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MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF MUSLIMS IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO SINCE 1845



BY
ZAINOL A. KHAN

MILESTONES
in the history of
MUSLIMS
in Trinidad and Tobago since 1845

by Zainol A. Khan

Fii sabii lillaah (In the way of Allaah)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



The author was born in San Fernando, Trinidad in 1929 and is a retired Public Servant.

He received his early education at Coffee St. E. C. Primary School, and Naparima and St. Mary's Colleges. The author is the recipient of several scholarships. He obtained the Diploma in Management Studies from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in 1968. In that year he also successfully completed a three-month intensive course in "Market Research, Marketing Management and Marketing Principles" conducted by the International Marketing Institute, Cambridge, Boston, U.S.A., and held on the campus of the Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration. In 1972, on a UN Fellowship, he completed a "Comprehensive course in Export Promotion and International Marketing" conducted in Geneva by the International Trade Centre, UNCTAD/GATT".

The author has been involved in Islamic activities at the national level for over six decades. He has had many of his articles on Islam published in the local press and has written five books on various aspects of Islam. In addition, he has edited many Islamic magazines and periodical leaflets. He has also been involved in multi-faith activities for over three decades and served in various positions in the Inter Religious

Organisation (IRO) of Trinidad and Tobago Inc., including President for three consecutive years. He has served on over half dozen Cabinet-appointed Committees.

He was listed in “Who’s Who – Trinidad and Tobago -1991” and was awarded a “Certificate of Merit for Distinguished Services to Religion and Public Service” by the International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England in 1991.

He is widely travelled and performed both the Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) and the ‘*Umrah* (Lesser Pilgrimage) on two occasions. He is married to Laila Momina (nee Ghany), who has also been involved in Islamic activities for many decades. The couple has five children and ten grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

By

Professor Brinsley Samaroo

The University of Trinidad & Tobago

During the long reign of indentureship in Trinidad, from 1845 to 1920, about 14% of the 147,000 Indians who came were Muslim. In the process of distribution on the estates no efforts were made to separate Muslims from the larger Hindu cohort of labourers so that the followers of Islam were scattered among the general population. After indentureship they fanned out into the population depending on the availability of employment. Despite their small number and their scattered distribution they quickly located other Muslims in their area and formed *jamaats* (congregations) which banded together to build their own mosques, offering comfort and instruction as they sought to adjust to the New World to which they had been transported. After they had laid the foundations of this new self-hood they then joined with other East Indian groups namely Hindus and Christian Indians to form associations such as the East Indian National Congress and the East Indian National Association to join in common agitation for improved conditions on the estates, representation on state authorities, recognition of non-Christian marriages and state acceptance and assistance to non-Christian educational institutions. From the early twentieth century they invited scholars and missionaries from South Asia to refresh the culture and to maintain the link with the ancestral home. This has continued up to the present time. Over the past three decades there has been the introduction of Middle Eastern Islam which has added a new, non-Oriental version of Islam and this has been the cause of considerable controversy as we shall see in the text which follows. Nevertheless, Islam has remained as a potent force in the society far more influential than their small over-all proportion might suggest.

Zainol Khan, born in 1929, has been a keen observer as the Muslim community has developed over the decades. As a youth he did not have the option of attending a Muslim

primary or secondary school since such recognition did not come before 1949. However, his parents and the elders of the Muslim community ensured that he and many other youths were kept within the Islamic *ummah* (community) through *maktabs* and *madrassahs* held in the galleries of mosques or under Muslim houses where the Imams gathered the faithful and imparted learning. Blessed with a very retentive memory Zainol clearly remembers the evolution of the community from those early days. In this autobiography we are given major vignettes of his exciting life and experiences. In this account of his two observances of the Hajj we get a closer explanation of the reasons for that pilgrimage and how it feels to be one of a million devotees in that sacred place. He expresses his admiration of those who breathed their last at Makkah or Medina, receiving the ultimate blessings for having been there. Back in Trinidad, Zainol is a regular host to visiting Islamic missionaries; he represented his community on a host of boards and conferences and his long experience and expertise in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) qualifies him to be a *Qadi*, even though he makes no claim to such office. He is never shy at expressing his firm views despite opposition to those views. Such confidence comes from the high degree of *Taqwa* (God consciousness) to which he has come after decades of Sufi-life meditation and contemplation.

There are some major issues in the life of our society upon which this autobiography sheds new light. Perhaps the most important is the struggle to obtain recognition for non-Christian schools in our educational system. Whereas the Christian denominations were recognized from the mid-19th century as legitimate providers of primary and secondary education, such a facility was not accorded to non-Christian schools since the European owners considered their colonies to be Christian havens ruled by Western values rather than by “heathen” creeds. Muslims and Hindus who were brought here were expected to conform to these Western norms or return to India at the end of their indentureship. For this reason, repeated pleadings by non-Christian groups for the recognition of their self-started schools were continuously

rejected by the state. Zainol Khan as a young man witnessed the pioneering role of the Islamic community to achieve this objective which came into effect in 1949 when he was twenty years old. His account fills a void in our educational history. Similarly, he traces the struggle for the recognition of Islamic marriages which was effected in 1935. As a young man, he was able to recapture those events through oral interviews and the careful collection of records. In like manner he gives a good account of the factors which led to the declaration of Eid-ul-Fitr as a national holiday. One of the ways in which a nation is built is the remembrance of leaders who laid the visions of nationhood. This book is a compendium of Islamic leaders in many aspects of national life: politics, business, culture and religion. It therefore constitutes a rich source of information for those who are concerned about nation-building.

Now in the evening of his life, Zainol Khan has generously bequeathed these memories to those of us whom he will leave behind. His own personal life and conduct has been beyond reproach and to many he remains a model to be emulated and a standard-bearer of Islamic behavior.

All of his readers would not agree with all of his opinions but he expects that in the Muslim tradition of *Shura* and *Ijma* (consultation and consensus). This is a worthy text of a long life spent in the service of humanity in general but of his nation in particular. As the author himself says, quoting from the *Ahadith*, among the three things which would benefit the person even after death, one is the knowledge that he leaves behind for people to benefit. This book is a storehouse of that knowledge.

May 2013

PREFACE

In the name of Allaah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

This book had its genesis in late 1987. The occasion was the First Annual Graduation Ceremony of the recently founded Haji Ruknudeen Institute of Islamic Studies, over which I had the pleasure to preside in my capacity as Chairman of the Board of Governors. The feature address on the occasion was given by then Dr. (now Professor) Brinsley Samaroo, Minister of Community Development and former Lecturer in History at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, specialising in East Indian History in Trinidad and Tobago.

During the course of his address the Minister lamented the fact that so little had been recorded of the history of Muslims from India. He then appealed to the Muslim leadership of the country to work towards rectifying this situation.

The writer had at that time been involved in Islamic activities in the country for nearly four decades as a result of which he had: either interfaced with a number of persons who had contributed significantly to the development of Islam in this country, or knew persons who had first hand information about such others. Consequently the writer, although not a historian, resolved that he would pen this book. As such, what follows here is, to a large extent, the recollection of the contributions of these individuals and epic events that contributed to the development of Islam and attainment of citizens' rights that impacted on the political and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago.

It has taken the writer over twenty five years to complete this task because of his involvement in other activities, including writing five books on various aspects of Islam, to which he had to give priority. Through the Grace of Almighty Allaah, Praised and Glorified is He, the task is now completed.

Writing a book on history has been a new experience for the writer. He must therefore record his deep appreciation to the young sister-in-faith, Dr. Halima-Sa'adia Kassim, who found time from her busy professional duties as a Senior Planning Officer, University Office of Planning and Development, at the University of the West Indies (UWI) to spend many hours of her time in perusing the manuscript and to offer valuable suggestions to improve the quality of the text and its presentation. She is a granddaughter of one of the subjects in this book, Moulvi F. Dad Khan {see Ch. 3 (c)} with whom the writer had the privilege and honour to work in the field of *da'wah* for over two decades. Her reward is with Allaah – Praised and Glorified is He.

The writer must also thank Professor Samaroo who, as mentioned above, inspired this book, for taking time off from his busy schedule in order to write the Introduction to this book.

In presenting this effort, the writer would like to point out that there were many individuals who contributed to the achievement of the development of Islam in Trinidad and Tobago. Some are known, many are unknown as they toiled silently for the development of Islam in the communities and districts. The major players have been identified in this book. Where the subject matter is an individual, it was not the intention to record that individual's biography, but simply to record the contributions the individual made to the advancement of Islam in Trinidad and Tobago. This book also reflects from the author's point of view significant events that defined the presence of Muslims in the country. In dealing with a number of subjects the writer has first given a brief description of the relevant Islamic belief/s so that the non-Muslim reader may better be able to appreciate the rationale of the individual/s in struggling to achieve the particular objective.

The writer would like to offer his view on the individual who has contributed most to the propagation of the Islamic faith

during the period under review. Two persons, both of whom lived very simply, were very humble, and never sought publicity or to project themselves, stand out significantly in this respect. They are:

- Haji Ruknudeen – for his role in successfully leading the struggle against the spread of the Ahmadiyyah Movement in this country, and
- Abdul Gany – for his efforts, along with others, in establishing the first national Muslim organisation in the country and also the first Muslim (and non-Christian) State-aided school in the Western Hemisphere.

Finally the writer wishes to thank his Creator for giving him the knowledge, guidance and health to complete this book. He prays that those who read it will not relax and bask in the achievements of their forefathers but will themselves be inspired to reach, if not exceed, the successes achieved by them so that at some time in the future their activities will also be recorded in a publication of this nature, *Inshaa Allaah*.

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GLOSSARY

Al-Faruq	One who distinguishes between right and wrong.
Ansaar-ul-laah	The friends of Allaah.
‘Aaqiiqah	The ceremony at which a child is named.
Allaah or Allah	God.
As-Siddique	The most truthful and sincere person.
Bai-ut	Oath.
Caliph	Spiritual leader in Islam.
Charch	A shortened version of Chacha, Urdu word for one’s father’s brother.
Dar-ul-Ifta	An Institute of Islamic Jurisprudence.
Dawah	The act of inviting people to be Muslims or expanding the knowledge of Muslims on Islam.
Diin	A complete way of life.
Divali or Diwali or Deepavali	One of the most important Hindu festivals.
Eid-ul-Fitr	The Festival to mark the end of the compulsory month of fasting.
Eid-ul-Adha	The festival of the sacrifice of Prophet Abraham (Ibraahiim) - peace be on him.
Fez	A felt hat without a brim (usually worn in Turkey and Egypt).
Fatwa - (pl. Fatawa)	A legal verdict given by an Islamic scholar (or group of scholars) which is based on Islamic law.
Fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence
Janaazah	Funeral prayer
Hadith (pl. Ahadith)	Saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him).
Haafiz (pl. Huffaaz)	A person who has memorised the complete Qur’aan.
Haji/hajji	A person who has performed the Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah).
Hanafi	One of the four schools of law in Sunni Islam.
Hijrah	The migration of Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) from Makkah to Yathrib (now Madinah).
Hujra	A cell, a closet, a chamber.
Imaam	The person who leads the congregational prayer.
Imaan	Faith.
Inshaa Allaah	Allaah willing
Jamaat	Muslim congregation
Jamma Masjid	The Friday congregational masjid in a town or city.

Jumu'a	Jihaad A struggle in the path of Allaah
Ka'aba	The Friday congregational prayers. The first house constructed for the worship of Allaah. It was originally built by Prophet Adam (peace be on him) and has been reconstructed from time to time. It is a cube-shaped building situated in Masjid al-Haram in Makkh, Saudi Arabia.
Kalla (also khalla)	One's mother's sister.
Kalloo (also khalloo)	The husband of one's maternal sister.
Khaliifaa' (pl- khulafaa')	Initially, the title given to the successors of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). Eventually, the word took on the meaning of the Head of State of a Muslim nation.
Khutbah	A sermon or speech, especially the Friday sermon.
Kurta	A loose shirt worn just above or below the waist.
Madressah	School.
Maktab	A Muslim primary school.
Mamee	Mother's brother
Mamoo	Mother's brother wife
Masjid (pl. Masaajid)	A Muslim place of worship.
Maulana	A title given to respected Muslim leaders, in particular those who have graduated from a religious institution.
Meelad-un-Nabee	The birthday of the Prophet Muhammad – p.b.o.h.
Mihraab	The niche or recess in one wall of a masjid which shows the direction to be faced when offering salaah (prayer).
Mir-aaaj	Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him).
Moulvi or Maulvi	See Maulana.
Mujtahid	A Reformer.
Mureed	Spiritual disciple
Mufti	Islamic scholar.
Pundit	A learned man versed in the Hindu religion, philosophy or law.
Qaarii (pl. Qurraa)	A person versed in reciting the Qur'aan.
Qadi	A Muslim judge: that is, one who renders decisions in accordance with Shariah.
Qadri	One of the oldest Sufi orders.
Qaseedas	Islamic songs.
Qiblah	The direction Muslims face when offering prayer. This direction is towards the Ka'aba, which is situated in the city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia.
Qur'aan	The book of revelations from Allaah to the

Raka'at	Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him).
Ramadaan	A unit of prayer. The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar which Muslims worldwide observe as a month of fasting. This annual observance is regarded as one of the Five Pillars of Islam. The month lasts 29–30 days based on the visual sightings of the crescent moon.
Salaat (pl. Salawaat)	Prescribed prayer.
Salaatul Janaazah	Funeral prayers.
Saum	Fasting. Also known as Roza.
Sawine	A traditional Eid drink.
Sunu	Please listen
Shariah	Islamic law
Shawaal	The tenth month of the Islamic calendar.
Sherwani	A long coat-like garment worn over the kurta, a loose shirt falling either just above or somewhere below the knees of the wearer, or is worn by men.
Sheikh	A religious official. Also spelt Shaikh.
Sheikh-ul-Islam	The title given to a superior authority of Islam.
Shukraana	Thanksgiving function.
Suffa	Shed.
Sufi	A lover of Allaah, who tries to show his love by constantly remembering Him.
Sunnah	Sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him).
Tabligh-ul-islam	Propagation of Islam.
Tapia	A Spanish word referring to a mud building or wall.
Taraweeh	The optional prayer performed after the Isha (night) prayer during the month of Ramadaan.
'Umrah	The lesser pilgrimage, which may be performed at any time in the year.
Waqf	Trust, property
Zil Hajj	The twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

ABBREVIATIONS

ASJA	Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association of Trinidad and Tobago Inc.
ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
CMI	Canadian Mission to Indians
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
EINA	East Indian National Association
EINC	East Indian National Congress
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IBN	Islamic Broadcasting Network
IRO	Inter Religious Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago Inc
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OCC	Order of the Caribbean Community
ORTT	Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
p.b.o.h.	Peace be on him
PHC	Population Housing Construction
PNM	People's National Movement
QRC	Queen's Royal College
T. C.	Trinity Cross
TIA	Tackveeyatul Islamic Association of Trinidad and Tobago Inc.
TML	Trinidad Muslim League Inc
UNC	United National Congress
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UP	Uttar Pradesh
UWI	The University of the West Indies
WWW	World Wide Web

CHAPTER ONE:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MUSLIMS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

(a) Overview of Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago is the southernmost island of the Caribbean archipelago and is geologically an extension of the South American continent. The country covers an area of 5,128 square kilometers (1,980 sq miles) and consists of two main islands, Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad is the larger and more populous of the main islands; Tobago is much smaller, comprising about six per cent of the total area. The total estimated population as of 2007 is 1,303,188.¹

Trinidad and Tobago is a multicultural society forged out of several migration and settlement streams. Early Muslim presence started with the arrival of Africans as slaves and as free men followed by the Muslims from South Asia who came as part of the Indian indentured system and lastly, the Syrian-Lebanese. It was from among these streams that Islam came to these shores. The focus of this book is the indentured Muslims from India.

Trinidad and Tobago achieved independence from England in 1962 and became a Republic in 1976. Its economy is primarily industrial with an emphasis on petroleum and petrochemicals. Agriculture, tourism and

¹ Background Note – Trinidad and Tobago, US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35638.htm>.

manufacturing are also important generators of revenue to the local economy.

(b) Positioning the Muslim community

The history of the Muslim community is integral to understanding the context of the contributions of individuals and epic events that led to the attainment of citizens' rights which in turn impacted on the political and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. As such, it is worth briefly looking at the migration and settlement of the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago.

Although the focus of this book is the indentured labourers and their descendants, it cannot be ignored or forgotten that the Muslim presence in Trinidad began with the Africans.² From 1845, Muslims arrived from South Asia, particularly North India, as part of the indenture system to work on sugar plantations. It is estimated that between 1845 and 1917, 143,939 indentured labourers arrived in the colony. While there are many conflicting reports of the ship that brought the first immigrants to Trinidad and in particular, the number of immigrants that arrived, the majority would have been Hindus and a minority Muslims. This remains true for the entire period the indenture system operated. An estimated eighty per cent of the migrants were Hindus and fifteen

² For more on the presence of African Muslims in Trinidad see B. Samaroo, "Early African and East Indian Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago". In Across the Dark Waters. Edited by D. Dabydeen and B. Samaroo. Macmillan/University of Warwick, UK, 1995, pp.201-212

per cent were Muslims.³ By 1946 the Muslim population accounted for 31 per cent of the Indian population and 5.8 per cent of the total population.⁴

Among the Muslim population, and East Indians generally, there was the need to preserve their identity and culture. Amid this group of indentured labourers, leaders emerged who strove to keep Islam alive on the estates and, later on, in the villages by way, among others, of offering *salaat* and recitation of the Qur'aan (the book of revelations from Allaah to the Prophet Muhammad p.b.o.h.). Not surprisingly then, by the late nineteenth century the Muslim community began actively establishing *masaajid* (places of worship), *jamaats* (congregations) and village-level organisations. These institutions further served as a means for sustaining the religion and signaled the intent of the indentured labourers and their descendants to demand rights and resources similar to those given by the Government to the Christian community to support their religious needs. Later on in the twentieth century, there were the establishment of religious organisations and the founding of denominational schools. Furthermore, there were periodic visits by Muslim missionaries from India and later, India and Pakistan (post 1947 with the Independence of India and its subsequent partitioning into India and Pakistan) that contributed to expanding the base

³ Brij V. Lal, "The Odyssey of Indenture: Fragmentation and Reconstitution in the Indian Diaspora" *Diaspora* (Vol 5 No. 2) 1996. 167-188. This is also supported by Dale Bisnauth, The vast majority of the immigrants came from the Indo-Gangetic plain, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar with a minority from Oudh and Bengal; predominantly Hindu areas. These were predominantly Hindu areas. In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, where a significant number of the immigrants originated Sunni (orthodox) Islam dominated. However, Shias (also spelt Shi'ites- another stream in Islam) and the Wahhabis (followers of strict fundamental Islamic teachings) were also to be found (Titus, 1960.31).

⁴ Jack Harewood, The Population of Trinidad and Tobago CICRED Series, 1975. 91, 95, 97, 108.

of knowledge on Islam in Trinidad. Muslim youths would also seize the opportunity to study Islam in India and the Middle East. During the second quarter of the twentieth century the Muslims lobbied for rights to establish schools, recognition of marriage and divorce according to Islamic principles, burial plots, and recognition of a national public holiday for a key religious festival, *Eid-ul-Fitr*. Some of these issues would be discussed in more details in subsequent chapters.

According to Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life the Muslim population in Trinidad and Tobago for 2010 was estimated at 5.8 per cent numbering 78,000⁵ and resides predominantly in Trinidad though there is a small percentage that lives in Tobago. These findings are consistent with the population distribution of Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago based upon the Population and Housing Census (PHC) 2000. The Pew study also noted that the estimated Muslim population in 2030 would increase to 80,000 though the percentage value would remain at 5.8 per cent⁶ of the total population.⁷

Today, there are over 130 *masaajid* in the country generally affiliated with the major Islamic organisations in Trinidad and Tobago namely, the Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association of Trinidad and Tobago Inc. (ASJA), the Tackveeyatul Islamic Association of Trinidad Inc. (TIA) and the Trinidad Muslim League Inc. (TML) as well as a few independent *masaajid*. There are fifteen Muslim Government-assisted primary and six Muslim

⁵ The Future of the Global Muslim Population for 2010-2030. Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, January 2011, accessed Jan. 2011, <http://pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx>.

⁶ The Future of the Global Muslim Population.

⁷ The total population in 2030 as estimated by the United Nations Population Division will be 1, 382,000. United Nations Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

Government-assisted secondary schools, and three institutions: the Darul-Uloom, Haji Ruknudeen Institute of Islamic Studies and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah Institute, which produce locally trained scholars and *imams* (the person who leads the congregational prayers) and teach Arabic language and Islamic law. In 2005, a Muslim-owned Islamic television channel, Islamic Broadcasting Network (IBN Channel 8), was born. In addition, broadcast time is regularly purchased by a number of groups and individuals on at least two commercial television stations and two commercial radio stations. The next year, 2006, a website TriniMuslims.com was created and more and more the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago through its organisations, youth movements and masaaqid are establishing a presence on the World Wide Web (WWW) e.g.

www.darululoomtt.net (Darul Uloom) and
www.mominatt.com (Momina) and via social
networking sites.

Thus, from indentured labourers to settlers the Muslim community has established a presence in Trinidad and Tobago. They have also played a significant role in the economic development of the country from indentured labourers on the plantations to peddlers and merchants to now being among the professional class and owners of businesses employing many individuals. Also, over the years there have been Muslim members of government and even holding the highest office in the land, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This suggests that Muslims, although a minority (generally 6 per cent of the total population), are a critical mass and able to participate and influence the development of their homeland.

The Muslim community in Trinidad and Tobago is now faced with several paradoxical and formidable challenges. These include positioning themselves within the larger Muslim *ummah*; asserting or establishing their minority presence within a larger multicultural society and making Islam a relevant part of their lives.⁸ This suggests that the Muslim community may now be faced with an even greater challenge to accommodate to the sociopolitical and economic changes associated with a globalised world. In this regard, issues such as democracy, modernity, secularity, liberalism and human rights can either be seen as compatible with Islamic laws and principles or incompatible and contradictory to Islamic teachings. Additionally, the Muslim community must assess their internal dimension of differences and identify mechanisms to promote dialogue and unity as well as give serious consideration to the dissonance between rights granted to them pre-independence and its relevance and appropriateness today with altered socioeconomic and political realities.

⁸ Janet Bauer, "Global Sightings: Muslim Women in Trinidad" Feminist Scholarship Review (Spring 2005), accessed Jan. 2011, http://www.caribbeanmuslims.com/attachments/1/trini_muslim_women.pdf.

CHAPTER TWO:

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

Islam is not a religion as the word is commonly understood. Rather, it is a complete way of life which provides Divine Guidance for mankind in all aspects of life and living. It touches not only on the spiritual but provides guidance on every aspect of life, living and society providing guidance on multiple topics from banking and welfare, warfare and the environment and governance and human rights. This guidance for mankind is to be found in the *Shariah* (Islamic Law), the two main sources of which are the Holy Qur'aan and the *Sunnah* (sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.)).

The Holy Qur'aan is the last revealed book of Almighty God and the complete book of guidance for the Muslims throughout the world. It was revealed by Almighty God to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.), through the Angel Gabriel, over a period of twenty-three years. As the first verses were revealed they were committed to memory by the companions of the Holy Prophet (p.b.o.h.) and inscribed on tablets. Up to the time of the demise of the Holy Prophet (p.b.o.h.) the Qur'aan had not been compiled in book form. However, there were many *Huffaaz* (persons who have memorized the complete Qur'aan and therefore could recite it from memory). The first *Haafiz* in Islam was Hazrat 'Umar Al-Faruuq (R.A.), who was later to become the second *Khaliifaa*' (successor to the Holy Prophet – p.b.o.h.).

As a matter of interest, it has been estimated that the Qur'aan is about the size of the New Testament. It, in

fact, takes about twenty-five to thirty hours to recite completely in one sitting.

During the reign of the first Caliph (leader) a number of *Huffaaz* (plural of *haafiz*) were killed in one of the battles the Muslims had to fight with their enemies. As a result of this Hazrat Umar (R.A.) prevailed upon the Caliph, Hazrat Abu Bakr As-Siddique (R.A.), to have a complete copy of the Qur'aan compiled. This was done and duly authenticated. A number of copies was made from this authenticated book by the third Caliph, Hazrat 'Uthmaan (R.A.), and distributed to various parts of the Muslim world. This is the text still in use today. Two of the manuscripts from the time of Hazrat 'Uthmaan (R.A.) are still in existence – one at Topkapi Palace in Istanbul (Turkey) and the other at Tashkent (now the capital of Uzbekistan). Today, there are scores of thousands of *Huffaaz* throughout the world, so that if all the copies of the Qur'aan in existence are destroyed, an exact copy can be reproduced.

A *hadith* (saying of the Prophet Muhammed - p.b.o.h.) narrated by Al-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawood narrated from Abd-Allaah ibn 'Amr states that whoever memorizes the Qur'aan and acts upon it, Allaah will reward him and honour him greatly for that, so that he will rise in status in Paradise to a level commensurate with what he memorized of the Book of Allaah.⁹ Thus, a *Haafiz*¹⁰ holds an honoured and important position in the Islamic system. Memorisation of the Qur'aan is a blessing in

⁹ Muhammed Salih Al-Munajjid, Reward for memorizing Qur'an. Islamic Propagation Office in Rabwah, Riyadh. 2009 (1430) <http://www.islam-ga.com/en>

¹⁰ A person desirous of becoming a *Haafiz* may attend an Islamic Institute where he would be taught a number of religious subjects, specialising in his choice. Such a person, on graduation, would have a fairly broad knowledge of Islam and be qualified to teach the religion. On the other hand, a person may arrange for private tuition if one can afford it. There is no special period of time to study in order to become a *Haafiz*. It depends on how much time is devoted to studying. There are many cases of children under five years achieving this objective.

itself. Teaching others to read and understand it is another blessing. In addition, the *Haafiz* must be given some preference when it comes to leading the congregational prayers, which are held five times a day.

Islam emphasizes the exclusive worship of the One Who created the heavens and the earth and to whom all creation will finally return. Muslims believe in the seven articles of faith (creed) and have five primary responsibilities to Allaah known as the *five pillars of Islam*.¹¹

A Muslim should be aware of the basic principles of Islam and of what is allowed and what is prohibited in the religion. If there are any doubts about a particular matter he/she would seek the advice of the *Imaam* who in turn, if he needs clarification, would consult the *Qadi* (Judge). In addition, the *Qadi* would be required to give a *fatwa* (ruling) about interpretation of the *Shariah* and also to settle disputes between Muslims, again in accordance with the *Shariah*.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.)

