

GUYANA: THE STORY OF FOUR MOULANAS (1937-1968)

By
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For one hundred years the Muslims in Guyana were completely isolated from their country of origin. They struggled against great odds to maintain their Islamic identity in a society that was highly prejudiced against Islam. The Muslims built Masjids, founded organizations, and were able to command respect from all denominations in Guyana.

The first Moulana came in 1937, and as from the 1960s, many Moulanas came from Barbados, UK, Canada, India, Pakistan, and other parts of the world with the Tablighi Jamaat. The word Moulana¹ can be interpreted to mean a Muslim who is learned and who is recognized as a spiritual leader (our leader) in a community.

A few Guyanese returned home with the title of Moulana after completing their studies in India or Pakistan. Guyanese who studied in the Middle East returned with the title of Shaykh. Of the Moulanas who visited Guyana, four have left their footprints upon the sands of time.² In terms of academics, Moulana and Shaykh have the same status.

1. His Eminence Moulana Al Hajj Sayed Shams-ud-din (RA)

As long as United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman exists, the name Moulana Al Hajj Sayed Shams-ud-din bin Nizam-ud-din, Alhoseini Qaderi of Navsari, Bombay, India will live. However, his arrival was steeped in controversy. The Trustees and members Queenstown Jama Masjid (QJM), The Islamic Association (TIA), and Jamiatul Ulama I Din of Guyana (JUDG) debated hotly whether to host Moulana Shams-ud-din (RA) who was at the time the guest of the Muslims of Trinidad.

All parties finally agreed, but not before a few members concluded that the formation of a new organization would best serve the interest of the Muslim community. These were the members of QJM who became responsible for the Moulana's tour and who expressed dissatisfaction over the management of the affairs of QJM and the weak performance of TIA. They discussed with the Moulana and found him very supportive since he also had reasons for discontent. He felt insulted by the statements that challenged his scholarship and his claim to be the 35th direct descendant of the Prophet (S).

The response and welcome of the Muslims influenced him to support the formation of another organization, Sad'r³ Islamic Anjuman of British Guiana. He supervised the formation of the Sad'r and was present at its inaugural meeting at the QJM in 1937. He

¹ Many Imams have assumed the name 'Moulvi' without truly understanding its meaning. This term 'Moulvi' springs from the word Moulā which means protector; master; lord; God (Q2:286). The word is not Moulvi but Moulawi which means a learned man; a professor; a Muslim doctor of the law.

² I met Moulana Noorani and Moulana Ansari. In 1961, Moulana Ansari was the guest of Shami Ali of Leonora Road, WCD. I have a picture of him with Mr. & Mrs. Fateh Muhammad, Miss Bibi Jamilla Fateh - Hamid, Bibi Safia Fateh - Bacchus, and little Naeem Haniff.

³ **Sad'r** springs from the word **Sardaar** which means chief, head, commander. **Anjuman** means assembly; congregation; union; society; association; meeting. In the name **Anjuman Sunnatul Jama 'at Association** (ASJA) of Trinidad and Tobago, all three terms exist, **Jama'at**, **Anjuman**, and **Association**. **Jama 'at** is used to refer to the Masjid and the Muslims who attend a particular Masjid.

afterwards formed twelve chapters of the Sad'r in the rural areas. Moulana Shams-ud-din spoke Urdu only, and brothers were always available to translate his speeches into English.

The formation of the Sad'r set in motion a twelve-year conflict that involved the trustees of QJM, Islamic Association on one side and the Sad'r and Jamiatul Ulama I Din on the other side. Matters were finally settled when Sad'r and the TIA united to form the United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman of British Guiana (1949).

