

# MUSLIMS IN GUYANA

by  
Ahmad Hamid

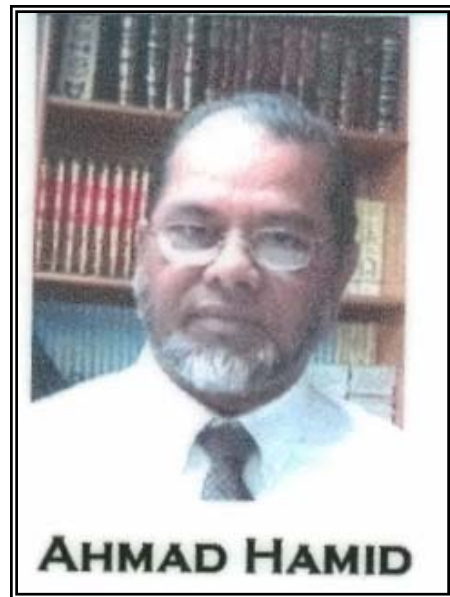
## The Unification of Sad'r Anjuman and The Islamic Association (1926-1950)

*"The secret of a people's progress lies in their past history."*

*Moulvi Mohammad Ahmad Nasir*

### Introduction

This chapter deals mainly with the issues and events that led to the unification of The Islamic Association (TIA) and the Sad'r Anjuman (Sad'r) of British Guiana. I do anticipate that some of the information presented will be challenged or denounced as fabrications, but such positions were taken before in Guyana and in New York. Those who had questioned the information were not quite informed or in some ways involved in the activities of Sad'r. Sentiments and political biases influenced their perceptions of truth and falsehood. (i) They did not know that Dr .M. B. Khan, President of Sad'r, compiled a booklet on the history of the Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam of British Guiana (1937-1944). I have an original copy of his booklet<sup>1</sup> given to me by Hajji Muhammad Abdus Sattaur of the Central Islamic Organization of Guyana (CIOG). (ii) I have also in my possession publications by The Islamic Association and Sad'r. These booklets are treasures and serve as a primary source. For this chapter, I also relied upon information given by elderly brothers who were involved in the activities of Sad'r since its inception.



Sad'r Islamic Anjuman was dynamic. It was a genuine pioneer of Islam in Guyana, and served as a representative body of the Muslims. Its achievements are numerous, and within a short period of three years it gained for the Muslims recognition and respect. The unification of the Sad'r and TIA to form the United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman serves as an example for the current organizations and leaders in Guyana. The activities and involvement of the **United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman of British Guiana** from the 1960s showed the destructive consequences when leaders act irresponsibly and become clumsily involved in national politics. Most unfortunately over almost five decades, our leaders in Guyana seemed to have not much from the history of the United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman.

<sup>1</sup> Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam of British Guiana 1937-1944: A Retrospective Glance by Dr. M. B. Khan. This booklet is dedicated to Al-Haj Moulana Hazrat Sayed Shams-ud-din bin Nizamud-din Alhoseini Qaderi, the first Moulana that came to Guyana from India.

## Muslims Becoming Organized

The first Muslims arrived in Guyana came from Africa. They were prisoners of war or were captured and sold into slavery by slave hunters. The extreme oppressive nature of slavery by the Dutch and later British on the plantations prevented the Muslims who were slaves from retaining their Islamic identity. The consistent policies of state and church ensured that the slaves by 1838 were Anglicized and Christianized.

The second set of Muslims to arrive in Guyana came from India under the system of indentured laborers. They were brought to replace the slaves on the sugar plantations who were emancipated in 1838. To a certain degree, the plantations offered protection to the indentured laborers. The East Indians were allowed to retain their culture, customs, language, and to practice their religions, Hinduism and Islam. The privileges granted by the plantation management were intended to exercise control and retain a large work force of Indian laborers.

The overwhelming majority of the Muslims from India was illiterate and came mainly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh which today are the poorest states with the highest illiteracy rate in India. For example, more than two thirds of girls between 12 -14 never went to school<sup>2</sup>. However, though being illiterates, the Muslims who came to Guyana were familiar with certain customs and practices derived from Islam but peculiar to the regions from which they came. In later batches of Muslims came educated Muslims who were competent to act as teachers or Imams, offer instructions in the performance of basic Islamic rites and rituals, and organize the Muslims as a functional religious group (Jamaat).

The Muslim population increased rapidly owing to the constant arrival of immigrant laborers from India (1838-1917). The presence of Muslims who could function as Imams and teachers promoted the idea of building Masjids in the 1870s. According to official reports, “Whereas in 1870 the Royal Commission ... noticed no Muslims mosque and only two Hindu temples, two decades later twenty-nine mosques and thirty-three temples appeared while in 1920 the number totaled fifty and fifty-two respectively.” (Mangru 49) In 1920, the Indian population was estimated to be 124,586. The census report of 1921 showed that there were 18,410 Muslims and 244 Parsis in Guyana. The 1931 report showed that there were 21, 792 Muslims and 74 Parsis. (Dwarka Nauth 219)

While the Muslims increased numerically, they did not advance educationally or were not meaningfully involved in politics. The Muslims in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were confined to the plantations, and the majority of Indian children did not attend primary school. Few parents could afford to send their children to study overseas. However, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim Guyanese were returning home having graduated from colleges. Their exposure to metropolitan life, non-Muslim organizations, and later to government and politics motivated them to form representative organizations and to act as leaders of the Muslims. At first, this assumed a highly academic stand. The professional and qualified brothers who were members of Queenstown Jama Masjid (QJM) formed the **Young Men’s Muslim Literary Society (1926)**.

## Queenstown Jama Masjid (QJM)

Georgetown was a developing town and towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, certain areas were not included in what is now considered the city. Queenstown was treated as a separate area while Kitty was regarded as being on the East Coast of Demerara. The

<sup>2</sup> ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttar\\_Pradesh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttar_Pradesh))

composition of the population was also changing as Indians were moving into the city areas for social and economic reasons. There were about 400 Muslims living in the Queenstown area by 1890 (Deen Kamaludeen), and the steady increase of Muslims prompted Moulvi Gool Mohamed Khan, an immigrant originally from Afghanistan, to spearhead the move to construct the Queenstown Jama Masjid (1895). The existence of a Masjid in Queenstown attracted a powerful and influential membership. Over the years, **QJM** consolidated its power and increased its sphere of influence, which allowed it to have access to resources not so readily available to organizations that claimed national or regional status. QJUM perceived itself as having the power and authority to manage the affairs of the Muslims in Guyana. This was the thought when the Sad'r was formed in 1937: *“To that end he [ Moulana Al Hajj Sayed Shams-ud-din] conceived the idea of organizing the members of the Jama Masjid as a timely and important step in the direction and pursuit of the religious uplift and advancement of Muslims in this remote outpost of the British Commonwealth of nations.”*

QJM served as the cradle for all the organizations, which were formed in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. It served as the headquarters of Anjuman Mofidul Islam, Jamiatul Ulama I Din of British Guiana (JUDG), The Islamic Association, and Sad'r Islamic Anjuman (Sad'r). Some of its trustees between 1934 and 1941 were founding members of the three organizations.

A group of young educated, qualified, and active Muslims formed the **Young Men's Muslim Literary Society** in 1926. It was the first organization that assumed a national status. Its members for the next thirty years played highly influential roles in the formation and functioning of the **Jamiatul Ulama I Din (JUDG)**, **Islamic Association**, **Anjuman Mofidul Islam**, **Sad'r Anjuman**, **Muslim League**, and the **Muslim Youth Organization of British Guiana (MYOG)**. Throughout the history of Muslims in Guyana, leaders competed and struggled for recognition, authority, power, and privileges. The myopic and jaundiced vision of certain Muslims caused the formation of organizations, and then the leaders attempted very weakly to justify their actions. Muslims in Guyana had witnessed between 1926 and 1960 the rise and fall of many Muslim organizations. The following organizations were formed in Guyana as from 1926 to 1950.

