THE IMPACT OF BEING TAMIL ON RELIGIOUS LIFE AMONG TAMIL MUSLIMS IN SINGAPORE

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SUMMARY

This thesis aims to investigate the impact of ethnic differences on the religious life of Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore. More specifically, it examines in which contexts ethnic differences between Tamil-speaking Muslims and other Singaporean Muslims become salient. Furthermore, the effects of that salience both in practical terms, e.g. in the organization of religious life, as well as in discursive terms, i.e. in the way ethnic differences are conceptualized in the religious domain, are elucidated. Both anthropological and historical research methods were employed in order to address these questions.

The thesis consists of seven chapters. After the *Introduction*, chapter 2 outlines the historical development of Tamil Muslim society in Singapore, with a focus on the colonial period, which will serve as a point of comparison for the contemporary situation throughout the thesis. Chapter 3 discusses the way Tamil Muslim society and community is imagined in Singapore, investigating in particular those aspects of Tamil Muslim society that delineate various social segments within a putative single Tamil Muslim community. The thesis then proceeds in chapter 4 to consider the institutions that structure and organize religious life among Singaporean Tamil Muslims, paying particular attention to the operation of Tamil Muslim associations. The use of the Tamil language and its impact on religious life in the form of preaching, teaching, publishing, and debating Islam is considered in chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses the debates that have grown out of the salience of ethnic differences in the religious domain. The first part of the chapter considers the structural challenges Singaporean Tamil Muslims are faced with in the local context due to ethnic differences, and the ways they have contested the institutional setup of

Islam in Singapore. The second part deals with the broader discourse on popular practice and identity that arises from the salience of ethnic differences, leading to the formulation of an essentialized 'Indian Islam' and an equally static image of an 'Indian-Muslim' community. The final chapter presents some conclusions that can be drawn from the evidence discussed in the thesis.

The results emerging from the thesis indicate that ethnic difference has a great impact on the organization as well as the imagination of religious life among Singaporean Tamil Muslims. Ethnic salience becomes most visible in two contexts, viz. that of popular practices and that of language use. It is the latter that has the greatest practical consequences on the organization of religious life, as it directly interferes with the capacity of Tamil Muslims to participate in certain normative Islamic practices. In contrast, it is popular practice rather than language that most strongly informs the imagination of difference between Tamil Muslims and other non-Tamil Muslims and non-Muslim Tamils in Singapore. In both cases, the impact of ethnic difference is furthermore shaped by the peculiar historical context, producing different reactions to ethnic difference among Muslims in different historical contexts, while at the same time suggesting a tendency to similar types of discourse in various historical and spatial settings.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMLA	Administration of Muslim Law Act
AMP	Association of Muslim Professionals
Ar.	Arabic
AWARE	Association of Women for Action and Research
CDAC	Chinese Development Assistance Council
CPF	Central Provident Fund
EA	Eurasian Association
FIM	Federation of Indian Muslims
HDB	Housing and Development Board
IMSSA	Indian Muslim Social Service Association
INA	Indian National Army
Ma.	Malay
MABIMS	Meeting of Ministers of Religious Affairs of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore
MBF	Mosque Building Fund
MENDAKI	Majlis Pendidikan Anak-Anak Islam (Council on Education for Muslim Children)
MTFA	Muslimin Trust Fund Association
MUIS	Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore)
PELU	Public Entertainment Licensing Unit
PERDAUS	Pelajar-Pelajar Agama Dewasa Singapura (Association of Adult Religious Class Students of Singapore)

PERGAS	Persatuan Ulama & Guru Guru Agama Islam (Singapura) (Singapore Islamic Scholars & Religious Teachers Association)
pl.	plural
PSLE	Primary School Leaving Examination
RTA	Rifayee Thareeq Association
SIJU	South Indian Jamiathul Ulama
SINDA	Singapore Indian Development Association
SKML	Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League
S.S.L.R.	Straits Settlements Law Reports
STMWS	Singapore Tenkasi Muslim Welfare Society
s.v.	sub voce
Ta.	Tamil
ThoMA	Thopputhurai Muslim Association (Singapore)
ThuMA	Thuckalay Muslim Association
TL	Tamil Lexicon
TMJ	Tamil Muslim Jama‘at
TMU	Thiruvithancode Muslim Union
UIMA	United Indian Muslim Association

NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

For this thesis, sources written in a variety of languages, most notably in Tamil, were perused. Furthermore, it was necessary to employ Tamil, Arabic, and Malay terminology from time to time. All translations are my own unless noted otherwise. Translations are generally based on a standard dictionary for the various languages, viz. for Tamil, the *Tamil Lexicon* (TL) of the University of Madras (Vaiyapuri Pillai [1924-39] 1982); for Arabic, the fourth edition of Hans Wehr's *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Wehr 1979); and for Malay, the revised edition of Coope's *Malay-English English-Malay Dictionary* (Coope [1991] 1993). All quotes from the Koran are from Abdel Haleem's translation (Abdel Haleem 2004).

I have decided to use full scientific transliteration for both Tamil and Arabic. Especially with regard to the former, all sorts of unscientific spellings abound for Romanizing Tamil. The argument that these popular spellings are easier to read and that specialists would be able to recognize the intended word anyway is simply mistaken. As many of these popular spellings are based on the respective author's understanding of the already rather inconsistent English orthography, it is often not immediately apparent whether, e.g., -oo- is supposed to represent -ō- or -ū-. Furthermore, the inconsistencies and impreciseness of such spellings sometimes makes it difficult to impossible even for a specialist to identify a word.

Similarly, I found using a reduced transliteration system, i.e. transliterating scientifically but omitting the diacritics, not advisable, as this would often make it difficult to distinguish words. Thus, for the recognition of Tamil and Arabic words, and especially for tracing bibliographical references, full scientific transliteration was the only option. For Tamil, I have used the standard system of the TL, with the

additional feature of transcribing the digraph -k̲p-in words of Arabic origin as -f-. For Arabic, I have employed the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

Generally, transliteration has been employed in the following contexts:

1. All direct quotes from Tamil or Arabic.
2. Technical terms in Tamil or Arabic. When referring to Islamic religious terms in general, I always give the Arabic spelling of a word rather than its Tamil or Romanized Malay spelling. The latter are only used if the reference is to a specific context, thus *waqf*, 'endowment', but 'Wakaf Board'. I do not normally use Arabic plurals, except where circumstances require it, and generally add the English plural –s to Arabic words to indicate the plurals, i.e. *fatwās* rather than *fatāwin* or *fatāwā*.
3. Names of individuals in cases where an individual is mentioned only in Tamil language sources, and thus no Romanized spelling of that individual's name is available. Similarly, the names of historical Muslim personalities have generally been transcribed from Arabic.
4. All bibliographical references, both in the footnotes and the bibliography.

On the other hand, I have refrained from using transliteration in the following cases:

1. Words and names that have become standardized in modern English, e.g. Muhammad, Hussein, Imam, Ramadan, Shiva, etc.
2. Personal names that have a commonly used English spelling, such as the names of many of my respondents. In case of a few individuals, whose names are commonly given in popular spelling in English language sources but whose Tamil language publications I quote, I use the common popular spelling throughout the text, but give the scientific transliteration at the first occurrence

and use this transliteration in bibliographic references; thus ‘Maideen’ in the main body of the text, but ‘Meytīṉ’ in bibliographical references.

3. For the names of towns, districts, and other geographical proper names.
4. When English and Tamil sources written by the same author are referred to, the English spelling of the author’s name is used in the bibliographical references. As this was the case only with one author, and the Tamil source in that case is an unpublished typescript that does not even carry the author’s name (Sayed Majunoon n.d. & 1996), this was the most prudent way to handle the situation.
5. Finally, when quoting verbatim, the spelling employed by the original source is retained.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

ISLAM AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCE

> People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into nations and tribes so that you should get to know one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most aware of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.[1]

> Among [the mosques of Singapore] there is a place available for our Kling Muslims which is a site in the city-centre where one may come and go at any time of the night without any fear whatsoever.[2]

> Though a minority [of Indian Muslims] has embraced the Malay culture…a vast majority of us are still culturally Indians – that is, we speak Tamil, we eat Indian food and we dress in the Indian style.[3]

[1] Koran 49.13.
[2] "Cavuttu piriṭciṟōṭ kuttupāp paḷḷivāyilaippaṟṟiya potuviṣayam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 15 Aug 1887: 29.
[3] "I'm flattered Indian Muslims like me were counted in", *The Straits Times*, 25 Mar 1992.

