

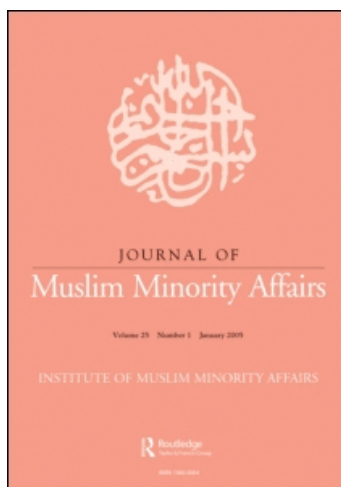
This article was downloaded by: [Chickrie, Raymond S.]

On: 19 April 2011

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 936624319]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713433220>

### Muslims in Suriname: Facing Triumphs and Challenges in a Plural Society

Raymond S. Chickrie

Online publication date: 19 April 2011

**To cite this Article** Chickrie, Raymond S.(2011) 'Muslims in Suriname: Facing Triumphs and Challenges in a Plural Society', Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 31: 1, 79 – 99

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/13602004.2011.556890

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2011.556890>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## Muslims in Suriname: Facing Triumphs and Challenges in a Plural Society

---

RAYMOND S. CHICKRIE

### *Abstract*

*The paper reviews the arrival of Islam in Suriname in 1873 and subsequent Muslim participation in this plural society of many races and religions, Africans, Amerindians, Chinese Dutch, Indians, Indonesians, Hindus, Christians, and Jews. Muslims, who originated mainly from Hindustan (India) and from the Island of Java, Indonesia, have assimilated with ease in Suriname. This paper summarizes the social and political history of Surinamese Muslims in negotiating with the secular state to meet the needs of their community in their new homeland. The paper examines the intricate relationship of the Muslim community with the state and with other ethnic and religious groups, and highlights the triumphs and challenges they face in a plural society. An attempt is made to analyze Hindu/Muslim relations outside of the motherland, Hindustan (India), which has been characterized by mutual respect, and cooperation, but was sometimes antagonistic, mainly due to external factors such as the arrival of the Arya Samajis from North India who brought discriminatory practices. After a turbulent period, the relationship between the two communities today is cordial as the local Muslims and the state were keen to prevent communalism engulfing Suriname. Further, this paper exposes the schism that exists among the Islamic organizations in Suriname, and finally concludes that Islam has now become part of the social and political fabric of the country.*

### **Introduction**

Suriname, a Dutch speaking republic located on the northern shoulder of South America, is one of the most unique countries in the world (see Figure 1). Interestingly, it is the only country in the world where a mosque and a synagogue face each other and where aspects of *Sharia* law were granted to its local Muslim community since 1940. Suriname has a population of about 492,000 and is home to over 20 languages and where the world's three major religions—Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam coexist peacefully (see Figure 2). The multicultural face of Suriname is a result of Dutch colonialism which began in seventeenth century and the institution of slavery to support the plantation economy. With the end of slavery in 1863, the Dutch turned to India to fill this void. Quickly, Dutch planters used the successful experiment of the British in neighboring British Guiana, and began importing contract laborers from China, British India and Dutch Indonesia. The Chinese came from Southeastern China, while 33,000 Indonesian from 1893 to 1940 came from the Island of Java. Between 1873 and 1916 about 37,000 East Indian laborers came mostly from the Indian States of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and the former United Provinces and Oudh (see Figure 3). Thus, it was under these historical circumstances that Islam arrived in Suriname, first with the West Africans and then with the arrival of Hindustanis and the Indonesians.

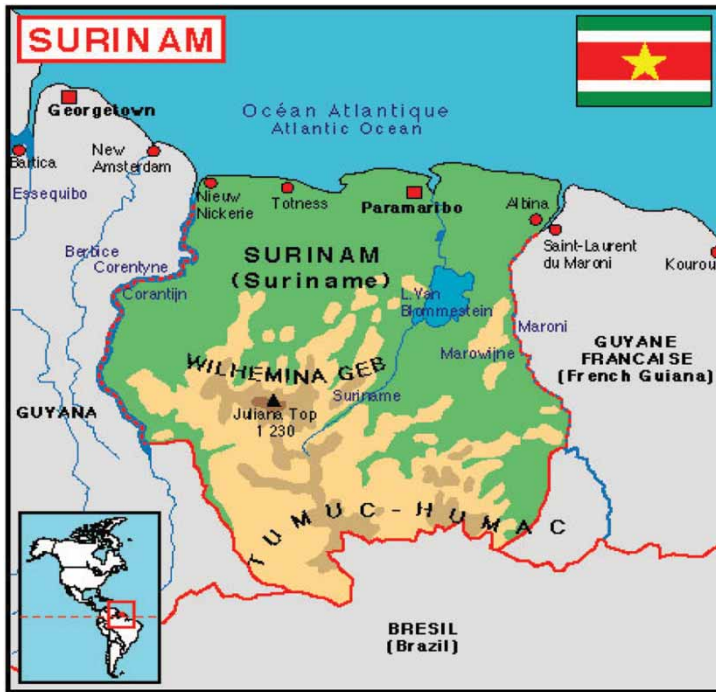


FIGURE 1. Map of Suriname.

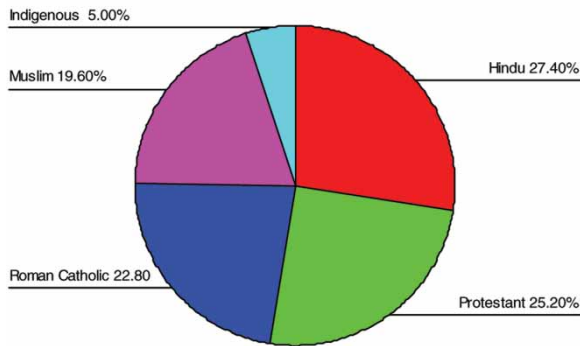
Source: Suriname Country Overview, available online at: [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/development/body/country/country\\_home\\_en.cfm?CID=sr&lng=en&type=home&status=new#overview](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/development/body/country/country_home_en.cfm?CID=sr&lng=en&type=home&status=new#overview)

Suriname was a Dutch colony until 1954 when it became an autonomous province within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Unlike, the French and British, the Dutch were not interested in “civilizing” the Asians. Dutch policies towards the different ethnic groups were “off hands”, and very soon the Dutch embraced “asianization”. A validation of this was the Asian Marriage Decree (Muslim Marriage Act) adopted by decree of the governor in 1940. At the end of World War II, a number of ethnic and religiously oriented parties blossomed, and in 1975 when Suriname separated from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, it had one of the highest standards of living in South America. However, this once prosperous country just after independence in 1980 was rocked by several coups led by Colonel Desi Bouterse, who is today the democratically elected leader of Suriname. Inflation and devaluation of the Surinamese guilder brought down the standard of living. Today, democracy has been restored in Suriname and with tightened fiscal policies, the liberalization of the economy, and the introduction of the new Surinamese dollar, the economy is growing steadily. Suriname today is making great economic and political strides.

### Islam in Suriname

The Muslim population of Suriname is predominantly made up of Hindustanis who belong to the *Hanafi Madhab*, while the Javanese belong to the *Shafi* theological school of Islam. A small group of Africans are Muslim and they were the first Muslims to set foot in Suriname, and have given Suriname some of its early heroes, such as Zam-Zam

Suriname Religious Affiliation 1980



Source CIA Factbook: Available online at: (<http://www.umsl.edu/services/govdocs/wofact2005/fields/2122.html>)

Suriname Religious Affiliation 2004

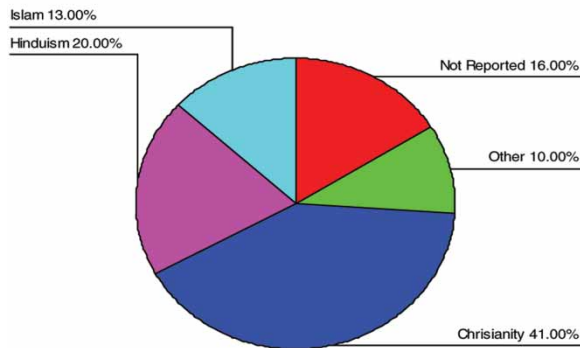


FIGURE 2. Suriname Religious Affiliation 1980 and 2004.

