

Guyana Islamic Trust: Genesis and Development (1977 – 2000)

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Abstract:

The Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT) is an indigenous group that was responsible for the revival of Islam in Guyana in the late 1970s. It organizes Muslim youths, Muslim women and communities to learn, live and promote Islam. It was responsible for the reintroduction of the Hijab among Muslim women, mass Islamic education by a variety of channels, establishing schools, and Islamic Institute, organizing Muslims to be more involved with civil society and represent the Muslims when it is much needed. With Islamophobia and the expansion of Muslim minorities in the western hemisphere, the GIT can serve as a model and template for Muslims in the various communities to bring about the necessary change and desired growth of their respective communities. In this paper we will be looking at the genesis and development of the GIT in the early period (1977-2000) of its emergence. This will serve for us to have a better understanding on the methodology of its formation, the variety of reform programs it developed and the positive impact it made on the Muslim community and the beautiful face of Islam it demonstrates to the wider society.

##Guyana Islamic Trust, Islam, Reform, Model, Methodology ##

Introduction

A story that lay hidden in the haystack for over forty years, but which has impacted people and communities in Guyana, the Caribbean and North America must see the light of the day, the story of the genesis and development of the Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT). It emerged out of the influence of tajdidi movement that emerged out of the heartland of Islam and began to spread rapidly to Muslim minority societies in the dying years of the last Hijri century. Guyana not only, benefited and borrowed from the transnational tajdidi movement but also it carved its own niche in Guyana and the Caribbean and developed its own unique character based on the exegesis of its own socio-economic and political condition.

It all began when Ahmad Ibrahim Ihwas¹, the Charge D'Affairs for the Libyan arrived in Guyana in 1977. He was transnational in outlook and vision, an interlocutor who nurtured for a short period of time the emergence of what he believed to be a localized reflection of the larger Revival (tajdid) taking place elsewhere in the Ummah. He

¹ Ahmad Ibrahim AzZarooq Ihwas was born in Benghazi, Libya in 1942. He was a Major in the Libyan Army. His education and Training took him to UK and America. He came from a very religious background. He was sent to represent Libya in Aden, South Yemen, Somalia, East Germany and Guyana. When he left Guyana in 1981, he resigned from his post and became a cofounder of the Nation Salvation Front. He was head of the Military wing and was martyred in 1983 in his quest to free Libya from the dictatorship of Muamar Ghaddafi. He never mixed his personal endeavor for his country with the dawah efforts in Guyana. No one knew until he was martyred.

served as a bridgehead who distilled, filtered and disseminated the core ideas of tajdid. The GIT initially borrowed, absorbed the ideas of tajdid from Sh. Ahmad but it then carved out its own unique niche on that map, a niche that can serve to influence other Muslim minority communities living in plural societies.

The formation of the GIT is unique in that a group of young men who were educated and trained by Sh. Ahmad were only high school graduates. They absorbed from him and defined a path that suit their realities. When Sh. Ahmad left in early 1981, these youths were able to transform the GIT into a multi-dimensional body that became a leading voice for Muslims in Guyana.

Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America and is located on the Northeastern part of the continent. It's immediate neighbor to the West is Venezuela (Spanish speaking), to the South is Brazil (Portuguese speaking), to the East is Surinam (Dutch speaking) and to the North, the Atlantic Ocean. It has an area of 83,000 square miles (215,000 sq. km) and a population of approximately 820,000 presently. Guyana is a tropical country with equatorial climate.

Background:

The situation of the Muslim Community in Guyana in the 1970s was that it needed assistance in many respects. Most of the Imams have just basic knowledge of Islam. Most of the Masjids were not having the five prayers, some were not having any, even the Jumma prayers. Muslim women were not observing the dress code of Islam, even when performing prayers. Most of the youths were non-committal to Islamic practices. Besides the architecture of the Masjids and the Kurta² and topi³ when attending masjid, Quran shareef⁴ and funeral prayers, there were no semblance of Muslim culture in Guyana.

Muslims influence was nil amidst their numbers, skills and economic strength. Muslims were absorbed with the political actors in social activism. Civil society in Guyana was non-existent. Politically, Muslims were inhibited to participate actively. This was so because the existing political parties were Marxist which in many ways contradict Islamic principles. The few that participated, compromised their religion in many aspects.⁵

Economically, Muslims were doing well but had very little influence in the wider society⁶. Muslims were involved with big businesses and industries. They will spend to build masjid, contributed to the operation of maktabas, maintenance of Masjid and its infrastructures, helping the poor and financed functions at the masjids.

Whatever social consciousness Muslims had been absorbed in trade unions and political parties. Their quest for change were influenced by Marxism. Their fight was for the working class and better living conditions. Most of the Muslims were living in

² It is the Kameez from India and Pakistan

³ Cap worn by Muslims in India

⁴ Gathering of People to recite the Quran together

⁵ Country Profile for Dawah Academy, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁶ Report in Arabic by Ahmad Ihwas in 1978

the sugar belt. The males were employed by the sugar estates. Their main trade union was Marxist. The energy expended for change was enhancing the Marxists agenda.⁷

It is important to note, that Islam survived in Guyana from 1838 with the indentured servants that came from India and their descendants. They build the Masjids, Orphanages for boys and girls, established the maktab system to promote the teaching of basic Islam to the children, supporting Islamic scholars when they visited Guyana and established the Guyana United Sadr Islamic Anjuman (GUSIA) to represent Muslims. With about ten percent of the population, over one hundred Masjids, two orphanages, over forty percent of private wealth and excellent administrators and managers, the Muslim community was not able to use that for greater influence as a community.

