

# Indian Muslims in South Africa: Continuity, Change and Disjuncture, 1860-2000

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Islam is a minority religion in South Africa. According to the 1996 census there were 553,585 Muslims out of a total population of forty million. Indian Muslims make up one of the two largest sub-groups, the other being 'Malay'<sup>1</sup>. The majority of Indian Muslims are confined to KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng, while most Malays live in the Western Cape. This has resulted in deep differences of history, culture and religious traditions. In post-apartheid South Africa Islam has moved from the private domain to public spaces. The most conspicuous illustration is the militant activities of the Cape-based group, People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD). Notwithstanding the differences among Muslims, there has been a tendency on the part of many commentators to lump Muslims together<sup>2</sup>. This paper will focus on Indian Muslims, both because their experience is different to that of Malay Muslims and because Cape Muslims have been relatively well researched in comparison to their Natal counterparts. As a result of the efforts of Tayob (1999), Davids (1980), Jeppe (1995) and da Costa (1994), great progress has been made in charting the history of Cape Muslims.

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<sup>1</sup> There were 246,433 Malay and 236,315 Indian Muslims according to the last census in 1996. While research has shown that there is no 'Malay community' (Jeppe 1987) and the term does not have a foundation in social science it is used here because it has been widely internalised by most South Africans to refer to 'Coloured' Muslims of the Cape.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Chiara Carter, writing in the *Mail & Guardian* (5-11 February 1999) on the 'Holy War for the hearts of SA Muslims', stated: 'South Africa's Muslim community is influenced by events abroad and a romanticisation of the international Islamic struggle .... Radical Islam has found fertile ground in the power vacuum .... Unease at the growth of American cultural and economic dominance, admiration for Libya and the early theocracy in Iran, and the formation of militias to fight in the Bosnian civil war have influenced local politics. This fuels youthful idealism which, if not channelled constructively, might pose a problem to the state'.

Although Indian Muslims have had a very visible presence in Natal since 1860 apart from monographs and a few works concerned with theological debates, there is no historical or sociological analysis of Muslim society. This is probably due to the fact that under apartheid they fell under the umbrella group 'Indian' and have been studied as part of an oppressed Indian community (Kuper 1960; Meer 1969). Recent studies by Mahida (1993) and Tayob (1995; 1999) have begun to fill the vacuum. Although detailed chronology is important, the limitation in Mahida's work is that he provides information on developments on a year-to-year basis without contextualising these. While Tayob's 1995 study is important and illuminating, its focus is narrow. He examines the rise and role of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), an important reformist organisation in the 1970s and 1980s, but only one of many groups contesting for support among Muslims. Similarly, Tayob's 1999 study focuses primarily on the discursive effects of sermons in two mosques, one in the Cape and another in Brits, a town in Gauteng. While stimulating and informative, this study does not examine Muslims in Natal, where the majority of Indian Muslims live. The void in the historiography is reflected in the fact that an authoritative survey of Islam in Africa devotes no more than a paragraph on South Africa's Indian Muslims, pointing out that they have made enormous progress as a result of close links with Ismaili Shias in East Africa (Hiskett 1994). Not only does the brevity fail to do adequate justice to the complex history of Indian Muslims, but also is also inaccurate because there are no links to Ismaili Shias. A more recent article by Schell (2000) is equally superficial and inadequate.

This article has relied on a wide range of sources, including archival material, especially for the earlier periods, newspapers, particularly Indian and Muslim newspapers, pamphlets and other ephemerals, and interviews. Its premise is that the beliefs and traditions of Indian Muslims are not uniform and timeless. As Kramer (2000:57) has argued, historians should not see Islam and Muslims as a:

distinct and homogeneous entity that is essentially defined by normative texts, i.e. the Qurán as divine word and the Sunna, or tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. For the unreformed orientalist, Muslims are sufficiently defined by their being Muslim. Little does it matter whether they live in Kuala Lumpur, Cairo or Karachi. They are overdetermined by Islam .... Scholars now insist on the openness of historical processes that are neither linear nor homogeneous, focusing on countervailing forces to megatrends such as industrialization, modernization or globalization. They highlight intra-cultural variation rather than uniformity, intra-societal conflict rather than harmony, fragmentation rather than coherence.

This article will explore change, conflict and choices made by Indian Muslims as they set about establishing Islam in a colonial setting, the process of negotiation that this entailed with non-Muslim Indians, whites and Africans: divergent religious practices and rituals; and the impact of changing political and economic conditions on religious beliefs, practices and identities.

## **Mosques, Mawlana and Muharram: Islam in Colonial Natal 1860-1910**

The majority of Indian Muslims arrived in Natal between 1860 and 1911 as contract indentured workers or pioneer traders. Indentured migration lasted between 1860 and 1911, by which time 152,641 Indians had come to Natal. Approximately 7-10 per cent (10-15,000) were Muslim<sup>3</sup>. The indentured Muslim population was characterised by diversity of religious tradition, caste, language, ethnicity and culture as migrants were drawn from a range of ecologies and modes of production. Traders from Gujarat on the west coast of India began arriving in Natal from the mid-1870s at their own expense and of their own volition. The majority of traders were Muslims, either Memons from Porbandar in Kathiawar or Sunni Bohras from Surat who spoke Gujarati. While the exact number of traders is not certain, the Wragg Commission approximated their number to be around one thousand in 1887 while Maureen Swan (1985:2) estimated that the number of Indian traders averaged around 2,000 between 1890-1910.

Indian Muslims were a minority within a minority. According to the 1904 Census, of 100,918 Indians in Natal, 9,992 (9.901 per cent) were Muslim, the overwhelming majority (72 per cent) of whom were male. There was a great degree of internal differentiation among Natal Muslims. While the most obvious distinction was between traders and indentured migrants, neither traders nor indentured workers comprised a homogenous group. Muslims traders were incorrectly called 'Arabs' because most adopted the Middle Eastern mode of dress. They themselves emphasised this distinction to obtain equality with whites on the basis of Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation that asserted the equality of British subjects (Bhana & Brain 1990:65). This class distinction among Indians was evident to the authorities. In a confidential report to the Durban Town Council (DTC) in 1885, police inspector

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<sup>3</sup> Details were very kindly supplied by Professor Tom Bennett and Professor Joy Brain who are compiling an inventory of every indentured Indian. This figure is an approximation as it is made up of those who listed their caste as Muslim, castes that were entirely Muslim and names that suggested that the immigrants were Muslims. Of 130,000 immigrants analysed, there were 7874 Muslims, comprising of 4958 males, 2418 females, 233 girls and 248 boys.

Richard Alexander (1885) pointed out that the 'Arabs will only associate with Indians so far as trade compels them to'. In fact, Gujarati Muslims had more in common with Gujarati Hindus than they had with indentured Muslims. George Mutukistna, a free Indian, testified before the Wragg Commission that 'caste feeling... is kept up by the Indian merchants, who think themselves better because they are rich and think that, by observing caste distinctions, they can set themselves apart from the Natal Indian people' (Wragg Commission 1885:393). Muslim traders considered themselves 'high-class'. They were largely endogamous and did not intermarry with Muslims from an indentured background that they disparagingly referred to as 'Calcutteas', Calcutta being one of the ports from which indentured Indians departed for Natal.

### **Indentured Indians and Islam**

In terms of the contract that they signed, indentured workers agreed to work for five years for the employer to whom they were allocated. Swan (1985) and Henning (1993) have chronicled the appalling conditions that indentured workers were subjected to. Swan concludes that 'there is a solid weight of evidence in the Protector's<sup>4</sup> files to suggest that overwork, malnourishment, and squalid living conditions formed the pattern of daily life for most agricultural workers' (1985:26). The experience of indenture militated against maintenance of culture, religion and caste. The long wait at the depot in India, the cramped journey to Natal, and delays in Natal while immigrants were inspected, would have made it difficult to observe the many everyday rules and rituals that are part of Islam (Buijs 1992:7). In the absence of oral or written histories it is difficult to be precise about the form and content of Islam among indentured Muslims. However there is evidence in the files of the Protector that on an individual level, many Muslims displayed 'Islamic awareness'.

The most important 'religious' activity of indentured Muslims was the Muharram festival. It was held on the tenth of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar, to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, who was killed in battle on this day. Hindus also participated in large numbers. Deputy Protector Dunning noted in his 1910 Annual Report that the festival is 'always well attended by Hindu indentured workers although it is a Mohammedan occasion of mourning'. In fact, the three days annual leave to which indentured Indians were entitled by law was granted to all Indians during this festival. Preparations began at least two weeks prior to the festival as bamboo and other

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<sup>4</sup> Following complaints by returning Indians about their treatment, a Protector of Indian Immigrants was appointed in 1874. Indentured Indians could lodge their complaints to him. In practice he was powerless since he was an employee of Whites.

materials were collected to build the *tazzia*, a miniature mausoleum constructed in wood and covered in coloured paper and gold and silver tinsel. On the tenth, groups of people pulled *tazzias* by hand, all the while singing songs to the memory of Hussain, beating on drums, dancing wildly or carrying out stick fights. There was always a strong police presence because the festival often ended with the spilling of blood. Despite strong disapproval from the local state as well as middle class Indians, Muharram remained a central part of the Islam of indentured workers and their descendants. Muharram provided an opportunity for developing and expressing a self-conscious local community identity. But Muharram also signalled the participation of Indians in a larger collective by drawing them together, and played an important role in fostering a wider common identity, 'Indian-ness', in relation to whites and Africans.