Source: Suriname Bureau of Statistics: available online at: (<http://www.statistics-suriname.org/>)

and Arabi of the Mandinka clan. With the arrival of the Hindustanis and Indonesians, the Muslim population of Suriname grew to 25% up until the 1980s; however with the generous offer of Dutch nationality, thousands left for the Netherlands. From the 1970s to 1980s an estimated 200,000 Surinamese left for Holland. Today, the Muslims are estimated at 20% of the total population, but the data from the 2004 census puts the figure at 13%. There could have been some flaws in the data collection which may not reflect the true religious affiliation of the people. There are over 100 mosques in the country and elements of *Shariah*, Islamic law, have been incorporated into Suriname’s Civil Code since 1941 when Governor Johannes Kielstra by decree passed the Asian Marriage Act which ended in 2003.<sup>1</sup>

Surinamese Muslims have always been politically and economically active. Suriname’s first political party, the Muslim Party (MP) was founded by Janab Ashgar Karamat Ali in 1942 which had a volatile relationship with the United Hindustani Party (VHP), a Hindu political party. The Muslims did not want to be dominated by Hindus from the bitter



FIGURE 3. Map of India.

The ancestral home of Suriname’s Hindustani Muslim- majority came from the United Provinces and Bihar, North India from 1873 to 1916.

Source: Historical maps of India, available online at: <http://www.india-history.com/british-india/india-in-1919-1947.html>

experience of events in the homeland. Today, the Muslims are well represented in Suriname’s *Staten* (National Assembly), and they face no discrimination. In fact, Suriname today has a Muslim Vice President, Robert Ameeralli. The country once had a Muslim Prime Minister, Janab Liakat Ali Khan and a Muslim Foreign Minister, M.A. Faried Pierkhan, and prior to that, many Muslims served as members of the National Assembly. The state accommodates Muslims for their religious obligations like giving them time off for the Friday *Jumma* prayers and for Ramadan. The end of Ramadan, *Eid-ul-Fitr* is a national holiday, and Suriname is a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) since 1996. The country has since appointed three envoys to the OIC—Dr. Anwar S. Lall Mohammad, Maurits Hassan Khan and Mohamed Rafeeq Chiragally who have all traveled to several Muslim countries to forge ties on behalf of the government of Suriname.

There are about eight *jamaats* (societies) in Suriname. Hidayatul Islam (1921), Khilafat Anjuman (1931), and Surinaamse Islamitische Vereniging (1929) are some of

the earliest organizations in the Suriname and they still exist today. Other organizations are the Madjlies Moeslimien Suriname (MMS) founded in 1974 and the Suriname Moeslim Association (SMA) founded in 1954. The Majlis Muslimin Suriname (MMS) or Council of Muslims in Suriname is an umbrella organization founded in 1974 to represent all Surinamese Muslims regardless of race. They have successfully established contacts with the Muslim World League, the World Islamic Call Society, the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations and the Islamic Missionaries Guild.<sup>2</sup> The *masjids* (mosques) in Suriname have institutionalized social welfare program to address the needs of their communities much like the Christian churches. They have established an efficient social infrastructure that aggressively addresses the basic needs of their communities such as homes for the abused and runaway children. They distribute *zakaat* (alms) to the poor; maintain *qabarstan* (graveyard), elderly homes, and operate many Islamic schools that offer Islamic studies, *adaab* (etiquette), Quran, math and the sciences. These religious schools have received government subsidies since 1950 when the National Assembly of Suriname voted to subsidize all Hindu and Muslim temples and schools to end the discrimination of aiding only Catholic and Protestant institutions for over a century. Finally, this injustice was corrected, Suriname and its Muslim citizens have come a long way forward. Suriname today prides itself as a showcase of tolerance and multiculturalism.

### The Indonesian Muslims

Since their arrival in Suriname from the Indonesian Island of Java (see Figure 4), the Javanese have been the most disadvantaged group educationally and economically. They are vulnerable to evangelism which has made converts of them to Christianity. The newer generations have quickly assimilated into the Surinamese society. Javanese were “outcaste minorities” like their Hindustani brothers but the Hindustanis were protected by the British Consul in Paramaribo and up until 1927 they were British subjects; on the other hand, the Javanese were unprotected.<sup>3</sup> Javanese, according to Surparlan, author of the book, *The Javanese in Suriname in an Ethnically Plural Society*,<sup>4</sup> had to strike a balancing act of not appearing too Javanese or too Dutch. In the early period



FIGURE 4. Java, Indonesia: The homeland of many Surinamese Muslims.

Source: Available online at: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/asia/indonesia/>

of indentureship many did not send their children to school, unlike the Hindustanis, and today most Javanese youths of Suriname have embraced Dutch-Western culture.<sup>5</sup> Many especially the children of the upper classes have an identity crisis.<sup>6</sup> From the last national census about 10,000 young people reveal that they do not know which religion they belong to. In various interviews with Surparlan many admit that they do not know what religion they belong to. They are circumcised but do not remember the grand *slametan* (feast) ceremony, and not all remember the *imam* guiding them to pronounce the *kalimat sahadat (shahada)* before the circumcision.

The Javanese are divided between traditionalist, reformists and the moderates in the center. They have their own interpretation of the Quran and the *sunnah* (teachings of the Prophet). Their Islam is a combination of indigenous practices going back to the Island of Java. The traditionalists combined *agama djawa* [Javanese religion] with Islam, while the reformists explicitly reject *agama djawa* as un-Islamic.<sup>7</sup> *Agama Kiwa* (pre-Islamic Religion), *salametan* (offerings), and *tajub* (feast, gamble, and drink) are pre-Islamic traditions. Most of them are part of *kejawen* (traditionalist) Muslim practice. *Agama Djawa* Islam, which was dominant in Javanese villages, is a syncretic Islam which incorporated old Javanese beliefs, including Hindu-Buddhist elements. Another schism is the direction of prayer. While in Java they faced the West, Makkah, to pray and did not realize that now being in Suriname they must face the East which has caused much feud among them, reformists within their own community and with the Hindustani Muslims. They are divided also over the question of *slametan*, and *tajub*.<sup>8</sup> *Slametans* and *Tajub* are “rituals ceremonies with food, social gatherings and feasts”.<sup>9</sup> Reformists assert that these festivities are *haram* (forbidden) because they involve alcohol and gambling, and extravagant spending of money that leads to the detriment of Javanese society.<sup>10</sup>

From 1890 to 1939, the Dutch began importing Javanese laborers to work the sugar and cocoa plantations of Suriname like their Hindustani counterparts. The Javanese arrived in Suriname without persons learned in religion. It was not until the beginning of the 1930s that partly through contacts with Hindustani Muslims some realized that the Kaaba was not located in the West, but to the northeast of Suriname.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, a number of Javanese Muslims started praying in that direction. This small group led by Pak Samsi, encouraged people to change the direction of prayer from West to East. Since then, this small group has been called *wong madhep ngetan* (East-Keblat people). Later some became very critical of what was seen as the superstition and religious innovation (*bidah*) among the Javanese Muslims. The moderates do not openly criticize the practice of praying to the West as most of the Javanese Muslims continued to do; hence they are called *wong madhep ngulon* (West-Keblat people).<sup>12</sup>

There are no Arabs in Suriname and Arab missionaries seldom visit this country. Most of the Muslim teachers and visitors come from Indonesia, Pakistan or India. Yet, the Arabs are getting the blame for the schism that exists between the Sunnis and the Ahmadis and between the traditionalist and the reformists Indonesian Muslims. But it is the Hindustani Muslims who first came into contact with the Indonesians in Suriname when this issue of facing East or West became highly contested. “The *Kejawen* Muslims conceive the reformists as belonging to an ‘Arabic Islam’. In their attempts to preserve their Javanese identity, the question of *keblat* occupies an important position”.<sup>13</sup> But according to eyewitness accounts, many Javanese pray towards the West at home but when visiting a mosque, *Kejawen* Muslims follow others and pray facing the East.<sup>14</sup> This small group argues that it is not the direction of West or East that is of prime importance, but rather the way one purifies his or her soul. They argue that “religious devotion is regarded as

having no value when one hurts and offends others".<sup>15</sup> These differences have fractured the Javanese Muslims into different religious organizations. There are about four major Indonesian Islamic organizations: (1) Stichting der Islamitische Gemeenten; (2) Sarekat Ashafia Islam (SAI); (3) P.J.I.S Shafiiten; and (4) Federatie van Islamitische Gemeenten Suriname (F.I.G.S).

