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# MOSQUES, MAWLANAS AND MUHARRAM: INDIAN ISLAM IN COLONIAL NATAL, 1860-1910

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the establishment of Islam in colonial Natal, attempting to fill a void in and correct the existing historiography.<sup>1</sup> In comparison with other parts of Africa, the lack of a historiographical tradition on Islamic South Africa is conspicuous, but understandable given that traditionally the impact and consequences of racial segregation occupied the attention of most historians. Although Islam is a minority religion in South Africa, apartheid has created an impression of population density not reflected in the census figures. According to the 1996 census, there were 553,585 Muslims in a total population of forty million.<sup>2</sup> Indian Muslims make up one of the two largest sub-groups, the other being 'Malay'.<sup>3</sup> There are 246,433 Malay and 236,315 Indian Muslims.<sup>4</sup> The majority of Indian Muslims are confined to KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng, while most Malay Muslims live in the Western Cape. There is thus very little contact and interaction between them; indeed there are deep differences of history, culture, class and tradition. Muslims have played an important role in the social, economic and political life of the country. The many mosques that adorn the skylines of major South African cities are evidence that Islam has a living presence in South Africa, while the militant activities of the Cape-based People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (Pagad) in the post-1994 period has ensured that Islam remains in the news. This study demonstrates that, apart from obvious differences between Indian and Malay Muslims, there are deep-seated differences among Indian Muslims. The diversity of tradition, beliefs, class, practices, language, region, and experience of migration has resulted in fundamental differences that have generated conflict.

### *Migration and Settlement*

The majority of Indian Muslims arrived in Natal between 1860 and 1911 as contract indentured workers and pioneer traders. The British annexation of Natal in 1843 and subsequent arrival of white immigrants stimulated the growth of settler agriculture. Planters, who successfully experimented with sugar, were frustrated by the absence of cheap labor. Natal consequently imported indentured workers from India to satisfy its need for a controllable labour force. Indentured

migration lasted from 1860 to 1911, by which time 152,641 Indians had come to Natal. Approximately 6 per cent were Muslims.<sup>5</sup> The main objective of planters was to acquire able-bodied men, so it is not surprising that around 80 per cent of migrants were between the ages of 17 and 30, and only a third were women. More migrants embarked from Calcutta (56%) in the north than Madras in the south. Northern migrants were drawn predominantly from the United Provinces (62%) and Bengal (19%), while the main export areas in the south were Arcot (31%), Malabar (14%), Madras (11%) and Mysore (7%). The indentured Muslim population was characterised by diversity of religious tradition, caste, language, ethnicity and regional cultures. This is understandable given that migrants were drawn from a large area of India and came from a range of ecologies and modes of production. The most prominent castes were Julaha, Labbai, Mapilla, Sayyid and Shaikh. To speak of caste seems anomalous since it does not form part of the Islamic worldview. However, as Bayly has shown, in a situation of rapid social change in post-Mughal India, many 'peasants' and pastoralists became devotees of Muslim pirs and 'became distinctly more castelike than hitherto through these new-found bonds of discipleship' which nurtured jati attachment.<sup>6</sup> At the broadest level, Muslims were divided into 'elites', who claimed foreign descent from Arab, Turkish, Afghan and Persian settlers and were considered of noble family, and 'converts' who embraced traditional low ranking castes who had converted from Hinduism.<sup>7</sup> There were many other lines of division: Shafi and Hanafi, urban and rural, Aryan and Dravidian, colour and occupation. Indentured Muslims were composed of fishing people and farmers, weavers and service people, perhaps religious teachers as well. The diversity of indentured Muslims is illustrated by language usage. Muslims who came via Madras spoke Tamil and Telegu, while northern Muslims spoke dialects of Hindi such as Braj, Bundeli, Awadhi and Bhojpuri.<sup>8</sup> Urdu, associated with the descendants of Muslims in present-day Natal, was very much a language of the Indian elite and only became significant among ordinary Muslims towards the end of the nineteenth century with the growth of tension between Muslims and Hindus in northern India.<sup>9</sup>

After indenture, the Natal government had expected Indians to work for planters at reduced rates. Instead, free Indians took to market gardening and flourished throughout Natal growing fruit and vegetables - potatoes, cabbages, garlic, paddy rice, melons, beans, chilies and tobacco - for the local market on land rented or purchased from absentee landlords and Land Companies.<sup>10</sup> In Durban, the first whites had established residences on the sea-facing slopes of the Berea ridge. As the

Berea became crowded, they established residence along the expanding railway line in Westville, Sea View and Malvern, with the result that Indian residence and market gardens developed in the rate-free zone just outside central Durban. The majority of Indians, 65.64 per cent in 1911, lived in this area.<sup>11</sup> The earliest settlements included Clairwood and Merebank in the south, Sydenham, Overport, Clare Estate, Mayville and Cato Manor in the west, and Riverside in the north.<sup>12</sup> The result was the emergence of segregated Indian communities. There was 91 per cent residential segregation between Indians and whites in Durban in 1951.<sup>13</sup> This meant that Muslims could practice their religion and establish their culture with the minimum of outside influence.

Traders from Gujarat on the west coast of India followed indentured Indians to Natal. Arriving from the mid-1870s they were termed 'passengers' because they arrived at their own expense. Although constituting a small number, there were many levels of differentiation. Gujarati traders were divided in the spheres of language, class and religious practice. The majority of traders comprised Memons from Porbandar in Kathiawar, and Sunni Bohras from Surat. Memons are descendents of the converted trading-class Lohanas from Lohanpur in Sindh who moved to Gujarat during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> The Gujarati-speaking Muslims of Surat were Bohras, comprised of both Shias and Sunnis. Only Sunni Bohras made their way to Natal where they came to be known as 'Surtis', the term that will be used in this paper.<sup>15</sup> The term Sunni Bohras did not stand for a single community but for several broadly similar agrarian groups that converted to Islam from the time of the Sultans of Gujarat (1390-1554).<sup>16</sup> Sunni Bohras were considered corporate in outlook and lived in separate neighbourhoods. Their tendency to marry within small local units resulted in their forming distinct regional communities within Gujarat.<sup>17</sup> The 1877 Gazetteer described them as 'very hard-working, intelligent, independent' peasants. In language and habits 'they resemble other Hindus, but are also distinguishable from Hindus by their beard as well as a peculiar cast of countenance'. While professing Islam, they did not 'intermarry with other Mussulmans'.<sup>18</sup>

In Natal, traders were incorrectly called Arabs because the majority were Muslims who adopted the Middle Eastern mode of dress.<sup>19</sup> Traders themselves affirmed this distinction because they wanted equality with whites in terms of Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation that asserted the equality of British subjects.<sup>20</sup> Ebrahim Camroodeen, for example, complained to the immigration restriction officer that 'no distinction is

made between common and better class Indians'.<sup>21</sup> Mohamed Tayob, complaining about racism on trains, wrote that he wanted to give 'publicity to the way in which we Arabs are treated on the railway'.<sup>22</sup> The class distinction among Indians was evident to the authorities as well. In a confidential report to the Durban Town Council (DTC) in 1885, police inspector Richard Alexander pointed out that the 'Arabs will only associate with Indians so far as trade compels them to'.<sup>23</sup> When Sheik Ebrahim wanted to adopt a child, the Protector emphasised that Ebrahim was a "Madras Muslim but not an Arab trader".<sup>24</sup> The exact number of traders is not certain.<sup>25</sup> The Wragg Commission estimated their number to be around one thousand in 1887.<sup>26</sup> The numbers of passengers increased during the 1890s when Muslim traders began running steamers between Bombay and Natal. Between June 1896 and January 1898, for example, 1964 passenger Indians came to Natal on Muslim-owned ships.<sup>27</sup> Swan estimates their number to have averaged 2,000 between 1890 and 1910.<sup>28</sup> In 1904 there were 100,918 Indians in Natal. This included 9,992 (9.9%) Muslims, the overwhelming majority (72%) being male.<sup>29</sup> Given that a third of indentured Muslims were women, this suggests that the number of passenger women migrants was extremely low.

