History and Politicking of Islamic Organisations in Guyana

Introduction

Muslims make up about fifteen percent of Guyana’s total population (see figure # 2), and they are represented by a plethora of Islamic institutions, both organisations and mosques. Jamiat-ul Ulama-E-Deen was the first Islamic Organisation established in Guyana. It was founded in 1934 by Maulvi Mohammad Ahmad Nasir. The Islamic Association of British Guiana was formed in 1936 to mobilize and preserve the Muslim identity in an ocean of evangelism. In 1936 the IABG published the first Islamic journal in Guyana, which was called Nur-E-Islam. Jamiat and IABG were defunct by the late 1930’s and the Sadr-E-Anjuman filled the void. Present day Guyana is home to a large number of Islamic organisations: Guyana United Sadr Islamic Anjuman (GUSIA), Anjuman Hifazat-ul-Islam (HIFAZ), Central Islamic Organization of Guyana (CIOG), Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT), Muslim Youth League (MYL), Muslim Youth Organization (MYO), Hujjatul Ulama/Tabligh Jamaat, Guyana Muslim Mission, the Guyana Islamic Forum (GIF), Diamond Dar Uloom, Imam Baqir Islamic Centre, and the Guyana Islamic Institute. Tensions exits between the CIOG, HIFAZ, GUSIA, MYL, GIF and the GIT. The oldest surviving organizations are the GUSIA and HIFAZ. HIFAZ, GUSIA and MYL have had a strong relationship and have been cooperating on numerous programmes. GIT sees the practice of Islam by the traditionalists who are those that attached great importance to certain practices those there Muslim ancestors who came from South Asia practiced, as corrupted with innovations (bidah). The CIOG it is trying to accommodate South Asian Muslims of the Hanafi Mazhab who attached great importance’s to some of these “traditional practices.” GIT on the other hand, brand these practices as unorthodox or bidah (innovations) that have no place in Islam. Recently the conflicts over these practices have abated and many Islamic organisations have been speaking of tolerance and are making efforts to unite.

Islam: Traditionalists vs. Reformists

At this stage it’s appropriate to discuss a few terms such as traditionalists and reformists. The Guyanese ulama are divided into two factions, reformist and traditionalist. Both seek an orthodox practice with a literalistic reading of the Quran and the Sunna, and sometime in the past, like their ancestors, predominantly adhere to the Sunni hanafi mazhab. The traditionalist continued the promotion and observance of certain “orthodox practices”; while the reformists feel that there is no basis from Quran and Sunnah for these practices. The salient point about this is that the reformist are tutored or follows ullemas from the Arab states However, the reformists see certain elements in Islam practice by South Asian as innovations that their ancestors were emotionally attracted to. The traditionalists prefer Urdu over Arabic which is their mother tongue and most of the texts of Islam brought by their fore parents from the Asian sub-continent were in Urdu. The reformists insist that practices such as Tazeem and Melaad are bidah or innovations. Also, they are against the recitation of qaseeda at religious gatherings. The villagers, the traditionalists, don't have the social capital to back their point of view. The reformists have higher education. They have been to the Middle East, and they can, claim they know better than the traditionalists. So far the two co-exist peacefully, if awkwardly. In some villages reformists and traditionalists attend different mosques, and they
can claim they know better than the traditionalists. So far the two co-exist peacefully, if awkwardly. Like in Guyana and else where in the world were you find Muslims, the debate between the orthodox 'ulama who insist that the religious text is final and irrevocable and modern scholars who insist that there can be a multiple understanding of the holy book, persist. Also, in recent times, as in Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad, the traditionalists have started to receive the support of qualified ullema from India and Pakistan (where their foreparents came from) as such the social differences as well as the religious knowledge gap between these two groups has lessened considerably. In fact, in many cases, the traditionalists have been seen to become adamant in their pronouncements of their practices as being totally correct, in line with Islam and challenge the views of the reformists with equal "proofs" from Quran and Sunna.

The Conflicts: Milad, Qaseeda, Tazeem, and Urdu

Many ideological differences exist among the Islamic organizations in Guyana. The GIT and other organizations have major differences with fiqh. HIFAZ for example says, “If we believe in the Hanafi Mazhab, Melaud and Tazeems, the Islamic observances, the old values, then we must be respected for that” Hifaz and GUSIA claim that they are traditionalists who practice the Hanafi mazhab. They have accused some organizations of trying to Arabize the local Muslims. In the past five years there has been a serious effort by the latter two organizations to preserve Milad-un-Nabi, Tazeem, Ashura, Muharram, Shab-e-Barrat, and the recitation of Qaseeda. Urdu is another bone of contention among these organizations. These organizations are at the forefront promoting the Urdu language. “Consistent efforts by some organizations over two decades to wipe Milad off Muslim cultural activities received the biggest blow-Guyanese Muslims want to have the Milad programmes.” Urdu is having a come back due to its popularity among the locals.

HIFAZ, MYL and GUSIA have been observing Milad and Tazeem, while other organisation such as the GIT does not. There are numerous disagreements among these organisations regarding these practices. The MYL and GUSIA are at the forefront in promoting the Qaseeda competition and teaching of the Urdu language. Most recently, the CIOG have had Qaseeda competition as well. Annual National Eid Milad-un-Nabi celebration takes place at Anna Catherina. In July 1998 the CIOG held its first Qaseeda competition at the National Cultural Center with response from both participants and audience. Preliminaries were held in Berbice and Demerara and the finals at the National Cultural Center. There were pressure to resurrect these practices and it’s now a yearly practice. “In a surprise move, the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (CIOG) announced that it will be returning to the promotion of Moulood and Tazeem.”

The MYL, HIFAZ, GUSIA and the New Amsterdam Muslim Youth Organisation host this event annually at the Anna Catherina Islamic complex, West Coast Demerara. The President of Guyana and a representative of the opposition party always attend this event. Some prominent Muslims who attended in 2003 were Hasrat Allama Maulana Mufti Aslam Naimi Quraishi and Hazrat Allama Maulana Ameer Sultan, Djamat Barakatuhumul Aliyat, both of Pakistan, Maulana Rahamat Moertabat and Imam Fieroz Alie Chitanie of Suriname. Also, a large delegation from Suriname, led by President of the Khilafat Anjuman, Haji Djameel Ashruf was in attendance. According to the Muslim Youth League of Guyana, these organisations have
been observing this occasion for over half a century and are joining Muslims in other parts of the world in these observances.

Urdu is an emotional issue these days especially since the majority of Guyanese Muslims are of Indo-Pakistani origin. It has resurfaced in the past five years, and effort is underway to bring it back to life. Annually there is Qaseeda (poetry) competition by various organisations in Guyana. Suriname always takes the top price in the Qaseeda competition due to the fact that Muslims of Suriname learn to read and write Urdu. The MYL is at the forefront in linking Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad. The appointment of Maulana Noorul Hadi who hails from Pakistan will give a boost to Urdu in Guyana. Until the 1960’s Urdu was synonymous with Guyanese Muslims. Maulana Hadi according to the MYL will concentrate greatly on teaching Urdu. He has also helped to coordinate the international Qaseeda competition.

Moon sighting is another major issue that has caused great rift among Guyanese Islamic organizations. Some have advocated local siting, while others wanted to follow Saudi Arabian construct. Most of these organizations met in 1998 to address this issue but no resolution came out of the meeting. In the 1998 caucus to settle the issue of moon sighting, some blame the CIOG for preventing the meeting from arriving at a consensus. It was understood that the CIOG would have been the coordinator of the project. Finally, they all came together in the past few years in order to make a united front to present a united position on moon sighting. The moon sighting committee is working and hopes to have a regional moonlighting with Suriname. In 1999 the GUSIA, CIOG, GIT and HIFAZ collaborated in researching the site of the first mosque in Philadelphia, Guyana, and they were all present at the dedication ceremony.