More recently, the local Javanese Muslim community in Suriname has come under the microscope of the United States' "war on terror". Suriname today, because of its close people to people religious ties to Indonesia and Pakistan is under America's CIA microscope because the alleged ring leader of the Bali bombing, Ali Imron Al Fatah, spent a year in Suriname where he taught at an Islamic school among his countrymen. In November of 2003, after the government of Suriname confirmed that Ali Imron lived there for a year, the head of the MMS, Isaac Jamaluddin, met with the US Ambassador to protest the stigmatization that Suriname was becoming a terrorist haven. He noted that this will polarize the Surinamese community and give the local Muslims a bad image; as well, he reiterated that the Muslims want a continuation of friendly ties with the United States, the Netherlands, and with Asian, African and Arabic countries.<sup>16</sup> However, the United States remains very unpopular in Suriname not only among the Muslims but in the wider society. Jonathan Schanzer of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, writes, "The Surinamese defense official insists that Washington 'is lashing out in anger at the Muslim world after 9/11'".<sup>17</sup> [Over breakfast, several prominent Muslims agreed with one Islamic leader when he said that the US war on terror "is a war against the Muslim world".]<sup>18</sup> Collectively the Muslims have met local politicians and the academia. They remain cynical about American involvement in the Middle East. The government of Suriname refused to allow US military exercise in their country and for years ignored the request of the US Embassy in Paramaribo to close a major road in front of the embassy which they alleged poses a security risk. Suriname ignored the request for years, but finally agreed after about five years, and the United States will pay for the reconstruction of the road and a new community plan.

### Javanese Islamic Organizations

Islam was used to mobilize the Javanese in the 1930s. The Persatuan Islam Indonesia (PII) which was founded in 1932 came into existence to unify the Javanese and to reform Islamic teaching. In 1935 the Sahabatul Islam was founded and it aimed to purge Islam of *bidah* (innovations) or un-Islamic practices.<sup>19</sup> The Javanese became politically conscious after contact with the Hindustani Muslims. These latter two parities according to Surparlan were reformist's parties.<sup>20</sup> The PII built the first Javanese mosque in Paramaribo in 1933 which was named Nabawi. Most recently Indonesia has paid for the restoration of this mosque. The Sahabatul Islam (Friendship of Islam) came into being to reform Islam and the "Javanese socio-cultural system in Suriname".<sup>21</sup> However, the organization and its leaders were disliked by the traditionalists. Members of this group stayed away from the traditionalists and were very much influenced by the reformists Muhammadiyah movement of Java whose crusade was to purge Islam of *bidah*.<sup>22</sup> The Muhammadiyah came to Suriname in the 1930s. The PII and the Sahabatul Islam have maintained friendly relationship, but "the PII was more gentle and refined in dealing with traditionalists" and because of this relationship the PII was able to bring traditionalist into the reformist's camps.<sup>23</sup> Also, the Indonesian Embassy has been very active in teachings of Islam and Indonesian culture, offering courses in Bahasa Indonesian and traditional dances.



### The Muslim Marriage Act of 1940

The Muslim Marriage Act was part of the Asian Marriage Act that took effect on January 1st, 1941. It was a result of strong lobbying by the Suriname Immigrants' Association since 1913. This plea received a sympathetic ear from the Dutch Social Democrat Member of Parliament, H. Van Kol who "urged the reorganization of Asian marriages since 1920s".<sup>24</sup> Muslims have been living in Suriname since 1873 and up to 1941 their religious marriages were not registered by the government, and that led to "many problems regarding law of succession and registration of children".<sup>25</sup> It was in this context that the Dutch Governor, Kielstra who came from Indonesia in 1937, and was very familiar with Hindu and Muslim traditions, finally "proposed to legalize marriages performed according to the Muslim or Hindu religion".<sup>26</sup> The draft bill met "strong opposition in the *Koloniale Staten*" (local parliament) Creole members feared the "asianization" of Suriname would lead to division of the country along ethnic lines.<sup>27</sup> However, by decree of the governor, the Asian Marriage Act came into effect in 1941. This bold step taken by the Dutch governor giving special privileges to the Muslim and Hindu community by treating them as equals was a kind gesture. As well, it demonstrated that the Dutch were not interested in the civilizing doctrine. It was a rejection of "Dutchification", and embracing of multi-culturalism. The decree consisted of two parts, the Muslim Marriage Act and the Hindu Marriage Act which legalized marriages performed by Hindu and Muslim religious leaders.<sup>28</sup> The Muslim Marriage degree concerned marriages among Muslims only and has drawn much debate since the 1990s. Critics see this dual law as a violation of Suriname's constitution and unfair to women. Non-Muslims have always had to register their marriages with the civil authorities, but cracks in the civil code because of the Asian Marriage Decree led to abuse of the laws by non-Muslims as well. The sentiments of the Muslims are encapsulated in an article found in *al-Fajr*, a Muslim newsletter, "the Muslim Marriage Decree should apply only to Muslims to prevent misuse by non Muslims for example 'by passing the marriageable age or parental consent'".<sup>29</sup>

There are sharp differences on the issue of divorce among Hindus and Christians as compared to Muslims, and this has been the bone of contention. Suriname's Civil Code entitles every man and women to a divorce. Marriages of Hindus and Christians cannot be dissolved because they are regulated by their "religious books", thus, a Hindu or a Christian must apply for a divorce based on Suriname's Civil Code.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, the Islamic Marriages are regulated by the *Sharia* and "the legislator could insert a separate regulation regarding divorce into the Muslim Marriage Decree".<sup>31</sup> Suriname's Civil Code contains four grounds for divorce which is in stark contrast to *Sharia* laws where there are no specific grounds for *talaq* (divorce).<sup>32</sup> A Muslim man according to the Muslim Marriage Decree has many options for a divorce; however the wife has only two routes to a divorce: (a) she can apply for a divorce based on Article 4 of the Muslim Marriage Decree; or (b) she can apply for a divorce via a magistrate.<sup>33</sup> With regards to the second case, the magistrate must abide with the Civil Code of Suriname to grant a divorce, however he is briefed by an expert of Islamic *fiqh* who verifies whether divorce is necessary. The role of this expert of Islamic Law is to save the marriage, and he must determine whether or not the couple can live peacefully, and then advise the magistrate if a divorce is necessary.<sup>34</sup>

In the past decade the Muslim Marriage Decree has come under attack from international human rights groups, women's groups, as well as Muslims who supports the integration or standardization of the country's Civil Code. This they assert complies

with the country's constitution. Islamic organizations including Surinaamse Islamitische Vereniging (SIV), Madjilies Moeslimien Suriname (MMA), and Suriname Muslim Association (SMA), presented a united case to the president of Suriname. They supported the modification of the Muslim Marriage Act in 1973 which became known as the Adhin Law (Marriage Law Revision Act 1973) which was ratified finally by the Surinamese Parliament in 2003. The Muslim intelligentsia who were part of the several commissions since 1973 to revise the Asian Marriage Act did not see it as an infringement of their religious freedom. In fact, they see it as an improvement of their country's human rights record because the dual laws created cracks for abuse where women were at the receiving end. Revision included the minimum legal age of marriage for both males and females to 17 for males and 15 for females; grounds for divorce; inheritance; guardianship or parental authority after divorce; maintenance or allowance; it further led to uniformity with the Civil Code of Suriname. Religious marriages of Muslims will now have to be registered with the civil authorities and divorce by a secular court. More or less the Muslim Marriage Act of 1940 was abrogated.