¹¹ The **Five Pillars of Islam** (*Arkaan al-Islam*) are: (i) *Shahadah* (Declaration of Faith) - there is no deity but Allaah and Muhammad is the Apostle of Allaah; (ii) *Salaat* or prayer at the five prescribed times a day; (iii) payment of *zakaat* (poor rate) for those in a certain financial position; (iv) *Saum* or fasting during the month of *Ramadaan*, except in certain circumstances; and (v) performance of *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah) at least once in one's lifetime if one is in a certain financial position. The **seven cardinal articles of faith of Islam** are: (i) belief in the Oneness of Allaah; (ii) belief in all of Allaah's angels; (iii) belief in all of Allaah's revealed books, which are four in number; (iv) belief in all of Allaah's Prophets; (v) belief in the Day of Resurrection; (vi) belief in the Day of Judgment; and (vii) belief that the power of doing all actions (good or bad) proceeds from Allaah, but each one is responsible for his or her actions.

Muslims believe that Islam is a faith that has always existed and that it was gradually revealed to humanity through the ages by Allaah through a number of prophets, but the final and complete revelation of the faith was made through the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century CE.

Muhammad was born in Makkah in Saudi Arabia in 570 C.E. and was orphaned at an early age and brought up under the care of his grandfather, then one of his uncles. He later worked mostly as a merchant, as well as a shepherd, and was first married by age 25. Muhammad habitually retreated into a cave on Mount Hira in the surrounding mountains of Jabal Noor for seclusion, meditation and prayer. It was there at the age of 40 that he was visited by the Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) and received his first revelation from God. He subsequently continued to receive these revelations and soon started preaching same publicly, proclaiming that there is no God but Allaah, and that life should be lived in complete submission to the will of Allaah.

His preaching attracted many people. Soon, Muhammad's popularity was seen as a threat by the powerful in Makkah. This led to his migration (*Hijrah*) from Makkah to Madina in 622 C.E., the year in which the Islamic lunar calendar begins. Within a decade Muhammad had gained a critical mass of followers which allowed him to return and conquer Makkah. Muhammad continued to lead his community in both spiritual and in earthly matters until his death in 632 C.E.

CHAPTER THREE:

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD (p.b.o.h.)

This chapter explores the lives and contributions of several individuals in the Muslim community who did their duty as Muslims and shared the message of Islam. These men were inspired by the injunctions in the Qur'aan as exemplified by the practices and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) and tried to live a life with scrupulous regard for devotion to Allaah.

(a) Yacoob Ali (1875-1925) - The First Local *Haafiz*

“The best of you is he who learnt the Qur’aan and then teaches it.” (The Prophet Muhammad – p.b.o.h.)

Thirteen-year old Bahadoor Ali arrived in Trinidad on the first ship bringing indentured immigrants to work on the cane-fields. The year is well known: 1845. The name “Bahadoor” is a strange one for a person who was born a Muslim as it appears to be a name associated with Hindus. One might wonder whether he was a convert to Islam or whether one of his parents was a Muslim and the other a Hindu.

Very little is known of the life of Bahadoor Ali, and he may have passed in ignominy but for the fact that he sent his thirteen year old son, Yacoob, to his homeland to study to become a *haafiz* (an individual who has completely memorised the Qur’aan). The mere fact that he chose for his son to become a *haafiz* shows the deep

love that Bahadoor Ali had for his religion. The fact his son would be thousands of miles away for many years and that he may never have seen him again also spoke highly of his faith in his Creator.

Bahadoor Ali ensured that young Yacoob had some basic training in Islam and other relevant subjects in his early youth. Thus, when young Ali left these shores he was already well versed in the Urdu, Arabic and Farsi languages, not to mention some *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence). Yacoob was accompanied by his brother-in-law (which indicates that Bahadoor Ali had at least two children). The journey by boat, as is well known, was long and arduous and it was expected that a few at least would die during it. However young Ali arrived in the land of his father safely (nothing is known as to who his mother was or from whence she came). In India the youth entered an Islamic institution where he studied such subjects as Urdu, Arabic and *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) for twelve years. While at the Institute he concentrated on becoming a *Haafiz*, and a *Qaari*, that is, one versed in the various intonations of the Qur'aan.

Ali returned to Trinidad in 1898 both as a *Haafiz* and a *Qaari*; the first local to be so qualified. Then twenty three years old, he embarked with all the exuberance of his youth on the mission for which he had been trained, that is, to spread the word of God as given through the Holy Qur'aan and the sayings and practices of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.). The young *Haafiz* was based in San Fernando, as it seems his parents lived there or in the environs. After living in one or two places on his return, he settled at the property which is immediately south of the San Fernando Jama Masjid, of which he became the *Imaam* when it was completed in 1917.

Ali conducted full time day classes in San Fernando which were attended by both boys and girls (including the writer's mother and aunts) from all parts of the country. He gave his time to the propagation of the faith and was supported in his efforts by generous members of the Muslim community, who sought the pleasure of God by supporting him in his efforts. The *Haafiz* had a close relationship in this respect with the late Abdul Gany, of St. Joseph [see Ch. 4 (c)], who has been described as a philanthropist. Many students were assisted with transportation expenses, while others who lived far away were accommodated in the two or three-room wooden building (called the *Hujra*¹²) at the rear of the adjacent *masjid*. This building served not only as a dormitory for such students, but also as an overnight resting place for those who would visit him from distant parts of the country seeking advice.

The late Hajjin Ayesha Khan of Champs Fleurs, who passed away in 2000 at the age of 90, was one of the students of the *Haafiz* in San Fernando. Hajjin Khan was a very close friend of the writer and his wife for the last twenty five years or so of her life and the writer always had to reserve a seat in his car whenever he went, or took his wife, to Islamic functions and lectures. The information, as paraphrased, in the following four paragraphs was obtained from the Hajjin.

The Haafiz was tall and slim. He dressed in the typical Muslim wear of the east, namely, pyjamas, long Kurta, turban and, in keeping with the Sunnah (practice) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.), kept a full beard.

¹² *Hujra* is an Urdu word meaning "a cell, a closet, a chamber.

The Haafiz was fully supported in his efforts by his wife Sakina. She sewed garments and sold them in order to assist in maintaining the family. In addition, she would joyfully answer her husband's call at late hours in the night to prepare a meal for those persons who would so often come to the home late in the evening to seek advice or, in view of the limited means of transportation in those days, to seek shelter for the night before continuing their journey the next day.

The Haafiz's activities were not restricted to San Fernando and its environs. He was invited by Muslims from all parts of the country to deliver lectures. He also visited British Guiana for this purpose. The month of Ramadaan, the month of compulsory fasting for Muslims, saw great demands for the Haafiz's services. Unfortunately, he could not accommodate all and so would spend a number of days (between five and ten) in one area conducting the Taraweeh (special nightly prayer during Ramadaan) and completing recitation of the Qur'aan during that period, then move on to another area. That meant reciting at least one tenth or more of the Qur'aan every night. Therefore, the prayer would finish about eleven p.m. The devotees would then have to walk back to their barracks (sometimes many miles) through dirt traces using flambeaux to light their respective ways. They would then go to bed and rise very early the next morning to commence the day's fast and then proceed to the fields to labour therein. They never complained about the length of the prayer for they understood the blessing to be derived from listening to the recitation of the Qur'aan. How have times changed!!

The ability of the Haafiz's wife to cater for guests was fully extended on the two Eid days. There were not as many *masaajid* as there are today in the areas

surrounding San Fernando so the Muslims in their numbers would converge on the Jama Masjid to read their special *Eid* prayers. After the prayer was finished the congregation could not leave to return to their respective homes without stepping across the boundary between the *masjid* and the *Haafiz's* home in order to partake of a glass of *sawine*, the traditional Eid drink, prepared by the *Haafiz's* wife. After the *Haafiz's* demise at the relatively young age of fifty years in 1925, his wife continued the tradition until her passing away in 1968. The tradition did not die then; it was continued by the *Haafiz's* elder son, Sheikh Fuzloo Rahaman, for a number of years. It was eventually stopped in the course of time because, with the construction of a number of *masajid* around the San Fernando area, the congregation at the San Fernando *masjid* came to comprise mostly of persons from the town itself.

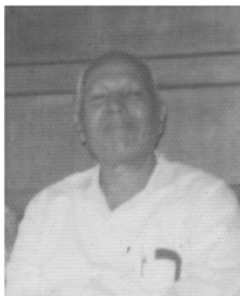
The *Haafiz's* students were many and from various parts of the country. Today most, if not all of them, have passed away. The vast majority of them however practised what they learned from the *Haafiz*. As a result of the knowledge obtained from him, quite a number of his students were able to serve prominently in the Muslim community, while others were able to pass on the knowledge gained from him to the younger generations.

The writer was born in San Fernando four years after the demise of the *Haafiz* and was a member of the Jama Masjid Jamaat for the first twenty five years of his life. He would always be among those participating in the *sawine* provided by the *Haafiz's* wife after the *Eid* prayer. The writer's first cousin, Zobaida (née Jaleel), was married to the *Haafiz's* elder son, Fuzloo, and he would often visit the home where he would pay his respects to

the *Haafiz's* wife, who was a very reserved and humble person.

(b) Gafur Ali (1903-1994)

“ And the servants of (God) are those who walk the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say: ‘Peace!’; those who spend the night in adoration of their Lord prostrate and standing.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 25 V. 63)



Gafur Ali was the son of the late Mowlah Baksh and Basheeran. He attended the Tacarigua C.M.I. School and, shortly after leaving, began working as a pupil teacher at the School at the age of about 14 or 15 years for the then princely sum of \$2.00 a month. In keeping with the practice of the time he studied as he worked and successfully completed the Pupil Teachers and Assistant Teacher I and II Examinations.

As a result of his success at the above examinations he was then eligible to enter a Teachers' Training College and become a Trained Teacher, with the possibility of eventually reaching greater heights in the Teaching Profession. However, this was never to be and in fact never was. This was because young Ali not only practised his religion – Islam - but also preached it. Ali's position in the school was a very sensitive one, to put it mildly. He was a practising and active Muslim, teaching in a Presbyterian school, which had been established by an organisation established specifically to work among the East Indian community. Work, in this case, of course meant “converting” them. The powers that be in the

Church naturally felt that Ali was an embarrassment to them. What could be done to remedy the situation? To fire him would be bad publicity. Therefore, taking a leaf out of the book of the Colonial master, the Church authorities decided to transfer him to the C.M.I. Primary School in the far-away village of Roussilac in the deep south of the country. Ali was then thirty-five years old and married, with several children.

Transportation and roads were not what they are now where one could possibly travel to and from work each day. Ali had a choice: to either accept the transfer and be effectively cut off from his Islamic activities, or to resign. He chose to resign. However, when he handed his resignation to the Headmaster of the Tacarigua C. M. I. School, the late Mr. C. W. Debysingh, the Headmaster destroyed the letter and told Ali not to worry as he would see to it that Ali was not transferred. Interestingly, Debysingh, after his retirement from the Teaching Service as a Senior Inspector of Schools, was to become the first Principal of the ASJA Boys College, San Fernando, when it was established as a private Secondary School in 1960.

Ali continued to teach as an Assistant Teacher at the Tacarigua C. M. I. School until he retired in 1960 although he was continuously overlooked, because of his religious persuasion, for entry to the Teachers' Training College.

As noted above, Ali was a devout Muslim and was active in the Muslim community. He was one of the founders of the Tacarigua Young Men's Muslim Association and became its first Secretary. This Association served as a good training ground for Ali. After a number of years he became President of the Tacarigua Jamaat (Muslim

congregation) and, up to the time of his death, was Honorary President. He continued to work among the Muslim communities while teaching and even for many years after his retirement. He passed away on the morning of July 3rd 1994 at the age of 91 years.

The writer first made his acquaintance with Ali about 1955. The writer was then Secretary of the ASJA and would regularly visit the Tacarigua Masjid, like many others, to attend functions and meetings at the Masjid. Ali was at that time President of the Jamaat. The writer subsequently became a close friend and co-worker in the field of Islam with Ali's son, Hyder, who over the course of time held a number of positions in the area of Islamic activities, including Treasurer of the Tacarigua Jamaat and ASJA, Secretary/Manager of the defunct Haji Ruknuuddeen Girls High School and Director/Secretary of the Haji Ruknuuddeen Institute of Islamic Studies. The writer regularly visited Hyder, who lived with his family at his parents' residence, to discuss matters of relevance to the Muslim community. He would usually meet Ali before and converse with him. Ali would sometimes join in the discussions and give valuable advice.

Ali was known and addressed by the majority of people in his village and surrounding areas as "Teach", as he had probably taught a substantial part of the population. He was a simple, humble person, devoted to developing the young people of Tacarigua both spiritually and academically. He never sought publicity but history will record that he had the dubious distinction of being the only person in Trinidad and Tobago to have spent a lifetime in the teaching profession without being recommended to attend a Teachers Training College. He preferred to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) who, in response to the opposition's offer of great wealth and a prominent

position in the community if he stopped his Divine Mission, replied:

.....I will not stop (preaching the Truth) and renounce my mission even though they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left. Either Allaah will give me success or I will be sacrificed for it.

(c) Moulvi Fateh Dad Khan (1911-1973) - The First Muslim Chaplain

“And We sent down the Book to thee for the express purpose, that thou shouldest make clear to them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 16 V. 64)



Moulvi Fateh Dad Khan was born at Canal No. 2, West Bank, Demerara, British Guiana (now Guyana) on the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr* 1330 A.H, which corresponds to the 13th November 1911 C.E. He was one of three children of Moulvi Alladin Khan, an Indian immigrant who, among other things, was a farmer, ranger/constable, and a road overseer.

Young Khan received his secular education at the village Canadian Mission School where he showed outstanding ability. His parents, however, ensured that he obtained a strong religious education by having him learn Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Hindi and even Dutch. Such was Khan’s knowledge of Islam that he was able to deliver his first

khutbah (Friday sermon) when he was only eighteen years old.

As a youth, Khan was very actively engaged in Islamic activities in the land of his birth, serving as President of the Young Men's Muslim Literary Association and Assistant Secretary of the national Muslim body, the Sadr Anjuman-i-Islam. He was given the title *Moulvi* in his native land because of his knowledge of Islam.

There were frequent visits by Muslims from Trinidad to British Guiana and *vice versa* over the years starting in the 1930s. As a direct result of some of these visits Moulvi Dad Khan's ability was recognised by a few prominent local Muslims and he was invited to participate in an exchange visit in 1941. He was eventually invited to migrate to Trinidad. He accepted the invitation and arrived in the country on the 4th May 1941. On the very day he arrived, he delivered his first public lecture in the country in the village of Cumuto in Eastern Trinidad. Five days later he conducted his first *Jumu'ah salaah* in the country at the Haji Gokool Meah Masjid, St. James. One week later he was unanimously elected Pesh Imam of that *Masjid*, a position he held with distinction until his demise some thirty three years later.

The position of *imaam* in Trinidad and Tobago is an honorary one. It is believed however that a small stipend was paid to him as *imaam* of the Haji Gokool Meah Masjid by the Gokool family so that he could carry on the *maktab* at the premises. Thus, Khan had to seek other means in obtain a livelihood. This he did by engaging in tailoring and watch repairing.

Immediately after his arrival in the country Moulvi Khan became very active in propagating the religion of Islam.

He was a very knowledgeable person in the religion and a fluent, powerful speaker who could hold an audience for an appreciable length of time. He broke new grounds in the country when he became the first Muslim to be granted permission to impart Religious Knowledge to the Muslim students at the prestigious Queen's Royal College (QRC) in the capital city of Port of Spain. In due course he started to teach Religious Knowledge at other Government Secondary Schools and also at the Government Teachers' Training College. He was also the examiner in Hindu and Urdu for students who wrote the examination subject for the Senior Cambridge School Certificate Examinations. It is believed that he was also Secretary of Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Assn. Inc. (ASJA) in the early forties.

In the early 1950's, Moulvi Dad Khan was officially appointed Missionary of the ASJA. Initially, it was not a full-time position due to lack of funds. He was to deliver one lecture a week and be paid the sum of five dollars for this purpose. This sum was also to cover his travelling expenses. The position was made full-time after a few years and, besides lecturing throughout the country, his duties expanded to include visiting the ASJA schools for the purpose of imparting religious education.

Moulvi Dad Khan achieved his life-long wish when he performed the Hajj in 1950. He also embraced the opportunity to visit Madinah and Jerusalem at the same time.

Moulvi Dad Khan had made a positive impact on the local Muslims from the time of his arrival in the country and as the years went by more and more *jamaats* and individuals requested him to speak at their functions. He was an indefatigable speaker and it was not unusual for

him to lecture on the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) to audiences in all parts of the country for the first twelve days of the month of *Rabi-ul-Awwal* (third month in the Islamic calendar and the month of the birth and death of Prophet Muhammad - p.b.o.h.). His knowledge of the *Mir'aaj* (Ascension of the Holy Prophet Muhammad - p.b.o.h.) appeared to be inexhaustible so that if one attended several lectures in different parts of the country to mark the occasion, one was sure to hear a different approach to the subject most of the time and thus learn something new. He was conspicuous in his suit and Red Egyptian *fez* (Islamic headwear).

In 1964, two years after gaining independence from the United Kingdom, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago decided to appoint both a Hindu and a Muslim Chaplain to the Prisons. This was not unexpected as there had been a Christian Chaplain (possibly two) for many years. The duty of the Chaplains was to visit the three Prisons (Port of Spain, Golden Grove and Carrerra) once a week in order to administer to the spiritual needs of the inmates. The post then carried a stipend of eighty dollars a month and a travelling allowance of forty dollars a month, which were indeed uneconomical. The logical choice for this position was Moulvi Dad Khan. He was recommended for the position by the ASJA, with the support of the TIA and, in due course was appointed.

Moulvi Dad Khan's duties as Muslim Chaplain to the Prisons did not in any way hamper his activities in the field of missionary work. He continued in this area until his sudden death on the 23rd Ramadaan 1393 A.H. (20th October 1973 C.E.). In keeping with Islamic practice, he was buried the very afternoon at the Western Cemetery, St. James, Port of Spain. The means of communication were not as swift as it is now, and many persons

(including the writer) who would have liked to read his *Janazah* (funeral prayers) were not aware of his demise.

The writer first became associated with the Moulvi when the writer was elected to the position of Assistant Secretary of the ASJA in 1951. The writer subsequently served in the positions of Secretary, Second and First Vice Presidents of that body and also acted as President General on many occasions. In addition, the writer served as Chairman of both ASJA's Propagation Committee for many years and Education Board for some time. These positions brought him in close contact with the Moulvi in order to:

- arrange lectures in various jamaats etc., and
- solicit the writing of articles for inclusion in the Association's annual Eid-ul-Fitr Magazine and bi-monthly leaflets (both of which were edited by the writer for a number of years).

The writer would often visit the Moulvi's home in St. James to discuss these and other matters and would be most cordially received by the entire family. The writer was able to increase his knowledge of Islam greatly by attending lectures given by the Moulvi, reading his articles and conversing with him.

The writer also travelled with Khan to and from lectures and functions on quite a number of occasions. One such occasion remains indelible in the writer's memory which is as follows: in 1953 the ASJA held a welcome function on a Sunday evening at Palms Club in San Fernando for the first Indian cricket team to visit the West Indies. The writer, who was not yet married, was working in Port of Spain and stayed at relatives in San Juan during the week for this purpose. The writer would travel to San Fernando after work on Saturdays to spend

the weekends at his parents, with whom he still lived, and return to work early on Monday morning. The writer met Khan at the welcome function and asked him if he would give him a drop at San Juan on his way home to St. James when he was leaving. Khan of course agreed and both left the premises at about 10.00 p.m. on the way to San Juan. There was no highway at that time and one had to travel through Marabella, California etc. Khan owned an old vehicle at that time and it started to overheat in the vicinity of Couva. Khan, who appeared unperturbed as he was apparently accustomed to dealing with motor vehicle problems, simply pulled the vehicle to the side of the road, took out a torchlight from the pocket of the car, opened the car's bonnet and, after looking around the engine for a while, reported that the fan belt was defective and he had to change it. He was able to drive the car very slowly until he reached a service station where he was fortunate to obtain an appropriate fan belt. Apparently having some experience with motor vehicle problems, Khan removed his tunic, took some tools from the trunk of his vehicle, and replaced the fan belt. We then continued travelling which was then early in the morning.

Moulvi Dad Khan lived a very simple life and was a very humble person. He was highly respected both in the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. He made great personal sacrifices in order to spread the Faith. It would not be unfair to say that since his demise, the local Muslim community has not had a local person devoted to the cause as he was and with the ability to hold an audience with the power of his speech as he had.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CHAMPIONS OF ISLAM

As the migrant community settled learned men came forth from within the community to advance the cause of Islam. This chapter examines the contributions of some of these individuals to the development of Islam in Trinidad and Tobago.

(a) Syed Abdul Aziz (1862-1927) - The First Qadi (Judge)

“God commands justice and fair dealing.” Al Qur’aan Ch. 16 V.70)

It was over fifty years after the arrival of first indentured Muslim immigrants from India in Trinidad and Tobago before a *Qadi* was appointed by the Muslim



community. This was due to two main reasons. Firstly, the restrictions placed on the immigrants while they were still indentured and secondly, the difficulties of moving from one part of the country to another because of lack of proper roads and transportation. Thus, the Muslims were geographically dispersed and were not as yet united at the national level. Among the indentured immigrants while there were Muslims who were knowledgeable there was no one with the relevant knowledge and who could

command the respect of the community to be named *Qadi*. Further, and perhaps, more importantly, prior to the introduction of the Land Commutation Scheme of 1889 which was a means to persuade the Indians to stay, there was no critical mass to support the appointment of a *Qadi*. Thus, it was not until the year 1907 that the first *Qadi* in the country was elected at a meeting of Muslims held in Princes Town. The person so elected was Syed Abdul Aziz.

Aziz was born in the year 1862 in the city of Hazara in Afghanistan. He was a descendant of the Quraish tribe, the tribe of which the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) was a member. He was educated in a religious seminary in Peshwar (located in Pakistan) and was well versed in the Arabic, Farsi and Urdu languages. He joined the Afghan army at the age of fifteen years and served for four years under Lord Roberts. It is also believed he was knowledgeable in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and mathematics.

Aziz migrated to Trinidad in 1883 as an indentured labourer and served his indenture in Tacarigua (Samaroo 1998 and Kassim 1999). He then moved to Iere Village and after a few years there settled permanently in nearby Princes Town. He would become not only a champion of Muslim causes but of Indians in general.

Aziz founded the East Indian National Association (EINA) in 1893 and was its President for many years. He was also one of the founders, in 1906, of the Indian Guardian Association, which was registered in 1913. As a member of the first-mentioned body, Aziz was a very strong advocate for the recognition of Hindu and Muslim marriages by the Government and also the abolition of the institution of indentured labour.

Aziz was also very active in Islamic affairs and initiated the construction of a number of *masaajid*. As mentioned previously, he was elected to the position of *Qadi* in 1907. The high esteem in which he was held by the Muslim community led to his being elevated to the position of *Khaliifaa*’ (civil and religious leader) in 1923. He was one of the founders, in 1926, of the Tackveeyatul Islamic Association (TIA), the first Muslim (and non-Christian) body to be established in the country. This organisation was incorporated by Act of Legislature in 1931 as a non-Sectarian body.

Aziz passed away on the 21st August 1927.

(b) Ruknuddeen (1870-1963) - The Second Qadi and First Sheikh-ul-Islam

“Be just, for it is closest to God-consciousness.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 5 V. 8)

A couple, Elahee and Ameena, who lived in a small village in Punjab (India) and had a baby boy in the year 1870, must have had a thorough grounding in the Islamic faith and a deep faith in *Allaah* for they named him Ruknuddeen, which means “Pillar of the Faith”.¹³ Little did they know that some fifty years after, in an



¹³ Islam requires that certain ceremonial rites, called ‘*Aaqiiqah*’, be performed on the seventh day after the birth of a child, or as early as possible thereafter. The objective of ‘*Aaqiiqah*’ is to safeguard the child from sickness and evil influences. These rites include giving the child a proper Islamic name. Some examples of such names are: (i) Abd-Ullaah (Servant of Allaah), (ii) Abd-Ur-Rahmaan (Servant of the Most Gracious), (iii) Zain-ul-Abidiin (Ornament of the Pious), etc.

unknown island thousands of miles away, he would indeed be The Pillar of The Faith, successfully (supported by a few other persons) protecting the faith against the teachings of *Ahmadism* and *Qadianism*.

Young Ruknudeen's parents ensured that he had a sound training in the Islamic faith and in reading Arabic, the language in which the Qur-aan was revealed. In addition, he became proficient in Urdu (his native language) and Farsi (both of which are rich in Islamic literature). To ensure his spiritual growth, he was brought up in a Sufi Order (Chhisti).

Ruknudeen arrived in Trinidad in 1893 at the age of twenty three years as an indentured labourer. In this connection it must be pointed out that there is a fallacy among most persons that the indentured immigrants who came to this country from the Indian sub-continent were illiterates. Nothing could be further from the truth. There were many knowledgeable persons among them (both Hindus and Muslims). Insofar as the Muslims are concerned, it must be recorded that the Urdu language is very rich in Islamic literature. While Islam may have been born in Arabia, it is understood not only in the Indian sub-continent but also practiced in Africa. Many Muslim indentured labourers came to Trinidad with their Qur-aan (Arabic with Urdu commentary), *Ahadith* and books of *fiqh* (Arabic with Urdu translation) among other books on religious subjects written in Urdu, their mother tongue.

As stated in the previous paragraph, Ruknudeen came to this country as an indentured labourer in 1893. The journey would have taken about three months. Some of the passengers would have died due to the length of the journey and the cramped unhealthy conditions on the

vessel. The vessel docked at Nelson Island, which was the depot at which immigrants were landed. He, along with the other immigrants, was then transferred to schooners which took them to the San Fernando Jetty. On disembarking at the jetty they were loaded into waiting carts which took them to their assigned work places.