There is also bitter rhetoric as to which organizations have the legitimacy to certified meat Halall. Initiated by GIT in 1999, a meeting was held at the Diamond Islamic Complex, and was attended by representatives of CIOG, GIT, GUSIA, and HIFAZ in an effort to form the National Halall Committee. CIOG is also a member of the National Halall committee, which over looks the implementation of the Halall standards. The CIOG is at the forefront monitoring the Halall Programme to ensure that the current procedures are adhered to. The CIOG has also issued warnings to the Muslim Community to be wary of food and meat vendors claiming to sell Halall products. According the CIOG it is working towards the legislation of the proper usage of the word “Halall.” Discredited the Didco claims of Halall meat to the public. The organisation did not endorse the machine slaughtering of Didco’s birds, however another Islamic organisation the Guyana Islamic Forum, certified Didco as Halaal.

“I am a practicing Muslim and wish to inform the Guyanese people that the majority of Muslims in Guyana support the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (CIOG) and have confidence in the leadership of CIOG. This organisation was formed with the approval of more than eighty Masjids of our country unlike many others. Therefore, it has a mandate to represent the majority of Muslims. We respect the positions taken by CIOG including their recent pronouncement on institutions that are not Halal. The Muslims should only accept Halal meat certified by CIOG. The CIOG agrees that this committee has to be more proactive.
Who represent the Guyanese Muslims? This has been another hot issue. The CIOG no doubt, unofficially speaks on behalf of the Muslims of Guyana and the government has in essence treated them in such manner. Prior to 1979, some claim that it was GUSIA who had the most clout and was the unofficial representative of the Guyanese Muslims. Bitter politicking since the 1960s was disastrous to Muslims and saw the decline of GUSIA’s national status. Since its formation the government of Guyana has invited the CIOG to sit on various issues. The CIOG was invited to take part in the 1993 tour of the late President Cheddi Jagan to the Middle East. All inquires regarding Guyana political, cultural and economic ties with the Islamic world is sent to the CIOG’s secretariat by the Government of Guyana. In the past decade, all ambassadors from Islamic nations to Guyana have visited the CIOG’s Secretariat. Without a doubt, it’s the Government of Guyana and the Islamic world that recognize the CIOG as the official representative of Guyanese Muslims and this has caused serious rift with other organisations. It would be unfair to say that the aims and objectives of the other organisations are not the same, but the CIOG has been recognized by the Government of Guyana as the representative of the local Muslims. However, the president of the CIOG Fazeel M. Ferouz was quoted as saying, “We need to find a solution to all of the differences and work together. I told them we have to be tolerant and respect each other’s views. This has to be inculcated at all levels or else we would always be competing, when the only way out is for us to cooperate.” It is the perception that due to the CIOG’s close relationship with the Islamic world- politically, financially and diplomatically, others have envied it. The government of Guyana’s unofficial recognition of the CIOG as the voice of Muslim Guyanese has also cause malice among these organisations.

The Guyana United Sadr Islamic Anjuman (GUSIA)

The Sadr Anjuman-E-Islam of British Guiana (now The Guyana United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman - GUSIA) was founded on the 10th of June 1937 by Maulana Sayed Shamsuddin of Bombay, India. The Maulana travelled to Guyana and persuaded the Muslims to unite. Primarily members of the Queenstown Jama Masjid attended the inaugural meeting. This was a milestone in the history of the Guyanese Muslims because it was the first time that the local Muslim population of Guyana emerged on the national and international stage. It was basically the Muslims from the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent during this early period and up to the sixties who made efforts to reach out to the Guyanese Muslim community in order to preserve Islam in the region.

At the first meeting in 1937 Mr. S.A. Sattaur, President, M. Azeem Khan and Abdool Hack, Vice Presidents, Mr. Abdool Gafoor, Treasurer, and Mr. J. M. Khan, Secretary were selected to form a committee. In addition, Messrs. M. Ishmail, M Sheriff, M. Rohoman, Pach Korie, A.H Mondol, R. Bacchus, K. B. Hoosein, A. R. Mondol, M. Mohamed, Abdool Rahman, Madar Baksh, M. Hoosein, Gul Mohamed and A. A. Gafoor formed the governing committee and were responsible for propagating Islamic works and controlling twelve other Anjumans founded also by the Maulana. During the first year of operation fourteen meeting were held and it became necessary to elect an Assistant Secretary. Mr. F. Dad Khan was chosen, and a constitution was drawn up.
The constitution envisioned that the Muslims live peacefully and encourage coexistence with other members of the community, and to safeguard the interests of the Sunnat-wal-Jamaat which is the Hanafi or orthodox teachings of Islam. The founder pledged to work diligently for the general welfare and rights of the Muslim community, and to guard the education of Muslims. They also pledged to work towards community actions programme such as burial for the poor and charity to orphans and widows and most importantly to protect the destitute Muslims. Prior to this the destitute were buried without religious rights.19

Three months later members gave various lectures and educated the local in order to settle various disputes that existed. Soon a branch of the Anjuman was established at Tuschen for the purpose of educating adults and children. A library was also attached to the Anjuman, and a school was established in Kitty, Georgetown. More than fifty children were taught Urdu. A special class was started and members’ friends were also welcomed. As the years progressed, the administration of the Anjuman naturally changed hands, but the basic and fundamental work of the organization continued.20

Later the GUSIA initiated several publications; among them was its official organ, the Voice of Islam. This was an educational publication, which outlined the basic and important teachings of Islam. Radio programmes were also launched. Pamphlets and booklets on Islamic topics were also printed along with useful advice on Ramadhan and Eid, which was printed in local newspapers when necessary. GUSIA was founded at a difficult time for Muslims in Guyana. Muslim religious leaders were fearful that eventually Islam would fade under pressure from the British colonial rulers not unlike the way the African slaves, lost their religions. Many Christian missionaries were in Guyana proselytizing and there was tremendous pressure to convert. Hindu and Islamic marriages were not recognized, and to be a teacher or to hold decent job one had to be a Christian. Many Hindus had converted to Christianity, and there was concern that Muslims would follow suit.21

It was this situation motivated the Maulana Shamsuddin to form the Sadr Islamic Anjuman. The Anjuman has given full credit to the Maulana for taking the initiative to start this organisation. “He visualised that such an organization would be responsible for the maintenance, upholding and perpetuation of Islam. He felt that a single organization would be heard more effectively that the voice of a single man.”22 In 1961 the Anjuman gained governmental recognition when it was incorporated under the laws of Guyana thus strengthening its position as representative of Muslim interests in the country.23

With the intensification of the independence struggle, the Guyanese masses became totally involved, so too were the Muslim populace. With the political split of the independence movement, resulted in division of the Muslims citizenry. In the 1960’s, even GUSIA was divided nationalist political lines. There was one faction under Moneer Khan and Yakoob Ali, which supported the PPP Government of Dr. Cheddi Jagan whilst the other, Mohamed Nisar, which supported the PNC. This situation continued until the late 1970’s. During this period, there were bitter battles between these two rival factions and Muslims once again lost their leadership and prestigious status in the wider community. The President of GUSIA, Mr. Abdool Majeed accepted the chairmanship of the United Force party and PPP Parliamentarian Mr.
Yakoob Ally replaced. This caused great tension since the PPP was known to be a communist party. Monoor Khan held a secret meeting in September of 1963 to muster support for Premier of British Guiana Dr. Cheddi Jagan. A member who was present at that “unconstitutional” meeting wrote in a letter to the Daily Chronicle, “This meeting did not represent the Muslims because only the PPP supporters were present. I was not allowed to speak... there were non-Muslims at the meeting and I was offended when Mr. Macce Hamid used the world comrade.”

The Anjuman sent a cable to Governor Grey telling him that “communism and Islam do not go together.” On October 21st 1963 a meeting of the Anjuman was held at the Muslim College trust. The meeting was filled with tensions and arguments became fights. Anjuman’s President Mr. Abdul Majeed was attacked and the police had to escort him home. “Sadr’ executive were manhandled and had to be helped by supporters and the police.”

It was alleged that the Jagan supporters fomented the violence. This division over the support for the PPP destroyed the unity of the Muslims.

This division was obvious on several occasions. Eminent Muslims from Pakistan who called on Guyanese Muslims not to support a communist party were not welcomed in Guyana. “On one such occasion in 1967, when Maulana Noorani was coming to Guyana from Suriname the GUSIA, HIFAZ and Ulama-E-Deen sent him a joint cable which read: `Your visit is most unwelcome.’ In a visit to Guyana in 1968, Maulana Fazlur Rahman Ansari visited Guyana but failed to get any support from GUSIA, Hifaz and Ulama-E-Deen when he stated publicly at the Town Hall the Islamic position with regard to socialism and communism. G USIA, Hifaz and Ulama-E-Deen publicly supported the PNC.