### The Vanishing of Casteism in Suriname

Casteism is deeply rooted in India and was very rigid from 1873 to 1916, the period that Hindustanis migrated to Suriname. This especially affected the backward states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where illiteracy, poverty, drought and communalism is rampant. Casteism has impeded India's social mobility and has led to violent conflicts. Since 1873 when Hindustanis began arriving in Suriname from North India casteism began eroding amongst the Hindus. Most of the Hindustanis who came to Suriname belonged to the schedule castes (*dalits*) such as *ahirs*, *dhobis*, *telis*, *chammar*, or *kurmis*. In the case of Bihar, for example, from where the ancestors of many Guyanese, Surinamese, and Trinidadians originated, 64% of Bihar's population is composed of *dalits* who "nursed a justifiable historical grievance against the upper caste (13%), who dominated the economic, cultural and political structures".<sup>35</sup> "The constant battle waged by the rural *dalits* in acquiring social dignity or '*izzat*' against the avaricious behaviour of upper caste landlords and rich farmers have been indefatigable and quite measurably successful".<sup>36</sup> However, in the Caribbean this evil disappeared because these Indians had to survive outside of India in difficult circumstances.<sup>37</sup> According to Moses Seesnarine who cited Smith, Jayawardena, and Schwartz, foremost experts on the Indian diaspora, Casteism persists in East Africa but is less prevalent in Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad.<sup>38</sup> The three month voyage by the sea from India to Suriname played a major role in the disappearance of the caste system in Suriname.

When the Indians arrived in Suriname they were forced to cooperate with each other. They were strangers uncertain of the future and they toiled the same sugar and cocoa plantations. The language and culture of Suriname were peculiar to them. Alienation from the motherland also helped in the demise of the caste system in Suriname. There was indeed tension between Hindus and Muslims but not at the level that we see in India at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup>

### Hindu-Muslim Tension

When we look at Hindu/Muslim relationship in Suriname we have to take into consideration a few facts. Unlike Guyana, Trinidad and Fiji, Muslims are large minority in Suriname, something like 25%. They also maintained their mother tongue, Urdu or

Javanese unlike immigrants in these latter countries. The geography of Suriname played an important role in forging strong communication among Muslims. It was easy for 10 powerful religious figures to oversee the religious and social affairs of the Muslims community throughout Suriname which has a good physical infrastructure. Guyana on the other hand, is divided by larger rivers and the British kept Guyana poor and dependent. Suriname on the other hand, was one of the richest countries in South America by gross national product. Economically, the Surinamese Muslims are well off. In stark contrast to Guyana or Trinidad, Muslim and Hindu politicians of Suriname come from the *masjids* and the *mandirs*, still speak their mother tongue; and unlike in Guyana are not afraid to admit that they represent their constituents. Nationally, they advocate for Islamic or Hindu issues and not behind the scene only. They keep strong ties to the religious institutions and many are practicing Muslims modeling good behavior: praying five times a day, refraining from consuming pork and alcohol, and some keep beards and wear *topis* (caps).

Once Muslims and Hindus arrived in Suriname they maintained friendly relations with each other. They were alien to this strange land and much uncertainty surrounded them, thus they found comfort among fellow Hindustanis. It was not uncommon to find Hindus and Muslims at each other's birth, wedding, death, religious ceremonies and celebrating holidays together. Muslims have been keen to respect old customs by respecting the religious restrictions of Hindus. They did not cook beef and made vegetarian meals for the upper class Hindus.<sup>40</sup> However, following the arrival of the Arya Samajis in Suriname in 1929, friction developed within the Hindu community. According to Yoginder Sikand:

By the early 1920s Hindu-Muslim conflict, which had been steadily growing with the onset of British rule, witnessed a sudden upsurge, with the emergence of numerous aggressive communal bodies and movements. In 1922, the Hindu revivalist Arya Samaj launched a well-organized campaign to bring the Muslims back to Hinduism also known as *shuddhi* (cleansing). They targeted large number of Muslim groups that had still retained many customs and practices associated with their pre-conversion Hindu past. In a few months they claimed to have made several hundred thousand such converts. Muslim leaders reacted with panic at the news, and several efforts were launched for *tabligh*, or Islamic mission, aiming principally at bringing back the apostates into the Muslim fold and to prevent further conversions to Hinduism by spreading Islamic awareness among non-Muslims. The *Tabligh Jamat* was only one of several such Islamic missionary groups that were launched at this time in response to the Arya challenge, but it was the only one to outlive its founder and grow into a global movement.<sup>41</sup>

Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal translated a newspaper article written by journalist, B.R.A. Sovan in which he claims that in Suriname the Arya Samaj's main goal was "*sudhi*", a movement to reclaim or reconvert former Hindus now in Islam or Christianity; and since Muslims were very resistant and ignored their call the Arya Samaji leaders became bitter.<sup>42</sup> Muslim leadership under men such as Munshi Rahman Khan, Janab Asghar Ali, Imam Kallan Mian, Maulana Hafiz Ahmad Khan, Janab Kazi Ahmad Ali, among others who engaged the Arya Samajis in intense debates. As well, the Arya Samajis could not make converts out of Muslims and that enraged them.<sup>43</sup>

In Suriname, the Sanathan Dharm and the Arya Samajis were at each other's throat because of attempt by the Arya Samaj to win converts. Initially, there was verbal and

physical conflict between these two groups. The Arya Samajis wanted to control the Sanatans, but eventually they accepted each other, allowing visits and marriages among their children. This harmony was short lived. During this time the Muslims kept friendly ties with both groups. In 1931, publicly the Arya Samajis leader, Shukdev verbally attacked the Sanatis and the Muslims. "He even remarked that the Quran was not the ultimate truth and was incorrect".<sup>44</sup> Swiftly, the Muslims confronted him. With the *Satyarth Prakash* (Arya Samaj's holy book) and the Qur'an, Rahman Khan and his son Suleiman Khan visited Shukdev and confronted him about his remarks, however, Shukdev denied the entire episode alleging that the Bible contained many flaws. Suleiman in an attempt to embarrass Shukdev offered him one hundred dollars to "decipher" the meaning of a verse, knowing fully well that Shukdev cannot read Arabic.<sup>45</sup>

The Hindu/Muslim tension was brought to the attention of the Bharrat Uday Committee, a Pan-Indian organization in 1931. Maulana Ahmad Khan, a member of Bharrat Uday who could not attend a meeting that took place on April 19, 1931 requested that Rahman Khan write a letter to the Chairman, Ramprasad to identify "the perpetrators" responsible for the conflicts among the Hindustani community. Munshi Rahman Khan penned the letter in Hindi since Ramprasad could not read Urdu, however Maulana Ahmad Khan only knew Urdu. Ahmad Khan and Ramprasad were influential leaders of Bharrat Uday.<sup>46</sup> Bharrat Uday however, was torn into two factions along religious lines and failed to effectively address or solve the Hindu/Muslim tension because the organization was dominated by Arya Samajis and 65 Muslims who wanted to join the organization were rejected.<sup>47</sup>

A verbal exchange between a Muslim and a Hindu in 1933 further strained tense relationship. At a Muslim wedding Imam Kallan Mian and Babu Puroshottam Singh "got involved in an altercation" and the Hindus left the wedding without eating. Vegetarian meal was prepared for them. Kallan Mian was at fault and two weeks later he admitted to his mistake and apologized to Puroshottam Singh. They both made peace with a handshake, and sharing tea and a cigarette, however this peace gesture did not end the conflict. The instigators were bent in fomenting Hindu/Muslim confrontation. They demanded that Kallan Mian apologized to the entire Hindu community. Quickly rumors spread in Livorno that the Muslims were always mixed beef with mutton and feeding it to the Hindus. At the house of Nagesh and Sahati Bahadur it was decided to boycott the Muslims.<sup>48</sup> A number of committees were set up to resolve the issues but their attempts were unsuccessful. The *Brahmins* demanded that if they accepted the Muslim demand the food must be prepared by Hindus, however the Muslims proposed that half of the cooks must be Muslims. This did not go well with the Hindus because of the Brahmins leading the flock refused to compromise.<sup>49</sup>