In February 1977, Sh. Ahmad Ihwas arrived in Guyana as the Libyan Charge D'Affairs. He was instrumental in raising the awareness of Muslims about their religious consciousness, their social commitment and influence in Guyana.⁸

Formation:

In March 1977, Muslim students organized a yaumun nabi program at the St. Rose's High School and invited Sh. Ahmad to do the feature address. After the program, he organized to reach with the organizers and started a class with them. From the class several Camps were organized for Muslim Youths in Guyana. Some of the names in that first class were Naseeb Khan, Faizil Baksh, Imtiaz Zaman, Abdool Aleem,⁹

In the process, Sh. Ahmad invited Sh. Daud Abdul Haqq¹⁰ from Barbados who was involved with Dawah in Trinidad to settle in Guyana. They expand the classes for males and later for females. Soon after Yassein Khan from Trinidad came and settled in Guyana. They visited other parts of Guyana and invited the youths to attend the youth camps they organized. As they were making positive impact, they start talking of having a permanent base in the city. Brother Foreman¹¹ loan his building (without a charge) at Water and Bentinck Streets to be the headquarters. In October 6, 1978, the Guyana Islamic Trust was officially registered in Guyana.¹²

In early 1978, the first National Muslim Youth Camp was organised at Kayuka on the Linden Highway. From here on, youth Camps, either two weeks during school holidays or weekends every month became a regular feature across Guyana.

In mid-1978, Asif Esau Rasool¹³ became part of the team. He was responsible to organised classes and camps in Berbice, Yassein on the Essequibo Coast and Islands, and the others Demerara and Linden.

In December 1978, the first Basic Islamic Course (BIC) was planned and executed at Whim, Berbice. In April 1979, another one was at Leonora and in July/August 1979 another at Anna Regina. The BIC was organised to educate and train Muslim youths to know and practice Islam. There were two levels, 9 – 12 years and 13 years and

⁷ Wazir Baksh, 1995.

⁸ Interview with Faizil Baksh, October 2021

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Originally from Barbados and studied at the Islamic University of Madeenah in the 1970s

¹¹ Naturalized Jamaican in Guyana. He was involved with the Tabligh Jamaat

¹² Faizil Baksh

¹³ He was from Corriverton, Berbice and studied in Madeenah in the 1970s

above. From here youths were selected to be in study circles in Berbice, East Demerara, West Demerara and Essequibo.¹⁴

These study circles became the core for the various areas above. Each will organize camps on a monthly basis. The Masjids were used for the weekend programs and government schools, Berbice Islamic Sunnatul Anjuman (BISA) Complex at Whim, General Council of Muslim Brotherhood (GCMB) Complex in Georgetown and Muslim Youth Organization (MYO) Complex in Georgetown were used for the two weeks courses.

In August 1979 an Islamic Orientation Course was organized to prepare workers for the GIT. Participants were selected from the various study circles to attend. Here they were taught and train in higher Islamic practices. They learn Tajweed, tafseer, basic Arabic language, Seerah with emphasis on the Prophets Methodology in Dawah, concepts on why we must strive spreading the message of Islam, group formation and the relationship between leaders and followers and personality development. After these courses, courses were diffuse to the respective counties.¹⁵

In October 1979, the first teachers training course was organized at the GCIB. Participants were train in Lesson planning and delivery, how to teach participants to read Arabic and Quran and other topics on basic Islam, Physical Exercise and First Aid.

Setting a Strong Foundation

From inception, Sh. Ahmad and Sh. Daud recognized the importance for wider networking among the Muslims in the Caribbean. A Coordinating Unit (CU) was formed in Trinidad and Guyana in 1979 to streamline plans and activities between the two. The CU will reach periodically and give updates for each unit and formulate plans to develop the Muslims in the Caribbean.¹⁶

In 1979, Sh. Raouf Zaman, A Masters student at Al Azhar was visiting his family in Guyana and Sh. Ahmad convince him to stay in Guyana and assist the nascent group as an educator. Later Sh. Abdul Wahad from Ghana, under the auspices of Darul Ifta, Saudi Arabia was added to the teaching panel. Both played important roles in the education and training of the early workers. Sh. Raouf served as the leader for a few years also.

A Caribbean Leadership Program was held in Guyana for the young leaders in the Caribbean in 1979. This program focused on the Islamic worldview, group formation and development, management and leadership and awareness of the situation of Muslims in the Caribbean territories. Another was held in Trinidad in 1981.¹⁷ Later in the year the Association of Islamic Communities in the Caribbean and Latin America was formed to coordinate the Muslim communities of the Region.