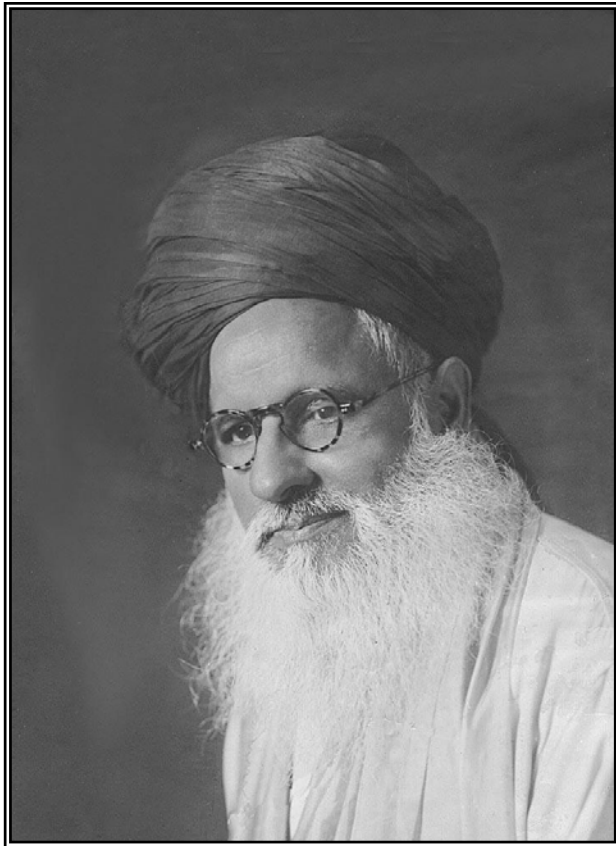
2. **His Eminence Moulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqi Al Qaderi (RA)**⁴

I refer to Moulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqi Al Qaderi (1892-1954) as **'The Prince**. He was dynamic, charismatic, and regarded as a reformer of his time and the **'Roving Ambassador of Islam'**. Muslims who met him could never forget him.

The Muslims of Trinidad were awaiting his arrival since 1935. He touched down at their airport on March 4, 1950 and from there he came to Guyana. The Anjuman Sunnatul Jamaat Association of Trinidad and Tobago compiled his lectures into six chapters and published them as **"The History of the Codification of Islamic Law"** (May 10, 1950).

Moulana Siddiq stands out as one of the greatest luminaries of Islam. Al Hajj Mohammed Ibrahim, President of ASJA says this of him: *"His Eminence's stay with us has been unmixed blessing. Being one of the most eminent Islamic religious leaders of the world and pre-eminently the greatest living international Islamic missionary, His Eminence has tackled and is tackling Muslim problems in his own inimitable style."*

Moulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqi (RA) traced his descent through Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA), First Khalifah of Islam. He belonged to the Sufi order of Alqaderi, and fits the description of a Mujtahid Imam. The Muslims of Guyana accorded him a princely welcome. No other Moulana was ever accorded such a magnificent and tumultuous welcome, and no other Moulana made such an impact upon the community. *[Picture of His Eminence Moulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqi (RA)]*



⁴ Read the article on the Moulana Siddiq (http://www.aleemsiddique.org.sg/about_moulana.htm).

3. His Eminence Dr. Moulana Fazlur Rahaman Ansari (RA)⁵

"Once you know something is the word of Allah, whether you understand it or not, whether you are comfortable with it or not, once you know it is the word of Allah, submit to it. Understanding can come later"

Dr. Moulana Fazlur Rahman Ansari

Moulana Fazlur Rahaman Ansari (1914-1974) accompanied Moulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqi in 1950 to the Caribbean. He was then quite youthful. Moulana Siddiqi had so much confidence in him that he named him his successor in preference to his sons, and gave him his daughter in marriage (1936). While they were in Makkah, Moulana Siddiqi handed over all temporal and spiritual matters to Moulana Ansari. He further initiated Moulana Ansari into the Sufi orders, including the Qadariyyah, Chistiyyah, Naqshabandiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah and Shadhiliyyah.

Dr. Ansari returned to the Caribbean in 1961. He invited the Muslims leaders of the Caribbean and formed the Islamic Missionaries Guild of the Caribbean (IMG). Hajji Nazir A. Khan (Guyana) was elected President. Moulana Ansari later withdrew his support from the IMG because it acted in contravention of what was originally agreed upon, that is, IMG to be an arm of ASJA and USIA.

In Guyana, he initiated the move with Abdool Majid, President of USIA, to establish the Muslim Trust College (MTC), Georgetown. In 1976, the PNC Government nationalized all schools and renamed MTC Brickdam Secondary School.