The Shaheeds Boys' and Girls Orphanages were founded under the administration of the GUSIA to care for the unfortunate children who had either lost their parents or were abandoned by them. Over the years the orphanages have saved many lives. It has offered abandon children new hope and rehabilitation. Naturally these children grow up in an Islamic atmosphere, and mostly likely will accept Islam for life. GUSIA also constructed the Muslim School on Brickdam. The Sadr, as it is also called made national headlines in 2003 when an orphan from its Shaheed Boys and Girls Orphanages was found dumped on the roadway after beaten to death. This was a national shock especially so for the Muslims.

The explanation given by the administration of the orphanage lacked credibility. Guyana’s Minister for Social Services, Ms. Bibi Safoora Shadick, a Muslim herself took the task of investigating the case. Her investigation was impartial and the revelation was shocking. The orphan was allegedly beaten to death by an administrator of the institution. The Rahaman’s family who runs this orphanage has had an impeccable track record and they issued several statements about the incident but more recently in July of 2004, the two men charged with the murder of the orphan were acquitted.

Due to this development, the CIOG took GUSIA to court to take control of the orphanage. Some other organisations were venting since they felt that the CIOG did not do enough dialogue with other local Muslim bodies to come up with a solution to the crisis. Instead they accused the CIOG of rushing to court to “take control” of the Sadr Islamic Anjuman. In early 2004 chief justice of Guyana Mr. Carl Singh ruled that both the CIOG and the SADR are charitable organisations, and that the CIOG can’t file an action against the SADR. This has been a common practice among Islamic organizations taking each other to court. Sometimes the
secular court encourages local Muslims to find resolutions to these disputes. Many times the secular courts are unable to solve disputed equitably since they are unfamiliar with Islamic Fiqh.

**Anjuman Hifazatul Islam (HIFAZ)**

The Anjuman Hifazatul Islam was formed in the 1950's. However, there has been some confusion as to the actual year that HIFAZ was founded. Around that same time its youth arm, the Muslim Youth League (MYL) was established in Georgetown. It is the belief of some that it was between 1950- 1955. Whatever, the actual date is an enigma, but most certainly the Anjuman Hifazatul Islam is the second oldest Islamic organisation in the history of Guyana. HIFAZ was founded in order to assist the Masjids within the West Demerara /East Bank Essequibo region. However, according to the HIFAZ their activities have been broadened to include the rest of Guyana; though, the concentration is still in the Demerara / East Bank Essequibo region.

HIFAZ, as it is popularly known, is an affiliate of the GUSIA, and this is provided for in the constitution of GUSIA. The HIFAZ is an orthodox Sunni organization that practices a tolerant Islam. The organization has maintained some aspect of "cultural Islam" that has been inherited from South Asia. According to Hakeem Khan, this at times has caused friction because of the Wahabis and Salafis who have been trying to penetrate the Sunni Hanafis of Guyana. From its formation to the 1960's, HIFAZ was very vibrant in realizing its aims and objectives. However, in 1967 Maulana Noorani of Pakistan came to Guyana and laid the cornerstone for the construction of the "Norrani College" at Meten-Meer-Zorg. "Br. Moneer Khan gave materials for a dormitory". Mr. Hakim Khan said that the building was constructed on a six-acre plot of land owned by HIFAZ. However, the entire building disappeared with no account being given. It is the opinion of a few that the material was used in the construction of some Mosques but this is mere speculation. Mr. Hamid Khan writes, “This project never really got started and ended in disaster”.

HIFAZ remained a service organization after that to 1997 when the entire scene of Muslims in Guyana was changed.

With the intention of reattaching the importance to Islamic events, HIFAZ started to organize activities for all occasions which have had quite an impact. HIFAZ and the West Demerara Muslim Youth Organization have recently been in the forefront promoting Milad-un-Nabi, Meraj-un-Nabi and Muharram programmes. The Muslim Journal (Islam Guyana), the voice of the Anjuman Hifazatul Islam and the West Demerara Muslim Youth Organization, express concern that consorted efforts have been made to eradicate Milad-un-Nabi observation in Guyana. “For over twenty years, continuous efforts have been made to destroy Milad programme from our community, and after all these efforts and years, two thousand persons have still turned out to support Qaseeda.”

In 1999 HIFAZ, MYL, and GUSIA in conjunction with the CIOG, held a national Qaseeda competition. County level competition was held in Berbice, Essequibo and Demerara. In its editorial, the Muslim Journal writes, “Then it was announced on television that Qaseeda and Milad is an Indian something and therefore has nothing to do with Islam.” With two thousand people attending the final Qaseeda competition, the Journal continues in its editorial, "The people have spoken, and no Sheikh, Maulana, Qari, Hafiz or self proclaimed Islamic
Muslim scholars can deny the voice of the people.” GUSIA, GIF and MYL hosted an international jalsa (gathering) at the Anna Catherina Islamic Complex in March of 2004. Muslim leaders from Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States met in Guyana. The Anjuman Sunnatul Jamaat Association (ASJA) representing Trinidad and Tobago, Khilafat Anjuman, Hedayatul Islam representing Suriname and Masjid Al Abdin of New York, in the United States met to plan and establish areas of cooperation between the Muslims of these countries, to specifically plan other activities, and to meet regularly. In attendance were Imam of Khilafat Anjuman and Chairman of the Sunni Muslim Society of Suriname, Al Haj Feroz Chitanie, President of the Hedayatul Islam, Al Haj Abdool Basheer Khudabux of Suriname and President General of the Anjuman Sunnatul Jamaat Association (ASJA), Al Haj Yacoob Alli and Caribbean Islamic scholar, Al Haj Kamaludeen Ghanny. Imam Zameer Sattaur of Masjid Al Abidin, New York was the chief guest, and US Ambassador to Guyana.

In its push to establish its presence in the country and to promote traditional Islamic traditions the HIFAZ and MYL have been building the necessary physical infrastructure. In 2003, the Madrasa Naqshbandiyya, located at the Anna Catherina Islamic Complex, West Coast Demerara opened. A release from the school said lessons in Hifzul Quran, Tajweedul Quran, Urdu Language, Basic Islamic Foundation Courses and Imams Training programmes are some of the courses offered. The classes are all based on the Ahle Sunnatwal Jamaat, Hanafi Mazhab and are for both male and female with limited live-in facilities for male students. According to the release, classes will be conducted from 9am to 12noon and from 4pm to 6pm and from 9pm to 11pm to facilitate everyone, with special sessions being held on weekends. Teachers from the Khilafat Anjuman in Suriname and the Anjuman Sunnatul Jamaat Association of Trinidad will boost the Madrasa from time to time. And in January of 2000 the Anna Catherina Islamic Complex on the West Coast Demerara (as headquarters of both Hifaz and Muslim Youth League) was formally open after twelve years of construction. The multi-million-dollar building boasts a large lecture hall, which will be used as a venue for indoor games for the MYL and offices for Hifaz and MYL. Today the complex has built and added a Madrasa-Nooranie Naqshbandiyya Madrasa, under the tutorship of Maulana Noorul Hadi Haleem. According to President of the Centre, Mr. Hakeem Khan, “this complex offers support to the government of this country, to assist in the molding of healthy people especially our youths.” Khan continues, “We do not expect the government to be the only one to provide facilities for our people, and we have tried successfully to create our vision.”