It is recorded that when the schooner docked in San Fernando there was a group of former indentured labourers waiting to see them, some expecting to perhaps see friends or relatives. One such person, the late Imaam Qurban Ali, brother of Haafiz Yacoob (the first Trinidadian to become a *Haafiz* [see Ch. 3 (a)], enquired



Imam Qurban Ali

loudly of the new arrivals whether there were any Muslims among them. To this Ruknudeen stood up in the cart and loudly replied: *“Yes. I am a Muslim, Alhamdulillah.”* (S.M. Hosein)

Ruknudeen served about half of his period of indenture at La Florissant Estate in La Romaine (near San Fernando) before purchasing the remaining portion. During his period of indenture he conducted classes in Islam in a limited number of areas. After purchasing the remaining portion of his indenture he was able to conduct Islamic classes in some of the surrounding *jamaats*. Similar classes were simultaneously conducted by other immigrants in different parts of the country. As a result of the efforts by these voluntary teachers, the Muslim community was able, to a large extent, to resist to an appreciable degree the well-financed and sustained

efforts of the Christian missionaries who were sent to this country to convert “the heathens”.

By this time Ruknudeen had built up a reputation not only as a person knowledgeable in the faith but also as a powerful speaker. He became a regular speaker at Islamic functions and active in the affairs of the Muslim community. After a number of years, he felt the urge to render more services to his brothers and sisters in faith. In order to do so he felt he should be self-employed. He moved to Tunapuna in the early 1920s where he opened a textile store on part of the bottom floor of the two storey building in which he resided.

Ruknudeen performed *Hajj* (the fifth of the five principles of Islam) in the early 1920s and is probably the first person from this country to have performed this sacred journey. This must have been a long and arduous journey and would have involved first travelling by steamer to England (about one month), crossing the English Channel by boat/ferry to France, travelling across Europe to Genoa, Italy, then travelling to Jeddah, Arabia, again by boat and ferry, and finally riding a camel or taking a bus (if buses were then available) or even walking with thousands of other pilgrims, the final forty odd miles to reach *Makkah al Mukarramah* (The City of Knowledge), and then perform the sacred rites required.

It is not known whether he also visited *Madinah al Munawwarah* (The City of Light), which is over four hundred kilometres from Makkah, to visit the tomb of the Noble Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (p.b.o.h.). One would expect that a person with the extensive knowledge of his religion as he had and with his sense of deep piety, having reached Makkah, would not let the opportunity

pass to visit the tomb of his beloved Prophet in Madinah and send *Daruud* (blessings) on him.

The writer surmises that this sacred journey could have taken about six months. There were no travel agents in those days and one has to wonder how he planned his journey, and the myriad problems he would have had to face with making travel arrangements, the language problem in different countries and so on. But those who perform this sacred duty do so because of their *taqwa* (God consciousness) and *sabr* (patience) to endure any hardships and problems they may encounter while on this pilgrimage. Today, *hajj* is vastly different – it is an organised business and made easier by *hajj* organisers, travel agencies and air travel (see Ch. 9).

At the time Ruknudeen performed the *Hajj* he was already a well-known and respected person in the national Muslim community. In 1922 he, together with Abdul Gany [see Ch. 4 (c)], another well-known person in the community, spearheaded a project to bring a qualified scholar to this country for the purpose of educating Muslims at a higher level than was at present being done and also to spread the faith to non-Muslims. They approached what they thought was a Muslim body in London which had established a mosque, not knowing that the body was affiliated with the Lahore section of the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The body recommended one Fazul Karim Khan Durrani for the position and he was duly appointed and brought to the country. On his arrival in the country he started to project the beliefs of his group which are not in consonance with those of Islam. Thus, his services were terminated after a while and he left the country. This matter is dealt with at some length in Ch. 5 (b).

Ruknudeen, together with Abdul Gany, took the initial steps in 1926 which led to the formation of the first island-wide Muslim body, the TIA, later that year. He was appointed *Qadi* in late 1927 following the demise of Syed Abdul Aziz and elevated to the position of Sheikh-ul-Islam (Spiritual Leader) in 1957. He led an exodus of members from the TIA in 1931 after Ameer Ali, who propounded the beliefs of the Ahmadiyyah movement, took over the leadership. Later that year he formed the ASJA with the assistance of Maulana Shah Muhammad Hassan, Qaderi [see Ch.5 (a)].

As *Qadi*, Ruknudeen was very cognisant of the fact that he should be independent and also should not receive favours from anyone. Thus, if he travelled in a taxi with others and someone gave the driver money to cover his fare, he would softly insist that he pay his own fare and indeed would do so.

Ruknudeen followed in the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) as far as possible, as all Muslims should. He dressed very simply: wearing white trousers with a length just above the ankles (in the Islamic tradition), white *kurta* and white *topee* (skull cap). His home was simply furnished. Following the death of his wife he occupied a small bedroom, perhaps about ten feet by eight feet, which was sparsely furnished. He was very humble. If he was present at a *Masjid* when the compulsory prayer was due to be performed the *Imaam*, out of respect for his position, would usually request that he lead the prayer. He would always decline, indicating in doing so that the *Imaam* should lead the prayer as was customary. The writer recalls an occasion when Ruknudeen was suffering from influenza and he was offered some vitamins by a senior member of the community. He declined to accept them initially but when

he saw that the person appeared hurt at being refused he said he would take them provided he was allowed to refund the cost of the medication to the person.

Ruknudeen often attended meetings of the Executive Committee of the ASJA in his capacity as its *Qadi*. While he did not speak in English he understood the language. Generally he did not take part in the discussions and mostly spoke if his opinion was sought on a particular matter. However, there were occasions on which heated discussions took place on a particular matter, mundane or religious. On such occasions he would intervene after a while by saying “*Sunu*” (please listen). Complete silence would immediately descend on the meeting. He would then give his “*Fatwa*” (ruling) in Urdu on the subject under discussion and that would be accepted as the Executive’s decision without being put to the vote. Such was the respect he commanded and such was the *imaan* (faith) of the Muslims then who, having elected him as their spiritual leader, were prepared to follow him unquestionably.

Ruknudeen was also highly respected outside the non-Muslim community. His advice was sought, and freely given, to all and sundry.

Ruknudeen was deeply spiritual and there were those who said they could see “*nuur*” (light) on his face when they looked at him. Indeed, it is said that when the late Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui visited this country in 1950 [see Ch. 5 (e)] he paid a courtesy call on Ruknudeen who was then eighty years. And, after the visit, he commented to those who had accompanied him in words to the effect that: “*You have a saint in your midst but you do not realise it.*”

Ruknuddeen died on the 10th July, 1963.

(c) Abdul Gany (1867-1951)
– Visionary in Education –

“O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 20 V 114)



Abdul Gany, the only son of Muhammad Haniff and Ulphat, was born on the Ortinolla Estate in Maracas Valley in 1867. Haniff, also known as Buddhu Meah, was born in India and was in Calcutta when he was kidnapped at the age of fifteen and carried on board a vessel bound for Grenada in the West Indies. Ulphat, aged eighteen, was also kidnapped around the same time while in Calcutta and carried on board the same vessel. Haniff and Ulphat met for the first time on board the vessel, fell in love, and were married under Islamic rites on the vessel by their ‘*jahaagi*’ brothers. Haniff and Ulphat worked for some time in Grenada before moving to, or being transferred, to Trinidad where they worked on the Ortinolla Estate in Maracas Valley. Their only son, Abdul Gany, was born there.

Haniff did not wish his son to work on an estate as he did. His ambition was that his son would achieve success not only in worldly activities, but also in spiritual affairs. To ensure this, he sent him at the age of eight to reside in Princes Town. This necessitated travelling first by a mule-drawn cart to Port of Spain, then across the Gulf of Paria by a small sloop (sailing vessel) to San Fernando, then finally on to Princes Town, again by a mule-drawn cart.

Young Gany would stay in Princes Town for six months then return home for a short visit. He did this until he was twelve years. At Princes Town he attended a Government Primary School during the day and a *maktab* (Islamic school) after normal school hours. At the *maktab* he learnt Islamic jurisprudence, to read and write Arabic (the language of the Qur'aan) and to read, write and speak Urdu, the language of his forefathers.

Gany too did not want to be like his father and work for others. Accordingly, he decided to learn a trade. He chose to become a goldsmith as he saw that there was a large market for gold and silver jewelry among women of East Indian descent. After he mastered the art he started manufacturing various items and travelling to different parts of the country to peddle them. Gany was a keen businessman and started several other business activities, including that as a wholesale provision dealer in Port of Spain. He eventually discontinued the other businesses in order to concentrate on the last-mentioned because of its great success.

As a result of peddling his jewelry in many parts of the country Gany was able to develop a friendship with many prominent workers of the Islamic community, including Ruknudeen [see Ch. 4 (b)] and *Haafiz* Yacoob Ali [see Ch. 3 (a)]. These people were all actively involved in the propagation of Islam and had established *maktabs* in various villages. Gany loved teaching Islam but could not devote much time to this because of his business activities and heavy commitments in the leadership of a major Muslim body, TIA. However, he established a *maktab* at his home in St. Joseph, paid a teacher for over twenty-five years to conduct it and, when time permitted, taught in it. As alluded to, the combined efforts of these soldiers of Islam throughout the country resulted, to a

very large extent, in the local Muslim community withstanding the onslaught of those whose sole mission was proselytisation.

Gany's contribution to Islam in this country covered three main areas in which he played a major role. These have been dealt with elsewhere in this book to some extent. They are briefly:

- (i) the recruiting of Fazl-ul-Karim Khan Durrani as the country's first resident missionary - see Ch. 5 (b);
- (ii) the formation of the first national Muslim organisation, TIA [see Ch. 6 (b), and
- (iii) the establishment of the first non-Christian school, the El Socorro TIA Islamia Primary School, to obtain State-aid - see Ch. 8 (c).

Gany and other members of his Association scoured the country for years to collect funds to establish and maintain the school referred to as the El Socorro TIA Islamia Primary School. On what was to be the eve of his death at the age of eighty-four, Gany addressed a gathering of Muslims at the Penal *masjid* urging them to continue the struggle to establish more schools. He concluded his address with the following words:

We need more and more schools because nothing can surpass the importance of education today. You must all unite and carry on this work. See and do not let it fall, for our salvation lies in the education of our youth. Bear this in mind always. I leave this work to you if I die tomorrow.

Gany returned to his home late that evening, performed his *salaat* (prayers) and retired to bed. He did not wake up from that sleep as he was called to his Creator during that time.

As for Gany's contribution to Islam in the country, Canon J.D. Ramkeesoon, a senior cleric of the Anglican Church in Trinidad and Tobago and a well-respected journalist, wrote an article entitled *A Tribute to the late Abdul Gany* which appeared in the Port of Spain Gazette (then the country's major daily newspaper) on the 28th April 1951. Canon Ramkeesoon wrote, in part:

*"He became in his prime, perhaps the foremost leader of his community and earned the reputation of being the Colony's most eloquent speaker in Urdu"*¹⁴

The writer concurs with the above view.

The writer's younger *Mamoo* (maternal uncle), S. M. Jaleel of San Fernando, was married to one of Gany's daughters. The family, like the writer's, lived in San Fernando, while Gany lived in St. Joseph, the former capital of the country. The writer accompanied some of his cousins on several occasions while in his teens to Gany's residence to visit him and other members of the family. The writer met Gany on a few occasions and would pay his respects to him. As the writer became involved in Islamic activities from about the age of nineteen he became aware of Gany's contribution to Islam in the country, especially with respect to education.

The writer is married to one of Gany's granddaughters, Laila, who is the eldest daughter of Gany's last son, Noor. Laila and her family grew up at her grandfather's and grandmother's home, which was adjacent to those of two of her paternal father's sisters. Laila vividly remembers her grandfather and his wife, and the simple and religious

¹⁴ J.D. Ramkeesoon, "A Tribute to the late Abdul Ghany" *Port of Spain Gazette*, 28 April 1951.

lives they observed, although they were by no means poor. She still recalls attending to the needs of her grandparents, and her grandfather requesting her, as a teenager, to sometimes prepare receipts when some of his tenants came to pay their rent. Still fresh also in her memory is her grandfather returning late at night from a lecture in Penal (where he had gone with others to solicit support for the T.I.A.'s school programme), retiring to bed after taking a meal and offering his night prayer, and when, not seeing him come out of his bedroom the following morning, she entered it to enquire if he needed anything, only to find he had passed away in his sleep. What was especially shocking to the family was that Gany's wife, who was seriously ill, had been expected to pre-decease him.

(d) Sheikh Abdul Ghani Shakir Mohammed (-1999) - First Local Graduate of Al Azhar University

“Seek knowledge though it be in China.” (Holy Prophet Muhammad – p.b.o.h.)

The first national from Trinidad and Tobago to attend the prestigious Al Azhar University¹⁵ was Abdul Ghani Shakir Mohammed of Chaguanas. As a young man he

¹⁵ Al Azhar University in Egypt is the oldest existing University in the world, having been established in the year circa 972 C.E. It is a chief centre of Arabic literature and Islamic learning in the world. Its main campus is in Cairo. There seems to be some differences of opinion as to the origin of the name but the majority view is that it was named after the Holy Prophet's daughter, Faatima *Az-Zahraa*. While Al Azhar University is also the most prestigious Islamic school of learning, it also offers tuition in secular subjects. Its graduates are spread throughout most countries in the world, Muslim and non-Muslim, and are involved propagating the faith in religious institutions and as missionaries.

was very active in Islamic activities and took every available opportunity to further his knowledge of Islam. He would walk or cycle for miles (as have indeed so many others) to attend an Islamic function or to listen to a lecture so that he could increase his knowledge, often times returning home late at night.

Shakir's zeal to learn more about Islam led him to apply at what many may consider to be a late age for admission as a student to the famous University. He may then have been in his mid- thirties or near forty years. He was accepted but apparently had to solicit funds to pay his passage. When he told a well-known and generous member of the community of his intention to enter the University, he was advised that it would be better for him to get married and settle down. However, this did not deter Mohammed and so he left for Egypt sometime in 1962.

The mode of transport in those days to reach Egypt was first travelling by steamer to Europe (which took approximately three weeks) and then taking another steamer to Cairo. Student life was not easy for him because, among other things, it was some time before he was able to learn the language of the country, become accustomed to its food, and understand its culture. In addition, there was the loneliness of being away from home, from his friends and family, with the only means of communication being by letter. Being of limited means he could not afford to return home for vacation as so many students do today. Thus, he spent six years at the University during which he specialised in the following fields: Arabic Grammar and Etymology, Commentary of the Qur'aan, Islamic Law and Jurisprudence with special reference to the Hanafi School of Thought, Exegesis (explanation) of the Qur'aan, Islamic History, Biography

of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.), and History of Muslim Education in the Middle East.

Mohammed returned to Trinidad sometime in 1968, having graduated from with the title of “*Sheikh*” (a religious official). He was employed with one or two of the smaller Muslim bodies for relatively short periods but after sometime he was forced to work in the clerical field in order to maintain his family. Eventually, he was employed as a Missionary with the TIA. His main duties were to give religious instructions to students at the Association’s five schools and to conduct lectures and seminars etc. on the request of various *masjid* boards. This he did with distinction. While in the employ of the TIA he was given permission to also serve as *Imaam* of the Real Street *Masjid*, San Juan. He occupied this position for a period of ten years.

Mohammed delivered lectures and *khutbaat* (the sermon at the Friday congregational prayer) in many parts of the country and this he did with distinction.

The writer had cause to meet Mohammed at his home on many occasions during the last fifteen years or so of his life either to seek his advice on certain religious matters or to request him to give lectures at various *masaajid* in the country on such occasions as the *Meelad-un-Nabie* and *Mir-aaj-un-Nabie* (birth and ascension anniversary of Prophet Muhammad – p.b.o.h.). The writer presided at many of those lectures and initially had to take Mohammed to and from the venues until he had his own means of transport.

Mohammed retired as Missionary of the TIA due to ill health after serving in that position for about fifteen years and passed away on the 1st August 1999.

CHAPTER FIVE:

MISSIONARIES

“Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. V. 104)

“Surely, Allaah will send for this Ummah (community or people) at the advent of every one hundred years a person (or persons) who will renovate its religion for it.” (Prophet Muhammad – p.b.o.h.)

As indicated in a previous chapter, Islam was kept alive to a large extent through the congregational prayers held at the barracks on the estates and eventually by the establishment of *masaajid*. The presence of Islam was also consolidated through the intermittent arrival of missionaries from India¹⁶ starting as early as 1914. These visits were aimed at broadening and deepening the religious knowledge base. This chapter explores the missionaries who made impact on the evolution and growth of Islam in Trinidad.

(a) Maulana Shah Muhammad Hassan, Hanafi, Al Qadri

Maulana Shah Mohammed Hassan of India was the first Muslim missionary to visit Trinidad and Tobago. There is no record available of who or what group made arrangements for his coming and sojourn in the country.

¹⁶ All references to India are made in relation to the country before the Partition in 1947 which led to the formation of Pakistan.

The fact that he did come and remained for about four years propagating Islam, however, shows that there was a group of Muslims who, in spite of the adverse conditions under which they lived and worked, were interested in seeing their religion kept alive and had the ability (organisational, administrative and financial, among others) to successfully embark upon such a venture.

The Maulana arrived in the country in or around the year 1914. He was of the *Hanafi* School of Law, which is followed by the vast majority of Muslims in the world. He was also a Sufi of the *Qadriyyah* Order. He was able to attract a large following because of his piety, personality and exemplary life. Maulana Hassan stayed in the country until the year 1918 when he returned to his homeland. However, he returned to this country in the late 1920s or early 1930s to continue his work. He was one of the two founders of the ASJA, the other being Haji Ruknuddeen. He eventually left the country to continue his missionary activities.

He was popularly known as ‘Red Beard’ because of the colour of his beard.

(b) Fazul Karim Khan Durrani

The departure of Maulana Hassan in 1918 left a gap which needed to be filled. Accordingly, in 1920 or early 1921 a few prominent Muslims, headed by Abdul Gany of St. Joseph, agreed that they should seek the services of a scholar to continue the work started by Maulana Hassan. They approached the Working Muslim Mission in London, England seeking the services of a suitably qualified person, unaware that it was an affiliate of the Anjuman Ahmadiyyah Isha’at-i-Islam, an organisation whose beliefs are considered to be outside the pale of

Islam. Why they approached that particular body is not known but the writer surmises that they had seen copies of the Mission's magazine, *The Islamic Review*, which was attractively printed and presented on high gloss paper.¹⁷ The Mission recommended Fazul Karim Khan Durrani, B.A., from India for the position. Durrani's services were subsequently contracted and he arrived in the country towards the end of 1921 and started a programme of work which included lectures and classes in some parts of the country.

Needless to say, Durrani was an Ahmadi¹⁸ and from the outset of his arrival started to project his beliefs which

¹⁷ The writer, as a young man in his teens who was interested in Islam, also came across some of these publications. He was attracted to them by their physical appearance and, in his ignorance (at that time), by their contents.

¹⁸ The Qadiani/Ahmadi movement was established by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1838-1938) of Rabwah, Qadian, India, in 1900. At first Mirza Ghulam Ahmad declared himself a *mujaddid* (reformer) and then a prophet and the Promised Messiah. It is said that he was encouraged in his efforts by the British Government, (who were then the rulers of India) in order to divide the Muslim community and thus weaken its resistance to British rule. Upon the death of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad a split occurred in the movement. Some of his followers then rejected his claim to prophethood and being the Promised Messiah. They moved to Lahore, formed a separate body, known as the Lahore Ahmaadiyya Movement or the Ahmadiyyah Isha'at-I-Islam and are referred to as "Ahmadis". Those who continued to believe in him as a Prophet and the Promised Messiah named their movement the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and remained with their headquarters in Qadian. They are known as "Qadianis". The group also hold *inter alia* that Prophet *Iisaa* (Jesus) –p.b.o.h. - had a father and was dead, the *Mir-aaj* (Ascension) of the HP Muhammad was not physical but spiritual, free intermingling of men and women was compatible with the teachings of Islam, the commemoration of a death of a Muslim by the reading of the Qur'aan at the end of three days and also forty days was against the teachings of Islam, and the *Meelad* (birth anniversary) and *Mir-aaj* (ascension) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h) must not be celebrated. Both the Ahmadis and Qadianis have been declared to be outside the pale of Islam. For instance, The Islamic Republic of Pakistan passed legislation in 1973 to declare them a minority community and some years later, to prevent them from, among certain acts, e.g. referring to their

were in line with the Ahmadi teachings. These beliefs naturally created major problems and divisions in the local Muslim community as they are in direct contradiction of the teachings of Islam.

In view of his beliefs, Durrani's services were terminated after some two years and he returned to his native India. However, the seeds of discord had already been sown and these were to have a divisive impact on the local Muslim community some years later [see Ch. 8 (c)]. It must be mentioned, though, that Durrani renounced the teachings of the Ahmadiyyah Movement on his return to India and so reverted to the fold of Islam.

(c) Maulana Shamshuddeen Nizamuddin, Al Hoseini, Al Qaderi

Maulana Syed Shamshuddeen Nizamuddin, *Al Hoseini, Al Qaderi*, of Bombay, India, visited this country for a few months in late 1936 or early 1937. He conducted a series of lectures and



places of worship as *masajid*. The Muslim World League (Rabiita), with headquarters in Saudi Arabia, made a Declaration at their Conference in 1974 on the subject "Qadianism or Ahmadiyyat". They commenced their Declaration as follows "It is a subversive movement against Islam and the Muslim world, which falsely and deceitfully claims to be an Islamic sect who under the guise of Islam and for the sake of mundane interests contrives and plans to damage the very foundations of Islam. Its eminent deviations from the basic Islamic principles are as follows: (a) its founder claims that he was a prophet, (b) they deliberately distort the meanings of the verses of the Holy Quran, (c) they declared that Jihad has been abolished. The Conference concluded their deliberations by making six recommendations, the fourth of which reads as follows; "They must be declared non-Muslim and ousted from the fold of Islam, and be barred from entering the Holy Land.' Numerous *Fatawa* Councils and internationally recognised Muslim scholars (Allama Dr. Sir Mohammed Iqbal and Maulana Abu Hassan Ali Nadwi, to name two), have also declared them to be non-Muslims.

conducted the *Jum'ua salaah* in various parts of the country.

The Maulana left the country for British Guiana (now Guyana) in early February 1937 where he continued his missionary activities for about six or seven months before returning to his homeland.

(The writer is in possession of a card posted from the Maulana on his return to India sending Eid greetings to Abdool Gany – see Appendix 1)

(d) Moulvi Nazir Ahmad Simab (- 1942)

Moulvi Nazir Ahmad Simab, B.A., first came to the country in January 1935 at the initiative of the ASJA for a period of twelve months. Moulvi Ahmad had been attached to the Anjuman-i-Khuddamuddeen of Lahore and was given leave of absence for a period of one year to serve in Trinidad. He



eventually served a total of eighteen months before returning to his native land in July 1937 as his services were terminated by the ASJA because of certain theological differences.

Moulvi Ahmad returned to the country in April 1939. Most writers, in dealing with the work of the Moulvi, have simply stated that he returned to the country in that year and then proceeded to detail his activities. The impression a reader would most likely obtain therefore is that he returned to this country on his own accord and

continued his missionary activities, also on his own, without any assistance, financial or otherwise, from any group or individual/s. This was not so. He was brought back to the country by a group of persons, led by Abdul Gany, one of the founders of the TIA, who had broken relations with that body (the second such group to do so – see Ch. 8 (c)). This group of persons, like the first, had left because the leadership of the TIA had fallen into the hands of a person who followed, or was sympathetic to, the teachings and beliefs of the Ahmadiyyah Movement [see Ch. 8 (c)].

The group was subsequently formalised into a body initially named the Tabligh-ul-Islam but later changed to Tabligh-ul-Jamaat Association. This Association was later dissolved and its membership absorbed into the TIA. {See Ch. 8 (c)}.

On his second arrival in the country the Moulvi initially became the house guest of the Treasurer of the Tabligh-ul-Islam, Sheik Hashim Muzaffarr, in San Juan. He occupied a small room, about ten feet by eight feet, which served as bedroom and office. The room was sparsely furnished and contained a small bed, his books and a table on which were a manual typewriter and a Roneo hand-operated duplicating machine. There were no electric typewriters or computers at that time nor were there electrically operated duplicating machines. There, he would write his *khutbaat* (sermons), then ‘cut’ them on a special stencil, and finally ‘roll’ off one page at a time. A very tedious process indeed! However, often the young children of the house and visiting relatives (including the writer) would take pleasure in assisting by turning the handle of the machine. After about a year the Moulvi became the house guest of the late Rajab Ali, a

member of the Executive Committee of the Tabligh-ul-Islam, in Arouca before embarking on his own.

The Moulvi's early published *khutbaat* (sermons), dated from October 1939, did not show any evidence that he was sponsored by an organisation. This is possibly because the group of persons who had organised his return to this country had not yet been formalised into a body. However, in a *Khutbah* dated 26 January 1940 and several thereafter the name "Anjuman Taq Veat-ul-Islam Inc." appears.

The Moulvi's activities included the following:

- publishing a weekly *khutbah* in English and Urdu and distributing it to Imams throughout the country.
- conducting classes in Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic and Urdu in various parts of the country. (These classes produced a cadre of persons who were not only able to propagate the tenets of the faith and were knowledgeable in the faith, but were also able to propagate and defend it).
- delivering lectures in various parts of the country.

Perhaps the Moulvi's most significant achievement was in having the words "*Islam was spread by the sword*" removed from a book approved by the then Colonial Government for schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Kamaluddeen Mohammed, a student of the Moulvi for many years [see Ch. 7 (c)], describes the matter thus:

"It was the late Moulana Sahib who fought a vigorous battle with the then Government of Trinidad and Tobago to remove from the records of 'West Indian History Book II' the blasphemous statement that 'Islam was spread by the sword'. When the matter could not be settled locally, the late Maulana took the matter to the Colonial Office in London and after several months of struggle, Maulana

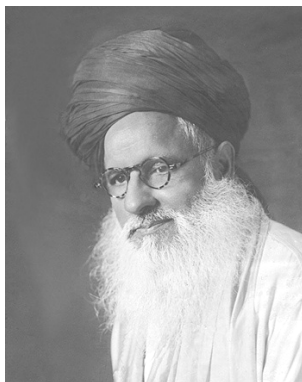
*Sahib and his band of loyal stalwarts were responsible for having the British Government decide to delete completely from the record of all books printed and circulated and from future editions the blasphemous statement already referred to.*¹⁹

Some writers have given the Moulvi the sole credit for establishing the first Muslim primary school in the country. This is another misconception, in the writer's view, and is dealt with in Ch. 8 (c).