Although free Indians were the first to exploit business opportunities in Natal, passenger merchants soon dominated Indian trade. Whereas in 1875 ten free Indians and one passenger held trading licenses, by 1885 the figures were 26 and 40 respectively.<sup>30</sup> Traders had a long history of overseas trade links, credit extensions and finance, as well as access to exploitable family labor, suppliers and distributors.<sup>31</sup> For example, the firm of Dada Abdullah and Company had fifteen branches in the interior of Natal and the Boer republics of the Orange Free State and Transvaal.<sup>32</sup> Aboobakr Amod told the Wragg Commission that he owned businesses in Bombay, Calcutta, and Durban, and used 'ships of my own' in addition to chartering others to transport merchandise from India.<sup>33</sup> This was not the norm, however. The majority of passengers were small retail traders or hawkers with limited capital. They were either agents of larger merchants or relied on them for credit extensions. Traders spread throughout the rural areas of Natal where they traded mainly with Africans.<sup>34</sup> Indian traders imported specialised products like rice, spices, cheap jewelry, apparel and cotton goods from India for their low-income clientele.<sup>35</sup> Traders saw themselves 'as a discrete community whose survival depended on co-operation' since they relied on independent funding rather than mainstream sources of financing.<sup>36</sup>

There was thus a great degree of internal differentiation among Natal Muslims. While the most obvious distinction was between traders and indentured migrants, neither traders nor indentured workers comprised a homogeneous group. The special circumstances of traders enabled them to keep their corporate character and social distance from other Indians. They saw migration as temporary and maintained links with family members in India by visiting home, marrying their sons and daughters in India, and remitting money to build mosques and schools in their villages of origin.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Gujarati Muslims had more in common with Gujarati Hindus than they had with indentured Muslims.<sup>38</sup> George Mutukistna, a free Indian, testified before the Wragg Commission of 1885 that 'caste feeling . . . is kept up by the Indian merchants, who think themselves better because they are rich and think that, by observing caste distinctions, they can set themselves apart from the Natal Indian people.'<sup>39</sup> Almost half a century after their arrival in Natal, the first Indian Emigrant's Conference in India in 1930 noted that although the caste system had received 'a fatal blow' in the Colonies, the 'Gujarati's of South and East Africa have, however, clung to their old customs as they have been able to maintain their social connections with their caste people at home.'<sup>40</sup> In Natal they formed parochial organisations like the Kathor Anjuman Trust, Rander-e-Mehfil and Porbander Memon Jamat, which were specific to their villages of origin.

### *Indentured Indians and Islam*

In terms of the contract that they signed, indentured workers agreed to work for five years for the employer to whom they were allocated. Swan (1985), Tayal (1977) and Henning (1993) have chronicled the appalling conditions that indentured workers were subjected to.<sup>41</sup> Swan concludes that 'there is a solid weight of evidence in the Protector's<sup>42</sup> files to suggest that overwork, malnourishment, and squalid living conditions formed the pattern of daily life for most agricultural workers.'<sup>43</sup> Indentured Indians had few ways of resisting their exploitation as a series of regulations maintained rigid control. Formal control included draconian laws that viewed all contractual offenses as criminal acts and sanctioned legal action against Indians.<sup>44</sup> Indians could not go more than two miles from the estate without an employer's written permission, even if the purpose was to lay a charge against that employer. They could not live off the estate, refuse work assigned to them, demand higher wages or leave an employer. Most protest was consequently by individuals, and comprised absenteeism, desertion, suicide, feigning illness,

and destruction of property.<sup>45</sup> The experience of indenture militated against maintenance of culture, religion and caste. The long wait at the depot in India, the cramped journey to Natal, and delays in Natal while immigrants were inspected, made it difficult to observe the many everyday rules and rituals that are part of Islam.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Muslims formed close bonds with non-Muslim migrants. During their journey to Natal passengers achieved 'Jahaji Bhai' ('brotherhood of the boat') which reduced their fear of the unknown.<sup>47</sup> The breakdown of caste, language, religious and regional differences accelerated on plantations where Indian workers did the same work at the same rate, irrespective of religious status or taboos.<sup>48</sup> Further, they were housed together in barracks, and subjected to communal bathing with no regard for caste or religion, while all decisions, be they of a social, economic, or political nature, were taken by white managers.<sup>49</sup> In the absence of oral or written histories it is difficult to be precise about the form and content of Islam among indentured Muslims. However there is evidence that, on an individual level, Muslims displayed 'Islamic awareness'.

For example, when Goolam Moideen was jailed for 14 days in 1879 for leaving the Estate without a pass, his beard and hair were shaved upon entering prison, as the law required. Moideen wrote to the Colonial Secretary in March 1880 that 'being a Mahomedan, the beard is sacred and should never be cut closer than what can be held by the hand. In my country people are severely punished if they cut any portion of a Mahomedan's beard. I am, as it were, outcasted'.<sup>50</sup> The Colonial Secretary's office instructed Resident Magistrates in October 1880 that when Muslims are committed to prison their beards should be cut, not shaved, and left one inch long.<sup>51</sup> Shaikh Moideen (colonial number 132085), who worked for Schram at Amatikulu, refused to handle a pig on the grounds that he was a Muslim. He was charged for 'willfully disobeying an employer's orders' and imprisoned for one month.<sup>52</sup> This incident shows both Moideen's concern with not flouting religious tradition, as well the intolerant attitude of employers who showed little empathy and understanding of the values of their workers. Schram had the law on his side and could treat Indians with contempt. When Ghazee Khan (colonial number 8842) died penniless the Protector said that this was because Muslims were in the 'habit' of using their money to buy 'special meat sacrificed according to their rites'. This suggests that some Muslims were observing Islamic dietary regulations that required the name of God to be invoked when an animal was slaughtered.<sup>53</sup>

The 1885 Wragg Commission reported that Muslims buried, rather than cremated, the bodies of their dead.<sup>54</sup> With regard to personal

hygiene Dr Bonnar testified to the Wragg Commission that employers did not provide 'latrine facilities', compelling Indians to use the sugar cane fields. However, they always carried containers of water to wash themselves.<sup>55</sup> Some Muslims even practiced purdah. For example, when Mohammed Ibrahim wanted to register his marriage to Beesha Bee, he wanted to avoid the 'necessity of the woman going to court to register'. It was agreed that they could sign a declaration before Deputy Protector Dunning who would register the marriage with the Protector.<sup>56</sup> Muslims were sufficiently different from other Indians for employers to notice. For example, when Syed Rajah Mian requested permission to go to India to arrange the marriage of his fifteen-year-old sister, as well as visit his parents and grandparents, his manager at Reynolds Brothers recommended that permission be granted because 'he is a Mussulman, and as you know, they are very Clannish and keen on the welfare of their relations.'<sup>57</sup> Planters actively discouraged the recruitment of Muslims because they were seen as being discriminatory towards the types of work allocated to them. For example, the Protector complained to the Recruiting Agent in Calcutta that Shafy Mohammed and Abdul Wahab, numbers 320 and 324 respectively on the ship 'Umlazi', gave a 'considerable amount of trouble on the voyage out, the latter led a revolt against rations and had to be confined practically the whole way. These men are Pathans and not likely to do much work. Pathans and Brahmins should not be sent on any account.'<sup>58</sup> As a result of his unpleasant experiences with Muslims, William Tipping Woods of Stockton, Estcourt, rated workers from Madras as the most productive, next were 'Hindoo's' from Calcutta while 'the Muhammadans' were rooted at the bottom of the productivity hierarchy.<sup>59</sup> The manager of the Town Hill Wattle Company in Hilton complained to the Protector that his Muslim workers were not accustomed to plantation work and requested that all five of his indentured Muslims be transferred to another employer.<sup>60</sup>

The most important 'religious' activity of indentured Muslims was the Muharram festival, which was held on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. This festival commemorated the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammed, who was killed in battle on this day. Hindus participated in large numbers. Deputy Protector Dunning noted in 1910 that the festival is 'always well attended by Hindu indentured workers although it is a Mohammedan occasion of mourning.'<sup>61</sup> In fact, the three days annual leave to which indentured Indians were entitled by law was granted to all Indians during this festival. Preparations began at least



two weeks prior to the festival, as bamboo and other materials were collected to build the *tazzia*, a miniature mausoleum constructed in wood and covered in colored paper and gold and silver tinsel. The building of *tazzias* was undertaken with great care and pride as each area attempted to build the most attractive one. On the tenth day, groups of people pulled each *tazzia* by hand, while singing songs to the memory of Hussain, beating on drums, dancing wildly or carrying out stick fights. Muharram was a major event in the local calendar. There was always a strong police presence because the festival often ended with the spilling of blood. Although there was strong disapproval, initially from the authorities and later from middle-class Hindus and Muslims, Muharram remained a central part of the Islam of indentured workers and their descendants. Muharram provided an opportunity for developing and expressing a self-conscious local community identity. Co-operation in planning and constructing *tazzias* fostered group pride. Hindus and Muslims participated jointly and communally and whatever blood was spilled was the result of disputes between neighbourhoods. The Muharram was the only opportunity for Indians from self-contained plantations to get together in an environment that clearly militated against this. But the Muharram also signalled the participation of Indians in a larger collective by drawing them together, and played an important role in fostering a wider common identity, 'Indianness', in relation to whites and Africans.

Since Islamic society is produced in historical contexts, the Islamic culture of Indian Muslims should not be understood as a foreign import that was not 'Indic'.<sup>62</sup> Sufism was responsible for both the extent and form of Islamic expansion in India. According to Lawrence, by 1500 Sufism had become an institutional movement that included hierarchical orders (*silsilas*), charismatic leaders (*pirs*), property for residential purposes or hospices (*khanqas*), tomb complexes (*mazars*), mosques (*masajids*) and religious schools (*madrassahs*).<sup>63</sup> The Islam of rural Muslims in the Indian sub-continent emphasised 'belief in miracles and powers of saints and *pirs*, and worship at shrines.'<sup>64</sup> Saints did not have to belong to established Sufi orders; they could include 'itinerant praise-singers, amulet sellers and diviners' who were 'valued because of their capacity to cut through worldly constraints so as to make direct and immediate contact with the divine.'<sup>65</sup> Such individuals featured among indentured Muslims. For example, Gafur (colonial number 143400), who constantly deserted from the Town Hill Wattle Company in Hilton, told the Protector that he was not 'accustomed to work on a plantation. I am a Mahomedan and I sold "tikolo" and "bangles" in India'.

