

Guyana: History of Muslims

LOSS OF A LANGUAGE 1930 – 2000 Imam Ahmad Hamid

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Assalamu Alaikum

All praise is for Allah, Lord of the worlds; we send salutations upon our noble Prophet.

In the history books very little attention has been given to Muslims whether they were slaves, indentured laborers from India, or citizens of Guyana. The conclusion may be made that writers and historians consider the history of Muslims insignificant. In some books there are isolated references to Muslims, for example, Reverend Dale Bisnauth (1993) offers only a token recognition of just six pages to the Muslims in his book “History of Religions in the Caribbean.” He merely states in six pages the dogmas and rituals of Islam. However, he affords extensive treatment to the introduction and spread of Christianity in the Caribbean.

Within the past decade, there have been attempts by Muslims to publish articles dealing with the history of Muslims in Guyana. Raymond Chickeri (New York) published on the internet his articles on Muslims with a bias towards Indian immigration in Guyana. This is a commendable effort. In 1995, on the occasion of its centenary, Queenstown Jama Masjid published a magazine, and in it was an article “A Short History of Muslims in Guyana.”

In the absence of any information, the Muslims have apparently nothing of worth to pass on to the next generation. It is as if they do not have a history. The current situation in Guyana and the negative impact of global events upon the Muslims make it imperative that Muslims must know their history, or at least they can have access to information. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Muslims to write their own history.

In the 1960s and more significantly in the period 1976 -1990, Muslims in Guyana were publicly and deliberately given false information about Islamic theology. They assumed highly prejudiced positions that sought to eradicate and oppose certain practices and supplant them with their preferences. In the clashes that ensued between Muslims for almost two decades, leaders defensively insisted that the information in Urdu texts were accurate and represented the true teachings of Islam. Furthermore confusion was created on the question of the phonics of Arabic and Urdu characters and the rules governing the recitation of the Quran. In so many different ways the impression was created that those involved were the sole authority on Islam. At times, their propositions became a mockery of the teachings of Islam.

Like the Muslims of the 1940s and 1950s, current leaders have raised the hopes of the public with regard to the development and spread of Urdu as a language. We are yet

to see a concerted effort to propagate Urdu by the leaders of organizations in Guyana. This cannot be done by any singular organization. It demands the cooperation and coordination among all the organizations in Guyana.

I lived in a community where there were many indentured Muslims and Hindus from whom I learnt about their village life – customs, practices, family relationship, economic hardships, and struggles for survival - in India. My maternal and paternal grandparents are from India. From my Daada (paternal grandfather) with whom I lived until I was about six and my Naanee (maternal grandmother) who lived with us for about ten years, I developed an understanding of Hindustani while I completed my Urdu primer with Ustad Chetah Singh (Hindu immigrant).

My childhood experience proved helpful and prepared me to function in adult life as an Islamic worker and executive member of several organizations. My meetings with immigrants, first generation Muslims, and my experience made me aware of the importance of a written account of the history of the Muslims. The problem was that I had no access to written information. This caused me to take the greatest interest in gathering information and to pay keen attention to what was said by elderly Muslims: Hajji Balli, Idris Deen, Hajji Raouf (78 Village); Nanhi Meah (StarthAvon); Hajji Ahmad Hussain , Hajji Muhammad Karmali, Meer Amjad Ali, Muhammad Saffee (Leonora); Hajji Basheer Farouk (Hogg Island); Moulvi Muhammad Ahmad Nasir (Vreed-en-Hoop); Hajji Rhostam Ali (Good Hope); Hajji Abdool Hamid, Munir A. Khan, Shameer Khan (Windsor Forest); Munshi Haniff (Anandale); Hajji Rasool Baksh (Hague); Hosein Ganie (Georgetown); Hajji Nasir A. Khan, Hassan Ali (IMG); Hajji S. M. Sakoor (Petershall); Hajji Abdus Sattaur (CIOG); Moneer A. Khan (PPP).

I used the information I received from Muslims (spanning a period of forty years), my personal experience, and available written information to attempt a very ambitious project, that is, to compile and publish, Insha Allah, a book on the history of the Muslim of Guyana. I have given this book a very unusual title: *“Let the Lion Roar.”* The title is based on an incident that occurred in Cornelia Ida, West Coast Demerara. The chapters of the book I intend to publish are:

1. From India to Guyana – based on a true story that forced my grandfather to flee India
2. Arrival of Muslims in Guyana – the arrival of Muslims from Africa and the loss of their identity; the arrival of Muslims from India and the establishment of Islam in Guyana
3. The Rise and Fall of Organizations (1930-1948) – the rivalry among the existing organizations and their unification
4. Loss of a Language
5. The Makkah of Islam – this is an account of my personal experience of the struggles, rivalry, and fights in West Demerara among the leaders and their supporters; the involvement of national and regional organizations in the struggles and impact upon the national scene
6. The Teaching of Arabic – the efforts to promote Arabic as a language and the success achieved
7. Islamic Theology – the loss of knowledge and its effects; the use of Islamic theology for political gains

8. Formation of CIOG – the reasons for formation; growth and development (1979-1999)

This chapter of the book deals with the gradual loss of Urdu as a language starting in the 1930s to 1990s. This chapter stresses the point that leaders must no longer engage in the wishful thinking of having Urdu used widely once again as a language. Statements and promises made to the Muslims have now to be translated into meaningful and positive actions since for the past six decades there has been only talk of reintroducing Urdu in the Madrasahs. The point to note is that most of the leaders who speak of reintroducing Urdu are not aware of its history in Guyana. They must consider the complexities, requirements, and costs to teach it on a large scale. There are others who are quick to point fingers to explain the decline of Urdu, but at the same time have done nothing to propagate the language. In fact, just a handful of Muslims in leadership positions have a facility of the language. Like many of the leaders in 1940s and 1950s, they give the impression that the teaching of Urdu will be achieved by the distribution books to organizations and Madrasahs.

I sincerely hope that my readers will appreciate the arguments and the facts mentioned in this chapter. I do anticipate some amount of criticisms; I welcome them. However, I do wish them to be constructive and based on facts. We have to learn from our history and never to repeat the past. I welcome information from anyone who has an article, book, booklet, or a verified story on Muslims in Guyana. Your information no matter how insignificant it may appear to you is of vital importance to the compilation of a history of the Muslims in Guyana.

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable help given by Nazir (Tally) Khan, Hassan Jabar, and Rahman Huggins Khan who took great pains to read and offer critical comments to this chapter as well as others.

Surely, Allah will reward us for our efforts in His Din.

Ahmad Hamid
January 20, 2007

Facts on Guyana

Area: 83,000 sq. ml.

Continental Neighbors:

Suriname (E), Venezuela (W), Brazil (S)

Population: 800,000

Capital: Georgetown

Towns: Guyana has six major towns of administrative and commercial importance: Linden, New Amsterdam, Corriverton, Rose Hall, Anna Regina and Bartica. The country is divided in three counties Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice.

Race: East Indians (50%), Africans (36%), Amerindians (7%), others (7%)



Religions: Christianity (50%), Hinduism (35%), Islam (10%)

Language: English, English Creole, and Amerindian dialects. To an extent there is some communication among the Hindus in Hindi and among the Muslims in Urdu.

Major Muslim Organizations:

- i. Central Islamic Organization of Guyana (CIOG)
- ii. Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT)
- iii. Muslim Youth Organizations Guyana (MYOG)
- iv. Anjuman Hifazatul Islam (Hifaz)
- v. United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman (Sad';r)
- vi. Muslim Youth League (MYL)
- vii. Tablighi Movement

Masjids

There are about 130 Masjids.

The Emergence and Development of Urdu

The language of a people transmits their culture and heritage from one generation to the next. Language is a badge of identity that helps to shape the way people think. Disassociation with a language soon leads to disassociation with the culture associated with that language, and finally a replacement of that culture and language. This is the case of the indentured Muslims and the Urdu language.

The Mughal rulers of India spoke Persian and Turkish¹ while the native population spoke several languages.² The need for communication between the Mughal rulers and the indigenous people of India necessitated the development of a local language, which became known as Urdu. Historically, Urdu evolved since the 12th century and found favor with court officials who acknowledged its usefulness and encouraged its usage. Eventually, it replaced Persian as the official language of the

¹ Timur spoke and wrote in Chagatai. The Indians spoke Hindi, Punjabi, and other languages of the Aryan-European Family.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_languages. The Constitution of India recognizes 22 "regional languages", spoken throughout the country, namely Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Meitei, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. Hindi is the official language of the states Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttaranchal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and the National Capital Territory of Delhi. English is the co-official language of the Indian Union, and that each of the several states mentioned above may also have another co-official language.

Mughal court of India. Its vocabulary is made up of Hindi, Persian,³ Sanskrit, and Arabic. The 38 letters of its alphabet are written in the Arabic-Persian script from right to left.

The complete Urdu alphabet

The Urdu Alphabet					
ا	ب	پ	ت	ٹ	ث
ج	چ	ح	خ	د	ڈ
ذ	ر	ڑ	ز	ژ	س
ش	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع
غ	ف	ق	ک	گ	ل
م	ن	و	ہ	ھ	ء
ی	ے				

Insofar as ordinary usage is concerned, there is little difference between Urdu spoken by Muslims and certain types of Hindi spoken principally by non-Muslims. Urdu-Hindi, formerly called Hindustani, exhibits the features that are characteristics of the language of the Indian sub-continent, for example, lack of distinctive word accent; retroflexion, aspiration and nasalization as phonemic features; and compounding of verb stems. Moreover, the Arab-Persian element provides Urdu with at least optional additional distinctions in pronunciation, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. The spread and dominance of Urdu were due to its popularity among non Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, and Christians. Urdu was not confined to one state in India. "...it wields a pervasive influence throughout the country...The early Englishmen vied with later Mughals to patronize it."⁴

³ Persian originated in a place called Persis, a language of Parsa, an Indo-European nomadic people that moved into the area 10,000 BC. Old Persian was spoken until 300 BC.

⁴ Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. Muslims in India (Delhi-6: 1966) 15

Although it is the richest and official language of Pakistan, Urdu⁵ is not as widespread as is generally believed. It is the native tongue of only about eight percent of the populace and is unfamiliar to many. Pakistan has a population 162,419,946 (July 2005 est.) with 48 % speaking Punjabi and 12% speaking Sindhi. In comparison, India has a population of 1,095,351,995 (July 2006 est.) with 13.4% classified as Muslims. The famous places in India⁶ with strong Urdu influence are Jullundur, Delhi, Agra, Lucknow, Allahabad, Patna, Goya, Calcutta, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Madras, and Bombay.