- 1) Young Men's Muslim Literary Society (**Queenstown, 1926**)
- 2) Anjuman Mofidul Islam of British Guiana (**Queenstown 1927**)
- 3) Jamaat-ul-Ulamaa (**Queenstown, 1934**)
- 4) Islamic Association (**Queenstown, 1936**)
- 5) Sad'r Islamic Anjuman (**Queenstown, 1937**)
- 6) Muslim League (Georgetown, 1945)
- 7) Muslim Youth Organization of Guyana (Ruimveldt Masjid)
- 8) **United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman (Sad'r Orphanage, Kitty 1949)**
- 9) **Anjuman Hifazatul Islam (Windsor Forest, 1950)**

The **Young Men's Muslim Literary Society (YMMLS)** and **Anjuman Mofidul Islam of British Guiana** became defunct by 1940. The Islamic Association (1936) and **Sad'r Anjuman (1937)** merged to form the **United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman of British Guiana (1949)**. Other organizations came into existence as from 1960 but because of their structural conditions, mismanagement, and political affiliation failed to satisfy the needs of the Muslim community.

The formation and existence of organizations afforded their respective leaders power, authority, recognition, and certain privileges within the Muslim community, government and non-government organizations. Organizational rivalry did not emerge only in the 1960's. The rivalry

resided always in the ambition of the leaders. This was quite evident in the struggles, which dragged on for twelve years between the Islamic Association and Sad'r Anjuman.

## **A CLASH OF GIANTS JUDG, ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION, SAD'R ANJUMAN, AND QUEENSTOWN JAMA MASJID**

### **Membership of Queenstown Jama Masjid**

Centrally located and being the only Masjid from Ruimveldt to Kitty, Queenstown Jamaat grew rapidly. Among its membership in the 1890s were immigrants, the educated, professionals, and businessmen. The composition of the membership of this Masjid makes it currently the most powerful and influential Jamaat in Guyana. On Fridays, it has the largest congregation for Salat al Jumua although there are five other Masjids<sup>3</sup> in the city. In the congregation are Muslims who come to the city from different parts of Guyana for various reasons. They make special efforts to conclude their business or take time off from work in order to attend Salat al Jumua.

The Muslim community was an evolving one, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Muslims were not organized. The exposure of the leaders in the city to organizations prompted them to consider the formation of representative Muslim organizations. The members of QJM readily supported the formation of JUDG and two years later supported the formation of the Islamic Association. The formation and composition of the Islamic Association did not find favor with a number of influential members of QJM. They felt slighted and opined they were deliberately excluded from leadership positions within JUDG, Islamic Association, and the Board of Trustees of QJM. As such, it did not take them too long to criticize the management of The Islamic Association (TIA). The criticisms had a direct flow to the members of Board of Trustees of QJM among whom were H. B. Gajraj (Town Councilor and Chairman), Moulvi Mohamad A. Nasir (Secretary), Abdool Rayman, H. B. Gajraj, A. S. Rohoman, Abdool Gafoor, Mohammad Akbar, and Meah Rahmat Ali (Imam of Queenstown Masjid). These were the brothers who could be found as executives in JUDG, Islamic Association, and QJM.

### **Islamic Association**

The **Islamic Association** was founded in **1936** and in that same year it gave Guyana its first Islamic journal, **Nur-E-Islam**, which was sold for six cents. JUDG and the Young Men's Literary Association supported the formation of the Islamic Association. At the inaugural meeting of the Islamic Association, the following members were elected.

<i>President:</i>	<i><b>Mohamad A. Nasir</b></i>
<i>Vice-President:</i>	<i><b>Cramat A. Mc Doom and S. M. Osman</b></i>
<i>Treasurer:</i>	<i><b>Abdool Gafoor</b></i>
<i>Honorary Secretary:</i>	<i><b>M. Adill Rayman</b></i>
<i>Asst. Secretary:</i>	<i><b>Yussuff Ibraheem</b></i>

<sup>3</sup> These Masjids can be found in Prashad Nagar, Kitty, Ruimveldt, Alexander Village, and Mandella Ave.

*Members of Committee:* **Rahman B. Gajraj**, A. S. Rohoman, M. Akbar, M. A. Hamid Khan, S. A. Sattaur, and A. Hailim

**Members of the Jamaatul Ulmaa:** *Moulvees Monawwar Khan, Masoom Ali, Mohamed Ali, Rahmat Ali, Kareemullah Khan, S. Kareemullah, M. Ishmael Khan, Syyed A. Sattaur, Mohamad Ishaque, Mohamad Kazim, Edan Meyan, Sheikh Abdul Gani, Goodar Meyan, Abdool Ghaney, Sardar Mohamad, and Shakir Hosein (Honorary Secretary).*

The growth and development of The Islamic Association were eclipsed because of the formation of the Sad'r Anjuman. The rivalry and competition between TIA and the Sad'r continued until 1949 when the two organizations were merged to form the United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman of British Guiana. Despite the rivalry, the Association attempted to pursue its goals and objectives. In 1941, there were changes in its leadership.

**President:** **Cramat A. McDoom**  
**Vice President:** **Mohamad A. Nasir and M. Azeem Khan**  
**Treasurer:** **A. D. Hack**  
**Honorary Secretary:** **Kamrudeen Ali**  
**Asst. Secretary:** **M. L. R. Naboo**  
**Urdu Secretary:** **Sheikh Shabrate**  
**Traveling Secretary:** **F. Dad Khan<sup>4</sup>**  
**Members:** **M. Hussain, A. A. Rahim, S. M. Shakoora, and Akbar Khan**

### **The First Moulana Comes To B. G.**

It was brought to the attention of JUDG, TIA, and members of the Queenstown Masjid of the presence of Moulana Al Hajj Sayed Shams-ud-din bin Nizam-ud-din, Alhoseini Qaderi of Navsari of Bombay, India in Trinidad. The QJM was also informed that an invitation was extended to the Moulana to visit British Guiana (B.G.). A special meeting was called by QJM to discuss the possibility of hosting the Moulana. During the meeting, questions were raised as the qualifications of the Moulana and the claim that he lacked proper credentials.

The discussions provided an opportunity for certain members to criticize the leadership of the QJM and the style of management of the Islamic Association. The discussion at Queenstown in 1937 and the ensuing results have been repeated throughout the history of Muslims in Guyana. Discussions generated conflicts that were destined to span decades. There have always been excessive criticisms and little or no attempt to understand the issues; obstinacy and a judgmental attitude; no inclination to verify the truth and a failure to make decisions in the interest of the Muslims.

According to Moulvi Ahmad Nasir, the credentials and claims of the Moulana were verified and he was accorded the honor of being the 35<sup>th</sup> direct descendant of the Holy Prophet Muhammad through Hazrat Imam Zainul Abideen. Moulvi Mohammad A. Nasir wrote in the Nur E Islam: "In

<sup>4</sup> Fateh Dad Khan migrated to Trinidad and was appointed Imam of the Hajji Gokool Mosque, St. James, Port of Spain. He had served as Assistant Secretary of the Sad'r Anjuman. Hajji Hassan Kareemullah of Wakenaam, Guyana, succeeded him as Imam of Hajji Gokool Mosque. Hajji Hassan was married to the sister of Mohammed Kamaludin, Deputy Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. He died in Venezuela while undergoing heart surgery.

*order to dispel any doubts as to his genuineness of his descent and activities the Maulana had exhibited various documents of importance to the President and Moulvies A. D. Hack and Mohammed Ali - to their entire satisfaction."*

The news of the intended visit of the Moulana was electrifying. No Moulana had previously visited Guyana. The fact that Moulana Shams-ud-din was labeled a **Sayyad** (a descendant of the Prophet) evoked strong feelings of love for the Prophet (S). The title Moulana conjured the image of a pious Alim with a special relationship with Allah and the Prophet (S). In addition to this, he was from India. Many Indian immigrants were still alive in 1937 and to know that the Moulana came from India created an exceedingly strong nostalgia. Jamaats in the rural areas anxiously awaited his arrival, and Muslims organized themselves into groups braving the weather, road hazards, and distance to get a glimpse of the Moulana at the Masjids where he delivered his lectures.

The Moulana was well informed about the resistance to his visit as well as the reasons for opposition to The Islamic Association. He is reported to have said: *"With reference to the validity of my descent (i.e., the 35<sup>th</sup> direct descendant of the Holy Prophet), I have authoritative evidence to prove it, and to convince anyone interested. Therefore the allegations against me are only poor attempts to separate me from my friends and well wishers."* His tours took him from Georgetown to different parts in the Colony. During his stay in Guyana, he delivered seventy public lectures and founded eleven chapters (Anjuman) of the Sad'r Anjuman.