**Muslim Journal**

The objective of the Muslim Journal which is now called Guyana Islam is to propagate and validate traditional practices such as Milad, Meraj, Tazeem, the recitation of Qaseeda and the reintroducing of Urdu to Guyana. Hakeem Khan who is an advocate of these practices is editor of Islam Guyana, and in an interview he related the history of the journal. The former secretary of Hifaz initiated the journal and asked Hakeem to come on board HIFAZ in order to do a newsletter to distribute at a Milad-un-Nabi program. It was done on two pages for the 1999. Then for Miraj, HIFAZ planned a public programme at the Cornelia Ida School. According to Khan these religious observances were in danger of becoming extinct, young Muslims knew nothing of them and non-Muslims knew less. The idea in these programs was to reattach the
importance of these events and to encourage Masjids to observe them. By then, very few Masjids were observing them,” Mr. Khan revealed.41

The first issue of the Muslim Journal was launched in 1997. It was a very humble effort, and the journal was in black and white. It was then decided to be produced quarterly or four times a year for Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Adha, Milad-un-Nabi and Meraj-un-Nabi. “At that time, the CIOG only had a magazine, but it was very irregular. Shortly after we started publishing the CIOG deteriorated and resorted to a newspaper.”42 Initially the magazine featured news from HIFAZ / MYL but with the alliance with GUSIA they decide to go national because of the fact that there was no other Islamic magazine in the country. The journal then decided to include the news and events from all other jamaats and masjids.43 The Muslim Journal does report the news and events from across Guyana, and the magazine is being issued regularly. The journal is very critical of the CIOG and some have accused Khan of launching his vendetta against the CIOG via this journal. HIFAZ claims that it reaches “every Masjid and organization in Guyana, every government and civil organization, Muslims and organizations in over thirty eight countries.”44 The Saudi based network, International Islamic News Agency, beaming to over 120 countries worldwide, features it.”45 The magazine is now a regular feature in Guyana but its editor claims that they are those who are keen in destroying it.46 That seems to be the politics of the Muslim organisations of Guyana. There is rivalry with the CIOG and the MYL.

In March of 2003 the Guyana Muslim Journal changed its name do to conflict with HIFAZ. HIFAZ supported the CIOG which took GUSIA to court. The journal was very critical of two member of HIFAZ who supported the CIOG. The MYL alliance with HIFAZ went flying, and the MYL/HIFAZ publication, the Muslim Journal changed its name to Islam Guyana. “Where is Hifaz in defence of GUSIA when the CIOG was attempting to take it over? Members of Hifaz were supporting the CIOG.47” GUSIA, Hifaz and MYL alliance since 2001 crumpled. There has been a called by the CIOG for merger, but the fact is that there is rivalry between these organisation and lack of cooperation much less unity. They are not united. According to its editorial, HIFAZ laid claim on the magazine. Mr. Hakim Khan claimed that the magazine was always independent of Hifaz and the MYL. Mr. Khan has challenged Hifaz to produce a magazine and he willingly changed the name from Muslim Journal to “Islam Guyana.”48 Again, this demonstrate the many petty conflicts that exists among these organisations and personalities.

Relationship with the Umma

Since 2002, Muslim organisations of Guyana have begun to broaden “Islamic” friendship with Suriname, the Netherlands, and Trinidad. There was always a vibrant relationship with Pakistan, the United States, the Netherlands, and those migrated to the United States. On the political level the MYL has a very vibrant relationship with the US Embassy in Guyana which is always present at MYL ‘s functions, the CIOG on the other hand, has stronger ties with the Government of Guyana. There has been many exchanges of visits between Guyana and Suriname. This growing tie have been encouraged by Mr. Fazeel Ferouz, President of the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (CIOG), the Muslim Youth League of Guyana, the Anjuman Hifazatul Islam and the Guyana United Sadr Islamic Anjuman. Mr. Hakeem Khan and Regional Vice-President of CIOG, Mr. Gulzar Namdar have been instrumental in bring the two Muslim communities together. They have hosted visits from Khilafat Anjuman of Paramaribo. In the
past five years they have been having Qaseeda competition in Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad. A thirty-member delegation of mostly female guests visited Suriname in March of 2002, and the Khilafat Anjuman hosted them. This tour was organised by the Anna Catherina Islamic Complex with the support of the MYL. Prior to this a delegation of Guyanese Muslims paid an official visit to Suriname, which was reciprocated by a delegation from Suriname to Guyana as well.

Suriname and Guyana have much in common because the majority of Muslims in these two countries are South Asians. They are both from the Sunni Hanafi Mazhab and sometime in the past shared Urdu. Urdu is the language of the Surinamese Hindustani Muslims who have resisted Arabic, while in Guyana Urdu is dead. After a visit in August of 2000, (Islam Guyana to Suriname by a delegation from CIOG, MYL and Anna Catherina Islamic Complex (ACIC), Maulana Noorul Hadi came to Guyana. Maulana Noorul Hadi hails from Pakistan and speak Urdu. In December of 2002, a group of Guyanese Muslims and four Iranians visited Suriname, which was organised by the MYL. There have been many other visits since 2002 to Suriname. One of the Iranian who was part of the delegation in 2002 was kidnapped and executed in Guyana in May of 2004. They visited the Khilafat Anjuman (400,000 USD facilities), which is one of its kind in the region. (Ties with Suriname’s Khilafat Anjuman. But in Guyana many are accused of creating white elephants- “structures with no purposes.” In Suriname the money goes to the Jamaat and they develop the infrastructure. In an attack directed at the CIOG, Khan asked, “What do we show for it in Guyana? Where is the money going? Many of the projects fail to get off the ground.” Suriname has the best and largest Islamic institutes in the regions. Hifaz/MYL also has a relationship with the largest Islamic institute in the region, Madrasa Alliyat Faridah.

Today in Guyana most Islamic organisations see the benefit of strong ties with neighbouring Suriname. Hakeem Khan has personally led this worked to improve these ties. Strong ties with Suriname will be beneficial to Guyanese Muslims since most Guyanese youths who travel to Arabia, Pakistan or Egypt for Islamic education never return to Guyana to service the community. Now there is an effort to train married and older Muslims in Suriname or such places like Syria and Egypt. Suriname is capable of training imams and providing Islamic teacher to Guyana, and Hifaz and MYL wants to exploit this good will. They see no reason why the youths should be sent to Arabic speaking countries for training. In fact, most do not return to Guyana they assert, and they are correct about this. These new alims who are funded by local Islamic organisations or by Muslim nations end up in USA, Canada and other parts of the Caribbean. Two youths who have studied in Pakistan reveal their desire to migrate to Trinidad or the United States. So, Hifaz asks the question: “Then why is it we are refusing the offer of a qualified Maulana to reside in Guyana? According to HIFAZ/MYL and the SADR, their efforts to promote orthodox Islam will be greatly boosted when a promise made by the Khilafat Anjuman of Suriname to provide a Maulana to live in Guyana is realized. A similar offer was made to the CIOG by the Surinamese. Indeed the Khilafat Anjuman of Suriname made and offer to the CIOG when Sheikh Moen Ul-Hack went there but the offer was not accepted due to salary and travelling cost and language barrier issues.
The Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT)

When Guyana gained independence in 1966, many Islamic countries such as Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Pakistan, and Malaysia opened embassies and consulates in Georgetown. The presence of these missions in Guyana makes Guyana unique among its Caribbean counterparts. The Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT) was founded in 1976 when Libya opened its embassy in Georgetown. In 1977 Libyan Charge de Affaire Mr. Ahmad Ibrahim Ehwass arrived in Guyana and in 1978 was responsible for the formation of the Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT). He introduced many activities to benefit the Muslim community, especially the youth. Many scholarships were given to young Muslims to study in Libya, currently however, the organisation has no relationship with Libya. The GIT came into being to eradicate innovations that polluted orthodox Islam and to save the Muslim youths. With regards to their structure, it is closed. They are registered as a trust, and they select there own to hold office. One cannot get in easily. There is a lot of secrecy. The present leader (Murshid) of the GIT is Mr. Wazir Baksh who is from Port Mourant, Guyana. Wazir Baksh attended Corentyne High School, and the New Amsterdam Technical Institute, Guysuco Training School and University of Guyana where he majored in history. His interest is in social change and he is very busy preparing field workers to help people to help themselves and community development. Since his coming to office, the organisation has tone down heavily its attack on traditionalist’s practices as mention before. This maybe attributed to the traditionalists discourse that has been given very prominent among the Muslims. Murshid, Baksh seems to be a pragmatic leader and if very focus on dawah, education, community building, relief and welfare and youth. The former Murshid was Br.Haseeb Yusuf. The GIT’s secretariat was burnt in 2003 and recently it moved to its former location.