¹⁴ Faizil Baksh

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Interview with Naseeb Khan 2022

¹⁷ Interview with Daud Abdul Haqq, 2021

Special Islamic Course (SIC)

It was soon recognized that the workers and teachers of the GIT and other Caribbean communities need further education and training. Hence the Special Islamic Courses (SIC) were held in 1980-81 and 1981-82 at the MYO in Thomas Land. These SICs were Intensive Courses to produce young leaders, teachers and workers for the Muslim communities in Guyana and the Caribbean. The SIC was intensive training for the participants, both in theory and practice. Participants were exposed to the Islamic worldview, an outline of politics, economics, family life, social life, nurturing communities, group cohesion, leadership and group formation, Seerah, tafseer, hadith, Qur'anic memorization and recitation, public speaking, organizing courses and camps and field work in the different communities in Guyana.¹⁸

The graduates from these year Courses went back to their respective communities and facilitated the further development and expansion of their communities. In Guyana, they returned to different parts of Guyana and literally transformed the Muslim Community in many ways. Classes were organized in various communities for the education of the Muslim youths and masses, the hijab for women became common place, the beard among males became prominent, many were converting to Islam, more and more youths attending the masjid for prayers, many dormant masjids became alive, government make it official for hijab in schools and other places of learning and working, the other Muslim groups became more active and competing in good deeds, youths moving away from intoxicants and smoking of cigarettes, Islamic societies were formed at University of Guyana and secondary schools, stabler Muslim families among the young Muslims, Drama, Islamic songs, poems became a regular feature among the Muslims, and the parents of the youths became more involved in their practice of Islam.¹⁹

Sisters (WOMEN)

In this intervention, Muslim females weren't left out. It is interesting to note that in 1977 when Ahmad came to Guyana, his wife was the only woman in Hijab. Many masjids didn't allow women for prayers and those that allow will not allow them to vote at elections for the office bearers for the Masjids. Besides maktab²⁰ education for little girls, there was no education for females. Whatever positions women hold were outside the Muslim community. Muslim women were managers and supervisors, teachers and counselors, doctors and nurses, politicians and social activists and trade unionists in the wider Guyanese society but had no position in the Muslim community. That's the dichotomy of the Muslim psychology.²¹

In 1978, classes were started for sisters taught by brothers and not long afterwards Muslim females became prominent in the Muslim community beyond the Masjid. They have a space for themselves. Here they organise, form groups, teach and learn and socialize as members of the Muslim community.

¹⁸ Naseeb Khan

¹⁹ Naseeb Khan

²⁰ Usually it is an annex to the Masjid that is used to teach children to read Arabic and the Quran and basic Islam

²¹ Naseeb Khan

One day camps were organised for them on a monthly basis in different parts of Guyana, courses were organised for them periodically and teachers training were organised for them also. This gives great boost to the effort of the GIT.

In 1982, the GIT embarked on a Five-year Plan. The focus was to strengthen the GIT. In 1987, a three-year plan was adopted to consolidate on the GIT gains. In 1990, another Five-Year plan was adopted to expand the GIT. The GIT saw long term planning as the way to go because it gives you greater scope and focus.²²

Conventions

In 1984, GIT organised its first Convention under the theme Best Community at Old Mosque, Alexander Village, Georgetown. In 1986, the 2nd was organised at the Canjie Secondary School in Berbice. In 1988, the 3rd was organised in Leonora Secondary School, West Demerara, in 1990 and 1992, the 4th and 5th were organised at Queens College, Georgetown, in 1994 the 6th was organised at the Sophia Exhibition Center, Georgetown, in 1996, 1998 and 2000, the 7th and 8th and 9th were organised respectively at the Guyana Islamic Institute (GII). Thousands across Guyana attended these conventions. Many overseas guest and speakers attended. We saw Rida Bashier, Maulana Naseem, Dr. Jamal Badawi, Dr. Ahmad Kutty, Abdullah Hakim Quick and others speaking at these conventions.

The Conventions were a forum for the workers, supporters and well-wishers of the GIT across Guyana to reach and socialize and discuss pertinent issues on Islam and Muslims.²³

Guyana Islamic Institute (GII)

In the early 80s many of the leading workers started to migrate. A need was felt to develop leaders, workers and teachers locally to continue the effort in Guyana. In 1986, the Guyana Islamic Institute (GII) was established to fulfill this need. The first batch of students completed in 1990. Students from other parts of the Caribbean attend the GII too. The graduates give a great boost to the work of GIT. Many also went to further study abroad. Many have migrated due to the economic condition in Guyana.

Organizing the GIT

As the GIT was gaining more workers and support, it was important for the GIT to organize itself more formally. In 1980, the GIT was organised into Zones, Zone B, Berbice, Zone E, East Demerara and Linden, Zone W, West Demerara and Zone S, Essequibo. At the same time also, the Education Committee, Liqaa Committee, Sisters Affairs Committee, Joint Islamic Society (Islamic Societies at University and Secondary Schools) and the Finance Committee were formed.

With rapid migration of seasoned and knowledgeable workers, it GIT has to reorganized itself to suit the new realities. It decided to break up the administrative units to smaller entity to facilitate greater inclusion of potential workers, smaller size

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

to manage, mobilize resources congenial to its space, network with all of the Masjids in the demarked area etc.²⁴

This reorganizing gives the GIT a great boost. The Islam Awareness Week became everybody IAW. Massive moral, physical and financial support were poured into the work. GIT's Financial base was boosted that over ninety percent of financial resources are from the Guyanese community.²⁵

Islam Awareness Week

Dawah to non-Muslim was always a priority for the GIT since its inception. Sh. Ahmad Ihwas organised the work around youth, education and Dawah. He gave Brother Musa²⁶ special responsibility for Dawah to non-Muslim. During the SICs²⁷ dawah was done on a regular basis. Periodically, the students will go out both to the Muslims and non-Muslims for a week across the country. Through this effort a number of persons accepted Islam in Demerara and Linden. After the SICs, dawah to non-Muslims was done in a limited way. This continued until 1994. In the later part of 1994, the GIT was invited to participate in Islam Awareness Week in Trinidad by the Islamic Dawah Movement. Brother Imtiaz Ali²⁸ represented the GIT at this event. When he returned, he submitted a verbal report and the leadership decided to start IAW on the pattern of Trinidad.

