

Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: A Historical Survey

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The contemporary Islamic resurgence and spirit of pan-Islamism that are being experienced today throughout the world did not come about overnight. They are the results of two counterforces operative in any give period of time. On the one hand, there was the deconstructionist force, in the form of the colonial and imperial forces that sought to destroy the Islamic value system. On the other hand, there was the reconstructionist force of 'ulamā] *ḥaqq* and the Sufi shaykhs, who served as the prime stimulators of the reform impulse and of change in the religiopolitical outlook of Muslims throughout the world.

Islam in South Africa

South Africa has played a forceful role in maintaining Islam's dynamic position for about three centuries. The picturesque activities of the earlier ulama (in the broadest sense of the word)—particularly the Sufi shaykhs—and early imams laid the foundations for the contemporary Islamic resurgence in South Africa, as seen in the Muslim Youth Movement and such other *da'wah* movements as the Call of Islam. Past workers and present movements have been religiopolitical positivists and activists. From the outset, Muslims needed to reconstruct Islamic education and maintain the momentum of revivalism and resurgence activities.

The Dutch East India Company and English East India Company: A Deconstructionist Force

The *East India Company* refers to any of a number of commercial enterprises formed in Western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to further trade with the East Indies. These companies were given charters by their respective governments to acquire territory wherever they could and to exercise therein various governmental functions, including legislation, the issuance of currency, the negotiation of treaties, the waging of war, and the administration of justice.

This article focuses on the Dutch East India Company and the English East India Company. The Dutch colonial empire in the East Indies was founded in 1619. The headquarters of the company was in Jakarta (modern Indonesia). From here, Dutch influence and activity spread throughout the Malay Archipelago and into China, Japan, India, Iran, and the Cape of Good Hope. The English East India Company was a major deconstructionist force in India for more than two centuries. It was granted a monopoly of trade in Asia, Africa, and America with the formal restriction that it not contest the prior trading rights of "any Christian prince." However, temptation could not be resisted, and competition began with the Dutch trading monopoly in 1609. After the massacre of Amboina, it conceded to the Dutch the area that eventually became known as the Netherlands East Indies.

The Dutch East India Company thus established its economic monopoly and political sway from the Cape of Good Hope to the Straits of Magellan and exercised sovereign rights in all of the territories acquired. But the company felt threatened by the dynamism of Islam. The Dutch, in their contact with the Muslims of the East Indies, must have realized that Islam was neither a corpus of fossilized beliefs nor a private individual affair, but rather a complete way of life, a code of law and morality, and an operational religiopolitical civilization. They must have realized that it was a moving reality and a timeless truth unfolding systematically in time and space. They must have sensed that, since it was a unity-based culture, this unity was the fountainhead, the alpha and omega, of its dynamism. Thus, it was a threat to their colonial regime. As a result, they began to suppress the free practice of Islam and impose restrictions. Muslims who resisted these developments were charged with defying the law, convicted, and banished for life with hard labor.

Muslims of the East Indies were brought to South Africa with the first European settlers, between 1652 and 1693, either as a labor force, a defense force, political prisoners, or exiles. Thus, Islam was introduced into South Africa via the Dutch colonization of the Cape in the seventeenth century. According to my historian colleagues, the role of the pre-1694 political exiles in the establishment of Islam has been highly exaggerated. As former rulers of state in the Malay Archipelago, they exerted very little direct influence on the organization and growth of Islam in the Cape.

In addition to the various categories of Muslims banished from the East Indies, there were also highly enlightened scholars and men of high spiritual stature who opposed the colonial regime in the East Indies. As the Muslim sultanates of the East Indies were in the forefront of resistance to Dutch imperialism, the political exiles were Muslims. The most famous of these exiles is Shaykh Yusuf of Macassar, who was exiled to the Cape in 1694 along with his two wives, twelve children, twelve imams, two maids, and several friends with their families. He was a prince by birth and an outstanding religious scholar who led an army against the Dutch and fought them stubbornly several times. Eventually, he was captured during a 1683

uprising, which he led, in Java. After a ten-year imprisonment in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), he was brought to the Cape, where he died in 1699.

Because the company's purpose was to isolate such people, neither Shaykh Yusuf nor the other so-called "fugitive" slaves were allowed to practice Islam freely and openly. In fact, local laws explicitly prohibited Muslims from practicing Islam in public or propagating it among Christians and "heathens." Violations were punishable by death. Such laws did not stop the Muslims, however; exiles and "fugitives" rallied around the shaykh for inspiration and spiritual nourishment. During the five years or so that the shaykh lived there, he organized Islam at the Cape and established it on a sound basis. Along with the imams who had accompanied him into exile, he conducted religious services in the few slave lodges and private houses where Muslims were able to meet and in lodges where meetings were illegal. The first Muslim community to be formed in South Africa is credited to the efforts of Shaykh Yusuf. Today, he is looked upon as a reconstructionist force and the epitome of virtue by all Muslims.