Within India, Urdu has assumed a very specific form. The Indian film industry used it for the dialogues in the Hindi films and lyrics of songs. There are annual competitions and awards for Urdu poems and literary works in India and Pakistan. The Qawwali and Ghazal which developed in India are somewhat religious in nature, set to music according to the classical ragas and made popular through Hindi films.⁷ Urdu assumed a specific form as a language of resistance, communication, and identity of the Indian Muslims who opposed British policies in India. Through their Urdu publications, Muslims attempted to show the importance of their own tradition as expressed in the writing of the reformer Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the educational novels of Nazir Khan, and Hafiz Jhullandari who composed the national anthem of Pakistan, and wrote the Shanama which is a description of the achievements of Islam.

Sir Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), most famous of Urdu poets of modern times, wrote poems in which he “exhorted the Muslims of the subcontinent to awaken from their slumber and shape their own future. Iqbal uses the whole poetical vocabulary of classical Persian-Urdu but infuses many of the time-honored words and expressions with new meanings ... Iqbal transformed Urdu poetry into a vital and vitalizing art to influence the Muslims of India to think of themselves as an entity since their survival was dependent on the maintenance of their Islamic identity.”

Peoples, Languages, and Religions

The Dutch arrived in the Guianas in 16th century and the by the 17th century they were fully engaged in the development of Guyana. The production of sugar and other crops in the Guyana, Caribbean, and South America required a large quantity of cheap laborers on the plantations. This resulted in the introduction of slaves who spoke different languages⁸ and belonged to different territories and tribes in West Africa. Arabic was one of the languages spoken by slaves who were educated Muslims. West Africa has a large

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Pakistan#Major_languages. The first **poetry** in Urdu was by the **Persian poet Ameer Khusru (1253-1325)** and the first **Urdu book "Woh Majlis"** was written in **1728** and the first time the word "Urdu" was used by **Saraj-ud-din Aarzo** in **1751**. Urdu was an official language in **British India** since **1835** and in **India** since **1947**, where it is spoken by the **Muslim population**.

⁶ There are functions to mark the contributions of Ghalib to Urdu poetry.

⁷ Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. Muslims in India (Delhi-6: 1966) 16

⁸ The people of Africa speak about 1800 languages which include Arabic, Hausa, and Swahili and they have been divided into language families, e.g., Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan. Ghana with a population of 20 million has 79 languages and among them are Abnron, Ahanta, Akan, Anufo, Anjim, and Awutu. Most of the slaves came from the West African region that includes Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leon, and Togo.

Muslim population; therefore, it was only natural for a significant number of Muslims to be among the slaves.

In a word	Alone	Alone	In a word	Alone	Alone
ضضض	ض	D	ابا	ا**	A
ططط	ط	T	ببب	ب	B
ظظظ	ظ	TH as in This	تتت	ت	T
ععع	ع	' or breathless A	ثثث	ث	TH as in Teeth
غغغ	غ	Gh	ججج	ج	J
ففف	ف	F	ححح	ح	H
ققق	ق	Q	خخخ	خ	KH
ككك	ك	K	د د	د**	D
للل	ل	L	ذ ذ	ذ**	TH as in This
ممم	م	M	ررر	ر**	R
ننن	ن	N	زبز	ز**	Z
ههه	ه	H	سسس	س	S
ووو	و**	W or U	ششش	ش	SH
ييي	ي	Y or I	صصص	ص	S

When Islam arrived in West Africa the languages of the natives were not expressed in writing. These languages were verbally transmitted from generation to generation. The exposure to Arabic and the acceptance of Islam resulted in the use of Arabic characters to write and read many languages of West Africa. In many areas Arabic became a second language.

Islam did not arrive in Guyana with the Muslim Indians, but with the Muslims from Africa who were prisoners of war and were then sold into slavery. The slave owners because of bigotry did not acknowledge that the slaves were capable of higher levels of thinking, had a religion (Islam), and could communicate in a written language (Arabic).

The suppressive policies and the inhuman punishments meted to the slaves had a devastating impact upon their languages, cultures, and religions. The slaves were in an ultra-hostile environment in which their customs and practices were categorized as pagan beliefs. The dominance and positions of power of the Europeans resulted in the adoption of Europeans languages (Dutch, French, and English) by the slaves. Disassociation from their original languages which include Arabic accelerated the process of acclimatization of a new culture (European) by successive batches of slaves from Africa. This caused a loss of tribal languages and Islamic identity, and by 1838, African Muslims and others to have lost their identity and religion as they became Anglicized and Christianized.

The anti-slavery movement in Great Britain sent a distinct message to the slave owners, traders, and plantation owners. The plantations must immediately find alternative labor force to replace the slaves or face bankruptcy. In 1807 the Slave Trade Act was

passed and in 1833, Abolition of the Slavery Act was passed in the British Parliament. The British Parliament and the home government of Guyana gave a helping hand to the planters to find substitute labor in the form of indentured laborers.

The poor economic conditions in Madeira, an island off the coast of Portugal, influenced the planters to bring Portuguese indentured laborers to replace slave labor on the plantations. During period 1834 – 1882, Guyana witnessed the arrival of 30,645 Portuguese. During the period 1853 -1879, the planters sought to complement the Portuguese laborers with Chinese laborers. About 13,541 Chinese immigrants⁹ were brought to Guyana. The Portuguese and Chinese proved unsuitable for work in the cane fields. With the slave being emancipated in 1838, the planters recruited indentured laborers from India to replace slave labor on the plantations. During the indentured period 1838-1917, about 238, 979¹⁰ Indians came to Guyana as indentured laborers.

The planters, slaves, and immigrants brought with them their cultures, languages, and religions. However, the religions of the European and the Portuguese immigrants survived because of the influence of the Catholic and Anglican Churches. When the British arrived, English replaced Dutch within a short while and the slaves began to communicate either in English or Creole. The Indians brought Islam and Hinduism and both religions survived because of the establishment of Masjids and Mandirs.

Arrival of Muslim Immigrants from India

East Indians arrived in Guyana as from May 5, 1838 and were ‘bound’ to sugar plantations for a fixed number of years. It is ironic that sugar plantations have been criticized for being enclaves, but the British plantation rules and policies were highly supportive of the Indian religions and cultures. In order to retain the labor force of the Indian immigrants, the planters did whatever they considered necessary. Indians were granted freedom to practice their religion and celebrate religious events. Plantation management granted permission to the Indians to build Masjids and Mandirs, and they patronized the Tazia¹¹ celebrations. Indian immigrants were also given farmlands for crop cultivation, cattle breeding, and land to build their homes. As a further measure to appease the immigrants, plantation managers did not allow Christian proselytes to enter the plantation to preach or seek Indian converts.

“By the end of indenture [1917] at least 75% of Indians in Guyana spoke Hindi or a Hindi dialect and about 5% Tamil. Muslims who then comprised about 16% of the total number of Indians spoke Hindustani, a mixture of Hindi and Urdu.”¹² The immigrants from Madras spoke Tamil and the immigrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh spoke Hindi. Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, or Nagri were the languages of the ordinary immigrants, but Urdu was the language of the educated class of Muslims.

⁹ The first batch of Chinese immigrants arrived in Guyana on Jan. 17, 1853

¹⁰ Basdeo Magru. *Indians in Guyana: A concise history from their arrival to present* (New York: Adams Press, 1999) 9.

¹¹ The Tazia is associated with the death of Imam Husein, grandson of Prophet Muhammad (S). The Tazia parade takes place in Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

¹² Basdeo Magru. *Indians in Guyana* (New York: Adams Press, 1999) 43.

According to Dr. Qamar Niazi,¹³ illiteracy was an important qualification for the selection of indentured immigrants from India to Guyana. Many Muslims denied being literate and secretly brought their religious books anticipating the need for them in the 'unknown land'. Dr. Cheddi Jagan in his criticisms of the labor policies of the planters pointed out that "The planters frowned upon education because they held the view that an educated worker would soon become dissatisfied with his status as an agricultural labor. What they needed, above all, was a cheap and abundant supply of agricultural labor. Bookkeepers, storekeepers, dispensers, engineers, and foremen could easily be found among the freed Africans and Portuguese."¹⁴ The planters considered social mobility of the Indian immigrants as being unimportant. Their policies sought to relegate the Indians and their descendants to a state of illiteracy and ignorance, which could be considered two important factors to ensure their servility under the system of neo-slavery.

The planters "concerned with the production of more sugar at less cost, kept wages so low that parents were unable to educate their children, who in large numbers remained more or less illiterate."¹⁵ The planters devised ways and means to justify their policies. They gave the impression that they were promoting the interest of the Indians (Muslims and Hindus). "The Swettenham Circular, which was issued in 1904, relieved Indian parents completely of their obligation to send their daughters to school."¹⁶ The same rule applied to the boys in order to promote child labor on the sugar plantations. Dr. Jagan also referred to the 1912-1913 Immigration Agent General Report which deemed it a great privation to prevent children under the age of nine from being employed on what is called 'light work' such as carrying earth, ashes, and manure. The argument was that it was not only a benefit to the parents but also a source of pleasure for the young boys and girls.¹⁷

The Colony employed measures to ensure that Indians were not given educational opportunities and they remained dependent on the plantation for all their needs. The majority of the Indians saw the plantation as the means of earning a living and providing for their families. They were bound to the plantation, their children were born there, and they were not exposed to any other form of socio-economic existence. The plantations provided land for farming (rice, ground provisions, and cash crops), the pasturing of cattle, privileges of free housing or the building of personal homes, and these were powerful binding ropes to the remaining and working on the plantations. Even after the expiration of their contracts, immigrants continued to seek employment on the plantation. In comparison to their experience in India, the plantation seemed a far better place.¹⁸

Despite the deplorable conditions in the plantations, Islam and Hinduism survived. The plantation provided some degree of stability and the opportunity for

¹³ Dr Qamar Niazi was a Pakistani national in charge of the Best Hospital, West Bank Demerara, Guyana in the 1970s.