Today the GIT claimed that they have put aside petty issues. Its leader says, “There are a number of issues that we have to address, both from the GIT point of view and the broader Muslim community.” They are also facing issues relating to fiqh to gain political mileage. Murshid Baksh revealed that the Muslims have felt a sense of marginalization and they are venting their pain. Git also confessed that there exist divisions among the Muslims in Guyana. He says, “There too much of hate and animosity among Muslims here, and national leaders are guilt to perpetuating this for their own narrow gains. For me, the challenges facing the Muslim community here, from within and without, are tremendous.” Baskh confess that the challenges are multifarious and he has to prioritize those challenges. (May 29, 2004-Guyanese Muslim). Dawah and community building and education are some of their priorities. Their dawah programme has targeted indigenous Amerindians, Hindus and Christians. In the year 2004 they claim that “200 or more reverted to Islam.” They have established a number of Islamic centers in Guyana’s hinterland (Flyer- Dawah, Community Building and Education 2004).

GIT’s objective is to disseminate the message of Islam to the people of Guyana and to revive the practices of the Qur’an and Sunnah in the lives of the Muslims, and to provide for those who respond to the call of Islam. It hopes to provide sound intellectual, spiritual, moral, and cultural training to those who want to cooperate and with individuals and groups locally and abroad. GIT hopes to promote the “good and forbidding of evil in accordance with Quran and Sunnah.” This organisation is adamant about supporting and the needy or deserving students, scholars or those people whose services are considered conducive to the attainment of the
objectives of the GIT. GIT believes that Islam in Guyana is polluted with Bidah or innovations that the ancestors of the Indian Muslims brought to Guyana from the Indo-Pakistani region. They hold the belief that it is polluted with eminences of Hinduism which the former Shah of Muslim India, Akbar allowed to penetrate into the religion. One of the GIT’s idealistic goals of empowering the local Muslims and to seek representation is yet to materialize neither has the CIOG in its attempt to do so. It is alleged that the CIOG is very much in the pocket of the current government and will not rock the board and are happy in receiving token gestures by the government in office. GIT’s effort to educate and train local Muslims to become Imams by establishing educational institution for adults and children has been successful. Generally speaking the GIT hope to educate Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam and to bring the message of Islam to non-Muslims. The GIT also carry out welfare relief and humanitarian work, and they hope that by establishing Islamic schools thought out Guyana they can educate youths and younger students before they fall in the crack of society. They also have a women body in their organisation and are keen in women’s development. Most importantly, the GIT is keen in building the Muslim community in Guyana. Education, dawah, social welfare and humanitarian work, young student development.

The GIT hold the belief that “because of the fraternisation of the Hindus and Muslims, and the numerical superiority of the Hindus, some practices of the Muslims reflected an accommodation of certain culture forms of Hindu culture and practices.” According to the GIT, the Indian Muslims while having good intention expressed their adherence to the Hanafi mazhab, but their practices reflected several innovations along with traces of Shia and even Hindu influences. This was due to the close geographical proximity of Hindus and Muslims on the plantations of Guyana. “The Masjid was very insular - there was a closer relationship among Muslims and Hindus on the same plantation than among Muslims from one plantation, to the Muslims on the neighbouring plantation.”

GIT see the corruption of society especially the youths as part of the collapse of the Madrasa system. Years of neglect and disorganized work were a result of no leadership and role models. The Muslim society was falling apart in their eyes. Wearing the Hijab became something of the past. No one recited the Quran according to rules of Tajweed. Most Imams were not performing namaaz five times per day, much less the other Muslims. The cinema had become the main source of cultural transmission and the liberalism that came with it exerted a damaging influence on young people. In this regard, the traditional Hindu and Western films which were later joined by Chinese films only served to reinforce each other, and with the Hindu and Western films progressively increasing in themes of violence and sex, a corrupt and promiscuous society came into being.

GIT has condemned the “un-Islamic” practice of not wearing a beard, the using of Urdu instead of Arabic, the making of Duahs, the practice of tazeem, milad-un-nabi and the recitation of qaseeda. This has place the GIT in confrontation with other Islamic organisations and some accused the GIT of “heavy Wahabiyah” influence. These allegations have been refuted by Baksh who says that they are not opposed to Duas and do not support extremism. The GIT is ambitious to bring all the Muslims under their control in order to teach them Sunnah and the Quran without innovations. It is their belief that they are leading the Muslims on the straight path but that the CIOG, Hifaz and the GUSIA have overlooked innovations that have penetrated
Islam in Guyana. Those who observe and make Duahs and follow the path of the sufis are “destined to hell,” because it’s against the Sunnah and the Quran claims the GIT.\textsuperscript{61} Recently the GIT has tone down its rhetoric about bidah for the benefit of unity. While it still has reservation bout these practices, it will not condemn others who practice them as non Muslims. The organisation wants to put these issues on the back burner and move on to more ambitious projects, and wants to portray it self as a tolerant of other Muslims who might not share their interpretation of the fiqh.

**Islamic Schools Nationwide**

Recently GIT has focused its energy on the building of Islamic schools in Guyana. Its first school was built in Georgetown the capital of Guyana. The school is named after one of Islam’s most influential 11th century scholar, Ibn Sina. Ibn Sina Academy is spearheaded by the Council for Islamic Academic Education, which is a subsidiary of the GIT. The building for the school cost fifty millions dollars and is housing about 400 students. It provides education from kindergarten to secondary levels in “an environment that resonates Islamic decorum and moral values.”\textsuperscript{62} The school follows the regular state mandated curriculum as established by the Guyana Ministry of Education; however the Arabic language at the G.C.E O levels and a certificate in Islamic Studies is offered. This successful undertaking has led to the establishment of two other Islamic schools in Rosehall, and Skeldon, Berbice. These schools will service kindergarten to secondary. Much of the Muslims in this region are much exited about this development and are anxiously waiting the opening of these schools. Today most Muslims prefer to send their children to such schools since government run schools have failed to produce top grades.

Mr. Haseeb Yusuf stressed that “we are not only giving knowledge or education but also making them certain kinds of responsible members of society.”\textsuperscript{63} He explained that Islam does not differentiate between religious and secular education. “Islam has always had a history of seeking knowledge be it chemistry, astronomy, biology or physics”.\textsuperscript{64} The school in general will reflect an Islamic environment. The design of the building incorporates elements of Islamic architecture, compromising of three stories including sixteen classrooms, gymnasium, auditorium, Namaaz and Wuzu areas. The GIT now calls the school ISA Academy after learning that Ibn Sina was a famous Sufi. Some have privately question GIT’s “brand of Islam”. “The GIT is schools are teaching their children that Duas are wrong, and that the observation of the Prophet’s Birthday celebration is haraam.”\textsuperscript{65} This charge has been denied by GIT, however these are the issues that continue to divide the Muslims in Guyana. On the other hand, ISA Academy has been very successful. “The ISA Islamic School broke its own records, producing two of Guyana’s best Common Entrance students and a pleasing 75%-100% passes at the CXC examinations.” (Flyer 2004).

**International Affairs/Pan-Islamism**

Since independence in 1966, the local Muslims have been exposed to the wider Islamic community. The influence of the Middle East on the local Muslim population has been an interesting phenomenon. This study has brought to light this link between local Muslims and Muslims in the Middle East and Asia and as a result of identification with the global umma and
increased contacts with the Muslim world, Pan-Islamism is far more important today than any time before. Muslim organisations of Guyana have maintained these strong links and access to the print and electronic media has also attributed to this phenomena. GIT has been at the forefront condemning atrocities against Muslims from Bosnia, to Kosova, from Chechnya to Kashmir and from Palestine to the Philippines. They have brought many Islamic scholars from across the world to Guyana, and they have also raised issues relating to Muslims at home and abroad. This has enabled local Muslims to identify with the global umma. And also the government of Guyana has had to issue statements on hot spots such as Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, Kosova and Bosnia... There publications have constantly strived to educate the locals about the umma across the world. Consistently pages in their publications have dealt with the history and current news of Muslims in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. GIT has raised funds for Bosnia and Kosova and brought scholars from these regions to Guyana to enlighten the local Muslims of the plight of the Muslims in these communities. They have also sent charitable donations to Muslims in Kosova, Bosnia and to non Muslims as well in places such as Grenada what was affected by Hurricane.