Social and economic conditions would have made it difficult for indentured Muslims to fulfil the many requirements of Islam. For example, because of the shortage of Muslim women the Protector registered 115 marriages between Muslims and Hindus between 1872 and 1887 (Wragg Commission 261). Muslims and Hindus lived on the same plantations, shared the same housing, experienced the same difficulties and reacted in the same manner to oppressive social and economic conditions. The files of Resident Magistrates and the Protector are replete with examples of Muslims engaging in crime, desertion, rape, adultery, and so on. Indentured Muslims were widely dispersed, hence the task of establishing mosques, madrasahs and other aspects of institutional Islam were difficult given the long hours, oppressive conditions and meagre wages. The files of the Protector make no reference to Muslims fasting, praying or observing the festivals of Eid. In the absence of contemporary records or oral history it is not possible to construct with certainty these aspects of the indentured Muslim experience in Natal.

The arrival of Soofie Saheb in 1895 had important consequences for indentured Muslims and their descendants. Soofie Saheb, full name Shah Goolam Mohamed, traced his genealogy to Abu Bakr Siddique, the first Caliph of Islam (Soofie & Soofie 1999:45). Soofie Saheb was born in 1850 in Ratnagir, about 200 kilometres from Bombay. He studied under his father and qualified as an *alim* (scholar of Islamic law). When his father died in 1872, Soofie Saheb was appointed to succeed him. In 1892 he became the *murid* of Habib Ali Shah, a Sufi in the Chisti order (Abbas Rizvi 1978:114). In 1894 Ali Shah sent Soofie Saheb to South Africa to propagate the Chisti *Silsila* (tradition). According to oral tradition, shortly after he arrived in Durban in 1895, Soofie Saheb proceeded to the Brook Street cemetery where he meditated until he located the grave of a 'holy man', who was given the title 'Badsha Pir' ('king of the guides'), around which a tomb was built (Soofie & Soofie 1999:56). Despite Badsha Peer's underdeveloped biographical profile and unclear biological genealogy his tomb continues to attract large numbers of Muslims and Hindus who believe that praying in the presence of a saint was 'much more likely to

be efficacious' (Robinson 1983:189). The promptness with which Soofie Saheb erected the shrine is consonant with Sufi practice. As Bayly has pointed out, migrating devotees build 'new shrines, inspired by the belief that each was an equally potent repository of barakat'. Migration results in a 'widening and intensification of the original cult tradition, and certainly not a turn towards a more 'universal' or transcendent faith devoid of shrines, magical intercessory power and all other features of the pir cult (Bayly 1989:93f).

Soofie Saheb purchased land in Riverside on the banks of the Umgeni River where he built a mosque, khanqah (teaching hospice), madrassah, cemetery, orphanage and residential home on this site. Between 1898 and his death in 1911 Soofie Saheb built mosques, madrassahs and cemeteries all over Natal: in Springfield and Westville in 1904, in Overport in 1905, in Kenville and Sherwood in 1906, in Tongaat in 1907, Ladysmith and Colenso in 1908 and Verulam and Pietermaritzburg in 1909 (Mahida 1993:44). These were situated mainly in rural areas and provided access to large numbers of working class Muslims. Soofie Saheb was instrumental in raising the levels of Islamic knowledge and consciousness among indentured Muslims and their descendants. As a result of Soofie Saheb the practice of pir-muridi became an established part of Indian Islam in Natal. Local Muslims believed that Badsha Peer and Soofie Saheb had special attributes of divinity and could bless the childless with children, cure diseases, prevent calamity and so on. Soofie Saheb also organised activities throughout the lunar year. The birth and death of the Prophet and great saints were commemorated at the shrine of Badsha Peer. Soofie Saheb's methodology was one adopted by religious leaders elsewhere in India who accommodated themselves 'to local needs and customs... gradually building a position from which they might draw people into an Islamic milieu, and slowly educating them in Islamic behaviour' (Robinson 1983:192). Soofie Saheb created an environment that resonated with the beliefs of his constituency. It was on the basis of these common practices that an Islamic tradition eventually took shape amongst working class Muslims in Natal.

## **The Islam of traders**

The situation was different with traders who set about building mosques shortly after their arrival in Natal. The Jumua Musjid in Grey Street, built in 1881, remains the largest mosque in the southern hemisphere. It was built on the initiative of Aboobakr Amod, a Memon from Porbander who settled in Durban in 1874. The Jumua Musjid has come to be known among Muslims as the 'Memon Mosque' because the majority trustees have been Memons who financed the building and upkeep of the mosque. Since 1905 trustees have comprised of five Memons, two Surtis, one Kokan and one 'colonial-born', that is, a descendent of indentured Indians (Sulliman 1985:10). This

is an indication of the depth of ethnic and caste differences among Muslims. Sectionalism explains the decision of Surti traders to build a separate mosque in 1885, just half a kilometre away in West Street (Jamal 1987:13). The first trustees were Ahmed Mohammed Tilly and Hoosen Meeran who, as per the constitution, were 'natives from Rander, Surat, in the Presidency of Bombay'. This indicates the corporate outlook of Surti's<sup>5</sup>. The amended constitution of 1899 stipulated that the mosque was for the use of 'Sunni Mahomedan worshippers from the District of Surat'. It broadened the base from which trustees could be drawn. While at least two had to be from each of Rander and Kathor, other trustees could originate from other parts of Surat so they long as they were Sunni Muslims, 'a storekeeper having a business in the Colony of Natal or connected with any such business in the capacity of General Manager' and had subscribed at least £25 pounds to the Mosque Trust<sup>6</sup>. Imams were appointed by mosque committees. As their paid employees they led the prayer and taught Islam but exercised limited authority over the Muslim community.

In addition to language and culture, religious practices also divided Memons and Surtis. Memons placed great emphasis on visitation of shrines. In India, those with wealth visited Baghdad to pray at the shrine of Abdul Qadir Jailani (d. 1165), considered the greatest saint in Islam. Those who could not go to Baghdad visited the shrines of Shah Alam at Ahmedabad or Miran Sayad Ali Dattar at Unja, 50 miles north of Ahmedabad<sup>7</sup>. According to an elder Memon, their strong faith in pirs is an expression of gratitude to saints for converting them to Islam (Moomal 1996:vi). Memons trace their origins to Sayad Kadiri of Baghdad, fifth in descent from Abdul Kadir Jailani. They believe that Kadiri was ordered in a miraculous dream in 1421 to set sail for Sindh and guide its people to Islam, and that this blessing is responsible for their success in trade (*Gazetteer* 1899:50f). While Surti's were also Sunnis of the Hanafi inclination, contemporary reports in India suggest that the influence of nineteenth century reform movements in India were filtering down to them. An 1899 report noted that they were 'rapidly shedding remnants of Hindu practices as a result of the activity of missionaries' (*Gazetteer* 1899:61). They 'were transferring their

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<sup>5</sup> Deeds of Transfer Constituting the Juma Musjid Sunat Jamat Amjuman Islam, Durban, 25 November 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Deeds Constituting the Surti anjuman Juma Masged, 16.1.1899.

<sup>7</sup> *Gazetteer*, 1899:56. Muin-ud-din was one of the panj pir ('five pirs') who are considered the five great Chisti Shaykhs; the other four being Nasir al-din, Nizam al-din, Farid al-din and Qutb al-din. Muslims from the Chisti sufi order from all over India visited Ajmer from the fourteenth century even though this was a dangerous undertaking because of the terrain and danger of armed robbery. Most of these pilgrims came dressed in pilgrim garb (ihram-l-ziyarat) and a few even professed bay'at at the grave even though the saint was dead (Digby 1983:97).

reverence to the new preachers who have become the leaders in religious matters'; women were changing their dress to 'Muslim fashion'; there were fewer public dinners; less extravagant expenditure on marriage, death and other ceremonies; and music was no longer played at weddings<sup>8</sup>. The Islam of traders centred on the mosque and two festivals of Eid. Aboobakr Amod told the Wragg Commission that 'the two Ids of Ramadan and Hajj' were the 'only' festivals observed by Muslims and that these days should be set aside as public holidays (Wragg Commission 389). The boisterous festival of Muharram did not have the same importance for traders as it did for working class Muslims. In comparison, Eid was a sober and temperate affair.