The Moulvi passed away at Arouca on December 10th 1942 at the age of 52. He was buried at the El Socorro Muslim Cemetery.

(e) Maulana Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqui Al Qadri (1892-1954)

Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, *Al Qadri*, was born in Meerut City, India, in April 1892. He was a direct descendant of Hazrat Abu Bakr *As-Siddique (R.A.)*, the first *Khaliifa'a* (Successor to the Holy Prophet Muhammad - p.b.o.h). The Maulana received his early education from his father and became a *Haafiz* at the age of four years and ten months. He delivered his first public lecture when he was nine years old at the Jama Masjid, Meerut City, where he



¹⁹ See article by Kamaluddeen Mohammed, "The Late Moulana Nazeer Ahmad Simab" in Tackveeyatul Islamic Association of Trinidad and Tobago Inc. Silver Anniversary Souvenir Brochure.

spoke for ninety minutes on the occasion of the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. He completed his studies in *Dars-e-Nizami* (a course of Islamic theological studies) when he was sixteen. He then obtained a B.A. degree with distinction from Meerut College in modern sciences and law. He received advanced training under the tutelage, initially, of the great Islamic scholar Maulana Shah Ahmad Raza Khan Bareilly and then from other prominent Islamic scholars in other parts of the Muslim world. He was fluent in eight languages including Arabic, Urdu, Persian and English.

The Maulana was described as "The Roving Ambassador of Peace" and considered by many to be the *Mujtadid* (Reformer) of the twentieth century. The Maulana made several world lecture tours and paid a relatively short visit of six months to Trinidad and Tobago during one such tour in 1950.

The Maulana's visit to this country came at a critical time as the forces of Qadianism and Ahmadism had gained some ground. Haji Ruknudeen [see Ch. 4 (b)], who had led the struggle against these two movements for nearly three decades, was then about eighty years old and could not do much more. However, he had laid a solid foundation from which the Maulana would deal a fatal blow to those two movements. Indeed, while the Maulana was still in the country a number of persons who were prominent in those movements saw *The Light of Truth* and disassociated themselves from them, while many did so after his departure. For the record, a number of them went on to hold important positions in one of the national Muslim organisations. Of major significance, however, was the fact that many of the top leaders of the Prince Alfred Street Mosque in San Fernando, which was considered to be affiliated or sympathetic to the

Ahmadiyyah Movement, defected from that mosque, becoming followers of the Maulana and active members of the San Fernando Jama Masjid, an ASJA affiliated mosque.

The Maulana's deep piety, depth of knowledge, oratorical ability, melodious voice, and affable personality ensured that halls and *masaajid* throughout the country were filled whenever and wherever he lectured. Hundreds of persons attended his many lectures throughout the country and his expositions on the various subjects on which he lectured re-enforced the vast majority of Muslims in their beliefs. A few persons of African descent, inspired by the lectures of the Maulana, reverted to Islam. The Maulana's departure left his followers with a deep sense of unity and responsibility.

The Maulana was mainly responsible for establishing the first Inter-Religious body in the world to promote religious understanding in a multi-religious society. During his visit to Singapore in 1949 an inter-faith reception was held for him at which the question of the establishment of such a body was raised. The idea soon became a reality in 1949 and the Inter-Religious Organisation of Singapore – then known as Johor Bahru - was formed and is still in existence. The Maulana promulgated the formation of a similar inter-religious body during his visit to this country. However, it was not until 1970 that such an organisation was formed.

The Maulana was the author of over two dozen books, including "Elementary Teachings of Islam". This book was first published in 1950 and is today still a standard work used in many parts of the world. He also wrote several *qaseedas* (Islamic songs), including one entitled *Zara Charay*. He began this *qaseeda* by praying to Allaah

to accept him as a devoted disciple and ended it by praying to Him to take him to Madinah (the city where the Prophet spent the last ten years of his life and is buried) and cause him to die and also be buried there. His prayer was answered as he passed away in that Holy City on the 22nd August 1954 at the age of 63 after performing the *hajj*, and was buried there. Just as his mission had been to the peoples of all parts of the world, so too were those who participated in his *janazah* (funeral service).

A number of institutions have been established in memory of the late Maulana, including the Aleemiyah Institute of Islamic Studies [see Ch. 5 (f)]. In addition, his books are being reprinted regularly worldwide and many of his lectures and articles are available on the internet.

The writer had just past the age of twenty when the Maulana arrived in the country. He had also only recently become involved in Islamic activities, being Secretary of the Jama Masjid Board in San Fernando and President of the Islamic Youth Organisation of San Juan (which he had founded). The writer paid frequent visits to the Maulana during the mornings (when he would receive members of the public) in order to meet him personally and clarify some of the teachings of Islam about which he had doubts and to elaborate on certain others.

At the time the writer met the Maulana for the first time the writer had, to put it mildly, a very cursory knowledge of Islam and burning issues for him were the question of the separation of the sexes at functions and the wearing of the *orrhni* (head covering) by women (which was opposed by the Ahmadis). Thus the first question raised by the writer to the Maulana was why these practices in the modern times? The Maulana responded by asking the writer if he knew the tamarind fruit to which the writer

replied in the affirmative. He then asked the writer what feeling he got when he thought of the fruit. The writer replied that his mouth watered. Then, getting the point the Maulana wanted to make, the writer smiled in acknowledgement of the wisdom of the practice and the way he answered the question.

The writer attended the vast majority of the lectures the Maulana delivered throughout the country. In addition, he was among the large gathering to greet the Maulana on his arrival in and departure from the country, and also among the huge number of males who marched from the *Jama Masjid*, Port of Spain to the Queen's Park Savannah there to assemble with their Muslim sisters and prominent members of the community, including the Governor and the Director of Education, Mr. Sidney Hogben, to celebrate in an elaborate way - never seen in this country before and after - the *Meelad-un-Nabee* (birthday of the Prophet Muhammad – p.b.o.h.).

The Maulana was a Shaikh of several Sufi orders and had *mureeds* (spiritual disciples) worldwide. During his visit to this country a considerable number of persons, including the writer, took *bai-ut* (oath) with him and became his *mureeds*. While in this country, he conducted spiritual exercises with them regularly. However, only a very few of those persons, including the writer, are still alive today.

(f) Dr. Muhammad Fazl-Ur-Rahman Ansari (1914-1974)

Dr. Muhammad Fazl-ur Rahman Ansari was born in Muzzaffar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh (UP), India on the 14th August 1914. He was a descendant of one of the



Holy Prophet's companion, Khalid Abu Ayyub Ansari. A brilliant scholar, he became a *Haafiz* at the age of six years. At Aligarh University he obtained the B.A. (Philosophy), and B.Th. degrees with First Class Honours and his M.A. He gained his Ph.D. at the University of Karachi and of his thesis (titled *Islamic Moral Code and its Metaphysical background*) Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Chairman, Department of Philosophy, wrote:

"It is indeed a comprehensive account of the moral code provided by the Qur'an, which, to my knowledge, has not been formulated with such extensiveness by anyone in the history of Muslim literature."

Dr. Ansari first met the late Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui in 1932. From the very beginning there was a strong relationship between the two and this was strengthened when Dr. Ansari married the Maulana's eldest daughter in 1936.

Dr. Ansari made his first world tour in 1950, accompanying Maulana Siddiqui as his Private Secretary. This country was included in that tour. He made four other world tours in addition to travelling to many other countries, especially in the Far East, for short periods.

During his visit to Trinidad in 1960 Dr. Ansari expressed the need, at a public lecture, for the formation of an Islamic Missionaries Guild (IMG) as an arm of the ASJA, to propagate Islam among non-Muslims. A body with this objective and name was formed by a few persons in 1962 and, initially, it worked very closely with the ASJA. Subsequently, it seceded from the ASJA [see Ch. 6(b)], notwithstanding pleas from Dr. Ansari for the Guild not to cause further disunity in the local Muslim community. He requested that, should his pleas be ignored, his name be removed as founder of that body. Unfortunately, his

pleas fell on deaf ears as that body has failed to respect his wishes.

Dr. Ansari was elected as Sheikh-ul-Islam of Trinidad and Tobago in 1964 following the death of Haji Ruknudeen. As he was resident in Pakistan, a local Muslim Advisory Council was elected to work under his direction. He also held positions at a number of Islamic institutions. He founded the World Federation of Islamic Missions with Headquarters in Karachi in 1958. In 1964 he obtained five years leave without pay from his position at the University of Karachi and established, under the World Federation of Islamic Missions (WFIM), the Aleemiyah Institute of Islamic Studies – named after Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui. He resigned his position from the University in 1969 in order to devote all his time to the WFIM and the Institute. His full-time devotion to these two institutions was made possible to a large extent by a few nationals of this country (some of whom, including the writer, are still alive), who each donated a monthly sum to ensure the survival of the Institute. The group of persons was not a formalised body and called itself '*The Ansaar-ul-laah*' (The Friends of Allaah).

The concept behind the establishment of the Aleemiyah Institute was that, unlike most of the already established Islamic institutions of higher learning, graduates would possess qualifications at the tertiary level in both Islamic theology and secular subjects. Thus, they would be able to obtain employment in secular areas and, being financially independent, would also be able to propagate the teachings of Islam as time permitted. Accordingly, the Institute's timetable was structured so that its students could study simultaneously at the University of Karachi.

Dr. Ansari was a prolific and brilliant writer. He edited many magazines and wrote over twenty books. His *magnus opus* was a two-volume work published in 1973 entitled *The Qur'anic Foundations and Structure of Muslim Society* which has been acclaimed by a number of prominent Muslim personalities. Most of these publications and lectures are available online.

Dr. Ansari paid several visits to Trinidad before passing away in Karachi on the 3rd June 1974.

As far as the writer recalls, Dr. Ansari spoke only once on his first visit to Trinidad in 1950. On that occasion he chaired the meeting of the various Muslim youth bodies in the country which had been called to form a national body. The feature address at the meeting was delivered by Maulana Siddiqui. In his subsequent visits, however, he delivered a number of public lectures, the majority of which the writer attended. In addition the writer was present at meetings of the ASJA Executive and Imaams' Council which were addressed by him.

Dr. Ansari became ill towards the end of his last visit to this country as a result of which he had to severely curtail his public lectures. However he was able to meet with ASJA's Executive Committee to give *fatwa* (a legal verdict given by an Islamic scholar) on a number of burning issues. He did so, giving the reasoning in each case before expressing his views, and promised to give his *fatwa* in writing on his return home. However, he passed away before he could do so.

The writer was honoured to have Dr. Ansari as his special guest for lunch at his home during two of his visits. On those occasions, he would take off both his turban, showing his shoulder- long hair (in the tradition of the

Prophet – p.b.o.h.) and his *sherwani* (long coat-like garment worn over the *kurta*), a loose shirt falling either just above or somewhere below the knees of the wearer, and is worn by men and, in a completely relaxed atmosphere, converse with the few guests. What a contrast from the imposing figure who would stand and address an audience!

(g) Mallam Salahuddeen Tayo

Mallam Tayo was a missionary of Ghanaian descent who was employed by *Dar-ul-Ifta*, the missionary arm of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He was assigned to this country for about six years during the 1980s. Unfortunately, he was not assigned specifically to any Muslim body and so was left to perform his mission to a large extent without direction or support services. Fortunately, the TML provided makeshift accommodation for him on their premises at St. Joseph. His *dawah* efforts were concentrated mainly among the people of African descent in the north western part of the country.

The writer visited the Mallam on a number of occasions to discuss matters relating to the Muslim community. The writer also arranged for him to give a few public lectures in different parts of the country and would drive him to and from the venues. On driving back home on one such occasion – an Eid-ul-Fitr function in Princes Town at which the President of the country was present and the Mallam was the guest speaker – the Mallam began singing a song in the Arabic language softly to himself. The writer enquired the name of the song to which he responded that it was the famous *Qaseeda – e – Burda* (Poem of the Mantle). He then went on to explain its history and give a gist of its meaning. The said *qaseeda* is

an ode in prose of the Prophet Muhammed (p.b.o.h.) by the poet, Imam al-Busri.

(h) Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani Siddiqui (1928-2003)

Maulana Noorani was one of the sons of the late Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui. He was born in Meerut City, India in 1928 and became a *Haafiz* at the age of eight. He attended a number of higher educational institutions and held, among others, the degree of *Fazil-e-Arabi* and the *Darsee-e-Nizame* (*Fazil*). He was actively



engaged in Islamic activities, visiting and lecturing in many parts of the world. He paid four visits to this country.

He founded the World Islamic Mission in 1972. This body has established branches in various parts of the world. He was also very active in the political field, serving as a Member of Parliament in Pakistan and elected leader of the Parliamentary Party of the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan* (*JUP*).

He became seriously ill in 1982 and as a result had to curtail his missionary activities. He passed away on the 11th December 2003.

The writer attended many of the lectures of the Maulana, who brought back memories of his late father, and had the honour of hosting him at his home for dinner on one occasion.

(i) Professor Syed Ali Ashraf (1925-1998)

Professor Syed Ali Ashraf was born in Dhaka, Bengal, in 1925. He obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English from Dhaka University after which he proceeded to Cambridge University, England, where he completed his Honours and Ph. D. studies in English.



The Professor taught at a number of Universities in various parts of the world including the following: Dhaka and Rajshahi (Bangladesh), Karachi (Pakistan) and Jeddah (Saudi Arabia).

He was a pioneer of faith-based education in England and conducted many seminars in various parts of the world, including two in Trinidad, on this subject. He was also a pioneer and an ardent advocate of the Islamisation of knowledge. He held many important offices in this area, including the first Director General of the World Centre for Islamic Education, which was established by the Organisation of Islamic Conferences in Makkah (1980-82). He was the author of a number of books and articles on various subjects, and also a poet.

The Professor first visited Trinidad in 1984 for the purpose of conducting a seminar under the auspices of the ASJA on genetic engineering. He was a deeply religious and spiritual person and a *Shaikh* of the *Naqsbandi* Order (Sufi).

Ashraf's first visit to Trinidad lasted one week during which he was the house guest of the writer. He attracted a number of followers as a *Shaikh* of one of the Sufi orders and subsequently visited the country annually to conduct spiritual exercises among them. As the writer was not among his spiritual devotees Ashraf would spend his first night and last day in the country as the guest of the writer, and the rest of the time as guest of one of his *mureeds*.

He passed away suddenly at his home in Cambridge on the 7th August 1998. At the time of his death the Professor held, among other positions, the following: Director General of the Islamic Academy, Cambridge, England and Vice-Chancellor of the Darul Ihsan University. At different times he was also a member of Clare Hall, Fitzwilliam College and Wolfson College, the University of Cambridge.

Ashraf and the writer spent two weeks in 1990 as representatives of the ASJA visiting a number of countries and meeting with a number of top officials in connection with the then recently established Haji Ruknudeen Institute of Islamic Studies. The two went first to Cairo, Egypt, where they met with the Minister of Religious Affairs of Egypt, and discussed a request for two *Qaaris* (a person versed in reciting the Qur'aan) to teach at the Institute. They then proceeded to Jeddah where they met Drs. Mohammed of the Islamic Development Bank, which had agreed to finance the construction and equipping of the Institute. They spent two nights at Ashraf's apartment in Makkah for this purpose and of course performed *Umrah* (the lesser pilgrimage, which may be performed at any time in the year) and visited the Prophet's Masjid in Madinah. They then proceeded to Delhi, India, where they held discussions with the late Professor Majid Ali Khan, who

was a Lecturer at the Jamia Millia Islamia University and had been recommended by the late Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi to fill the position of Principal of the Institute (Khan had previously taught at the ASJA Boys College, San Fernando, during the late 1960s early 1970s). From Delhi they proceeded to Lucknow where they were guests of the Nadwatul Ulama, one of the top Islamic institutions in the world, and held discussions with its Rector, Maulana Abul Hasan Ali, a close personal friend of Ashraf, with the object of being affiliated or working in close association with that Institute. Their mission then having ended, they returned to Delhi. The writer proceeded to London in order to return home, while Professor went on Bangladesh.

There was an incident that took place while on the above journey which the writer feels need to be mentioned. It was as follows:

At the time Ashraf and the writer arrived at Jeddah Airport, the Gulf War was in its fourth month. Strict security measures were in force as there were, and still are, a number of US military bases in that country. There were long queues of passengers at both the Immigration and Customs check points and Customs Officers were examining all baggage thoroughly while security officials were performing detailed checks on all incoming passengers. The writer was directly in front of Ashraf in the line to Customs when the latter tugged at the upper part of the writer's *Ihram* (they were dressed to perform the *Umrah*) and whispered to him that he was going in front of him. Ashraf did this, pulled their two suitcases together and then very softly uttered a *du'a* (supplication or prayer) after which, in keeping with the practice of the Prophet (p.b.o.h.), he blew over them. On reaching the Customs Officer he presented their passports to him and

addressed him in the Arabic language, following which the Officer initialed their baggage without even asking one question, thus indicating they were free to enter the country. They then proceeded out of the restricted area.

The above was only one of few which the writer witnessed of what may be called Ashraf's prowess in the spiritual field.

CHAPTER SIX:

THE ‘FIRSTS’- MASAAJID AND ISLAND-WIDE RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION

“The mosques of God shall be visited and maintained by such as believe in God and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, and practise regular charity, and fear (none at) all except God” (Al Qur-aan Ch. 9 Verse 18)

The Muslim community struggled to assert itself through the establishment of *masaajid*, *maktabs* and organisations as a means to sustain their religion. To that end, these also acted as mechanisms to maintain identity within an alien host society. In this regard, geographical-specific religious organisations were established that eventually led to the development of island-wide associations. The establishment of these organisations coincided with the presence of missionaries while the champions of Islam and those who followed in the footsteps of the Prophet played key roles. As they sought to make sense of their new reality and validate themselves the *masaajid* which developed at village level also sustained Islam through transmission of knowledge and as a meeting place for Muslims to bond. This chapter investigates the ‘firsts’ in the Muslim community. In particular, it looks at the first *masjid* that was built in the 1860’s and the first island-wide Muslim organisation that was formed in the country.

(a) The First *Masjid*

The first *masjid* constructed in Islam was at Qu'baa, on the outskirts of Madinah in Saudi Arabia. Construction began when the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) spent four days in that village while on the journey migrating from Makkah to Madinah. Of this *masjid*, Almighty Allaah says in the Qur-aan:

“There is a mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety; it is more worthy of thy standing forth (for prayer) therein. In it are men who love to be purified: and God loveth those who make themselves pure.” (Ch. 9 V.108)

A *masjid* is distinctive by virtue of its *minaret(s)*, which is the dome(s), and the *mihraab* (niche in one of the walls which indicates the direction the worshippers must face when offering the prayer). Once a building is designated a *masjid* it becomes *waqf* (trust property). Accordingly, it must always be used for that purpose and must be open for use by the community. In addition, the property cannot be sold, mortgaged, rented or disposed of. The Qur'aanic verse quoted above shows clearly who shall maintain *masaajid* (plural of *masjid*). As a result, donations are not sought outside of the Muslim community for the construction and maintenance of *masaajid*. In addition, it must be mentioned that there are certain acts in respect of which a person receives rewards continuously, even after death. One such act is contributing towards the construction and maintenance of *masaajid*.

One can imagine the early Muslims in this country, accustomed as they were in the land of their birth to attending their respective *masaajid* regularly, seeking out

a place to perform their prayers in congregation. As is well known, they were housed in barracks, which were long narrow buildings divided into rooms about ten or twelve feet square. Each family was allotted one room. One can also imagine these people crowding themselves in such a room, or in an open outdoor space, for the purpose of offering some of their prayers together in order to benefit from the greater blessings derived by offering the prayer in congregation. As regards the *Jumu'ah* (Friday congregational prayers) and *Eid* prayers, it is most probable that these may have initially been offered outdoors and then in small makeshift sheds because the barrack room, which served as living, dining, bedroom and kitchen, would not have been able to accommodate all the devotees for such occasions.

Masaajid, dedicated structures for devotion, began to appear as early as the 1860s as 'nice little buildings with galvanized roofs' (Sarah Morton, 1916). Calcutta No.1 *masjid* (1863), Tacarigua (1865), the Victoria Village (1868), Iere Village and Ryan Street (San Juan), Thomas Street (Chaguanaus) *masaajid* all lay claim to being the first *masjid*. Haji Ruknudeen Sahib, who later became Qazi and then Shaikh-ul Islam, was the first Imam at Victoria Village while Dookie Meah is reported to have been the first Imam at Calcutta No. 1 Masjid.

A Muslim must face the direction of the Holy Ka'aba in Makkah, Saudi Arabia (the first House built for the worship of God) no matter what part of the world in which he or she resides. Thus, Muslims to the north of the Ka'aba, to illustrate, must face south, those to the east of the Ka'aba, for example, India and Pakistan, must face west. In Trinidad, Muslims must face east when praying. However, in the case of the Tacarigua and Victoria Village *masaajid* when first constructed (and possibly a

number of others), the *mihraab* faced west, instead of east. This may have been because of the fact that the indentured immigrants were accustomed to face west and, either through oversight or perhaps lack of expertise to determine the proper direction of the Ka'aba, they constructed these *masaajid* in the direction opposite to that which they should have faced.²⁰ This situation was however rectified in due course.

The construction of the earliest *masaajid* would have been a community affair. One can safely surmise that the first structures would have been small shed-like structures erected with the trunks of mature bamboo trees used as uprights, and cross-bars (of smaller bamboo trees) to support a roof laid with the branches of coconut trees or of *carat* leaves. As time passed this type of structure would have improved, with members of the community going to the forest to cut sibling hardwood trees, vine and “carat” leaves. The trees would be appropriately trimmed and tied together with the vine to make the frame, and the frame would then be covered with the *carat* leaves. The next step would most probably have been erection of the four walls of *tapia*²¹, which may have been about three feet high.

The Muslim community continued to construct *masaajid* in various parts of the country and is still doing so. In addition, most of the older *masaajid*, including the Victoria Village and Tacarigua *masaajid*, have been

²⁰ The writer is informed that many of the early *masaajid* constructed by Indonesian immigrants in Suriname also faced, and in fact still face, west as that was the direction they too had to face in their native country while offering their *salawaat* (prayers).

²¹ “Tapia” is a Spanish word and refers to a mud building or wall. It was the accepted way for construction purposes many decades ago. Some of these buildings still exist locally, especially in the rural areas.

renovated and/or reconstructed over the years. The *tapia* buildings gave way first to wooden structures which in turn gave way to stone structures such as those at San Fernando (with eighteen inch thick walls) which was constructed in 1913.²² Of similar design, perhaps because the same builder may have been responsible for constructing them, were the old El Socorro Road *masjid* (now demolished), the old Caroni Savannah Road *masjid* (rebuilt, with the front part of the structure retained) and the Sangre Grande *masjid*. The roofs of the aforementioned *masajid* were, or still are, supported by arches in the interior of the building. Some concrete moulding was usually worked unto the arches and at the base of the supporting pillars and, in some cases, small pieces of different colours of a glass-like object were embedded on the circumference of the arches and at the base of the supporting pillars to give a decorative effect.

The older *masajid* in the country were constructed, to a large extent, with voluntary labour given by the members of the congregation. They worked on afternoons and weekends after completing their respective work schedules. For them, it was a labour of love. The writer spent most of his first twenty five years of his life in San Fernando and a few of those years in San Juan. He frequented both the San Fernando *Jama Masjid* and the

²² The San Fernando Jama *masjid* structure is still in existence but has been extended by a modern-type building to accommodate the much larger Muslim population of the area. When the structure was completed in the early 20th century, it was found that a second entrance was needed. To that end, Haafiz Yacob Ali (mentioned in the previous chapter) donated a piece of land so the second entrance could be built. (San Fernando Jama Masjid, <http://www.sanfernandojamamasjid.org/about.html>) Much later on, about 15 - 20 years ago, his elder son, Haji Fuzloo Rahman, donated a small strip of land so that access could be had to the Haji Shaffick Rahaman Hall which was constructed obliquely behind the masjid on a parcel of land behind his home, with entrance on Gomez Street.

old El Socorro *masjid* during those years and has commented time and again that there always seemed to be a cool breeze pervading those two *masaajid*. This, the author believes, might be attributed to the thick walls which kept out the rays of the sun to a large extent during the day, and retained the cool air during the night. The writer has also many times commented that he experienced a feeling of peace and tranquility while in those *masaajid* which he attributes to the fact that they were built, to a large extent, with voluntary labour given by members of the congregation out of love for their faith and with the expectation that they would be appropriately rewarded in the Hereafter. The stone walls have now given way to the modern plastered concrete or hollow clay block walls in the construction of new *masaajid*. In addition, many of the *masaajid* have been air-conditioned and all have a hall which is used for educational/social purposes.

Today, there are approximately 130 *masaajid* in Trinidad and one in the neighbouring twin island of Tobago. The number keeps increasing to meet the needs of the growing Muslim community.

(b) The First Island-Wide Muslim Organisation - The Tackveeyatul Islamic Association Of Trinidad Inc

“And hold fast, altogether, by the Rope which Allaah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allaah’s favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allaah make His Signs clear to

you: that ye may be guided.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 3 V. 103)

The first island-wide Islamic organisation in Trinidad and Tobago was founded in 1926. This is not to say that group activities among Muslims on an island-wide scale were not taking place in the country before. For instance, it may be deduced from the presence of missionaries such as Maulana Shah Muhammad Hassan, *Hanafi, al-Qadri* who arrived in the country in 1914 as a missionary and stayed for four years, that there must have been a group of persons who arranged for his visit, his upkeep and programme of work. It is also known that in 1921 a group of persons with Haji Ruknudeen of Tunapuna and Abdul Gany of St. Joseph at the helm, wrote the Woking Muslim Mission in Woking, England, seeking the services of a qualified Islamic scholar in an endeavour to fill the gap left by the departure of Maulana Hassan to his homeland. The Mission recommended one Maulana Fazlul Khan Durrani, B.A., who was eventually brought to Trinidad - see Ch. 5 (b).²³

The first island-wide Islamic body was founded as a result of the efforts of a Steering Committee headed by Abdul Gany of St. Joseph and Haji Ruknudeen of Tunapuna. It was named the Tackveeyatul Islamic Association (TIA) of Trinidad. The word Tackveeyatul is an Arabic word meaning “strengthening of Islam”. There is no record of where and when the meeting to this effect was held, how many persons attended or who were the first officers elected. However, it is believed that the first meeting took place sometime in January 1925, when

²³ It appears to the writer that the persons who were responsible for the decision to contact the Shah Jehan Mosque must have been influenced - like the writer as a youngster and so many others - by the very attractive magazine, Islamic Herald, published by the Mosque on high-gloss paper.

a group of Muslims that included Syed Abdul Aziz, Abdul Gany, Gokool Meah, Ameer Baksh, Rahim Baksh, Shaffie Mohammed, and Haji Ruknudeen Sahib among others met in St. Joseph. Their intention was to organise the Muslim community into a group and thus continue the trend started earlier in south Trinidad. That auspicious meeting in January 1925 set the tone for the formation of the TIA in the following year. (Kassim, 1999)

As far as the position of first President is concerned, a leaflet apparently printed by the family of the late Syed Abdul Aziz, who was elected Kazi in 1907 and elevated to the position of *Khaliifaa* in 1927, names him as the first President. The writer has difficulty in accepting this for a number of reasons, including the following:

- Aziz was more of an activist for the rights of indentured Indian immigrants and their descendants,
- some of his religious beliefs were at variance with those of the vast majority of Muslims in the country, and
- more importantly, to hold the position of President (an administrative office) would be incompatible with holding the position of *Qadi* (Spiritual Judge) at the same time.