The Central Islamic Organization of Guyana (CIOG)

On the 1st of July 1979, at the Bishops High School in Georgetown Muslims from all parts of Guyana assembled establish, and elected the first executives of the CIOG. This marked the birth of the CIOG in hope of reorganizing of the local Muslim population. The CIOG’s slogan was unity and mobilization. The organization wanted to depolitize Islam and to regain the dignity of the local Muslim community after a decade of politicking. Its first director was Mr. Nasir and its current CEO is Al Haj Fazeel M. Ferouz. Since its establishment in 1979, the CIOG has worked vigilantly on the domestic and international scenes for the welfare of local Muslims, non-Muslims, and the umma at large. They have worked to strengthened Muslim education and social welfare though various programmes while propagating Islam. One of their strength has been their commitment to the welfare of the Muslims and their shrewd political acumen to relate themselves to the wider polity and to society at large. They have long responded to the challenge by insisting that Muslims must seek to dialogue with people of other faiths and work along with them for common goals, such as democracy, secularism, social justice and inter-communal harmony. Some have questioned the CIOG’s structure that does not allow for others to move to the top in its hierarchy and allege that elections are fixed. Its relationship with the government is also controversial and has frequently been accused of being in the pocket of the current government at hand; the CIOG on the other hand, claims that it’s apolitical. The CIOG have also sat on the Election Reform Committee and the Sodomy Committee. The fact that the CEO of the CIOG was part of the PPP presidential visits to India and the Middle East in the last decade has aroused suspicions.

During the period 1963 - 1978 the most important the Muslim organization in Guyana, the Anjuman, developed serious problem because of various reasons. This organization had two persons who claimed to be its president, Mr. Abdool Masjid and Mr. Nasir. As mention before the split in supporting the PPP or the PNC led to the crisis. It was this period 1963 - 1978 that the Muslim community suffered a great deal of humiliation and frustration because the two factions of the Anjuman was always in the court and in the press fighting each other. This
situation convinced a group of concerned Muslims to get together with the consolation of other existing organizations in the country. This meeting led to the idea of a new organization to represent the Muslims in Guyana. A consensus was reached among the masjids that a new organisation should be forged. These concerned Muslims went from masjid to masjid throughout the length and breadth of Guyana to get a consensus about the need to establish a new organisation. After a period of almost one-year that is from 1978 - June 1979, a consensus was reached to forge a new Islamic organization. According to the CIOG the concerned group of Muslim had received over eighty-eight signed resolutions authorizing the formation of a new organization to represent the Muslims of the country.66 Also, the CIOG claims that there is no other Islamic Organization in Guyana that can make this claim. The CIOG would like to believe that when it makes a statement it speaks for the Muslims of Guyana, and it claims that there are 134 Masjids in Guyana and the Imam and president of each masjid is a member of the General Council of the CIOG. 67 The government recognizes the CIOG as the official representative of Guyanese Muslims and accords it that treatment as we will see.

EDUCATION

The CIOG conducts training programmes of various lengths of times for Imams, Islamic teachers, women and youths. Training programmes for children, youths and women are held in various parts of Guyana. A special committee called the National Committee of Sisters Affairs (NACOSA) was founded in July, 1992 and consists of twenty three Muslim women voluntarily engaged in the programmes and projects undertaken, either directly or through the CIOG. Also the CIOG organizes programmes to get Muslims together. Such occasions having provided excellent opportunities for creating social awareness in the Islamic Community. The CIOG continues to hold talks, seminars, and workshops throughout the country, with invited guest’s speakers from abroad participating also.68 Like other Islamic organisations in Guyana, they too want to educate Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam and the Umma. The organization has links throughout the country. It has an executive body, comprising office bearers and representatives from each of the ten districts across Guyana. During 1998 NACOSA conducted seminars and workshops for women, youths and children on issues such as HIV Awareness, legal issues, narcotics and substance abuse and domestic violence. In addition to counseling programmes for married persons experiencing difficulties and parents/children encountering problems, NACOSA also conducts literacy programmes for women and children, which focus on educational and religious topics.69

Secular subjects are also covered in CIOG’s education programmes such as leadership training, civil responsibility, computer training, and vocational skills, English, Math and Science. In the future the (CIOG) envisage-more computer schools, the completion and start of four vocational schools, the establishment of nursery, primary and secondary schools in each county of Guyana that will combine both secular and Islamic subject. Three schools have been completed and waiting furniture. The executives of the CIOG are also exploring the possibility of distance education via computer on by setting up a TV station that will focus on education and community development. In 1997 the CIOG received a commitment from the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah to build four vocational schools. Some have questioned: “A decade ago, the ISDB made available to the CIOG 300,000 USD to construct five vocational schools. Where are these schools” the Muslim Journal ask.70 The money from the IDB was
given to the contractors as they complete a phases of the project. Three buildings have been completed at a cost of 150,000 USD from the allocated funds. CIOG estimated that the cost of each building would be 75,000 USD including furniture. In 2005 the CIOG will erect a school in New Amsterdam, Berbice and they will apply for money to furnish the existing schools. Representatives of the IDB were in Guyana in August of this year and they visited the project and met with President Jagdeo and member of the CIOG. There has been no mishandling of funds according the CIOG that some have alleged. This again demonstrates what frequently happens in Guyana among rivals organisations. When rumors reach the IDB only the local Muslims will suffer this is something that these Islamic organisations have not come to terms with. On the other hand, if there has been misused of funds the local will suffer. Some of the ideals these ideals have been stymied because of mud slinging which has retarded progress. Too much energy is spent destroying each others ambitious plans.

Since 1999 the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (CIOG) in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) provides interest-free loans for Muslim students pursuing studies at the University of Guyana. Over the years many students have benefited benefiting from this programme at the University and some have graduated in civil engineering and computer science. Most recently, the CIOG and IDB have been in the process of establishing a trust fund to benefit other students from the repayment of funds from students who have already graduated. Scholarships are also given to young Muslim students to attend Al- Azhar University in Egypt to study Islam as well as in Pakistan, Malaysia and Syria.

SOCIAL WELFARE

The CIOG has runs an excellent social welfare programme that helps orphans, widows, abused women, runaway, prisoners and the elders. Its excellent Zakaat programme is outstanding and even its critics would agree. Through some dynamic programmes in conjunction the business community, the legal and the medical Muslim community the CIOG has been able to provide help to the most needy in society and to also safeguard those at risk. For example in one year the CIOG collected from Muslims and distributes on a monthly basis 2.3 million Guyana dollars to approximately 937 poor Muslims in 100 mosques throughout Guyana. In one year of funds received mounting about thirty two million, it disbursed twenty-seven in Zakaat. The team compromise the CIOG’s executive and regional representative’s who spearhead the collection drive.

On a yearly basis CIOG in collaboration with the Zakaat House of Kuwait and other local Muslims sponsors an event called Orphan Day. Zakaat House is an organisation based in Kuwait, and currently sponsors 890 orphans. Under the CIOG's Orphan and Destitute Programme, it generously provide for some 360 orphans drawn from Skeldon; West Berbice; East and West Coast Demerara; East and West Bank Demerara; Essequibo Coast and Islands, Georgetown and Bartica. All orphans receive assistance in the areas of education, social, medical and finance, CIOG said. Under the CIOG's Orphan and Destitute Programme, it lavishly provided for some 360 orphans drawn from Skeldon; West Berbice; East and West Coast Demerara; East and West Bank Demerara; Essequibo Coast and Islands, Georgetown and Bartica. According to the CIOG, this programme started seven years ago with twenty three children and grew to 360. CIOG spends more than $800,000 per month on this
programme. These Muslims orphans receive a total of G$535,000 monthly. They also provide school uniforms, clothing, schoolbooks, shoes and access to medical attention. The CIOG holds an annual fun day for orphans. This event has indeed highlighted the need for more protection of children. President of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo frequently expressed his admiration for the commitment of Muslims to charitable work in communities across Guyana. While attending “Orphan Day” the President called for new laws backing protection of the child can be passed in Guyana. There have been recent cases of child abuse, which have triggered concern in the society.