### Race, class and religion

Natal's Muslims developed along separate trajectories. Traders did not attempt to forge a broader Muslim community on the basis of Islam. Their concern was to protect their economic and political rights in Natal and they forged class alliances with Hindu traders who were similarly affected. Indian traders who threatened their dominance of local trade aroused the hostility of Natal's whites (Wragg Commission 131). Once Natal achieved self-government in 1893 laws were passed to regulate Indian access to trading licences, deny Indians the municipal vote and control Indian entry into Natal. Merchants formed the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in August 1894, whose strategy was primarily constitutional, dominated Indian politics. Each of the NIC's six presidents between 1894 and 1913 was a prominent Muslim merchant (Bhana 1997:12). The NIC was a tool of the Indian elite and concentrated on protecting their economic and political interests. While Memon and Surti disagreed in religious matters, they worked closely in political affairs as a result of their common class interests.

Politically and socially, Muslim merchants mingled with their Hindu counterparts rather than working class Muslims. For example, Muslims attended the middle-class Hindu festival of Diwali. In 1907 Hindu merchants arranged a Diwali celebration at the premises of a Muslim, Abdool Latif, which was attended by non-Hindus like Sheth Rustomjee and Dada Osman (*Indian Opinion* 16 November 1907). In 1911 Muslims like Dawad Mahomed, M.C. Anglia, and Ismail Gora attended Diwali celebrations. Mahomed considered the unity and 'happy gatherings' between Hindus and Muslims 'an excellent thing' (*Indian Opinion* 21 October 1911). When a dinner was held to bid farewell to Omar Jhaveri, a Muslim intimately involved in local politics, who was departing to India on account of ill-health, the reception was attended by Muslim, Hindu and Christian elites. In his speech, A Christopher 'bore testimony to his

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<sup>8</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Musalmans and Parsis* Vol. IX, Part II. (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1899), 61.



(Mr. Jhaveri's) catholicity of spirit in the community life of the Indian in this country, making no distinction against any of his countrymen on the grounds of religion and working for the upliftment of them all' (*Indian Opinion* 2 September 1914). The relationship between Muslim traders and workers was mainly economic, causing the 'African Chronicle' (14 October 1914) to chide merchants for 'hugging to themselves the delusion that their fate is not bound up with the ordinary labourer.... Many are indifferent to the sufferings of the labouring class'.

A similar tendency developed among working-class Hindus and Muslims who shared a history of indentured labour. Both were recruited to work on plantations, came from the same districts of India, spoke the same languages, shared local traditions in India, and had similar backgrounds as peasants, tenant farmers, artisans and agricultural workers. In Natal, the behaviour of working class Muslims was not much different from that of their Hindu counterparts. The files of the Protector of Indian Immigrants and Magistrates' Reports abound with examples of Muslims guilty of assault, rape and other crimes. The list is endless and illustrates the fact that traders and indentured Muslims came for different reasons, from different social and economic backgrounds, and established themselves in different milieus in the local colonial setting, which impacted on their understanding and observance of Islam. Indian Muslim society in Natal was dominated by elites and riven by cleavages due to class, the urban/rural dichotomy, language, variance in modes of migration, and region of origin. There were fundamental differences in practice, belief and definitions of 'true' Islam. The identities of Muslims were left in tension because of the difficult to assert a transcendent Islamic identity.

While Indian Muslims had 'hybrid' identities relating to language, class, ethnicity and religion, the most important identity in the political realm was race. The emergent white state felt economically, socially and politically threatened by Indians, who were consequently treated legislatively as a homogenous entity, separated into a discrete racial category and subdued on the basis of that category. Use of the appellation 'Indians' inferred that the attribute 'Indianness' united them as a collectivity in opposition to whites and Africans. According to Bhana, in the 'unique circumstances in which the notion of 'Indianness' became crystallised in South Africa, it became racialized in the creation of White supremacist rule' (Bhana<sup>9</sup> 1997: 100). Indian community formation was a complex construction historically fashioned out of disparate peoples. It was discursively constituted by struggles among Indians, and between them and whites and Africans. The privileged economic position of Indian traders was neutralised by racist policies that placed them in the same situation as workers. Politically, this forced a 'made-in-Natal' consciousness, a fact emphasised by Imam Bawazeer, a Muslim priest, when he was departing for India in 1915:

We are all Indians in the eyes of the Europeans in this country. We have never drawn distinctions between Mahomedans and Hindus in public matters. Mahomedans, like the Hindus, look upon India as our Motherland, and so is it a matter of fact, and when it is a matter of serving India, we must set aside any differences and be united (*Indian Opinion* 3 December 1915).

### **Urbanisation, poverty and community: Pre-apartheid South Africa, 1910-1948**

The four decades after 1910 were witness to important developments. These included the rapid urbanisation of Indians, extensive poverty among them, formation of education and social welfare institutions by traders to take care of their working-class counterparts, and increasing hostility by the state. The overwhelming majority of Indians remained Hindu. According to the 1936 Population Census, for example, 81% of Natal's Indians were Hindu and 14% Muslim. In Durban 70,272 (79.64%) Indians were Hindus and 13,009 (14.74%) were Muslims out of a total Indian population of 88,226 in 1946 (SAIRR 1946). It is therefore difficult to separate the Muslim experience from the Indian one. By and large, Muslims existed as Indians; being Indian was the primary identity in the public sphere.

The availability of African labour rendered Indians superfluous in farming, mining and the public sector. When the Indian Legislative Council banned indentured emigration to Natal from July 1911, employers turned to African labour and the numbers of Indians dropped on Natal's mines, the railways, in general farming and on sugar estates. This spurred the urban-ward migration of dispensable Indian labour. In Durban, for example, the number of Indians increased from 17,015 in 1911 to 123,165 in 1949. As a percentage of Durban's population Indians increased from 23 to 33 per cent (Housing Survey 1952:35). Unemployment and low pay resulted in wide-scale poverty among Indians. While the depression of 1929-1933 was a significant cause, the situation was exacerbated by the White Labour Policy, which resulted in a drop in Indian employment in industry and the municipality. The majority of Muslims, being descendents of indentured Indians, experienced difficult conditions in the urban milieu. Extensive poverty was a pervasive feature of Indian life in Durban. A 1941 survey found that 36% of Indian families in Clairwood were in debt, 38% barely made ends meet and only 26% were able to save money (Sykes 1941:54). The University of Natal reported in 1943/44 that 70.6% of Indians were living below the poverty datum line and that 40% were destitute. A six-year study of the clothing industry reported in 1944 that 90% of Indians suffered from malnutrition (*Daily News* 8 June 1944). Poverty manifested itself in the diseases that afflicted Indians. For example, G.H. Gunn, Durban's Medical Officer of Health, reported in 1935 that higher disease and death rates among Indians were due to the 'low standard of living conditions which poverty imposes upon those sections of the population: ...

slum housing, overcrowding and defective nutrition combine to create a favourable climate for the spread of disease (*Indian Opinion* 31 January 1936).

Throughout this period the government focused on repatriating Indians. A round-table conference between the South African, Indian and Imperial governments in 1927 introduced a system of voluntary repatriation. At the same time an Agent was appointed by the Indian government to oversee the upliftment of Indians who remained in South Africa (Pachai 1971:108). The policy failed because few Indians were willing to repatriate. The government, for its part, did nothing to improve the condition of Indians. This was left to private agencies administered by Indians. Muslim traders were prominent in a wide number of organisations that cut across religious and ethnic lines. Haji Dawood Mohamed, for example, was secretary of the NIC, trustee of the West Street Mosque, member of the Rice Advisory Committee formed during the First World War rice shortages, as well as a member of the 1917 Floods Committee. When he died, Hindu and Muslim businesses shut for the day as a mark of respect. An obituary in a Hindu newspaper pointed out that 'his heart ever pulsated for the welfare of the entire Indian community. He was a truly and thoroughly patriotic man; ... his genuinely ardent patriotic zeal to lift up his compatriots ever commenced him to the community' (*Dharma Vir* 29 August 1919). When M.E. Lakhi, another Muslim trader heavily involved in community work, died in 1941, Sorabjee Rustomjee noted in his eulogy that 'he knew no communalism. He was first an Indian and always an Indian .... The vast concourse of Muslim, Hindu, Parsee, and Christian Indians that followed the funeral was a striking testimony to the esteem and respect that he was held by all (*Leader* 25 October 1941).