¹⁴ Dr. Cheddi Jagan. *West On Trial* (London 1966) 16

¹⁵ Dr. Cheddi Jagan. *West On Trial* (London 1966) 16. This was not the case only for a primary school education but also the acquisition of Islamic education (ability to read the Quran and Urdu).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p 16

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p 16

¹⁸ Try to picture what our existence would have been in India. Would we have been able to come to the USA? Would we would have been able to on a home and offer our children the basic needs? Would have been able to afford them a sound education? Compare the life of the immigrants in 19th and early 20th centuries in Guyana with that of India.

parents to eventually educate their children and this served as the stepping stone for social mobility. From the plantations emerged Indian scholars, politicians, professionals, and qualified men and women.

Emergence and Dominance of Plantation Creole

From 1799 to 1816, Britain occupied Suriname, and had officially seized Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo from the Dutch in 1803. The remarkable development in Suriname was that of Sranan (Suriname Creole) which came into use as early as 1700 as a means of communication among the Dutch, Africans, and Amerindian. The arrival of Indians,¹⁹ Chinese, and Indonesians immigrants increased the difficulties of communication in Suriname, and at the same time promoted the use of Sranan as a common language for all races. Hindustani, Chinese, and Javanese have remained spoken languages while Dutch is the official language of Suriname.

In comparison, a second language did not develop in Guyana. The Creole that developed during Dutch occupation was used by John Wray to communicate with slaves who did not know English. "Wray visited Hans several times in prison. He spoke to Hans in the Creole he had learned so that he could talk to slaves who could not speak English." On the plantation Le Resouvenir,²⁰ East Coast Demerara, Dutch was the official language but most of the slaves who came to listen to John Wray at his church on Sunday spoke English. Many slaves continued to speak Dutch while others were learning English and spoke Creole.²¹

The development of Creole was not peculiar to Guyana and Suriname. French Creole developed in Haiti, and American slaves and their descendants spoke Creole also. The Creole spoken in the different territories was based on the linguistic background of the speakers and assumed its own peculiar form. Rosa Grant, a sixty-five year old American, in remembering her Muslim grandmother said, "*Muh gran come from Africa too. Huh name wuz Ryna. I membuh wen I was a chile seein muh gran pray. Ebry mawnin at sunup she kneel on duh floor in uh room and bow obuh an tech uh head tuh duh flo tree time. Den she say a prayuh. I dohn membuh jis wut she say, but one wud she say use tuh make us chillun laugh. I membuh it wuz 'ashamnegad'. Wen she fniish prayin she say 'Ameen, ameen, ameen'.*"²²

All immigrants are forced by circumstances - social, economic, law, and conditions of employment - to learn to speak the language of the country or region to which they have migrated. In New York about 180 different languages are spoken, but the dominant language is English. It is common in New York City to find people in the same subway carriage sitting in adjoining seats speaking different languages. The existing situation in New York shows clearly the process through which a language gradually loses its utility. Immigrants are forced to learn the dominant language, and the process of acculturation moves in with the force of continuous change.

¹⁹ Indian immigration began in Suriname in 1873 and about 37,000 Indians came. About 33, 000 immigrants (1900-1940) came from Indonesia.

²⁰ Emilia Viotti da Coasta. *Crown of Glory and Tears of Blood* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 93.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Sylviane A. Diouf. *Servants of Allah*. (New York: New York UP, 1999) 62. Emphasis and interpretation are mine. Ashamnegad is really Alhamdulillah.

It takes time and considerable effort to attain an appreciable command of a new language. The adult Indian immigrants in Guyana experienced great difficulties to speak English. In the plantation environment, Plantation Creole became established as a spoken language by the Africans and was adopted by the newly arrived Indians. Indians gave the Creole their own peculiar style that involved changes in pronunciations, and word forms as well as loan words from their native languages.

Although parents spoke Hindustani at home, their children did not acquire a significant command of the language.²³ On occasions when children conversed with their parents and other adults, replies in Hindustani were not extensive but limited to short answers not requiring a large vocabulary. Gradually, children began to respond to their parents not in Hindustani but in Creole.²⁴ In the Guyanese society, there was no pressing demand or urgency for the use of Hindustani. Immigrants and their children realized that it was far more beneficial socially and economically to acquire a command of English. The exposure to and constant usage of Creole in the 'logie' neighborhood and places of employment served to reinforce its dominance and gave it preference over Hindustani and other Indian languages. In time, Creole became established as the language of communication between Indians and non-Indians. On the plantations were immigrants who spoke Chinese, Portuguese, and Hindustani, Nagri, Tamil, and Telugu.

Primary School Education

The different Christian denominations established schools in Guyana with the main objective that through education they would be able to convert Muslims, Hindus, and their children to Christianity. Each of the Christian church denomination hired only Christian teachers to teach in their schools while the government paid those teachers' salaries. This system was referred to as dual control. In 1876, the laws were passed making primary school education compulsory, but the immigrants did not send their children to school for two main reasons.

- (i) They were suspicious of the intentions of the school system and interpreted the education act as an attempt to make their children Christian.²⁵ (They also reasoned correctly that education in a Christian dominated school would have cultural implications.)
- (ii) The economic hardships forced parents to send their children as from eight years to work in the fields. The income of children enabled large families to meet the basic necessities. It was the case of survival versus primary education.

²³ The same is happening to children of Arab immigrants. They speak Amia (Street Arabic) and not classical Arabic (Fushah). Many children enter the Pre-Kindergarten of Al Noor School, Brooklyn, New York without being able to speak English. Students from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Arab countries are placed in special language programs to learn English as a second language (ESL) in the public schools of New York.

²⁴ On a visit to a Madrasah in Barbados in 1986, the students were asked questions in Urdu but their answers were in English. A similar situation exists at Al Noor School. The Principal poses his questions in Arabic and receives replies in English.

²⁵ Christian missionaries paid special attention to the Muslims who were noted for their strong opposition to their children being educated in schools owned and operated by Christians.

Illiteracy combined with a low standard of education, placed the descendants of Indian immigrants at a great disadvantage with regard to the enjoyment of certain privileges and rights: securing government jobs, voting, and enjoying social mobility. While most Indian children did not attend school, affluent parents afforded their children higher education overseas. By the end of the 19th century, Guyanese educated overseas were returning home. The emphasis was primarily on the acquisition of an academic type of education for social and economic advancement. It is significant to note that during this period, no student was sent to any Muslim organization to study in Islamic institutions overseas.

Teaching and Learning Urdu

. When the Mughals arrived in India, they brought Persian translation of the Quran. Until the 18th century, the only available translation of the Quran in India was in Persian, which was the tool language for the studying of all subjects related to Islam. A firm knowledge of Persian was the qualifying mark of scholarship in India and in Guyana.

The development of Urdu and its dominance required that the Quran to be explained and translated into Urdu. Scholars were forced by necessity to translate the Quran and major Arabic Islamic works into Urdu. The availability of Urdu translations of the Quran and other literary works reduced the dependence on Persian. The earliest Urdu translation of the Quran was completed by Shah Abdul Qadir of Delhi (d. 1826). Other translations followed and among them were the efforts of Shah Ashraf Ali Thanwi, Moulvi Nazir Ahmad (d. 1912), and Hafiz Gulam Sarwar. The first edition of Moulvi Muhammad Ali's translation into English is dated 1917 and came to Guyana through the Ahmadiya Anjuman. Allama Yusuf Ali's translation of the Quran is dated 1934 and arrived in Guyana by the 1940s.

It would be a fatal mistake if Muslims equate the Madrasah of Guyana with the Madrasah of India. In the 13th century, the Madrasah of Delhi was ranked among the foremost learning institution in the Islamic world. The Madrasahs produced some of the best scholars of the Indian sub-continent. Studies took students into the numerous branches of Islamic sciences. In Madrasahs of India in the 18th and 19th centuries could be found the scholars of Islam qualified enough to issue fatwas. "During the Sultani period the madrasah syllabus included Arabic, *nahu* (syntax), *sharaf* (morphology), *balagat* (rhetoric), *mantik* (logic), *kalam* (divinity), *tasauf* (mysticism), literature, *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *falsifa* (philosophy)." ²⁶

A few Muslim immigrants had attended or graduated from the Madrasahs in India where **they studied the Islamic sciences according to the Hanafi Madh-hab**. All the literate immigrants in Guyana had an excellent command of Urdu, and were easily identified to fill the roles of teachers and Imams. Some Ustads were paid a small sum on a weekly basis, or given gifts²⁷ on certain occasions. Some taught simply for the love of

²⁶ <http://www.languageinindia.com/aug2004/hasandissertation1.html> Cha

²⁷ The Imams of Leonora Masjid were given a small stipend as teachers of the Madrasah. This continued until the 1970s. My father sent me to learn Urdu on the understanding that my teacher, Chetah Singh, would be provided with one pint of kerosene every week. Chetah Singh was well known to my grandfather, an Indian immigrant.

Islam, that is, to impart knowledge for the sake of protecting the Muslim identity and the establishment of Islam. They displayed a rare commitment and dedication. They too were employed on the plantations and were forced by law to fulfill their contractual obligations.

Generally, the Ustads in the Madrasah of Guyana taught their students first to read Arabic. After they completed Juz Amma (Am Parah / 30th Parah), they were then introduced to Urdu. By reading the Am Parah, the students acquired the knowledge of the sounds of letters, pronunciation, shapes and forms of the letters, and learned to read words using the vowel signs.²⁸ The Ustads used the sounds of the Urdu letters to teach Arabic, so when the students were introduced to Urdu, they were already familiar with the shapes and sounds of most of the characters common to Urdu and Arabic.