As *Bakra Eid* (*Eid-ul-Azah*) approached, rumor went out that the Muslims intended to slaughter a cow but according to Munshi Rahman Khan this was just rumor. There was no such intention asserted Khan. News spread that the Hindus were collecting money to slaughter a pig on *Bakra Eid*. Money was collected by upper caste Hindus in Livorno. This was against the holy books of the Hindus but not in conflict with the Qur'an, Muslims argued. The Muslims argued that the Hindus killed in revenge, while the Muslims offered sacrifice (*qurbani*) in accordance with their religious injunctions. The Hindu community appealed unsuccessfully to the colonial authorities to ban the killing of cows, and in 1933 the day of *Bakra Eid*, the Muslims went ahead and sacrificed a cow while the Hindus took out a procession with flags and killed a pig near a mosque.<sup>50</sup> This rage could have become bloody and sensing this, "the government sent troops to control the situation at the site of the slaughter. They forced the mob to

disperse within minutes leaving all their drums and flags scattered.<sup>51</sup> Elsewhere in Suriname, the government troops guarded places of sacrifice. The Hindus felt defeated with the government backing of the Muslims and employed some other strategies to avenge the cow killing. The cow slaughtering upheaval threatened the Hindu Muslim harmony in Suriname. There was fear that Suriname would become embroiled in communalism like India. Muslims were aware of communal conflicts in India.<sup>52</sup>

Some Hindu leaders of the Sanathan, Pandits Paltan, and Jadhunath were at the forefront looking to convert Muslims to Hinduism. The Muslims confronted the Sanathan leaders, and asked, "What do you get by converting poor foolish Muslims who never even knew their religion?"<sup>53</sup> He continued, "You should accept a knowledgeable Muslim in your fold so that your fame and religion would increase in status".<sup>54</sup> Pandit replied, "Through the conversion of the illiterates, I received money and their services as well".<sup>55</sup> This development led to the division of the first Hindustani organization of Suriname, Bharrat Uday. Two Muslim organization in 1934 Anjuman Islam and Hidayat Islam under the leadership of Janab Ashgar Ali attempted to unite the two communities. Several meetings did not result in any resolutions. The Sanathans did not invite the Arya Samajis, and the Hindus demanded the end of cow slaughtering, while the Muslims demanded that the boycott against them be lifted before they refrained from cow sacrificing during *bakra eid*. In the district of Nickerie, where Hindus are majority, the slaughtering of cows was banned by the local government.<sup>56</sup>

Putting aside their differences, Pandit Paltan at the helm of the Sanathans sought the support of Babu Heerasingh who was the chairman of the Arya Dewarkar since they could not stop the cow sacrificing in 1934. These two groups who condemned each other publicly were now united in their effort to antagonize Hindu/Muslim relationship but history proved that this alliance did not last and eventually the Hindus were embroiled in their own bitter conflicts. On April 1st, 1934 the two groups met at the Arya Dewarkar and passed an 11-point resolution against the Muslims. By 1934 both the Arya Samaj and the Sanathans were united in the anti-Muslim boycott and the ban on cow killing.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, the Arya Samaj employed the same tactics in Fiji which led to conflict with the Muslims there. Ali writes, "Arya Samaj formed the Sangathan Movement in Fiji and began the onslaught on Muslims through a string of social and commercial boycotts".<sup>58</sup> Besides Khan's account, the Hindu boycott of the Muslims is documented by DeKlerk and Biswamitre.<sup>59</sup> The boycott was emotionally devastating to Muslims and marked a dark chapter in Hindu/Muslim relationship in the Suriname. It was an economic pact among the Hindus that was meant to hurt the Muslims economically; however it was not successful and led to more mistrust between Hindus and Muslims.

In Paramaribo the Hindu leaders rode high on this edict hoping to capture the anti-Muslim sentiments of the time. They purchased a large plot of land in Paramaribo for the establishment of a Hindu bazaar. "The bazaar was ready and equipped within one night and early next morning it was open to everyone except the Muslims". This displayed the solidarity that existed among the Hindus in their attempt to antagonize the Muslims. However, the government intervened by ordering the closure of the bazaar and punished the ring leaders. Governor Kielstra was fully aware of the conflict in India between Hindus and Muslims. As well, Munshi Rahman Khan was very aware of the cow slaughtering issue that was simmering in his motherland and it provoked him to take actions in Suriname. Khan received letters and newspapers from India and he was keen in not letting communalism engulf his new homeland, Suriname. It was during the governorship of Kielstra, 1933 to 1943 that communal bloodletting in India was at an all time high. Hindu and Muslim leaders in Suriname were very much in

touch with the motherland via local ethnic Hindu and Muslim newspapers that they received from the motherland. Back in the homeland, cow killing had caused great communal tensions that led to violence and Suriname was not spared of this ordeal. However, in Suriname it was not bloody. Many Hindus did not abide with the boycott. They continued their close ties with the Muslims, and in no severe term did the ban affect the Muslims, however it did cause more mistrust between the two communities. Eventually, the pact between the Aryas and Sanatis did not last. By the end of 1934 they were physically man handling each other. This friction according Khan was a result a few *Brahmins* who suddenly reclaimed their status after arriving in Suriname.<sup>60</sup>

### Conflict over Political Representation

Suriname today is a secular state that is neutral to all religions. Some argue that the Qur'an does not demand the establishment of an Islamic state. Muslims in Suriname view Islam as a personal battle to make oneself better and not a means of establishing an Islamic state. They are equal citizens in a plural and multi-religious Suriname with pragmatic visions void of separatist mentality that has plagued the Indian Subcontinent and other parts of the world. The Surinamese Muslims are not poor, illiterate, and backward. Interestingly, they do not view the world as *dar-al-Islam* and *dar-al-harb*. They have sought religious, political and economic cooperation with other ethnic and religious group. Their support of a secular state is not in violation of Islamic injunctions, and in the past they have bargained with the state taking advantages of the spaces and freedom it offers. For example in the 1940s they successfully lobbied the state to adopt aspect of *Sharia* Law. Governor Kielstra by decree adopted the Asian Marriage Decree. Many law makers challenged the motion in *Staten* and the governor was accused of favoring the Asians. However, in 2003 Suriname's National Assembly adopted the Adhin Law or the Marriage Revision Act which was supported by the Muslims. Muslims have been granted *Eid-ul-Fitr* a national holiday and government employee can take half day off on Fridays to attend the *Jumma Namaz*. Moreover, they lobbied successfully to have Suriname join the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

Today, Surinamese Muslims continue to enjoy the freedom of being able to fulfill their religious obligations in this secular republic. Muslims have always had an active political life in Suriname for Islam does not separate religion, and politics. In fact, Islam urges Muslims to be active in their society and to serve the interest of all; Muslims must be involved in politics. So it is not surprising that the first political party in Suriname was founded by a Muslim, Ashgar Karamat Ali with a religious and secular platform. There are many Muslims since 1975 who have been members of the National Assembly and in various cabinets.

After World War II, the Dutch government began to democratize the *Staten* and invited local politicians for constitutional reform talks in the Netherlands. In 1945, a delegation from Suriname was appointed to travel to the Netherlands to be part of the autonomy talks. The Hindus and the Javanese were angered that only Christians were part of the delegation and eventually a Hindu and a Javanese were included. This was unacceptable to the Muslims and there was an outcry because no Muslims were invited. The delegation was made up of four Christians and one Hindu. Ashgar Karamat Ali, a member of the National Assembly and a notary clerk upped the political ante. "Setting up the Muslim Partij (MP) in May 1946", he claimed to speak for both Javanese and Hindustani Muslims.<sup>61</sup> Ashgar Ali was a member of Bharrat Uday and that organization had had a history of Hindu Muslim friction. Ali was keen that Hindustani Muslims not be yoked with their Hindu countrymen. Islam was the basis for the party platform. He called for

universal suffrage and some sort of autonomy beginning at the village level. The Muslims quickly sent a cable to the Dutch queen demanding representation since they were “sixty thousand Muslims in Suriname”<sup>62</sup> and with the “intervention of the Dutch Minister of Overseas Affairs, the *Staten* hastily included a Javanese Muslim”.<sup>63</sup>

Following the Muslim move, the Hindus and Catholics founded their own parties. The Catholics founded Unie Suriname, which became National Party of Suriname (NPS) in 1946 and led by J. Pengel from 1959 to 1969. The NPS was founded and they tried to appeal to all races and religious groups. Since the 1930s, the rivalries between the Hindustani groups continued. “The proselytizing rivalry between members of the orthodox Hindu Sanatan Dharm and the more reformist Arya Samaj had become intense since the 1930’s and had continued so through the 1940’s”.<sup>64</sup> The Suriname Hindoe Partij (SHP) was founded in 1947 followed by the Hindostans-Javaanse Politieke Partij (H-JPP). Some Javanese who were former members of the Muslim Party joined the HJPP and the KTPI leaders accused them of selling out the Javanese to the Hindustanis. Leader of the Arya Samaj, J.S. Mungra attacked the Hindu party as narrow minded and not having any Aryans in its leadership.