M.A. Motala, who arrived from India in 1903, and started out as a small retailer, was one of the richest merchants by the time of his death in 1957. In 1922 he founded a school for the children of employees of the Durban Corporation. In 1939 he established the M.A. Motala Boys Hostel near Pinetown for delinquent Indian boys between twelve and eighteen. He was also the second largest contributor to the Sastri College and donated land to the Natal Indian Blind Society in 1945 for the building of a Home and Vocational Training Centre (Mahida 1993:68f). The R.K. Khan Hospital treated large numbers of patients annually at clinics in Somtseu Road, Clairwood and Sea Cow Lake from the mid-1930s. In 1943, for example, 43,917 Indians were given free treatment (*Leader* 6 February 1943). This was made possible by the philanthropic gesture of Advocate R.K. Khan who was born in Bombay in 1874, educated in England and brought to South Africa in 1895 by Gandhi. During his stay in Natal he acted as leader of the Ambulance Corps during the Anglo-Boer war, was joint-secretary of the NIC for many years until his death in 1932, president of the Orient Club, trustee in educational and Charity Trusts, and a generous contributor to educational projects. He bequeathed £40,000 for establishing hospitals and dispensaries for Indians (*Indian Opinion* 14 October 1932). The clinics evolved

into a fully-fledged hospital, which was opened in Chatsworth in 1969 with facilities for training doctors and nurses, as well as conducting medical research. One Muslim who played a critical role in education was Mulukmahomed Lappa (M.L.) Sultan who was born in Malabar, South India, in 1874, and came to Natal as an indentured labourer in 1890. He worked as a railway porter for the Natal Government Railways. When he completed his indenture in 1895 he went to the Transvaal where he worked as a waiter. After his marriage in 1905 he took up banana and tobacco farming in Natal. When his wife died in 1933 Sultan established the Mariam Bee Charitable and Educational Trust in her memory with a contribution of £100,000 to promote cultural, educational spiritual and economic activities among Indians in Natal 'irrespective of creed, caste or religion' (*Leader* 27 August 1949). Sultan was responsible for the first tangible development in technical education among Indians as a result of his donation of £17,500 in January 1942. He doubled this just prior to his death in 1953. The M.L. Sultan Technical College is one of the largest technikons in South Africa (Mahida 1993:81).

As far as education was concerned, religious training rather than secular education was a priority. Muslims received formal religious education from a young age at madrassahs attached to mosques. For example, the Durban Anjuman Islam School, attached to the West Street Mosque, was opened in 1909 (*Indian Opinion* 5 February 1910). Similarly, a madrassah attached to the May Street Mosque had an average daily attendance of 79 in 1920 (*Indian Opinion* 15 April 1921). A.M. Lockhat, proprietor of a large wholesale and import business, established the Hajee Ahmed Mohammed Lockhat Wakuff (Trust) in 1922, which founded madrassahs in many parts of Durban. According to Bawa, madrassahs taught Gujarati, Urdu and Arabic in addition to the tenets of Islam. For example, the Stanger Madrassah had three teachers who taught these languages to 124 pupils<sup>9</sup>. Very few Indian children had access to secular education. In 1930, for example, only 30.9 per cent of children of school-going age attended school (Henning 1995:138). It was only during the 1940s and 1950s that leaders like A.I. Kajee and A.M. Moolla attempted to combine religious and secular education and opened the South Coast Madrassah State Aided School, Ahmedia State Aided Indian School, Anjuman Islam State Aided School and Orient Islamic High School for this purpose.

### Muslim organisations

For most of this period, Muslim organisations were confined to localised areas and took care of parochial needs. These included bodies such as the *Iqbal Study Group*, *Orient*

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<sup>9</sup> SAR, BNS 902 A/1675, 8 May 1926, Stanger Madrassah to Principal Immigration Officer.

Islamic Educational Institute, Young Mens Muslim Association, May Street Muslim Jamaat, Isipingo Muslim Social Group and Ahmedia Madressa. The first umbrella Muslim organisation, the *Natal Muslim Council (NMC)*, formed in April 1943, was the brainchild of Advocate Ibrahim Bawa who was born in India in 1915 and came to South Africa at the age of four. He completed a BA degree at Wits University in 1938, a rarity for an Indian at that time, and qualified as a barrister at Lincoln's Inn, England, in 1941. According to Bawa, when he returned to Durban 'he was struck by the lack of common vision and properly trained hafiz and ulama among Muslims' and was determined to form an organisation to attend to the needs of Muslims in a coherent manner. Together with A I Kajee, the most prominent moderate Indian politician during the 1930s and 1940s, Bawa travelled all over Natal to drum up support for a body to speak with one voice for Muslims. The NMC eventually represented 22 organisations. At the first meeting chaired by Bawa, an Executive Committee comprising of A I Kajee as president, Bawa and M.S. Badat as secretaries, and M.A. Motala, A.M. Moolla, E.I. Haffejee and A.B. Moosa as vice-presidents, was formed. There was only one Mawlana on the committee, Mohammed Bashir Siddiqui. The others were traders who were also involved in sports and community organisations. The Council focused on propagation, culture, social welfare, secular and Islamic education, and finance (Interview 20 January 1999).

That the NMC, dominated by traders and professionals, was the main voice of Muslims, is indicative of the lack of power of ulama. A I Kajee, president of the NMC, was a moderate politician who served on many charitable organisations and mosque committees. He was secretary of the NIC and SAIC, manager of the May Street Indian School, secretary of the Indian Child Welfare Society and was connected to virtually every public movement in relation to Indians. According to Mr G.M.R. Kajee was a regular at the Salisbury Club in Umgeni Road where his favourite past-time was snooker. Writing about Kajee, Pauline Podbrey (1993:94f), a white member of the Communist Party in Durban, recalled that during the 1930s and 1940s:

One place where H.A. [her fiancée] and I might have gone together was A.I. Kajee's luxurious house. His candle-lit dinner parties were posh affairs, with damask tablecloths, sparkling wine glasses, polished silver. One dressed up to go there and the men behaved with courtesy and charm .... But H.A. wouldn't hear of it. Kajee was his political adversary. More than that, he didn't trust his intentions towards me. H.A.'s distrust of Kajee expressed itself in other ways too. I was employed by Kajee. Afterwards Kajee would invite me for a drink or offer me a lift to wherever I wanted to go. H.A. wasn't happy so he took to dropping in at Kajee's office and waiting for me to finish my work.

Kajee was not the exception. E.I. Haffejee, a committee member of the NMC, was the president of the Durban and District Football Association and helped to form the Muslim Youth Brigade in 1934 with Mawlana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui. The brigade included girls and music, both of which would later be proscribed by the ulama. According to Mr O.V., a band member, they performed during the Prophet's birthday, when Muslims departed for pilgrimage to Makkah, when prominent personalities visited Durban and during weddings. On festive occasions the streets of Durban were decorated with flags, buntings and decorative streamers. Thousands of Muslims lined the streets to watch the brigade march to the Grey Street mosque where the Mayor of Durban or other prominent whites, local Mawlanas and community leaders addressed the gathering from a podium especially erected outside the Jumuah Mosque in Grey Street.

Muslim leaders were involved in a host of activities running the gamut from sports and social welfare to education. According to one informant, Mr G.M.R., a regular at West Street mosque from the 1920s, decisions affecting Muslims, such as when to celebrate Eid, were made by E.M. Paruk, a prominent trader. To cite another example, in 1949 the Durban City Council (DCC) prohibited the slaughter of animals in private premises during the festival of Eid, a tradition practised by Durban's Muslims since 1860. The fight against the DCC by agitated Muslims against what they considered a wanton attack on their religious freedom was taken up by trader elites rather than the religious clergy. The split over this issue among Durban's Muslims reflected political divisions. A M Moolla and moderate traders preferred to negotiate with the DCC, while A I Meer and the ANC-aligned NIC called for a boycott of the abattoir and for Muslims to send monies abroad to India or Saudi Arabia to slaughter animals until the DCC changed its attitude (*Indian Views* 5 October 1949). While the DCC only changed its position in 1953, this incident demonstrates that leadership was provided by traders rather than traditional ulama. The little that is known about the ulama suggests that they were very orthodox in their thinking. This is illustrated, for example, in their attitude towards the sighting of the new moon which determined the day of the Eid. Thirteen leading ulama decreed in Durban on 4 November 1934 that news of the sighting of the moon received via the telephone, telegram, or wireless message could not be accepted. Such information had to be conveyed personally by the individuals sighting moon<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> *Indian Views*, 7 November 1934. The thirteen Mawlanas were Abdul Rehman Ansari, Pietermaritzburg; Ahmed Mukhtar Siddiqui of Durban; Mahomed Abdul Kadir Afriki of Durban; Abdus Samad of Durban; Sayyed-up-Haq of Verulam; Mohamed Yousuf of umzinto; Sayed Serfuddin of Durban; Abdul Karrim of South Coast junction; Hazrath-ud-Deen of Stanger; Sayed Abdul Kadir of Durban; Abdul

Formally trained ulama were in a weak position because they operated as individual employees of mosque committees. The South African government prohibited Indian immigration from 1914, except for ten 'Exempted Educated Entrants' annually. Mosque committees had to apply for permission from the Immigration Department to import religious educators. Successful applicants were allowed into the country for a probationary period of twelve months which was renewable annually. Permission was only granted when it was shown that a suitable person could not be obtained locally. For example, when seeking a replacement for the deceased Moulvi Matiola Amanulla, the Stanger Madrassah emphasised that advertisements had been placed in *'Indian Views'*, an Indian newspaper printed and circulated in Natal, but there was no response<sup>11</sup>. The West Street Mosque likewise imported Shaik Saith Nagar from the Cape in May 1919<sup>12</sup>. The Immigration Department insisted that permission be confirmed before the individual departed from India. For example, Moobin-ul-Hak and Ahmed Mohammed Vahed departed from India in November 1917 before permission was received from the Immigration Department. They were stranded at Delagoa Bay because G.W. Dick, Principal Immigration Officer, Natal, refused to allow them into the country<sup>13</sup>. Ulama were dependent on their employers to renew their permission annually. In June 1917, for example, the trustees of the West Street mosque appealed to the Minister of the Interior to renew the visiting pass of Tajammal Hoosen<sup>14</sup>. These India-educated ulama, with minimal command of English and in totally foreign surroundings, were totally dependent on their employers and too weak to organise to protect their interests or articulate a coherent position.