### **Meteoric Rise of Sad'r Anjuman**

The welcome of Moulana Shams-ud-Din in the rural areas was overwhelming and beyond expectations. Those who accompanied him shared in the spotlight and became popular overnight. It was during these visits that the formation of an organization was seen as an immediate reality. By the time the tour was over, the foundations were laid for the launching of **Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam of British Guiana**. Although not expressed, the thought of forming another organization at the Queenstown Jama Masjid to rival The Islamic Association had been entertained before the Moulana's arrival.

The Moulana was definitely sympathetic to those who organized his tour. He was fully aware of the influence he wielded and the consequences of any action he took. He had a profound impact upon the Muslims. Picture this scene: From Leonora Masjid, WCD a large following accompanied the Moulana as he walked a distance of five miles to Windsor Forest where he offered Salatul Maghrib at Sultan's residence. The Moulana was in constant contact with Muslims since his arrival February until his departure in September 1937. Those in favor of the formation of another organization (Sad'r) discussed the matter fully with the Moulana and gained his patronage. The idea to form an organization is said to have been initiated by Mohamed (Dispenser) Ishmael.

The Moulana gave immediate support and personally supervised the formation of the Sad'r Anjuman-e-Islam of British Guiana. While the Moulana was still in Guyana - and this was an excellent strategy - a meeting was called on 20th June 1937 for formation of the Anjuman. This was how the leaders justified the formation of the Anjuman: *"At that time another Organization endeavored to satisfy the religious interests of the our community, but in view of the volume of work and the paucity of workers, the Moulana Sahib with commendable foresight, set about examining conditions and visualizing the future of the Muslims. To that end he conceived the idea of organizing the members of the **Jama Masjid** as a timely and important step in the direction and pursuit of the religious uplift and advancement of Muslims in this remote outpost of the British Commonwealth of nations."*



Another argument used to justify the formation of the Anjuman was: *“This Anjuman was formed at a time when the religious interests of our people were gravely overlooked; other Islamic Organizations were only active with the political and social sides of only a certain section of our people much to the detriment of the Muslim community all over the Colony. The Moulana Sahib’s wisdom in organizing the members of the Queenstown Mosque into a compact body was indeed a timely rescue to the Muslim Community.”*<sup>5</sup>

*“It should be of interest to note that at the Inaugural Meeting the fact was emphasized that the Anjuman will not countenance any rivalry with other organizations, but instead, exert every endeavor to work in cooperation with other societies, providing that in the event of any issue arising, it be determined in accordance with the Sunnat-wal Jamaat School of Thought.”*<sup>6</sup>

*“At the inaugural meeting attended by the majority members of the Queenstown Jama Masjid, and by Muslims that were invited from all over the Colony, the following were elected to constitute Sad’r first Executive: Messrs. S. A. Sattaur (President), M. A. Khan and Abdool Hack (Vice-Presidents), Abdool Gafoor (Hony. Treasurer), J. M. Khan (Honorary Secretary), with Messrs. Mohammed*

**SAD’R ANJUMAN-E-ISLAM OF BRITISH GUIANA**

**MEET THE EXECUTIVES**

SHEIK ABDOL SATTUR,  
President, Business Manager,  
and Urdu Editor of this  
Journal.

(1) MOHAMMED BARKAT-ULLAH KHAN  
N.D., (Eng.) M.T.D.,(Penn.)  
Senior Vice President and Editor of "Islam"

(2) ABDOL HACK, (Kitty),  
Junior Vice President.

(3) MOHAMMED ISHMAIL,  
Hony. General Secretary-  
Treasurer.

(4) JAN MOHAMMAD KHAN,  
Assistant Hony. Secretary.

JAN MOHAMMAD (GILWAH),  
Travelling Secretary.

RAMZAN KHAN,  
Travelling Secretary.

ABDOL GHAFOR,  
Travelling Secretary and  
Sick Visitor.

<sup>5</sup> ISLAM, July-September 1940 p 27

<sup>6</sup> Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam of British Guiana 1937 – 1944, A Retrospective Glance by Dr. M. B. Khan. p 8

*Ishmail, Mohammed Sherriff, M. Rohoman, Pach Korie, A. H. Mondol, R. Bacchus, K. B. Hosein, A. R. Mondol, M. Mohammed, Abdool Rahman, Madar Baksh, M. Hoosein, Gool Mohammed Khan, and A Gafoor (Committee Members)."*<sup>7</sup>

The aims and objects of the Anjuman in 1937 were:

1. "To protect the general interest of the Muslim community and to propagate the religion of Islam.
2. To safeguard the interest of the Sunnat-wal-Jamaat school of thought (Hanafi).
3. The establishing of Schools for the teaching of Islamic and general education.
4. To give burial (Janazah) to Muslim paupers who may die in the Public Institutions or on the public streets.
5. To promote communal unity, friendship, and harmony.
6. To advocate the cause of the oppressed.
7. To disseminate knowledge of Islam through the pages of the Official Journal, *Islam*.
8. To give Islamic lectures throughout the Colony, and printing Islamic tracts.
9. To visit the sick in all the public institutions.
10. To receive donations for Sad'r Baitul Maal to foster the activities of the Anjuman.
11. To contribute towards the maintenance of our orphans.
12. To inculcate a sense of loyalty to the Crown."

The aims and objects of the Sad'r were not cited for decorative purposes. Its annual reports and journal, ISLAM, showed that each of the twelve items listed above was attended to. In ISLAM, the names of the sick visited and the Muslims buried were listed. The term Sad'r means head, chief, and to show its position of centrality, twelve branches of the Sad'r were formed. Each branch was referred to as Anjuman, had a chairman, and was governed by the constitution of the Sad'r. The twelve branches were:

- |                                |                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1) Anjuman Sharf-ul-Islam      | Blairmont, WBB         |
| 2) Anjuman Showkat-ul Islam    | Cotton Tree, WCB       |
| 3) Anjuman Thar-ul-Islam       | Dundee, Mahaicony, ECD |
| 4) Anjuman Ameen-ul-Islam      | Cane Grove ECD         |
| 5) Anjuman Nizam-ul-Islam      | Clonbrook, ECD         |
| 6) Anjuman Anwar-ul-Islam      | Enmore, ECD            |
| 7) Anjuman Shams-ul-Islam      | Lusignan, ECD          |
| 8) Anjuman Hamdard-E-Islam     | Triumph, ECD           |
| 9) Anjuman Mobeen-ul-Islam     | Windsor Forest, WCD    |
| 10) Anjuman Itifaq-ul-Islam    | Wakenaam, Essequibo    |
| 11) Anjuman Sadaqat-ul-Islam   | Vergenoegen, EBE       |
| 12) Anjuman Miraj-ul-Muslameen | Bartica, Essequibo     |

The Sad'r pursued the task of attending to the needs of the Muslims with determination. Within three years, the organization was able to capture the support of the overwhelming majority of the Muslims and established itself as **the representative body** of the Muslims. Yusuf Mohammed, in referring to the achievements of the Sad'r, said: "...*the extent of the success attained in such a brief*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p 8-9. It will be of great help if information can be given of these brothers by their relatives.



*space of time is yet unparalleled among Muslims in British Guiana. They broke new grounds, filled long felt wants, and meteoric rise to a place among the forefront of religious and social organizations was not a surprise. 'The age of talk, talk, and still more talk-without action-must go.'*

Some achievements of the Sad'r were:

- i. Successfully represented to the Georgetown Town Council to waive the \$300 tax owed by the Queenstown Masjid.
- ii. Gained permission for the burial and to perform the Salatul Janazah of destitute Muslims who died in the PHG, Palms, or any institution.
- iii. Publication of its official organ, 'Islam', in 1939.
- iv. Building the Sad'r Masjid at Sandy Babb Street, Kitty (1942).
- v. Building the Sad'r Yateem Khanna (Orphanage) for Boys.
- vi. Building Sad'r School at Kitty.
- vii. Creating a Baitul Mal Fund; national collection and disbursement of Zakaah
- viii. Representing that halaal food must be served in public institution.
- ix. Making representation to the Franchise Commission on adult suffrage.
- x. Presenting a memorandum to Government on the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Bill.
- xi. Dawah activities at public institution, e.g., visits to the prisons in Georgetown and New Amsterdam.