Most students did not attend the Madrasah long enough to complete the Arabic Qaidah while others demonstrated no motivation to pursue in Islamic studies. Students attended classes in the evenings after school either at the Madrasah or at the homes of their Ustads. They were taught from the Urdu primers (1-5) in which the lessons were poems, munajaats, and prose passages based on Islamic morals, values, and history. The more advanced students read Melaud texts and Urdu fiqh books under the instructions of their Ustads. In Ta'leem Namah Jild Awwal (Hindustani Talim Namah), the first lesson is a munajaat. The first line is: "*Khuda yaa to Khaa-wind sab se baraa, Zameen aasmaan too nay paidaa ki yaa.*" The last line reads: "*Na Gumraa hoon ki baat ham ko dikhaa, ham ameen khetay ai kibriyaa.*" This munajaat was memorized and sung daily in many Madrasahs by the students just before they were dismissed for the evening.²⁹ In Urdu Book Five, the first lesson is a poem written by Moulvi Abdul Hakeem. Students who went on to study Persian were introduced to the book "Karema." The first lesson is also a famous dua (*Kareema be Baskhaa-ay bar haale maa ki hastam aseere khamandde huwa*).³⁰

As their proficiency in Urdu developed, their teachers introduced them to scholarly works written in Urdu. This included Tafseer of the Quran, hadith, and Islamic Fiqh (Hanafi). The most competent students completed at least one recitation of the Quran with their Ustads and finished reading a number of Urdu texts. A few students went on to read Persian.³¹ One of the famous books read was *Gulistan Saadi*, which was written by Shaykh Saadi (RA). In it can be found his famous Rubai.

*"Balaghal ula be kamaalahi
Kashafat duja be jamaal lahi
Hasanat jami ikh salahi
Sallu alaihi wa aalahi"*

The most educated and knowledgeable Muslims attained positions of recognition through self-studies. However, they were not too many, and all were not involved as teachers or Imams. Time, distance, and the economic situation did not permit a sufficient

²⁸ This has been dealt with extensively in the chapter "The teaching of Arabic."

²⁹ There is another famous munajaat: "Ai Khudaa -ay paak Rahmaan o Raheem...". In 2002, I was present on occasions in New York when Imam Fareed Khan, son of Moulvi Akbar Khan (Triumph, ECD) sang this munajaat as well as "Khuda yaa to Khaa-wind sab se baraa, Zameen aasmaan too nay paidaa ki yaa."

³⁰ Hajji Muhammad Zakir of Jama Masjid, Queens uses this dua quite often in his supplication, and so did Hajji Muhammad Hamid and Moulvi Abdul Jabar of Leonora.

³¹ Khalil Khan of Uitvlugt learnt Urdu and to read Persian. He memorized quite a few verses from the Persian poems of Shaykh Saadi. At functions he quotes the Persian poetry.

number of students to the classes conducted by them. The fact is only a few young Muslims were given the support and encouragement to pursue an Islamic education.

The Muslims born in the 19th century and early 20th century had better and more opportunities to acquire a sound Islamic education because Ustads who were educated in India were available to teach them. They grew up in a community where a large percentage of the adult population spoke Hindustani. Verbal communication enabled them to acquire some amount of proficiency in Hindustani.

Until the 1970s, Urdu remained the dominant tool language to access information, transmit Islamic knowledge from one generation to the next, and to educate young Muslims about Islamic values, morals, and culture. However, in each decade, there was an ever-increasing shortage of Urdu teachers while the competency among the Ustads, Imams, and leaders decreased. This resulted in the loss of Islamic knowledge which had a negative effect upon the community. From 1838 to 1937,³² the Muslims were left to grapple with the problems of offering an Islamic education to their children and dealing with complex questions of Islamic jurisprudence. They were now in a strange land and with new experiences that require Islamic rulings. No Islamic scholar from any part of the world visited Guyana. The financial status of the Muslims, and to an extent their interest, did not permit them to make trips to India³³.

The Urdu lessons took a holistic approach. The lessons comprised of prose and poetry that dealt with Tauhid, Quran, hadith, Islamic Jurisprudence, Seerah of the Prophet, and stories of the Sahabah. Their lessons were of different genres, fiction, non-fiction, fables, tafseer, and interpretations of hadith. They were not just reading to gain mastery of a language. It was an education of character development. Their teachers imposed a strict discipline upon them, and demanded they showed respect to their teachers, parents, elders, and fellow Muslims. They received instructions on Islamic morals, values, history, and theology. They were taught what it meant to be a Muslim and to take responsibility for their own actions. This type of training and education cannot be found today in any of the educational institution in Guyana.

They developed patience and consistency, to be good listeners, to value knowledge, and to act in all matters in the interest of the Muslims. Information in the Fiqh books, e.g., Fatwa Abdul Hayy and Behesti Zewar could not be found in any English text at that time. The moral teachings derived from the books they studied and the imposed discipline of their Ustads molded their characters and formulated their perspective of life. These students were dedicated, motivated, and believed they had a positive role to play. They felt obligated towards the Muslim community. They and their ustads realized the importance of having Muslims who would act as teachers and Imams, would be capable of interpreting the Shariah, and would enforce it in their respective communities. They did not anticipate any economic gain, and that was why they were able to fill the vacancies in Jamaats and to be founder members of organizations. These "Urdu Readers" kept Islam alive in Guyana. They were the ones responsible for the retention of our Muslim identity. History must always judge them and their teachers as

³² In 1937, the first Moulana from India arrived in British Guiana as the guest of Queenstown Masjid, Georgetown.

³³ The Muslims of Trinidad and Suriname were able to visit India and to have established communications with the Ulama there.

having made the greatest contribution: the survival of Islam and the Muslim identity in Guyana.

Khutbah Books

An education in Urdu enabled Muslims to function as Imams or teachers. However, by the 1930s Imams needed additional certain skills and a command of English. Interpreting or explaining passages from Urdu texts did not prove difficult to the Imams of the 1920s and 1930s. Urdu proficiency was put to the test when it came to the preparation of the Khutbahs in Urdu for Salat al Jum'ah, Eidul Fitr, and Eidul Adha. This demanded a good command of the language and knowledge of the subject matter (Fiqh and history). To solve this problem, the practice developed of using Arabic-Urdu texts of prepared Khutbahs. With constant use of these books over the years and the inability of the Khatibs to prepare Khutbahs, this practice became institutionalized and considered a part of the rites for Jum'ah and Eid.

It was almost unthinkable by a Khatib to deliver a Khutbah without that 'Urdu Khutbah Kitab' in his hands. Later editions of Khutbah books had Arabic, Urdu, English transliteration and translation of the Arabic Khutbah. The Urdu was written below the Arabic, and next to the Arabic in separate columns were the English transliteration and translation. The Khutbahs were written to coincide with important events as they occur in each of the twelve Islamic months. For the Imams, it was a valued possession and of great convenience since to deliver the Khutbah required no previous preparation. The Khatibs just read the Khutbah from the text for Jum'ah or Eid, and then they gave explanations of the content matter as they read the Urdu translation.

Loss of Islamic Knowledge

There are sufficient reasons to believe that some teachers wanted to be considered the most knowledgeable persons with regard to Islamic jurisprudence. They feared that teaching Urdu would one day create a situation whereby their students would surpass them in knowledge and would challenge their authority by contradicting their findings or statements. They conceived of Urdu as a means of power and control that gave them leverage, prestige, and recognition within the society. Their attitude exhibited a certain degree of selfishness and the desire to withhold knowledge. The anecdote of Uncle Cat and his student Tiger Cub (TC) can be used to explain the situation.

Uncle Cat found TC a very willing and gifted student. One day, TC disagreed with his teacher who brought new points into the argument. Words began to fail TC, so he pounced on Uncle Cat. Although older, Uncle Cat was nimbler and wiser. He expertly dodged TC, and then ran up quickly the nearest tree. TC growled below. Looking up while he grabbed the tree trunk between his paws, he asked, "But Uncle Cat, you never taught me how to climb trees."

Cat in a laughing voice explained to him, "Had I taught you to climb trees, I would now be a dead Uncle Cat."

In each decade, the number of persons with Urdu linguistic skills decreased, and this had religious and cultural implications. In 1936, Moulvi Mohammad Ahmad Nasir of Vreed-en-Hoop wrote: "In this connection, the loss of the mother tongues of about 99% of local Muslims – Urdu - is very deeply regrettable. There can be no doubt that the task of imprinting religious knowledge would be much easier and more effective if we had

retained our language since any amount of Islamic literature can be procured in Urdu to cover every aspect of the religion, while the same is not yet applicable with English.”³⁴ He made an accurate conclusion that any person who was not Urdu literate could not know much about Islam since the available English texts did not deal with the details of fiqh; therefore, they could not represent the teachings of Islam in terms of content.

The lack of Islamic knowledge resulted in a break down of morality, values, law and order, recognition of Islamic authority, deviation from the Islamic path, and inability to differentiate between the halaal and haraam. Very often, leaders who were asked questions did not consult the more knowledgeable brothers for fear of exposing their level of knowledge or their command of Urdu. This resulted in misinformation and a distortion of the teachings of the Hanafi Madh-hab, and for some Muslims to declare incorrectly that Quran and hadith support certain prevalent customs and practices which were alien to Islam and had no precedent in India.

The Muslim leaders of the 1930s and 1940s were critical of the practices of the Muslim youths. They declared: “...it was specially noted that the lack of knowledge of Urdu language was mainly responsible for the laxity among Muslim Youth of the Colony.”³⁵ The poor Islamic consciousness among the adult population became very evident. The Muslims indulged in festivities which included imbibing of alcoholic beverages and free mixing of the genders. It was from this criticized generation that the leaders of organizations and Jamaats emerged as from the 1950s.

Urdu Examination and Grant

Written examinations are powerful tools of evaluation to measure the standard and level and the quality of education afforded to students in any institution of learning.³⁶ Examinations also gauge competency of teachers. The social conditions and the representation made by Indian immigration officials prompted the colonial office to appease the Indian population in British Guiana and the home government of India by introducing an Urdu examination.

Basically, the newly introduced Urdu examinations were not intended to promote Urdu as a language. The primary intention was to force civil servants to learn Urdu in order to communicate effectively with the immigrant population. “The Board of Examination in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu was created on 8th August 1914.”³⁷ All Magistrates, Immigration Agents and other Officers of the Immigration Department above the rank of 4th Class Clerk (old classification) were required to pass a higher standard on pain of forfeiting an increment of salary except for the first failure and interpreters to pass the higher standard before his appointment.”³⁸

In 1948, the government introduced an Urdu examination for teachers with a passing grade of 60%. The examination consisted of essay writing (one hour), dictation (thirty minutes) and reading comprehension from ‘Islam ki Panchwen Kitab’ or an equivalent text (ten minutes). This examination was not difficult and was up to the fourth

³⁴ Nur E Islam 1936 p3

³⁵ Nur E Islam Muslim Board of Education p 16

³⁶ The results GCE and then the CXC English examinations gauge the level, quality, and standard of English in the Caribbean countries.