How do differences between ethnic groups affect the practice of Islam among Muslims? Despite the fact that Islam is professed by people from vastly different geographic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, this question has been largely ignored by students of Muslim society. Though the Koran acknowledges ethnic diversity as an "…anthropological fact…",[4] as the first of the three quotes makes clear, this 'fact' has not been investigated as thoroughly as other aspects of Muslim societies. It is not that evidence for the continued importance of ethnic diversity among Muslims is lacking; the second and third quote, produced by Muslims in Singapore speaking the Tamil language of southern India and Ceylon and separated from each other by an interval of almost 105 years, attest to the importance that can be attached to ethnic identities and practices even in contexts closely connected with religious practice.

Ethnic diversity among Muslims rarely features as a topic worthy of discussion among both Muslim intellectuals and scholars of Muslim societies. When it does, what is addressed is usually how Islam was made sense of in specific historical, regional and ethnic contexts. Ultimately, these discussions are not about ethnic diversity and its effects on Muslim religious life, but about the way the Muslim ideal of a universal Islamic tradition is realized in various ethnic contexts, and how ethnicity relates to an Islamic identity.[5] Yet the question of what impact the encounter of Muslims of different ethnic or linguistic backgrounds has on the religious practice of these Muslims is rarely contemplated. The theoretical premise adopted by many scholars seems to be that ethnic or linguistic differences do not affect religious practices or identities, as explicitly stated by Nielsen, who contends that "...in village to city migration in the Arab world or Pakistan there is an element of cultural

[4] Osman 2007 [sic]: 481.
[5] For some examples, cf. Eaton 2003; Osman 2007 [sic]; Robinson 2004: chapter 4; Sāti' al-Husrī 2007 [sic].

migration as there may be of ethnic or linguistic migration. But in these circumstances, it is the ethnic, cultural, or linguistic identity that is challenged in the first instance. The environment remains Muslim in expression".[6] This premise does not only affect studies of Muslim society, but seems to be more common generally in Religious Studies. A recent *Handbook of Language & Ethnic Identity* has chapters dealing with the relation between language and ethnic identity from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, such as Economics, History, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology, but not Religious Studies, despite the role 'sacred languages', 'chosen people', and other aspects of religion play with regard to both language and ethnic identities.[7]

Of course, studies considering the impact of ethnic differences among people professing the same religion are not completely lacking. Especially the field of Diaspora Studies has taken note of the phenomenon, observing processes of negotiating practices and identities as Muslim migrants of various ethnic backgrounds come to live together in diasporic settings. Vertovec has claimed that common transformations among diasporic Muslim communities include shifts from 'localized' to 'universal' practices and a greater differentiation between 'religion' and 'culture'.[8] The same processes were identified by Gibb in her study of Ethiopian Hararis in Canada.[9] Yet the diasporic Muslim societies in Europe and North America that form the subject of these studies are peculiar in many respects – in most cases, Muslim communities in these countries are relative newcomers; Muslims are both less established in these regions than they are in parts of Asia or Africa, and ethnic

[6] Nielsen 2000: 121.
[7] Cf. Fishman 1999.
[8] Vertovec 2003: 316-8.
[9] Cf. Gibb 1998: 260-4; for an example of similar processes in a Christian group, cf. Zane 1999.

heterogeneity is far more pronounced, as migrants come from many different parts of the planet.

Studies of the impact of ethnic heterogeneity on Muslim practice in regions where Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds have been interacting for centuries are much less common. Nagata, in her article on "Religion and Ethnicity among the Indian Muslims of Malaysia", spends less than a page on the impact differences between Indians and Malays in Malaysia have on religious life.[10] In another interesting study, Sakallioglu has investigated the differences of Islamist discourse among ethnic Turkish and Kurdish writers. He suggests

> …that Kurdish-Islamist writers tend to search for a 'space' for Kurdish ethnic distinctiveness within the framework of the suggested formula of *ummah*, the Islamic community of the faithful, while the position of the Turkish-Islamist writers leans heavily toward defending the integrity of the Turkish state rather than to acknowledging a Kurdish ethnic distinctiveness.[11]

This finding is important in so far as it questions the assumption made by many authors that the universal claims of Islam and ethnic particularities are necessarily contradictory.[12] We shall return to this issue in chapter 6 of this thesis.

Singapore provides an ideal setting to investigate the impact of ethnic difference on Muslim religious life. Not only has Singapore's Muslim community been multi-ethnic from the very beginnings of the British settlement founded in 1819 and probably even before that, but ethnic difference, or rather what the Singaporean state

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[10] Nagata 1993: 529-30.
[11] Sakallioglu 1998: 74.
[12] Cf. e.g. Gibb 1998: 260; Nagata 1993: 529.

perceives as such, has had a strong impact on public policies and is thus highly visible in the public sphere.[13] Given the strongly multi-ethnic character of Singaporean Muslim society, including Malays as well as various ethnic groups of South Asian backgrounds usually lumped together as 'Indians', Arabs, and more recent Chinese and Western converts, it is surprising to see that until now, the effects of this ethnic diversity have not been adequately addressed by scholarship on Singaporean Islam. While the presence of Indian and Arab Muslims is usually acknowledged in studies of religion in Singapore,[14] its significance is either ignored or explicitly denied by the authors. Thus, a German publication calls Indian and other non-Malay Muslims in Singapore 'negligible'.[15] Similarly, though having just mentioned the existence of Indian Muslims in Singapore, Siddique concedes that "…the real problem with accommodating religion to race is the Chinese community", suggesting that the fit of 'Malay' and 'Muslim' is neat enough to ignore other ethnic groups among the Muslims.[16]

This latter statement exemplifies one of the greatest problems in the study of religion in Singapore, viz. the sometimes tacit, sometimes not so tacit identification of the 'racial' categories of Malays, Indians and Chinese with various religions,[17] in our case the almost interchangeable use of 'Muslim' and 'Malay'.[18] The connection between categories of 'race' and 'religion' has led to some reflections on the relationship between ethnicity and religion. Thus, Clammer discusses the importance that religion assumes as an ethnic boundary marker in the Singaporean context, where other markers of difference are disappearing, and he even suggests the significance of

[13] Cf. e.g. Benjamin 1976; Siddique 1989; Teo & Ooi 1996; Wu 1982.
[14] Cf. e.g. Bonneff 1985: 82; Clammer 1990: 160-3; Ling 1989: 696; Mak 2000: 13; Metzger 2003: 18, 206-7; Siddique 1986: 316-7; Siddique 1989: 567-8; Stahr 1997: 193.
[15] Stahr 1997: 195.
[16] Siddique 1989: 567.
[17] Cf. Tong 2004: 306.
[18] Cf. e.g. Tong 2002: 384-9.

ethnic identification within religious communities, though he does so primarily to point out how religion and ethnic or linguistic identity are reinforcing each other, something that may be true for Malays, but is more problematic for 'Indians'.[19] More pertinent are Clammer's observations on Singaporean Christianity, noting many of the elements that are also of interest in a Muslim context, such as the question of different 'styles' of religious practice and, more importantly, the importance of language use in religious contexts.[20] Yet for Singaporean Islam, an investigation of these issues still has to be accomplished. It is noteworthy that in a recent handbook on Singapore Sociology, the chapters on the sociology of Malays and Indians both point out that the relationship of 'race' and religion in the Singaporean context is far from facile. Thus, Arumugam raises the question of how non-Hindu Indians relate to the Hindu majority among the Indians in Singapore, and whether linguistic differences have an impact on the practice of Hinduism.[21] Similarly, Alatas points out that "…the cultural lines separating Malays from Arabs, Indians and Chinese who are also Muslims are both subjective as well as objective".[22] Significantly, the chapter on religion of that Handbook has nothing to say on the issue.[23] On the whole, the facile identification of 'race' and 'religion' has retarded a scholarly assessment of the impact ethnic difference plays within a religious community. The most egregious example of this is Mak's study on *Modeling Islamization in Southeast Asia*. Mak justifies his exclusion of Chinese and Indian 'converts', by which he obviously means all Chinese and Indian Muslims in Singapore, from his Singaporean samples, as "[e]thnicity might confound the effects of religion on social interaction between religious groups, hence

[19] Cf. Clammer 1985: chapter 4; Clammer 1990: 166-7; Clammer notes some of the effects of ethnic differences on Muslim practice in Singapore, but on the whole does not attempt to analyze these cases.
[20] Clammer 1985: 42-4.
[21] Arumugam 2002: 332-3.
[22] Alatas 2002: 291.
[23] Cf. Tong 2002.

the exclusion of Chinese and Indian Muslim [sic] makes relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims more manageable".[24] Ironically, Mak concedes the effects of ethnic difference on religiously motivated behavior – yet rather than engaging with these effects, he tries to avoid them by focusing on just one ethnic group, apparently not realizing that thereby he is obscuring the problem rather than solving it, for his study consequently becomes not one of Muslim, but of Malay Muslim behavior.