### **Division, Rivalry, and Organizational Politics**

Within five years, the Sad'r became very influential, powerful, and confident, but unfortunately its leaders became embroiled in organizational politics. Dr. M. B. Khan lamented in 1944: *"I observe that there has been too much malice, envy, jealousy, rivalry, hatred and back-biting among our people, and opine that the time is at hand when a place should be given to better understanding, cooperation and concord among us, for until such esprit de corp can prevail we cannot boast of achieving anything among our community. There are still many problems which affect Muslims and have to be tackled, as they are all prejudicial and inimical to the best interest of our community."*

**These words are applicable to the present existing situation in Guyana among leading organizations and their leaders.**

The formation of the Anjuman had an immediate impact upon the entire Muslim community of Guyana. Leaders and Jamaats began to align themselves either with The Islamic Association or the Sad'r Anjuman. This alignment was found also among the members and trustees of the Queenstown Masjid since they had been actively involved in the formation of JUDG, Sad'r, and the Islamic Association.

While there were criticisms against the Association, there were criticisms of the Moulana Shams-ud-Din. Hosein Ganie deemed the Moulana responsible for the division and disunity that erupted after his departure. He claimed the Moulana took advantage of the naivety of the Muslims and their love for the Prophet (S) and his descendants. Hosein Ganie explained the Moulana accepted gifts of money from those who swore allegiance to him and categorized this to 'godfatherism' as found in Christianity.

The departure of the Moulana on September 12, 1937 was strangely the end of his connection with the Muslims in Guyana. Despite the loud praises for the Moulana, the Sad'r did not benefit from his declared scholarly connection with educational institutions in India. A few attempts were made to contact him as indicated in the token references in ISLAM. On the occasion of the departure of the

Moulana, the Sad'r printed a scroll-like letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> September 1937 signed by the most prominent members:

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

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

*"The Sad'r Anjuman-e-Islam and other kindred Muslim Organizations which have been founded by you, will stand as a fitting tribute to your memory in this country, and we hope, Insha Allah, that these Anjumans,<sup>8</sup> will progress in such manner, so that your illustrious name will be handed down to posterity.*

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

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

For the Anjuman to grow and develop, it had to formulate policies and to execute strategies to secure support. This meant competing with The Islamic Association for members, financial contributions, and support from the Masjids. Its involvement with the Moulana gave the Anjuman an immediate advantage. It definitely had popular support, but it had to tread warily because of the influence and connections of the leaders of TIA, who had established support from a substantial number of Jamaats and members of the Muslim community. To allay all fears, the Anjuman declared: *"...this body was not formed with the object of competing against any other Association but will exert every endeavor to work in harmony and cooperation providing the issue in question is within the regulations of the Sunnat-wal Jamaat School of Thought."*<sup>9</sup>

The Anjuman in an effort to secure the confidence of the Muslims and to show its democratic nature made a highly political statement: *"... the activities of the Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam of British Guiana are free from any party or family influence, and are therefore under no circumstances being governed by the dictates of any fanatical individual, but by the voice of the Muslims."*<sup>10</sup>

## **Split In The Queenstown Jama Masjid**

*"... that the high ideals aimed at be kept steadfast in view and that the mean and petty things which might split and endanger our community, be always cleared from its path, for only in this way can success be attained."*

Janaab Hussain Baksh Gajraj Sahib

The Islamic Association had the support of top members of the Queenstown Masjid. In order to neutralize that support, the Sad'r appointed Hussain Baksh Gajraj, Town Councilor and Chairman

<sup>8</sup> The word Anjuman was used to refer to each Jamaat or Masjid. This resulted in many Jamaats adopting the term Anjuman.

<sup>9</sup> July-September 1940 p 27

<sup>10</sup> July September 1940 p2

of the Board of Trustees of Queenstown Masjid, as its patron. The support from the general members, executives, and influential members of Queenstown placed Sad'r in a very formidable position. In the beginning, an excellent relationship existed between Sad'r and Queenstown. As Sad'r grew, it began to flex its muscles, and in doing so attempted to direct the Board of Trustees of the Queenstown Jamaat with regard to management and policies. This caused the trustees to take a second look at the Sad'r, and this was the beginning of a deteriorating relationship.

Some officials of Sad'r failed to exercise caution and openly criticized the Board of Trustees. They identified issues and asked that these be immediately addressed. In the process, they made another mistake: they attempted to instruct the trustees. It was clear from correspondence that Sad'r intended to make their differences a national issue by including them on the agenda of its third annual general meeting. The tension intensified as the date of the third annual general meeting of the Sad'r approached.

Since its formation, Sad'r had been using the QJM compound and facilities to stage its meeting. In 1941, the QJM in response to the criticisms, decided to take a formal position on the use of the compound and facilities by the Sad'r. This is the first recorded instance of an open and internal challenge to the members of the Board of Trustees of Queenstown with regard to management and politics. There are other recorded instances when Muslims – members and nonmembers- demanded constitutional changes to accommodate the Westminster model in the electoral process. Each attempt failed. In another failed attempt in the late 1980s, a very prominent city lawyer opposed the constitutional structure of QJM. However, the nature of each conflict served to reinforce the system of management of the Board of Trustees. Had the struggle to seize power and a change to Westminster model been successful, it would have been disastrous for QJM. It would have opened the gates of politicking along party lines. It would have created division, fragmentation, and ushered in a series of never ending court litigations.

Probably, the leaders of Sad'r felt they had the right to make demands and formulate policies for the management and administration of any Jamaat and specifically QJM. There might have been those who were overtly too ambitious and wanted to take over the Jamaat through the Board of Trustees by either being appointed or have their candidates elected to serve on the board. In 1940, QJM was strategically placed and had the facilities to serve as the national headquarters of any organization. The trustees might have felt insecure and saw the Sad'r as a direct threat to their status quo or they might have foreseen the dangers of having a Westminster model. Either way, the scene was set for confrontation.

Sad'r spoke highly of its patron, H. B. Gajraj. It said, "... *we commend to our readers the message of our esteemed and loyal patron **Janaab** Hussain Baksh Gajraj Sahib, Chairman of the Queenstown Mosque Committee and Board of Trustees, and to whom we are deeply indebted for the very valuable advice given to us time and time again in our activities to maintain Islam's prestige.*"<sup>11</sup>

The following is the text of the message of Janaab Hussain Baksh Gajraj Sahib to the Sad'r acknowledging his appointment:

*"In the Western world there is a grave misconception of the religion of Islam among the masses of people. In this country especially because most of the adherents of this ancient religion are Indians, and because the language used for so many years in the propagating of it is foreign to the other people, the misconception is even greater, because those who are outside the fold look upon its rites as weird, and its teachings pagan.*

<sup>11</sup> ISLAM Vo. 1 1 No 1 July – September 1940 Editorial p 3. Janab is a title of great honor (Your Honor, Your majesty, Your Highness, Sir).

*That it is more than time that serious efforts be made to make the fundamentals of our religion clear is admitted on all sides, but I think that the methods to be adopted are not clear cut in the minds of our people.*

*A magazine such as this (ISLAM) can do an inestimable amount of good, and for such good works as it sets out to perform it has my best wishes. It must not be forgotten that this magazine will strive to do its best to combat ignorance and misunderstanding of our religion.*

*I accept the assurance of the publishers of this new magazine that it does not enter the field of opposition to, but rather to assist, any other local Muslim publication in the task to which they are dedicated. I sincerely hope that this excellent spirit will continue to guide this new venture for all time.*

*For, honestly, I do not see the need for opposition. The work which lies ahead of our people is hard, and the workers are few. There is therefore enough room for any such journals and while I offer this welcome to the magazine "ISLAM" I once again echo the hope that the high ideals aimed at be kept steadfast in view and that the mean and petty things which might split and endanger our community, be always cleared from its path, for only in this way can success be attained."*

The rivalry that soon developed between Sad'r and Islamic Association and the involvement of members of the Queenstown Jamaat in both organizations caused the high ideals and expectations expressed by ISLAM and H. B. Gajraj to become unattainable. Within six months after the H. B. Gajraj's appointment as patron, he became the central figure in the dispute between Sad'r and Queenstown. Sad'r's criticisms and attempts to direct the policies of QJM and indirectly to restrain the activities of TIA resulted in disagreements and conflicts. The Treasurer of Sad'r, Abdool Gafoor, had this to say: *"You would be surprised however to learn that this Journal of Islam was labeled a "Commercial Advertiser" by a certain irresponsible and evil-minded critic whose perversion and display of chamber-politics did not add much to his very mean propaganda against the Anjuman especially since his capitulation therefrom ..."*<sup>12</sup>

The executives and supporters of the Sad'r openly criticized the members of the Board of Trustees of the Queenstown Masjid on several issues. The editorial of 'Islam' (July-December 1941) with reference to Queenstown said:

*"In that connection the Chairman and his co-trustees with no qualms of conscience stated in effect that as the major portion of financial expenditure on the building was contributed by Chairman Gajraj he was in consequence entitled to be the chief guardian of the entire property.*

*"To this day, however, the Muslim community is unaware of what is the expenditure for repairs to the Mosque, as no account whatsoever has ever been submitted to the congregation.*

*"... it is stressed that the tolerance, patience and sobriety of members was most exemplary and outstanding against the unlovely conduct of the Trustees of the Queenstown Mosque in their undemocratic intent to subordinate the work of the Anjuman to the oligarchy they had set up."*

Sheik A Sattaur in a letter to Moulvi M. A. Nasir further said, *"That we are willing to accept the present Imam, providing he effects a 'tobah'<sup>13</sup> for his past conduct and in future live up to the ideals and tenets of Islam."*

The trustees interpreted the actions of the Sad'r as an attempt to dictate policies to the Jamaat and verbally conveyed their disapproval. They were of the view, also, that there was a pressing need for a clear distinction between the activities and officials of Sad'r and the Queenstown Masjid. They, therefore, took a formal approach in dealing with the Sad'r. Previously, the formality of applying and securing permission to stage a meeting by Sad'r was not required, but for the meeting of 1941, the

<sup>12</sup> ISLAM Vol. 2. No. 1 January – March 1941 p 24

<sup>13</sup> Tobah (Taubah) means sincere repentance for a major sin and seeking the forgiveness of God.

Sad'r was told that they had to seek formal approval from the trustees. The Sad'r and the trustees engaged in correspondence between January 10 and January 25, 1941 to work out the details and conditions for the holding of the Anjuman's third general meeting in the Masjid compound. The matter ended in a stalemate.

The issue won additional support for the Sad'r, which had nothing favorable to say of the trustees. It is ironic that while the Sad'r preached peace, unity, and love by quoting Quran, hadith, and western poetry, it promoted hate and opposition to the trustees and the Islamic Association. They had nothing good to say about the trustees of QJM and the Islamic Association. Dr. N. D. Khan said ; *"It was, however, subsequently discovered that the crux of the whole question was based on the fact that the majority of the members who had constituted themselves as trustees - self elected- were relatives and members of another Muslim Organization [Islamic Association], and therefore, having realized that the Anjuman had taken root and had gained the confidence of our community, they endeavor to hinder its further progress."*

Since the trustees refused to comply with any of the demands, Sad'r sought legal aid from Cameron & Shepherd, a reputable law firm operating in the city. This prompted Moulvi Mohammad A. Nasir to admonish (in letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> August 1941) Sheik A. Sattaur, President of Sad'r, for consulting the law firm. Moulvi M. A. Nasir wrote: *"I must state had you taken up the attitude you now suggest at the commencement of the trouble between yourselves and the Trustees instead of first resorting to Messrs. Cameron and Shepherd (lawyers) it would have certainly saved all the unnecessary worries of today. There can be no doubt that the whole matter could have been amicably discussed at a conference of Muslims with the consent of both sides."*<sup>14</sup>

Sad'r accused the Chairman, H. B. Gajraj, of *volte-face* in dealing with the issues raised. The law firm in representing Sad'r sent two letters dated November 6 and November 22<sup>15</sup> to H .B. Gajraj in which the major issues and demands of the Sad'r were stated.

- i. The Muazzin {the person who gives the Adhan – the call to Salah} was wrongfully dismissed and should be reinstated for he had given very valuable service to the Jamaat.
- ii. Rule 9 (a) of the Trust Deed was ultra vires and was inconsistent with Islam and should be altered.
- iii. The Trustees should present an audited financial statement.
- iv. The trust deed, power and control of the Jamaat had fallen into the hands of H. B. Gajraj and his family.
- v. The trustees were unsympathetic to the Sad'r Anjuman.
- vi. The trustees should no longer be appointed on the basis of financial contribution but elected by popular vote of members of the Masjid.
- vii. The body of trustees was an oligarchy.
- viii. A general meeting should be called to discuss the financial status and other issues affecting the Jamaat.

The two rules that were the areas of dispute were Rule 9(a) and Rule 3 sub-section 8 (c). Rule 9(a) stated, *"The trustees shall have the power to prevent and exclude any person or persons from entering the property whose presence therein shall be deemed by them to be undesirable or inimical to the best interest of the Mosque notwithstanding that the said person or persons may be of the Muslim faith."* Rule 3 subsection 8(c) stated, *"Whenever the number of trustees shall be reduced*

<sup>14</sup> ISLAM Vol. 2 Nos. 3 & 4 July – Dec 1941 p105

<sup>15</sup> ISLAM Vol. 2 No. 1 p 35-37

*below the number of 5 the continuing Trustees shall appoint such number of the Trustees as shall be required to make the total number of Trustees to its full strength.”*

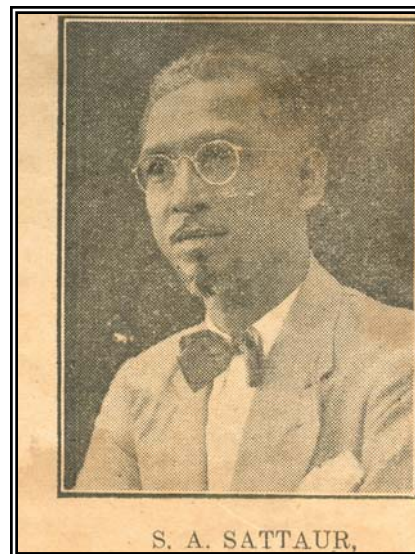
G.R. Reid on behalf of Cameron and Shepherd in his letter to H. B . Gajraj insisted on an early reply in order to resolve the issue. Almost two months later, a reply dated 13<sup>th</sup> January 1941 with its excuses was sent<sup>16</sup> by H. B. Gajraj who took pains to answer the points raised by G. R. Reid on behalf of his clients.

- i. For the first time, he made a clear distinction and categorized the Sad'r and Queenstown as two separate and distinct entities.
- ii. The trustees insisted they would not deviate from the precedent established for the appointment of a trustee in the case of a vacancy.
- iii. All Muslims are free to offer Salaah in the Masjid.
- iv. The Sad'r must delete from its letter that Queenstown was its headquarters.
- v. The trustees would not amend or change the rules to accommodate the demands for a popular vote.
- vi. He stressed that all members of the Jamaat participate in the management process and the secretary<sup>17</sup> of the Anjuman, who was a trustee, was chairman of the 12-man working committee of the Queenstown Jamaat.
- vii. The election of trustee was not dependent upon or limited to the rich.
- viii. The Sad'r had to apply to the trustees for the use of the Masjid and its facilities as any other organization.
- ix. The trustees would not allow others to dictate to them.

The correspondence between Reid and the Board of Trustees did not settle anything. The most important issue that demanded immediate attention was the granting of the Masjid and its facilities to the Sad'r for its third annual general meeting. QJM eventually granted permission but with a set of conditions. Condition (b) of the QJM stated: *“That no discussion regarding the Mosque and/or the Trustees must be indulged in during the time the Shed and Compound are lent to you and your Anjuman.”*

President of Sad'r, S. A. Sattaaur, responded by saying: *“... we cannot agree that no discussion will take place as to the trustees, as our recent correspondence shows we consider the Trust Deed and Rules under which the Trustees act constitute them a close corporation out of touch with the general sentiment of the other members and that these Rules, etc., require amendment. Surely the Trustees are not afraid of having their actions as Trustees discussed. If they consider any such discussion unseemingly, please say so at once, as we cannot agree to muzzle members in the way suggested.”*<sup>18</sup>

The exchange of correspondence with QJM indicated that Sad'r could not hold its meeting there. The Sad'r, therefore, applied and secured permission to hold its annual general meeting at Old Mosque, Alexander Village. At the meeting held at Alexander Village, supporters of Sad'r were very



<sup>16</sup> ISLAM vol.2 no. 1 p 39-42

<sup>17</sup> The secretary, J. Mohammed Khan, and the treasurer, A. Gafoor, of the Sad'r Anjuman were trustees of the Queenstown Masjid.