The writer is of the view that the person most likely to have held that position was Abdul Gany, who had been actively involved in a number of matters at the island-wide level, and was also one of the two persons (the other, as mentioned, being Haji Ruknudeen) who was in the forefront of the movement to establish such a body.

The TIA was incorporated in 1931 by Act of Legislature (No 39 of 1931) as being “representative of the Muslims in the Colony”. The Trustees of the Association, as then named, were Haji Gokool Meah of Diego Martin and

Abdul Gany of St. Joseph, both of whom were described as “Proprietors”.

The TIA experienced two relatively large exoduses of members in its early formative years. This was as a result of the teachings promulgated by Ameer Ali of Siparia who, encouraged by Durrani, had left the country in 1923 to study at the Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Ishaat-I-Islam in Lahore. After completing a four-year course at that institution, Ali proceeded to Egypt where he studied for a further period of three years. He returned to the country in 1930 with the title of Moulvi and was appointed Mufti of the TIA shortly thereafter. His beliefs on very important Islamic issues were not in conformity with the vast majority of Muslims in the country who, like the large majority of the Muslim world, follow the *Hanafi* School of Law. He propounded, like Durrani, the beliefs of the Ahmadiyyah Movement, which are considered to be outside the fold of Islam - see Ch. 5 (b). Indeed, in his first public lecture given at Liberty Hall in Port of Spain on the 29th. December 1931 on the subject “*The Death of Jesus*”, Ali stated that the Prophet (p.b.o.h.) neither died on the cross nor was he taken up physically to heaven but “*he had survived the crucifixion and had travelled eastwards from Jerusalem to India*”. This statement, while contrary to the teachings of the Qur’aan, was consistent with those of the Ahmadiyyah Movement. He, however, insisted that he was not a follower of that Movement, although in later years (1964) he did join it. Ali, as Mufti (Islamic scholar) of the TIA, continued in the footsteps of Durrani in attempting to spread the teachings of the Ahmadiyyah Movement in this country. This was naturally unacceptable to the vast majority of not only the membership of the TIA but also the Muslims of the country.

The first exodus of the membership took place in 1931 shortly after Ali was elected President of the TIA. At that time a group of persons headed by Haji Ruknudeen (one of the body's two main founders) left the Association and formed the Anjuman Sunnat-ul Jamaat Association (ASJA).²⁴ The first President of ASJA was Syed Mohammed Hosein, a powerful speaker in both the Urdu and English languages, who was a film censor and a Court Interpreter. The exodus resulted in father going against son, brother against brother, public debates, and pamphlets being circulated and eventually court action.

In 1935, Ali was elected to the position of Life President of the Association. Serious conflict still continued within the body. This led to the second exodus of members from the TIA when, in 1939, another group of persons, led by Abdul Gany, left the Association because of Ali's beliefs. This group involved itself in the propagation of the faith and was responsible for the return on the 14th April 1939 of Moulvi Nazir Ahmad {see Ch. 5 (d)} to the country. The group soon formalised itself into a body called the Tabligh-ul-Islam Committee and subsequently changed its name to the Anjuman Tabligh-ul-Islam Association. It was responsible for establishing the first private Islamic primary school in the country at Bissessar Street, El Socorro Road, San Juan. This school eventually became the first non- Christian denominational school to be granted State assistance [see Ch. 8 (c)].

Following negotiations between the TIA and the Anjuman Tabligh-ul-Islam Association in 1943, Ali relinquished his post as Life President of the TIA on the 7th February 1943. As a result, the Anjuman Tabligh-ul-

²⁴ This body was later incorporated by Act of Legislature (No. 24) in 1935 with Syed Mohammad Hosein, President, John Mohammed, First Vice-President, Buckradee Meah and Mustapha Khan as trustees.

Islam Association, which had been in existence for nearly four years, was dissolved and its membership absorbed into the TIA, with Ali as President. Not unexpectedly, serious differences of opinion of a religious nature again arose within the TIA. This situation was further aggravated when, at the Annual General Meeting of the Association held in February 1944, all positions on the Executive Committee were won by former members of the Anjuman Tabligh-ul-Jamaat Association. This resulted in accusations being made by each side against the other, cross talks and insults being hurled at one another at meetings and court action eventually being taken, so much so that the work of the body was practically brought to a standstill. Eventually, an agreement was reached by the opposing parties in 1947, as a result of which Ali and his followers left the TIA. This agreement provided for Gany and his followers to retain control of the TIA and the privately run Primary School, while Ali and his followers obtained possession of two parcels of land, one being State lands at Frederick Street, St. Joseph and the other in Princes Town.

Ali and his supporters subsequently founded the Trinidad Muslim League (TML), which was launched on the 15th August 1947. It was subsequently incorporated by Act No. 26 of 1950 as a body representing the Non-Conformist (*Ghair-Mukallid*) Muslims in the country.

The parcel of land at Frederick Street (St. Joseph) was exchanged for another at the Eastern Main Road, also in St. Joseph. Construction of a *masjid* there, the Jinnah Memorial Mosque, commenced in 1951 and was completed in 1954. Annual bazaars open to the public were held to raise funds for the project and, contrary to the teachings of Islam, at least one raffle was held for a number of years for which the first prize was a motor car. Ali officially became a member of the Ahmadiyyah Movement in 1964 following his second visit to the

headquarters of the Movement. He subsequently was able to convince most of his followers that *Ahmadiyya* and *Ghair Mukallidism* were not incompatible. As a result, a special Conference of the League was called in 1967 to decide whether or not the League should be affiliated with the Ahmadiyyah Movement. The Conference, which was presided over by Justice Noor Hassanali (then Solicitor General) agreed, with the exception of one branch (St. Joseph), to secure affiliation to the last-mentioned body. This was effected and the name of the TML was consequently changed to Trinidad Muslim League Inc. Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at-e-Islam.

This change of name by the TML soon had serious repercussions within the body, however, as either there had been a “silent majority” who did not wish to be identified with the Ahmadiyyah Movement or, perhaps more likely, members now realised that they were considered to be outside the pale of Islam. As a result, two factions arose in the body: one following Ali with his Ahmadiyyah beliefs and the other, *Ghair Mukallidism*. An internal struggle began in 1970 when the leadership fell into the hands of persons who were followers of the Ahmadiyyah Movement and/or who were sympathetic to it. Each faction of the TML projected different beliefs, held separate meetings, organised separate fund-raising events on the same day but at different venues. There was friction within and between families, publications by each side against the other and again eventual court action. There was, to put it simply, a struggle for control of the body, a struggle to wrest it from the control of the Ahmadi and bring it within the fold of Islam. The bitter struggle ended in 1976 when that leadership was removed and replaced by persons who were against the beliefs and teachings of the Ahmadiyyah Movement. Since that year the *status quo* of *Ghair Mukhallidism* has remained.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

MUSLIMS IN PUBLIC LIFE

“There are seven categories of people whom God will shelter under His Shade on the Day when there will be no shade except His. One is the just ruler.” (Holy Prophet Muhammad -p.b.o.h.)

Improvement in their socio-economic conditions was among the motivations for the indentured immigrants to leave their homeland and come to a foreign country. As such, when the opportunities presented themselves land and education became the commodities in which they invested. Not surprisingly, therefore, as the descendants of indentured immigrants became educated they entered the professional workforce and eventually, public office, thus making clear contributions to the legal and political fields. This chapter provides a brief biography and the contributions of some Muslims in the public domain.

(a) H. E. Noor Mohamed Hassanali, TC (1918 – 2006) - President of the Republic Of Trinidad And Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago was a British Colony until midnight on the 31 August 1962 at which time they became an independent nation. The country became a Republic on August 1, 1976 and the position of Governor General, who was appointed by the Queen, was replaced with that of President, elected by a joint sitting of the House of



Representatives (the Lower House) and the Senate (the Upper House). The first person to hold the position of President of the Republic was Sir Ellis Clarke, who was the Governor General at the time the country elected to become a Republic within the British Commonwealth.

Sir Ellis was a distinguished lawyer before being elected President and had served in a number of important positions under the PNM Government. He served as President from 1976 to 1987.

The national elections in 1986 saw a new party, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), arising out of a coalition of four parties winning thirty-three of the thirty-six seats in the election. When Sir Ellis' second term as President was due to expire (March 1987) there was a strong feeling that the next President of the country should be a person of East Indian descent. This was in view of the ethnic composition of the country at the time (approximately 40% East Indian, 40 % African at the time). The first Governor General had been of Chinese descent and the incumbent President, who had served as Governor General for four years and then as President for ten years, was of African descent. It was felt that he had served the country long and well but the time had come to give an opportunity to someone else. It was also felt that the ruling party was in power due to a large extent because it had attracted a large percentage of the East Indian vote. Further, the East Indian population felt alienated from the former Government and a way of rectifying that was to have a President of East Indian descent.

One might have expected that as about 25 percent of the population belonged to the Hindu faith, the President, if chosen from the East Indian community, would come

from that religious group. In fact, the name of a prominent Hindu leader who had given yeoman service to the country in a number of areas was called. However, his age and his health were factors that acted against his being elected to the position.

It was against this background that Noor Mohamed Hassanali was elected President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the 19th March 1987. He was born on the 13th August 1918 in Victoria Village, which is about two miles from San Fernando (the second city). His father was a cane farmer and he grew up in a cane-farming area. He attended the Picton Canadian Mission Indian School (later changed to Presbyterian School), walking the considerable distance barefooted daily, not for want of money to purchase shoes but because shoes were not a regular part of one's apparel in that part of the country at that time. When the time came to attend Naparima College in San Fernando he had to practise walking in new shoes before the school term started. He graduated from Naparima College in 1938 and taught there for five years (during which time the writer was a student of his for a year or so) before proceeding to the University of Toronto in Canada in 1943, graduating there with a Bachelor of Arts in 1947. He then proceeded to study law and was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn, England, in 1948. Returning home, he engaged in private practice for five years. He was appointed a Magistrate in 1953 and served in the Public Service with distinction in various positions such as Senior Magistrate, Senior Crown Counsel, Assistant Solicitor General and High Court Judge until his retirement in 1984 while holding the position of Justice of Appeal, Supreme Court. Upon his retirement he served as a Member of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission (1985–1987), Master of the Moots, Hugh Wooding Law School (1985 –1987), and a

Member of the Defense Force Commissions from 1985 until his appointment as President of the Republic.

The academic and professional career of Justice Hassanali by themselves may not seem to warrant election to the highest office in the country. A close examination of his extra-curricular activities will however justify why he was chosen. He was a sportsman, sports administrator, and social worker and his involvement in a wide range of social and community activities at all levels of the society indicated that he had the requisite social skills and was civic-minded.

Justice Hassanali was elected President of the Republic for a five-year term in early 1987 and took the Oath of Office on the 19th March of that year. Justice Hassanali accordingly assumed the position of President of the Republic and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces shortly after midnight. He was re-elected for a second term at which time the PNM was in office.

President Hassanali was a person who followed the tenets of his religion, which includes, among other things, abstaining from drinking alcoholic beverages. All the past Heads of State had been Christians and it was therefore traditional to serve alcoholic beverages at official functions at Government House. This did not take place while Justice Hassanali was President as he had made it clear before accepting office that he would not serve anything in President's House which he did not serve at his own home.

President Hassanali brought a new image to the position of President: a President who accepted invitations not only from national and prominent organisations, but one who would accept invitations from little known organisations in the rural districts of the country, and also

as one who would intermingle with the audience well after the function was officially closed. In this connection the writer attended many functions given by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) some of which he chaired, at which the President was the special guest. He lingered after most of these functions were officially closed and would often leave the rostrum and move around, greeting and conversing with the guests. This often reminded the writer of one of the principles of leadership in Islam: a leader was in no way superior to those who put him in the leadership position and must always meet freely with them.

Hassanali taught the writer during his early years as a student at Naparima College in the early '40's. It was some decades later before the writer started meeting him again, albeit occasionally. The writer had the opportunity of meeting the late President on quite a number of occasions, including official functions at President House, at functions organised by the IRO and various religious bodies, in his Office at President's House and also of conversing with him on the telephone.

However, about a week before he was officially announced as President he telephoned the writer stating that he and his wife would be visiting very close friends (who the writer knew) the following day and they would like to drop in at the writer's home to discuss the opening, with a multi-faith prayer service, of a Moot Trial at the Hugh Wooding Law School. The writer agreed to the request. The couple came at the appointed time and the writer gave him his advice as a senior official and former President of the IRO. He then requested the writer to meet with a Miss Kamla Persad (now Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago) who was looking after the arrangements. The writer agreed to

the request and Miss Persad did visit him. As the question of his pending appointment as President was then very much in the air, the writer broached the subject with him. His response was that some overtures had been made to him. As the matter was a very sensitive one, the writer let it rest there. About a week or so after, however, an official announcement to the effect was made.

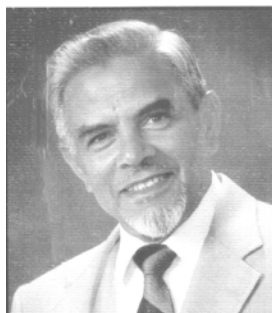
The writer attended Hassanali's installation as President in the capacity of Acting Chief Representative of the Muslim Community, and also his installation as President for a second term at which he offered the prayer on behalf of the Muslim Community. During his ten years as President, the writer met him at several official functions held at President's House and by a number of non-Government organisations. Hassanali was not one above asking a favour while he was President and when this was granted, sending a "Thank you" note in his own handwriting on the Presidential letterhead in appreciation when there was a positive response. He also telephoned the writer, and the writer visited him at his Office, on a few occasions to discuss some matters the writer does not feel free to disclose. Suffice it to say that early in his first term of office he sent a hand-written letter on the President's stationery to the writer expressing appreciation.

He died on the 25th August 2006.

**(b) Dr. Wahid Ali, TC, ORTT. (1928-2008)
- Acting President of the Republic Of Trinidad
and Tobago**

“A true Muslim is thankful to Allaah in prosperity, and resigned to His Will in misfortune.”

(Prophet Muhammad – pboh)



Dr. Wahid Ali was the first Muslim to be appointed President of the Senate and also to act as President of the country.²⁵ He was first appointed a Senator by the ruling party, the PNM, in 1970 for the unexpired term of another person. After the General Elections in 1971 he was again appointed, on the recommendation of the ruling party, as a Senator (for five years) and then elected as President of the Senate. He was re-appointed for two further five-year terms as a Senator and President of the Senate, thus serving for sixteen years on the Senate and fifteen years as its President.

Ali acted as President of the Republic on twenty occasions and was awarded the Trinity Cross, the nation's highest award, for public services in 1977. He was the first Muslim to receive this award. He was also

²⁵ The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is governed by a bicameral Parliament comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Constitution provides that *“Where the office of President is vacant or the President is incapable of performing his functions by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago or by reason of illness, the President of the Senate shall act temporarily as President.”* It will therefore be seen, from the Section of the Constitution quoted in the preceding paragraph, that the President of the Senate is the second highest office holder in the country.

posthumously awarded the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, which replaced the Trinity Cross, in 2010 in the sphere of “Community Service”.

Ali was born on the 27th June 1928 in the village of Carapichaima in Central Trinidad where he attended Primary school. There was no free secondary education in those days and only a few secondary schools existed in the country. A person could therefore only obtain education at the secondary level if he won a College Exhibition (of which there were very few) or if the person’s parents could pay the school fees and also the necessary transportation and/or boarding fees. Ali, however, won a College Exhibition (scholarship) to Osmond High School in Port of Spain. As a result of the poor transportation facilities in those days, he resided at relatives in Port of Spain in order to attend the school.

Ali’s ambition was to become a medical doctor but he could not pursue that career upon graduation from college because of financial constraints. Accordingly, he decided to do the next best thing, which would also in the long run assist him in achieving his ambition. He thus became a qualified pharmacist: achieving this objective by working in a pharmacy and studying at the same time.

After obtaining his pharmacist’s licence in the early fifties Ali, in partnership with some of his elder brothers, opened a pharmacy. Although now a businessman, Ali was still fired with the ambition to be a medical doctor. So when the University of the West Indies (UWI) opened its first Medical School in Jamaica in 1956 Ali was in the first class. By then he was married with four children. He graduated from the University in 1961 and was awarded the Clinical Prize in Surgery in his Final Examination. He was also the first recipient of the Sir Thomas Taylor

Award by the Taylor Hall Society of the UWI. Ali was subsequently named the “Distinguished Graduate of the UWI in 1968”.

Ali was not only focussed but also civic-minded. In that regard, he was actively involved in many service and professional organisations. For example, he was involved in youth activities at both the national and international level. Among other offices he held were: President of the National Youth Conference of Trinidad and Tobago; Senior Vice president of the World Assembly of Youth; President of the Guild of Undergraduates of the University of the West Indies (Jamaica); and Chairman, International Students Conference, Switzerland and also Canada. In the sphere of parliamentary activities Ali served as Joint President, Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (1971-1986); Elected Member, Standing Committee of Commonwealth Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers (1978-1981); Vice President, Eight Commonwealth Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers (New Delhi – 1986); and Elected Member, Standing Committee of Commonwealth Conference of Speakers and Presiding officers (1986). In the areas of his profession Ali was a member of the Council of the Pharmacy Board of Trinidad and Tobago and an Executive Committee member of the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association.

Ali had also been very active in the area of religious activities from his youth. He was Secretary and First Vice President of the ASJA. He was also elected first President of the IRO of Trinidad and Tobago when it was founded in 1970. Ali’s involvement in the Senate later restricted somewhat his activities in the Islamic and inter-religious fields.

Ali was a well-known lecturer in the fields of Caribbean Affairs, Current International Affairs, and Islam/Comparative Religion. He was also the author of two books: *Building Bridges in Society (Selected Speeches)*, and *Back from the Brink*.

The writer first became associated with Ali in 1950 during the visit of Maulana Siddiqui to this country. Ali was the Secretary of ASJA at that time. In 1951 the writer was elected Assistant Secretary of that body and would meet Ali at meetings of the Executive Committee of the Association. Subsequently, the writer developed a fairly close relationship with Ali which lasted until his demise. In the early 1950s, the writer would often drop in by Ali at his work place in a pharmacy on Frederick Street, Port of Spain, and discuss matters relating to the Muslim community. After Ali proceeded to Jamaica in 1956 the writer would visit him on his return home for vacation in order to solicit articles for publication in ASJA's Eid-ul-Fitr Annual, of which the writer was Editor for many years.

Ali attended the *Shukraana* (thanksgiving) functions held by the writer and his wife to mark their tenth, twentieth and fiftieth wedding anniversaries. He was the feature speaker on the first two occasions and, on the last, in spite of not having fully recovered from a very serious illness, rendered a particular *Qaseeda* (Islamic song) at the writer's request.

The writer was among the relatively small number of guests at Ali's home on the occasion of the wedding of Ali's only daughter and also a few *Shukraana* functions, the last being held about a year before he died. As the writer and his wife were preparing to leave the last-mentioned function and were about to extend their

salaams to him Ali requested the writer, in broken Trinidad English as he, and many others are wont to speak sometimes, to stay back for a few minutes as he wanted to discuss an important matter with him. The writer and his wife delayed their departure and Ali, after seeing some of his other guests off, came to the writer and continued the conversation: both speaking in broken Trinidad English. Ali told the writer that he had planned to write a brief history of Muslims in Trinidad but could not do so because of his illness and time was against him. He continued that the only person he considered who could undertake that task was the writer because of his long involvement in Islamic activities and asked him to consider undertaking it. The writer looked at Ali, smiled and thanked him for the confidence he had in him. Continuing, the writer stated that the task was a huge one, time was also against him, and he had been working on recording certain aspects of such history for some twenty years (the present work) but had been unable to complete the project because of other more pressing commitments.

The writer also met Ali on quite a number of occasions which Ali attended in his official capacity as Acting President or President of the Senate.

Ali died on the 9th August 2008.

**(c) Kamaluddeen Mohammed ORTT, OCC,
LLD (Hon) (1927-) - Acting Prime Minister**

“And do not forget to do good to one another.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 2 V. 238)



Kamaluddeen Mohammed, popularly known as “*Charch*” (one’s father’s brother), was born in El Socorro in the then primarily agricultural village of San Juan on the 14th April 1927. He was the fifth of thirteen children of Fazal and Khajiman Mohammed. His father was a “short crop” gardener and Mohammed, like the rest of his brothers, had to assist his father in planting and reaping crops, often missing classes at the primary school which he attended. Notwithstanding this he was able to win a scholarship to a private secondary school where he furthered his secular education. His father died when he was twenty-two years old and this placed an additional burden on him as he had to assist in the upkeep of his younger siblings.

Muhammed’s education was not restricted to secular matters only. His father, who had a strong Islamic background, ensured that his children were taught the basic elements of the faith and in addition, were able to read, write and speak Urdu (the tongue of their forefathers) and read the Qur’aan in the original language, Arabic. In later years, he expanded his knowledge of his religion and the Urdu and Arabic languages under the guidance of a Muslim missionary. He also learnt to read, write and speak Hindi from a Pundit (Hindu priest) versed in this language.

Mohammed worked in his late teens in various business places before he was approached in 1947 by the management of the then only local radio station, immediately after its formal opening, to host a weekly local East Indian radio programme. The offer was made after the management became impressed with his professionalism and eloquence in translating the prayer delivered on the occasion by the representative of the Muslim faith. People of East Indian ancestry formed a substantial part of the population at that time (as at present) and had to tune in to Guyana (then British Guiana) for such programmes. His programme was therefore an immediate success and led to his popularity not only locally but also in neighbouring Guiana and Suriname where there were also a substantial population of East Indians.

Young Mohammed had been involved in the activities of the Muslim community and also the community in which he lived as a youth. With his involvement in community work, his popularity as host of an ethnic radio programme, and his ability as a speaker it was only natural that he would enter the field of politics. And this he did, winning a seat by one vote for the St. Ann's Ward, County of St. George in the 1953 County Council General Elections. He was then elected Chairman of the Council at its inaugural meeting, again winning by one vote. He was re-elected as Chairman in 1954, again winning by one vote. He did not seek re-election as Chairman when his second term in that position expired. Nor did he seek re-election to the Council at the expiration of its three-year term in 1956.

This did not mean however that Mohammed had retired from politics. In 1955 he became involved with a small group of persons who were concerned about the state of

the country and were exploring the possibility to establish a political party to contest the General Elections which were due to be held in 1956 and which had been postponed for six months. The group was headed by Dr. Eric Williams, an island scholarship winner, former Deputy Chairman of the Caribbean Research Council of the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission. From this group emerged the PNM in 1956, with Dr. Williams as Political Leader and Mohammed as Assistant Secretary.

When national elections were called in 1956 Mohammed successfully contested the St. Joseph seat on a PNM ticket. The party won the majority of elected seats and its leader, Dr. Williams, was asked by the Governor to form the Government, which he did. When Williams named members of his Cabinet, Mohammed was named the Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries. Mohammed subsequently fought, and won five successive elections, serving as an elected Member of Parliament (MP), and also a Minister in various Ministries, until the PNM, including Mohammed, was defeated in 1986. During that time he also acted as Prime Minister on eight occasions.

Mohammed was able to adapt himself to the workings of any of the many Ministries to which he was appointed. The writer was one of a number of persons from the private and public sectors in the Caribbean chosen to participate in a course in early 1972 at the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT, Geneva. The first two weeks of the course took the form of an orientation programme in Trinidad, with most of the remaining time being spent at the Centre in Geneva. Mohammed, as Minister of West Indian Affairs, formally opened the Course, addressing the participants' *ex-tempore* for nearly one hour. Some refreshments were served after the formal opening during which one of the foreign students

commented to the writer on Mohammed's eloquence and the depth of his speech and enquired what University Mohammed had attended and what discipline/s he had studied. The writer's response was that Mohammed had never achieved a tertiary education and may not have even completed his education at the secondary level.

Dr. Williams, Political Leader of the PNM, headed the Government from September 1956 until his sudden death on the 29 March 1981. At that time the Party had three Deputy Political leaders, all of whom held positions in the Cabinet. The most senior and experienced was Mohammed, who was also a foundation member of the Party. The second most senior Minister was the Hon. Errol Mahabir, while the most junior was the Honourable George Chambers.

Section 76 (1) of the Constitution provides for the appointment of the Prime Minister by the President, then Sir Ellis Clarke. It is logical to assume that Mohammed would have been invited by him to accept the position having regard not only to his seniority but also to his wide experience. However, the President, after consulting with a few senior officials of the party, including the three Deputy Political Leaders, decided to appoint Chambers to the position. This was not entirely unexpected as the base of the ruling Party came from persons of African descent, while the base of the opposition was persons of East Indian decent. Charges of racial discrimination in the ruling Party were made but these were naturally denied. But when one considers that two top personalities of East Indian descent in the Party resigned early in the life of the Party and migrated to Canada there appears to be some reason to believe that

the rank and file of the Party would not have accepted a person of East Indian descent as the Prime Minister.²⁶

As mentioned previously, Mohammed lost his seat in Parliament in 1986 when the PNM was heavily defeated. Patrick Manning, who was subsequently elected as Political Leader of the Party, apparently chose to present a new image to the Party and thus most of the Ministers of the past PNM administration, including Mohammed, were sidelined. After the election defeat Mohammed offered to assist the PNM, then in opposition, in re-grouping but he was ignored.