Taking examples from the Creoles and Hindustanis, coupled with developments in their homeland, Indonesia, the Javanese became “politicized”.<sup>65</sup> In 1947, the Kaum Tani Persatuan Indonesia Party (KTPI) was founded by Iding Soemita with the assistance of Ashgar Karamat Ali. The party aimed to reawaken and mobilize the Javanese socially, culturally and economically. Later, Salikin M. Hardjo left the Unie Surinam Party to form the Pergerakan Bangsa Indonesia Suriname (PBIS) in April of 1947.<sup>66</sup> This party was made up of a mixture of reformists and moderates, traditionalists and Christian Javanese who were more educated than KTPI members.<sup>67</sup>

The Asian parties “demanded more civil jobs, the removal of the derogatory term *coolie*, more agricultural lands, roads, credits, agricultural extension programs and asked for a more sympathetic treatment towards Asians”.<sup>68</sup> Fearing Asian domination of the political landscape, the Creoles opposed Asian universal suffrage and some favorable amendments by Governor Kielstra. From 1940 to 1950, the Hindus and Muslims had an antagonistic political relationship as well. The Muslims were keen not to be swallowed by the Hindus and had a pact with the VHP of sharing power according to a 2:1 proportionality, but by 1950 the division became apparent. As we approached the twenty-first century, the unwritten law of allotting two cabinet position to the Muslims, one going to the Ahmadis and the other to the Sunnis, remains the status quo more or less, however there are complaints that Muslims are only awarded one cabinet post these days. Muslims hardly sit on the executive board of the VHP, and do not support the VHP as a block but can be found in the other political parties of Suriname. In the 1950s, Muslim and Hindu politicians traded verbal attacks at each other in the media and the once secular VHP—Hindustani Party changed its name to Verenigde Hindoe Partij. Prior to events leading up to 1950, all Hindu *Staten* (parliament) members supported the government of Pengel; however the only two Muslim in the *Staten*, Mohammed Radja and S.M. Jamaluddin supported the opposition. Mohammed Radja was a VHP member but by 1950 the split among the Hindustanis grew wider when he left that party. The VHP informed the Dutch government that Mohamed Radja no longer represented that party and in a meeting with the Sanathan Dharm, Professor Dew in his book, *The Difficult Flowering of Suriname*, quoted Lachmon as saying, “if I Lachmon, take no revenge on Mohamed Radja and S.M. Jamaluddin, then am not a son of a Hindu”.<sup>69</sup>

In 1950 these men accused the VHP of driving out the Christians and Muslims from the party. They also accused the party of undemocratic maneuvering. “They warned that

these forces were violating the established principle of 2–1 proportionality between Hindus and Moslems”.<sup>70</sup> This led to the VHP selecting a Muslim candidate in the October election, however that candidate did poorly which further inflamed Muslim and up the anti-Hindu sentiments. Dew attributes this low point in Hindu Muslim relationship to the bloodshed leading up to the division of India and the creation of Pakistan.<sup>71</sup> Adding more discontent to the rocky Hindu/Muslim relationship, Muslim parliamentarians who had long lobbied for an increase in the rice price of paddy, were not credited for this accomplishment. The Creole members of the NPS attributed this development to Hindu *Staten* members which further inflamed Mohammed Raja and S.M. Jamaluddin. In fact, *De West*, a local paper “replied that credit should really have gone to Mohamed Radja”.<sup>72</sup> An angry Jamaluddin then wrote an open letter to Lachmon:

And now you present yourself as a martyr, blaming.... You and Mungra are busy day and night pumping the Hindus full of hate and revenge against the Moslems. The consequence is that the Moslems are being boycotted in the districts and are being unnecessarily harassed and bothered by Hindus. Any action against us will be against all Moslems.<sup>73</sup>

### Relationship with the Islamic World

At people to people level, strong ties have always existed with the larger Islamic World. In spite of geographical disadvantages and limited financial resources of an uprooted people from Asia to South America, the Muslims of Suriname have maintained strong ties with the Islamic World since 1873. Naturally, strong bonds exist between the local Muslims and Indonesia and with India and Pakistan because it is from these countries that Surinamese Muslims originated from. Up to the 1920, they were relatively isolated from the Islamic World until the coming of the Ahmadis. Locals were exuberant when men such as Maulana Amir Ali, Maulana Shah Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqi, Maulana Ahmad Shah Noorani, and Maulana Ansari visited Suriname. Suriname is geographically at the Islamic periphery. Locals are eager to welcome any Islamic scholars to Suriname in an effort to renew the teachings of Islam. The local Muslims leaders were yearning of an Islamic reawakening. They did not question whether these Maulanas were *Ahmadis*, *Shia*, *Sunnis* or *Ishmaelis*, for them there was only one Islam. One *kalimah* (*shahadah*) as one Suriname articulated it. It did not matter if they were *Sunnis*, *Shia*, Ahmadis, Hindustanis, Arabs or Indonesians. They were unaware of the *Ahmadi*. They were only Muslim and were not divided between *shia* and *sunnis*.

It was only after World War II when Maulanas from Pakistan arrived in Suriname that the locals were informed that the Ahmadis are not Muslims and that their doctrines are in violations of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* of the Prophet. These *maulanas* are well respect in Suriname and has been instrumental in clarifying theological issues. Their contribution to the development of Islam in Suriname is widely known among the locals. On the other hand, they are blamed for the schism that exists among the Muslims of Suriname today. This relationship with the *maulanas* has led to numerous *maulanas* from India and Pakistan coming to work in Suriname to give theological support and to clarify issues relating to *shariah*.<sup>74</sup> However, locals were not ignorant that back in the motherland, India, there were *Sunnis* and *Shia* Muslims. In fact, *Shia* Muslims who came to Suriname from India were quickly neutralized by the majority *Sunnis*. By the 1960s the *Shia* observation of *taziyah* (*Shia procession*) had disappeared in Suriname.

The Indonesians community is the most recent immigrants and they have maintained strong ties with the motherland. The embassy of Indonesia in Paramaribo has been



instrumental in forging cultural ties with the local Indonesian population. The embassy regularly organized courses in dances, including contemporary Javanese dances. They also offer elementary and advance courses in Bahasa Indonesia in Paramaribo and in cities with a high concentration of Javanese. Most Indonesian and Surinamese heads of state have visited each other's country testifying to this vibrant relationship between Suriname and Indonesia. The majority are Muslims while a handful have accepted the gospels of the evangelists flooding the country from North America. It is in this backdrop that the Indonesian government has more recently has been active in educating and nurturing this diaspora outside of Indonesia.

Since the 1960s the Muslims have been drawn closer to the Islamic World partly due to mass communication—proliferation of newspapers, television and now the internet. Dramatic events in the past 50 years have helped in bringing them closer to the Umma (the Muslim world). They have spoken out on the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian land and the conflicts in Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia, Kosova, Afghanistan, and Iraq. More recently, they held rallies in front of the US Embassy in Paramaribo protesting the US invasion of Iraq, and in 2001, the Madjilies Moeslimien Suriname (MMS), renewed its solidarity with the global *ummah* when it declared, “our thoughts are with the peoples of Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq and the victims of diseases, poverty, hunger and ignorance in the Third World”.<sup>75</sup> In that said statement, MMA in alluding to Israeli “state sponsored” terrorism called upon the EU and the UN to exert pressure to end the Israeli occupation and illegal settlements in Palestine. They further asserted that “Palestinian children and their parents are also entitled to calm and peace”.<sup>76</sup> On the issue of Iraq, all the major organizations, SIV, SMA, and MMS in 2003 with the support of former Surinamese President Jules Wijdenbosh helped to organize a protest rally against the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq.<sup>77</sup>

### **The OIC and the Islamic Development Bank**

At the governmental level, Suriname since 1975 has maintained friendly ties with major Islamic countries. There has been a natural fraternal relationship with Indonesia, the largest Islamic country in the world, since 18% of Suriname's population is of Indonesian decent. Libya is the only Arab-Islamic nation to maintain an embassy in Suriname. Ties with the Islamic world were further enhanced in the 1990s because of the hard efforts of the Surinamese Muslims who pushed to have Suriname join the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1996 becoming the 55th member of that organization, and the first country in the Western Hemisphere to join the OIC. In 1997, Suriname also became a member of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). Since the 1990s Suriname has established diplomatic ties with Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. The majority of Surinamese Muslims who have made it into the country's national assembly were *imams* or leaders of mosques and Islamic organizations. Thus, when these very Muslims enter the National Assembly or were ministers in various cabinets, they work for and speak for the needs of Islam and the Muslim community at large. In 1996, Suriname made a pragmatic move to establish diplomatic ties with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This relationship Suriname hopes will facilitate exports and investments from Saudi Arabia. Suriname is keen in attracting capital investors for the different Suriname sectors. Saudi Arabia is also a member of the OIC, and is one of the largest shareholders of the IDB.