<sup>18</sup> ISLAM Vol. 2 No.1 45.1941



emotional, and clearly indicated they wanted to terminate their association with Queenstown Jamaat. The opinion was openly expressed that conditions for the use of the Queenstown Shed were “*unjustifiable, and deliberately wicked on the part of the Trustees, with the view of submerging and, or sabotaging the noble work which the Anjuman had undertaken for the uplift of the Muslim community in particular, and for the public good in general. It was however subsequently discovered that the crux of the whole question was based on the fact that the majority of members who had constituted themselves as Trustees – self-elected – were relatives and members of another Muslim Organization, and therefore, having realized that the Anjuman had taken root and had gained the confidence of our community, they endeavored to hinder its progress.*”

The scene then was set for the leaders and immediate supporters of Sad’r to sever relationship with the QJM. The existing bitterness did not allow the leaders of the three organizations to share a common physical environment. The crisis caused the leaders of Sad’r to consider the prospects of having a Masjid and facilities completely under their control. It did not take long for the Sad’r to locate a site in Kitty.

In offering justifications to break way from QJM and establish a Masjid under its control, Sad’r blamed the trustees of Queenstown, but at the same time ventured to say: “*The new mosque that is being erected at **Sandy Babb Street, Kitty**, will be a great boon and blessing to the residents of the district and its environs. The spot, which has been specially selected, is central, and Muslims are bending all their energy towards its successful and timely accomplishment.*”<sup>19</sup> In terms of distance and population, the Muslims needed a Masjid other than QJM. In 1942, Kitty was regard as part of the East Coast of Demerara while Ruimveldt and Alexander Village were on the East Bank of Demerara.

Sad’r built a Masjid<sup>20</sup> in Kitty and opened it on February 15, 1942 and named Sad’r Masjid. At the Fourth Annual General Meeting of the Sad’r Anjuman, **Moulvi Shakir Hussain** was elected unanimously the first Imam of Kitty Masjid. Over the years, the trustees of Kitty Masjid changed and so did control of the Masjid. Today, the Kitty Masjid operates as an independent body not under the influence of the United Sad’r Islamic Anjuman. The Masjid has since been beautifully rebuilt with modern facilities.

### **Amalgamation of Sad’r Anjuman and the Islamic Association**

With the existence of two organizations and each claiming to represent about 22,000 Muslims, concerns were raised in the Muslim community and in government and non-government circles. Inevitably, each organization engaged in propaganda to win support as the representative body of the Muslims. Sometimes, the rivalry assumed a personal note, and supporters exchange words at Islamic functions, meetings, or in the official organ of their respective organizations. The articles in Nur-E-Islam and ISLAM displayed a high level of penmanship. At times it was poetic and depicted the skilful use of literary styles peculiar to the English gentlemen of old England, clichés used in the USA, and legal Latin terms.

The Sad’r had appointed H. B. Gajraj as its patron. The issues between the Sad’r and QJM forced Gajraj to take a side, and he chose QJM. The Sad’r therefore attacked its patron: “*Mr. Gajraj’s conduct was most inimical to the best interest of the Mosque, as he defiled the sacred precincts of the property by threats of violence, abuse and obscene language when he drove out responsible Muslims from the Mosque Compound on the meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> September (1940), last.*”

<sup>19</sup> ISLAM Vol. 2 No 3 & 4 July Dec 1941 Editorial p 76.

<sup>20</sup> The cost of building the Kitty Sad’r Masjid was estimated at \$1,400.

Some of the written remarks contradicted the declared Islamic beliefs of the writers of ISLAM, and made a mockery of their Quranic quotes. Saif-ul Khalid was bitter against those who opposed the Sad'r. He wrote, "*The natural concomitant of having **traitors** in the camp of every good cause was also present among our sincere workers, and the Anjuman suffered a similar fate like our great Empire when those in whom implicit faith was placed **capitulated** and joined the ranks of our **detractors**. To these Islamic **apostates** [an extremely dangerous accusation]] who allowed themselves to be misled by the **oleaginous tongue** of **Islamic fiends**, I pray that the All-Knowing, All-Seeing and All –Magnificent Allah forgive them*"<sup>21</sup>

The dispute among the Muslims leaders had reached the Governor of British Guiana and the Colonial Office. The Islamic Association sent a letter dated May 25, 1943 to the Governor, Sir Gordon James Lethem, objecting to the opening of a tavern for the sale of alcoholic beverages at the Georgetown Ferry. The letter was received but a note dated December 18, 1943 was inscribed on it. It read: "*There is a schism in the association, two rival groups*". The Governor never invited the Association, and Banks DIH operated the tavern until the 1960s. The Islamic Association also wrote a petition to the Governor (June 11, 1943) proposing incorporation of their organization. This was also turned down.

The Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam made the first move to be incorporated and sent an application dated 20th October 1937 addressed to the Colonial Secretary. A reply # 118/12/3 and dated 30th November 1937 was sent to the Sad'r.

*Colonial Secretary Office.  
British Guiana  
30th November, 1937.*

Sirs,

1. *I am directed to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 20th October, 1937, transmitting a copy of application to the Registrar of Friendly Societies for registration of a society known as the "Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam" under the provisions of the Friendly Societies Ordinance, Chapter 214.*
2. *In reply am to request you to inform the petitioners that Government is advised that this society being, it would appear, primarily intended for the promotion of religion is not as much suitable for the registration applied for. It would seem, however, that there is nothing to prevent the Society's incorporation under the Companies (Consolidation) Ordinance, Chapter 178, if desired by its members.*
3. *The enclosures to your letter are returned herewith.*

*I have the honor to be,  
Sirs,  
Your obedient servant*

*G. Green  
for Colonial Secretary*

---

<sup>21</sup> ISLAM July-August-September 1940 Sad'r Anjuman –e – Islam: A Brief Retrospect of Activities p 29. The highlights are mine for emphasis.

The Islamic Association and Sad'r operated in isolation of and in opposition to each other with each attempting to gain an advantage. The biases in the society and matters that affected the Muslims directly required the collective approach of both organizations. Sad'r was growing and the Association was shrinking as evidenced by the financial statements of both organizations. In 1941, the expenditure of Sad'r was five times greater than the Islamic Association. Sad'r had an abundance of workers and supporters while TIA had a few that could be easily counted. With financial and moral support, the Sad'r became equipped to complete several projects.

The leaders of JUDG, Sad'r, and TIA met very often as businessmen, at social and religious functions, and political events. Their behavior, attitude and publications aroused concern. A certain amount of pressure was put on TIA and Sad'r to identify areas of cooperation. Though the leaders agreed, there were reservations since each organization wanted to have the lion's share. At the national level, both organizations failed to show a united front in dealing with matters affecting the Muslims community.

1. J. D. Tyson visited Guyana as a representative of the government of India to look into the interest of the Indians. In a petition dated 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1939 and signed by S.A. Sattaur, M.A. Khan, A Hack, J. M. Khan, F. Dad Khan, S. M. Haniff, M. Mohamed, Mohamed Ishmail, M. Rohoman, M. Sheriff, and Aziz Gafoor, the Sad'r represented the following:

- i. "That this Anjuman at all times will be loyal to **THE BRITISH THRONE** is one of our tenets..."
- ii. The Muslims are at a disadvantage to offer a sound religious education to young Muslims.<sup>22</sup>
- iii. The government should establish a school to offer Islamic education.
- iv. A Moulana from India should be appointed head of that school.
- v. The Moulana should be appointed a Kazi, and Imams of the Board of Ulmai-Din should be appointed deputy Kazis.
- vi. The Muslims should be granted divorce without recourse to the courts.
- vii. The Sad'r represented the majority of the Muslims in Guyana.

Regarding No. (iii) above, the Muslims of Trinidad and Tobago were ahead of the Muslims in British Guiana. Between 1914 and 1921, missionaries arrived in TT from India to teach the Muslims. One such scholar was Naseer Ahmad whom ASJA brought to Trinidad and Tobago (T & T) from India. The Muslims of T & T were also sending students to be educated in India. The Ahmadi sent Amir Ali of Siparia to the Ahamadi institution in Lahore. He returned to T&T to spread the Ahmadi doctrines.

---

36. This should be of special to members of the Hifaz, MYL, and JUDG who falsely represented the reasons for the decline of Islamic education in Guyana. The result of the 1990s was a culmination of the situation that developed as from the 1930s.