According to the Protector Gafur was always encouraging others to desert.<sup>66</sup> There were other such individuals, hence the directive from Natal's planters to stop the recruitment of Muslims. This policy was pursued successfully, it seems, because the Protector reported in 1909 that 'very few Mohammedans have been introduced in recent years.'<sup>67</sup> Two individuals recognised as playing a spiritual role amongst indentured Indians are Sheik Ahmed and Goolam Rajpool. Rajpool, colonial number 3543, arrived in Natal aboard the *Saxon* in August 1864 at the age of 27. He was indentured to T.L. Polkinghorne, a farmer on the North Coast. Rajpool acquired a reputation as a 'holy man' and was released by Polkinghorne to carry out his spiritual work amongst indentured workers. He died in 1890 at the age of 53.<sup>68</sup> Sheik Ahmed, colonial number 282,<sup>69</sup> came from Chittoor, Arcot, in 1860 aboard the *Truro*, the first ship to bring indentured Indians to Natal. Aside from curing the sick physically and spiritually, Badsha Peer ('King of the Guides'), as Sheik Ahmed came to be known, is credited with a number of miracles. One of these is that even though he meditated all day the work assigned to him was miraculously completed. When the authorities recognised 'him to be of spiritual mind' he was 'honourably discharged'.<sup>70</sup> He subsequently spent most of his time preaching to locals in the vicinity of the Grey Street mosque. Tradition has it that he often visited plantations to 'encourage' and 'inspire' indentured Indians to cope with the difficult conditions. Shortly before his death in 1894, Badsha Peer foretold the arrival of Soofie Saheb, another important saint in Natal, who will be discussed later.<sup>71</sup>

Social and economic conditions would have made it difficult for indentured Muslims to fulfill the many requirements of Islam. For example, because of the shortage of Muslim women the Protector registered 115 marriages between Muslims and Hindus between 1872 and 1887.<sup>72</sup> Muslims and Hindus lived together on the same plantations, shared the same housing, experienced the same difficulties and reacted in the same manner to the oppressive social and economic conditions. The files of the Resident Magistrates and Protector of Indian Immigrants are full of examples of Muslims engaging in crime, desertion, rape, adultery, and so on. Indentured Muslims constituted a tiny minority within a minority group, and were widely dispersed, hence the task of establishing mosques, madrassahs and other aspects of institutional Islam was difficult given the long hours, oppressive conditions and meager wages to which they were subject. The files of the Protector make no reference to Muslims fasting, praying or observing the festivals of Eid. In the absence of contemporary records or oral history it is not possible

to construct these aspects of the indentured Muslim experience in Natal with any certainty.

*The Islam of Traders*

The situation was different in the case of traders. They possessed resources and set about building mosques shortly after their arrival in Natal. The Jumuah Musjid in Grey Street, Durban, built in 1881, remains the largest mosque in the southern hemisphere and a major tourist attraction. Its construction was the initiative of Aboobakr Amod, a Memon merchant from Porbander. Amod, who was born in 1850, went to Calcutta in 1867 to manage a branch of the Vania family. He transferred to Mauritius in 1869,<sup>73</sup> to the Transvaal for a few years, Tongaat on the Natal North Coast, and finally settled in Durban in 1874, where he bought property in West Street, a prime white trading area.<sup>74</sup> In August 1881, Amod and Hajee Muhammad, another Memon merchant, bought a site in Grey Street where they built a tiny brick and mortar structure that could accommodate 250 people by 1884.<sup>75</sup> Amod, who left Durban in July 1886, died unexpectedly and prematurely in India in August 1887 of cholera at the age of 37.<sup>76</sup> The Jumuah Musjid is known amongst Muslims as the 'Memon Mosque' because the majority trustees have always been Memons who have financed the building and upkeep of the mosque. Since 1905 trustees have comprised five Memons, two Surtis, one Kokan and one 'colonial-born', that is, a descendent of indentured Indians. This stipulation is an indication of the depth of ethnic differences among Muslims.<sup>77</sup>

Although the number of passenger Muslims was small, sectionalism was rife. The depth of this divide is shown by the decision of Surtis to build a separate mosque about half a kilometer away. According to tradition the split occurred because of an argument between a Memon and a Surti. The latter is alleged to have questioned the cleanliness of the mosque. The Memon's riposte was to the effect: 'If you are so fussy, why do you use our mosque?'<sup>78</sup> While this incident seems trivial, elders believe that it triggered the decision to build another mosque. Surti traders purchased a site in West Street in 1885.<sup>79</sup> The first trustees were Ahmed Mohammed Tilly and Hoosen Meeran who named the mosque 'Juma Musgid Sunat Anjuman Islam', even though the mosque in Grey Street was also known as Jumuah Musjid. According to the Constitution, trustees had to be 'natives from Rander, Surat, in the Presidency of Bombay'. That trustees had to originate from a specific village in Surat indicates the corporate outlook of Surtis.<sup>80</sup> Both Tilly

and Meeran were prominent traders, and representatives on local political bodies. The Constitution of the mosque was amended in 1899. The new Constitution stipulated that the mosque was for the use of the 'Sunni Mahomedan worshippers coming from the District of Surat' and broadened the base from which trustees could be drawn. While at least two trustees had to be from each of Rander and Kathor, the rest could originate from other parts of Surat so long as they met three requirements. They had to be Sunni Muslims from Surat, 'a store-keeper having a business in the Colony of Natal or connected with any such business in the capacity of General Manager' and had subscribed at least £25 to the Mosque Trust.<sup>81</sup> The control of both mosques by small communities of trustees meant that Imams were appointed by these committees and were their paid employees. Imams led the prayer and taught Islam but did not have the power to enforce Islamic law. Unlike in the Cape,<sup>82</sup> Imams were not leaders of the community and exercised very limited authority and influence.

In addition to language and culture, class and religious practice also divided Memons and Surtis. Although Surtis now believe that they are descendants of wealthy traders with a rich tradition of international trading, this is not borne out by the facts. According to an elderly Surti respondent, whose father arrived in Durban in the 1880s, 'we were nothing compared to them [Memons]. We were battlers. They had all the money.'<sup>83</sup> This is borne out by contemporary reports in India. Memons were extremely wealthy in Surat during the city's period of prosperity between 1580 and 1680. When Surat went into decline they moved to Kathiawar and Bombay where they invested heavily in ginned cotton and shipping.<sup>84</sup> Their vessels sailed to Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta, Basrah, Aden, and the East African coast.<sup>85</sup> A report of 1899 described Memons as the 'most successful shopkeepers and miscellaneous dealers amongst the Mussulman' of Gujarat.<sup>86</sup> Steamers belonging to Memon traders, such as the *Courland*, *Naderi*, *Hooseni* and *Crescent*, carried up to 400 Indians, indentured and passengers, between Bombay and Durban from the 1890s.<sup>87</sup> Among Bohras, the Shias were rich and powerful in Gujarat. By the seventeenth century they were involved in trading networks that spread to China and East Africa.<sup>88</sup> The progress of Shia Bohras is reflected in the fact that they were known as 'town Bohras', while their Sunni counterparts were referred to as 'rural Bohras' because they were, in the main, less prosperous tillers of the soil.<sup>89</sup> Historically, Sunni Bohras were more important in local trade, as petty traders, butchers, cart drivers and artisans, than international trade.<sup>90</sup> A survey of rural Sunni Bohras in 1898 recorded names like Badat, Bhabha,

Bobat, Dockrat, Goga, Jeena, Mayat, Timol, Vanker and Vawda who were all prominent traders in Natal.<sup>91</sup> In the 1880s they were the 'nouveau riche' of Surat because many of them had made money from the cotton boom that resulted from the American Civil War. This gave them the means to migrate to Bombay, Mauritius and Natal in search of economic opportunities in the context of declining opportunities in Surat. In contrast, Memon traders who arrived in Natal were much wealthier. It is thought that Memons brought large quantities of gold and silver coins with them when they came from India and were involved in money-lending to other traders in Durban.<sup>92</sup>