In December 2010, Sheikh Khaled Ahmed Moosa, CEO of Spirito Investment Ltd, a Dubai, and United Arab Emirates-based investment company seeking investment in the

oil, timber, gold and housing sectors of Suriname. The Emarati Company signed a memorandum with the Surinamese entrepreneur Andre Roy Royce of N.V. Orië. Yes, Emirate investors are discovering Suriname. This is part of the current President of Suriname, Bouterse push to attract Middle East investors.

Since becoming a member of the OIC and especially during the presidency of Jules Wijdenbosch relationship with the Islamic World grew rapidly. In Tehran, the Foreign Minister of Suriname, Mr. M.A. Faried Pierkhan met his Iranian counterpart, Kamal Kharazi on the sidelines of the 8th summit of the OIC in 1997. Praising Iran, the foreign minister of Suriname expressed pleasure for attending the OIC Summit in Tehran. Briefing Kharazi on economic conditions in Suriname, Pierkhan expressed hope that his country will begin cooperation in industrial and oil sectors with Iran. He also asked for expansion of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Welcoming the proposal, Kharazi expressed Iran's readiness in cooperation with Suriname in the fields of interests of both countries.<sup>78</sup> Iran then appointed an ambassador to Suriname.

Membership in the OIC has brought Suriname closer to the Arabic speaking world. Many Arabic speaking countries are keen in learning more about Suriname and to help in its development. More recently, in New York in October of 2005, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the leader of Qatar requested a meeting with Suriname's President Venetian. Oil rich Qatar wants to explore areas of cooperation with Suriname in areas of oil and water "Many countries have shown an interest forging economic ties with Suriname and we are looking to cooperate with them", says President Venetian.<sup>79</sup> President Venetian visited Qatar in March 2009 to attend the Arab South American Summit. Qatar is interesting in cooperating with Suriname in the oil sector. Suriname has a fledging oil industry.

Surinamese Muslims are doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, bankers, entrepreneurs and diplomats and the government is tapping this human resource by using its religious ties with the Muslim World to emphasize economic diplomacy. After a year in the IDB, Suriname joined the highest levels of this organization; its former Central Bank Governor, Henk Goedschalk was elected First Vice Chairman of the IsDB for 1999 at a meeting of the IDB Board of Governors. Henk Goedschalk was elected First Vice Chairman of the IDB for 1999 during its annual meeting of the Board of Governors. He is now replaced by Mr. Andre Tetling and Mr. Hendrik Asgarali Alim Mahomed. This led to an IDB delegation who visited Suriname in 1999 and again in 2005 to discuss various projects. Besides government officials that they met, two professors from the University and advisors to the government, Mr. Hassankhan and Mr. Nur Mohammed sat with the visitors to trash out some of these projects. Another visit took place in February 2005 by Mr. Mohammad Reza Yousef Khan who came to take a first-hand look at the Zanderij and Nickerie project which eventually was approved at the June 2005 IsDB governor's meeting in Malaysia. The IDB's main goal is to promote economic growth and social progress in the member states of the OIC. Suriname's purpose in joining this organization is to find new sources for financing development projects. Besides current projects that were being implemented for that year, Suriname submitted 15 projects totaling US\$ 160 million for 1999–2003.

However, when the government of President Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan came to power they were skeptical about ties with the Islamic world. Some alleged that the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) which Suriname is a member of is an Islamic evangelical organ and that it would export radical Islam and terror to Suriname. More precisely, a member of the previous government of President Venetiaan made these allegations.<sup>80</sup> This could have accounted for the lack of engagement with the

OIC and ISESCO seriously. This only happened during the second term of President Venetiaan. An indication of this change was the presence of a large Surinamese delegation to the 10th Summit of the OIC in Dakar, Senegal in 2008 headed by its Foreign Minister, Lygia L.I. Kraag-Keteldijk. A stronger indication of Suriname's will to foster closer ties with the Arab World was the presence of President Venetiaan in March 2009 in Qatar to attend the 2nd Arab South American Heads of Government Summit.

Due to a thaw in relationship with the OIC during the Venetiaan presidency, Suriname has managed to get the IDB Bank to fund only four projects in this tiny South American country. Suriname first appointed Mr. Lall Mohammed as special enjoy to the OIC and currently that post is held by Mr. Rafiek Chiragally and Maurits Hassankhan who have all at different periods attended OIC summits and foreign minister conferences across the world representing Suriname. Later in the President Venetiaan administration, Suriname demonstrated more consistency, diligence, and put in place man power to maintain strong ties with the Middle East. Since becoming a member of the OIC and the IDB, many visits were made my Surinamese diplomats to various Islamic countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Mali, Burkina Faso and Yemen. There is a person at the Surinamese Foreign Ministry who handles OIC affairs. This has brought some tangible benefits to Suriname but a more serious engagement with the OIC and the IDB can yield more benefits for Suriname. And now that the architect of Middle East ties, President Desi Bouterse, is in office, Suriname OIC and Middle East engagement will move forward. Bouterse recently met with the OIC Secretary General, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu during a mini-summit with Guyana's President Jagdeo in New York.<sup>81</sup> President Bouterse since taking office in August 2010 chose a Muslim, Robert Ameerli as his vice president. Both men attended the Eid-ul-Fitr Namaz (prayers) which was held in front of the Presidential Palace of Suriname.

So far the IsDB has financed two infrastructural and two health projects in Suriname. In February, the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Tourism (TCT) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a delegation of the IDB for the purchase of radar equipment to help air traffic controllers monitor flights within a radius of 220 miles. This project was approved at the governor's meeting in Malaysia in June, 2005 and the Saudi Arabia-based IDB agreed to loan Suriname US\$23.5 million to pay for the new airport radar system. This radar navigation system will improve air traffic safety at Suriname's international airport.<sup>82</sup> The IDB and the Surinamese Government also signed a MOU for the rehabilitation and expansion of the New Nickerie Harbor. The bank will finance US\$10 million for this project, and more recently allotted an additional 5 million for the project. The ministry of Regional Development and Public Health of Suriname are in cooperation with the IDB to execute a health project in Suriname's hinterland. With this project, the primary health care in the interior of Suriname will be improved. This project envision the building of 21 new standard out-patient clinics and 57 personnel houses for the benefit of health workers, three health centers and three landing sites on various locations. The IDB has also agreed to finance the building of a Radio Therapeutics center for cancer treatment in the Paramaribo Academic Hospital.<sup>83</sup> This project and the latter mention will cost a total sum of approximately 16 million US dollars. Suriname is now asking the IDB to open a local office here with a local representative and if Guyana becomes a member of the IsDB it will be more reason for the IDB to have a local representation in South America. This step will ensure execution of projects and foster closer ties with the bank and the Islamic world.