This thesis attempts to address the question of the impact of ethnic difference on Muslim religious life by looking at one particular group of Singaporean Muslims, viz. the Tamil-speaking Muslims, for reasons that will be discussed in the next section. Despite their numbers as well as longstanding historical connections with Singapore, this group has received rather little attention, though some preliminary studies have been conducted, which will be discussed below. Yet none of these studies have been carried out with a background in South Asian Studies, which limits the access some of the authors had to sources in South Asian languages, as well as lack of knowledge of the similarities and differences between the situation in South Asia and Singapore. This study thus attempts to be of use for scholars of Muslim societies both in South as well as Southeast Asia. The study will be guided by three main questions: In which context does ethnic difference become salient in the religious domain? What practical impact does ethnic difference have on the organization and practice of religious life? And what discourses arise from the salience of ethnic difference in the religious domain? In addition to these questions, I also aim at advancing our knowledge of Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore and their histories, as they tend to be omitted form many historical accounts.[25]

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[24] Mak 2000: 13.

[25] For example, a publication by the Singapore Indian Associations claims that Muslims and Europeans brought down the "…flourishing Indian commerce in the Malay Archipelago…", a completely mistaken notion, as chapter 2 will show; Netto 2003: 5. Furthermore, though it lists Indian Muslim

Before I proceed to discuss the scope and methodology of the thesis, a note on my use of the term 'ethnic difference' is on order. By this I mean all differences which are due to the linguistic, cultural or ethnic background of an individual, regardless of whether these differences play a role in the formulation of ethnicity on part of an individual or not. I had originally planned to focus on ethnicity and identity, yet I realized quickly that some differences have an impact regardless of the identity formulated by an individual – ignorance of the Malay language, for example, excludes an individual from religious knowledge transmitted in that language, no matter how that individual perceives its ethnic or religious identity. Indeed, as I will try to show, many debates about identity among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore have been precipitated by a context in which ethnic difference became salient, not the other way round. Identity is an important aspect of the discussion, but not the only one.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In order to be able to identify the various domains in which ethnic or ethno-linguistic differences become salient in the religious sphere, we need to circumscribe the society that forms the subject of this study more carefully. People of South Asian origins are generally identified as 'Indians' in Singapore. It has been pointed out that this tag obscures more than it reveals, for the putative Singaporean 'Indian' may actually trace his or her origins to several contemporary nation-states in South Asia, be it India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka or Bangladesh. Furthermore, Singaporean Indians speak a great variety of languages – besides South Asian languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and others, there are also 'Indians'

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places of worship in early Singapore, it neither mentions Muslims as a group nor comments on the fact that these mosques and shrines outnumber the Hindu ones; cf. ibid.: 9-10.

having English or Malay as their main household languages.[26] It is thus not surprising that 'Indian' has been called "…the most problematic" of Singapore's official 'race'-categories.[27] It is obvious that this diversity renders any focus on 'Indian' or South Asian Muslims in Singapore useless, as 'Indians' in Singapore are as much likely to exhibit ethno-linguistic difference among themselves as they are in relation to wider Muslim society.

To avoid some of these problems, the thesis will focus on a particular section of South Asian Muslims in Singapore, viz. Tamil-speaking Muslims, i.e. those Muslims whose main household language, and usually also main language of religious activities, is Tamil. There are several reasons to focus on this group – Tamil-speaking Muslims are the largest Muslim group speaking a South Asian language in Singapore, have the longest history of settlement on the island coupled with an even longer presence in the wider region, have of all South Asian Muslim groups most actively participated in shaping Singapore Muslim society through the endowment of mosques and the establishment of religious associations, and have created the largest record of publications and documents relating to Islam in any South Asian language in Singapore. Tamil-speaking Muslims are in no way a homogeneous group. There are significant differences in regional background, affiliation to a sub-community or law-school, religious practice, class, occupation, migratory history, and degree of 'Malayization', many of which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. The Tamil language may be common to all these individuals, but this does not mean that each individual will identify as Tamil, and those who do may have very different perceptions of what it means to be Tamil. Thus, when I use 'Tamil Muslim' throughout the thesis instead of 'Tamil-speaking Muslim', it is solely for the sake of

[26] Cf. Leow 2001b: ix; PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 83-95.
[27] Arumugam 2002: 323.

readability, and not for suggesting that something like a unified Tamil Muslim community exists, even though such a community is definitely imagined by many Tamil-speaking Muslims.

Having said this, it is nevertheless necessary to take account of the fact that the term 'Indian Muslim' is widely used in public discourse in Singapore, and is certainly more common than 'Tamil Muslim' or 'Gujarati Muslim' or any similar combination. When I explained to people that I was conducting a study on Tamil Muslims in Singapore, I was fairly frequently confronted with the question: "Only Tamil Muslims?", suggesting that Tamil Muslims were seen only as a sub-community in a wider 'Indian Muslim' community, which was in turn perceived as the 'proper' unit of inquiry. This reaction was more common among academics than among respondents, most of whom agreed that it was necessary to focus on one linguistic group.[28] It needs to be kept in mind that 'Indian Muslim' is at least since the 1990s the common term in use in the Singaporean public sphere. Its prominence is hardly surprising, as 'Indian' is a recognized census-category, while 'Tamil' or 'Bengali' is not. Yet the use of 'Indian Muslim' as a catch-all category in the public sphere has a deeper dimension: as I shall argue in chapter 6, it lends itself to disciplining Muslims of a South Asian background and to obscure the problems various sections of 'Indian Muslim' society may be facing. In addition to its use as a general term for all Muslims in Singapore who are 'Indians' by race, it has to be noted that the term 'Indian Muslims' is also used in a different sense. Given the close link in Singapore of the category 'Indian' with 'Tamil', due to the fact that Tamil is the official 'mother-tongue' associated with Indians, 'Indian Muslim' is not infrequently understood to

[28] I have not encountered any objections on part of my respondents to the term 'Tamil Muslim', as reported by Mariam; cf. Mariam 1989: 102.

refer primarily to Tamil Muslims.[29] Many of my respondents shifted between using 'Indian Muslim' and 'Tamil Muslim', and some were obviously surprised when I pointed out that there were non-Tamil Indian Muslims. One respondent summarized the situation thus: "The Indian Muslims in Singapore, basically, when they talk about Indian Muslims they talk about Tamil-speaking Indian Muslims".[30] This ambiguity in the use of the term 'Indian Muslim' in Singapore sometimes causes problems, as it is not always clear which meaning is intended by a respondent or source. As a result, it was sometimes simply not possible to determine what a source meant by using the term; in these cases 'Indian Muslim' has been retained, as also in cases when a statement is clearly valid not only with regard to Tamil Muslims, but also with regard to other Muslims of South Asian background.