Islam was a taken-for-granted aspect of the lives of most Muslims who were tolerant and broad-minded in their practices. Muslims accommodated a wide range of practices, including those associated with folk Islam, which was the Islam of the majority of Durban's Muslims. Muslims who did not partake directly in activities such as Muharram engaged as observers. Muharram remained a pivotal part of Islamic practice. There were literally hundreds of applications each year from Durban's Muslims to organise the festival which was spread over several days. Essop Khan's

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Vahed Punjabi of Durban; Mohamed Abdul Aleem Siddiqui of Durban and Sulaman Mohammed Kafletvi of Durban.

<sup>11</sup> SAR, BNS 902 A/1675, 8 May 1926, Stanger Madrassah to Principal Immigration Officer.

<sup>12</sup> SAR, BNS 902 21/A/461, 26 May 1919, Principal Immigration Officer (Natal) to PIO (Durban).

<sup>13</sup> SAR, BNS 902 21/A/461, 26 November 1917, Principal Immigration Officer (Natal) to PIO (Durban).

<sup>14</sup> SAR, BNS 902 21/A/461, 18 June 1917, E.M. Paruk to Minister of Interior.

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October 1949 application was typical. He requested permission to hold the Muharram festival from 18 to 23 October. Festivities included nightly street processions from until 11 pm, a fire walking ceremony at Khan's home in Sea Cow Lake and the final procession that made its way to Umgeni River<sup>15</sup>. Opposition to Muharram did not come from ulama who considered these practices contrary to Islam, as would be the case later, but from educated and trader elites embarrassed by the raucous processions. Chief Constable Graham interviewed seven 'better class Indian persons' in July 1949, all traders, who told him that the procession was 'definitely against the Mahommedan Religion' and that they would give the police their 'whole-hearted' support in stopping it<sup>16</sup>. The meeting was followed by a letter from E.I. Haffejee and the NMC that stated:

To our utter dismay and concern we note that some people instead of actually mourning the event actually rejoice. Pagodas are brightly decorated and conveyed through the streets of Durban. Usually music, the beating of tom toms and tiger dancing accompany the procession and this generally initiates drunkenness, fighting and rowdiness. Most of the participants in these celebrations are Africans, Coloureds, Hindus and Moslems of the ignorant type.... We strongly feel that the Islamic religion is being ridiculed and the Moslem community disgraced before the eyes of others. We now appeal to you to refuse to issue these permits and thus do away with this religious farce<sup>17</sup>.

The call for action was in vain. Muharram remained a central part of the lives of the majority of Muslims until education, economic mobility and a concerted crusade from reform-minded ulama in the 1970s reduced and/or changed the form of participation in the festival.

For the most part, Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony. Recalling life in Durban in the 1930s and 1940s, Harry Sewlall recalled that:

... what was remarkable was the camaraderie that existed between Muslims and Hindus, who lived cheek-by-jowl with one another. I was not aware of

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<sup>15</sup> NAR, 3/DBN, 4/1/4/1093, D.E. Khan to Town Clerk, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1949.

<sup>16</sup> NAR, 3/DBN, 4/1/4/281, Sergeant Graham to Chief Constable, 7 November 1949. The seven were A.E. shaikh of 339 Pine Street; A.M. Moolla of Lockhat Brothers; S. M. Lockhat of Lockhat Brothers; I.A. Kajee of 37 Albert Street; M.A. Lockhat of Commercial Road; E.I. Haffejee of the Natal Muslim Council and the Mawlana (High Priest) of the Grey Street Mosque.

<sup>17</sup> NAR, 3/DBN, 4/1/4/281, Natal Muslim Council to Chief Constable, 10 July 1949. The letter was signed by E. Haffejee, C.A. Kajee, C. Asmal, H. Badah and A. Motala.



any differences between us. In my family, we referred to our elderly Muslim neighbours as 'mausi' (aunt) and 'mausa' (uncle) (*Sunday Times Extra* 12 December 1999).

Muslim leaders largely overlooked religious distinctions. For example, at a meeting to mark Indian Independence Day, A.I. Kajeer, a Muslim, made it clear that they,

... were not assembled as Hindus, Christians and Muslims but as Indians. The religious politics of India have not been imported into South Africa. Indians in this country must be Indians alone and not Mussulmans and Hindus (*Leader* 30 January 1943).

At the same time, Muslims celebrated Jinnah's birthday annually and sent funds to him in his attempt to create Pakistan. At the 1946 celebration, for example, Kajeer regarded Jinnah as a 'leader of the entire Muslim world'. Jinnah thanked them for the aid and emphasised that 'as far as South Africa is concerned it will be treated as an all-Indian problem and I will help the Indians as Indians and not as Hindus or Muslims' (*Leader* 5 January 1946). While Muslims celebrated the creation of Pakistan, Muslims and Hindus together celebrated the independence of India. At the 1947 Indian Independence celebrations in Durban, the NIC held a meeting in Durban at which the flags of both India and Pakistan were unfurled side-by-side with photographs of major leaders, including Jinnah (*Leader* 2 September 1947).

During the period 1910-1950 the majority of working class Indians moved from agricultural work into the rapidly growing manufacturing sector of Durban. As a result of the role that traders played in forming welfare and education bodies, the gap between them and working-class Indians closed. While a multitude of regional and sectarian identities coexisted, they were all 'Indians' in relation to Africans and whites. From the 1930s the focus of the state was on segregating Indians. The struggle over land was protracted and culminated in a passive resistance campaign by Indian between 1946-1948 (Bugwandeen 1991). This increased the distance between Indians and the [white] state. At the same time, the growing tension between Indian and Africans during the 1940s culminated in riots between Africans and Indians following a minor altercation between an Indian man and an African youth on 13 January 1949. In three days of rioting 142 people were killed and 1087 injured. That a minor incident escalated into a major riot was an indication of the depth of antagonism Africans felt against Indians in a climate where they competed for scarce resources in trade, housing and transport (Edwards & Nuttall 1990). Tension with Africans on one hand, and the purely Indian political parties formed to fight wholly Indian struggles, brought Indian Muslims and Hindus together in the public sphere.

and helped to foster Indianness. This racial identity was cemented after the National Party (NP) came to power in 1948.

### **Institutions and Exemplars: The Apartheid Period, 1948-1994**

The coming to power of the National Party (NP) government in 1948 had paradoxical consequences for Indians. On the one hand, segregation was intensified socially, politically and economically. At the same time, Indians were finally recognised as permanent citizens, and there was an expansion of educational opportunities and economic mobility. These socio-economic changes impacted on the form and practice of Islam. Younger, better educated Muslims challenged traditional conceptions of Islam at the same time that more conservative interpretations of Islam were introduced. The latter laid the basis for the emergence of traditional Ulama as an influential factor shaping local Muslim communities. In 1951 there were 367,000 Indians in South Africa; of these, 79,000 were Muslims who mostly resided in Durban. Only 6 per cent of Indians regarded English as their home language. Around 25 per cent of Muslims spoke Gujarati and the rest primarily Urdu. Economic mobility and residential segregation were the main features of Indian life after 1960 (Brijlal 1989: 29).

Residential clustering was pivotal role in consolidating Muslim values. Indian traders who began arriving from the 1870s could not compete with the established white businesses and established their shops on swampy land at the northwestern periphery of the city. When the Indian and white business areas impinged, whites used the 1897 Dealer's License Act to restrict the further expansion of Indian traders (Davies 1963:23). Residential areas were also segregated according to race in most parts of Durban. Clearly defined residential areas emerged either because whites were dissatisfied with the climate or topography or because of deliberate attempts by the local state to implement segregation. There was 91% residential segregation between Indians and whites in Durban in 1951 (Davies 1963: 37). Segregation was consolidated after 1948 through the Group Areas Act. In Durban, 140,000 Indians were moved from their original homes to new residential areas between 1950 and 1978. They were segregated in two large townships, Chatsworth and Phoenix, while areas like Reservoir Hills, La Mercy and Westville were made available for middle class housing (Butler Adam & Venter 1984:18). Segregation led to population density that allowed Muslims to build mosques, madrassahs, and community halls and practice Islam in a value-friendly environment.