From 1995 to 1998 IAW was organised by the different zones with lectures at schools, University of Guyana and the street corners in different parts of Guyana. It was evident that follow up was difficult because of the many locations. In 1999, a proposal was submitted advocating Dawah Villages. The idea was to focus on one neighbourhood for the week with a plethora of activities. This included house to house visit and sharing of tracts every day in the designated neighborhood, evening lectures at the Village, feeding program for the elderly, medical outreach, art and crafts, village project with partnership with the people etc. The idea was to have full time operation at the village. This would be easier to follow up at least once per week. Lectures to schools and UG to continue. Also, to have special forum to target Non-Muslim professionals and opinion leaders and courtesy calls to the political leaders and other social leaders. The leadership accepted the proposal and IAW was transformed.

In 1999, with the reorganizing of IAW, the GIT had a boost in its support and volunteers. Many persons came on board to work with the GIT on this project. Additionally, there were a lot of support in donations to cover some of the expenses of IAW. The media started to carry the GIT's activities in the major television stations and newspapers. People accepted Islam in cloisters. In those villages where follow up was done people still continue to accept Islam even after the week.

A major feature of IAW from its inception is to invite some personality who will be a crowd puller. Names like Daud Abdul Haqq, Siraj Wahaj, Dr. Shabir Ally, Abdur

²⁴ Interview with Haseeb Yusuf, December 2022

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ One of the early brothers of the GIT

²⁷ SIC (Special Islamic Course) was an Intensify One Year Program to prepare leaders and teachers for the Islamic Revival Process

²⁸ Early pioneer of the GIT

Raheem Green etc. They were able to pull the Muslim crowd all over the country. This makes the GIT more accepted in the Muslim community. This approach also enhances the GITs image in the wider Guyanese society.

The theme for IAW is usually based on a challenge in the wider society. Sometimes it is based on a challenge to Islam in Guyana. Reaching out to Guyanese through the live television programs discussing issues that affect the nation was a great blessing for the work in Guyana and abroad. Many of the foreign guests had requested that the GIT do a write up on IAW in Guyana and share it with the world. They said that they never experienced something like IAW in Guyana.

Over the years, IAW has become a national activity. Muslims from all walks of life participated and donated to it. This give the Muslims confidence and pride that the Muslim community is taking Islam to the people of Guyana.²⁹

Education

Education is central in Islam. Through education, Man is abled to fulfill his obligations to himself, His Lord and his community. Man is commissioned to be responsible steward on earth (Khalifah). Education is the means by which he will be competent to fulfill that role. All the Prophets were educated par excellence. It is important to note that we don't loose focus of education in it's comprehensive outlook.

Due to space and time, we will look at Al-Ghazali's contribution in the field of knowledge. His framework is very novel and convincing. He premises his dissertation on the needs of man so he can gain happiness in this life and the hereafter. He identified four broad areas of religion, food, clothing and shelter. He then said man needs the knowledge and skills for these necessities. He further explained that knowledge is of two kinds the beneficial and the non-beneficial. For our purpose we will concentrate on the beneficial knowledge.

He explained that the Quran and the sunnah extolled the importance and blessings of seeking knowledge. He saw knowledge as compulsory on everyone based on his/her responsibility so that they can fulfill it effectively.

He divided knowledge into those that are compulsory of every adult and those that compulsory on the community. Knowledge of the basics of the articles of faith, pillars of Islam, salaah, fasting, skill to earn a livelihood to provide for oneself and family and responsibility one may have in life as compulsory for individuals. Knowledge of production of food, manufacturing and repairing tools and machineries for food, clothing and shelter, deep knowledge of the religion and its branches, health care, security, defence, knowledge of preparing the tools and machines of defence, growing and production of food, producing raw materials for housing and clothing etc. are compulsory on the community. That is some people of the community must acquire these knowledge and skills or else the whole community will sin.

According to him the sources of knowledge are revelation, teachings and practice of the holy Prophet, observation, experimentation, reasoning, contemplation etc. However, if anything contradict revelation, it has to be discarded. According to him, the truth cannot contradict revelation.

²⁹ Ibid

From Al-Ghazali, we learnt that all branches of knowledge are important for the wellbeing of human beings so all of them are sanctified by religion. There is no dichotomy of religious education and the other sciences. All knowledge is religious in the sense that they are compulsory based on religion. Therefore, specialization is communal responsibility and people who are doing the religious sciences and those doing the others are all fulfilling a responsibility for the community. All providers of services are important. The human community is interdependent. It is important to note however, that based on the hierarchy of knowledge, the religious sciences are higher.

With this comprehensive understanding of education, the Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT) began its intervention in the Muslim community. It focused on basic education and went higher and higher over time. It promotes Islam as a comprehensive system of life which is essential for man to gain felicity in this life and the life to come. In its educational thrust, it encourages participants to practice Islam in all aspects of their lives. Its basic educational program highlighted the various aspects of the Islamic way of life. Besides the rituals of salaah, fasting, zakaah and hajj, and food and drink, clothing and adornment, earning a livelihood etc. it also taught the basics of economic life, social and family life, political and community life. Besides it looks at the needs from the beginning and evolve by arranging special educational and training programs to fulfill those needs.