Tuan Guru (literally Mr. Teacher) was another Muslim reconstructionist force. After his release from prison on Robben Island in 1793, he established classes in a private home for the education of slaves and free black pupils. In his capacity as an Islamic scholar and leader, he agitated for a more favorable attitude toward Islam and demanded land for a mosque. As a result of his campaign, the first mosque at the Cape was erected in 1794. Thanks to his leadership, religious freedom was attained in 1804 and at least five (perhaps more) mosques were established. Since then, the Muslim community has gained a permanent religiocultural identity.

The findings of our local research historians indicate that the Muslim children who attended the first *madrasah* learned the fundamental tenets of Islam, how to recite the Qur'an, and how to read and write Arabic. Many prominent Cape imams graduated from this *madrasah*. In summary, Islam was maintained at a constant level because of these earlier contributions. Imam Abd Allah Haron was the product of this heritage.

The Advent and Settlement of Muslims in Natal

The first Muslims in Natal landed two centuries after their counterparts in the Cape. By 1858, the Umzinto Sugar Company experienced an acute labor shortage, which led the British to import some Malay and Chinese laborers from Java. The first Muslims to be brought to Natal were probably "among the fine body of Chinese and Malays brought from Java in February 1858."

The first batch of Muslims from India were brought by the British as indentured laborers to work in the sugar cane fields. They arrived in 1860 on the S. S. Truro and numbered 342 men, women, and children. There is, however, a difference of opinion among researchers regarding the number of Muslims among them: Some put it at 16 and others at 24. Other ships brought more laborers to Natal. Eventually, Indian Muslims constituted

about 7 percent of all Indian indentured workers. Some of them remained after completing their term of indentured service, while others chose to return to India. One of those who remained was a great personality who was discovered, much later, by Sufi Sahib of Riverside (Durban) to be the great Sufi Hazrath Badshah Peer. Unfortunately, not much material is available on Peer's life and contributions. I hope researchers in South Africa's Muslim history will study this subject and make their findings available to us. From 1878 onward, Muslim traders came to Natal at their own expense and without being recruited. This group formed about 10 percent of the total Indian community in Natal. Some came via Mauritius and East Africa.

The first Muslim settlers in Natal were very Islamic in their outlook and way of life. As a result, their immediate concern was to establish a mosque and attach to it a *madrasah* so that their children could receive an Islamic education. It was this outlook that caused Aboobaker Amod Jhavery to purchase, in 1880, a site on which the Grey Street Mosque, the largest mosque in the southern hemisphere, now stands. In later years, the Jumma Masjid School was attached to it.

At the insistence of his mentor, Sufi Sahib eventually settled in Riverside, where he worked mainly among the indentured laborer community. He noticed that this sector of the Muslim community was composed of heterogenous elements, the larger part of which was from south India and still un-Islamic in speech and behavior. Also being a small minority in South Africa, they had mixed freely with other segments of the community and were rapidly forgetting their obligatory Islamic practices. Seeing the danger in such a situation, he began the gradual process of molding these Muslims into a relatively homogeneous community. His effort was largely successful, as can be seen in his approach: providing education to them while preaching to the surrounding non-Muslims and inviting them to Islam with practical wisdom. As a result, many embraced Islam and lived as good Muslims.

As part of his program to make the Muslim community homogenous, Sufi Sahib championed the cause of Urdu and introduced it as the religious *lingua franca*. He laid great stress on educating the illiterate or semiliterate and was always looking for orphans and other children who might benefit from the education provided at the orphanage. Thus, Sufi Sahib played a pioneering and prominent role in *madrasah* education and mosque construction. His main center for education and spiritual development was built in Riverside and is still standing. Under his direction, mosques and *madrasahs* were built in other parts of Natal, the Cape, and Lesotho. In fact, the *madrasah* in which I received my early education was one that he had built in Overport (it was run by Ghulam Farid Sufi, his youngest [and now deceased] son). He was one of my teachers and mentors before I went to India for higher Islamic studies. Another of my teachers and mentors at this institution was Sayyid Abd al Hamid Sahib (also deceased), who graduated under Sufi Sahib. The only living personality that springs to mind is Mawlana Abd al Qadir Sahib, who graduated from Sufi Sahib's *madrasah*

in Riverside and then was sent to a Dār al 'Ulūm in Delhi, where he graduated as a full-fledged 'ālim.