Having thus delimited the section of Singaporean Muslim society that shall form the subject of this study, it is necessary to shortly explain the exclusive focus on Singapore. It was suggested to me several times to include Malaysia in my investigation, and it had originally been my plan to do so. Yet apart from the huge amount of additional field- and archival work that would have been necessary to accomplish this, the character of contemporary Muslim society in the two countries is rather different. Most important in this context is the status of the Malays as the majority ethnic group among Muslims in both countries. In Singapore, Malays form just one of the officially recognized 'racial' groups in the Republic, and even though Malays are the dominant ethnic group among Singaporean Muslims, there is little collective pressure on Tamil Muslims to 'Malayize' and to sever their links with the equally recognized 'Indian' 'racial'-group; indeed, the negative stereotypes associated

[29] Cf. PuruShotam 1998: 89-90; Siddique 1989: 570-1.

[30] Some North Indian respondents explicitly supported my language-based distinctions precisely because the term 'Indian Muslim' often implies Tamil Muslim, and therefore in their eyes a 'working-class' background; on stereotypical depictions of North and South Indians in Singapore cf. Rai 2004: 260-4.

with Malays may actually act as a deterrent against 'Malayization'.[31] In Malaysia, by contrast, getting recognition as Malay allows access to the special rights allocated to indigenous *bumiputra*, 'sons of the soil', while there is little incentive for Tamil Muslims to identify with the marginalized and Hindu-dominated Indian minority.[32] In Malaysia, Indian Muslims stand less to gain from maintaining ethnic difference from the major ethnic group among the Muslims, while in contrast "…the advantages of being part of the Malay community in Singapore are substantially fewer".[33]

An incident during my fieldwork may illustrate the difference between both countries. In December 2004, I took part in a trip organized by one of the Tamil Muslim associations of Singapore to the waterfalls of Kota Tinggi in southern Malaysia. At Johor Bahru, a Malaysian Malay tour-guide joined the group.[34] After she had warmed up by poking fun at the supposed Singaporean gluttony, already to the visible annoyance of some of the Singaporean participants in the trip, the tour-guide began cracking rather racist jokes. "Why do Chinese have so little eyes?", she asked. When nobody was able (or willing) to give the correct answer, she provided it herself: "Because they only look for money. And", she added, "why do Indians have such big eyes? Because they always look after women"! The guide was obviously not prepared for the indignation she had to face on part of the group. "How do you dare say this to us? You know we are Indians"! Slightly startled by so much ignorance, she tried to explain: "No, no, Indians and Indian Muslims different lah! See, for example Indian women wear saris…". "We also wear saris!", quipped one elderly lady, effectively ending the exchange, and mercifully saving us from any further chauvinist jokes on part of the guide for the rest of the trip. While I am not sure whether the tour-guide

[31] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 58.
[32] Nagata 1993: 526-9; cf. Khoo 1993: 278-81.
[33] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 58.
[34] The guide spoke in both Malay and English. My own understanding of the incident was later confirmed by one of the other participants.

ever understood why these Singaporean Indian Muslims so tenaciously clung to identifying themselves as Indians, the incident illuminates the very different constraints on the maintenance of ethnic difference among Muslims in Singapore and Malaysia.

REVIEW OF PRIOR STUDIES

Several studies of both Singaporean Indian Muslims in general and Tamil Muslims in particular have already been conducted. The majority of them are in the form of unpublished academic exercises, complemented by a few articles and working papers. It is possible to divide these studies into three groups: those dealing with Indian/Tamil Muslim society in Singapore as a whole, those dealing with questions of identity, accommodation and difference, and those concerned with publishing and literary production.

Among the studies attempting to deal with Tamil Muslim society as a whole, we find Syed Mohamed's academic exercise on *The Tamil Muslim Community in Singapore* of 1973, Mani's article on "Aspects of Identity and Change among Tamil Muslims in Singapore" of 1992, and the published notes of Shankar's thesis on *Tamil Muslims in Tamil Nadu, Malaysia and Singapore* of 2001 – while the latter two studies ostensibly focus on identity, they are nevertheless much broader in scope, and it is thus justified to discuss them as studies of Singaporean Tamil Muslim society as a whole.[35] Syed Mohamed's study is largely an ethnographic description of Tamil Muslim society in Singapore in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and as such offers rich source material for this period, especially on the operation of Tamil Muslim

[35] Mani 1992; Shankar 2001; Syed Mohamed 1973.

associations prior to the establishment of the hegemony of MUIS. The main weakness of the study is its exclusively descriptive nature, largely lacking analysis of the described phenomena. This is compounded by some statements of a highly ideological and idealizing nature;[36] finally, it is disappointing that Syed Mohamed, though conversant in Tamil, made little attempts at utilizing relevant Tamil language sources.

Mani's article largely draws on Syed Mohamed's study, but updates and complements the material with further sources[37] as well as the incorporation of some studies on Tamil Muslims in India. The latter is an important point, as it distinguishes Mani's study from most of the other studies of Singaporean Tamil Muslims.[38] Mani touches upon many pertinent issues regarding Tamil Muslim society in Singapore, but due to the constraints of space in a journal article, is unable to develop and analyze them more comprehensively. The same problem, though for different reasons, pertains to Shankar's published notes, which were intended as part of an ambitious thesis on Tamil Muslims in Malaysia and Singapore which was left unfinished due to the untimely death of the author. Most of Shankar's notes deal with Malaysia and India, yet there is still much valuable material for our purposes in them, especially notes regarding the situation of Tamil Muslims in Singapore immediately after World War II. On the other hand, most of the information lacks references; furthermore, Shankar is sometimes prone to make value-judgments, i.e. such as claiming that certain practices are "…strictly un-Islamic…".[39]

The first study that dealt exclusively with questions of identity and ethnic assimilation faced by Indian Muslims in Singapore is Bibijan's article on

[36] E.g. Syed Mohamed 1973: 27-8 (on social stratification), 83 (on idolaters).
[37] Such as Meytīṉ 1989.
[38] With the partial exception of Fakhri 2002 and Shankar 2001.
[39] Shankar 2001: 49.

"Behavioural Malayisation among Some Indian Muslims in Singapore".[40] This study, like Syed Mohamed's, is largely descriptive, though Bibijan attempts some analysis of the patterns of 'Malayization' in various domains of daily life. Though dealing largely with sections of Singaporean Indian Muslim society that have adopted Malay as their household language, it still offers valuable ethnographic material. Conversely, it suffers from the fact that no attempt is made to analyze under which conditions the adoption or rejection of a certain practice may constitute 'Malayization', thus imbuing many practices and customs with an essentialized 'Indian' or 'Malay' identity, something that will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. In contrast to Bibijan's dichotomy of 'Indian' and 'Malay', Mariam devotes part of her 1989 thesis on *Uniformity and Diversity among Muslims in Singapore* to Indian Muslims as just one element in the diversified Muslim society of Singapore.[41] Mariam provides important ethnographic detail on the rituals performed at the now closed Nagore Durgah, as well as interesting material on Indian Muslim self-identification in Singaporean Muslim society. The main problems with her study is the severely limited source basis of her observations which derives almost exclusively from conversations with participants in the rituals and her own observation of the event, which are backed by only very limited further field-work and no secondary literature.

The most important study dealing with Indian Muslim identity in Singapore is Noorul Farha's thesis *Crafting Selves* of 1999/2000.[42] Based on a number of in-depth interviews, Noorul Farha presents us with a detailed investigation of the construction and negotiation of Indian Muslim identity/identities in Singapore, as well as factors constraining identity options. On this basis, she posits a continuum of formulations of identity ranging from 'Indian' and various kin-center based identities via an

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[40] Bibijan 1976/77.
[41] Mariam 1989: 41-6, 101-21.
[42] Noorul Farha 1999/2000.

overarching 'Indian-Muslim' identity to a 'pan-Islam' identity. The statements of her respondents in many cases closely tally with responses of my own informants. Her thesis has provided a valuable basis for my own thoughts regarding the topic of identity, though my analysis of the issue departs in some important aspects from hers. As several aspects of her analysis will be treated in more detail in chapter 6, it suffices here to point out what appear to me to be the three main drawbacks of her thesis. Firstly, even though she repeatedly stresses the contextualized nature of identity,[43] she limits herself by adopting the problematic term 'Indian' as the framework of her thesis. By adopting a term that is at least partly imposed from the outside, i.e. as census-category, she subordinates other aspects of identity formation such as language or historical imagination *a priori* to the 'racial' category of 'Indian'. Secondly, as Noorul Farha was not proficient in Tamil, she was unable to utilize Tamil language material (which she freely admits); this, coupled with the fact that she did not utilize any literature pertaining to Muslims in India,[44] limits her analysis and her ability to contextualize the identities of Muslims speaking Tamil and other South Asian languages in Singapore. Finally, by positing a primordial tension between being 'Indian' and being 'Muslim', without stating why such a tension should exist, she inadvertently follows the common Singaporean fallacy of confusing 'race' and 'religion'. Despite these drawbacks, her thesis provides a stimulating discussion of the topic.