The CIOG has a medical committee that conducts medical outreach programme in the poor areas of our country. The medical committee also assists in helping people who have to go overseas for Medical attention. Many Muslim doctors of Guyana volunteer in this programme. The Medical Committee of CIOG recently donated Caesium Unit and neurosurgery equipments to the Public Hospital of Georgetown. This donation was received through CIOG’s strong relationship with Muslims Organisations in Kuwait. “It is unfortunate that the Ministry of Health has not been able to get this unit operational as yet because we were hoping to ask the same organization for a donation of a Kidney Dialysis Machine.” Guyana does not have a dialysis machine for patients suffering from kidney problems.

The CIOG operates a transportation service for the burial of Muslims and expect to expand this service to a fully operational funeral home that will cater for both Muslims and Non-Muslims. From speaking to many Guyanese one get a sense that this has been of great help to them especially the very poor Muslims. have always tried our best to ensure that any Muslim who passes away at the Palms or the Georgetown Hospital and Muslims who do not have anyone is buried free of cost. Their burial and hearse committee continues to take care of many Muslims and provide an excellent service that is more economical than all the existing funeral homes. CIOG provides the transportation, the cotton, the boxes, and perform the Ghusl for the poor. It is very economical for those who are poor and for those who can afford to pay it is more than half the price they would pay at the funeral homes in Guyana. It is the hope of the CIOG to put up a separate facility to do all of this in the future.

The CIOG conducts two programmes per week in the prison. It also has a prison committee petition for parole of prisoners, and has had discussion with the Minister of Home Affairs - Mr. Ronald Gajraj and indicated their willingness to assist in providing more skills training opportunities for those who are in prison. This will make it easier for many of these persons to find employment when they are released from prison. One is the Friday Jumma prayer and the other is a programme to assist prisoners to improve their secular education. The CIOG has also helped prisoners to pay for fees to take their CXC exams and complete their secondary education.

During the month of Ramazan the CIOG feature articles and news relating to this tradition in Al Bayan, its official publication and daily newspapers in Guyana. Like other Islamic organisations in Guyana, they also sponsor radio and TV programmes during this important month in the Islamic calendar. Funds are collected from Guyanese Muslims in Canada and the United States, and then Zakaat, Fidya and Sadqatul Fitr are distributed to about seventy-four Masjids and Muslim prisoners during the month of Ramazan. In one year for
example they claim that a total of 3770 persons benefited, thirty-seven orphans, and approximately fifty-two Masjids were visited during Ramazan. For Eid Ul Azah like all masjids, and organisations, they have special TV and radio programmes and sponsor ads in newspapers. Qurbaani meat is distributed though out the country. Every Muslim household rich and poor receives Qurbaani meat, however many mosques are independent of the CIOG and make their own arrangement to distribute Qurbaani meat. It is also disputed whether the CIOG support all mosques and distribute Qurbaani meat countrywide.

The CIOG has numerous programmes to help Muslims and non-Muslims. Their feeding programme is at the Bourda Market daily. Their medical programme headed by Dr. Bacchus; provide medical aid to poor Muslims who can’t afford the fees of private doctors. In one year (1998) 700 patients were provided with free medication, consultation and treated for other related problems. The Medical Committee handled twenty-six circumcisions to poor Muslims. The Legal Committee of the CIOG provides legal assistance to Muslims. Ombudsman S.Y Mohammed heads it. Muslims are provided with free legal advice and assistance with the preparation of legal documents. The CIOG also runs a cemetery operation, which is geared to the cleaning up of the Muslim section of the Le-Repentir Cemetery. This venture included the cleaning of drains, weeding of grass, cleaning of bushes and construction of three bridges. According to the CIOG the project is the beginning of a series, where CIOG has undertaken to beautify the surrounding and simultaneously fulfilling our moral duties towards our deceased relatives.

LINKS WITH THE BODY POLITICS

The dawa spread by foreign lecturers from Pakistan, Egypt, USA, South Africa, and Syria among other countries has brought the local Muslims into the global-politic. They were affected by the anti-colonial movements of India and Pakistan in 1947, and more recently the conflicts in Palestine, Chechnya, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir which led to identifying with the global umma. The President of the CIOG has met with Muslims the Arab/Islamic World, and the Muslims of the Caribbean, Suriname and French Guyana and the bond between the local Muslims and the Umma have continue to grow. These developments coupled with mass-media may have led to a sense of pan-Islamism. The CIOG hopes to use its contacts in Islamic countries in the Middle East, Far East and Africa to promote trade and investment opportunities and to get markets for Guyanese products in these countries. The CIOG is carry out many projects in Guyana on behalf of, International Islamic Charitable Organisation (IICO), Kuwait, Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Saudi Arabia, World Assembly of Muslim youths (WAMY), Saudi Arabia. (Training Camps), Muslim World League, Saudi Arabia. (Islamic Propagation), Saudi Embassy, Washington D.C. (Islamic Propagation), Al-Azhar University, Egypt. (Scholarships). Discussion was also help with Mr. Waleed Ad-Dyel who is a member of the Chamber of Commerce of Riyadh of Saudi Arabia to bring a team of Saudi Arabian businessmen to Guyana.

CIOG has maintained an active role in the politics at home and abroad. It has been a champion of Islamic causes throughout the world. It has brought to attention the plight of Muslims in
Palestine, Chechnya, Kosova, Bosnia, and Kashmir. On many occasion the organization has called for Guyana to sever ties with Israel because of its occupations of Arab land and gross human rights violations against Palestinians. The CIOG following the advice of Dr. Kettani, a specialist in the Muslim minority affairs, lobbied the government of Guyana of former President Hoyte to join the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). President Hoyte was committed to join the OIC in 1992 but in that year he was defeated at the polls by the PPP.

However, this was not a set back because the CIOG pushed the idea to the new Prime Minister of Guyana, Mr. Sam Hinds who had reservation about joining the OIC which may have strained relationship with India. He felt that it would have offset the balance of Guyana’s close ties to India. But after learning about the nature of the OIC and India’s own quest to join that body, the Prime Minister took the idea to President Cheddi Jagan. Under the former President of Guyana, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, Guyana became a permanent observer of the OIC in 1997 and in 1999 became the 57th member of the OIC. The CIOG vehemently deny that it has been pocketed by the ruling government. According to its CEO, AL Haj Fazeel Ferouz, their relationship with the government is based on mutual respect. “We have meetings with the President and many Ministers to discuss different problems that come up from time and needs to be addressed.”

Ferouz says that the CIOG lobbies for “our community whenever they (the people) come to us with problems.” And what have they gotten for the local Muslims, “lands for masjids, land for the poor, money to assist people to go abroad, duty free for items for Masjids, we look into claims of wrongful dismissals, or a Muslim being discriminated against, Alhamdolilah, we try.” When asked about future plans of the CIOG, Ferouz revealed that they are actively looking to open a library at their new secretariat, a bookstore in each county of Guyana, T.V and radio recording studio and eventually a T.V and radio station, an Islamic University that will cover both secular and Islamic subjects, a Muslim Credit Union- which will be the forerunner to the Islamic Bank and some economic projects to assist in funding their activities.

 Ambassador from Muslim countries upon presenting their credentials in Georgetown has always called on the CIOG. Mr. Muhammad Kashif Azzadi, the Iranian Ambassador to Guyana, held a meeting with CIOG members, during which he lauded the CIOG's Community Services in Guyana. He expressed his willingness to assist CIOG in economic projects. Pakistani, Egyptian, Iranian, Malaysian, and Kuwaiti, Syrian diplomats have all visited the head quarters of the CIOG whenever they are in Guyana. In addition, the CIOG 7. Dr. Ali Mazuri was invited by CIOG to deliver a lecture. CIOG has established branches in Miami, New York and Toronto and is a registered organization in the USA. The CIOG holds meetings with various ambassadors in Guyana. Most recently four meetings were held between the CIOG and the Ambassador of USA, Brazil, Venezuela and Suriname to discuss ways to end Guyana's political, social and economic unrest. The CIOG has also been meeting with the Private Sector Commission, the Guyana Council of Churches and other civic bodies with a view of promoting racial harmony, respect and tolerance. Public lectures dealing with topics such as unity and tolerance have been held.