The GIT started with one class with some brothers, Naseeb Khan, Faisal Baksh, Imtiaz Zaman, Abdool Aleem, Daud Abdullah, Gibran Ali, Omar Insanally, etc. with Ahmad Ihwas as the conductor. Later Sh. Daud Abdul Haqq joined as a conductor. From this class which was like a work/study unit, they planned a variety educational program. There were weekend living in programs popularly called Liqaa which culminated with the Basic Islamic Course (BIC) at Whim, Berbice in December 1979, and another at Leonora, West Demerara in April 1979 and in Anna Regina, Essequibo Coast in July 1979. These BICs were important in that they provided the education of the participants and practical training for the administrators and teachers. From these basic courses study circles were formed. The study circles in Essequibo, West Demerara, East Demerara, Linden and Berbice were work/study units. They study and discuss the topics they did at the BIC, organised Liqaat, each member was commissioned to start a basic class.³⁰

In August 1978, Ahmad Ihwas organised a five-day program Camp Kayuka in the jungle. It was very clear that the Caribbean has to be part of the initiative in Guyana. At this program, a number of brothers from Caribbean attended. Being held in the jungle, it allowed a lot of time for the participants to bond together.

Ahmad also invited the head of the Islamic Party Muzaffruddeen because he and his group was heavily promoted by Brother Daud Abdullah³¹. This camp also had attendees such as Haniff Bagh Khan³², Zabar Baksh and other Trinidadian brothers. Ahmad also invited The Jordanian brother Badran who was famous for his camps in Trinidad. ³³

³⁰ Interview with Naseeb Khan via What's App, 9th October 2021.

³¹ From Grenada and was studying at the University of Guyana at the time

³² A prominent personality in Guyana, who introduced a novel system to teach persons to read Arabic via English letters

³³ Naseeb Khan

“This camp also was intended to push us to a next level. Six months prior Ahmad give each one of us a 45 mins talk to deliver and give us 10 books or so to prepare it from. We had to write out complete speech prior and he had copies typed and handed out at the camp. Prior to this we had done two- or three-minutes talks..... This camp Ahmad was a forum for Ahmad to assess what potential was available in the various communities and to give him a chance to see how he will proceed with them. He also tested us to see our commitment. We had to go visit personally each person who applied for the camp. There were roughly 120 people. Kayuka was five days in the jungle, so we had ample time to build relationships.”³⁴

In November 1979, a Teacher Training Course (TTC) was implemented for a week. Brothers from Guyana and Trinidad participated. The contents of the program were lesson planning, methodology of planning a syllabus, First Aid, Physical Education, organizing classes and practical teaching techniques for the various subjects and the usage of books in the study circles.³⁵ This boosted the efforts of the education thrust of the GIT. Tens of classes were organised in various parts of Guyana for both males and females. Additionally, the administrators had the skills to execute living programs lasting between five-days to two weeks. It is important to note that professionals were the trainers. Teachers training is perennial in the GIT ongoing work.

GIT's Method of Reform

Before going forward it is important that we look at the educational and training methodology of the GIT from its inception and how it evolved over the years. Basically, GIT had a three-pronged approach to education and training, namely general call, recruitment and training and implementation.

The general call is opening for all to attend. This covers it madrasah programs, general programs for adults, Basic Islamic Course, Liqa'at, general Seminars, Nuzha, Sports Day etc. These varied programs have their general value. However, from here we scanned to look at potential for higher and specialized education.

Recruitment happened at the open programs, after which those recruited are organized into study circles and work units. Here they get more edified and are train in the field to do practical work for Islamic reformation through Intermediate Islamic Course, Advance Islamic Course, Special Seminars and workshops and Qiyamul Lail. They are also exposed to skills training in teaching, public speaking, administration and management and the theory and method of Islamic reformation through studying seerah and appropriate literature. After this phase, they are ready to deliver.

Implementation is where the trained persons take on responsibilities and can work by themselves with very little supervision. Training continues here to enhance them to perform at higher levels.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Interview with Alyasa Muhammad of Trinidad, who was both a participant and a trainer at this TTC, 7th October 2021

This three-pronged approach is perennial. Education and recruiting never stop, nor training and skill development.

In Retrospect

The whole of GIT's intervention in Guyana focus on Muslim Youth, Dawah to Non-Muslim and the Muslim community. Its training program on skills enhancement and team building (Ukhuwah). It also places a lot of emphasis on the spiritual development of its workers. Workers were reminded regularly to:

1. Focus on the big issues
2. Do not let you critics distract you
3. Be punctual
4. Careful planning and documentation
5. Commitment to deliver
6. Attach to Qur'an
7. Never speak ill of anyone
8. View problems as solvable challenges
9. Network and cooperate with other endeavors
10. Smile easily and often
11. Frank speech
12. Treat others with respect and importance
13. Challenge others to raise the bar and push them
14. Be organised, personally and collectively
15. Keep good relationships
16. Keep promises
17. Recreation is a tool for Dawah
18. Family is important
19. Lead by example
20. Give people a second chance if they fall
21. Competence is learnt on the job
22. Training is important
23. Evaluation and Follow up
24. Variety is important
25. Sincerity
26. Consistency
27. Enthusiasm for learning and knowledge
28. We should live our Islam
29. Brotherhood was strong
30. Tahajjud
31. Defend the workers
32. Patience with ignorance from others
33. Take criticism
34. Teach what you know³⁶

In the Islamic work the GIT workers first define the world they want to for themselves and their children to live in, then they focus on the kind of people they will need to build/train who will work to make such a world a reality and then the third thing is what will be the methodology that will need to be used by those who were trained.