Finally, there are a few studies dealing with publishing and literature among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore. An important survey of Islamic Tamil literature is provided in Tamil by Jafar Muhyiddin (Jāpar Muhyittīṉ) in his

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[43] E.g. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 70.

[44] Such as the important studies of Fanselow and Mines regarding Tamil Nadu; c.f. Fanselow 1989, 1996; Mines 1972a, 1972b, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1983, 1984, 1986.

"Ciṅkappūr tamiḻ muslimkaḷiṉ ilakkiyappaṇi".[45] Similarly, Fakhri's working paper on *Print Culture among Tamils and Tamil Muslims in Southeast Asia, c. 1860 – 1960*, supplies some general background information, as well as more detailed discussions of two important individuals in the history of Tamil Muslim journalism in Singapore.[46] His analysis is particularly pertinent as it is one of the few attempts to integrate developments in India and in Singapore.

Beside the studies mentioned here, there are many monographs and articles dealing with other topics pertinent to our subject that provide important information. Among these are studies on the history and sociology of Islam and Muslim society in Singapore and South India; 'racial', religious, and linguistic policies of the Singaporean state; Indians in Singapore and Malaysia; and a variety of other issues. The information provided by these works will be evaluated in the main text of the thesis when and if the need arises.

METHODS, SOURCES, AND STRUCTURE

Several research methods were employed in order to study the salience and impact of ethnic difference on the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore. These methods were chosen on the basis of three premises. Firstly, such a study has to take its basis in the investigation of actual practices, which can be of different kinds, such as the organization of religious life or the use of language in religious contexts. Secondly, in order to properly contextualize the impact of ethnic difference on religious life among Singaporean Tamil Muslims, a diachronic perspective needs to be adopted, which allows us to better assess under what conditions ethnic difference becomes salient.

[45] Jāpar Muhyittīṉ 1990.
[46] Fakhri 2002.

Thirdly, in order to avoid the risk of primordializing certain aspects of Tamil Muslim society in Singapore as ‘Indian’, it is important to consider the situation of Tamil Muslims in India and note similarities and differences between the two countries. In order to satisfy these premises, both ethnographical and historical research methods were selected. In order to be able to compare and contrast the situation in Singapore and India, I engaged in ethnographic and historical research in both countries, somewhat along the lines of the ‘multi-sited ethnography’ as suggested by Marcus.[47] As I had already conducted fieldwork among Tamil Muslims in India before, two spells of three-month fieldwork there in May-July 2003 and February-April 2005 supplied me with a large amount of data.

Among the ethnographical methods employed in both India and Singapore, the most important proved to be participant observation of religious functions, ceremonies, and rituals, activities organized by Tamil Muslim institutions, and religious lectures. I attempted to attend as many activities as possible; knowledge of these activities was provided through informants whom I had met in the course of my fieldwork or who were suggested to me by other respondents. In a few cases, I was approached directly by respondents, especially after an article mentioning my fieldwork had appeared in the local Tamil daily *Tamiḻ Muracu* in April 2003.[48] In general, people and institutions were very helpful in allowing me to observe and participate in their practices. Indeed, I was often compelled to cross the line from being a ‘participating observer’ to that of ‘observing participant’.[49] I was sometimes asked to deliver short speeches or give some presentation during functions organized by Tamil Muslim associations and mosques; when respondents learned that I was able to read Arabic, I was also requested several times to participate in the recitation of

[47] Cf. Marcus 1995.
[48] “Tamiḻp paṇpāṭu eṉakku mikavum piṭikkum”, *Tamiḻ Muracu*, 14 Apr 2003.
[49] Cf. Bernard 1995: 138-9.

eulogies (*mawlid*). In all these cases, my role as non-Muslim researcher was clear to both organizers and audiences. Participant observation allowed me to examine the salience of ethnic difference in such practices directly and to engage with other people attending the activity or ceremony. A difficulty in participant observation was that, as gender segregation is commonly practiced in public Muslim ceremonies and functions, with women being separated from men either by a curtain or by being located in a different room altogether, most of my observations pertain to male practices only. Furthermore, Indian Muslim associations are strongly male dominated, with women playing few if any roles; one respondent mentioned that membership in a kin-center association in mixed kin-center families was usually determined on the basis of the husband's, not the wife's kin-center. Even though women were interviewed by me, my data is weighted towards the male side, so that further research regarding women's perspectives on the issues is desirable.

Participant observation was supplemented by in-depth, usually unstructured interviews. During my research, I conducted about forty in-depth interviews in Singapore and India using both English and Tamil. Most of the interviews in Singapore were conducted in English; in India, when Tamil was used for an interview, I mostly worked with one or two research assistants, who would conduct the interview having a general list of topics that I was interested in, while I would add questions of my own in order to follow up on some information a respondent gave. Interviews were conducted for several purposes: to elucidate oral-history, to understand the setup of a particular institution, or to discuss about the role ethnic difference played in the life of these respondents. It should be noted that several of my Singaporean respondents preferred not to have their interviews recorded, and others gave only very vague answers to questions which they perceived as controversial, and

would then correct their opinion once the voice-recorder was switched off.[50] It should also be noted that in general, casual conversations proved a lot more informative than formal interviews, as people tended to be more open and frank during such conversations than during interviews. Whenever I gained information by means of casual conversation, I recorded it on paper or voice-recorder as soon as possible.

In addition, I perused written material, both contemporary and historical, to supplement my findings. Among such sources were souvenir journals published by Tamil Muslim associations, handbills, announcements, newspaper clippings and similar material in Tamil and English.[51] In order to allow for diachronic comparisons, historical primary sources were of some importance to my thesis. While oral-history interviews supplied some information, these interviews were limited in their time-frame, as most respondents had come to Singapore after World War II. Yet the prewar period was of particular interest for me as it provided the greatest possible difference in context to the contemporary situation. A cursory glance at the secondary literature reveals that the sections on the prewar history of Tamil Muslims in Singapore are usually poorly documented. This is not to say that the depiction of the prewar history of Tamil Muslims in these studies is incorrect; on the contrary, it seems to be largely correct, if superficial. Yet to be able to compare the prewar period with the contemporary situation, more primary sources had to be utilized.

Information about the prewar period was drawn largely from two kinds of sources. Firstly, there are various English-language materials. These include administrative documents such as census reports as well as the relevant Indian District

[50] Interestingly, it was those respondents which held the strongest and most controversial opinions who were the least concerned about me recording them; as one of them stated: "I'm [already] on record with this".

[51] Noorul Farha's thesis contains a selection of newspaper clippings largely from *The Straits Times* dating between 1982 and 1999; cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: appendix D. While I had already uncovered several of these items prior to my perusal of her thesis, I came to know about items 2, 4, 5, 6, 15, 16, and 19 through her work.