Education played an important role in transforming Indian Muslims. Literacy levels were very low in 1950. The majority of Muslim children attended ordinary government secular schools. After the control of Indian education shifted to a Department of Indian Affairs in 1965, free and compulsory education was available

from 1970. The rapid increase in the building of schools resulted in adequate space for all children by 1983. This reflected in the numbers of children attending school. For example, the number of candidates who wrote the final year examination at secondary school level increased from 2,623 in 1968 to 10,449 in 1984 (Naidoo 1989:116). This was coupled with the opening of the University of Durban-Westville (1963) and expansion of the M L Sultan Technical College. The advantage taken by Indians of these opportunities is reflected in the fact that the number of Indians who regarded English as their home language increased from six per cent in 1951 to ninety-three per cent in 1996. Mass education was critical in reshaping conceptions of self and religion. It gave Muslims direct access to the printed word, thus threatening the special position of traditional ulama; it marked a shift from religion being 'taken-for-granted' to Islam being thought of as a self-contained system that could be distinguished from other systems; it cultivated debate among Muslims and the formulation of clear statements of belief in order illuminate sectarian distinctions. Islam became a subject that had to be 'explained' and 'understood'; rather than 'assumed'. This brought differences among Muslims to the surface (see Eickelman 1992).

### **Islamic Revivalism**

There was a gradual change in the manner in which Muslims understood and practiced Islam. Islamic revivalism manifested itself among all sectors of Muslim society in Durban and resulted in larger numbers of Muslims introducing Islam into their lives in a more systematic way, propagating and or contesting the hegemony of their version of Islam, and reconstructing the relationship between faith, community and society. This part of the paper will focus on three broad traditions, modernist, Deobandi and Barelwi, that were influential in Durban. The resurgence of Islam among younger Muslims drew inspiration from the ideas of thinkers like Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) and Sayyad Qutb (d. 1966) who attempted to marry Islamic knowledge with modern secular knowledge to engage Western culture and thought. A forerunner of later movements was the Arabic Study Circle which began operating informally in 1950 and constituted itself into a formal body in 1954 with Dr. Daud Saleh Mall as president. The social base of Circle members comprised mainly of the descendents of Gujarati trading class families who could afford secular education locally and abroad. Further, these individuals also traveled to the Middle East for Hajj (pilgrimage) which brought them into contact with Muslims from other parts of the world. The Circle promoted the study of Arabic so that Muslims could consult the Quran and formulate their own interpretations without passively relying on the analysis of ulama. The Circle introduced annual speech contests for school children, trained madrassah teachers, established an Islamic library, introduced Arabic at schools from 1975, introduced Arabic (1963) and Islamic Studies (1974) as academic disciplines at the University of Durban-Westville, sent young students abroad to expose them to new ideas, and invited dynamic non-

ulama Muslim thinkers such as Joseph Perdue, an English convert to Islam, to live and lecture in Durban. For these actions, the Circle was heavily criticised by traditional ulama (Mahida 1993:71-74). The Circle also promoted religious tolerance and organised regular seminars on Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and African faiths. Speakers included luminaries like Professor van Selms of the Department of Semitic Studies at the University of Pretoria, Rabbi Swift, then chief Rabbi of South Africa and author Alan Paton (Bhayat 1992:8f).

There were several other organisations with a similarly broad perspective. The Durban and District Muslim Association attempted to narrow the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims, and Indians and whites. It was led by E.H. Ismail, a trader who was also heavily involved in soccer administration. For example, when the annual celebration to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet was organised on 31 October 1955, Ismail invited speakers such as the Mayor of Durban, Vernon Essery, Professor Leo Kuper of Natal University and M B Naidoo, vice-principal of Sastri College. After garlanding the Mayor, Ismail told the audience: 'Our desire is to live in peace and to share our heritage with our fellow subjects who sympathise with these' (*Indian Views* 23 November 1955). The Iqbal Study Group, named after the great Muslim thinker Sir Mohamed Iqbal, was made up of young Muslims who met to discuss issues affecting the Muslim world. They were especially critical of rich Muslims and the ulama. At the 1965 Iqbal Day celebrations, G.H. Bhabha was shocked that one of the speakers, Abdullah Deedat, had stated that 'Moulanas are good for nothing. How can we expect our children to respect the Moulanas when such slanders are being hurled by mature men'. Cassim Abdullah also complained that 'the day was a monotonous sing song of hurling abuses at the rich, and slurring the molvies' (*Indian Views* 30 August 1965). A.S.K. Joomal, who organised the event, was unrepentant. He pointed out that Iqbal has said:

many things against the ways, manners, preachings, and peculiar brand of the mullahs' Islam, and also the brutal, ruthless manner in which the affluent class has always exploited the poor. If the speakers have quoted from the Doctor's work on these topics thus showing the Doctor up as the defender of the poor and a crusader for TRUE Islam, what crime did these speakers commit? (*Indian Views* 23 August 1965).

Other groups included the African Muslim Society and Kemal Study Group.

While these organisations were critical of stagnant thinking among Muslims they were conservative politically. In comparison, the Muslim Youth Movement (1970) and Muslim Students Association (1974) actively challenged apartheid (Tayob 1995). They were founded by young professionals and businessmen such as Hafiz Abu Bakr, an advocate who had memorised the Quran, and who was one of the main spokesmen

during the formative years. It is no coincidence that he had spent a year in Cape Town where he was in close contact with the Cape Muslim Youth Movement (Tayob 1995: 107). The emergence of these organisations must be viewed in the context of the changing international Islamic environment where events such as the 1973 oil crisis, the 1978 Iranian revolution, ongoing Palestinian problem, and Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 radicalised many Muslims. Like the Arabic Study Circle, the MYM invited Black and women speakers to its conferences. They included Fatima Heeran, a German convert to Islam, Dr. Rushud Din Malik, a black American Muslim, and activists like Dr. Ahmed Sakr and Ismail Faruqi from Temple University (Tayob 1995:108f). The MYM spawned a host of organisations such as the South African National Zakaat Fund (1977), Islamic Dawah Movement (1981), Association of Muslim Accountants and Lawyers (AMAL), Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (1981) and Islamic Relief Agency (1987) which attempted to make Islam meaningful in the day-to-day lives of Muslims in an organised, coherent and systematic manner.

The MYM's support was confined to the rapidly growing student and professional population. Among the mass of Muslims there was a growth of conservative tendencies that came to be termed 'Deobandi' and 'Barelwi'. 1968 probably marks the apogee of a tolerant and liberal Islam in Durban. In that year Durban's Muslims celebrated the 1400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revelation of the Quran. Over 20,000 Muslims gathered at Curries Fountain in August 1968 where the likes of Dr Mall of the Arabic Study Circle and A M Moolla, moderate politician and community leader addressed the gathering. Muslim children dressed in gorgeous, colourful costumes that represented the dress of fourteen different Muslim countries including Pakistan, Burma, Kashmir, Moghul India and Egypt; boys and girls recited 'qasidah' (songs) in honour of the Prophet; the Durban and Overport Muslim Brigades lent a special glamour to the occasion as they rendered a military display and led the thousands of Muslims in a procession through the streets of Durban; men, women and children performed their Friday prayers in the open at Curries Fountain, and joined together in lunch, singing and speeches (*Indian News and Views* 15 August 1968). In subsequent years activities such as singing, music, brigades, and men and women praying together were proscribed as a result of the growing influence of conservative ulama.

### **Deobandi Islam**

Deobandi and Barelwi institutions have played an important role in shaping Indian Muslim opinion. Deobandi Islam became a force in India from the 1860s when certain ulama responded to British dominance by renewing spiritual life through teaching principles of early Islam. They targeted popular behaviour and claimed the right to interpret Islam for ordinary Muslims on the basis that only they had access to original Islamic sources. Deobandi schools remained aloof from political activity and the

state, focusing instead on ministering to the educational and religious needs of Muslims in an attempt to create a sense of cultural community (Metcalf 1982). Deobandi ulama were closely allied to the Gujarati trading class. According to Robinson the conflict between popular and reformist Islam was between an intercessory and otherworldly Islam, and one which is 'this-worldly' in which the human conscience is brought into full play for man to act on earth to achieve salvation. Reformist Islam required Muslims to be literate, and most who embraced reformism were located within the middle class and engaged in aspects of the modern economy (Robinson 1997). Institutionally, this tradition was represented by the Jamiatul Ulama Natal (hereafter Jamiat), established in 1952 to 'guide generally the Muslim public in complete consonance with the laws of Islam' (Mahida 1993:71). Deobandi Islam focused on eradicating practices associated with Muharram and the visitation of saints shrines, as well as reforming Indian customs related to marriage, funeral rites, dress and so on which had become part of Muslim practice.