³⁶ Naseeb Khan

In terms of the training of workers they focus on four broad areas of which there is a great degree of subheadings that are often more 10 times. The four areas are captioned under the acronym of STAR:

S is for all things pertaining to the spiritual and relationship with Allah

T is Tarbiyyah i.e. training and acquiring knowledge and skills. It is the relationship to our self-development

A is activism and deals with our relationship to the Islamic Dawah and all that is required to become proficient

R is our relationships and deals with brotherhood, family, HR, community, networking and working with fellow humans.

These four areas cover all aspects of their relationships i.e. Allah, themselves, Dawah and with others. When the GIT train its workers with these, they become balanced and ready to effectively confront the challenges they faced in the field. A STAR is produced.³⁷

Ahmad's basic methodology of the Islamic work was as follows:

1. Connect: this is to provide as many doors as possible for people to get interested and connected to the work. This included all the various outreach programs such as live in courses, liqa'at, seminars, sport days, Quranic competition, debates, bake sales, etc.
2. Train: this was done via classes and circles and seminars and courses
3. Mobilize: this was to connect people to the structure of the work such as committees, zones etc.
4. Empower: provide opportunities for practice in leadership, to send us into the field to fall and get up again, to learn on the job and to try to figure it out.³⁸

At the Masjid, there are those who attend out of a family culture but is a secularist at heart. There are others who believe that Islam is a religion to practice at the individual level only. There are others who believe in the holistic nature of Islam but have different methods to attain the higher objectives of Islam. Leadership at the Masjid level have to walk delicately as they are navigating the terrain within their local environment. All are important for the community.

Ahmad practiced the Sunnah to connect with those in positions of authority. He would go to visit Fazeel Feroze, head of CIOG and sit with him every Friday evening for an hour or two (He convinced Fazeel to use his home for a critical study circle). He would pick up Juman Yasin, head of the General Council of Islamic Brotherhood and bring him to the Liqaat. (Juman allowed the GIT to start the SIC at the Brotherhood HQ). He would engage with Mandal, the leader in Meter Meerzorg. He would visit Sultan Hafiz, the leader in Berbice. He got him to allow the GIT to use the

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

Whim complex for classes and courses. He had a relationship with Foreman, the head of the Tabligh Jamaat (he got him to donate for five years rent free the GIT first HQ). He would hold dinners at the embassy and invite the Imams and government officials so these two groups can meet and socialize. He met with the Ulema ud Deen (the body of Imams).³⁹

The workers of the GIT recognized the following:

1. A shared vision is crucial for group cohesion and success in endeavors
2. A shared history/engagement does not necessarily mean agreement or even synergy - people evolve in their thinking and stances. Agree to disagree in a civil manner and maintain ties of brotherhood
3. Mass education, while important, is not a replacement for Tarbiyyah (personal development)
4. Get close to scholars, but know they are human beings with weaknesses. Be prepared to be disappointed
5. On this path your family will have to sacrifice much; but ensure you bring them along with you in your work. A family that is left behind due to your engagement is an accountability for you here and the hereafter
6. In many cases you will have to carry the burden of the work; and you will be disappointed with the level of commitment of some. It's just the reality. Carry on.
7. Never be afraid to connect - I have connected "cold calling" with many leaders, scholars, etc. and they have benefitted the community
8. Evaluating the efficacy of your engagement; adjusting and even changing course are important steps
9. Young people have incredible talents and potential. Focus on nurturing them while fostering relationships with their parents
10. Never stop learning yourself - both Islamically and in terms of skill set - it will guarantee you relevance in the work you do.⁴⁰

AIM of the GIT

The GIT will develop a strong, viable Islamic community in Guyana, adhering to the tenets of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah operating as a non-profit, religious organization in the State of Guyana.⁴¹

OBJECTIVES of the GIT

1. Uphold and share the principles of AL ISLAM with the people of Guyana;
2. Articulate and represent the interests of Muslims and the values of AL ISLAM at all levels of national life;
3. Develop Institutions that will provide for the sound intellectual, spiritual, moral and cultural well-being of Muslims;
4. Promote co-operation and unity among Muslims locally, regionally and internationally;
5. Publish books, magazines, journals, newspapers, newsletters and articles as deemed necessary for the dissemination of Islamic teachings and the propagation of ISLAM;

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ GIT Constitution

6. Associate with others to undertake programs to promote peace, harmony and the development of Guyana;
7. Raise funds through investments, grants, Zakaah, donations, loans, house to house solicitation and by any other means permitted by Islamic Law;
8. Organize sporting, cultural and recreational activities for Muslims; and,
9. Do what may be conducive to the attainment of the Organization's Objectives.⁴²