There were differences in practice as well. Memons were considered 'very pious' by other Muslims in Gujarat. Over 40 per cent of Memon families in Kathiawar had been to Makkah for pilgrimage (Hajj) by 1899, an indication of their piousness and wealth.<sup>93</sup> In addition, those with wealth visited Baghdad to pray at the shrine of Abdul Qadir Jailani (d. 1165), considered the greatest saint in Islam. Those who could not afford to visit Baghdad went to local shrines such as those of Shah Alam at Ahmedabad or Miran Sayad Ali Dattar at Unja, 50 miles north of Ahmedabad. When the Rajputana Railway was opened, Memons made regular ziyarat (visiting with due ceremony and circumambulation) of the tomb of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chisti of Ajmer.<sup>94</sup> According to an elder member of the community, Memons have very strong faith in pirs as an expression of their gratitude to saints for converting them.<sup>95</sup> Memons trace their origins to Sayad Eusuf-ud-din Kadiri of Baghdad, fifth in descent from Abdul Kadir Jailani. They believe that Sayad Kadiri was ordered in a miraculous dream in 1421 to set sail for Sindh and guide its people to Islam. Once Sayad had achieved this, and received an assurance from the converts that they would not revert to Hinduism, he blessed them and returned to Iraq. Memons believe that this blessing is responsible for their success in trade.<sup>96</sup> Memons owed allegiance to a succession of Pirs whom they considered their leaders. Pir Buzurg Ali Kadiri of Mundra in South Cutch, who died in 1896, was the eighteenth in descent from Sayad Kadiri. His successor was his son Sayad Jaafar Shah who lived in Bombay.<sup>97</sup> He visited every Memon family annually when a money subscription was made, a practice called 'kheda', and he passed rulings in marriage, divorce and other disputes.<sup>98</sup>

While Surtis were also Sunnis of the Hanafi inclination, and many did have spiritual guides,<sup>99</sup> the effects of reform movements in nineteenth-century India were filtering through to them. An 1899 report noted that they were 'rapidly shedding remnants of Hindu practices as

a result of the activity of missionaries.<sup>100</sup> Many of them 'were giving up their former spiritual guides and transferring their reverence to the new preachers who have become the leaders in religious matters'. There were visible changes in behaviour as a result of the 'growing fervour of their belief in Islam'. For example, women were changing their dress to 'Muslim fashion', there were fewer public dinners, less extravagant expenditure on marriage, death and other ceremonies, and music was no longer played at weddings. As a result of the 'influence of the Wahhabi preachers'<sup>101</sup> there is a new-kindled zeal for Islam, both in village mosques and in a college in the town of Randir, gather bands of youths to be taught the religious literature of their faith.<sup>102</sup> Randir was the home of many of Natal's Surti traders, including the trustees of the West Street mosque. The movement of reform in nineteenth-century India emphasised the study of textual sources like the Quran and Hadiths as a basis of Islam, attacked intercessionary Sufism and re-asserted the principle 'tawhid,' the oneness of God.<sup>103</sup> These reformist movements were creating a new understanding and producing Islam as a set of unifying practices and ideas. While there were variations among reformers, all were committed to purifying Islamic practices and eradicating behaviour not sanctioned by textual sources.<sup>104</sup> Robinson considers this change 'revolutionary' since the focus of Muslim piety moved from the next world to this one. This involved the 'devaluing of a faith of contemplation on God's mysteries and of belief in His capacity to intercede for men on earth. . . . Muslims were increasingly aware that it was they, and only they, who could act to create a just society on earth.'<sup>105</sup>

One of the first practices that Memon traders sought to introduce in Natal was the Urs, the annual celebration of the death of the Prophet. They were unable to do so because Indians and Africans were subject to a 9 p.m. curfew. In March 1877, the 'Mahomedan Inhabitants of the Town' petitioned the Protector to exempt them from the curfew during the 'period of the Mouloud Sharif'. Fifteen Muslims signed the petition. The seven who signed in Gujarati were Memon merchants. They included pioneer traders like Abu Bakr Amod, Dada Habib and Abdullah Khan Kathree. The names of the other eight indicate 'Afghan' roots. The first name was that of Mohammed Ali Shah Qadri. Next to each of the other seven was written 'in the pen of Mohammed Ali Shah Qadri'. Ali Shah probably signed on their behalf because they were illiterate. The Protector advised the Mayor that permission be granted because this was 'one of their religious seasons when they require liberty to stir about until one a.m.' Failure to grant permission 'will only serve to intensify the feeling of dissatisfaction with the Borough

Bye Laws already existing amongst the Indian population.<sup>106</sup> The Town Clerk replied that permission could only be granted to ratepayers.<sup>107</sup> The Protector felt that 'the accident of a man's not being a ratepayer is hardly sufficient reason for his being precluded from the observance of his religious rites', and warned that denying permission might lead to trouble, given that 'we have to deal, it must be remembered, with a fanatical race who care but little for the consequences of their actions when their religion is in question.'<sup>108</sup> Even though the Protector felt that the law was one-sided, permission was refused.<sup>109</sup> The Protector took the matter up with the Colonial Secretary, pointing out that as a result of the arrival of a 'Moulvi', there was

fresh access of zeal in the members of the faith' who 'have been stirred out of their lethargy and are about to erect a mosque and take measures for the observance in future of their religious rites. This man surely did not come here as a vagrant, he came accompanied by a personal attendant, bringing his carriage and household furniture. The Mahomedans form a considerable proportion of the Indian population and several of the most respectable of them, headed by the Moulvi, waited upon me and requested me to address the Mayor and ask an exemption. . . . The Moulid Sharif is a feast of great importance with the Mahomedans, connected as it is with the birth of their Prophet. The practice is to begin its celebration after the termination of the usual evening prayers at 8 o'clock.<sup>110</sup>

The Moulvi in question was probably Ali Shah. The Colonial Secretary granted 'reasonable exemption' to 'respectable Mahommedans'.<sup>111</sup> While the Islam of indentured Indians centered on the Muharram, that of traders centered on the mosque, the Urs and the two festivals of Eid. Aboobakr Amod, in fact, told the Wragg Commission that 'the two Ids of Ramadan and Hajj'<sup>112</sup> were the 'only' festivals observed by Muslims and that these days should be set aside as public holidays. Muharram did not have religious importance for traders.<sup>113</sup> In comparison to the boisterous festival of Muharram, Eid was a sober and temperate occasion.

There were many other differences of practice between traders and working-class Muslims. While the marriage of indentured Muslims was registered by the Protector, Muslim traders employed Goodricke and Son to petition the Colonial Secretary to employ a marriage officer to solemnise Muslim marriages. Kazee Ramatooloo was eventually appointed officer.<sup>114</sup> Burial practice provides another example. While indentured Muslims buried their dead in scattered graves, merchants demanded and received two acres of land close to the Grey Street Mosque for a cemetery. Further, burials were carried out immediately after a death, even if this meant that the burial had to take place at night. Thus,

Servant J. King, constable in charge of the cemetery, complained to police superintendent Alexander that he wanted the cemetery:

Fenced and locked up. No one should be allowed to burie people at night or without someone to see them buried properly. As things stand now they come at any hour of the night. Arabs come here and coat Mahomedan law at any hour and dig up the skilliten of another corps and string it all over the place and I can't stop them . . . Sometimes I dig a grave and they say I made it north to south and they wants it made east to west.

### *Soofie Saheb and Constructions of New Practices*

The arrival of Soofie Saheb in Natal in 1895 had important consequences for indentured Muslims and their descendents. Soofie Saheb, full name Shah Goolam Mohamed, traced his genealogy to Abu Bakr Siddique, the first Caliph of Islam and father-in-law of the Prophet.<sup>115</sup> The link to Abu Bakr, it is claimed, is biological as well as spiritual, thus strengthening Soofie Saheb's claim over his adherents in Durban. Soofie Saheb was born in 1850 in Ratnagir, about 200 kilometers from Bombay. He was the eldest son of Hazrath Ibrahim Siddiqui, imam of a masjid and teacher at a Madrassah in Ratnagir.<sup>116</sup> Soofie Saheb studied under his father and qualified as an alim (scholar of Islamic law) and hafiz. When his father died in 1872, Soofie Saheb was appointed to succeed him. In 1892 he went for Hajj and visited the tomb of Abdul Qadir Jilani in Baghdad.<sup>117</sup> Upon his return to India he became the murid of Habib Ali Shah, a Sufi in the Chisti order, which is considered the most authentic Indian sufi order.<sup>118</sup> It is stated that in 1894 Ali Shah received a message through spiritual contact to send Soofie Saheb to South Africa to propagate the Chisti Silsila (tradition).<sup>119</sup> Soofie Saheb was a Konkani Muslim.<sup>120</sup> The predominant element in the ancestry of Konkanis was Arab. Pirs, shrines and festivals were central to the Islamic practices of Konkani Muslims. At least twenty fairs were organised yearly in Bombay, lasting from one to ten days and attracting crowds of up to twenty thousand.<sup>121</sup> According to oral tradition, as soon as he arrived in Durban in 1895, Soofie Saheb asked for the grave of a 'holy man' who had recently died in Durban. Since nobody was able to identify this individual with certainty, Soofie Saheb proceeded to the Brook Street cemetery where he meditated until he located the grave. The 'holy man' was subsequently identified as Sheik Ahmed and given the title 'Badsha Pir' ('king of the guides'). Soofie Saheb placed his shawl on the grave until a permanent structure was erected. This tomb became an important site of veneration for many Muslims and Hindus. During the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal, the month in which



the Prophet was born, he organised an Urs near the tomb.<sup>122</sup> Until his death in 1911 Soofie Saheb was the *sajda khadim* (keeper of the tomb) of Badsha Peer, a position subsequently filled by his descendents.<sup>123</sup>

