabic. Certainly the Quran was at the core of his religious studies. He obtained the title of “Sheikh” as an attribute to his qualification in religious studies. He was a multilinguist with a very high proficiency in Kiswahili, Arabic and English. He studied English and Arabic at London University.

Due to his expertise in those languages he was requested to join the BBC London to work with the Corporation in the Arabic Department. In the 1950’s the late Sheikh decided to return home to Zanzibar. Soon after returning home from U.K. Sheikh Mohamed worked with Sauti ya Unguja, Zanzibar, up to the early years of 1960’s.

From his background, the late Sheikh Mohamed Burhani was a good and staunch worshiper of God. But not a fanatic.

From early 1964 to 1969 the late Sheikh Mohamed was employed by the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar. He worked with several ministries including the Ministries of Local Government and Regional Administration, Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Health.

From 1971 he worked with an academic institution, the University of Dar es Salaam, in the Institute of Kiswahili Research. He began as a Research Assistant, then he became as Assistant Research Fellow, and finally a full Research Fellow. His main preoccupation in the institute was translation, transliteration and lexicography.

The late Mohamed Mkelle transliterated the *Utenzi wa Kadhi Kassimu* from Arabic to Roman script. He was a hardworking person. He translated a book written by an American lady on anthropology titled *In the Shadow of Man*. It took him only eight months to finish that tedious work which took ten years to compile. Before Sheikh Mkelle took over that job (in 1975), the member of Parliament for Kinondoni, the late Dereck Bryceson, had assigned it to other people to translate, but unfortunately the work was not properly done. It was the late Mohamed Burhani Mkelle who managed to do the work successfully.

In 1978, Sheikh Mohamed Burhani Mkelle was compelled to relinquish his contract with the University of Dar es Salaam as he could not continue working due to his illness. He fought for his eye sight and after a while he got better. He then worked with the Eastern African Center for Research in Oral Traditional and African National Languages (EACROTANAL) in Zanzibar. After 3 years the Japanese Embassy approached him with the request to go to Japan for a special assignment of teaching Kiswahili in their University. He accepted the offer and signed the contract with the Japanese Government. He went to Japan and stayed there for three years, i.e from 1981 to 1983. Thereafter he returned to his home, in Tanzania.

Immediately after his arrival, even before he had rested, the Libyan Embassy called on him with an offer of a similar nature. The government of Libya requested him to teach at one of its universities. It was in 1985 when this exceptionally talented man was bogged down again with eye problems and was forced to retire.

From 1985 to 1999 the late Sheikh Mohamed Burhani Mkelle lived at his home in Dar es Salaam, Nkurumah and Uhuru Streets near the Clock Tower until his death.

I personally witnessed the life style of the late Sheikh Muhamed Burhani Mkelle when he was still working with the University of Dar es Salaam. I met him for the first time in 1964 at Malindi in Zanzibar. We had been travelling together. None of us knew that we would meet again and work together in the same office. He used to treat me with kindness, telling me that I knew more Kiswahili than he did, but in fact he knew Kiswahili better than I did.

The late Sheikh Mohamed Burhani Mkelle was one of the important personalities in Zanzibar and Tanzania Mainland. Only a few people, especially those who were close to him, knew him well. He was a rare personality in many respects.

I will not have done justice if I do not mention also his hospitality, kindness and consideration to his close friends like myself and certainly his other close intimates. It is pitiful to miss him. His family must be in great grief to lose him.

Let us all join hands in this great sorrow during this period of mourning the late Sheikh Mohamed Burhani Mkelle. We pray to our Almighty God to lay him in peace.

AMEN

Hamisi Akida
UKUTA,
Dar es Salaam