Closely allied was the role of the Tabligh Jamaat, the transnational religious movement founded in India by Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944) (See Anwarul Haq 1972). This movement was committed to the fundamentals of faith and an unquestioning loyalty to a literal interpretation of Prophetic authority proclaimed to be Sunna' (Moosa 1997:31). The movement first made inroads in South Africa in the early 1960s among Gujarati traders. Later, however, it attracted support from Memons as well as some Urdu-speaking descendents of indentured Muslims (Moosa 1997:33). The main methods of propagation are Gusht (visiting Muslims door-to-door), an annual ijtima over Easter (nation-wide mass gathering) and kitaab (book) reading. The latter involves reading extracts from the works of Mawlana Zakariyyah of India. Gusht involves moving from Muslim house-to-house, city-to-city, and country-to-country to impress on Muslims the need to live a righteous life by following the commandments of God and the example of the Prophet. An indication of the growth of the movement is that whereas the first ijtima attracted 300 people to Ladysmith in 1966, the gathering in Durban over Easter 1999 attracted at least 25,000 people. The ijtima provides common group identity and reinforces Muslim perceptions that they belong to a larger international entity. While the putative right of Deobandi Islam to convey what it meant to be a good Muslim was very strong, and it exerted a powerful influence over local Muslims, the diversity of Indian Muslims meant that no group could claim hegemony. In particular this tradition has been challenged by Barelwi Islam.

### **Barelwi Islam**

The Barelwi tradition has its origins in the work of Ahmad Raza Khan (1856-1922) of Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, India (Sanyal 1996). In South Africa this tradition found expression through Soofie Saheb and his descendants. The main following is among

descendants of indentured Muslims who followed this more populist form of Islam which centred around shaiikhs and shrines. This tradition was given organisational expression through the Sunni Jamiatul Ulama of South Africa, established in 1978 and Imam Ahmed Raza Academy which was formed in 1986 (Mahida 1993:114,133). Differences between Deobandis and Barelwis are due to class (trader against indentured), regional origins (western India against North and South), ethnicity (Gujarati against Urdu) as well as differences in belief and practice. As descendants of indentured Muslims acquired education and economic mobility a professional class emerged from the 1970s that challenged the hegemony of traders, leading to numerous violent altercations. Barelwis were scathing of reform-minded Deobandis. The Badsha Pir Mazaar Committee, for example, described them as 'white ants, eating away the foundations of Islam'. They were seen as following in the 'footsteps of Christians'. The long white robes of tablighis were equated with the dress worn by followers of the Carmelite order, the veil was equated with the head-dress of nuns, the chillra (forty days devotion) was equated with Lent, and so on. The annual Ijtima was described as a 'picnic': 'their only enjoyment in life was to hold this annual Ijtima where they put up huge degs (pots) of food. They have their four days of enjoyment, all under the pretence of propagating Islam'. Tablighis were also accused of being CIA agents because their members were granted visas more easily than other Indian South Africans ('The Tableegh' 1 May 1976). While Barelwis wanted to end practices like kitaab (book)-reading, tablighi's prohibited Salaami, a practice where members of the congregation stood and communally sent salutation to the Prophet. The tabligh programme entailed reading extracts from *Hikayaat-e-Sahaabah (Stories of the Companions of the Prophet)*, by the late Mawlana Muhammad Zakariyya of India, after each prayer. While this might seem an innocuous exercise, together the stories portrayed a picture of what the companions of the Prophet were like and provided an ideal that Muslims should strive for. This included wearing a beard, women wearing a veil, shunning the visitation of tombs, wearing of pants above the ankles and so on. Many of these practices were contrary to those accepted by Barelwis.

There were several instances of violence. In July 1977, the chairman of the Grey Street Trust, Aboobaker Ismail, terminated a special meeting to elect a new trustee after accusing Mawlana Omarjee, the tabligh-inclined candidate, of having brought supporters from outlying areas like Verulam, Tongaat and Stanger to vote on his behalf (*Mercury* 27 July 1977). In January 1980, twenty men entered the Sparks Road mosque in Overport and stabbed Mawlana Tauhid of India to prevent him from speaking because he was allegedly pro-tabligh. A lecture scheduled for Grey Street mosque the following evening was cancelled. According to one of the attackers, tablighi's controlled mosques in Newcastle, Port Shepstone, Ladysmith, Stanger and all over the Transvaal. 'We do not wish to go to their mosques and they must not come to ours' (*Sunday Times* 13 January 1980). When the Grey Street mosque

allowed tabligh-aligned ulama to speak, 'Militant Sunni Musallees' distributed a pamphlet warning 'fence-sitting' trustees that unless they stopped 'kitaab (book)-reading', they would be responsible for 'lighting a fuse that would eventually explode into an inferno'<sup>18</sup>. An altercation on 7 March 1987 between Deobandis and Barelwis in Azaadville resulted in the death of Sheik Mohideen Saib, a Barelwi (*Sunday Times* 8 March 1987). Hajee A Jabbaar and three other worshippers were hit outside a mosque in Chatsworth in April 1988 (*Daily News* 27 April 1988). These and many other instances of violence led some Muslims to conclude that the only solution was to have separate mosques. For example one A. Raooof felt that

... with both groups pointing their goals in different directions, there is only one solution if peace is to prevail among the Muslim community; and that is to have separate mosques (*Leader* 4 March 1983).

This is what happened. Barelwis used their numerical superiority to challenge and oust the trading elites who traditionally dominated mosque committees. Examples include Verulam and Lodge Grove where trading elites were ousted, sometimes after lengthy court cases. The response of Deobandi-oriented trading elites was to build their own mosques a short distance away even though population numbers did not warrant a second mosque. In places like Verulam, Westville and Mallinson Road each tradition has its own mosque to carry out its practices.

### Islamic Council of South Africa (ICSA)

Formation of the Islamic Council of South Africa in November 1975 marked an attempt to unite Muslims on a national level. ICSA was formed during a visit to South Africa by Dr Inamullah Khan of the World Muslim Congress and Abdul Muhsin Al-Shaykh of Saudi Arabia. Comprising of 109 organisation, the first office-bearers included Advocate A B Mahomed (President), Mawlana Ansari (Vice-President) and Advocate Bawa (Secretary General) (Bawa 1976). The Transvaal Jamiat did not join because it believed that only ulama, not professionals, could speak for Muslims. To placate ulama in Natal and the Cape, ICSA gave them the power to veto any decision of the Judicial Committee. There were many differences between ICSA members. For example, while ulama condemned a translation of the Quran into English by Muhammad Asad, a convert to Islam who adopted a liberal position, educated Muslims welcomed it. This led to the MYM and Arabic Circle withdrawing from ICSA (Bawa 2000). Some of ICSA's other messages did not sit well with traditional ulama. For example, Bawa appealed to Indian Muslims.

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<sup>18</sup> Pamphlet issued in March 1980. A kitaab is a book and this refers to the practice of Tablighi's to read extracts from the works of Mawlana Zakariyyah of India.



to increase their sensitivity to the situation and condition of the Black community .... Quicken your conscience to help them in every way possible, be just in your dealings with them, build bridges of understanding ... (*Post* 6 July 1983).

This did not resonate well with Indian Muslims in a situation where there was minimal contact between them and African Muslims who were mainly cleaners and bhanguis (callers to prayer) in mosques. Political differences also created tension among ICSA members. ICSA rejected the separate parliaments that the government created for Indians and Coloureds in 1983. The Juma Masjid Trust and Sydenham Muslim Association, whose respective chairmen Aboobakr Ismail and Abdullah Khan favoured the proposals, withdrew from ICSA (*Mercury* 7 June 1983). As a result of these tensions, ICSA was an empty shell from the mid-1980s. Though it continues to exist, ICSA enjoys minimal support among Indian Muslims in a situation where the balance of power has shifted to institutions controlled by traditional ulama.

### **Islamic Propagation Centre (IPC)**

This period was also witness to cracks in the relationship between Hindus and Muslims as a result of the activities of Ahmed Deedat and the IPC. Deedat had formed the IPC in 1957 to counteract the propaganda of Christian missionaries who, he asserted, were claiming that Muslims were anti-Christ, Muslims worship Muhammad, Islam was a danger to South Africa and so on (Mahida 1993:80). Both Hindus and Muslims initially supported Deedat. Hindu support was due to two factors. First, Christians was associated with whites and any attack on whites was welcomed during the apartheid era. Second, even a cursory reading of newspapers during the 1970s and early 1980s shows deep fear and concern among Hindu leaders regarding the conversion of Hindus to Christianity. Newspaper headlines such as 'Christian exploitation of Hindus could lead to religious war' and 'Conversions worry SA Hindus' (*Sunday Times* 2 May 1982) were common. In this context, Deedat's denigration of Christianity was welcomed by Hindus. This changed when the IPC produced a video 'From Hinduism to Islam' in 1986. P.D. Persadh, General Secretary of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha, 'viewed the present conflict with dismay .... Surely Islamic teachings are not intended to ridicule and build enmity' (*Post* 4 May 1986). The Sabha's appeal to the IPC to withdraw the video was unsuccessful as was the attempts of Hindu leaders to get the Government to ban it. Many Muslims also criticised the tape. For Example, Bawa of ICSA 'deplored attempts by any group to degrade the religious practices of any other community' (*Tribune* 20 April 1986). Despite Bawa's censure the video led to tension between Muslims and Hindus. For example, at a meeting at UDW in 1986, Hindu students 'heckled and booed Muslims in the audience, who then walked out' (*Post* 18 May 1986). In another incident, Hindus in Avoca, a suburb of Durban, circulated pamphlets to boycott a

pharmacy owned by a Muslim. Mr Hassen (*Tribune* 11 May 1986)<sup>19</sup>. The relationship between Hindus and Muslims never achieved the harmony of the pre-video period.