Despite Badsha Peer's underdeveloped biographical profile and unclear genealogy, his tomb site continues to attract large numbers of Muslims and Hindus of all classes who visit to pay homage to him. This cult has taken on a momentum of its own even though information about Badsha Peer is slim and the evidence not conclusive. According to Lawrence four characteristics, genealogical purity, anecdotally studied popularity, and disposition to poetry and music, develop a pattern of piety within a *pir* and mark him as a leader of a mystical order.<sup>124</sup> There is no evidence that Badsha Peer possessed any. The only common link between Soofie Saheb and Badsha Peer is that both were Muslim. Soofie Saheb was from the 'elite' class, urban and well-traveled, a speaker of Urdu/Marathi mixed with Arabic and Persian, Konkani, a Sufi of the Chisti order and from western India; Badsha Peer was a 'convert', a Telegu-speaking, rural Muslim from south-eastern India, while there is no evidence to indicate whether Sheik Ahmed was influenced by any Sufi order. The promptness with which Soofie Saheb erected the shrine is consonant with the Sufi world-view. As Bayly has pointed out, migrating devotees do not lose their bond to the local shrine. Instead, they build 'new shrines, inspired by the belief that each was an equally potent repository of *barakat*'. Migration results in a 'widening and intensification of the original cult tradition, and certainly not a turn towards a more 'universal' or transcendent faith devoid of shrines, magical intercessory power and all other features of the *pir* cult.<sup>125</sup> In pre-reformist India, Muslims believed that when *pirs* died they were very receptive to intercessory pleas on the site where they were buried.<sup>126</sup> Saints and shrines were consequently an integral part of the Islamic practices of indentured Indians. Large numbers of Muslims visited the tomb of Soofie Saheb because they believed that praying to God in the presence of a saint was 'much more likely to be efficacious.'<sup>127</sup>

According to tradition, after identifying the grave Soofie Saheb hired a horse-drawn wagon and gave the horse a free rein. It went in a northerly direction until it reached the banks of the Umgeni River and stopped at the site of the present Riverside Sufi dargah. This site, owned by Narainsamy, a Hindu, was for sale but there were no purchasers because there was a python on it. According to his biography the python left the land when Soofie Saheb ordered it to do so. This was the first of many miracles that he allegedly performed. He built a mosque, *khanqah* (teaching hospice), *madrassah*, cemetery, orphanage

and residential home on this site,<sup>128</sup> which was strategically placed. It was within reach of the city, within access of the plantations on the north coast and very close to Springfield where large numbers of free Indian market gardeners lived. In 1898 Soofie Saheb received the Khilafat from Ali Shah so that Muslims in Durban could become his murids.<sup>129</sup> Between 1898 and his death in 1911 Soofie Saheb built mosques, madrassahs and cemeteries all over Natal: in Springfield and Westville in 1904, in Overport in 1905, in Kenville and Sherwood in 1906, in Tongaat in 1907, Ladysmith and Colenso in 1908 and Verulam and Pietermaritzburg in 1909. These were mainly rural areas which gave them access to large numbers of Muslims.<sup>130</sup> Family members were placed in leadership positions at these sites. In this way, Soofie Saheb's influence was extended over a vast expanse, an influence that continues to the present because religious authority has been passed down to family members. The orphanages and cemeteries and feeding schemes meant that Soofie Saheb was able to take care of the day-to-day needs of Muslims and increase his influence among them. This extensive programme was instrumental in raising the levels of Islamic knowledge and consciousness among indentured Muslims and their descendents. The tomb of Soofie Saheb flourished after his death. The dargah complex in Riverside is a very impressive site with his large tomb as the central ritual object. A museum houses his artifacts while a permanent *tazzia* made out of oak is also to be found on the site.

As a result of Soofie Saheb's activities the practice of *pir-muridi* became an established part of Indian Islam in Natal. Local Muslims believed that *Badsha Peer* and Soofie Saheb had special attributes of divinity and could bless the childless with children, cure diseases, prevent calamity and so on. Individuals visiting their shrines took offerings in cash or kind. Soofie Saheb also organised activities throughout the lunar year. Celebration of the birthday of the Prophet and regular *Urs*<sup>131</sup> were held at the shrine of *Badsha Peer* to commemorate his death as well as the births or deaths of the other five great Chisti saints, from *Mu'in-un-Din* to *Nas'r ud-Din*. This served to link *Badsha Peer* to the chain of *pirs*.<sup>132</sup> Soofie Saheb also organised his own *tazzia* procession. In the face of criticism from reformist Muslims in contemporary Natal that such practices were relics of Hinduism, a biography of Soofie Saheb suggests that he was forced to introduce these practices and rituals because indentured Muslims had intermingled with Hindus to such an extent that they had lost their Islamic identity. Soofie Saheb felt that mosques and madrassahs were insufficient to bring them back to Islam and that he had to 'provide some incentive whereby he could

get them together to carry out his mission.<sup>133</sup> This resonates with Jeppie's observation that 'people do not live by, or under the power of, ideology alone. Communities are reproduced through deeply ingrained practices and these practices are in turn imbricated in ideology and discourse.'<sup>134</sup> Soofie Saheb's methodology was one adopted by saints elsewhere who accommodated themselves 'to local needs and customs . . . gradually building a position from which they might draw people into an Islamic milieu, and slowly educating them in Islamic behaviour'.<sup>135</sup>

By building the shrine of Badsha Pir and khanqahs throughout Natal, Soofie Saheb created an environment that resonated with the beliefs of his constituency. These mosques, khanqahs and festivals developed an Islamic identity among the majority of working-class Muslims who came from a variety of regions and spoke a number of languages. As a result of these practices and discourse a specific form of Islam became hegemonic amongst descendants of indentured Muslims. The emergence of Urdu as a lingua franca of working-class Muslims was critical for the consolidation of this tradition.<sup>136</sup> The activities of Soofie Saheb were important since lectures and lessons in mosques and madrasahs were conducted in Urdu. It was on the basis of common language and practices that an Islamic tradition took shape in Natal amongst working-class Muslims. In time they came to be known as Barelvis, after Ahmad Riza Khan (1856-1921) of Bareilly whose movement in India strongly opposed reformist efforts to eliminate folk practices from Islam.<sup>137</sup>

### *Race, Class, and Religion*

Natal's Muslims developed along several separate trajectories. Traders did not attempt to forge a broader Muslim community on the basis of Islam. Their concern was to protect their economic and political rights in Natal and they forged class alliances with Hindu traders who were similarly affected. The hostility of Natal's whites to Indian immigration was aroused by ex-indentured and 'passenger' Indians whose presence threatened white dominance of local trade. The 1885 Wragg Commission noted that the Indian trader was the cause of 'much of the irritation existing in the minds of European Colonists.'<sup>138</sup> Once Natal achieved self-government in 1893 the new government addressed 'the Indian problem' so that whites would feel secure against the 'Asiatic Menace'. The Indian Immigration Law of 1895 imposed an annual tax of £3 on free Indians. This forced Indians to reindenture or return to India

after completing their indenture.<sup>139</sup> Laws were also passed to regulate Indian access to trading licences, deny Indians the municipal vote and control Indian entry into Natal.<sup>140</sup>

Indian politics was dominated by merchants who focused largely on problems specific to them. In August 1894 merchants formed the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), whose strategy was primarily constitutional and comprised of long petitions to private persons and government officials, and letters to newspapers. Each of the NIC's six presidents between 1894 and 1913 was a prominent Muslim merchant. Abdulla Haji Adam, the first president, was manager of Dada Abdullah and Co., which had 15 branches throughout Natal and two steamers between Bombay and Durban; the next president was his brother Abdul Karim Hajee Adam, then Mohammed Jeewa, president until 1899, Abdul Kadir (1899-1906), who was a partner in the firm of M.C. Camroodeen and Co., and Dawad Mahomed (1906-1913), a partner in Ismail Mamoojee and Co.<sup>141</sup> The NIC remained a tool of the elite since the majority of Indians could not afford the annual membership fee of £3.<sup>142</sup> In 1901, for example, when there were around 100,000 Indians in Natal, the NIC had 723 subscribers. At this time the NIC owned a building that it had purchased with subscriptions, and had a cash balance of over £3000.<sup>143</sup>

The major concern of Muslim merchants was protection of their economic and political interests. Construction of a broader local ummah was not part of their agenda. For example, although merchants invested in political events and organisations, there was no provision to take care of destitute Muslims, even though the care of the poor and destitute is an article of faith in Islam. The Medical Officer of Stanger Hospital, for example, reported to the Protector that Said Peer (colonial number 20495) was found 'destitute and in a dying condition' and admitted to hospital. From enquiries the Protector discovered that he had a wife and two sons in Tongaat who were not interested in his welfare.<sup>144</sup> Moideen (colonial number 39761) was found by Constable Purtab 'lying down on the tennis court. I understand he has no relations about here and just goes about begging'.<sup>145</sup> W. Daugherty, Inspector of Nuisance, reported to the Protector that an 'old Indian man, Sheik Fareed is very infirm, suffering from senility and homelessness. He is generally somewhere in the vicinity of Grey Street, and crawls painfully from door to door begging. Please find a place where he can get food and shelter'.<sup>146</sup> Imam Buksh (colonial number 25099), who had arrived in Natal in 1881, was an invalid with defective eyes. He was returned to India at Government expense, as provided by Law 25 of 1891.<sup>147</sup>