2. The Sad'r and the TIA were treated separately by the government. For upcoming general election, each organization was asked [and they did] to nominate Moulvis to act as Commissioners Oaths. The appointment of six persons nominated by the Sad'r was confirmed in the Official Gazette on June 23, 1946. They were S. M. A. Hamied (Hamburg), Rahmatally (Bel Air), M. I. Dookhi (Reliance), M. B. Hooseiny (Victoria), and Mohammed A. Raouf (La Jalousie). Six members also were appointed from the Islamic Association.<sup>23</sup>

3. Sad'r and TIA agreed to present a joint proposal to the Franchise Commission. However, when The Islamic Association sent its proposals for consideration by Sad'r and for submission to the Franchise Commission, Sad'r rejected TIA's proposals and took immediate action to inform all its branches of its decision. Sad'r eventually submitted its own proposals.

By 1944, Sad'r had the popular vote and was established as the representative body of the Muslims. However, within The Islamic Association and among the membership and trustees of the Queenstown Jama Masjid were powerful and influential Muslims who voluntarily joined the Sad'r and became active members. The addition of former Islamic Association and Queenstown members into the ranks of Sad'r influenced its policies. Gradually, the hardliners within Sad'r decreased and new policies evolved aiming at cooperation rather than confrontation. At the same time, the lines of differences were disappearing and it gradually became difficult to distinguish who was Sad'r and who was Islamic Association. Inherent in all of this was the hope, as expressed very often, that Guyana must have one representative body.

The changes that were taking place became quite apparent for by 1945 influential members of The Islamic Association assumed leadership positions within the Sad'r. **R. B. Gajraj**, son of H. B. Gajraj, was a founder member of the Islamic Association. He was elected President of the Sad'r Anjuman in 1945. His election was very crucial and vital for the unification of the two organizations. He had access to executives of the Islamic Association, JUDG, and BOT of Queenstown. In all the organizations and among the leaders, he commanded respect. In 1948, Moulvi M. A. Nasir was seen as active member at the Annual General Meeting of the Sad'r. At that meeting, he moved a motion for the amendment of certain rules of the Anjuman. This was a clear indication that The Islamic Association was taking its last gasps of breath, but at the same time its chief members started to figure prominently in the politics of Sad'r.

Organizations are political by nature and as such can never be free from conflicts with regard to organizational rivalry, policies, exercise of authority, scarce resources, goals and objectives, attainment of successes and placing blames for failures. The real test for the organizations and their leaders, however, is how they resolve their differences and conflicts. They have to separate the issues from the personalities; identify the root causes of the conflicts; develop strategies that would resolve the conflicts; make every effort to act justly and to honor their agreements. Throughout its history of seventy years (1937-2007), Sad'r had to deal with numerous problems and conflicts whose nature and root causes were never quite understood by its chief supporters while the external influences prevented its leaders from making decisions in the interest of the Muslims.

## Change in Leadership

S. A. Sattaur, founder president of Sad'r, declined nomination at the annual general meeting in 1941 because he had enlisted in join King George's army to fight against Adolf Hitler of Germany.

---

<sup>23</sup> ISLAM Vol. 8 No. 2 1946 p 63

He was appointed Honorary President for life and Dr. Muhammad Barkatullah Khan was unanimously elected as President of Sad'r. Dr. M. B. Khan brought with his own style of management, values, and expectations. The officials of Sad'r in 1944 were:

**President:** Dr. M. B. Khan

Vice-Presidents: Moulvie Shakir Hussain (senior) and Moulvie Abdul Hamid Khan (Junior)

Secretary-Treasurer: Mohammed Ishmail

Assistant Secretary: Jan Mohammed

Traveling Secretary; Ramzan Khan

Sick Visitors; John Bacchus and Rahim Baksh

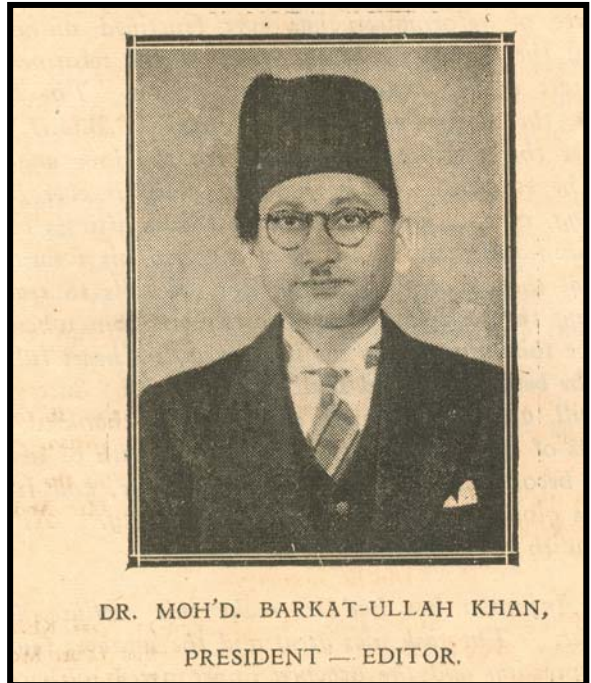
**Committee Members:** Gool Mohamed Khan, Habibur Rasool, Kasimally, Mohamed Ibrahim, Abdool Samad, Twahar Ally, Olie Mohamed, Sultan Khan.

Committee Life Members: S. A. Sattaur (Hony. President), Abdool Razack, N. Deen, F. K. Rahaman, and L. Bacchus

**District Secretaries:** Moulvies S. Mohamed Eshaque (No. 74, Corentyne); Hyat Khan (No. 78, Springlands); Messers Yusuf Ali (Skeldon); Nadir Bacchus (Port Mourant); M. Mobeen Khan (Albion); M. I. Dookie (Reliance); Alli Mohamad (Bath); M. Hyat (Sisters); Joe A. Aziz (Wales); M. Aziz (Versailles)

**Editor of ISLAM:** M B. Khan

**Trustees of Sad'r:** Dr. M. B. Khan; Abdool Munir Khan; A.D. Hack; M. Ishmail; S. A. Sattaur; Gool Mohamed Khan; M. Azeem Khan.



## Formation of the Muslim League

A full-blown crisis emerged in 1945 when Dr. Khan after being elected to serve his fifth term encountered difficulties with his executives. To demonstrate his influence and to pressure the executives, he resorted to drastic measures. (i) He resigned as president and (ii) founded the Muslim League. The Sad'r immediately rejected him and refused to acknowledge the existence of the **Muslim League**. Dr. Khan had overestimated his popularity and power to change decisions. He misread the situation and proved incapable of dealing with a crisis. By forming the Muslim League, Dr. Khan destroyed the very principle he fought to establish and acted in opposition to the mission of Sad'r. This was a clear case when the organization and cause were considered greater than any individual. Such grandiose feelings have been the downfall of many popular leaders.

Sad'r reacted swiftly against Dr. Khan. It immediately disassociated itself with the new organization, Muslim League, and through its official organ, ISLAM and in the editorial Sad'r dealt with the topic hypocrites (Q9: 74): *"With this belated number we wish to apologise to our members and readers for the unavoidable delay. We presume you may have read our Notice in the Daily Newspapers – the resignation of the Editor-President, Dr. M. Barkatullah Khan, published for your information and guidance.*

*"We however take this opportunity to notify our Members that the Sad'r Anjuman-Islam of British Guiana in no way concerned or interested in the newly formed League by ex-editor-President.*

*"We also wish to remind you to address all communication, Literature, Money Orders, etc., direct to the Hony. Secretary, Anjuman-E-Islam of B. G., Orphanage Building, Kitty (P. O. Box 283)."*

With the resignation of Dr. M. B. Khan, John Bacchus became the acting president. Subsequently, the internal issues of Sad'r were resolved and Dr. Khan rejoined the ranks of Sad'r, but the Muslim League did not disappear. It continued to exist and to attract a particular kind of membership in the late 1940s and 1950s. It formed a youth arm called the Muslim Youth League to compete with the Muslim Youth Organization of British Guiana which was affiliated to the USIA. History repeated itself in 2000 when the West Demerara Muslim Youth Organization was dissolved to make room for the resuscitation of the Muslim Youth League (MYL), which again set itself up as a rival to the MYOG. MYL is now associated with the USIA and is claiming national status.

From 1937 to 1946, there was a constant change in the composition of the executive council of Sad'r and TIA. Of the originally elected executives of the Sad'r 1937, only two members, G. M. Khan and S. A. Sattaur, remained as executives. From the TIA, founder members left to join the Sad'r. The change in executive members definitely affected policies and the balance of power within the two organizations, Sad'r and TIA. These changes placed the main power brokers within the Sad'r and they had the difficult task of finding a suitable candidate who would be recognized, respected, and acceptable to all factions within Sad'r, TIA, and QJM.