The So-Called Zanzibaris of Natal

The British brought indentured workers from East Africa (e.g., Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Somalia, and Zanzibar) during 1873-80 and settled them at Kings Rest on the Bluff. These people, most of whom were Muslims, were dubbed with the convenient label "Zanzibaris." They lived on the Bluff until the Group Areas Act was passed, after which they were moved to Chatsworth. In 1961, they were classified as "Other Asiatics," and their children were permitted to attend Indian schools. Indentured African workers were imported for mining, forestry, and citrus farming on plantations from Malawi and Mozambique to the Witwatersrand and Eastern Transvaal. There were hundreds of Muslims among them.

Institutions of Higher Education

Before 1917, Muslim education could only be religious in nature. The Madrasa Anjuman Islam was established in 1917 in Pine Street in order to introduce an integrated system of education. The idea was received favorably, and such prominent people as A. I. Kajee, M. A. H. Moosa, A. S. Kathrada, A. M. Moola, and A. M. Lockat played a dynamic role in Muslim education. After protracted negotiations with the authorities, special permission was granted to the Orient Islamic Institute, the Anjuman Islam, the erstwhile Ahmedia School, and the South Coast Madressa School to run an integrated system of education in which secular and Islamic subjects were included in the mainstream schedule. These are state-assisted schools. Since then, of course, many similar private schools have been established in Natal, Transvaal, and the Cape.

In the present set-up, every town and suburb has a *madrasah* for imparting basic Islamic education to Muslim children. They attend the "secular" school during the morning hours until 2:30 or 3:00 P.M. Thereafter, they attend the local *madrasah*, which is organized and run by private bodies and trust funds.

The situation for higher education has also improved considerably. At present, there are institutions of higher learning in various parts of Natal, Transvaal, and the Cape. They were established during the last decade or two and include Dār al 'Ulūm (Newcastle), as-Salaam Educational Institute and Dār al 'Ulūm Rizviyah (Natal); al-Madrasah al-Arabiyyah al-Islamiyyah (Azaadville), Madrasah Zakariyyah (near Lenasia), and Waterval Islamic Institute (at Halfway House between Johannesburg and Pretoria [Transvaal]). In the Cape, the Institute of Shari'ah Studies and Usuluddin Islamic College are available for students who want to acquire a more advanced Islamic education. Several South African universities (e.g., UCT, UWC, UDW, Unisa, UPE, UP, UG, and UZ) offer Arabic and Islamic stud-

ies at the undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels. The University of Durban-Westville also offers degree courses in Urdu and Persian.

Muslim Publications

There are regular and occasional publications on current Islamic topics and issues put out by organizations and individuals for public enlightenment. Two Muslim newspapers, *Muslim Views* (Cape Town) and *al-Qalam* (MYM, DBN), are published regularly and enjoy a reasonably wide readership.

The Muslims' Economic Situation

Historically, South Africa has not been a bed of roses for Muslims. Muslim slaves and indentured workers were exploited and denied proper education and training, and the best jobs were reserved for white South Africans. Muslim traders had to compete with their white counterparts under restricted conditions. Despite these and other hurdles, Muslims have made substantial contributions to South Africa's national life. They have always played, and are still playing, a powerful role in the nation's economic, commercial, and business life. While Muslim descendants of businesspeople from the Indian subcontinent have achieved success in the business world, those whose forebears came from the East Indies have made their mark as craftsmen and artisans. Members of the contemporary Muslim community are often professionals, such as lawyers, medical doctors, dentists, opticians, teachers, lecturers, nurses, architects, engineers, social workers, and writers. Others work in tourism, radiography, telecommunications, journalism, computer programming, and other fields.

Muslim Charitable Trusts

There are several Muslim charitable trusts in South Africa: the Lockett Charities Trust, the A. M. Moolla Charities Trust, the Hafez Moosa Family, the Rajab Family Charitable Trust, and the M. L. Sultan Charitable Trust and Educational Trust, to name only a few.

These and many other trusts, as well as individual Muslim businesspeople (often inspired by their wives, as in the case of Aisha Bi Bi of A. M. Lockett Charities Trust), have always provided financial support to the Muslim community's spiritual, educational, cultural, and social welfare programs. In addition, they have contributed their share to humanitarian causes for the benefit of all South Africans. Muslim businesspeople have made substantial financial contributions toward the establishment of secular schools, hospitals (such as R. K. Khan), clinics, and other state-assisted institutions. They have donated and made endowments toward several welfare organizations, orphanages, relief agencies, universities and technikons, sporting bodies, and recreation clubs throughout the country. South African

history bears testimony to the fact that Muslims have responded quickly to relief measures in times of droughts, floods, and earthquakes.