³⁷ DN 222

³⁸ DN (find the page)

standard level. Neither the Sad'r Anjuman nor the Jamiatul Ulama-E-Deen of British Guiana (JUDG) organized classes in the city or rural areas to prepare Muslims to take the examination. Candidates for the Urdu examination had to find their own tutors and engage in self-study. There has never been a genuine effort in Guyana by any organization to promote Urdu through the voting of a budget and securing qualified teachers. This demonstrated the conviction and the extent to which organizations were prepared to promote Urdu. The strong sentiments expressed for the survival and propagation of Urdu were merely a matter of convenience to appease the Muslims.

The success of Imams and Ustads at the interpreter and teacher examinations conferred upon them recognition and prestige in the community. Many of them declared openly their Urdu competency.³⁹ However, the fear of failing and personal conviction that they did not possess the knowledge to pass the examination resulted in a few Imams and Ustads only taking the Urdu teacher or the interpreter examinations.

At the Madrasah, grammar skills were crucial in order to interpret accurately passages and to prepare for the Urdu examination. Learning a second language was not so easy for "Languages are immensely complicated structures. One soon realizes how complicated any language is when trying to learn it as a second language."⁴⁰ The situation required the establishment of an Urdu Board of Education managed by the Muslims for the purpose of conducting examinations at different levels for Madrasah students, Ustads, and Imams. Such a board could have been used to train Imams and Ustads to teach the language and prepare others to take the Urdu examination sponsored by the Urdu Board.

Government Grant to Teach Urdu

The Muslims on the plantations and in the city were in no position to promote and sustain Urdu as a language. No organization owned an Urdu printing press nor did they publish Urdu periodicals or journals. It was a common practice for Muslims to make Urdu presentations⁴¹ at Islamic functions or to speak Urdu interspersed with English. At the annual general meeting of the Islamic Association on 15th January 1941, the reports of the Secretary, Treasurer, and Auditors were translated into Urdu. At the nikah of Mohamed A. Hiye Hack (1941)⁴², Moulvie Muhammad Ahmad Nasir delivered the marriage ceremony in Urdu to the appreciation and satisfaction of the guests.

In 1937 when Moulana Shamsuddin visited Guyana, M.B. Hooseiny of Victoria Village (ECD), Twalib Ali of Wakenaam (Essequibo), and S. A. Sattaur founder President of Sad'r acted as his translators since he did not know English. S. A. Sattaur translated an Urdu book of the Prophet's life into English. The foreword is by J.D. Tyson:

"It gives me great pleasure to send Mr. S. A. Sattaur this brief Foreword for the translation which he has undertaken of the Life History of The Holy Prophet. When so many of the younger generation in British Guiana have lost command of their parents'

³⁹ At many meetings of the Jamiatul Ulama E Deen, reference was made to those Imams who has passed the Urdu examination.

⁴⁰ EB22:549

⁴¹ According to J. D. Tyson, Representative sent by the Indian Government to investigate the conditions of Indians in Guyana, The President of Sad'r Anjuman, S. A. Sattaur had a good command of Urdu. Foreword of Islam, October 1938.

⁴² Mohamed A. Hiye Hack served two terms as President of the USIA in the 1950s. The practice of delivering the marriage Khutbah in Arabic, Urdu, and English continued into the 1960s.

Mother-tongue, it is both fitting and necessary that information connected with Founder of their religion should be made available to them in the only language which they now readily understand, namely English. I feel sure that this translation into English of a well known authoritative Life of the Prophet will be of immense value to the younger generation of the Muslims in British Guiana.”

The loss of Urdu gave rise to numerous problems that occupied the best Muslim minds. In the 1940s the existing Muslim organizations were in agreement about the need to learn Urdu. The Islamic Association and Sad'r Anjuman were of the view that the cause was not lost. In 1946, a joint effort was made by the Islamic Association and the Sad'r Anjuman E Islam to attend to the teaching and growth of Urdu as a language. To this effect, the President of Sad'r, R. B. Gajraj, said, “Believe me, dear brethren, I am most happy to announce the unanimous agreement between both the Islamic Association of B. G., [British Guiana] and ourselves to form a Joint Committee to administer the proposal grant of Government for Urdu education.”⁴³ A. D. Hack, S. M. Shakoor, and M. Azeem Khan (Anjuman The Islamic Association) and R. B. Gajraj, S. A. Sattaur, M. H. Rahaim (Sad'r) were members of the joint committee..

The Joint Education Committee (JEC) faced the task of identifying pilot schools to implement an Urdu program since the grant was not large enough to be given to all the Madrasahs, and experienced difficulties to secure suitably qualified persons to accept appointment as Urdu teachers in the Madrasahs. The experiment with the grant did not produce the desired results, and the organizations did not possess the political influence to pressure the colonial government to continue the grant. Eventually, the grant was discontinued and Urdu was removed from the school curriculum. Despite the problems and the outcome, Sad'r and the TIA failed to take appropriate action, that is, to formulate a program for the training of Urdu teachers. Had the Muslims been properly organized, they could have established schools to teach Urdu under the dual control system which was enjoyed by Christian schools.

The Pilot Schools of Sad'r Anjuman

The Sad'r Anjuman informed the public of its involvement in Islamic education for children and identified twelve Madrasahs in 1941 to pilot its programs. These Madrasahs functioned in isolation of one another and each was left to formulate and pursue its own policies. For these pilot schools to be successful there should have been certain prerequisites:⁴⁴

- (i) A structured and standardized curriculum for all Madrasahs
- (ii) A standardized system of evaluation to assess the performance of Ustads, students, and each Madrasah
- (iii) Establishment of national standards for each level of the examinations
- (iv) A training program for Ustads to enable them to implement the education program
- (v) Standardized textbooks
- (vi) Overseas education and training programs for teachers and Imams

⁴³ Islam Vol. 8 No2 1946 page 53

⁴⁴ These prerequisites are needed even today. In 1985, as the Director Education and Dawah of CIOG, the national Islamic Certificate Examination was introduced. About 350 students participated. Queenstown and Kitty Madrasahs emerged as the top schools.

- (vii) Existence of a five-year education plan
- (viii) Technical assistance from a recognized Muslim educational institutions

The Muslims needed the services of qualified bilingual teachers, but none were available in Guyana. Probably, the officials of organizations, Ustads, and Imams were of the opinion they were competent to deal with all aspects of an Urdu education program. The fact was the knowledge of most of the Ustads from the 1930s was limited thus restricting any form of development. In the absence of qualified teachers and an organized Urdu program, the further growth and development of the language suffered extensively. There was a significant reduction of Muslims who were able to read, write, and speak Urdu. This was true even among the Imams and other categories of leaders.

An assessment of the Urdu competency of the Imams in West Demerara showed the extent to which Urdu has been retained. Each successive Imam was less competent than his predecessor. From Vreed-en-Hoop to Parika, there were fourteen Masjids in 1950 and each one had an Imam who could read, write, and speak Urdu to a fair extent. In 1990, there were four Imams who could read Urdu. Of the four Imams, only two could speak while only one had a fair competency to write Urdu.

At the Tenth Annual General Meeting of the Sad'r Islamic Anjuman held on January 4, 1948, the secretary said, "While on the subject of Urdu Vernacular Education, it is appropriate to report that our President [R.B. Gajraj] has been in active contact with several Muslim educational bodies in India, with a view of getting latest information on the modern methods of teaching Urdu and very soon he expects to get down sample sets of these modern books. He has been offered also, the services of a number of graduates of Aligarh University to come here and teach.

"This whole matter of education is very close to the heart of our President and the Executive Committee, and it will be pursued in the new term with greater perseverance. We must establish proper Urdu Elementary Schools, and in the near future, our long cherished dream of a Muslim Secondary School.

"In the meantime, the President wishes me to tell all Muslims that in deciding to give their children higher education, to give very special consideration to the choice of Aligarh University – purely Muslim Institution – its whole structure, its staff, its environment, is 100% Muslim, and its status is considerably high.

"Our President is in contact with members of the Faculty of this University, and would willingly get all information and make arrangements for intending students. Such scholars on their return will be a tremendous asset to Islam and Muslims in British Guiana. The whole nation will be proud of them."⁴⁵

The vision of the President of Sad'r, Rahman B. Gajraj as outlined above by the secretary of Sad'r Anjuman, must be highly commended, for he projected correctly the advantages of having students graduating from Aligarh University or any university where the language of instruction was Urdu. He was actually echoing the call of Sir Muhammad Iqbal with regard to the knowledge and identity of Muslims. In his dream, Rahman Gajraj saw Urdu being taught in the Madrasahs throughout the Colony. He pictured clearly the role of the graduates and the involvement of the Imams, Ustads, and leaders in a national Urdu language program. Such efforts would have definitely increased greatly the Urdu competency and literacy among all age groups. He probably

⁴⁵ Islam Vol. X No 1 pg 26

also saw the leaders having easy access to information in the Urdu books and Urdu finally established as a language of communication among the Muslims. Had his master plan been implemented, the state of Urdu would have been much different. The Imams and the leaders would have attained a much higher level of Islamic education and would have been in a formidable position to answer questions posed to them in the 1980s that purposefully challenged their knowledge. Qaseedah singers would have been using Urdu script while the Melaud functions would have had a greater significance.

Probably the socio-economic and political situation in the Indian sub-continent prevented the realization of the plan. Gajraj's vision came not too long after the state of Pakistan was created. The Muslims remaining in India were under political pressure while Pakistan was struggling with numerous problems directly related to the creation of a new state.⁴⁶ There is no evidence to show that any student from Guyana was accepted at Aligarh University.

Like so many other discussions on the propagation of Urdu, the plans were just plans. The discussions of teaching Urdu to young Muslims in order to preserve it as a language merely served to appease those who raised the issue. The other factor that negatively affected Urdu and Islamic education was that far greater emphasis was placed on the acquisition of a secondary and college education.⁴⁷ The more intelligent and gifted students, generally, did not seriously pursue an Islamic education.⁴⁸ They were groomed to enter the academic world of the west. They spent little or no time at the Madrasah. It was not unusual to find Muslim professionals (1960-1990) who could not read Arabic or Urdu and whose knowledge of Islam was highly limited.