MEMBERSHIP

1. Membership of the GIT shall be open to anyone who:
 - a. Is a sane, mature Muslim and who is a citizen/resident of Guyana;
 - b. Subscribes to the same Aqeedah (Beliefs) and agrees with the aims and objectives of the GIT.
 - c. Shows respect for the Leadership and Structure of the GIT.
2. Membership of the GIT shall be sought by way of application through its Administrative structure and shall be subject to the criteria set out in this Constitution as well as any other criteria that may be stipulated by the Administrative Council.
3. Members of the GIT shall be entitled to certain Rights and have certain Duties as set out in Appendix # 1 of this Constitution.
4. There shall be compiled and kept a Members' Register of the GIT.
5. All members of the GIT shall work conscientiously and strenuously for the attainment of the Aims and Objectives of the GIT by participating in and otherwise supporting its programs and policies.
6. Members shall display exemplary Islamic behavior and conduct at all times and circumstances and shall relate with each other in a spirit of Islamic Brotherhood/Sisterhood.
7. A person shall cease to be a member of the GIT if he/she becomes an Apostate is expelled or resigns from the GIT. A member shall be expelled from the GIT if he/she:
 - a. Is proved to be in violation of the conditions of membership of the GIT and after three warnings.
 - b. Is found guilty of any action inimical to the interest of the GIT. Is out of contact with the Administrative Council of the GIT for a period of two years.⁴³

AFFILIATION

1. The GIT may affiliate itself to any International Islamic Organization whose Aims, and Objectives are compatible with its own.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

2. The GIT may affiliate itself to or accept affiliation from any organization within Guyana whose aims, and objectives are compatible with its own, and whose constitution provides for such affiliation.
3. 3. a. Affiliation may be only entered into if it is perceived to be in the interest of promoting and advancing the aims and objectives of the GIT; and b. Provides a platform for networking with other Muslims and Islamic Organizations.
4. All decisions to affiliate to other Islamic Organizations or to accept affiliation of another Organization shall be taken by the Administrative Council of the GIT and shall be subject to the ratification of the Shuraa of the GIT.⁴⁴

STRUCTURE

The structure of the GIT shall comprise of Districts, a General Assembly, a Shuraa an Administrative Council, Arms, Departments, and Institutions.

1. Districts:

- a. The District shall be the Administrative Unit of the GIT.
- b. Each District shall convene a District Ijtima biennially and elect a District Committee comprising of an Ameer, Deputy Ameer, Secretary, Treasurer and a minimum of three Committee Members.
- c. The boundaries of the District shall be set by the Shuraa
- d. The Districts shall be organized in clusters according to the Government's Regional Administrative Structure in Guyana;

2. General Assembly:

- a. The General Assembly shall comprise of not more than two hundred members who shall represent the District Councils of the G.I.T and its Arms and Organs.
- b. The number of representatives to be selected by the District Council of the G.I.T and its Arms and Organs shall be determined by the Administrative Council from time to time and shall be based proportionally on their respective registered memberships at a specifically stated date.
- c. The Administrative Council shall have the prerogative to elect a maximum of twenty five members to the General Assembly.
- d. The Administrative Council shall have the prerogative to review the proposed list of Invitees to the General Assembly from the Districts, Arms or Departments.
- e. The General Assembly shall be presided over by the President of the GIT and shall elect a Shuraa every two years.
- f. The General Assembly shall ratify the plans and policies of the GIT.
- g. The General Assembly shall receive an Annual Report on the performance of the GIT.
- h. The General Assembly shall perform such other functions and wield such authority as provided for in this Constitution.

⁴⁴ Ibid

3. Shuraa:

- a. A Shuraa Member must be an official member of the G.I.T for (2) two years.
- b. A Shuraa Member shall not be officially or actively involved with any parallel Islamic Organization or Movement
- c. A Shuraa Member must be actively involved in the Work of the GIT
- d. The Shuraa shall comprise of not more than forty members, which shall include those elected by the General Assembly, the District Umaraa and six representatives of the National Islamic Sisters Association.
- e. The Shuraa shall elect a President, Vice-President and an Administrative Council every two years.
- f. The Shuraa shall meet every six months and shall fill any vacancies which may exist in the Administrative Council.
- g. The Shuraa shall approve of the rules, regulations and/or statutes of the GIT and its Arms, Institutions and Departments.
- h. The Shuraa shall develop the plans and strategies of the GIT in seeking to achieve its objectives and shall formulate the general policies of the GIT.
- i. The Shuraa shall receive the audited accounts of the GIT annually and shall approve the Auditors for the next year.
- j. The Shuraa shall ratify all affiliations of the GIT.
- k. The Shuraa shall evaluate all aspects of the work of the GIT.
- l. The Shuraa shall perform such other functions as delineated in this Constitution.

4. Administrative Council:

- a. An A.C Member must be in the Shuraa for (2) two years.
- b. An A.C Member must have actively served within an Administrative or Leadership capacity of the Work within the last two years.
- c. The Administrative Council shall comprise of nine members including the President and Vice President.
- d. The Administrative Council shall be the highest authority of the GIT between Shuraa Meetings;
- e. The Administrative Council shall support the President in the management of the personnel, activities and programs of the GIT.
- f. The Administrative Council shall interpret all the statutes, rules and policies of the Organization its Arms, Institutions and Departments.
- g. The Administrative Council shall dispense with all questions of discipline subject to the review of the Shuraa;
- h. The Administrative Council shall set up Departments and appoint subcommittees where necessary for the efficient discharge of essential functions at all levels of the structure of the GIT.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid

ARMS, & DEPARTMENTS

The GIT shall have as part of its structure Arms, and Departments.