The relationship between Muslim traders and workers was mainly economic. This caused 'Indian Opinion' to chide merchants for 'hugging to themselves the delusion that their fate is not bound up with the ordinary labourer. . . . Many are indifferent to the sufferings of the labouring class.'<sup>148</sup> Thus, L. Fyvie appealed to the Protector on behalf of one of his Muslim servants, Abdullah Sahib (99856), who was in debt to a merchant Amod Bayat. Bayat had got the court to issue summons for Sahib's arrest. With Fyvie's help it was arranged to repay the debt over a period of time.<sup>149</sup>

Instead of forging a local Muslim community in Natal, traders reached out to the international ummah. An example of this is the meeting of Durban's Muslims in October 1911 at the Anjuman Islam to protest against the Italian attack on Turkey. The chairman was to have been Dawd Mahomed, secretary of the NIC. However, he declined the chair because he had just lost his daughter to illness. But he did tell the audience that he 'felt death more for the Ottoman Empire than my daughter'. All the prominent traders were present: Abdool Cadir, Dada Osman, M.C. Anglia, Moosa Hajee and Ebrahim Mayat were among a crowd of several hundred. According to Osman Ahmed 'we, in Durban, must help with all the means possible. We must send them a cable of sympathy and also the great help of money. Financial help is of the utmost importance. There are many Anjumans in Durban but, up to now, they have done nothing. Just see how the nations of the world help their kings in times of peace and war; we start at the eleventh hour. It is the Sultan who defends our religion, who needs our aid.' According to Abdullah Hajee Adam, the Sultan was the defender of the faith and 'it is the duty of all Mahomedans to help Turkey'. A cable to the Grand Vizier in Constantinople read: 'Mahomedans in South Africa strongly sympathise with and defend at any cost against Italy's cowardly act. Offering our help.' The Red Crescent Society, whose leadership comprised of Memon and Surtee traders, raised £400 immediately.<sup>150</sup> By November £1600 had been raised for 'our suffering brethren' in Turkey.<sup>151</sup> When Turkey was struck by an earthquake in 1912 Durban's Muslims sent £3000 and a cable of sympathy for the victims.<sup>152</sup> When Sultan Hamid celebrated the anniversary of his reign each year, Durban's Muslims 'suspended business and the buildings were tastefully decorated with flags and buntings', while a telegram of congratulation was also sent.<sup>153</sup> The 1908 message read: 'Mussulmans enthusiastically celebrate 33rd auspicious anniversary. Pray many happy returns of this propitious day. Business suspended. Elaborate

decorations. Night Mawlood. Please place respectful greetings at the feet of Ottoman throne.<sup>154</sup>

Politically and socially, Muslim merchants mingled comfortably with their Hindu counterparts rather than with working-class Muslims. For example, Muslims attended the middle-class Hindu festival of Diwali. As Dr Goonam pointed out, 'Diwali was not seen by them [working class Indians] very much. It was more important to most of us in the urban situation where we clung to these festivals. . . . We celebrated with our Muslim and Hindu friends'.<sup>155</sup> In 1907, for example, Hindu merchants arranged a Diwali celebration at the premises of a Muslim, Abdool Latif, which was attended by non-Hindus like Sheth Rustomjee and Dada Osman.<sup>156</sup> In 1911 Muslims like Dawad Mahomed, M.C. Anglia, and Ismail Gora attended Diwali celebrations. Mahomed considered the unity and 'happy gatherings' between Hindus and Muslims 'an excellent thing'.<sup>157</sup> Hindu and Muslim traders forged class solidarity on the basis of common class interests. When a dinner was held to bid farewell to Omar Jhaveri, a Muslim who was intimately involved in local politics, who was departing to India on account of ill-health, the reception was attended by Muslim, Hindu and Christian elites. In his speech, A. Christopher 'bore testimony to his (Mr Jhaveri's) catholicity of spirit in the community life of the Indian in this country, making no distinction against any of his countrymen on the grounds of religion and working for the upliftment of them all'.<sup>158</sup> When Pandit Bhawani Dayal started a newspaper, 'Hindi', the opening ceremony was performed by a Muslim Hajee Amod Jhaveri. When Imam Bawazeer, a Muslim priest, was departing for India in 1915 he remarked:

We are all Indians in the eyes of the Europeans in this country. We have never drawn distinctions between Mahomedans and Hindus in public matters. Mahomedans, like the Hindus, look upon India as our Motherland, and so is it a matter of fact, and when it is a matter of serving India, we must set aside any differences and be united.<sup>159</sup>

Differences between the Muslim working class and traders were commented upon by police inspector Richard Alexander who, in a confidential report to the Colonial Secretary in 1885, considered 'the conduct of Arabs exemplary'. Next to the 'Arab comes the Afghans recently imported, then the Calcutta men, then the Madrasee'.<sup>160</sup> In 1892, Alexander reiterated this when he wrote:

One thousand and odd Arabs in this Boro', you will not find one in the gaol, nor will you find one amongst the six thousand offenders arrested during last year—except a few under the building or sanitary laws. But you will find them

the prosperous and contented Race in Durban. Why is this? Because their own Laws (the Code of Religion, moral and Social) under which they were born, and educated will not permit them to drink intoxicating liquors, under penalty of being driven from the Society of their own people and friends. The result is, neither the pocket nor stomach need be empty. Their brain is never muddled, their nerves shaky or their temper ruffled. On the other hand, let us take here the same race and blood, who are not bound by the same law, but are governed by their own appetites and own Laws—out of a population of about 5000 Indians, half of which are women and children, last year's return shows 3113 arrests, of this 2152 for drunkenness.<sup>161</sup>

Alexander conveniently ignored the social and economic milieu in which traders and working classes operated and shaped their outlook. The behaviour of working-class Muslims was not much different from that of their Hindu counterparts. The files of the Protector of Indian Immigrants and Magistrates' Reports bear this out. Abdul Karrim (colonial number 142260) was jailed for seven days for beating Jokhi, the woman with whom he lived, and for tearing her clothes and stealing her jewellery.<sup>162</sup> Abuse and rape of women were part of the problem associated with the shortage of women. Thus Mahomed, Sirdar at the Natal Government Railways, was guilty of abducting, raping and robbing Bhugwandeya (colonial number 14369).<sup>163</sup> Cassim was fined for 'harbouring' Bheemadu (colonial number 22081). He had completed his indenture and was living in Isipingo. She was working at the nearby Prospect Hall Estate. Her clothes and belongings were found at his house.<sup>164</sup> Rohoman Khan, found suffering with venereal disease, had a reputation for liaisons with lots of women.<sup>165</sup> Muslims were also guilty of murder and assault. The court records are replete with examples. Nana Sahib (colonial number 108005) was jailed in February 1908 for six months for assaulting his sirdar.<sup>166</sup> Ali Saib (colonial number 107601) was sentenced to six months imprisonment for assaulting a policeman.<sup>167</sup> Fakira Gadu (colonial number 128761), indentured to T.G. Colebrander of New Guelderland, was sentenced to four months imprisonment for attacking another Indian with a cane knife.<sup>168</sup> Ahmed Saib (colonial number 116358) was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for theft in December 1912.<sup>169</sup> Sheik Mathar (colonial number 124711) was imprisoned for desertion, stealing vegetables, stealing the passes of free Indians and issuing free passes to other Indians.<sup>170</sup> Hoosen Saib (colonial number 5348), who worked for J. Mackenzie of New Hanover, was convicted of murder and sentenced to death.<sup>171</sup> Jumar Bux, indentured to E. Ratsey of Rosetta, was sentenced to death for the murder of Mahbooban (colonial number 147886).<sup>172</sup> These examples illustrate the fact that traders and indentured workers came for different reasons, from different social, economic, and religious backgrounds, and

established themselves in different milieus in the local colonial setting, which impacted on their understanding and observance of Islam.