In 1956, The United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman (USIA) made a call again for the teaching of Urdu. "At a recent meeting of the Board of Education the great need to spread the teaching of Urdu language was discussed - and it was specially noted that the lack of knowledge of the Urdu language was mainly responsible for the laxity among Muslim Youth of the Colony.

"To propagate the Urdu language therefore Haji A.D. Hack, Chairman of the Board, has undertaken to assist such Muslim schools as are getting no assistance from Government Grant, and which cannot be maintained properly by their respective Jamaats.

"Any schools desiring such assistance must apply to Haji A.D. Hack, Chairman, Muslim Board of Education, P. O. Box 395 Georgetown."

"Haji Hack also has a number of Urdu Primers and Books 1, 2 and 3 which he is prepared to distribute free to the children of **Urdu schools**.⁴⁹ Applications from the teachers or managers of such schools must be forwarded to him stating their needs.

"It is hoped that by these means the knowledge of Urdu ought to improve appreciably."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Pakistan came into existence on 14th August 1947 and was known as East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Indian Territory separated East and West Pakistan. In 1971, East Pakistan broke away from West Pakistan in a bloody war and renamed itself Bangladesh.

⁴⁷ The other section of the Indian population, Hindus, was having the same experience. Maybe it was necessary for Hindus and Muslim to pursue the language problems together.

⁴⁸ The founder President of Sad'r and his successor, Dr. M. B. Khan, had an excellent command of Urdu and the Islamic Fiqh.

⁵⁰ The emphasis is mine.

The last line of the release clearly shows the simplistic and naivety approach of the USIA in dealing with the complex problems of promoting of Urdu as a language and providing an Islamic education for approximately 10,000 students. From being a very active body having covered the entire Colony in three months and having gained the support of all the Jamaats, the USIA, became city-centered and city-dominated. It was clear the Muslim Board of Education (MBE) was not in possession of important facts related to the administering of a sound education program. It did not engage in any field survey to ascertain:

- (i) Needs of Madrasah
- (ii) Number schools receiving government grants and those that were not receiving
- (iii) Number of functioning Madrasahs and those without Urdu teachers
- (iv) Knowledge and ability of teachers with regard to the teaching of Urdu
- (v) Means to improve generally the standard of Urdu
- (vi) Effectiveness and relevancy of recommended Urdu books
- (vii) Ways to provide an education to suit the environment of the young students
- (viii) Reasons why some schools were not functional
- (ix) Strategies to secure competent teachers

The Chairman, as an individual, could only attend to a few Madrasahs that were conducted after the normal school hours. The task of formulating and implementing an Urdu curriculum by nature should have been the task of highly qualified Muslims. The local Urdu speaking Muslims erroneously believed they were competent to deal with about 30, 000 Muslims scattered along the coastline. This lulled them to the incorrect conclusion that they were in control of the situation. Another factor that concealed the problems was the reading of Urdu prose and poetry at Melaud Shareef functions. Pronouncing Urdu words did not mean the person understood the language or could engage in an Urdu conversation. It is the belief of many that once Melaud functions continue Urdu will be kept alive. This is a grave misconception.

While repeated calls were made for the use of Urdu as a language of instruction in the primary schools, no effort was made to select and train Muslims (males and females) to take up teaching appointments as Urdu teachers. It was obvious the Muslims wanted to propagate and retain Urdu, but did not implement strategies to achieve this objective. The retention of the language demanded well organized educational programs executed jointly by the USIA, Jamiatul Ulama E Deen, Anjuman Hifazatul Islam (Hifaz), Muslim Youth Organization of British Guiana (MYOG), and Muslim League. They should have:

- i. Secured the services of educators from India or Pakistan to formulate an Urdu curriculum for implementation in the Madrasahs or modify an existing curriculum
- ii. Established a national school for the training and education of Imams, Ustads, and workers with Urdu as the language of instruction
- iii. Instituted Urdu examinations for students and Ustads
- iv. Standardized Urdu texts in all Madrasahs
- v. Secured scholarships for Muslims to study Urdu and Islamic theology in India and Pakistan

- vi. Paid Islamic workers to act as teachers at the various Madrasahs (pilot schools).

Muslim Trust College

The establishment of the Muslim Trust College (MTC) in 1960 did not match the dreams of R. B. Gajraj and the USIA. The name Muslim was a misnomer. MTC operated as an ordinary high school that prepared its Christian, Hindu, and Muslim students to take the College of Preceptors Examination (CP), Senior Cambridge Examination, and General Certificate Examination (GCE). Islamic studies were not given the weightings and emphasis as the academic subjects and as was envisaged in the 1940s and 1950s by those who called for the establishment of Muslim schools. A few who made that call became members of the management committee of MTC.⁵¹

Nothing prevented the MTC from placing Arabic, Urdu, and Islamic Studies on the curriculum. The Muslim Guide June 1961, in an article entitled Arabic and Urdu Classes (extra-curricular) at Muslim Trust College, stated that Arabic and Urdu classes for children and adults would be held Monday through Friday from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Moulvi B. A. Chand was placed in charge of the Urdu class; Raymond Shah, Mohamed Khayume, and Mrs. Kassim were in charge of the Arabic classes. This was a feeble attempt to teach Arabic and Urdu. It was ironic that the MTC was managed by Muslims, but the acquisition of Islamic knowledge was not emphasized and a part of the curriculum. It was relegated to extra-curricular activities. The school dismissed at 3:00 p.m. and the students⁵² from the rural areas could not attend the Urdu and Arabic classes at 4:30 p.m. Such an arrangement catered only for those living in the city.

Again, almost two decades later, a Muslim school experienced grave difficulties of securing qualified Urdu teachers and implementing suitable programs. Muslims tutored students in French, Latin, English, and Spanish for CP, Senior Cambridge, and GCE ('O' and 'A' levels), but qualified teachers could not be found to tutor students to take Urdu at the GCE. It stands to reason that as a 'Muslim school', MTC should have prepared students to take Arabic and Urdu at the GCE level. This school could have been used as the center to attend to the educational needs of the Muslim community.

Qaseedah Competition

The CIOG, USIA, Hifaz, and Ulama E Din have repeatedly declared their intention of reintroducing Urdu as a language in the Madrasahs of Guyana. Their intention was never translated into action. Each time CIOG hosted a Pakistani ambassador assigned to Guyana, it raised the matter of teaching Urdu and securing teachers, grants, and suitable Urdu books from Pakistan. On each occasion, the Pakistani politician explained diplomatically that he would try his best to accede to the requests. In CIOG's formal meetings with officials of the Indian embassy in Georgetown, it made similar requests.

⁵¹ Among the members of the management committee were Abdool Majeed (President of Sadr Anjuman), Hajji S. M. Shakoor, Hassan Ali, Hajji Nazir Ahmad Khan (IMG).

⁵² The Georgetown-Vreed en Hoop ferry schedule was 3:15 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. with train connections. The next ferry with train connections was at 7:00 p.m.

The High Commissioner of India, Dr. Prakash Joshi, presented a set of Urdu texts to the Hifaz/MYL on January 23, 2000. The Muslim Journal⁵³ in reporting the event stated: “HIFAZ/MYL is making every effort to revive this language, as all the books of Islam are found in this language. A request was made to the Indian High Commission by these organizations for the Urdu Books, which the High Commissioner gladly consented to, and the presentation was a materialization of his promise.

“The NATIONAL QASEEDA COMPETITION, in which the MYL is associated, is also a method used to revive the language. Qaseedahs are written in the Urdu language, and have remained a part of the culture of Muslims.

“Classes for the Urdu language will commence shortly Insha Allah, and it is hoped that our Muslims, especially those in leadership capacities, will take the opportunity to learn this beautiful language.”⁵⁴

The declaration of HIFAZ/MYL is reminiscent of the proposals of the USIA in the 1950s. Qaseedah Competitions do not promote Urdu. Promotion means the establishment of classes and an increasing amount of Muslims becoming Urdu literate. It means also that more Muslims would be using the language as a means of communication. The Qaseedah Competitions have become political, less religious, and far removed from the promotion of the language. The winner of the 1999 Qaseedah Competition sponsored by the CIOG at the National Cultural Center cannot read Urdu; he was using English transliteration. In the competitions, the emphasis is not on the messages of the Qaseedahs. The audience is there to be entertained and moot for their champion. The ‘singers’ are there to show their talents and to win. At one Qaseedah competition at the National Cultural Center, a participant openly displayed his displeasure by challenging the decision of the judges. He felt he was robbed the first place.

The mere presentation of books and speeches about the usage of Urdu will definitely not revive the language. Such declarations serve as means of getting support. The propagation of Urdu is much more profound and requires the direction of qualified educators and professionals to structure a curriculum with relevant means of evaluation. The Imams, Ustads, and leaders of organizations must be the first to attend Urdu classes. This will enable them to interpret the Qaseedahs in accordance with the Quran and ahadith. They will then be in position like the founding members of Sad’r and Islamic Association who were able to read, write, speak and translate Urdu in English.

Urdu Transliteration

As the years passed, it was quite noticeable at Melaud Shareef functions that less and less Muslims were able to read Urdu. Prior to 1950, only Urdu Melaud texts were used while explanations were given in English and Urdu. This limited the participants to a select group. Younger and adult Muslims desired very much to participate in the Melaud functions, that is, to sing the Qaseedah and Tazeem. To encourage their participation and accommodate their wishes, and at the same time promote Melaud

⁵³ The Muslim Journal, Vol. 2 Issue 7 March – April 2000 page 14

⁵⁴ It would be interesting to know how many leaders of Hifaz and MYL attended classes and have attained some level of competency in Urdu.

functions, organizations and individuals published English transliteration of the Urdu Melaud texts in the form of Qaseedah books.

The transliteration and translation of the Qaseedahs did not aid the promotion of Urdu. To some extent it promoted the idea that it was no longer necessary to learn Urdu. The end results were quite damaging and in opposition to what were intended. Readers and Melaud singers who depended on transliteration mispronounced words. Many Melaud singers felt offended if their mispronunciations were pointed out to them or if they were asked to improve their pronunciation. In the absence of qualified persons to make corrections, bad pronunciations became frequent.