1. Arms:

- a. The GIT shall have a Sisters' Arm which shall be called The National Sisters Association (NISA) and an Education Arm - Guyana Islamic Institute (GII) and Islamic Academic Schools.
- b. The Arms shall at all times enjoy the confidence of the Administrative Council of the GIT. If such confidence is lost, the Shuraa shall dismiss the entire leadership of the Arm and have elected new leaders within three months of such dismissal;

2. Departments:

- a. The GIT shall have Departments as part of its Administrative structure.
- b. There shall be Departments responsible for Administration, Dawah, Youth, Social Relief and International Affairs and Economics.
- c. Each Department shall have a Head who shall be selected by the Administrative Council of the GIT.
- d. Each Head of Department shall be accountable to President for the operation of his Department.
- e. The Department of Administration shall:
 - i. Provide the President with the necessary administrative support to carry out his duties as Head of the GIT.
 - ii. Provide administrative support for all Districts and Arms and Departments of the GIT.
 - iii. Keep records of all aspects of the work of the GIT.
 - iv. Be responsible for the Register of Members of the GIT
 - v. Dispense with all external correspondence and shall be the medium of communication between the Leadership and the Districts, Arms, and Departments of the GIT.
 - vi. Carry out any other duty of an Administrative nature that may be assigned to it by the President from time to time.
- f. The Department of Dawah shall be responsible for planning and executing all the Islamic propagation activities of the GIT.
- g. The Department of Youth and Students shall be responsible for organizing all Youth and Students activities of the GIT.
- h. The Department of Social Relief shall be responsible for all the Social Relief activities of the GIT.
- i. The Department of International Affairs shall maintain contact with all members and supporters overseas and facilitate communication between the GIT and all International Personalities, Organizations and Institutions.
- j. The Department of Economics shall be responsible for all the Economic activities of the GIT.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid

DUTIES OF OFFICERS

A. President:

A member who has actively served two full terms in the Administrative Council shall be qualified to be elected as President of the GIT.

The President shall:

- a. Be the overall Leader of the GIT.
- b. Be accountable to the Shuraa.
- c. Convene and preside over the General Assembly, the Shuraa and Administrative Council meetings.
- d. Manage the implementation of all decisions of the General Assembly, Shuraa and Administrative Council of the GIT.
- e. Have the power to veto any decision of the General Assembly or the Shuraa providing that any such decision does not have the votes of two thirds of those present.
- f. Be the Authority for communication between the Administrative structure of the GIT and all external agencies.
- g. Be the Authority over the use of the Official Seal and Letterhead of the GIT.
- h. Consult with the Administrative Council and in cases of emergency he shall make decisions on his own.
- i. Overlook the workings of the Arms of the GIT.
- j. Delegate responsibilities from time to time as he sees fit.

B. Vice-President:

The Vice- President shall:

- a. assist the President in the performance of his duties and,
- b. Perform the duties of President in his absence.
- c. "If the President resigns, dies, or become incapacitated, or has been expelled legitimately, or can no longer perform the functions of the President, the Vice-President should assume the position of President after which, the Administrative Council will convene a Shuraa meeting to elect the New President within sixty (60) days from the date the President would have been out of office".

C. Accountant/Internal Auditor:

The Administrative Council shall appoint an Accountant/Internal Auditor.

The Accountant/Internal Auditor shall:

- a. Be responsible for all aspects of the fiscal operations of the GIT.
- b. Present a Budget to the Administrative Council at the beginning of each financial year
- c. Present an audited financial statement to the Shuraa annually.

D. Public Relations Officer:

The Administrative Council shall appoint a Public Relations Officer of the GIT who shall:

- a. Develop and maintain relations between the GIT and the General Public through the use of public and private media.

- b. Promote the policies and programs of the GIT through the use of all public and private media.
- c. Disseminate information to the General Public about all activities of the GIT.⁴⁷

As is evident from the Constitution, the GIT has a network that cover most of the inhabited areas of Guyana. Its achievement were numerous in short period of time. Some of which are:

1. Inspired hundreds of youths to love Islam, practice Islam and commit themselves to its propagation.
2. Hundreds of youths became socially conscious to improve their respective communities.
3. Introduce the Muslims to the proper pronunciation of Arabic and Tajwidul Quran.
4. Reintroduce the Hijab among women that was lost among Muslim women working on the sugar plantation.
5. Mobilize the Muslims of Guyana to reach out to their fellow Guyanese with the message of Islam.
6. Inspire Muslims to seek education in all spheres in all of knowledge.
7. Challenge Muslims to look at Islam for different solutions to present day challenges.
8. Facilitated the massive reduction of drugs and intoxicants among Muslims.
9. Organised Muslim women to actively participate in its work of Tajdid. not only organised a separate arm for them, but also give six seats at the Shuraa.
10. Through its efforts with the Muslim community, Muslims are very much respected by all strata of the Guyanese society.
11. Young Muslims attend the Masjid more regularly. They are over 65 percent at Jumu'ah.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the GIT has withstand the challenges of the times. It was able to adapt and make the necessary changes to be relevant. At its inception, the government and opposition were Marxists oriented. One of the major parties was communist. To evolve and grow under authoritarian regime and then maneuver itself when the country moved to open market in 1986. The diaspora of the GIT have made tremendous impact in New York, New Jersey, Florida and Toronto. It has inspired many communities in the Caribbean. Traversing this road was not without hurdles. This paper is too short to deal with them. Happy to say, the GIT was able to be friends most of those who were antagonistic towards it.

⁴⁷ Ibid

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