His lecture on his third and final visit at the Town Hall in 1968, "Islam and Socialism," drew criticisms from the People's Progressive Party and its supporters. After his departure, the Mirror published articles condemning his lecture as political interference.

It is reported that Muslims complained to him about the poor quality of leaders in organizations. He was very critical and factual. He explained that the Muslims have to strive to better their conditions in all respects. The Muslims of Guyana had the type of leadership they deserved, for as long as the learned and qualified remained non-committed and non-involved, just as long those who were not fit and qualified would occupy leadership positions.

In Pakistan, he founded the Aleemiyah Institute and united forty organizations to form the World Federation of Islamic Mission. He made five world tours and visited forty countries. *"Dr. Ansari's intellectual exposition of Islam gave the bright young Muslims some hope that Islam, as a dynamic religion, can withstand the challenges of the twentieth century."* Three Guyanese, Moulana Siddiq Ahmad Nasir, Shaykh Raouf Zaman, and Shaykh Muhammad Saffee graduated from the Aleemiyah Institute. Moulana Imran N. Hosein of Trinidad who married his daughter is also a graduate of the Aleemiyah Institute.

His family traced their lineage back to Khalid Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (RA), a distinguished Sahabi, who hosted the Holy Prophet (S) upon his arrival in Madinah.

4. His Eminence Moulana Shah Ahmad Noorani (RA)

⁵Read the article on Moulana Ansari (<http://www.fazlurrahmanansari.org/bio.html>).

Moulana Shah Ahmad Noorani (1926-2003) followed his father's example of defending Islam, promoting its teachings, and upholding the dignity of the Muslims. In his quest, he made several tours to Europe, North America, and the Caribbean. In 1967, he attempted to enter Guyana, but the welcome party advised him at the airport to continue to Suriname because of the racial unrest in the country. From Suriname, he re-entered Guyana as the guest of Hajji Balli of # 78 Masjid, Berbice.

Moulana Shah Ahmad Noorani returned to the Caribbean in 1967. He mesmerized the Muslims with his recitation of Quran, and his style of expressing love for the Holy Prophet. He commanded respect from his audience, and everyone stood up to chant with him *"Ya Nabi Salaam alaika Ya Rasool salaam alaika..."* He left behind his inimitable style of chanting the Tazeem. The Muslims of Trinidad & Tobago cut an LP of his recitation.

The USIA, Hifaz, and Jamiatul Ulama I Din of Guyana being politically motivated objected to his coming. They wanted control of his tour. The Moulana in order to resolve the issues held discussions with USIA, MYOG, IMG, JUDG, Hifaz and leaders for two days at the Home of Hajji Muhammad Ferouz, father of Fazeel Ferouz (CIOG). Finally it was agreed that the USIA would manage the Moulana's tour after his visit to Leonora Masjid, WCD. The Moulana was no stranger to politics, for he was involved in the national politics of Pakistan. He understood the moves and handled the situation expertly.⁶ The Moulana toured Guyana, and on his return from Leguan to Georgetown, he stopped at Mete Meer Zorg East, WCD to place the corner stone of the Noorani College, which Hifaz named after him.

He was an astute scholar (Alim), political leader, and a patriot. In Pakistan he formed the alliance of six political parties to form the Muttahida Majlis-e- Amal (United Action Forum), and he was the head of the Jamiatul Ulema-e-Pakistan. He also founded the World Islamic Mission (WIM). He earned the respect of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the Ulema of Pakistan. The Muslims and the Ulema called him endearingly **"Noorani Mian"**.



He died on December 12, 2003 at the age of 78 from a massive heart attack. Punjab Governor, Khalid Maqbool, expressed profound grief on his death and said, *"Pakistan has lost an enlightened religious scholar who always worked to promote religious tolerance and national cohesion throughout his political career."*

Moulana Shams-ud-din & Sad'r Anjuman

Sad'r Anjuman kept excellent records, and dedicated an entire publication to the visit of Moulana Sham-ud-din. I have not given any comments, but traced his visit over a given period. I do not know many of the persons mentioned. I would appreciate it very much if information on these persons can be conveyed to me.

⁶ I was present throughout the discussions on the second day. The leaders of the organizations actually apologized for their error of judgment.