## Muslims and Apartheid

When it assumed power in 1948, the NP was determined to entrench racial identities. Apartheid restricted contact between Indians and those defined as African, Coloured or white in all areas of life. The NIC engaged in cross-race protest with the ANC during the 1950s but this ended with the banning of the ANC and PAC in 1960 (Bhana 1997). Ironically, the continued existence of the Natal 'Indian' Congress, perpetuated racial divisions of resistance and reinforced racial identities (Vawda & Singh 1987). The legal position of Indians changed when they were granted the status of permanent residents in 1961. A Department of Indian Affairs was established and the government attempted to incorporate Indians politically by appointing Indian advisory bodies. The South African Indian Council, comprising of nominated members, was inaugurated in 1968, while Local Affairs Committees were established to advise municipalities and local authorities on 'Indian matters'. In 1983, the Tricameral Dispensation introduced a separate parliament for Indians. The reaction of Indian Muslims to apartheid, like Indians generally, ran the gamut from vigorous opposition to active co-operation with the regime. Muslims such as A. Joosub and A.M. Moolla participated in apartheid structures while the likes of Farouk Moer and Jerry Coovadia joined the United Democratic Front (1983) which had been established to co-ordinate opposition to apartheid. The NIC joined the non-racial United Democratic Front during the 1980s to oppose participation in government created ethnic structures<sup>20</sup>, but the ideology of non-racialism did not extend to the masses. The racial exclusivity of Indians continued until the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the unbanning of political organisations, multi-party negotiations and, ultimately, South Africa's first democratically elected government on 27 April 1994. While it is dangerous to generalise it can be safely argued that unlike the Cape the Muslim experience in Durban has been a very de-politicised one. This differs from the more radical expression of Islam in the Cape during apartheid. Cape Muslims,

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<sup>19</sup> Mr. Hassan had chaired the session in which Mr. Deedat delivered his lecture on Hinduism.

<sup>20</sup> The United Democratic Front (UDF), based on the principles of the Freedom Charter, was launched on 20 August 1983 to protest against the tri-cameral dispensation. It included trade unions, religious bodies, student organisations, and civic associations. The formation of the UDF marked another attempt to reinstate the heritage of non-racialism. The NIC's vigorous anti-election programme included mass and local rallies as well as house-to-house visits. This resulted in low voter registration and turnout.

influenced by the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, formed the Pan-Africanist 'Qiblah' under Ahmed Cassiem which popularised the slogan 'One solution. Islamic Revolution'. Qibla provided the revolutionary fervour that made Muslims a feared force amongst the police and the armed forces (Essack 1980:486).

### Post-1994: Turning to the Core?<sup>21</sup>

The growing influence of institutional Islam and orthodox ulama during the 1970s and 1980s have impacted on Islamic practices. The post-1994 non-racial democracy clearly does not support an Islamic worldview; on the contrary, the new ANC government has legalised abortion, prostitution, pornography and so on. In addition, Muslims are also affected by affirmative action policies and the African Renaissance agenda. The uncertainty generated by transition has resulted in large numbers of Muslims changing their behaviour in various ways. There is a staggering increase, for example, in the numbers of women who cover their face, a requirement contested within local Islamic tradition<sup>22</sup>. The veil is seen by the Ulama as a pivotal aspect of the drive to prevent transgression of gender norms. Muslim women venture far more in public spaces than their predecessors of a generation ago, appearing regularly in places where un-Islamic practices are the norm, such as holiday resorts and the beach. According to the 1996 census 7900 (32%) of the 24,842 Muslims in formal employment in Durban were women. This is relatively high considering that prior to the 1980s there were few women in formal employment and that the census does not account for large numbers of women in informal work such as dressmaking, cooking, babysitting and religious education. The result of this drive to re-establish gender norms will be a reversal of the trend in the 1970s and 1980s whereby Muslim women acquired education and went out to work.

There is far greater concern with observing religious 'regulations' concerning food consumption; the numbers of Muslims going annually to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage has increased from an average of 4,000 per annum at the beginning of the 1990s to 8758 in 1998; there has been a concerted and successful effort to root out television from Muslim homes; Muslims are marrying younger and

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed examination of this period, see Vahed, G 2000. Changing Islamic Traditions and Emerging Identities in South Africa. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20,1, April:43-73.

<sup>22</sup> The Jamiat, for example, ruled that 'due to the immorality of the times ... it is compulsory for a female to cover her face which is the focus of her beauty. This would accord a woman a 'degree of respect, honour and dignity and of being in charge of her body'. The Sunni Jamiat, on the other hand, whose support base is amongst working-class Muslims, does not compel women to cover their faces.

eliminating lavish ceremonies; there is a return to 'authentic' Islamic dress among many men who have taken to wearing Arab garb and long beards; many Muslims have given up insurance and medical aid and have turned to Islamic banks such as the Al-Baraka Bank; there is a dramatic growth in Muslim and Islamic schools; while standardisation of the syllabus has meant that madrasahs are disseminating a rigorous knowledge of Islamic rituals, beliefs, values and practices to children from a young age. The new Islamic lifestyle is behavioural in perspective. There is an almost complete lack of theological debate. 'Truth' is synonymous with the ulama and to question them means questioning the truth. Another conspicuous feature of the new Islam is self-reformation. The trend whereby individuals become attached to Shaykhs (spiritual mentors) is becoming extremely popular.

In seeking to introduce new and tighter Islamic codes in the public and private domains, Indian Muslims are using the new freedoms of a secular state to create space for themselves and are thereby redefining for themselves the kind of Muslims they want to be. An inward-looking Indian Muslim community is developing, with an understanding that the constitution can be used to struggle for specific needs and rights. Oliver Roy refers to this as the creation of 'liberated zones', spaces where the ideals of a future society can prevail. In 'liberated zones, no counterpower is established, no counterstate'. Instead, there prevails the 'idea of later spreading the principles on which it is founded to the whole of society' (Roy 1996:80). This did not imply animosity to the state. This differs from the Cape where Muslims have rallied in large numbers around issues of crime, drugs, the US bombing of Iraq, and the visit by Tony Blair. Attempts by PAGAD to form a chapter in Durban under Rashid Sulaman failed to muster support. The two Islamic parties that contested the 1994 election, the Cape-based Islamic party under Abdullah Gamielidien and the Africa Muslim Party under Intiaz Sooliman, failed to gain a seat. In 1999 the Africa Moral Party contested the election without success. The new Islam does not have a proselytising aspect to it. It is based largely on self-reformation while contact and integration with non-Indian African, white and Coloured Muslims is largely non-existent. While many Muslim intellectuals and professionals are concerned about the new conservatism, their problem is one of relevance because the shapers of opinion among the majority of Indian Muslims are formally trained ulama. The influence of intellectuals is marginal and they are confined outside mosques.

### **Conclusions: Changing Discourses, Boundaries and Identities**

Islam and Muslim societies are often viewed as 'one global, timeless and cultural system'. On the contrary, Muslims and Muslim societies are 'complex and sociologically diverse' (Roy 1996:vii). As the study shows, there have been multiple Islamic voices and multiple Islamic traditions among South Africa's Indian Muslims.

There has been continuous re-interpretation and re-definition of Islamic tenets, which are often contested. Debates have centred on what it means to be a Muslim, what Islam is about and how the Quran and hadith should regulate one's life. Transformation has been integral to all traditions and is not confined to modernists. While these traditions have been transforming, they have not lost their status of normativity. The majority of Muslims, and particularly the Barelwi and Deobandi traditions, continue to view Islam as a unique and timeless whole that is the sum total of divinely ordained beliefs.

The identities of Indian Muslims have been constantly shifting since they first arrived in South Africa in 1860. For the most part, the dominant identity in relation to outsiders was 'Indian' in a situation where race played a central role in defining existence. This is changing in post-apartheid South Africa where many Muslims seem to be retreating to an Islamic identity that is superseding ancestry, descent and language. This must be understood in the wider sociopolitical context of African majority rule in South Africa, globalisation and Muslims fears. Muslims are constructing boundaries around various points of contact; between men and women. Muslims and non-Muslims, Muslims and the state, Islam and secularism, and so on. The interpretation of institutional Islam in the Deobandi / Barelwi tradition, conservative and strict, is becoming more hegemonic. The attempt to forge a 'Muslim identity' is difficult because of deep differences of tradition. However, while it would be incorrect to suggest that a homogeneous Islam is emerging, there is greater tolerance for the perspectives of others. The violent altercations between Barelwis and Deobandis, for example, have largely subsided, while the rise of Sufi Islam is one example where middle ground has been found.

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