## Conclusion

Surinamese Muslims came from West Africa, Hindustan and Indonesia, and have coexisted peacefully among Hindus and Christians, Creoles, Whites and Jews. However, in the early period of indentureship communalism embroiled the Hindustani community after the Arya Samaj launched its reform program to reform and mobilize the Hindu community which disrupted the tranquil Hindu/Muslim relations that existed in Suriname since 1873. The Arya Samaj's *shuddi* mantra, to return Muslims to the Hindu fold angered the Muslims community and led to confrontations between Muslim and the Hindu leaders. When Surinamese Muslims arrived from Hindustan they were united but later they became divided into Ahmadiyya and Sunnis. And with the founding of the SIV in the 1920s, it waged a long battle to educate the public about Islam, fought for political representations of Muslims, undertook *dawah* work and established many social-welfare programs to benefit the Muslims. Also, they have written extensively on Islam and Surinamese Muslims. Interestingly, when some learned Muslims discovered the SIV had been penetrated by the doctrines of the Ahmadiyya, it led to verbal confrontations and debates. This schism led to the establishment of other organizations; however division among Surinamese Muslims has not ended but has exacerbated because organizations compete against each other rather than compliment each other. It is now evident that Muslim organizations in Suriname are more divided than ever. Muslims are very active in politics, but are divided in their political allegiance and are found in all political parties. In the period, 1940–1960s there was Hindu/Muslim friction as they competed for political power. Muslims felt dominated by Hindus and left to support other political parties especially the Creole parties, eventually some returned to the VHP Hindu party who today allots one cabinet seat to the Muslims.

Suriname today enjoys fraternal relationship with the Islamic World since it joined the OIC and the IDB. Having entered the twenty-first century, the Muslim community faces many challenges such as how to preserve Islam in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic community in an ocean of evangelism and to balance the growing influence of globalization in which the youths are propelled to Western culture. Suriname's different races continue to mix, mingle and interbreed; many families or offspring are unsure what religion they belong to. Many youths do not identify themselves as Muslim which is evident when we compare the 1980 and 2004 census of religious distributions which shows that the Islamic population of Suriname has plummeted from 20 to 13 per cent. However, it is an important international recognition for Suriname that even with a smaller percentage of Muslims in the population, it continues to enjoy the privileges of a full member of the Organization of Islamic conference and benefit from the funding support available to it through the Islamic Development Bank as a member country of these well established organizations in the Muslim world.

## NOTES

1. B. Ahmadali, *Herziening Huwelijksrecht*, (The New Asian Marriage Act). Available online at: <http://www.geocities.com/ivisep/tijdschriften/nb200306.htm#huwelijkswet>
2. Rosemarijn Hoefte and Peter Meel, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Suriname*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2001.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
4. P. Surparlan, *The Javanese in Suriname in an Ethnically Plural Society*, Arizona State University, 1995, p. 87.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

7. Moch Nur Ichwan, "Prayer in the Surinam-Javanese Diasporic Experience", *ISIM Newsletter*, No. 3, 1998.
8. *Ibid.*
9. P. Surparlan, *The Javanese in Suriname in an Ethnically Plural Society*, Arizona State University, 1995, p. 87.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–90.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *De Ware Tijd*, Newspaper in Dutch, Paramaribo, Suriname, November 11, 2003.
17. J. Schanzer, "Unforced Error", *New Republic*, November 26, 2003. Available online at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=687>
18. *Ibid.*
19. P. Surparlan. *Javanese in Suriname*, p. 134.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. Rosemarijn Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery, a Social History of British Indian and Javanese Laborers in Suriname*, University of Florida Press, 1998, p. 177.
25. The Quran, *The Asian Marriage Decree and the Practice*, *De Ware Tijd*, May 17, 2002, and Al- Fajr, Paramaribo, Suriname, July 7 2002, pp. 3–4.
26. Rosemarijn Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery, a Social History of British Indian and Javanese Laborers in Suriname*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.
27. *Ibid.*
28. The Quran, *The Asian Marriage Decree and the Practice*, *op. cit.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. Goldy M. George, *The Dalit World of Injustice & Peacelessness*. Available online at: <http://daga.dhs.org/justpeace/reflective/dalit.html>, May 26, 2006.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Basdeo Mangru. *Benevolent Neutrality: Indian Government Policy and Labour Migration to British Guiana, 1854–1884*, London: Hansib Publishers, 1987 and Mohan, K. Gautam. *The Construction of an Indian Image in Suriname*. Available online at: <http://www.saxakali.com/indocarib/sojourner7c.htm>, May 26, 2006.
38. Seena rine Moses, *The Continued Persistence of Caste and Anti-caste Resistance in India and the Diaspora*. Available online at: <http://www.saxakali.com/indocarib/caste1.htm>, May 26, 2006.
39. Edward M. Dew, *The Difficult Flowering of Suriname: Ethnicity and Politics in a Plural Society*, Vaco, Paramaribo, 1996, p. 73.
40. Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, Ellen B.A.L., and Alok Deo Singh, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer-Munshi Rahman Khan*, Delhi: Shipra, 2005 p. 194.
41. Y. Sikand, *The Tablighi Jama'at and Politics: A Critical Re-Appraisal*. Available online at: <http://www.islaminterfaith.org/may2005/article3.htm>
42. Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, *et al.*, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer*, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
46. *Ibid.*
47. The Muslim/Hindu tension over "reconversion or cleansing", and the "cow slaughtering" issues have been well documented by Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, *et al.* who have translated many documents from Dutch to English. *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer*, *op. cit.*, pp. 254–255.
48. Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, *et al.*, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer*, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 203 & 209.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*
56. Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff writes that the cow issue was also burning in Corantijnpolder (Nickerie District) in 1929–1930 which led to the outlawed of cow killing in Hindostani dominated districts, p. 254.
57. Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, *et al.*, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer*, *op. cit.*, p.205.
58. A. Jan Ali, “Islam and Muslims in Fiji”, *Journal of Muslim Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 1, April 2004, p. 150.
59. Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, *et al.*, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer*, *op. cit.*, p. 197 made references to De Klerk, C.J.M., 1953, *De Immigratie der Hindostanen in Suriname*, Amsterdam, *Urbi et Orbi*, and Biswamitre.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
61. Edward M. Dew, *The Difficult Flowering of Suriname*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
63. *Ibid.*
64. Edward M. Dew, *The Difficult Flowering of Suriname*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
66. *Ibid.*
67. P. Surparlan. *Javanese Suriname*, *op. cit.*, p. 227.
68. Mohan K. Gautham, *The Construction of Indian Image in Surinam* (Part III). Available online at: <http://www.saxakali.com/indocarib/sojourner7c.htm>
69. Edward M. Dew, *The Difficult Flowering of Suriname*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. M.S.A. Nurmohamed, *De Geschiedenis Van De Islam in Suriname*, SMA Handbook, August 1985, *50 Jaar Surinaamse Moeslim Associatie 1950–2000*, SMA 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Booklet, published 2000 and *De Surinaamse Islamitische Vereniging Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore*, SIV Handbook, July 1989, Paramaribo.
75. *De Ware Tijd*, daily newspaper, Paramaribo, Suriname, Dec. 17, 2001.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *De Ware Tijd* daily newspaper, Paramaribo, Suriname, November 29, 2003.
78. Irna, *Iranian News Agency*, Tehran, Iran, December 11, 1997, and December 6, 1997.
79. Vernon Texel, “Suriname zal toescheidingsovereenkomst verlaten”, *De Ware Tijd*, September 9, 2005. Available online at: <http://www.dwtonline.com/website/nieuws.asp?menuid=37&id=9959>
80. Interview with Maurits Hassan Khan former Home Affairs Minister of Suriname, Paramaribo, 20 August 2009.
81. Raymond Chickrie, “OIC Secretary General meets with Presidents of Guyana and Suriname,” New York, September, 29, 2010. Available online at: [http://www.caribbeannewsnow.com/suriname.php?news\\_id=2161&start=0&category\\_id=36](http://www.caribbeannewsnow.com/suriname.php?news_id=2161&start=0&category_id=36)
82. Signa Vianen, “Luchtvaartdienst toe aan introductie radarsysteem”, *De Ware Tijd*, August 5, 2005. Available online at: <http://www.dwtonline.com/website/nieuws.asp?menuid=37&id=8468>
83. Lorenzo Irion, “Radio Therapeutisch Centrum Suriname voor effectievere kankerbestrijding,” *De Ware Tijd*, March 21, 2006, 21/03/2006. Available online at: <http://www.dwtonline.com/website/nieuws.asp?menuid=37&id=16578>