Muslim Establishments

Several Muslim establishments in South Africa cater to the general needs of Muslims, and others cater to more specific needs. Among the ulama bodies, one can find the Jamiatul Ulama and Sunni Jamiatul Ulama (Natal), the Jamiatul Ulama (Transvaal), the Muslim Juridical Council (the Cape), and the Islamic Council of South Africa. These bodies of Islamic scholars and jurists interpret and apply Islamic law on matters affecting Muslim life at the individual, communal, and national levels. During the last decade or so, Muslim professionals have begun to form their own organizations, such as the Islamic Medical Association, the Association of Muslim Accountants and Lawyers, and the Society for the Promotion of the Arabic Language.

Islamic *da'wah* activities are carried out by, among others, the Islamic Propagation Center International, the Islamic Da'wah College (Natal), the Islamic Missionary Society, the Muslim Da'wah Society, the Islamic Da'wah Movement (national), and the Tablighi Jama'at. These *daw'ah-tabligh* movements have both male and female wings.

Social welfare and relief activities are carried out by several bodies, as for instance, the Muslim Assembly, the Muslim Darul Yatama wal Masa-keen, the Soofie Saheb Dargah and Orphanage, the Muslim Charitable Foundation (Natal), Lenasia Muslim Association and Central Islamic Trust (Transvaal), Muslim Africa, the Africa Muslim Agency, the Islamic Relief Agency, and the South African National Zakah Fund (national).

Political Participation

Muslims, both men and women, in Natal, Transvaal, and the Cape have played an active role in the political struggle for equality and justice. Hundreds and thousands of them were imprisoned or banned for opposing the previous government's apartheid policy. Several Muslims (e.g., Molvi Cachalia, Imam Abdullah Haron, Fathima Meer, and Zulekha Mayat) and organizations (e.g., the Call of Islam, Qibla, MYM-SA, and MSA-SA) have been in the forefront of denouncing governmental policies and actions. Many Muslims are dynamic members of such politically active groups as the ANC, PAC, and Azapo. Since the April 1994 elections, Muslim men and women are serving as ministers in or members of parliament.

Perhaps a concise historical analysis of the negative effects of the Group Areas Act is warranted. This act uprooted thousands of people, including Muslims, from districts and regions where they had lived for generations. It often had an adverse effect on the livelihood of traders, because the new areas were often incapable of meeting their business-related needs.

Workers were compelled to travel long distances to and from their places of work, and their children often found no proper schooling and educational facilities in the new area. As a result, both children and parents had to travel long distances in order to have their needs met. The act disrupted social contacts established over many decades and forced the Muslim community to spend millions of rands to build mosques in the new areas where they were compelled to settle, while the mosques in their former settlements were virtually abandoned. The apartheid regime has now been replaced by a government of national unity, but the act has done so much damage that its harmful effects will be felt for a very long time to come.

Muslim Women in the History of South Africa

Unfortunately, no scientific research has been done on the role of Muslim women as shapers of South African history. I can make an anecdotal claim, on the basis of my personal experience, that Muslim women have played an active and dynamic role, directly or indirectly, in shaping our nation's history. Our local historians, especially those who happen to be women, adopt a scientific approach by analyzing closely the anecdotal material and evidence and then make their findings available. Female historians have produced the delightful *Indian Delights*—surely they can produce an edifying *History of Muslim Women*. Women's organizations, according to the affiliates' list of the Islamic Women's Forum include the Bushra Group, Imdaad, Inter Agencies, the Islamic Da'wah Movement, the Islamic Medical Association (Women's Wing), the Islamic Society UDW, the Islamic Society UND, the Islamic Women's Association, Jamaatun Nisaa Natal, the Muslim Student Association, the Mustadafin Foundation, the Reservoir Hills Tafseer Group, the Women's Cultural Group, and various independent groups.

Conclusion

As a result of the so-called "Uplift Clause" in the Cape Town agreement of 1927, all sections of the Muslim population of South Africa have fallen prey to the Western tendencies of secularism and obsession with materialism. This is due primarily to the Western educational system, which has affected the Muslims' mental outlook and behavior.

However, on the whole, Muslims in South Africa have retained their loyalty to Islam. In fact, there is a general resurgence of Islamic activities among Muslims, who are exerting their best efforts to restore the Islamic value system in their own lives. Religious gatherings such as *ijtimā's*, *mawlūds*, conventions, and conferences are held regularly. Muslim students, as well as Muslim academics and professionals who previously had kept away from mainstream Islamic activities, now play a vital role in the general affairs of South Africa's Muslims. In short, the Muslim community in South Africa is dynamic and progressive.