The PNM under Patrick Manning was returned to government in the national elections of 1991. After Manning called elections half-way in the five year Parliamentary term and lost to the United National Congress (UNC), Mohammed, who by then had been openly critical of the leadership of the PNM, became openly supportive of the UNC. Mohammed was appointed CARICOM Ambassador under the UNC Government and served in that position from 1999 to 2001 when the PNM was returned to power.

²⁶ The reader can judge as to whether or not racialism was practised by certain individuals in the PNM by contemplating an extract from page 473 of the book entitled "KAMAL – A lifetime of Politics, Religion and Culture", a biography by Dr. Hamid Ghany: The extract relates to the constituency elections which were held for the Barataria Constituency in 1987 and reads as follows: *When the elections began Kamal's name was proposed as Chairman and he rose to decline on the grounds that he was still a Deputy Political Leader of the Party. One member, a former policeman, got up just after Kamal to say that it was time that the party changed the Indians at the helm and proposed another person who was subsequently elected.*

Mohammed was nominated on a number of occasions for the country's highest honour while the PNM was in power but he was never favourably considered. This, notwithstanding that he had served thirty consecutive years (a record at that time) as a Minister, and a pioneer in the propagation of East Indian culture in the country. However, Mohammed was given a number of awards by some NGO's for his contribution in the areas of public service and culture. He also received the highest awards from seven countries.

With a change in Government again in May 2010 (the PNM losing to a coalition of opposition parties), Mohammed was awarded the nation's highest honour, the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in August of that year for National Service. Mohammed was also honoured with an Honorary LLD degree at the graduation exercises of the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies held in October 2011.

In July of 2012 Mohammed was awarded the Order of the Caribbean Community (OCC) – the Caribbean Community's highest award - at the Thirty-Third Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) held in Saint Lucia.

Mohammed has over the years been a popular speaker not only at Islamic functions but also at functions organised by other sections of the community. After his exit from active politics in 1986, Mohammed resumed his association with the TIA of which he had been Secretary, and served for a while in that body as its First Vice President.

Mohammed is retired but his views are sought by the media from time to time on those areas in which he has expertise.

Mohammed is married to the last daughter of one of the writer's *Kallaas* (mother's sisters) and Khalloos. The writer's mother's family, like the writer, is from San Fernando. When the writer's Kallaa got married to Sheikh Hashim Muzaffar, who was from a prominent family in San Juan, she naturally moved to live there. Muzaffar was a well-to-do merchant and also a well-known and respected member of the community and an official of the TIA.

The Muzaffars' originally lived in a large upstairs wooden house which was later demolished and replaced by a large two storey brick house. The house was strategically located near the Quay D'Orsay, the railway station and the Eastern Main Road. The Muzaffar's home was like a second home to the writer's family as during the vacation they, like some other relatives from San Fernando, would take the train and travel to San Juan, spending many pleasant vacations there.

The writer transferred from Naparima College in San Fernando during his last year at College in 1946 to St. Mary's College in Port of Spain on the recommendation of his science teacher, Percival Harnarayan, who later went on to study medicine on a CD & W scholarship and later became one of the country's leading specialist surgeon/gynecologists. The writer lived at the Muzaffar's during that time and for about two to three years from 1950 when he obtained a position in the Customs and Excise Department in Port of Spain. During the time that the writer lived at the Muzaffar's, Mohammed's future wife and an older sister, both of

whom were younger than the writer, looked after the welfare of the writer, performing duties of mother and elder sister.

The writer has closely followed all national elections, except the one in 1956, since the year he sat the Cambridge School Certificate Examinations in 1946. As regards the exception, which was in 1956 and the year Mohammed successfully contested his first national election, the writer was unable to do so because he was participating in a residential six-week course sponsored by the Government, and organised by the British Council, for public servants and members of the business community. As a result, the writer was only able to attend public election meetings on week-ends. However, the course ended two days before the elections were held. On election day, the writer went to Mohammed's election headquarters (the Muzzaffar's residence) and assisted in tallying the incoming votes from the various polling stations until the final results were received, which showed that Mohammed had won the seat. The outgoing Member of Parliament asked for a recount which was held on the following Thursday in St. Joseph and at which Mohammed was confirmed as the winner. The writer was present at the recount.

After the writer was married in 1954 he and his family would regularly visit relatives with whom he had a close bond from time to time. Included among these were the Mohammeds, but these were later restricted due to Mohammed's busy schedule as a politician. However, the writer would meet Mohammed at many functions held by mutual friends and also at Islamic celebrations, many of which the writer chaired when Mohammed was the feature speaker. The writer had the privilege of having as his house guests for periods of a week or so a number of

prominent foreign Muslim persons. Among them were Professor Syed Ali Ashraf (Director of the Islamic Academy of Cambridge, UK and Editor of the Muslim Educational Quarterly), Sheikh Adeeb Raipuri (President of the Pakistan Naat Academy), Sheikh Muhammad Ja'fer (Secretary General of the World Federation of Islamic Missions and Editor of "The Minaret") and *Qaari* Ghulam Rasool (internationally known reciter of the Qur'aan and former official reciter for the Pakistan National Assembly). On such occasions the writer would invite a few persons on each day of the guest's stay to have lunch with him in order to meet the guest. Mohammed was always among those invited because of his contribution to, and interest in the propagation of Islam in the country.

The writer has never been one to seek personal favours from anyone but would however do so in the interest of his community. Such an occasion arose during Mohammed's second year as a Minister when the writer, as Secretary of the ASJA, was organising a one-day excursion of Muslims to Barbados to attend the formal opening of the first *masjid* there. There was a heavy demand for seats and quite a number of persons expressed the desire to go but feared they could not obtain passports in time. The writer made enquiries from Immigration authorities about what could be done to solve the problem and was informed that the relevant Minister could authorise the departure and return of the intended travelers if their names and certain other information were submitted to him on an approved Form. The writer telephoned Mohammed at his office at the Ministry of Agriculture, apprised him of the situation, and sought his assistance in the matter. Mohammed acted immediately and shortly after telephoned the writer, informing him that he had spoken with the Minister

concerned, who expressed agreement to the request, and advised him to prepare the request on the appropriate Form, and then go to a certain senior Officer in the Immigration Department who would handle the matter expeditiously. This was done, the request was approved and a full plane load of local Muslims was able to attend the function.

Mohammed came from very humble beginnings and has remained a very humble person throughout his life. Whenever he attended functions of an Islamic nature, where he would usually be invited to address the audience or to render a *Qaseeda*, he would mill around and mingle with the guests after it was concluded.

In so far as the writer was concerned whenever both Mohammed and he met, Mohammed would always speak with the writer, even if for a short while, enquiring about the writer's family. Embedded in the writer's memory is the time in 1968 when the writer was studying at the UWI for the Diploma in Management Studies. Lectures for the programme were held in an upstairs classroom opposite the building housing the lecture rooms of the Institute for International Relations. The two buildings were separated by a small car park. The writer was in the gallery outside his classroom with a few other students when he saw a car with the flag of Trinidad and Tobago pull up outside the Institute's building and Mohammed (who was then Minister of West Indian Affairs) exit. A number of officials from the Institute who were awaiting Mohammed's arrival greeted him. Mohammed then first looked around the ground level of the surrounding area, then started to look at the upper level of the buildings when his and the writer's eyes met. They both waved in recognition of each other. The writer was pleasantly surprised when Mohammed left the welcoming officials, walked across the quadrangle, then up the stairway to

where he was standing and, after exchanging greetings and a few pleasantries, returned to meet the officials.

The writer was appointed by Cabinet to seven committees, of which four were on the recommendation of the IRO. As regards the other three, the writer is not aware on whose recommendation he was included. However, there was a Christian priest, a Pundit, and a Muslim (the writer) on each of these committees to represent their respective religion's point of view. The writer is of the strong view that Mohammed, who was a member of the Cabinet at the time, was responsible for his nomination. The writer met Mohammed on many occasions after these appointments but Mohammed never mentioned his involvement, if any, in these, nor did the writer ever ask.

(d) Justice George Anthony Aslam Edoo (1926 – 2013) Ombudsman

“O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allaah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor: for Allaah can best protect both.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 4 V. 135)



The Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago provides, *inter alia*, that:

“There shall be an Ombudsman for Trinidad and Tobago who shall be an Officer of Parliament and shall not hold any other office of emolument whether in the public service or otherwise nor engage in any occupation for reward other than the duties of his Office.”

Under the provisions of the Constitution, the President of the Republic appoints the Ombudsman²⁷ after consultation with the Prime Minister of the country and the Leader of the Opposition. The Ombudsman's term of Office, as specified in the Constitution, is five years. The first Ombudsman appointed in Trinidad and Tobago was Justice Evan Rees, who served from 1977 to 1990. He was succeeded by Justice George Anthony Aslam Edoó who was first appointed to the position for a three-year term in 1991.

Edoó was born in San Fernando on the 17th January 1926. His father was an indentured immigrant who opened a dry goods shop after serving his term of indenture and his mother was the daughter of an indentured immigrant. Young Edoó received his primary school education at the San Fernando R.C. Primary School. A prerequisite to his and his siblings being admitted to the school was that they must join the Church responsible for administering it. He then entered Naparima College on an open scholarship in 1937, graduating in 1941.

²⁷ The word 'Ombudsman' is of Swedish origin and is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as follows: *a Government official (as in Sweden or New Zealand) appointed to receive and investigate complaints made by individuals against abuses or capricious acts of public officials, one that investigates, reports on, and helps settle complaints.* The position of Ombudsman was first introduced in Sweden in 1809, from which country it has spread to over fifty others, including Trinidad and Tobago. There is strong evidence to suggest that the concept was introduced to Sweden by the country's King, Charles XII, who, while in refuge in Turkey for a number of years, was impressed by the institution of 'Qadi-ul-Qudat'. The Islamic equivalent of the Ombudsman - *Mohtasib* - was created was Caliph 'Umar, the second successor to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). The word 'Mohtasib' is derived from the Quranic word '*hisab*' which, when applied to worldly affairs, means accountability by State officials.

Employment opportunities for persons of African and East Indian descent were at that time largely restricted to the Government service and the companies engaged in oil exploration. Edoe at first worked with an oil exploration and refining company but left after four years because of the restricted promotional opportunities. He then entered the Civil Service as a Second Class Clerk in 1945 and was posted to the Sub-Registry of the Supreme Court in San Fernando. He started studying for the ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) qualifications but had to abandon this after successfully completing Part 1 of the course because, as was required, he was not employed in the accounting field.

Edoe's exposure to law in the courts aroused in him a desire to study for that profession. Thus he embarked upon studies simultaneously for the Bar and for the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) at London University by correspondence courses. By 1961 he had completed both the first part of the Bar and the London LL.B. He then enrolled as a member of Lincoln's Inn and proceeded to London for the final examination at the Bar and for his Degree course. He completed his final examination for the Bar at Michaelmas (Christmas) 1962 having placed third in the Commonwealth with Upper Second Class Honours and was called to the Bar in July 1963. He also completed his final examination for the London LL.B. He was admitted to the Bar in Trinidad in August 1963.

Edoe then resumed duties as Principal Officer and 2nd Deputy Registrar in the Registry of the Supreme Court, a position in which he had acted prior to his departure for London in 1961. In 1964 he was promoted to the post of Assistant Registrar and Deputy Marshal of the Supreme Court in charge of the Sub-Registry in San Fernando. He was induced to early retirement by the legal practitioners

who had benefited from his wealth of experience. He retired in 1978 and practised law in San Fernando for two years before he was appointed to the position of High Court Judge in February 1980. He was promoted to Justice of Appeal in 1987 and retired in 1991. In February 1991 Justice Edoo was appointed as Ombudsman of Trinidad and Tobago by the President for a three-year term and, by successive terms, his tenure was extended until February 2006 when he retired.

Justice Edoo has over the years been making a substantial contribution to Islam in the country. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the ASJA and Chairman of its Education Board and Divorce Council. Following the repeal of the Muslim Marriage and Registration Ordinance in 1961 and its replacement by the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act which came into force on the 1st. December 1964, it became necessary for the Registrar General to make rules prescribing the procedure and practice to be observed by a Divorce Council in dealing with applications for divorce. Because of the failure by the appropriate authority to make the relevant rules the Divorce Councils could not function for a number of years. As a result, representatives of the three Muslim bodies (ASJA, TIA, and TML), under the chairmanship and guidance of Edoo, formulated the rules, which were then submitted to the Registrar General, and eventually passed into law - see Ch. 8 (a).

His advice has often been sought by other bodies and individuals in the country *pro bono*.

The writer has been closely associated with Justice Edoo for nigh unto six decades. The writer has known Edoo since 1953 when he started visiting the family home. This stems from the fact that he married one of the writer's

sisters (now deceased) some two months after the writer was himself married in 1954. The relationship between the writer and his two sisters has always been very close with frequent visits to each other's homes and regular telephone conversations. That relationship has permeated down to their children.

The writer also met Edoo regularly at meetings of the AJSA Executive of which he was a member until his elevation to the position of Judge of the High Court.

As regards the Islamic field, the writer was an Officer of the ASJA when Edoo, besides being Chairman of the Education Board and the Muslim Divorce Council, also served on the Executive Committee. Many members of the family, including the writer, would frequently seek Edoo's advice not only on matters of law but also on personal affairs.

Edoo passed away on the 10th April, 2013.

(e) Noor Mohammed Ghany (1910-1990) - Recipient of Chaconia Medal (Gold) – The Nation's second highest honour

"Believers are like one person. If his head aches, the whole body aches with fever." (Holy Prophet Muhammad – p.b.o.h.)

Noor Mohammed Ghany was born on the 29th January 1910 in St. Joseph. He was the last son of Abdul [see Ch. 4 (c)] and Ameeran Gany.



Ghany received his secondary education at the Queen's Royal College (QRC) and his Islamic education from his father as well as at the *maktab* which was sponsored for quite a number of years by his father. He was well versed in the Urdu language (which he could speak and write fluently) and in the reading and recitation of the Holy Qur-aan. He had a melodious voice and his rendition of the Holy Qur-aan and *qaseedas* (Islamic songs) were well appreciated at Islamic functions. He was also an able and persuasive speaker.

Ghany took an active part in religious activities from a youth and served as Secretary of the TIA for a number of years. While in that position he led the small delegation of persons who successfully negotiated the grant of State-aid to the then privately administered El Socorro Islamic School - see Ch. 8 (c). He succeeded his father as President of the Association in 1951 and held that position until his demise in 1990.

Ghany entered business at a very early age and was able to successfully establish businesses in a number of areas. He was an active member of the Trinidad Chamber of Commerce which was mainly comprised of the large business companies in the country.

Because of his successful business activities and organisational and management ability, Ghany was appointed Chairman of the Marketing Board, a Government authority charged with developing agriculture, in the early 1950s. In that capacity he accompanied the then Minister of Industry, the Hon Albert Gomes, to British Guiana (now Guyana) as an Advisor to negotiate for the purchase of rice from that country. The Central Marketing Agency was eventually established to replace the Marketing Board and a senior

Civil Servant was appointed Chairman of the Agency. Ghany was appointed as Vice-Chairman of that Agency from the middle 1960s to the early 1970s. Ghany also served as a member of the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), a Government statutory board created for the purpose of encouraging the establishment of business enterprises, for a number of years from the late 1960s to the middle 1970s.

Ghany intermingled freely with people of various sections of the country and when he was invited to assist in forming a body to teach the Hindi language in the country he willingly agreed to give his services. When the body, the *Hindi Nidhi*, was formed he was elected Vice President and served in that capacity for a number of years before retiring. Ghany was one of the founders of the now defunct India Club which was established in the very early 1940s on premises around the Queen's Park Savannah. The Club was established for the purpose of providing a venue for social and cultural activities for persons of East Indian descent in Trinidad. Ghany served for a number of years on the General Committee of the Club before being elected President.

Ghany was awarded the Chaconia Medal (Gold), the nation's second highest honour, for "Community Service" in 1977. He was described as "Businessman/Religious Leader".

Ghany was the youngest brother of the writer's younger Mamee, Mrs. S. M. Jaleel of San Fernando. As the writer spent a lot of time as a youth at the Jaleel's home, the name of Noor Mamoo was often mentioned by his first cousins whenever he visited them.

The writer became more aware of Ghany's activities in the fields of business and Islam when he himself became active in the Islamic field in the late forties.

The writer was married Ghany's eldest daughter in June 1954 and, as a natural consequence, a strong relationship existed between the two. The writer and his wife would visit regularly, mostly on a Sunday afternoon, and have tea with the family, attend functions at their residence and spend week-ends with them at their Mayaro estate. Ghany would also visit the writer and his wife regularly to have dinner or tea after he retired from active involvement in his business activities.

The writer met Ghany regularly at meetings of the Muslim Co-ordinating Council which had been established locally during the Rabeta Conference held in Trinidad during 1978. The Council comprised two representatives each from the ASJA, TIA and TML. Ghany was the President of the TIA at that time and one of its representatives. Haji Abdool Sattar, President of the ASJA and the writer (then First Vice President) represented that body, while Haji Mohammed Ibrahim and Imam Mohammed Hafeez represented the TML. Chairmanship of the Council rotated for each meeting as did the venue.

The Council met regularly for about eight years and was able to make valuable contributions, by consensus. However, it ceased to operate after that time as one body, whose leadership had changed, endeavoured to impose its views on the other two.

Ghany passed away on the 26th October 1990.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

CAN NOW CALL TRINIDAD HOME

“Say: In the Bounty of God, and in His Mercy, in that let them rejoice.” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 10 V 58)

This chapter looks at the acquisition of citizen’s rights within a multicultural society. It starts with the clamour for the recognition of Muslim marriages, the right to establish denominational schools and the right for a Muslim public holiday. Muslims demanded recognition of their individual and community needs and aspirations, and rights and resources necessary to maintain their religious identity. Ultimately, the Muslims called for social justice and equity.

The first positive change towards recognition of the Hindu and Muslims religions took place in 1935 with the enactment of the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act. The second was the extension of payment of the Ecclesiastical Grant to include Hindu and Muslim bodies. The third was the decision in 1949 to grant State-aid, after nearly a decade of representations, to the privately-run TIA El Socorro Islamia School.

(a) The Muslim Marriage And Divorce Registration Ordinance

“And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and he has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.” (Al Qur’aan: Ch. 30 V. 21)

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) said:

“Marriage is my tradition: whosoever keeps away there from, is not from amongst me.”

Marriage in Islam is compulsory under certain conditions and there are persons to whom one cannot be married. It is not within the scope of this article to elaborate on the latter. Marriage in Islam is a contract and thus, as in the case of any contract, it can be dissolved. However, dissolving a marriage must not be taken lightly as the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) said that:

“Of all the things allowed, the most abominable to God is divorce”.

The marriages of the indentured immigrants from India performed in accordance with their religious beliefs (Hindus or Muslims) were not recognised by the Colonial Government until, in so far as the Muslim community was concerned, the enactment in the Legislative Council of the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Ordinance in 1935 (No. 29 of 1935). This Ordinance was assented to by His Excellency the Governor Sir A. C. Hollis on the 13th November 1935 and came into effect on the 1st July 1936.

Prior to 1930, as a consequence of the non-recognition of Muslim marriages, both the persons who were married according to their religious rites and their progeny suffered immensely. As the married couple was not considered legally married according to the (civil) law of the land, the offsprings from such marriages were considered bastards and the father's name was not indicated on the child's Birth Certificate. In fact, the word “illegitimate” was written under the column in the Certificate headed “Name if any” and no entry was made under the heading “Name and Surname of Father”. In

addition, when one party to the marriage died, neither the other party nor the children could benefit from the deceased's estate as the marriage was not recognised in law. Consequently, the Government would usually acquire the property of the deceased as '*bona vacantia*' (in place of, or in the absence of, a parent).

Representations were made by both individuals and organisations from as early as 1915 or before to have Hindu and Muslim marriages (and in the case of the Muslims, divorces) recognised by the then Colonial Government. Playing a major part in these representations was the East Indian National Congress (EINC) of Trinidad, which had been founded in 1915. It must be stated that the Colonial Government was not unsympathetic to the pleadings of the immigrants and they put steps in place to have the aspirations of the immigrants materialise. Eventually, on the 18th October 1935 the then Attorney-General moved the first reading of a Bill entitled "An Ordinance relating to Muslim Marriages and Divorce". The motion was seconded by the then Colonial Secretary and agreed to. The Bill was accordingly read, in keeping with established procedure, for the first time. The second and the third (final) readings of the Bill took place two weeks later on the 1st November 1935. After the Bill had been read a second time, the Council went into the Committee Stage and certain amendments were agreed upon. The amended Bill was then passed by the Committee after which the Council resumed its sitting. The Attorney-General then moved the third reading of the Bill. This was seconded by the Colonial Secretary and agreed to. The Bill was then read a third (and final) time and passed.

The address of the Honourable Attorney-General in moving the second reading of the Bill on the 1st

November 1935 is reproduced in full hereunder as it shows, among other things, the problems faced by the Muslim community with respect to the non-recognition of marriages conducted in accordance with *Shariah*, the steps the Government had taken to prepare the Bill in order to ensure that it would satisfy the needs of the Muslim community, and the main provisions of the Bill:

“The Bill provides for the registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces which have been effected in accordance with the Islamic Law.

For Muslim marriage purposes the Colony will be divided in Marriage Districts with district Registrars and Muslim Marriage Officers appointed in each District, but a Marriage Officer will have jurisdiction throughout the Colony. The appointment and removal from office of such officers will be discretionary with the Governor. Each Marriage Officer will be provided with a Marriage Certificate Book containing a counterfoil in which he will enter the prescribed particulars at the time the marriage is effected and send the certificate to the District Registrar within 7 days of the marriage. The latter, if he finds the certificate to be in order, will countersign the same and forward it to the Registrar General for registration. After registration, the Registrar-General will send a certificate of registration to the contracting parties and notify the Marriage Officer of the fact of registration.

The requisites of a valid Muslim marriage are set out in detail in clause 8, being principally that the parties must profess the Muslim faith, and have proper qualifications according to the Islamic law and must not be within the prohibited degrees of marriage, that the parties must be freely consenting, and the marriage must be effected by

or before a Marriage Officer and be duly registered.²⁸ The age limit for contracting marriage is in the cases of a male 16 years, and in the case of a female 12 years, and if the male contracting party has not attained 21 years and the female contracting party 18 years (unless she is a widow) then it is necessary to obtain the consent of the father, and in default of the father then of the guardian or other person in loco parentis (in the place of a parent) ; where the consent of no such person is obtainable, then it is within the power of the Governor to appoint a member of the Muslim community to examine into the circumstances, and in effect to give his consent to the marriage if there are no impediments.

For purposes of Civil status the effect of registration will be to secure statutory recognition of marriages which have been effected in accordance with Islamic law and the children of a marriage so registered will be legitimate. Provision is also made whereby prior marriages entered into before the commencement of the Ordinance may be registered, by complying with the

²⁸ Before a Muslim marriage ceremony (Nikah) takes place it is necessary to ensure the following: the bride is not already married, in the event any of the parties is below the age of puberty, the guardian has given consent to the marriage, and the contracting parties are outside the degrees of relationship which would make the marriage unlawful. The essential elements (*arkaan*) of a Muslim marriage (*Nikah*) are: the "*Ijab*" (proposal of marriage), and the *Qubuul* (acceptance). This must be done in the presence of either two male Muslim witnesses, or one adult male and two female Muslim witnesses. In addition, it is commendable that a *Khutbah* (sermon) be given, preferably before the marriage ceremony takes place, advising the bride and bridegroom of their responsibilities as a married couple from the Islamic viewpoint, and the bridegroom give a marriage gift (*mahr*) to the bride as a symbol of her independence to own property in her own right. It is also commendable for the bride and bridegroom to re-iterate the articles of faith before the marriage rites take place and for a *du'a* (supplication) to be made. A simple marriage feast should also be held as this was a stressed practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.). No priest is required nor are there sacramental rites.

formalities set out in Clause 13, whereby the parties will be required to appear with a marriage officer before a District Registrar and make a declaration to the effect that the marriage was duly contracted and is subsisting – any children of such marriages being legitimated from birth. (Vide Clause 15.)

Divorces will only be effected by or before such Muslim Divorce Officers as may be appointed for the purpose, after due consideration of any representation made, and registration of divorce will be effected in a similar manner to registration of a marriage except that the Divorce Officer will send the Divorce Certificate direct to the Registrar General who will notify the Divorce Officer of the fact of registration. Registration must be affected within one month from the absolute dissolution.

Clause 24 requires that all certificates and entries shall be in the English language. The Marriage Officer or Divorce Officer is required to at least be able to read and understand the English language. In the event of his being unable to write in the English language, he may employ someone to make the necessary entries for him, but he must sign the records.

Provision is made for rectification of errors in the registers and the granting of decertified extracts by the Registrar-General, in whose office will be filed all original certificates.

Penalties are provided in Clauses 25 to 28 for certain offences in the nature of fraudulent registration, or forgery of registers, and destruction of records.

Power is given to the Governor in Executive Council to make registrations, which will be essentially concerned with departmental matters. The sections of the

Immigration Ordinance, Ch. 245, relating to marriages and divorce will no longer apply to Muslims.

The Bill constitutes a very liberal effort to satisfy the aspirations of the Muslim community in relation to their Civil Status in matters of marriage, legitimacy and divorce. The history of this legislation dates back to the year 1929, when a Committee was appointed to enquire as to the procedure to be adopted. The Committee collected evidence but was not able to arrive at a basis of agreement satisfactory to the Muslims. My predecessor in office revived the matter, and with the assistance of Mr. Marriott who possesses a special knowledge of the requirements of the Muslims, a new Bill was drafted. I am pleased to see that Mr. Marriot has not lost interest in this matter but has given it his blessing by his presence here today. The Bill was forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Colonies who submitted same to the Authorities in India. Certain suggestions were made by the different authorities consulted, and by some of the Muslim Associations here and in India. In so far as it has been practicable, these have been embodied in the present Bill. Every endeavour has been made to meet the wishes of the Muslim community. It has not been possible to satisfy them in every respect, but it is believed that the Bill in its present form is acceptable to the members of the community."

Following proclamation of the Act signed by H. Nankivell, the Acting Colonial Secretary made the following appointments under Section 4 of the Ordinance on the 1st July 1936:

- The Registrar General of the country was appointed Registrar-General of Muslim Marriages and Divorces for the Colony.