Manuals and Gazetteers. Various Law Reports turned out to be a particularly rich source for social history; for this study, I have gone through the descriptions of 52 cases apparently involving Tamil Muslims.[52] In addition, I have occasionally drawn on other English-language sources, such as Buckley's *Anecdotal History*,[53] or *The Singapore Free Press*. Secondly, I have perused Tamil language materials, which form a particularly understudied source for Singaporean history. Most prominent among these is the newspaper *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, published by a Muslim between 1887 and 1890, and containing much material on Muslim practice in that period. Another interesting source is a series of articles that appeared in the controversial journal *Tārul Islām* between February and October 1925, reporting on a journey of its editor, P. Daud Shah (Pā. Tāvutṣā), to Malaya from the 20th of February to the 12th of June 1925. These consist of reports by the manager of the journal on the progress of Daud Shah's journey, and occasionally articles that appeared in the Tamil press in Malaya, as well as a three-part travelogue by Daud Shah himself, of which however only the first part is pertinent to our discussion.[54] Finally, I drew on the autobiography of A.N. Maideen (A.Nā. Meytīṉ), a former leading member of the Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League (SKML), which, despite reflecting Maideen's own biases and prejudices, is a valuable source for the lives of Tamil Muslim laborers and coolies in the 1920s and 30s that seem to be otherwise undocumented.[55]

The thesis is divided into five main chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 provide background information on Tamil Muslim society in Singapore, the former being concerned mainly with historical development, and the latter with contemporary social formations within this society, especially in comparison to India. Chapter 4 discusses

[52] Cf. appendix 4.
[53] Buckley 1902.
[54] Tāvutṣā 1925.
[55] Meytīṉ 1989.

various Tamil Muslim institutions, such as mosques and associations, which play a role in the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore, and locates them against the wider background of the administration of Islam in the Republic. Chapter 5 deals with the most important aspect of ethnic difference for religious life, viz. language use, while Chapter 6 discusses the debates and discourses on ethnic difference in the religious domains and the contexts in which they arise. This is followed by the conclusion in the last chapter.

Chapter 2

HISTORY

TAMIL MUSLIMS IN PRE-COLONIAL SOUTHEAST ASIA

Tamil-speaking Muslims had been in contact with the Malay world for several centuries prior to the founding of the British *entrepôt* on the island of Singapore in 1819. South Indian Muslims are said to have played an important role in Malacca prior to the Portuguese conquest of the town in 1511.[56] For the century-and-a-half following this event, we have little evidence for the involvement of Tamil-speaking Muslims in trade with Southeast Asia, but from the late 17th century onwards, there is copious evidence for the presence of Tamil Muslim traders from the Burmese coast in the north-west through the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra to Banten in West Java, and possibly beyond.[57] During the 18th century, Kedah on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula and Aceh in northern Sumatra came to be important ports of call for Muslim merchants from the Coromandel Coast.[58]

[56] Fujimoto 1988: 11-8; McPherson 1990: 35-6.
[57] Arasaratnam 1987: 127-35.
[58] Arasaratnam 1987: 141-2; Bonney 1971: 10 n. 51, 41; Lee K.H. 1995: 11; all this evidence clearly disproves Tham's statement that in the case of Indian Muslims, "…contact with the Malays is of a more recent genesis…"; Tham 1992/93.

It has become common in historical studies of Southeast Asia in the 18th century to refer to Tamil Muslims collectively as 'Chulias'.[59] Other terms in use include 'Kling' and 'Moor', though especially the latter seems to be largely confined to Portuguese and Dutch sources. The use of such labels, invariably derived from European travelogues, letters, and other documents, is highly problematic, for several reasons. First, scant attention is paid to the particular background of the documents in which the term is used. As yet there seems to have been no study of any of these terms, and it is thus premature to conclude that a term used in Portuguese Malacca in the 16th century necessarily had the same meaning in English letters from Bencoolen in the 18th. Second, the use of such labels often tacitly assumes that there was a social reality behind the label, such as a shared identity among members of the group. Especially the term 'Chulia' has come to be identified with the Tamil term *marakkāyar*;[60] yet, as we shall see in chapter 3, equating the two terms does not lead to more clarity, but rather to more terminological quicksand.

There is no need to go into the details of the use of such labels here, and it will suffice to point to some of the inconsistencies in the use of the labels 'Chulia' and 'Kling'. It has been argued that 'Chulia' always refers to South Indian Muslims.[61] Yet English sources of the early 19th century, among them documents regarding the founding of the English settlement in Singapore, seem to refer to both Hindus and Muslims when using the term 'Chulia'.[62] While other sources do equate 'Chulia' with Muslims,[63] this usage of the term cannot be generalized. Similarly, some scholars have claimed that 'Kling' only referred to Hindus. This distinction has again been

[59] Cf. Arasaratnam 1987; Bhattacharya 1999; McPherson 1990.
[60] Cf. Subrahmanyam 2001: 95.
[61] McPherson 1990: 44 n. 2.
[62] Cf. Buckley 1902 (vol. 1): 73, 83-6; Raffles [1830] 1991: 11-2; Wurtzburg 1954: 69; cf. also Lee's statement that a certain ship belonged to "…some Chulia merchants from Nagore…", while the owner's name was Candapati Chitty, obviously a Hindu; Lee K.H. 1995: 160; 189 n. 39.
[63] Raffles [1830] 1991: 20.

most rigorously made by McPherson, though it is difficult to see on what basis. In Portuguese Malacca, the term 'Kling' may have been used mainly for Hindus, but this would probably be due rather to the low numbers of Indian Muslim traders in that port in the 16th century rather than an a priori distinction.[64] But the references to Muslim Klings are too numerous to assume that the term ever referred exclusively to Hindus.[65] It is thus most probable that the terms 'Kling' and 'Chulia' were largely synonymous, and referred to people originating from the Coromandel Coast in general.

The term 'Kling' actually derives from Malay, where it was used to label South Indians in general.[66] While in many contexts the term refers to Tamils,[67] it would be wrong to simply equate 'Kling' and 'Tamil', as is sometimes done.[68] The term could refer as well to people from other parts of South India, especially the Telugu-speaking regions.[69] Yet in contrast to Crawfurd's assertion that "[b]eing the only Indian nation familiarly known to the nations of the Archipelago, the word [Kling] is used by them as a general term for all the people of Hindustan, and for the country itself",[70] Malays were aware of regional, ethnic and linguistic difference among Indians. The first Malay-English dictionary, published in 1701, lists three terms for Indians under the

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[64] McPherson 1990: 44 n. 2; cf. Bhattacharya 1999: 64 n. 7; yet according to Subrahmanyam, the Portuguese sources do apply both *quelim*, 'Kling', and *mouro*, 'Moor', to the same individual; Subrahmanyam 1999: 64.

[65] Cf. e.g. B.W. Andaya 1978: 21-3; Buckley 1902 (vol. 2): 645-6, 729; Fujimoto 1988: 30-1. Cf. also Yule & Burnell [1903] 1969: 487-90.

[66] In contrast, the term 'Chulia' does not seem to be used in Malay. That Marsden included it in his 1812 dictionary is inconclusive, for it may have been borrowed into Malay from English by that time. In contrast, Bowrey's dictionary of 1701 does not contain the term, even though Bowrey himself seems to have used it in his travelogue; Marsden [1812] 1984: 121, s.v. *chūlīa*; cf. Bowrey 1701; B.W. Andaya 1978: 51.

[67] E.g. when Munshi Abdullah writes that *pali* means 'mosque' in the Kling language (*bahasa kĕling*), *paḷḷi* being the Tamil word for mosque; Abdullah 1960: 9. In dealing with Munshi Abdullah's text, I have used Hill's translation (Abdullah 1970), but checked every passage against the Malay original, as Hill's translation turns out to be highly unreliable.

[68] E.g., Hill translates *kĕling* in most cases as "Tamil"; cf. Abdullah 1970: 31.

[69] Marsden [1812] 1984 (vol. 1): 262, s.v. *kling*; cf. also Crawfurd [1856] 1971: 148-50, 198, 428, even though Crawfurd was rather ignorant of Indian ethnic groups.