Moulana Sham-ud-din arrived on the S.S. Nerissa from Trinidad on **February 10, 1937**. He was met at the wharf by Messrs: M.A. Nasir (Vreed-en-Hoop), M. Adill Rayman (Vreed-en-Hoop), A.D. Hack (Kitty), **M.A.H. Khan, Moulvi Mohamad Ali**, Moulvi Shakir Hosein (JUDG), Moulvi Naseer Ahmad Khan (Ruimveldt), and **Walee Mohamad**. A. D. Hack of Triumph Cycle Dept, Georgetown and of 23, Sussex St, Charlestown acted as the host of the Moulana.

The Moulana delivered seventy lectures in different parts of the Colony and founded twelve chapters of the Sad'r in the rural areas. There were about sixty Masjids in Guyana in 1937. In one of his discourses, he claimed he had no intention of coming to British Guiana. The following is some of his activities covering a period of six months.

Sunday February 11

Lecture at Ruimveldt Masjid to about 100 Muslims.

Monday February 12

Khutbah and led Salatul Jumuah at Ruimveldt Masjid

Thursday February 22

Eidul Adha prayers and gave the Khutbah at Queenstown Masjid

Friday February 23

Traveled to Essequibo and was the guest of Sheikh Naby Buksh

February 24

Lecture at Danielstown

February 25

Lecture at Huis't Dieren.

February 26;

Lecture at Aurora

February 27

Returned to Georgetown

February 28

Attended a Melaud function at M. Z. Khan's resident, Rahaman's Park

Friday March 5

He delivered the Khutbah and led the Salaatul Jumuah at Windsor Forest Masjid, West Coast Demerara. On this occasion, Windsor Forest Jamaat was made an arm of Sad'r and took the name **Anjuman Mobeenu'l Islam**

March 7

Officiated at a wedding ceremony at Lusignan

Friday March 12

Led Salatul Jumuah at Triumph Village Masjid which assumed the name Anjuman Hamdard Islam and became arm of Sad'r

Sunday March 14

Lecture at Plantation Diamond Masjid

March 19

He led Salatul Jumuah at Lusignan and remained as the guest of Noor Hassan, Estate Dispenser⁷ for one week. Mr. Richards, estate manager, took him for a ride on the estate railway. The estate had a railway which took workers to the fields.

Sunday March 21

He delivered a public lecture at Lusignan. Noor Hassan was the President of the Lusignan Muslim Association and S. M. Hanif was the Imam of the Masjid. The Moulana delivered his talk in Urdu, and it was translated by M. B. Hooseiny of Victoria Village, ECD.

Monday March 22

Ashoora was observed at Ruimveldt Masjid. About 500 Muslims from different Jamaats attended, and about 400 poor and needy persons were fed in the evening. The dinner was sponsored by Karamat Khan of Mora Point, Mahaicony Creek, East Coast Demerara.

Tuesday March 23

Toured the Lusignan Sugar Factory

Thursday Mach 25

Delivered a lecture on Kerbala, martyrdom of Imam Hosein, grandson of the Prophet (S) at a rice mill owned by Nageer Bros. Mahaicony

March 26

Returned to Georgetown and led Jumuah at McDoom Village

April 7

The Moulana attended a special general meeting of the Islamic Association at Ruimveldt Masjid at 7:00 p.m.

Daily Chronicle April 18 (Press article)

Five Anjuman⁸ were formed by the Moulana: Anjuman Shamshul Islam of Lusignan; Anjuman Hamdardey Islam of Pln. Triumph; Anjuman Nizamul Islam, Ann's Grove ECD; Anjuman Ameerul Islam, Pln. Cane Grove; Anjuman Mubeenul Islam, Pln. Windsor Forest.

⁷ Dispenser Noor Hassan's son resides in Brooklyn, NY. He is a member of Masjid Abu Uabidah, Brooklyn. He is 89 years and recalls the visit of the Moulana to his father's home.

⁸ A total of twelve Anjumans were founded by the Moulana:

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|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1) Anjuman Sharf-ul-Islam | Blairmont. WBB |
| 2) Anjuman Showkat-ul Islam | Cotton Tree, WCB |
| 3) Anjuman Thar-ul-Islam | Dundee, Mahaicony, ECD |

Friday April 23

He paid a three-day visit to the island of Wakenaam, Essequibo River, where he offered Salatul Jumuah. Br. Twalib Ali acted as his interpreter.