The existence of transliteration encouraged Muslims, old and young, males and females, to participate in Melaud functions. The emphasis here was not to enhance a command of the language, but to develop the artistic ability to entertain the congregation through the rendition of the Qaseedahs in popular ‘filmi’ tunes. Jagjit and Chitra have made recordings of some famous Islamic songs.⁵⁵ The renditions of Hajji Mohammed Rafi, ‘*Parwarr Digaray Alam*,’ (Hatim Tai, a Hindi film), “Hamd” (*Tujhay dhoondta Tha main Chaar soo teri shaan jalla jalaalahu*) and *Salaam* are very popular and have found their way into the Qaseedah books of singers and organizations. At the bottom of the page for each Qaseedah in the books by Anjuman Sunnatul Jamaat Association (ASJA) and Berbice Islamic Sunnatul Association (BISA) is a synopsis.

An attempt was made by the Sad’r Anjuman-E-Islam to publish an Urdu section in its journal, ISLAM.⁵⁶ The English translation and the Urdu articles in the May-June 1941 edition were not written by Guyanese, but were extracted from Urdu texts. In it was a poem⁵⁷ written in English transliteration. Four lines of the poem read:

“Kuchh ka raha hai tujh-say ek sharm-o-sar sun-*lai*⁵⁸
 Chas-o-karm ka sadqa a-marz-o-gar sun-*lai*
 Jo too nahee sunay-ga hai kown sun nay walah
 Donon Jahan ka Walie Parwardegar sun-*lai*.”

English transliteration became the trend as a means of sustaining participation in Melaud functions. Sadr presented Qaseedahs in English transliteration in its journal in 1944, and in 1946 the famous Qaseedah⁵⁹, ‘*Jannat mey ma-kan apana banatay hai Namazi*’ was published. Trinidad adopted the same pattern, and ASJA published a collection of Qaseedah prepared by Moulvi Hamid Rajab. In Guyana, Mohamed (Iboo) Ibraheem produced a transliteration of Melaud Akbar. Berbice Islamic Sunnatul Association (BISA) followed by using the ASJA Qaseedah book while adding some of its own selections that included songs by playback singer, Mohammad Rafi of India.⁶⁰ Apart from the Melaud functions, Indian movies are very popular in Guyana. The Hindi film

⁵⁵ The record was cut in Trinidad and the LP contains ‘Zara Chehray say Kamli ko’ and ‘Dunya say dil laga kar’. The renditions of Jagjit, Muhammad Rafi, Talat Mahmood, and others are sung at Melaud Functions.

⁵⁶ Islam April-May-June 1941

⁵⁷ Ibid p 1 Urdu Section

⁵⁸ The spelling does not confirm with the Latin equivalents.

⁵⁹ This Qaseedah can be found in Melaud Akbar.

⁶⁰ The name of the collection is “Nagmae Ishq BISA Qaseeda Book.” One of the Qaseedah sung by Muhammad Rafi is found on page 34, “Shukhr hai tayra ai khalik-kay bahr-ro bar.”

songs are aired on TV and radio. Some ‘filmi’ tunes⁶¹ are used to render Ghazals and Qaseedahs.

Khutbatul Jumuah and the use of English

The leaders realized the ever increasing difficulties of communicating the first and second generation Muslims in Urdu. The Muslims born in Guyana experienced difficulties in understanding the Imams when they gave Urdu translations of the Khutbah. The leaders were caught in a dilemma: they wanted to propagate Urdu but at the same time had to consider giving explanations of the Arabic Khutbah in English.

In the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century, the Imams were Urdu literate and demonstrated a strong bias against giving explanations of the Khutbahs in English. While the Imams had a strong command of Urdu, their congregation had a poor understanding of the language. The Nur-E-Islam, Jamiatul Ulama E Din, Sadr Anjuman, and later the USIA and Hifaz repeatedly advised the Imams to use English in explaining the Arabic Khutbah of Salatul Jumuah. The following statements represent the advice given to the Imams and leaders of Jamaats.

“Masjids where Jumma namaz was held the Imam or some responsible person should give 10 to 15 minutes talk immediately after Jumma Namaz in the language the congregation understands best – whether it be Urdu or English.”⁶²

“If it were for the Namaz alone, without the Khutba, Jumma would lose most of the significance and appeal! But it is the Khutba (sermon) which keeps the Muslims soul alive, the faith awake.”⁶³

“Time and again we have stressed in the pages of Nur-E-Islam the absolute necessity for our Imams to explain the text (or part of it) of the Khutba read at Jumma time in the language but best understood by the congregation.”⁶⁴

“...if English is the only language which the audience unfortunately understands best, then the explanation must be made in English.”⁶⁵

By the 1930s, the majority of the Muslims did not understand most of the Urdu explanations of the Khutbah. The majority of the Imams had a limited vocabulary of English because they were immigrants. Others either did not attend school or did not complete their primary school education. This caused many of them to oppose the use of English because of their limited education and poor command of the language. It was difficult for them to translate from Urdu into English. At the same time, within the first quarter of the 20th century, the number of children attending the primary schools increased rapidly. While their English improved, their facility of Urdu decreased rapidly.

Some of the Imams were of the opinion that English at no time must be used to explain the Khutbah. This opinion veiled their inability to prepare their own Khutbah in Urdu or English. It was convenient and easier for them to use Khutbah texts written in Arabic with Urdu translation and notes.⁶⁶ These compiled Khutbahs were prepared in

⁶¹ Nasir Khan (Trinidad) and Nazim Bacchus (Guyana) have presented their CD.s to the Muslims of New York. They used ‘filmi’ tunes of Muhammad Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Hemant Kumar, and Talat Mahmood.

⁶² Nur E Islam October 1936 p 14

⁶³ Zil Hijj 1374 p4

⁶⁴ Zil Hijj 1374 p 3

⁶⁵ Ibid page 5

⁶⁶ One such book is Khutbah Hanafi.

India and coincided with Islamic monthly events. Week after week, year after year, the khateeb reads the same book and gave the same Khutbahs.⁶⁷ This was criticized in 1954 by the USIA and its affiliates: “Personally, we see no need to bind ourselves to the stereotyped Khutbah found in most Khutbah Kitabs. Some, or probably most of our Imams, should by now be able to prepare their own Khutbahs (at least the part they should explain). And in preparing these, they must pay attention to the pressing problems among their Jamaats.”⁶⁸

The Imams were neither trained nor skilled in speech craft to prepare and deliver a Khutbah. They seldom ventured outside the ‘Khutbah Kitabs’, which were prepared about 100 years ago and related to India. The use of the Khutbah Kitabs continued into the 1980s. Officials of certain organizations strongly objected to the use of English in delivering the Jum’ah Khutbah, and any Khateeb who formulated and delivered his Khutbahs in Arabic⁶⁹ and English was criticized. In some cases Imams did not allow persons to deliver the Khutbah when they knew the Khateeb⁷⁰ would use English on the *mimbar*.⁷¹ The call for the use of English was made in 1953. Thirty years later, Hifaz, USIA, and JUDG officially condemned the use of English to deliver the Khutbatul Jum’ah (and Eid). To prove their point, they staged a debate with Shaykh Irshad Azami⁷² at La Jalousie Madrasah, WCD. These organizations’ which were opposed to the use of English to deliver the Khutbah were ignorant of the fact that the USIA, Hifaz, and JUDG granted approval for the use of English for any Khutbah. They set in motion a series of events that was detrimental to the growth and development of the Muslim community on a national scale for almost two decades. Today it is a common practice for English to be used in delivering the Khutbah for Jum’ah and the two Eids.

Urdu versus Arabic

In the 1960s, Ustad Haniff Bagh-Khan of Georgetown introduced his system of simplified Arabic to the various Masjids and organizations. The system used the sounds of English letters as substitutes for the sounds of Arabic letters and vowels⁷³ which accelerated the process of learning to read the Quran. Quite a number of brothers became Ustad Haniff’s students, and his system of teaching Arabic filtered through his students into the rural areas.

In the 1960s, the Islamic Missionary Guild (IMG) secured the services of Professor Abdus Salaam from Al Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt, to teach Arabic in

⁶⁷ It was August and I took my two sons for Salatul Jum’ah. After the Salaah, the Imam began his explanations of the Khutbah. My elder son, Gibron, asked: “Pappy, is he going to talk about the dog and the roti again?” The Imam had given this Khutbah the previous year. When Ramadan came, the Khateeb followed the text and ended with the ‘Alwida Khutbah’.

⁶⁸ Nur-E-Islam Zil Hijj 1374 p 4

⁶⁹ I was asked to deliver the Khutbah at #78 Masjid. I did not use the text. My action served to establish the fact that the book was not needed and the Khateeb can make his own Khutbah. Hajji Muhammad Ballie was then the Imam.

⁷⁰ Shaykh Salu Sinah Wahab politely declined to give the Khutbah when he was told he could not offer explanation in English.. The Shaykh is a graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah and speaks Arabic fluently.

⁷¹ This is a platform for the Imam to stand upon when delivering the Friday or Eid sermon (Khutbah). Most of these platforms in Guyana have three steps.

⁷² See Chapter on “Makkah of Islam” for details.

⁷³ See chapter on Teaching of Arabic.

Guyana and the Caribbean. The Professor conducted evening classes for Imams, Ustads, and leaders at the Muslim Trust College. After a while Professor Salaam discontinued classes because of poor attendance, which was due to the difficulties suffered by his students on account of time, distance, hours of work, and inability to cope with the lessons. Eventually, he was transferred to Trinidad under the aegis of the IMG.⁷⁴

In 1978, Ustad Ahmad Ibrahim Ehwas arrived and made a monumental contribution to the development of Islam in Guyana. Within two years he established the Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT), and organized youths from Guyana and Caribbean to attend a one-year course at the MYO Building, Georgetown. Ustad Ahmad served as the role model for his students. They emulated him. He placed great emphasis on the learning of Arabic⁷⁵ and carefully selected youths to form the “inner circle” of teachers and Islamic workers. To this end he established an Islamic center in Queenstown which housed a library and suitable equipment for an Arabic Language lab.

The emphasis on Arabic was reinforced through the granting of scholarships to study at Islamic University in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Libya. When the undergraduates returned home from Saudi Arabia for the summer holiday, they taught Arabic and Islamic studies at the Masjids, courses, classes, and elsewhere. This fired the imaginations of the youths and motivated them to seek scholarships to study in Saudi Arabia.