### *Conclusions*

This study has focused on the nature of the Muslim community that was established in Colonial Natal, and particularly on the way that they observed Islam. Muslim society was dominated by elites and riven by class cleavages. Despite the portrayal and indeed the ideal that Muslims comprise a transnational community that transcends ethnic, linguistic, class and racial identities, there were fundamental differences in practice, belief and definitions of 'true' Islam. The outcome was a Muslim community that cannot easily be characterised. Organisations, institutions and leaders represented narrow interests and impacted on the manner in which Islam took shape. Segmentary traditions, institutions and identities were a feature of Muslim life during this period. These differences had deep roots. Class, the urban/rural dichotomy, language, variance in modes of migration, and region of origin contributed towards these differences. The conflict was between a pre-reformist and a reformist tradition, between an intercessory Islam and one in which the human conscience must be brought into full play to dictate man's actions on earth, and between one which is other-worldly and one which is this-worldly, one in which man must act on earth to achieve this salvation. Reformist Islam required Muslims to be literate, and most who embraced reformism were located within the middle class, either being prepared for or actively engaged in aspects of the modern economy. The reformist caste of mind prepared its followers for individualism and involvement in a capitalist economy. Although Memons also came from an urban, trading background their practice of Islam included veneration of the Prophet and respect for shrines. This does not necessarily imply ideological similarity with working-class Muslims. As Sherif Mardin has shown, behind the shell of old practices all kinds of reformist practices can be taking place, while the same congregation can understand a religious ritual in different ways.<sup>173</sup> In the absence of concrete evidence it is dangerous to impute reason to what was going on. For indentured Muslims, the context in Natal was radically different to that in India. Occupation and social mobility no longer depended on caste, while race played a pivotal role in shaping social relations. They constructed common forms of cultural and religious practices, a process boosted by the arrival in Natal of Soofie Saheb. Since they lived in largely de facto racially segregated areas,



Urdu came to serve as a *lingua franca*, while a pre-reformist religious tradition that centred around the festivities of Muharram, the visitation of shrines, and Urs in respect of the Prophet and saints pre-dominated. This tradition became widespread as a result of the tombs and *dargahs* that were built all over the Colony.

The experience of traders was very different. Their Islam centred around the mosques that they built shortly after arrival in Natal. Traders controlled mosques through parochial committees. Imams were their paid employees and exerted little influence on other aspects of Muslim lives. The corporate outlook of traders did not impact on their politics. Traders were jointly represented in organisations that confronted the government over its anti-Indian legislation. They worked together in the short-lived Durban Indian Committee (1890) and the more durable Natal Indian Congress (1894). While Indian Muslims had 'hybrid' identities (race, language, class, ethnicity, religion), the most important identities in the political realm were race and class. Socially, Muslims were divided along lines of caste, class, ancestry, and language. For example, marriage across these lines of stratification was opposed. Memon-speakers would oppose the marriage of their children to Surti-speakers, Surti-speakers would not want their children to marry Urdu-speakers and so on.<sup>174</sup> However, as Habib points out, 'this conflictual relationship that they [Muslims] display to other categories of Muslims . . . is not extended to the political realm. They do not demand a political identity, but rather are content to manifest this identity in their own personal lives.'<sup>175</sup> Memon and Surti traders were socially distant and disagreed in religious matters, but worked closely and intimately in political matters, mainly as a result of their common class interests. These divisions made it difficult to assert a transcendent Islamic identity and left the identities of Muslims in tension. The social and political order in Natal shaped the emerging identities of Muslims in important ways. In many situations where Muslims find themselves in a minority situation, it is possible that an encompassing Islamic identity emerges at the same time as distinctive class identity is asserted, with the result that both Muslim community and Muslim division emerge.<sup>176</sup> In this instance, race, 'Indianness' positioned against Africans and whites in the political realm, was dominant in the local configurations of power. Muslims of various classes were allowed to practice their forms of Islam in the 'comfort zones' of racially segregated areas. Constructing a transcendent racial identity was more urgent than an Islamic one. The result was that differences among Muslims remained unresolved. There has been a great deal of conflict since the 1970s as a result of class

differences (trader against indentured), regional differences (western India against North and South), ethnic differences (Gujarati against Urdu) and the deep differences in belief and practice. Class differences were extremely important though they have been downplayed. As the descendants of indentured Muslims acquired education and economic mobility, and a professional class emerged, they began to assert themselves against traders. The conflict between Barelwis and Deobandis since the 1970s needs to be analysed along these lines.

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## NOTES

1. For example, Hiskett (1994: 174) devotes one paragraph to South Africa's Indian Muslims in which he points out that they have made enormous progress as a result of close links with Ismaili Shias in East Africa. This fails to do justice to the rich and complex history of Indian Muslims, and is inaccurate because Indian Muslims have never been linked to Ismaili Shias. Schell (2000) is equally superficial. One must distinguish between Indian Muslims and 'Malay' Muslims who predominate in the Cape. Shamil Jeppie, Abdulkader Tayob, Achmat Davids and Yusuf Da Costa have contributed to charting Cape Muslim History. The same cannot be said of Natal where Mahida (1993) and Tayob (1996) are exceptions. The problem is that Mahida records events in chronological order without contextualising them while Tayob focuses primarily on the 1970s and 1980s. The antecedents and historical background remain to be studied.
2. Population Census, 1996.
3. Jeppie (1987) has shown that there was no 'Malay community'. While this term may not have a foundation in social science it is used here because it has been widely internalised by most South Africans to refer to the 'Coloured' Muslims of the Cape.
4. Population Census, 1996.
5. Figures supplied by Tom Bennett and Joy Brain who are compiling an inventory of indentured Indians. Of 130,000 immigrants analysed thus far, 7874 were Muslim, comprising 4958 males, 2418 females, 233 girls and 248 boys.
6. Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics*, 48. See Chapter One, 25-64.
7. Ahmad, 'System of Caste', 42.
8. R. Mesthrie, *Language in Indenture*, 29.
9. See, for example, Shackle and Snell, *Hindi and Urdu*.
10. Coolie Commission Report 1872, in Meer, *Documents*, 76.
11. Davies, 'Growth of Durban', 26.
12. NIO, 'Memorandum', 1949.
13. Davies, 'Growth of Durban', 37.
14. *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, 1884*, 162.
15. In Natal 'Surti' refers to Gujarati-speaking traders from Kathor and Rander in Surat. The correct term is Bohora.
16. Misra, *Muslim Communities in Gujarat*, 122.

17. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual*, 72.
18. *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, 1877*, 57.
19. Bhana and Brain, *Setting Down Roots*, 65-66.
20. Ginwala, 'Class', 368.
21. Padayachee and Morrell, 'Dukawallahs', 10.
22. *Natal Mercury*, 12 October 1892.
23. Alexander, 'Progress of Arabs and Indians', 1885.
24. NAR, II, 1/184, Protector to Manager, Hull Valley Estate, 29 August 1912.
25. Exact numbers cannot be established because the files were damaged by rain in the 1980s.
26. Quoted in Hiralal, 'Natal Indian Trader', 193.
27. Quoted in Hiralal, 'Natal Indian Trader', 186.
28. Swan, *Gandhi*, 2.
29. Natal Census, 1904.
30. 'Wragg Commission', in Meer, *Documents*, 81.
31. Padayachee and Morrell, 'Dukawallahs', 9.
32. Swan, *Gandhi*, 6.
33. 'Wragg Commission', in Meer, *Documents*, 389.
34. See Padayachee and Morrell, 'Dukawallahs'.
35. Bhana, 'Indian Trade and Traders', 236.
36. Padayachee and Morrell, 'Dukawallahs', 13.
37. Ginwala, 'Class', 181.
38. Padayachee and Morrell, 'Dukawallahs', 10.
39. Wragg Commission, in Meer, *Documents*, 393.
40. *African Chronicle*, 5 July 1930.
41. See Swan (1985), Tayal (1977) and Henning (1993).
42. Following complaints by returning Indians in 1870, a Protector of Indian Immigrants was appointed in 1874 to 'protect' Indian workers. He was powerless since he was an employee of white planters.
43. Swan, *Gandhi*, 26.
44. Tayal, 'Indentured Indians', 546.
45. Swan, '1913 Strike', 243.
46. Bujs, 'Disappearance of Caste', 7.
47. Lal, 'Nonresistance', 202.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. NAR, II 1/6. Goolam Moideen to Colonial Secretary, 5 March 1880.
51. NAR, II 1/6. Colonial Secretary to Resident Magistrates, 11 October 1880.
52. According to Islamic law Muslims cannot eat the flesh of pigs.
53. NAR, II 1/30, Protector's Minute Paper, 18 January 1887.
54. Wragg Commission, in Meer, *Documents*, 289.
55. Wragg Commission, in Meer, *Documents*, 340.
56. NAR, II, 1/167, Deputy Protector Dunning to Protector, 19 July 1909.
57. NAR, II 1/190, Manager, Reynolds Estate, to Protector, 13 June 1914.
58. NAR, II, 1/187, Protector to R.P. Gibbes, Calcutta, 7 April 1910.
59. Wragg Commission, in Meer, *Documents*, 433.
60. NAR, II 1/177, Manager, Town Hill Wattle Company to Protector, 13 October 1910.
61. Annual Report of the Deputy Protector, 1910.
62. van der Veer, 'Foreign Hand', 27.
63. Lawrence, 'Islam in India', 27.
64. Alavi, 'Pakistan and Islam', 94.
65. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 76-77.