CIOG’s Haji Ferouz was part of the late President Dr. Cheddi Jagan delegation during his 1996 tour of the Middle East. In fact, he worked behind the scenes to execute this successful tour. Ferouz with Dr.Jagan had a meeting with an official of the Islamic Development Bank of Saudi Arabia. This meeting took place in Bahrain. As part of the presidential
delegation, Haj Ferouz visited Bahrain, Syria, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In Kuwait, the Guyanese leader held talks with Kuwaiti leader, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Al-Ahwad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Those countries, have agreed to send trade and investment missions to Guyana. Kuwait has lived up to its promise. In 2004 the CIOG facilitated a meeting between President Bharrat Jagdeo and the Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Kuwait, Bader-Al Mutairi. The two discussed key areas of cooperation in which their respective governments can be engaged and the fostering of amicable relations between the two countries. President of the CIOG Fazeel Ferouz, CEO Moen ul Hack and Kerry Arthur, an official from the education department, accompanied Al Mutairi to meet the President of Guyana. Mr. Feroze stated that the Under-Secretary’s visit was made in return for many he has made to that country.

**ISLAMIC BANK**

The CIOG is affiliated with the Islamic Development Bank (ISDB). And now that Guyana is a member of the OIC, full membership of the ISDB is possible at national level, which will benefit the entire nation. CIOG has been in the forefront in this endeavor to forge strong ties with the IDB. It is their opinion that Guyana and its people will benefit if Islamic Banks and Islamic Insurance Companies invest in Guyana. CIOG has already draw funds from the ISDB for projects in Guyana. The late President has asked CIOG to request the Islamic Development Bank to send a team to Guyana to have discussions with the Government, and the Private Sector on Islamic Banking and Insurance. However, due to the death of Dr. Jagan and the unstable political situation in Guyana in 1997 delayed these negotiations. CIOG later held discussion with Mrs. Janet Jagan to follow up these discussions with Islamic Banks and to arrange for officials from the Islamic Banks to come visit Guyana. CIOG has written the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah and a team from the CIOG and the private sector commission was planning to visit Jeddah to hold discussions with the ISDB.

The CIOG is very keen in having Guyana join the Islamic Development Bank. The CIOG views contact with the Islamic Development Bank as very crucial as it will enable them to get the necessary expertise to venture in many areas using the systems of financing that are permitted under Islamic law. Muslim organizations cannot participate in programmes that charge interest for it is forbidden in Islam. “We are also of the opinion that the interest rate being charged by most of the financial institutions to small business and in the micro-credit programmes are far too excessive.” In the interest of the nation CIOG says, “These rates range from 20% to 40%. We call on the Government to intervene and reduce this high rate of interest if we are to stimulate the economy of our country. These high interest rates are stifling the poor especially women's group, the youth and the unemployed.” The CIOG has been urging Organizations like C.I.D.A. and U.N.D.P. to make available loans to Muslims using the systems permitted by Islamic law. “These development organizations can get knowledge of these systems through their international networks, very easily from the Muslim countries in Africa, Middle East or the Far East.” The CIOG has plans to hold discussions with C.I.D.A. and U.N.D.P. on these; the outcome of such is yet to be determined. Due to this factor that is that programmes in the Micro Credit have a component of interest involved, the CIOG has been forced to curtail its activities in Micro Credit and extending loans to poor Muslims to build their homes.
Conclusion

There is lack of cooperation among Islamic Organisations in Guyana, however each organisation has served a specific purpose. Hifaz, MYL and the Anjuman have engaged its opponents in a scholarly discourse and the conflict over these kept traditional practices have subsided. They have also led the way in forging ties with the Islamic communities of Suriname, the Netherlands, Pakistan and Trinidad and Tobago. GIT has been aggressive in its dawah and education drive and has open many institutions to teach Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims a like. Many of their schools offer Islamic and secular education to Muslim students and today in Guyana Muslim parents how have an option of sending their children to Islamic schools. GIT has also opened the hinder land of Guyana to Islam by extending their dawah dive to indigenous communities. The CIOG on the other hand, through its dynamic Zakaat programme have supported the orphans, widows and elders of society who are most at risk and at the same time lobbied government for the social and economic benefits of the local Muslims. They are recognized unofficially as the voice of the Muslim Guyana in Guyana and have negotiated internationally on behalf of the local Muslims. The Muslim community’s commitment to charitable work in communities across Guyana has earned them great admiration.

Rivalry among the CIOG, GIT, HIFAZ and GUSIA, the leading organisations has stymied the full development of this community socially, economically and politically. These organizations seem preoccupied, competing and condemning each other, and at the center of the debate are questions surrounding practices such as Tazeem, Milad, recitation Qaseeda and the use of Urdu traditions that came from the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent from the early Muslims in 1838 to 1916 which are branded as bidahs. There has been some call for a Muslim political party, an idea supported by many organisations. These divisions expose the weaknesses of Muslims among the non-Muslims and this has had lasting effect on Guyana’s main political parties, the PPP and the PNC both are ethnically polarized among Blacks and East Indians. They are comfortable accommodating the Muslims with token gestures- appeasing and pacifying them. It seems like everyone wants their own organisations and mosques, and the learned Muslims who return from abroad seem to cause more frictions. “The Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (CIOG) president Fazeel Ferouz is warning that there is division and disorder that affects the public image of Muslims and Islam in Guyana and also the correctness and validity of worship and cohesion based on time-honoured devotional practices.”

While the Muslims have a good chance because of their numerical numbers to gain up to seven seats in Parliament, everyone knows that that will never happen because they are busy fighting about “tazeem, Milad, Miraj, Urdu, Dua and the recitation of Qaseeda.” The latter are the “devotional practices” that Mr. Fazeel Ferouz is referring to. On the international scene the mushrooming of Islamic organisations in Guyana may have led to pan-Islamism. Today in Guyana, Islamic organisations are talking about unity and tolerance which may lead to a new beginning of more ambitious projects that they envisioned.
NOTES

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16. Ibid.
17. [Guyana United Islamic Anjuman (GUSIA)], available on line at: http://www.gusia.com
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28. Ibid.
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41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
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84. CIOG’s Auditor’s Report 1998, Georgetown, Guyana
85. Newspaper
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Religious Affiliation in Guyana, 2004

Islam 15%
Others 2%
Christianity

Source: http://www.escapeartist.com/guyana/map.htm
Author’s Note:

This is an ongoing project to document the history and politics of Islamic organisations in Guyana. A version of this paper has been accepted for publication in the spring of 2005 and is being edited by a Pakistani who holds a PHD. Over five years ago I commenced this project and the findings maybe not pleases all. Every organisation discussed in this study would like to look good but that’s not the objective of my paper. I am not affiliated with any of these organisations and do not speak on their behalf. The realities are harsh and as an “insider,” a Muslim, I have strong opinions which I tried to suppress in order to add objectivity to this research. Sources of my information are field research (interviews), Emails, Flyers, Brochures, Newspaper Articles (Guyana Chronicle, British Guiana’s Daily Chronicle and Stabroek News), the Guyana Muslim Journal, Islam Guyana, Al Bayan (CIOG’s publications) Websites (GIT and Sadr), and Guyanese Muslim Yahoo Group (CIOG, GIT, Hifaz/MLY and GIF participated). In the past, I tried contacting GIT and once visited their headquarter with little success, however, other sources compensated for my not being granted personal interviews. In November of 2004, its new leader, Wazir Baksh invited me to Guyana for a “face to face” meeting. The old website of the GIT provided a wealth of information especially on the discourse of bidahs or innovations of the traditionalists; however that information have been removed and the new or updated site reflect the new Murshid’s emphasis on unity and tolerance and GIT’s ambitious projects. When money and time permits I shall take his offer. Here I would also like to make a statement about the source of my figure on the Muslim population of Guyana. That figure was taken from the US State Department latest Post Report. It replaces the old 9% figure which has never been revised since the 1950’s, and of course there are margins of error. Many have converted to Islam from the Christian (Afro-Guyanese) and Hindu communities and a handful in the Hinterlands are accepting Islam.