Through Dr. Kem Hussain⁷⁶, the CIOG was granted the service of Dr. Fa Abdur Rahim (Madras, India), Islamic University of Madinah to conduct Arabic Language course in Guyana. One was held at the MYO Building, Georgetown and the other in Corriverton. From Al Azhar University came Shaykh Hafiz Ahmad Zaki Al-Badr who spent two years in Guyana to teach Arabic and was attached to the CIOG.

The promoters of Urdu never carried out their proposals of securing Urdu teachers to come to Guyana or to secure scholarship for students in colleges in India or Pakistan. The securing of qualified persons could have been obtained from Suriname where Hindustani was used as the language of communication. The granting of scholarships to Saudi Universities had the effects of creating problems based on Madh-hab. Those who studied in Arabia were taught according and influenced by the Hambali Madh-hab while the practices of the Muslims of Guyana were in accordance to the Hanafi Madh-hab.

As from 1977, Islamic literature in English from Arab countries⁷⁷ poured into Guyana on various subjects. The Islamic Studies syllabus prepared and executed by Ustad Ahmad Ehwas required that students study certain books.⁷⁸ Most of these books were written with a bias supportive of the Islamic practices in the Middle East. Education and knowledge effect great influence on people, and so it was only natural for the youths (and elders) to reject certain practices while adopting those observed by the Muslims of

⁷⁴ Hajji Nazir A. Khan was the President General of the IMG which was known as the IMG of the Caribbean and South America. Hajji M. K. Husain was a very influential figure of the IMG in Trinidad.

⁷⁵ This subject is treated in another Chapter, Teaching of Arabic.

⁷⁶ Kem Hussain was a student then at the Islamic University of Madinah and Prof. Fa Abdur Rahim was his Arabic professor. Dr. Kem Hussain is now the principal of an Islamic school in Florida.

⁷⁷ At the first one month course (1985) conducted at the MYO Building by the CIOG and MYO, Islamic literature was air expressed r from Iraq by the Head of IIFSO.

⁷⁸ Some of these books are Islam in Focus, Towards Understanding Islam, Forty Hadith, Tafseer of Am Parah (Juz Amma) by Qutub, Muhammad by Hykal, Riyadus Saliheen, Bukhari translated by Mohsin Khan. There was also a great number of books at the library housed in the Libyan Cultural Center, Queenstown.

the Middle East. They challenged Imams and demanded that they provide proofs from the Quran and hadith to support their customs and practices. The leaders of the community as well as organizations objected to the many practices introduced into the community as a result of Middle Eastern influence. They based their arguments on what information was found in the Urdu texts and the customs and practices found in the community.

Coming out of Saudi Arabia were books published in Arabic and English condemning Melaud functions. Shaykh Ben Baz of Saudi Arabia had issued a fatwa condemning Melaud functions, but the flaws in his arguments could be found in the premise on which he based his arguments. The information given to him did not represent what really constitutes a Melaud Shareef function. This same Shaykh failed to acknowledge the facts of science. He wrote:

"In The Name Of Allaah, The Most Merciful, The Bestower of Mercy."

"The earth is flat, and anyone who disputes this claim is an atheist who deserves to be punished."

Title of the Book: "Evidence that the Earth is Standing Still."

Author: Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ben Baz.

Editor: Islamic University of Medina.

Year: 1395 AH

City: Medina, Saudi Arabia. Page: 23.⁷⁹

At these Melaud Shareef functions the interpretations of the Qaseedahs and other forms of poetry and prose left much to be desired. The readers experienced great difficulties in dealing with poetic and figurative language. Their explanations were very often literal. The explanations, especially those that appeared incorrect, were used as the yard stick to measure everything else written in the books of Melaud.

The Urdu Islamic literature written and produced prior to the 1950s did not have a bibliography. The references to books and hadith were general, e.g., Sahih Bukhari. In the past, it was taken for granted that once the reference was given, the information was authentic. The Imams and leaders found great difficulties in identifying the hadith mentioned or worse yet to produce the books mentioned.

Shaykh Ben Baz's fatwa encouraged youths to demand proofs to support Melaud functions and the act of standing for Tazeem. Their demand for proofs extended to the format observed in the performance of Salaah (Hanafi Madh-hab), e.g., placing of the hands below the navel. From the position of challenging the authenticity of what has been written in Urdu books, the situation degenerated into political confrontation for power and authority.

The trend of the argument was:

- (i) Urdu was no longer important and it was pointless to study Urdu.
- (ii) The Urdu Melaud books contained incorrect information, fabricated hadiths, and doctrines of Sufism that border on shirk.
- (iii) The Imams were too incompetent to lead and offer Islamic instructions.

On account of ignorance and the desperation to prove the Imams wrong, those opposed to the Melaud made fun of the interpretations of Qaseedahs, e.g., '*Amade Mustafa say hai pholon phala chaman chaman. Aae bahar har traf Khilnay laga*

⁷⁹ <http://www.salafitalk.net>

*chaman cham*⁸⁰ However, as their readings and education increased, they encountered the story of Halimah's trip to Makkah and the transformation of her mount from the slowest to the fastest in the group.⁸¹ The same can be said with regard to the sending of Salaat and Salaam upon the Prophet (S) in congregation and when the Muslims offer Salam at the graveside of the Prophet (S) in Madinah (Bukhari). The basic problem was the Imams and elders were unable to use the Melaud texts as an effective Dawah tool because they could not prove that the Melaud books were based on the Quran and Hadith.

By attempting to learn Arabic which is the language of at least twenty-two Middle Eastern countries., the youths identified themselves with Middle Eastern culture, which they considered to be Islamic and in conformity with the Sunnah of the Prophet (S). This was evident in the stories told, dress (men and women), foods, observance of Islamic events,⁸² and wedding celebrations.⁸³ Pakistan and India no longer had any appeal to them. They were no longer of any consequence or importance and belonged to the distant past ... they were the countries of the Indian immigrants. They perceived Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries as more important religiously, culturally, and economically. They wished to have such a command of Arabic as tool language they would be able to access the most important works on Islam. for them became Arabic

While Guyanese students were attending colleges in Arabic speaking countries, others were attending institutions in India and Pakistan. In India and Pakistan, students also complete courses in Arabic, and upon graduation returned home with the title of Moulana. Three graduates from Pakistan returned home at about the same time, and they figured very prominently in the society as scholars and authorities on Islam. Moulana Siddiq Ahmad Nasir, Shaykh Raouf Zaman, and Shaykh Muhammad Saffee were educated at the Aleemiyah Institute and Karachi University, Pakistan.

Raouf Zaman, after graduating, attended Al Azhar University, Egypt but discontinued his studies. Upon his return to Guyana, he joined Ustad Ahmad Ehwas and became a very prominent member of the GIT. Muhammad Saffee secured employment with the CIOG. In August 1981, he was influenced by Razak Mandall to visit Libya which he did and the Libyan Call Society appointed him the Director of Education at the Islamic Cultural Center in Queenstown, Georgetown. Moulana Siddiq was associated with the CIOG for a while and then accepted an appointment as the Shaykh-ul-Islam of the Anjuman Sunnatul Jamaat Association of Trinidad (ASJA). There were brothers who attended the schools of the Tablighi Jamaat in India and Pakistan. They returned home

⁸⁰ Melaud Akbar (Urdu) 29. Moulvi Mohamed (Iboo) Ibraheem (page 58) gave the following translation to the two lines : 'Welcome from the chosen one

Flowers all were ever green
Rejoicing came from all around
Started to spring ever green

⁸¹ Martin Lings. Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources (Lahore, Caravan Press , 1997) 25. A. H. Siddiqui. The Life of Muhammad (Delhi, Calcutta Offset Printers, 1994) 44. Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri Saudi Arabia, Maktab Dar-us-Salam, 1995 57-58

⁸² The GIT introduced the observance of the Conquest of Makkah and the Battle of Badr at its institute in Mete Meer Zorg, WCD. M. T. Ali was the then manager of GIT. These two observances were questioned in the light of the argument condemning Youmun Nabi. As a result, the events were dropped by the GIT.

⁸³ Much to the anger of the Muslims, a few persons conducted marriages with the bride and groom sitting immediately next to each other. However, the open criticisms caused adjustments to be made. Instead of being allowed to sit next to each other, the bride and groom sat apart with the parents sat between them.

with the title of Moulana also, but none of these brothers were motivated or convinced of the importance to conduct classes in Urdu. At courses and at classes they taught Arabic.

Despite the emphasis placed on Arabic for over three decades (1978-2007), it has not reached the level of Urdu as taught and learnt by the first, second, and third generation of Muslims. In teaching Urdu, a holistic approach was taken. In the teaching of Arabic a grammatical approach is taken. In the case of Urdu, the teachers could read write, and speak that language. Except for those who were formally educated in Arab schools and colleges, those who learned Arabic in Guyana did not attain an appreciable level. They cannot access information from the Arabic texts as the Urdu teachers could access information from Urdu Islamic Fiqh books. Probably with time, the skills and proficiency of Arabic will develop and attain the level and standard Urdu enjoyed in Guyana.

Conclusion

Recently there has been a revival of Melaud functions. However, sentiments alone will not revive Urdu as a language. Will there be assistance by either Pakistan or India? Will they provide sufficient funds and professional help to develop and implement an Urdu curriculum throughout the country? The critical question is how many Muslims in Guyana are prepared to undergo training and to act as Urdu teachers? CIOG, MYL, Sad'r, Hifaz, and all other organizations and leaders interested in the propagation of Urdu will have to vote a sizeable amount for this educational exercise. The truth of the matter is that Urdu no longer has that appeal and utility it once enjoyed.

There are still Muslims who could read and interpret Urdu at an appreciable level. Urdu is still used in Guyana. Many elders show great satisfaction when they converse in Urdu, and some Imams feel more comfortable making dua in Urdu. Those Imams who did not know Urdu had arranged to have the dua written in English transliteration so they can make such duas at functions. They memorized the duas, and if the guests did not know better, they would assume that those persons making the dua knew Urdu.

Urdu has always been a part of the lives of Guyanese, Trinidadian, and Surinamese. It was the language of their Imams, parents, grandparents, and Ulama of Guyana. It meant so much in terms of culture, learning, and part of the establishment of Islam in Guyana. Urdu clashed with Creole, English, and Arabic, but continues to linger after 1170 years. It is awaiting that opportunity to regain the spotlight and seeking support of a dedicated and powerful group to give it promotion.