66. NAR, II 1/177, Manager, Town Hill Wattle Company to Protector, 13 October 1910.
67. NAR, CSO 299/1910, Protector Polkinghorne to Town Clerk, 11 November 1909.
68. *Sunday Times Extra*, November 1984.
69. Mahida, *History of Muslims*, 22.
70. *Sunday Times Extra*, 28 September 1986 and 14 February 1988.
71. *Sunday Times Extra*, 28 September 1986 and 14 February 1988.
72. Wragg Commission, in Meer, *Documents*, 261-2.
73. Sulliman, *Juma Masjid*, 9.
74. Sulliman, *Juma Masjid*, 10.
75. Sulliman, *Juma Masjid*, 13.
76. *Natal Mercury*, 11 August 1887.
77. Before 1905 all the trustees were Memon. This was challenged in the Supreme Court by a Surti. The outcome was the present arrangement.
78. Interview with Mr A.R., May 1999.
79. Jamal, 'West Street Mosque', 13.
80. Deeds of Transfer Constituting the Juma Masjid, 25 November 1893.
81. Deeds of Transfer Constituting the Juma Masjid, 16 January 1899.
82. See Jeppie, 'Leadership and Loyalties'.
83. Interview with Mr A.R., May 1999.
84. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis, 1899*, 50-51.
85. *Gazetteer of Kathiawar, 1884*, 223.
86. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis, 1899*, 57.
87. Quoted in Hiralal, 'Natal Indian Trader', 186.
88. *Gazetteer of Surat District, 1962*, 301.
89. Misra, *Muslim Communities in Gujarat*, 122.
90. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 62.
91. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 59.
92. Padayachee and Morrell, 'Dukawallahs', 91-2.
93. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 56.
94. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 56. Muin-ud-din is considered one of the five great Chisti Shaykhs. From the fourteenth century Muslims of the Chisti Sufi order visited Ajmer from all over India even though this was a dangerous undertaking because of the terrain and danger of armed robbery. Pilgrims came dressed in pilgrim garb (ihram-I-ziyarat) and some even professed bay'at (pledge) at the grave even though the saint was dead. See Digby (1983: 97).
95. Moomal, *End Of The Road*, vi.
96. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 50-51.
97. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 50-51.
98. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 57.
99. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 60.
100. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 61.
101. 'Wahabism' was a generic term for nineteenth-century reform movements. It was named after Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who was attempting to purify Islamic practices in eighteenth-century Arabia.
102. *Gazetteer of Musalmans and Parsis*, 61.
103. Under Akbar (1556-1605) some Ulema feared that Islam was being engulfed by Hinduism because Akbar abandoned Islamic law (shariah) and adopted many syncretist practices. Shaikh Ahmad Sihidi (d. 1625) reacted by compiling a core of ideas that included uniting Muslims under Islamic law, eradicating innovations, reducing the power of saints and shunning contact with Hindus. Shah Wali-allah (1702-1763) refined Sirhind's ideas and advanced a congruous doctrine of reformation. This movement was continued by reformers like Saiyid Ahmed (d. 1831), Moulanas Muhammad Qasim Nanautvi

and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi who founded the Deoband tradition from the 1860s, Moulana Nazir Hussain and Nawab Siddiq Hassan who founded the Ahl-I Hadith movement in the late nineteenth century and Moulana Muhammad Ilyas who founded the faith movement of Tabligh-I-Jamat in the 1920s. For a discussion of these developments see Haq (1972), Metcalf (1982), Robinson (1988) and Robinson (1997).

104. Robinson, 'Varieties of Islam', 3.
105. Robinson, 'Religious Change', 1.
106. NAR, II, 1/2, Protector McLeod to Mayor, 14 March 1877.
107. NAR, II, 1/2, Town Clerk William Cooley to Protector, 15 March 1877.
108. NAR, II, 1/2, Protector McLeod to Mayor, 16 March 1877.
109. NAR, II, 1/2, Town Clerk William Cooley to Protector, 16 March 1877.
110. NAR, II, 1/2, Protector to Colonial Secretary, 26 March 1877.
111. NAR, II, 1/2, Colonial Secretary to Protector, 27 March 1877.
112. The first celebrates the end of fasting in Ramadan while the Hajj Eid (Baqr Eid) starts on the tenth of Zilhijja, the last month of the Islamic calendar.
113. Wragg Commission, in Meer, *Documents*, 389.
114. NAR, CSO, vol. 5001-200/92, Colonial Secretary to Protector, 17 November 1892.
115. Soofie and Soofie, *Soofie Saheb*, 45.
116. Soofie and Soofie, *Soofie Saheb*, 45.
117. Soofie and Soofie, *Soofie Saheb*, 47.
118. Rizvi, *Sufism in India*, 114.
119. Soofie and Soofie, *Soofie Saheb*, 50.
120. They were originally from Konkan but began moving to Bombay from the mid-seventeenth century where they dominated trade and owned land. From the mid-eighteenth century they were displaced by more dynamic Memon traders. By mid-nineteenth century Konkans occupied lowly economic positions such as clerks, mechanics and labourers, and large numbers began migrating to Rangoon, Mauritius, Zanzibar, Natal, Transvaal and the Cape. Shaikhs and pirs followed. *Gazetteer of Bombay City*, 257.
121. *Gazetteer of Bombay City*, 265-7.
122. Soofie and Soofie, *Soofie Saheb*, 56.
123. Mahida, *Muslims in South Africa*, 23.
124. Lawrence, 'Islam in India', 33.
125. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 93-94.
126. Lawrence, 'Islam in India', 30.
127. Robinson, 'Islam and Muslim Society in South Asia', 189.
128. Soofie and Soofie, *Soofie Saheb*, 56-58.
129. This is the practice whereby a pir confers the khilafat (power) to his murid (disciple) who can then take on his own disciples.
130. Mahida, *Muslims in South Africa*, 44.
131. Urs refers to a wedding ceremony. In this context it suggests that upon his death, a pir or saint, who is a bridegroom, will join God, the Beloved Bride, in an eternal marriage.
132. Lawrence, 'Islam in India', 30.
133. Soofie and Soofie, *Soofie Saheb*, 59.
134. Jeppie, 'Leadership and Loyalties', 155.
135. Robinson, 'Islam and Muslim Society in South Asia', 192.
136. While Mesthrie (1991) has studied the emergence of a South African Hindi, there is no equivalent study for Urdu.
137. See Sanyal, *Devotional Islam*.
138. Wragg Commission, in Meer, *Documents*, 131.
139. Petition by Abdullah Haji Adam and 60 others to the Natal Legislative Assembly, March 1898. In F. Meer Collection.
140. Swanson, 'Asiatic Menace', 415-418.

141. Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*, 12.
142. Swan, *Gandhi*, 51.
143. Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*, 11.
144. NAR, II, 1/190, M.O, Stanger Hospital, to Protector, 9 November 1914.
145. NAR, II, 1/190, Magistrate, Inanda Division to Protector, 10 November 1914.
146. NAR, II 1/179, W. Daugherty, Inspector of Nuisance, to Protector, 21 March 1911.
147. NAR, II, 1/168, Protector's Minute Paper, 13 September 1909.
148. *African Chronicle*, 14 October 1911.
149. NAR, II, 1/182, Fyvie to Protector, 10 January 1912.
150. *African Chronicle*, 14 October 1911.
151. *Indian Opinion*, 18 November 1911.
152. *Indian Opinion*, 12 October 1912.
153. *Indian Opinion*, 15 September 1908.
154. *Indian Opinion*, 15 September 1908.
155. Interview with Dr Goonam, 31 May 1989.
156. *Indian Opinion*, 16 November 1907.
157. *Indian Opinion*, 21 October 1911.
158. *Indian Opinion*, 2 September 1914.
159. *Indian Opinion*, 3 December 1915.
160. Alexander, 'Progress of Arabs and Indians', 1885.
161. UDW Accession Papers No. 957/2044, Special Report of Police Superintendent Richard Alexander to Mayor and Town Councillors, 4 July 1892.
162. NAR, II, 1/187, Karrim to Protector, 31 August 1912; Manager, Reynolds Estate to Protector, 2 September 1912.
163. NAR, II, 1/24, Protector's Minute Papers, 6 March 1885.
164. NAR, II, 1/16, Protector's Minute Paper, 17 December 1883.
165. NAR, II, 1/12, Protector's Minute Papers, 16 June 1883.
166. NAR, II, 1/179, Manager, Port Natal Harbour, to Protector, 26 November 1909.
167. NAR, 1/170, E.M. Hawsworth to Protector, 8 November 1909.
168. NAR, 1/182, T.G. Colebrander to Protector, 4 February 1912.
169. NAR, II, 1/178, J.A. Franks to Protector, 1 December 1912.
170. NAR, II, 1/174, M. Stephen to Protector, 11 May 1910.
171. NAR, II, 1/182, Acting Under-Secretary to Protector, 20 May 1912.
172. NAR, II, 1/182, Protector's Minute Papers, 14 March 1912.
173. In his study of Islamic reform in nineteenth and twentieth century Turkey, Serif Mardin focuses on the life of Seyyid Bediuzzaman Nursi who developed a Deobandi orientation within a well-developed Sufi frame. See Mardin (1989).
174. The depth of caste feeling is indicated by the trust deed of the Grey Street Mosque which provides for nine trustees on sectarian lines: five Memons, two Gujaratis, one Koknee and one colonial-born. The deed defines a 'colonial-born' as an Urdu-speaking descendent of indentured labourers.
175. Habib, 'Transition to Democracy', 54.
176. Gilmartin makes this argument in relation to Pakistan. See Gilmartin, 'Partition', 1068-1097.