[70] Crawfurd [1856] 1971: 198.

heading *Ōran* (=*orang*): *Ōran guzarattee*, "a Surat Man", *Ōran hindoo*, "an Indian", and *Ōran killing*, "a Man of the Coast Chormandel".[71] Munshi Abdullah similarly was aware of Bengalis, Hindustanis, and possibly Gujaratis besides 'Klings'.[72]

The main reason for the presence of South Indians in the Malay world was trade. According to Barbara Andaya, "…in Malay society in the 17th and 18th centuries, Muslim Indians…were not only the most numerous but also the most competent Asian traders…".[73] The main Indian product shipped to Southeast Asia was textiles, while among the goods procured by Indian merchants in the region, tin, elephants, and areca-nuts stand out.[74] This trade brought them into direct conflict with European trading companies, but also opened up avenues of cooperation with these Western rivals. Europeans were ready to rent excess shipping capacity to Indian Muslim merchants, and also to transport the merchants themselves.[75] If the Europeans provided Indian Muslims with shipping space and protection, Indian Muslims could provide Europeans with expertise of and links to Malay ports and courts. European traders often preferred to deal with Indian intermediaries, whose knowledge both of local society and languages as well as the court made them important contacts for foreigners,[76] though this knowledge made them suspicious in the eyes of Europeans at the same time.[77]

Their economic expertise, knowledge of local conditions, and linguistic skills made Indian merchants not only attractive intermediaries for European traders, but also to the Malays themselves. This is most salient regarding the Indian dominance of

[71] Bowrey 1701: s.v. *Ōran guzarattee*, *Ōran hindoo*, and *Ōran killing*.
[72] Abdullah 1960: 26-7, 31.
[73] B.W. Andaya 1978: 24.
[74] Cf. B.W. Andaya 1979: 22, 106-7, 402-3; L. Andaya 1975: 75-6; Arasaratnam 1987: 128; Lee K.H. 1995: 203, 252.
[75] Arasaratnam 1987: 136-9; Lee K.H. 1995: 160-3.
[76] B.W. Andaya 1978: 25, 28; Lee K.H. 1995: 45-7; an example would be the Kling interpreter acting for the Dutch in Perak in the mid-18th century; B.W. Andaya 1979: 126-135.
[77] B.W. Andaya 1978: 28-33; Bonney 1971: 50; Lee K.H. 1995: 50-1.

the office of royal merchant or *saudagar raja*. Indian traders provided not only links to Europeans, but served to connect Malay rulers to India.[78] Indians came to acquire property in Southeast Asia, and the 18th century chronicle of Perak, *Misa Melayu*, notes a Tamil Muslim who had a wife each in Perak and in the *nĕgĕri Kĕling*.[79]

While we are able to gain a differentiated picture of the economic activities of Indian Muslims in 18th century Southeast Asia, we know rather little of other aspects of their culture. Language was obviously an important component of Indian Muslim identity in Southeast Asia. Munshi Abdullah relates that he was sent by his father to study the Kling language "…because it had been the custom from the time of our forefathers in Malacca for all children of good and well-to-do families to learn it".[80] Most Indian Muslims in Southeast Asia were obviously fluent in 'Bazaar-Malay', the lingua franca of the region.[81] Bilingualism was certainly common among the descendants of Indian merchants. A late 18th century manuscript kept in the Leiden University Library (OR 7368), possibly from Sumatra, contains texts in both Tamil and Malay on Islamic creed and practices written apparently by the same person using the Arabic script.[82] Even when they used Malay among themselves, Indian families continued using certain kinship terms. Munshi Abdullah's father addressed his own mother as *ācci*, a term that can mean 'elder sister', but which is also used a term of respect for older women in general. That Abdullah was unaware of this latter meaning, but had to explain this term of address by relating that the age-difference between his father and grandmother was so small that people regarded them as

[78] B.W. Andaya 1978: 25; Lee K.H. 1995: 31.
[79] Lee K.H. 1995: 45; Raja Chulan [1962] 1966: 78; that this 'Kling' was a Tamil is revealed by his name, Tambi Kĕchil, almost certainly a partial translation of the common Tamil Muslim 'name' *Ciṉṉatampi*, "Little Younger Brother".
[80] Abdullah 1970: 45, Hill's translation.
[81] Cf. Sneddon 2003: 84.
[82] Cf. van Ronkel 1921: 293-4 no. 754; I have to thank the staff at Leiden University Library for allowing me to study the manuscript on 22nd of June 2004 and for providing me with a microfilm of it.

siblings may be an indicator that Abdullah's mother-tongue was Bazaar Malay rather than Tamil.[83]

If language may have separated Indian Muslims and Malays, their common religion was a uniting factor. Given the current state of research, there is little one can say about Islam as practiced by Tamil Muslims in Southeast Asia during the 17th-18th centuries, but the importance of Islam can be gauged from the fact that there were Tamils who converted only after their arrival in Southeast Asia.[84] Nevertheless, the majority of Tamil Muslims in Southeast Asia during the 17th and 18th centuries will already have been Muslims before coming to the region. Some authors have actually argued that Tamils may have had a role in spreading Islam in Southeast Asia,[85] but the evidence is inconclusive. It is more probable that similarities are due to the close contacts of Malay and Tamil Muslims during the 17th and 18th centuries rather than to a direct impetus to the Islamization of Insular Southeast Asia from South India, though this does not make such an impetus impossible. More research is needed before any conclusions can be drawn.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the power of the native Malay states began to be finally eclipsed by European powers. The British takeover of Penang and establishment of the port of Georgetown on the island by Francis Light in 1786 attracted a large number of 'Chulia' settlers and seasonal traders. In 1794, there were about 1000 permanently settled Chulias in Penang, and 1500-2000 seasonal traders and workers, most of whom were actually from Kedah.[86] Tamil Muslims grew into an

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[83] Abdullah 1960: 14; it is highly improbable that Abdullah's father called his mother 'Achi' as a shortened form of her 'name', Peri Achi, as suggested by Traill, as this would be considered as very rude among Tamils. Traill is further mistaken in claiming that 'Achi' means only 'sister' or 'female relative' in general; cf. Traill 1979: 73. The 'question' of Abdullah's mother-tongue (Malay or Tamil) is resolved differently by different author's; for Malay, cf. Sneddon 2003: 71; for Tamil, cf. Maier 2004: 210; Traill 1979: 72-81; only Traill argues his case, but his argument is at best inconclusive.
[84] Cf. Abdullah 1960: 5; Abdullah 1970: 32.
[85] E.g. Drewes 1968.
[86] Light quoted in Lee K.H. 1995: 235 n. 29; McPherson 1998: 203.

important community in Penang, as is evident from the foundation of the Kapitan Kling Mosque in 1801, and the Nagore Dargah shortly afterwards.[87] The settlement of South Indian Muslims in a port dominated by Europeans was of course not without precedent – many Klings had made Dutch Malacca their home. Yet with historical hindsight, the foundation of Penang foreshadowed the establishment of Singapore some 23 years later.

TAMIL MUSLIMS IN SINGAPORE 1819-1942

Demography and Origins

It is not easy to give a coherent account of Tamil Muslim settlement and society in Singapore during the 123 years between the founding of British Singapore in 1819 and the occupation of the island by Japanese forces in 1942. Despite the fact that sporadic censuses were taken right from the founding of the colony, and regularly every ten years from 1871 onwards, the Census Reports are of limited value for gaining insights on Tamil Muslim society in Singapore. The earliest censuses only count 'Indians' (or 'Chuliahs'), without any further indication of ethnic or religious background.[88] The census of 1871 introduced a basic distinction in South Indians ('Klings', called 'Tamils' from 1881 onwards) and North Indians ('Bengalees') that was kept up during the following censuses.[89] In 1911, for the first and apparently only time, figures for individual Indian languages were provided. Despite shortcomings, this is perhaps the best information on the ethnic background of Indians in Singapore available. It amply demonstrates the dominance of Tamil-speakers among Singaporean Indians, with 19,378 Tamils among the 27,990 speakers of Indian (and

[87] Fujimoto 1988: 27-39; Ghulam-Sarwar 1989: 34; cf. McPherson 1998: 203-5.
[88] Turnbull 1972: 22; Wurtzburg 1954: 589.
[89] Cf. Innes 1901: 29; Merewether 1892: 47; Straits Settlements 1871: 10; Straits Settlements 1881: 4.