- The five Wardens (County of St. George, Eastern Counties, County of Caroni, Counties of Victoria-St. Patrick, and Tobago) were appointed Registrar of Muslim Marriages for their respective areas of authority.²⁹

In the Notice reproduced in the *Trinidad Royal Gazette* the Acting Governor also appointed forty-one (41) persons under Section 5 of the Ordinance to be Muslim Marriage Officers. They were:

- ***For the District of St. George:*** Al Haj Moulvi Ameer Ali, Mr. Mohammed Rafeeq, Mr. Abdulllah Khan, Mr. Juman Rahamadeen, Mr. Ghulam Hosein, Mr. Bashir Meah, Mr. Haafiz Naseruaddeen and Mr. Cassim Karim Baksh

- ***For the District of the Eastern Counties:*** Mr. Oli Mohammed, Mr. Mohammed Baksh, Mr. Subran Ali, Mr. Rahim Baksh, Mr. S. O. Mohammed, Mr. Joseph Azize, Mr. Goole Mohammed and Mr. Ali Khan

- ***For the District of Caroni:*** Mr. Asgar Ali, Mr. Mohammed Ishark, Mr. Tyab Ali, Mr. Shamhair, Mr. Azeem Khan, Mr. Abdur Rahman Khan and Mr. Abdul Aziz

- ***For the District of Victoria-St. Patrick:*** Mr. Mohammed Ishmael, Mr. Juman Meah, Mr. Noor Mohammed, Mr. Abdul Ghany, Mr. Hassan Ali, Mr. Shukoor Mohammed, Mr. Abdool Gaffor, Mr. Sharafat, Mr. Ranzaan, Mr. Mainooddeen, Mr. Nawaaz, Mr. Rahim Shah, Mr. Imam Baksh, Mr. Abdool Sattar, Mr. Abdulla Badloo Meah, Mr. Wasie Mohammed, Mr. Madaar Baksh and Mr. Rahamat Ali.

On the 8th October 1936 His Excellency the Governor appointed the following persons under Section 5 of the

²⁹ Notice No. 246 of the *Trinidad Royal Gazette* dated July 2, 1936.

Ordinance to be Divorce Officers for the Colony: Al Haj Moulvi Ameer Ali, Aziz Mohammed, and Syed Mohammed Hosein.

The aspirations of the Muslim community insofar as recognition of marriages and divorces conducted in accordance with the faith were achieved with the passing of the Ordinance and the official appointment of a number of Marriage and Divorce Officers.

Because of perceived abuses in the granting of divorces by Divorce Officers appointed under the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Ordinance and, in light of three established Muslim organisations representing Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago being recognised by the Government, it became necessary to amend the Ordinance. In fact, the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Ordinance was repealed in 1961 and replaced by the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act which came into force on the 1 December 1964 with the assent of the Governor General. It is contained in Chapter 45:02 of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Act is divided into four parts. Of relevance to this article, Part II deals with the requirements of a Muslim marriage and contains provision for registration which was written and reviewed. Part III deals with Divorces, the effect of which was to take away from the Divorce Officers the ability to grant divorces and to vest the function in Divorce Councils. The Act also provides for the registration of divorces in the Office of the Registrar-General. Of significance, with respect to divorces, is the provision of regulations to the Act.

The Regulations which form part of the Act provide for the appointment of fifteen Divorce Officers to be

appointed by the President, five each from TML, ASJA, and TIA. The Regulations provide for each body to apply to the President for appointment of not more than five persons to be Divorce Officers, one of whom shall be a barrister or a solicitor. The Regulations also provide for the filing of the application for divorce in accordance with Islamic law and for the registration of the decisions of the Council in the Office of the Registrar-General.

The Regulations also provide for a Rule Making Committee to be appointed by the Registrar-General to make rules prescribing the procedure and practice including rules of evidence to be observed by a Council in dealing with applications for divorce. Because of the delay in appointing the Committee, the Divorce Councils remained in abeyance for a number of years. In 1967 the ASJA executive appointed Mr. G. A. Edoo, L.L.B., Barrister at Law, [see Ch. 7 (d)] to take steps, in collaboration with the two other Muslim bodies, toward the formulation of the rules. Efforts had been made previously to have the Councils constituted and operationalised in light of Section 13 (4) of the Regulations which prescribed that in the absence of any rules, the law and practice in force in Trinidad and Tobago governing matters of a similar nature in the Courts shall be applied *mutatis mutandis*. The Registrar-General, at the time, did not think that the Muslim bodies should proceed along these lines since these were new bodies performing functions of a court of law and the absence of rules of procedure would have posed a hindrance to their operations. The intention at the time was for the Legal Drafting Department of the Attorney-General's Ministry to draft the rules and submit them to the Rule Making Committee for ratification. When this was not forthcoming, the ASJA approached the Registrar-

General who suggested that the bodies prepare the rules and submit them to him.

Accordingly, Justice Edoo held consultations at the time with the Presidents of the TIA and the TML and with Mr. Sham Mohammed, M.P., Barrister at Law, and Mr. Kamal Deen, Senior Magistrate, who represented the TIA and the TML, respectively. This resulted in the formulation of Rules which were submitted to the Registrar-General and passed into law in 1968 as subsidiary legislation (147/1968) titled Divorce (Procedure and Practice) Rules. The Rules provide for the filing of the Petition with the Secretary, for the service of the Petition on the spouse of the petitioner, for the hearing of the Petition, and the issue of decisions dissolving or annulling the marriage.

Finally, it is pertinent to note the following:

- Divorce Councils only have the power to annul the marriage. Applications relating to maintenance of the wife and custody and maintenance of children are assigned to the High Court which has jurisdiction in these matters,
- the grounds for dissolution or annulment of a marriage under Islamic law are substantially the same grounds specified under the Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act 1972. Previously, under the civil law, the only ground for dissolution of a marriage was adultery,
- there is provision in the law for petitioners to apply either to the Divorce Councils or the civil courts for annulment or dissolution of the marriage.

(b) The Ecclesiastical Grant

The Colonial Government used various forms of discrimination against the religious survival of the East

Indian immigrants. They imposed various measures which acted to the detriment of the Hindu and Muslim population, and indeed threatened their very survival. Some of these were financial in nature, such as the grant to establish Christian schools, and the Ecclesiastical grant³⁰ which was given to the Christian churches on a *per capita* basis for proselytising purposes.

The then Colonial Government agreed in the early 1940's to extend the grant to include Hindu and Muslim bodies. There were then two Muslim incorporated organisations (the ASJA and the TIA). The Government asked the Muslim bodies to decide how the grant budgeted for the Muslim community should be apportioned between them but they could not agree on this for nearly a decade. As a result, the grant could not be accessed by any of the two bodies. In 1951, by which time the country was enjoying internal self-government, the then Minister of Education, the Hon. Roy Joseph, called a meeting of the then three incorporated Muslim bodies (by that time the TML had been founded), and urged them to settle the matter as the Muslim community as a whole was being denied the benefits to be derived from the Grant. The representatives of the three bodies, after consultation among themselves while still in the Minister's office, agreed that the grant would be divided as follows: ASJA (44 percent), and the TIA and the TML 28 percent each.

As regards utilisation of the grant, this was the cause of a considerable amount of discussion in the ASJA. The *Imaams* were expecting the monies to be paid to them although when divided the sum payable to each would

³⁰ The Ecclesiastical Grant is an annual grant to the religious bodies in the country. It was based on a *per capita* basis but neither the quantum per person nor the amount based on the increases in population has been increased for decades.

then have been about \$25.00 per year. However, a very senior official of the organisation and an Executive member were strongly of the view that the grant should be paid to one person to perform missionary work. The matter eventually was referred to the *Qadi*, Haji Ruknudeen, for decision. He ruled that the money should be distributed equally to the *imaams*. This decision led to the resignation of the senior official of the Association and also the member of the Executive Committee, both of whom were in opposition to this move. TIA used it to pay a missionary who, among other duties, paid regular visits to their schools.

Finally, it should be recorded that the Grant was suspended by the then Government under the leadership of Dr. Eric Williams some four decades or so ago for a number of years and then re-instated. No reason was given for the suspension of the grant but readers may wish to draw what is the obvious conclusion. Today, the grant is still given and the quantum was only increased one or two times, the last being some three decades or so ago. As far as ASJA is concerned, initially the annual sum when divided equally between 50 odd imams worked out to be approx \$25.00 each. This was increased by donations by members of the Executive from time to time.

(c) The First Muslim (And Non-Christian) Government-Assisted School - El Socorro T.I.A. Primary School

“He who wants this world then knowledge is essential; he who wants the Hereafter, then knowledge is essential. The one who wants the one and the other, then knowledge is indispensable.” (Prophet Muhammad - p.b.o.h.)

The Prophet (p.b.o.h.) said:

“Acquire knowledge even though it be in China”.

This refers to both religious and secular knowledge. Religious knowledge enables you to develop your soul and so prepare yourself to meet your Creator while secular knowledge enables you to provide sufficiently for your family, which is an act of *ibadaat* (worship). It also enables you to go into business, employ others, give charity etc., all of which are acts of *ibadaat*. One may even say it was a *jihad* (struggle) to preserve one's religion is very relevant.

In dealing with this subject it must first be understood that Almighty Allaah describes Islam as a *diin* (complete way of life) and the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.) as “The Perfect Exemplar” in the Qur-aan. This Code of Laws, if followed by man, will enable him to achieve peace, success and happiness both in this life and in the Hereafter.

The Holy Prophet (p.b.o.h.) led the way in the spreading of the Faith. He could not do much while he was in Makkah because of the constant persecution of the enemies of the Faith. When, however, he migrated to Madinah in the thirteenth year of his Mission, one of his first acts was to construct a *masjid* and, attached to the *masjid*, a shed (*suffah*) with three open sides and the fourth being one of the walls of the *masjid*. This shed was used for meetings, conducting classes in Islam, and as a residence for those temporarily in need of shelter. Those

who graduated from the *madressah* (school) after the prescribed course of studies was successfully completed were assigned to various towns and cities to spread the Faith. This was more or less continued over time, with the mosques serving as the centres for education (as indeed they should). It was thus only a question of time before many of these *madressahs* became centres for higher learning, attracting students from far and wide.³¹ Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, is over one thousand years old and the oldest in the world. It evolved with the construction of the Al Azhar Mosque in 972 C.E. and attracts students and research scholars from around the world.

A proper secular education is the gateway to obtaining meaningful employment, with the consequent financial benefits, in most countries. Without that, one is practically doomed to a life of poverty. Without such an education one may not even obtain a job as a sales clerk and will be confined to performing menial work for life, barely able to feed one's family and to provide them with the basic necessities of life.

³¹ Africa is often referred to as "The Dark Continent". There is an expression in many parts of the world, if one wants to get rid of another person, to tell the person to 'Go to Timbuktu', most of the time not even knowing that Timbuktu is a city in Mali, West Africa. Very few today know that that city was the centre for the expansion of Islam for over a century, that it was "an intellectual and spiritual capital of the Madingo Askia dynasty (1493-1591) and home to a prestigious Koranic school" which attracted students from all parts of Africa, including Arabia; and that three great mosques were constructed there during that period. Muslim scholars in the middle ages gained eminence in all spheres of knowledge, and the works of many were translated into Latin for the benefit of students in Europe. The names of many of these scholars, however, were "latinised" in order to hide the fact that they were Muslims. For example, Ibn Sina was changed to Avicenna, Ibn Rush to Averroes, to give two examples. Many examples can be given of the contribution of Muslims to secular education.

The indentured Indian immigrants of the country and their children contributed to the economy of the country for over one hundred years. Improvement in their socio-economic condition was among the major reasons for the immigrants' presence in Trinidad. Land and education were avenues of socioeconomic mobility for the indentured immigrants and it is therefore not surprising that there was keen pursuit of such among that sub-population. The absence of secular schools in the Muslim community forced parents to send their children to the Christian denominational schools. The Christian Churches were granted substantial grants towards the construction of schools, funds to cover the payment of salaries to teachers and other facilities but these were denied to the Hindu and Muslim communities until 1949. As is well known, this monopoly of the education system was used by most of the Christian Churches to increase the numbers of their respective flocks. This situation was of grave concern to the Muslim community who feared the loss of their religion as a result. Consequently, members of the indentured immigrants' community and their descendants made representations over decades to have this injustice rectified. These calls fell on deaf ears for decades. The writer notes that Marriot-Mayhew Commission acknowledged the position of the Indian population and recommended that the group should be able to establish schools of their own. This was not a simple question of being placed on an equal footing as the Christian. It was a question of spiritual and economic survival.

Much has been written and said over the past decades about who or which body established the school as a private institution and also financed the project until State-aid was granted for its operations. The following are the facts as far as the writer has been able to ascertain.

The school was initially started by the Anjuman Tabligh-ul-Islam [see Ch. 8 (c)] as a private primary school on rented lands (where it is still located, but in a new building) as the following Circular Letter, dated 29th March 1942, shows “A Great Need Fulfilled”

“Dear Brothers in Islam

Assalam Alaaikum

Anjuman Tabaligh-ul-Islam (formerly Tabligh-ul-Islam Committee of Trinidad) has started AN ISLAMIA SCHOOL, at ISLAMIC HALL, SAN JUAN, from 2nd March 1942, where Islamic education is being given to Muslim children side by side with secular education. The number of children is about 300.

Pay a visit to the school between 9.00 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. and see by your own physical eyes that a great need of the Muslims of this country has been fulfilled.

The school is under the charge and supervision of M. Nazir Ahmad, Missionary.

*Yours in Islam,
Secretary,
Anjuman Tabligh-ul-Islam,
Trinidad,
Waterloo Road, Arouca.”³²*



Shakeralli Damree

³² Waterloo Road, Arouca, was the residence of Mr. Rajab Ali, at whose home Maulana Ahmad lived for a short while shortly after his return to this country. Mr. Ali was a member of the Executive Committee of the Anjuman Tabligh-ul-Jamaat Association and, very probably, Secretary of the Management Committee of the School.

With respect to the above, it must be noted that Maulana Ahmad was the missionary of the Anjuman Tabligh-ul-Islam and was thus an employee of that body. Maulana Ahmad passed away on the 10th December 1942, a little over six months after the school was established. The school was run as a private institution for about seven years before State-aid was granted for its upkeep. The school was not started in the shed-type structure as shown in photographs over the years but in a much smaller structure on the same parcel of land. The original structure was expanded to the east and west, then to the south, finally resulting in the shed-like structure. The first Headmaster was Mr. Shakeralli Damree, a young graduate of Naparima College, who served in that position for a few months before being replaced by a Mr. Henry, a retired headmaster.³³

Obtaining donations for the upkeep of the school was the result of the efforts of the members of the Anjuman Tabligh-ul-Islam, who had seceded from the TIA and later rejoined the TIA in 1943. As a consequence of this, the school then fell under the administration of the TIA [see Ch. 6 (b)]. It must be recorded that the school was opened in the middle of World War II and a state of emergency existed in the country at that time and a 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. curfew was in effect. The state of emergency required among other things, that all windows etc. be properly shaded so as to ensure that no light was emitted from any building. British and American troops (with appropriate weaponry) were stationed at strategic locations in the country to protect its oil industry, which was essential to the efforts of the Allied forces. Staple food commodities were rationed; new vehicles for

³³ This move was apparently taken to meet one of the Ministry of Education's requirements that in order to qualify for State-aid, the school must be staffed with a certain amount of trained teachers.

civilian use were not available as the production of factories was geared only towards vehicles for use by the military; vehicles were zoned and many had to be laid up for unavailability of spare parts and tires, so that travelling within the country was extremely difficult. German warships and submarines were very active around the seas surrounding the country and, according to reports, sank several Allied naval vessels and cargo ships within miles of the Port of Spain harbour.

In spite of these drawbacks, the leadership of the Association scoured the country as best as they could and at great personal sacrifice seeking financial support to maintain the school. The Muslim community, notwithstanding their relatively weak economic position and general lack of secular education, rallied to the call and contributed generously to the cause.

The turning point in the struggle for State-aid came, in the writer's view, with the assumption of Mr. Sidney J. Hogben of duties as Director of Education on the 23rd October 1946. Hogben, an Englishman, had previously served in the field of education in Palestine and a number of colonies of the British Commonwealth. He was thus very cognisant of the emphasis which Islam placed on the acquisition of knowledge and also of the contribution Muslims had made in this area over the centuries.³⁴

³⁴ The writer recalls that during the visit of the late Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui to this country in 1950 - see Ch. 5 (e)- a grand Meelad-un-Nabi (birthday of Prophet Muhammad - p.b.o.h) celebration was held at the Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain, at which Mr. Hogben was a specially invited guest. Mr. Hogben, the Director of Education, was asked to address the audience as a guest speaker and did so for about ten to fifteen minutes in the Arabic language, not knowing that while local Muslims could read the Holy Qur-aan in the language in which it was revealed, they were not able to speak or understand that language.

Noor Ghany was appointed by the TIA to lead the negotiations with the new Director of Education regarding the grant of State-aid. The delegation was advised to pursue approval of such aid not only for Muslim schools, but also for all non-Christian schools which may be established. After prolonged discussions the Government eventually agreed that the school would be granted State-aid provided it was maintained in accordance with certain provisions for a period of two years. The school, having met the conditions, was granted State-aid with effect from the 3rd March 1949 and formally opened as a State-aided school by the Acting Governor, Mr. P. M. Renison, on the 18th September 1949. The decision to grant State-aid to the El Socorro Islamia Primary School specifically, and to all non-Christian schools generally, ended the long struggle with the Colonial Government, and by extension the British Government, for equal rights with the Christian community in the field of education. A similar struggle had been fought, and won, with respect to the recognition of Muslim marriages and divorces as discussed earlier.

The writer is of the view that the true impact of the significance of the grant of State-aid to the El Socorro Islamia Primary School was only realised by very few persons then and even fewer now. The writer will therefore briefly attempt to state, in his view, the impact of the decision on the descendants of the Indian immigrants in particular, and on the country as a whole. Before doing so, however, the following brief background is given.

The country was granted internal self-Government in 1950 and the late Honouable Roy A. Joseph was appointed Minister of Education. Mr. Joseph was of Syrian descent and was married to a lady of Muslim

background. He was sympathetic to the cause of the Hindu and Muslim communities and fully appreciated the disadvantages they experienced educationally and, as a result, economically. In 1952 he drastically relaxed the standards in relation to the approval of buildings for State-aided schools, allowing halls attached to *masaajid* and temples, and other such structures to be used. This resulted in both the Hindu and Muslim organisations competing for approvals for the opening of a number of schools in annexes to *masaajid*, temples and in halls. A few of these schools were officially opened in January 1953 at which time the school year then commenced.

During the visit to the country in 1950 of the late Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui an informal agreement was reached between the TIA and the ASJA, the two bodies following the *Hanafi* School of Law, that the ASJA would concentrate on *dawah* through *maktabs* etc. and the TIA would look after the establishment of schools. Shortly after, however, the agreement was broken by one of the parties.

Now, some of the major impacts. Employment was given to Hindus and Muslims in the teaching profession as well as ancillary staff. Hindu and Muslim children were able to access a secular education without being forced to give up their religious beliefs. Muslim and Hindu students at these schools were able to receive religious instructions in their respective faiths concurrently with secular education. The receipt of an education at the primary school level was the stepping stone for many to successfully further their education at the secondary school level and yet others at the tertiary school level.

(d) Eid-ul-Fitr – A Public Holiday

There are two religious festivals in Islam namely, *Eid-ul-Adha* (the Festival of the Sacrifice of Prophet Ibraahiim (Abraham) – peace be on him, and *Eid-ul-Fitr* (the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast).³⁵

³⁵ None of these is mentioned in Al Qur-aan. Eid-ul-Adha is celebrated on the tenth day of Zil Hajj, the twelfth and last month of the Islamic calendar, and commemorates Prophet Ibraahiim's (Abraham's) decision to obey Almighty *Allaah's* command to sacrifice that which he loved (who was in fact) his only son (at that time) Prophet Ismaa-iil (Ishmael) - peace be on them both. *Eid-ul-Fitr* is celebrated on the first day of Shawwal, the tenth month of the Islamic calendar, and the day after the compulsory month of fasting (*Ramadaan*) ends. Fasting from the break of dawn until darkness falls, except in certain circumstances, during the month of *Ramadaan* is, as you may know the fourth of the five fundamental principles of Islam. Both *Eids* require that Muslims should go to the *masaajid* in the morning to perform special congregational prayers and to listen to a *Khutbah* (sermon). In the case of *Eid-ul-Adha* Muslims who are in a certain financial position must make the animal sacrifice, which is usually performed immediately after the special prayer service is completed. However, one has up to three days to perform the sacrifice. *Eid-ul-Adha* is the more important of the two celebrations but for reasons which are not known, *Eid-ul-Fitr* is celebrated as the bigger of the two festivals in this country. It might be that while many members of the congregation have to leave the *masjid* quickly after the congregational prayer on the occasion of Eid-ul-Adha in order to perform the animal sacrifice this is not so in the case of *Eid-ul-Fitr*. Thus, there is more time after the prayer for fraternising both in the *masaajid* and by visiting relatives and friends. Additionally, members of the congregation endeavour as much as possible to attend the *masaajid* every night during the month of *Ramadaan* in order to perform the compulsory night prayer (which is followed immediately by the special *taraweeh* prayer, both of which together last above fifty minutes to one hour). As a result of this, and also meeting in the *masaajid* and individual homes during the course of the month to break the fast, a special camaraderie develops among the congregation during the month of *Ramadaan*. The end of *Ramadaan* brings compulsory fasting to an end and the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr*, besides being a day of thanksgiving, is also seen as a temporary farewell for the close relationship established with other members of the congregation during the past month. In Muslim countries three days are generally given as public holidays to mark each of these Festivals.

Prior to 1962, when Trinidad and Tobago attained independence, the official religion of the State was Christianity and at all official functions where it was necessary to offer a prayer this was performed only by a representative of a Christian faith. National public holidays were generally associated with Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter. Despite the presence of other religious denominations such as Muslims and Hindus no public holidays were granted until 1966 despite representations made by them.

However, on the 9th September in that year both the festivals of *Divali* (Festival of Lights) and *Eid-ul-Fitr* were approved as Public Holidays by the Cabinet and, by extension, the PNM Government led by Dr. Eric Williams. It may not be incorrect to say that it was politically expedient for the then Government to take such a decision, in the context of an independent country and increasing pressure from both the Hindu and Muslim communities and the fact that national elections were constitutionally due in late 1966. General elections were in fact held on the 7th November 1966 and the PNM emerged victorious. The first *Eid-ul-Fitr* after which the day was declared a public holiday was Friday 13th January 1967.³⁶

Insofar as a holiday for the Muslim community was concerned, while there was unanimous agreement that at least one holiday should be approved, the writer (who was very active in the Islamic field at that time) is not aware that any widespread consultation took place by the Muslim leadership with the various *jamaats* (congregations) in the country or at the Executive Committee level of the three representative Muslim

³⁶ See Government Notice No. 160 of 1966.

bodies. This is not to say that informal discussions did not take place within the Muslim community before the Cabinet took a decision on the matter. However, there was no known consensus as to the festival that should be so approved.

Muslims follow a lunar calendar with a month being either twenty-nine or thirty days. According to *Shariah* one must look for the new moon immediately after the current month has completed twenty nine days and, if the crescent of the new moon is seen that means a new month has commenced; if not, then the current month must complete thirty days. The relevant legislation under which public holidays are granted requires that an official Notice to this effect be published at least seven days before the proposed public holiday. Should either of the two *Eids* be approved as a public holiday, it would not be administratively possible to meet the legal requirements to declare the day a public holiday. Accordingly then, the *Meelad-un-Nabi* (birthday of the Prophet Muhammad-p.b.o.h.) which falls on the twelfth day of Rabi-ul-Awwal (third month of the Islamic calendar) is celebrated in many parts of the Muslim world including Guyana, and should have been given serious consideration as the holiday as among other things it would meet the administration requirements. However, it appears that it was politically expedient for the Muslim community to be granted a public holiday before the elections were held, and an influential few were of the view that that day should be *Eid-ul-Fitr*. Who were consulted and what were their recommendations are not known!

As regards the declaration of *Eid-ul-Fitr* as a public holiday, the procedure has been for the relevant Ministry to request a recommendation from the three recognised Muslim bodies, namely; ASIA, TIA, and TML. If the

three bodies recommended the same day, then that day is so announced. If there is no unanimity, then the majority view is carried.

As far as the writer recalls, the Cabinet always accepted, except on one occasion, the recommendations of the three representative Muslim bodies. With respect to the exception, this was the year 1984 when *Eid* could have fallen, depending on the sighting of the moon, on either Saturday June 30 or the day after, that is, Sunday July 1st. The three bodies thus recommended unanimously that the Monday 2nd July be declared a public holiday to mark *Eid-ul-Fitr* as the convention in Trinidad and Tobago is that if a public holiday falls on a Sunday the Monday is recognised as the public holiday.³⁷ Their recommendation for the 2nd July to be declared a public holiday was based on the age of the new moon. While it was likely that the moon would be seen if weather conditions permitted, there was a strong possibility that it would not if weather conditions were unfavourable. Further, all Government offices, banks, and many business places were closed on Saturdays so that even if *Eid* fell on that day only a small percentage of the Muslim community would be inconvenienced. In any event, Muslims could obtain leave or time off from their jobs for the purpose of attending their respective places of worship. If the Saturday was declared to be a public holiday and the Sunday turned to be the actual day of *Eid*, then the anomalous situation would arise whereby the Muslim community was fasting while the rest of the community was celebrating *Eid*. However, Cabinet did not accept the unanimous recommendation of the Muslim bodies and, in spite of, or perhaps because of, a Muslim presence

³⁷ Section 3 (2) of The Public Holidays and Festivals Act (Ch.19.05) provides as follows: "*Where a public holiday falls on a Sunday or where two public holidays fall on the same day, the next following day that (apart from this sub-section) is not a public holiday shall be a public holiday*".

therein, declared the Saturday as the public holiday. As it turned out, the new moon was not seen on the Friday night; the month of *Ramadaan* thus continued for one more day; and Muslims continued fasting while the rest of the community enjoyed the public holiday.

(f) Conclusion

In short, the landscape of the country in all aspects: political, economic, social or otherwise, was changed by the efforts of those few indentured immigrants and sons of indentured immigrants (most of whom never had a partial or full education at the elementary level) who engaged the might of the British Government and fought, and won, their rights for equal treatment as the Christian community. The names of these persons, except a very few, have been lost with the passage of time and all of them have, as far as the writer is aware, have passed away. However, they will receive the blessings of their Creator for the Last Prophet of Allaah, said:

“When a man dies, he leaves behind three things that benefit him even after death: righteous children who would pray for him, a Sadaqa e Jariya (continuous charity)³⁸ and the knowledge that he leaves behind for people to benefit.”