April 25

The Moulana delivered a public lecture in Wakenaam to an audience of 200 Muslims and Hindus. He condemned the translation of the Quran by Muhammad Ali.

Monday April 26

He returned to Georgetown.

Sunday May 23, 1937

The Muslims observed the occasion of Youmun Nabi to mark 1409th birth anniversary of the Prophet (S). The celebration was held at the Queenstown Masjid. About 500 people attended. The poor were fed for the occasion.⁹

Friday May 5

The Moulana offered Salatul Jumuah at Windsor Forest at 1:00 p.m., and at 7:30 p. m. he delivered a lecture there.

May 28

He traveled to the Mahaicony district and gave a lecture at Dundee Masjid. Hasmat Juman, Mohammad Hoosain, A. Khanoo, Mohamed Hashim Khan, Juman, and Abdool Rahman signed a letter of thanks and recognition to him on behalf of Dundee Masjid.

June 20, 1937

The Moulana aided the formation of the Sadr Anjuman at Queenstown Jama Masjid.

Daily Argosy Aug. 30, 1937

The Moulana officiated at the wedding of the daughter of S. Tallim at Port Mourant

September 10

4) Anjuman Ameen-ul-Islam	Cane Grove ECD
5) Anjuman Nizam-ul-Islam	Clonbrook, ECD
6) Anjuman Anwar-ul-Islam	Enmore, ECD
7) Anjuman Shams-ul Islam	Lusignan, ECD
8) Anjuman Hamdard-E-Islam	Triumph, ECD
9) Anjuman Mobeen-ul-Islam	Windsor Forest, WCD
10) Anjuman Itifaq-ul-Islam	Wakenaam, Essequibo
11) Anjuman Sadaqat-ul-Islam	Vergenoegen, EBE
12) Anjuman Miraj-ul-Muslameen	Bartica, Essequibo

⁹ It is to be noted that during this period the Muslims always paid attention to the poor and needy in all their functions.

Farewell function for the Moulana was held at R. Bacchus' residence. The final leave taking was organized at M. Hussein's residence, 23, Saffon Street. The Sad'r was loud in its praise of the Moulana and had this to say:

"We, the executive committee, and members of the Sad'r Anjuman-e-Islam, on behalf of ourselves and the Muslim community of British Guiana, desire to express to you on the eve of your departure from this Colony, our deep gratitude for your advent to this remote part of the Globe.

"O Torch-bearer of Islam! Your advent in this Colony has awakened as to a deeper feeling of love for our noble religion. In a language plain and unmistakable, and in eloquence unsurpassed, you have impressed us with the depths of your thought, and we have realized more fully the true beauties and grandeur of Islam. Through the medium of your instructive lectures and discussions we have been manifestly inspired to lofty conception of Islamic duties.

"The Sad'r Anjuman-e-Islam and other kindred Muslim Organizations which have been founded by you, will stand as a fitting tribute to your memory in this country, and we hope, Insha Allah, that these Anjumans,¹⁰ will progress in such manner, so that your illustrious name will be handed down to posterity.

"It is indeed a rare privilege and unique pleasure to meet with such distinguished Muslim visitor as you are, in our midst, whose devotion to Islam and purity of motive are unequalled.

"It is now extremely painful to us to part with you, but we know that the time will have come when the best of friends must part."

September 12

The Moulana left Guyana on C.N.S Lady Nelson for Trinidad from where he intended to leave for Makkah. The Moulana had spent two years in Trinidad and Guyana. In Trinidad, he was the guest of ASJA, Mohamed Ibrahim, and Nagi Asgarali Syne. He delivered his farewell sermon at El Socoro Masjid, San Fernando. The last communication with the Moulana after he left Trinidad was a post card. Sad'r grew to be a giant and dominated the scene. It was very active and was a true representative body of the Muslims within the period 1937-1948.

¹⁰ The word Anjuman was used to refer to each Jama'at or Masjid. This resulted in many Jama'ats adopting the term Anjuman and the use of the term Sad'r to show centrality and head.