At the annual general meeting of 1945, Rahman B. Gajraj was elected president and held this position until the 1950s. He had ready access to influential members within Sad'r, TIA and QJM. Through his efforts, a tacit agreement was reached between TIA and Sad'r to identify areas of cooperation in the interest of the Muslims. To this effect R. B. Gajraj, President of the Sad'r Anjuman, said in the editorial of ISLAM: *"Believe me, dear brethren, I almost happy to announce the unanimous agreement between both The Islamic Association of B. G. and ourselves to form a joint committee to administer the proposed grant of Government for Urdu education."* This resulted in the formation of the Muslim Education Committee comprising of:

- (a) Messrs A. D. Hack (President), M. Azeem Khan (Vice-President), and S.M. Shakoor from the Islamic Association
- (b) Messrs Rahaman. B. Gajraj (President), S. A. Sattaur (Honorary President) and M. H. Rahim from the Sad'r Anjuman-E-Islam of B.G.

The President of the Sad'r concluded by saying: *"...the success gained in this discussion of matters educational could well be emulated by our people in some parts of the country where minor disputes have been magnified into extraordinary proportions. To these of our brethren, I say once gain 'Let bygones be bygones' and start all over again, building a better friendship, a wiser partnership, a long lasting brotherhood which shall endure until time with us shall be no more."*

These words set the tone. Subsequent events showed that the leaders of the two organizations met more frequently to discuss Islamic issues and the welfare of the Muslims. The stage was finally set in 1949 when the two organizations amalgamated to form the **United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman of**





**British Guiana.** A committee was appointed comprising of, among other members, Gool M. Khan (Secretary of Sad'r), Ayube Edun (MPCA), Moulvi M.A. Nasir, and Al Haj Mansoor A. Nasir (Attorney at Law). Negotiations were completed and a joint meeting was held at the Orphanage Building, Kitty. A five-point agreement was drafted and agreed upon for the amalgamation of the Sad'r Anjuman and The Islamic Association on February 28, 1949.<sup>24</sup> Those elected to serve in the newly formed United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman of British Guiana were:

**Patrons:**

H. B. Gajraj of QJM (former patron of Sad'r) and Abdool Rayman (IA)

**Honorary Presidents:**

S. A. Sattaur former President of Sad'r

Muhammad Ahmad Nasir and Hon. Cramat A. McDoom, former presidents of The Islamic Association

**Executive and General Council for 1949**

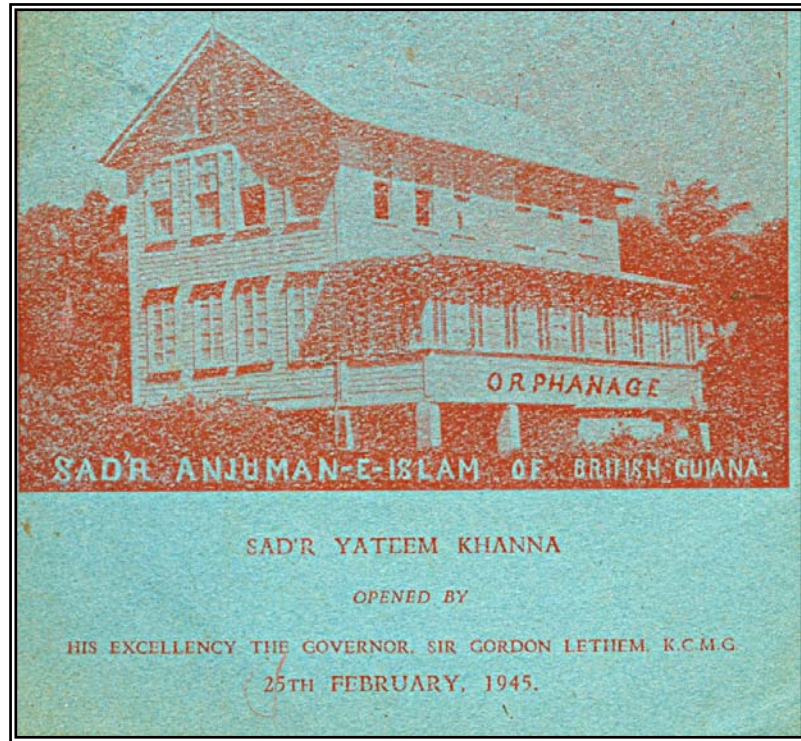
President: Rahman B. Gajraj (formerly IA and now Sad'r)

Deputy President: M. A. Nasir (IA)

Vice-Presidents: M. Azeem Khan (IA), G. M. Khan (Sad'r), S. Shabratee (IA), and Dr. M. B. Khan (Sad'r)

Hony. Treasurer: A. Aziz Gafoor (QJM & Sad'r)

General Secretary: Gool M. Khan (Sad'r)



Five Boards were appointed and each board had a chairman and secretary:

1. Orphanage Board
2. Baitul Mal Board
3. Janaza Board
4. Muslim Education Board
5. Press and Publicity Board

<sup>24</sup> ISLAM & Nur-E-Islam, March-April 1949. In moving from Guyana to New York, I misplaced this copy, which was the first publication of USIA. It contained information about the amalgamation of Sad'r and Islamic Association. I had taken information from this publication for article published in French in 1992 at the request of Dr. Ali Kittani of Morocco. What I have stated is what was taken from the article to Dr. Ali Kittani. *Note: I have retained the spelling of quotes. There are differences in spelling of words according to the Queen's English and American English.*

The unification raised high hopes and the Muslims expected in the future the Sad'r would play a dynamic role. The history of the Sad'r (1949-2007) splendidly depicts the heights of achievements, unity and strength as well as the depths of failures, periods of dormancy, and gross mismanagement. The activities of the United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman as from the mid-fifties were a shadow of the 1940s and early 1950s. S. A. Yassin, at the Sixth Annual General Meeting of the USIA, March 6, 1956, expressed doubts and hopes when he said: *"the status of this premier Muslim Organization in B. G. has risen to such a position of prominence as it did in the olden days when the Anjuman enjoyed the confidence of its supporters."*<sup>25</sup>

It was obvious in the 1950s to many leaders that the USIA was not performing as it should in comparison with the Sad'r in the 1940s. The prominence of an organization and the confidence reposed in it are dependent on several factors. Br. Yusuf Mohammed of Springhall, Mahaica (1945) identified the reasons for the meteoric rise of the Sad'r. He writes: *"No tree of reformation has ever fructified without being irrigated by the blood, sweat and tears of the reformers... Sad'r has had to make this sacrifice during its chequered career. The task was great and the workers few. The necessity was pressing and the urgency impregnated with crying instances that called for immediate action. This, I believe was what actuated its Executives in their endeavours and extent of the success attained in such a brief space of time is yet unparalleled among Muslims in British Guiana."*

In the years that followed, Muslims continued to measure and make such comparisons. As from the 1960s, each year seemed worse than the preceding one because a different kind of leadership emerged within the USIA. By association, activities, and representations, USIA was never able to reach the heights of the Sad'r Anjuman of B.G. This was due mainly to its quality of leadership, its priorities, and how it perceives itself as an organization. Its mismanagement of the affairs of the Muslims in the 60s and 70s and its involvement in national politics caused the Muslims to lose their self-respect, credibility, and dignity in the eyes of non-Muslims. The 80s and 90s brought another set of problems that showed corruption which climaxed in the murder of an orphan in the Sad'r orphanage.

The pioneers of Sad'r gave blood, sweat, and tears towards its establishment. Within a matter of three years, Sad'r had won mass support and earned the respect and confidence of the overwhelming majority of Muslims. When leaders are no longer prepared to make sacrifices and consider the welfare of the Muslims as top priorities, their organizations will fall and become a burden upon the Muslims. Today Sad'r continues to struggle for recognition and acceptance. It will continue to linger because there are many Muslims who still remember it as the premier organization in Guyana while there are others who intend to use it as a stepping stone to promote their personal agenda.

Its involvement directly in party politics, its four decades of incompetent leadership, and the state of corruption within it have ensured its decline. It is shadow of its former self. It is not foreseeable in the near future for it to regain some of its glory or to play a significant role in the lives of the Muslims. What it needs is a qualified Islamic leadership that will build bridges not burns them. The best line of action is cooperation with all existing organizations and work in the interest of the Muslims community.

---

<sup>25</sup> Nurul Islam ZilHajj 1374 p 7