³⁸ For example: constructing bridges, roads and educational institutions (secular and religious) from which people benefit.

CHAPTER NINE:

THE FIRST ORGANIZED HAJJ GROUP FROM TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

“Complete the Hajj or ‘Umra in the service of God.....” (Al Qur’aan Ch. 2 V. 196)



Tahseen-Ur-Rahman

The performance of *Hajj*³⁹, or pilgrimage to Makkah, is the fifth and last of the Pillars of Islam. It is compulsory on all Muslims who “can afford the journey”. The *hajj* is performed during the five days from the eight to the twelfth of *Dhul Hajj*, the last month of the Islamic calendar. Today, *hajj* is a highly organised business. As long as one can afford the pilgrimage, one can go with a number of *Hajj* organisers locally, pay the prescribed fees and give him your passport. He will make all your travel arrangements and accompany you on the journey, leading you through the various rites. All pilgrims from this country travel by air. One can be in Makkah in about thirty six hours, perform the rites of Hajj and be back in the country fifteen days later. Or one can add another nine or ten days to the journey and visit the Noble Prophet’s *Masjid* in Madinah.

It is the yearning of most Muslims to perform the *Hajj* and many save for a lifetime and are only able to perform the sacred journey in their old age, though more and more

³⁹ See Prof. Syed Ali Ashraf, Teacher’s Manual entitled “Islam” for a comprehensive description of the conditions and rites of *hajj*.

younger people are now doing so as well. Pilgrims travel by various means, each according to his or her financial ability. The *hajj* sees the largest gathering of people for a religious occasion in the world. The number performing these rites was said to be nearly four million in 2012 and quotas have had to be placed for some years now on the number of *hajj* visas that are issued to each country. These quotas are reviewed regularly. The two countries which received the largest number of *hajj* visas in 2011 were Indonesia (200,000) and Pakistan (165,000).

The scenes in the two sacred *masaajid* in Makkah and Madinah are unique (as in all *masaajid*) as there are no reserved places when the prayer is being offered. The first worshippers to enter must go to the front row, and only when this row is filled should the worshippers begin the second row, then the third and so on. Thus the ruler may find himself standing side by side with his subjects, the rich side by side with the poor, the fair-skinned side by side with the dark-skinned, all equal in the sight of their Creator, except in their degree of piety. This emphasizes equality.

El Hajj Malik El-Shabbaz, the late internationally known Afro-American activist, formerly known as Malcolm X, became a member of the Nation of Islam in the United States of America and one of the leaders of that group. He fought for the rights of black Americans and criticized the white Americans for the way they treated the black Americans. He eventually broke with that group, became a Sunni Muslim, and performed the *hajj*. There he saw the way that people of all races, colours, nations, financial status etc. intermingled freely during the *hajj* and realized that all men are equal in the sight of Allaah except in their degree of piety. He thus described the scenes as follows:

“There were tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world. They were of all colours, from blue-eyed blondes to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a sense of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist. You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought patterns previously held.” (Malcolm X, Letter from Mecca, April 1964.
http://www.malcolm-x.org/docs/let_mecca.htm)

The Noble Prophet of Islam (p.b.o.h.) is buried in the room which was attached to the *masjid* in Madinah and in which he lived and departed from this life. Many pilgrims visit the site as it is considered sacred.⁴⁰ In light of the above most pilgrims visit Madinah either before or after the *hajj* rites are performed and endeavour to spend at least eight days and nights in that City so that they can perform forty consecutive prayers in the *masjid* in accordance with the statements of the Prophet (p.b.o.h.).

Among the first known persons to perform the sacred duty of *hajj* from Trinidad and Tobago were Haji Ruknudeen and Haji Gokool Meah who did so in the early 1920s - see Ch. 4 (b). No one could have travelled

⁴⁰ The *masjid* was constructed shortly after he migrated to that city from Makkah. The first Khaliifaa', Abu Bakr As-Siddique, was buried next to him and the second Khaliifaa', 'Umar Al-Khattaab, was buried next to the first. The original *masjid*, known as *Masjid Al-Nabaawi*, has been rebuilt and extended through the centuries so that the three graves are now all within the *Masjid* proper. The Holy Prophet (p.b.o.h.) stated that *“the person who offers forty (40) prayers consecutively in my Masjid (Masjid Al-Nabaawi), without missing a prayer in between, will secure immunity against the fire of hell and other torments and also against hypocrisy”*; and again: *“One who visits my holy grave after my demise will gain the same blessing as if he had seen me during my lifetime.”*

during World War II. It was only in the early 1950s that a number of persons, mostly a family and close friends at a time, made the sacred journey. The journey would have been by steamer to Europe (England or Italy), then boat-train to Jeddah. The travelling time alone would have been around four weeks each way. It was not until 1962 that the first “commercial” effort was made to organise a *hajj* trip. The move was initiated by a well-known local travel agency and highly publicised, naming Tahseen-Ur-Rahman as “Tour Organiser and Tour Guide”. Rahman was a relatively young person who came from a well-known local family. In addition, he had received island-wide exposure to the Muslim community while serving as Private Secretary to the late Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui (R.A.) during the Maulana’s six-month visit to Trinidad in 1950, thus accompanying the Maulana onstage during the latter’s public lectures.

Rahman and the writer were very close friends and he confided to the writer that the travel agency had approached him seeking advice on arranging the tour and soliciting prospective participants. He further told the writer that the travel agency promised him that if he could persuade fifteen persons to perform the *hajj* he would be appointed as Tour Guide and as such, would accompany the prospective pilgrims free in order to ensure that arrangements for the journey proceeded smoothly.⁴¹ The writer was very skeptical about whether fifteen persons could be obtained to embark on the journey and indicated such to Rahman. Rahman, however, was very keen on the proposal because, besides practising the tenets of his faith, he was a deeply spiritual

⁴¹ It is normal practice in the airline and hotel industries to donate a free ticket or free hotel accommodation to tour operators so that a tour guide may accompany the group.

person and, as a public servant in the lower ranks, perhaps felt he might never be able to perform the hajj and visit the tomb of the Final Prophet of Allaah (p.b.o.h.) on his own. However, subsequent events proved the writer wrong as apparently there was a latent demand by many persons to perform the pilgrimage as eighteen persons booked and paid for the sacred journey. The group left Trinidad by air on the 29th April 1962, spent three days in Cairo, Egypt, and arrived in the Holy City of Makkah on the 4th. May. The group performed the *'umrah* (lesser *hajj*) and *hajj* rites and visited sacred and historical sites in and around Makkah before travelling to Madinah to visit the tomb of The Last Prophet of Allaah (p.b.o.h.), then returned home spiritually revitalised.

That first organised tour paved the way in subsequent years for tours to be arranged every year by various organisations/individuals. At present (2012) seven or eight different groups leave this country every year. The number of persons leaving this country has been increasing rapidly, with an estimated four hundred plus having made the sacred journey in 2012. Those performing the *hajj* come from all strata of the society and, like the trend in the rest of the world, comprise an increasing proportion of young persons, including students of secondary schools and university.

The places of departure of persons leaving for the Sacred Journey are usually filled with immediate family members, relatives, friends and well-wishers to see them off on the occasions of their departure and arrival. There is the shedding of tears by many, with a *du'a* (supplication) being offered just before the pilgrims depart that they would return safely to their families. On the return of the pilgrims, there are also large crowds to meet them and much shedding of tears: this time however

the tears are those of joy. There should be no shedding of tears, however, because the Noble Prophet said:

“A person who dies while proceeding toward Makkah or while returning back from Makkah will be protected from the great distress on the Day of Resurrection”.

The writer, through the Grace of Allaah, Praised and Glorified is He, has been blessed with the privilege of performing both the *hajj* and the *‘umrah* twice. Forever imbedded in his memory is the vivid scene on many occasions of sitting in the Sacred Mosque in Makkah and seeing a group of pilgrims wearing the *ihraam* and bearing the shrouded body of a deceased person. They would trot briskly (in the Islamic tradition) to the position in the *masjid* from where the *Imaam* would lead the *salaat* (prayer) and lay the body for the *janaazah* (funeral prayer) to be performed immediately after the congregational prayer is read. The writer would then think to himself: *“Who is that person who was so fortunate to die, and be buried, in the Sacred City in which the Last Prophet of Allaah was born?”.*

Following the congregational prayer, as the worshippers then stand up either to read optional prayers or to leave the *masjid*, the *imaam* would announce *“Salaatul Janaazah”* (funeral prayer). The worshippers would stop, stand in lines and follow the lead of the *Imaam* in the prayer. And again the writer would wonder: *“Who was that fortunate person who had hundreds of thousands of worshippers offering the Salaatul Janaazah (funeral prayer) for him or her? Would that it was me”.*

CHAPTER TEN:

A COMMUNITY IN RETROGRESSION

(a) Local Muslims: Now a Divided Community

“My followers will be divided into seventy three sects. All of them will be in the Fire except one” (Prophet Muhammad – p.b.o.h.)

The Muslim community lived amicably from the time the first immigrants arrived in the country until the early 1920's. This was because they were homogeneous in their religious beliefs in that they followed the *Hanafi* School of Law.⁴²

⁴² A schism of a political nature took place in the Muslim community very shortly after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.o.h.). This arose because a very small minority projected the view that the *Khaaliifa'* (successor to the Prophet- p.b.o.h.) should be chosen from his immediate family (in this case Hazrat Ali, the Prophet's first cousin and only son-in-law) and not by the Islamic principle of consensus of the people. However, the latter view prevailed and Hazrat Abu Bakr As-Siddique was elected to the position. Although Hazrat Ali swore obeisance to the new *Khaaliifa'a* his supporters did not. He was overlooked for two successive occasions but was selected for the position on the fourth.

After a period of time the persons who accepted all the *Khuulaafa'a* (from the first) were referred to as “*Sunnis*” (those who accepted the sayings and practices of the Prophet), while those who rejected the legitimacy of the first three were referred to as “*Shi'as'*” or “*Shi-ites*” (a shortened version of the word “*Shi'at Ali*” (the party of Ali). The Sunnis and Shi'as both believe in the fundamental principles of Islam, the schism, as stated above, being of a political nature. The Sunnis comprise approximately 80-85% of the world Muslim population and form the majority in such countries as Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia. Shi'ites comprise the rest and form the majority in a small number of countries, including Iraq, Iran and Azerbaijan. the Sunnis are divided into four main schools of law: Hanafi, Shaafi-yii, Hanbali and Maalaki. Followers of the Hanafi School of Law comprise the vast majority of Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago.

The position remained like this until the early 1920's when a missionary brought to the country by a group of persons headed by Haji Ruknudeen and Abdul Gany turned out to be a follower of the Ahmadiyyah Movement, whose members are considered to be outside the pale of Islam [see Ch. 5 (b)]. Although the missionary's services were terminated some two years after his arrival in the country, the seeds of division had already been sown. The situation was further aggravated when Ameer Ali returned to the country in 1929 after completing seven years of study at the Ahmadiyyah headquarters in India and was elected a year later as the President of the TIA, the then only national Muslim body in the country. Serious conflict then occurred within that body resulting in two exoduses of members and the subsequent founding of the ASJA and the TML [See Ch 6 (b)].

Around the late 1960's there was an influx of graduates of religious schools in Saudi Arabia and India, and while the threat from the Ahmadiyyah Movement was more or less put to rest, these graduates project teachings and practices which are not in consonance with those of the community at large. In addition their followers are known to have taken control of a number of *masaajid* in the country resulting in those who do not follow their view sometimes making their exoduses and subsequently constructing new *masaajid*. These new *masaajid* are controlled, in some cases, by groups whose beliefs differ, sometimes substantially, from those of most of its membership.

The writer considers that there has been a drop in ASJA's membership over the years for some of the reasons stated above.

In addition, whereas the ASJA commanded the support of the majority of Muslims in the past, its support has fallen

during the last fifty years, more so during the last twenty five, because of internal conflicts. As a result, a number of influential persons and *jamaats*, while still retaining their membership in that body, have withdrawn their active support from it. In the writer's estimation, that organization now represents a maximum of 20-25% of the Muslim community.

Mention must be made of the Population Censuses which were held in 1990, 2,000 and 2010. In 1990 the writer represented the IRO on a Committee of the Central Statistical Office to promote the census. One of the official documents given to the writer was a copy of the proposed Questionnaire which sought to classify a Muslim as being either "ASJA, TIA, TML or other". The writer drew to the attention of the Committee the fact that there is no such division in Islam and that Muslims can only be classified as "Muslims". The Chairman of the Committee, who was the Ag. Chief Statistical Officer, explained that this was not a matter for the present Committee but one for the Technical Committee. As a matter of interest the writer must mention that when a Census Officer interviewed him during the 2010 Census the interviewer asked of the writer whether he belonged to the ASJA, TIA, TML or other sect. The writer asked the interviewer to clarify the words, which the interviewer could not. The writer then told the interviewer that he should be recorded as a Muslim, and let the matter drop there because the interviewer appeared quite confused. This was an example of what "experts" do when they do not seek advice about that which they know not.

The writer would like to point out that in Trinidad and Tobago, and indeed in most countries of the world, when the time arrives to perform any one of the five

compulsory daily prayer a Muslim would proceed to the nearest or most convenient *masjid*, regardless of by which body it is controlled. As an example, when the writer was working in Port of Spain (which has a very small Muslim population) he would perform the noon prayer at the Jama Masjid which was within walking distance from his office. There would normally be fifty to sixty worshippers for the prayer from Mondays to Thursdays while the *masjid* would overflow with worshippers for the *Jumu'ah salaah* (Friday congregational prayer). The vast majority of the congregation was comprised of persons who resided in other parts of the country and worked, or came to conduct business, in the city. The writer experienced a similar situation in Mayaro when he went for a short vacation some two years ago. He went to the small village *masjid* to perform the *Jum'uah salaah* and was pleasantly surprised to find it full to capacity. After the prayer the writer spoke with *the Imaam* expressing surprise at the large number of persons attending, only to be informed that the Muslim population in the area was small and scattered over a wide area and that the vast majority of the congregation comprised non-residents who worked in the area. The point that the writer would like to emphasise here is that when the time comes to perform the prayer, especially the *Jumu'a salaah*, a Muslim would attend the most convenient *masjid* at the time.

(b) The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act: UN Proposal to Universally Raise the Minimum Marriage Age to Eighteen Years

The enactment of the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Ordinance in 1935, subsequently repealed by the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act which came into

force on the 1st December, 1964 [see Ch. 8 (a)], saw the end of nearly a century of discrimination to the Muslim community. Of relevance to this Section is the minimum marriage age for males and females which were fixed at 16 and 12 years respectively after extensive consultations with not only local Muslim scholars but, Trinidad and Tobago then being a Colony of the British Empire, with senior *Ulema* (Islamic scholars) in India. [See Ch. 7 (a)]. (It is to be noted that, with precedents dating back to the 19th century, the English Common Law provides for marriages to be contracted for girls at 12 and boys at 14.)

In 1962 the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a Resolution entitled “Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages”. It was subsequently opened for signature and registration by General Assembly Resolution 1763 A (XVII) on the 7th November, 1962 and entered into force on the 9th December, 1964 in accordance with Article 6 thereof which states as follows:

“State Parties to the present Convention shall take legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage. No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons, in the interest of the intending spouses.”

However, the 1965 Recommendation on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages, which is a non-binding recommendation that accompanies the 1964 Convention, suggests that the age of marriage should be “no less than 15 years unless a

competent authority agrees that there are serious reasons to provide otherwise.”⁴³

Fifty five countries, including Trinidad and Tobago, have so far signed the Declaration and are therefore under legal obligation to enact appropriate legislation to enforce its provisions. In pursuance of this obligation, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Development called a meeting of certain relevant groups on January 20, 2012 for the purpose of discussing a Consultation Paper. Satnarine Maharaj, General Secretary of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago Inc. (the country’s largest Hindu organisation who, among other activities writes a regular weekly column in the Trinidad Guardian), wrote commenting on the meetings in three issues of the paper dating from 12th March, 2012. In the first article Maharaj stated, *inter alia*, that:

- a. in December 2011 the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Development called a meeting of certain organizations;
- b. the various groups were sent a Consultation Paper in December 2011 to attend a meeting to be held on January 20 2013. This invitation was however subsequent to the initial consultation with academics and university intelligentsia who had already drawn up their consultations with a view to ignore the practitioners of marriage;
- c. “in the final analysis none of the religious groups present agreed to what was considered a seriously flawed and even offensive paper”;
- d. “the statistics as provided by the Ministry showed that over a ten-year period (1997-2007) there was never more than 15 ‘early’ marriages in any particular year with some years being as low as three marriages”;

⁴³ Women’s Human Rights Resources –

www.law.lib.utoronto.com/diana/age/htl

- e. “a very well-researched presentation from the Islamic group revealed that in the USA, Canada and UK there was no standardized age”;
- f. the general consensus around the table from the religious groups was that religious and cultural practice should be allowed to evolve on their own without force, intervention or interference by the State;
- g. it was the opinion of religious groups at the meeting that the Ministry was proposing to raise the marriage age to 18 as set as set out in the Civil and Christian Marriage Act;
- h. the Ministry ultimately revealed that they had not in fact proposed an age to be standardized but was suggesting that the religious groups propose such an age;
- i. the discussion ended when no amicable resolution could be reached as it was discovered that the thought patterns of both groups (religious vs technocrats) were totally different.

He also made the point that the PNM, while in power, never attempted to change the minimum marriage ages.

It is to be pointed out that Chapter 1 of the Constitution provides for the recognition and protection of “fundamental human rights and freedom” and Part 1 thereof specifies a number of rights as enshrined in the Constitution. These include “freedom of conscience and religious belief and observance” - SS (h) thereof refers.

From the preceding paragraph, it would appear that any attempt to change any of the minimum marriageable ages in the relevant acts would require a special majority in Parliament, which is difficult for any Government to obtain. In addition, any Government in power would have to consider the severe adverse political implications of such a move.

The writer has pointed out in Ch. 2 that Islam is a *diin* (a complete way of life) based on Divine Revelation and the *Sunnah*. This *diin* covers all aspects of man's life from his birth to even after his demise, and cannot be changed by man. If one follows it he will gain the Pleasure of his Creator in the Hereafter and if he does not he will incur his Creator's Displeasure.

The writer has not seen or heard of any statement/s made by the Muslim leadership or members in the community of this threat to their religious freedom or of any efforts by them to sensitise the Muslim population not only to the importance of this issue but also to galvanise them to vigorously protest and oppose such a move. However, the writer recalls that he was a member of a Cabinet Committee appointed in 1984 to explore the possibility of introducing a system of national service in the country when a misleading report in the newspapers some two years later stated that the Committee proposed to recommend a system of compulsory national service (this when the Committee had not yet even started to formulate its recommendations). As a consequence, a few members of the Muslim community gained front page headlines in a daily paper when they vowed to declare a *jihaad* if any attempt was made by the Government to impose such a service. (It must be mentioned that the persons using the word were misinformed as to its meaning.)

While the number of early marriages per year is relatively insignificant the CSO statistics for live births for the year 2006 reveal that there were 17,264 births during that period, and of these:

- 4 of the mothers were under 13 years,
- 21 were under 14,
- 1,989 were between the ages of 15 to 19 and,
- 5,348 were between the ages of 20 to 24.

Finally, it seems ironical to the writer that the guarantees of religious freedom which were granted nearly a century ago by the then Colonial Government are now being threatened by a Government by the people. It appears that the struggle which began a century ago and lasted for nearly two decades will have to be re-enacted, this time against our own people, some of whom took oath to high office to uphold the Constitution of the country while holding the Qur-aan.

The writer recalls that sometime during the tenure of Attorney General Glenda Morean-Phillip (Dec. 2001 to Nov. 2003) he was invited at very short notice (which is not unusual with Government) to attend a meeting at the AG.'s office in connection with proposed legislation to deal with the question of terrorism. One of the proposed provisions was that the donation by a person of money to an organisation which gave financial support to the family of suspected terrorists e.g. parents, children etc., would be guilty of a very serious offence punishable by a long prison term. The writer had to point out to the meeting that the third of the five fundamental principles of Islam requires that Muslims in a certain financial position must pay *zakaat* annually, which must be distributed in certain specified ways such as to needy widows and orphans. The writer then went on to explain that in carrying out this Divine obligation the person making the donation must only be concerned with the needs of the beneficiary and not the actions of the parents or relatives. He emphasized that if the proposed legislation was enacted it would impinge on Muslims' rights under the Constitution of freedom to practice their religion and, further, they would therefore have no option but to disobey the law.

(c) State-aided Denominational Schools: Now a Myth?

The writer would like to clear up any misconceptions some persons may have when they hear the words “State-aided Muslim schools” in the country. When they hear or see these words some may conjure visions of educational institutions in which:

- a. the male teachers wear turbans, full beards and long white gowns,
- b. the female teachers wear traditional Islamic garments including the *hijaab* and sometimes the *niquaab*, and
- c. the students more or less wear the same modes of dress, and
- d. the school curriculum consists to a large extent of subjects directly relating to Islam such as Arabic as a language, *Fiqh*, *Siraah*, *Ahadith* etc.

Nothing is further than the truth as:

- (i) the majority of teachers and students in these schools wear Western-style garments,
- (ii) all State-aided denominational schools, be they Christian, Hindu or Muslim, must adhere to the curriculum and timetable fixed by the Ministry of Education which includes one period a day for religious instructions of the beliefs of the body administering the school, and
- (iii) religious instruction is not compulsory.

Another grave misconception is that there is a preponderance of Muslim students in the schools administered by Muslim bodies. This is not so as the following figures will show:

- (a) the six secondary schools in the country (all of which are operated by ASJA) have a total enrolment of 3,664 students of which Muslims number 719 or 19.6%.

The percentage of Muslims in the various schools range from a low of 16 to a high of 35; and the fifteen State-aided Muslim primary schools (ASJA – 7, TIA – 5, TML – 3) have a total enrolment of 4,425 students, of which Muslims number 2,339 (52.8%). The percentage of Muslims in the various schools range from a low of 16.7 to a high of 80.1. The above figures are understandable, considering that the Muslim population in the country is only about 7% of the country's total. It is to be noticed however that the schools in which there are relatively large percentages of Muslims are located in areas in which the Muslim population is above the national percentage.

Now, to deal with the subject matter under consideration. The writer would like point out the following fundamental changes that have been made by various Governments in power since State aid was given to the first non-Christian denominational school in 1949:

a. The right “of employment, retention, promotion, transfer and dismissal of teachers in Primary Schools” now rests with the Teaching Service Commission, instead of the Boards.

b. Whereas grants were made to Boards for the construction/repairs to schools, this function has now been taken over by the Ministry of Education, through a State company (the Education Facilities Company Limited).⁴⁴ This in the writer's view is costing the

⁴⁴ State companies were introduced by the then Government about a decade ago to carry out specific functions on the ground that they would result in quicker delivery of ...than if these functions were carried out by the relevant Government Ministries. The then Opposition (which is the majority partner in the present) opposed the concept alleging that the objective of the move was to give contracts to party supporters.

Government between 50-60% more than if the construction/repairs were undertaken by Boards.

c. The twenty percent allocation of pupils given to Principals in denominational Secondary schools has been unilaterally altered by the Ministry of Education with the imposition of a minimum amount of marks that a student must obtain in order to gain admittance to a particular school. What this in effect means is that if a Muslim chooses a particular Muslim Secondary School as his/her first choice when sitting the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) that student will not be admitted to that school unless he/she attains the minimum number of marks set by the Ministry. This, in the writer's view, is telling the Muslim student that he/she is not intelligent enough to enter a Muslim school.

As regards (a) of the preceding paragraph the practice had been, in so far as Primary Schools are concerned, the Boards would interview applicants who were registered with the Ministry of Education for acting appointments as OJTs. After these persons served satisfactorily for a period of two years they would then qualify to enter the Teachers' Training College following which they would then be employed on a permanent basis.

Some five years or so ago the Ministry of Education agreed that teachers at Primary Schools must possess a first degree in Education and began awarding scholarships for persons to study for the degree. (The writer considers this decision to be a laudable one).

What the writer foresees will happen in the very near future, if it has not yet started, is when there is a vacancy in a Denominational School the Ministry, whose principle on first appointments, as far as the writer is aware, is that they must be based on seniority of registration as a teacher, will submit a list from which the Board will be asked to select. The writer recalls an occasion when he

was Chairman of the Board of a particular Association the Board was asked to fill a vacancy in one of its secondary schools and the names of twelve persons were submitted from which the Board must choose. Not one of the twelve persons was a Muslim. The Board had on file a Muslim person who was suitably qualified both academically and religiously. Naturally, the Board rejected all the persons recommended by the Teaching Service Commission and submitted its nominee for appointment. After protracted correspondence the Board invoked its right under the Concordat to appoint its nominee to the position and the person was eventually appointed. In the meantime the students suffered because of the absence of a teacher for the subject.

The writer foresees that a similar problem will arise with appointments to Primary Schools in the future. In addition, Boards have no input in the choice of persons chosen for scholarships. As far as the writer is aware, the criteria for granting scholarships for teaching do not include spiritual and moral values.

The writer has been active in the establishment and/or administration of Muslim schools since 1952. The primary aim for establishing such schools was to ensure that Muslim students who attend these institutions obtain, in addition to a sound secular education, a firm knowledge of the basic tenets of their faith. Considerable time and money was, and is being spent, in running the schools. The writer is not satisfied that this objective has been achieved, for a number of reasons, including the following:

1. not all applicants for first appointments as teachers have a reasonably good knowledge of the religion;

2. some persons “lose” their enthusiasm for teaching the religion after being appointed on a permanent basis; and
3. the lack of serious interest by some of the parents of Muslim students in having their children attend the religious instruction classes.

As far as the writer is aware no study has been undertaken to determine to what extent these schools are really serving the purpose for which they have been established and/or what are the alternatives for spreading the Faith, especially having regard to the use of modern technology in teaching. The writer accordingly trusts that the leadership in the Muslim community embarks on a professional study in this area as soon as possible.

APPENDIX

**Back of card from Moulana Al haj
Sayed Shamshuddin Nizamuddin
Alhoseni, Qadri sending Eid greetings to
Mr. and Mrs. Abdool Gany of St.
Joseph. The year would be 1936 or
1937.**



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