Iranian) languages in the Settlement of Singapore.[90] In the censuses of 1921 and 1931, information on language was collected, but this information was not presented in the reports.[91] Instead, the Census Reports favored again the inaccurate category of 'race', though at least for South Indians, 'races' were labeled according to language as Tamil, Telegu [sic], and Malayali.[92]

There is no need to go into the details of Indian migration and demography in the Straits Settlements, which have been described by Sandhu.[93] The most important information for our purposes is that the Indian population of Singapore formed usually about 7.5-10% of the total population of prewar Singapore, and that Tamils where the dominant ethnic group among them, forming 69-79% of Singapore's total Indian population between 1911 and 1931, for which years census-figures on Tamils are available.[94]

Unfortunately, the data on religion is even sketchier than the data on language and ethnicity. Religion was counted consistently only from 1911 onwards. Prior to this, information is available only from one of the sporadic earlier censuses, that of 1849. The data from this census is highly significant, for it shows that even thirty years after the foundation of Singapore, Indian Muslims clearly outnumbered their Hindu compatriots – of 6,261 Indians, 4,915, or 78.5%, were Muslims.[95] Seventy years later, the situation had changed. In 1921, the 9,523 Indian Muslims formed almost 30% of the Indian population of Singapore, while the percentage was lower in 1931 (about 26%), even though the absolute numbers rose to 13,330.[96] There are no figures

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[90] Marriott 1911: 66-8.
[91] Cf. Nathan 1922: 383; Vlieland 1932: 27, 85.
[92] Cf. Vlieland 1932: 84.
[93] Sandhu 1969: 175-204.
[94] Cf. Innes 1901: 29; Marriott 1911: 66-8; Merewether 1892: 47; Nathan 1922: 190; Sandhu 1969: 200 table 9; Straits Settlements 1871: 10; Straits Settlements 1881: 4; Vlieland 1932: 193. Apparently, the percentage of Indians in Singapore was slightly higher in the mid-19th century; cf. Turnbull 1972: 22.
[95] Jackson 1850: Table II.
[96] Nathan 1922: 105, 216; Vlieland 1932: 208.

available for the ethnic background of the Indian Muslims, but there is little doubt that Tamils will have been the largest community among them, given that Tamils even now form the largest ethnic group among Indian Muslims in Singapore. There is no way to determine the percentage, but it will probably have been lower than that for Tamils in the whole Indian community.

Within Singapore, Tamil Muslims seem to have settled predominantly in the business districts, corresponding to Divisions A (the China Town-Tanjong Pagar area southwest of Cross Street), C (between Cross Street and the Singapore River), and G (between Middle Road and the Rochor Canal/River) of the 1891 census, to judge from the location of properties mentioned to be owned or held in interest by Tamil Muslims in the Law Reports (cf. appendix 1). While it is possible that this data is slightly distorted by the fact that most of the cases preserved in the Law Reports relate to merchants and are thus more likely to mention property in the business districts, it is confirmed by the location of endowments made by Tamil Muslims as well as the comments of Maideen.[97] On the other hand, there is no evidence for the presence of Tamil Muslims in the rural divisions except for the last decades prior to the war.

The Census Reports are of little help in elucidating the regional background of Tamil Muslims in Singapore, as they are limited to recording only the respective Presidency as place of birth, which in the case of most Indians in Singapore was unsurprisingly the Madras Presidency. According to Sandhu, the most important Districts for the recruitment of labor in Madras Presidency were North Arcot, Trichinopoly (Tiruchirapalli) and Tanjore (Thanjavur), and migrants from the first two districts also formed the largest contingent among South Indian migrants in

[97] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 43-61; Meytīṉ 1989: 7, 13-4; cf. Merewether 1892: 52-88, see also map I & II; Sandhu 1969: 223 fig. 31(f); Syed Mohamed 1973: 25-6.

general.[98] Yet both evidence from prewar documents as well as later sources and currently existing kin-center associations allow us to form a clearer picture of the regional background of Tamil Muslims in Singapore. In principle, most hail from two regions – on the one hand, the coastal strip of South Arcot and Tanjore Districts from Kottakuppam near Pondicherry in the north to Muthupettai in the south, and on the other the Tenkasi Taluk of Tinnevelly (Tirunelveli) District (cf. appendix 2).

In both cases, the reasons for the prominence of natives from these two regions among Tamil Muslims in prewar Singapore are fairly obvious. In the case of coastal Tanjore and South Arcot, seaborne trade was the central factor drawing Muslims from these regions to Singapore [**Figure 1**]. The District Gazetteer for Tanjore District of 1906 supplies details for various goods traded between the District and the Straits Settlements. The most important among them were livestock, cotton and silk piece-goods, and tobacco. The principal imports from the Straits Settlements were areca-nuts and undyed cloth, which was then dyed and re-exported.[99] Cattle were largely shipped through two ports, Nagapattinam and Thopputhurai.[100] The Muslims of Nagore are depicted as an important business community, which imported pearls and rubies from the Gulf of Mannar and Burma, had them polished and re-exported them to the Straits. They also exported scents, and their women manufactured betel-boxes for export to the Straits. Furthermore, native firms at Nagore are said to have been in control of the areca-nut trade.[101] Similarly, in South Arcot certain sections of the Muslim population were said to be "…largely big traders with other countries, such as

[98] Sandhu 1969: 161, 164 fig. 10. Arasaratnam also mentions Madura (Madurai) District, but this is not borne out clearly by Sandhu's figures; Arasaratnam 1979: 15.
[99] Cf. Hemingway [1906] 2000 (vol. 1): 130-2.
[100] Hemingway [1906] 2000 (vol. 1): 117, 130-1, 284; cf. ibid. (vol. 2): 52-4; Mani 1992: 345; there is apparently a mosque in Thopputhurai called Malākkā Paḷḷi (Malacca Mosque), indicating longstanding links with Southeast Asia; Muhammatu Meytīṉ 1989/90: 23.
[101] Hemingway [1906] 2000 (vol. 1): 126, 129-31, 243; cf. also Hemingway 1907: 167-9; Syed Mohamed 1973: 80-1.

Ceylon and the Straits Settlements…”,[102] exporting tartan cloths to the Straits and importing areca-nuts through ports like Cuddalore and Porto Novo.[103]

Figure 1: Colonial-period mansion of a Tamil Muslim merchant in Karaikal (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Muslim traders from Tanjore and South Arcot Districts seem to have formed a rather unstable community in Singapore, in so far as most of these traders did not settle permanently in the city. Their movements were ‘circulatory’ in the way the term has been used recently by Markovits and others, as trade was conducted by kinship networks with one member of a family replacing a kinsman in Singapore when the latter returned to India.[104] Most of these traders were single men,[105] though this does not mean that the local Tamil Muslims were not married – on the contrary, many of

[102] Francis 1906: 86; cf. also ibid.: 165.
[103] Francis 1906: 157, 163-4.
[104] Cf. Markovits, Pouchepadass & Subrahmanyam 2003: 2-3. The role of such kinship networks in the migration to and setting-up of businesses in the Straits Settlements is amply illustrated by a case decided in 1941; S.S.L.R. 1941-2: 281-6.
[105] In 1921, most Indian Muslims in Singapore were men, the percentage of Indian Muslim women in the Straits Settlements being as low as 16.4%; Nathan 1922: 105.

them had wives living in India,[106] or had married women from among the Malay population, and occasionally a wealthy individual had both Indian and local wives.[107]

In many regards, the Muslims from Tinnevelly District present a contrast to their compatriots from Tanjore and South Arcot. Their contacts with Singapore and Southeast Asia had been indirect at best prior to the early 20th century. Whereas the coastal Muslims were engaged in trade, those from the western parts of Tinnevelly District were largely weavers. Muslim weaving centers developed mainly in the 'wet zone' along the river Tambraparni, close to the trade route that connected the Fishery Coast with southern Kerala.[108] Over time, a system evolved where the richer Muslim capitalists and merchants, based in the towns of Melappalaiyam and Pettai close to Tirunelveli town, advanced yarn and the warp to weavers in various towns of the district, and then arranged for the export of the finished piece-goods.[109] Until the early 19th century, the industry flourished, but by the early 20th century only the large investments of a small class of investors insured some viability and profits.[110]

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[106] Cf. S.S.L.R. 1928: 96-7; S.S.L.R. 1940: 250; Tamil Muslims at times returned to India specifically to get married; S.S.L.R. 1895-6: 25.

[107] One of my respondents told that his grandfather had had two Tamil wives in Nagore and two Malay wives in Singapore. This is also evident in some court cases; cf. e.g. S.S.L.R. 1937: 48. Daud Shah also severely criticized his countrymen in Malaya for taking temporary Malay wives or even concubines for the time they were in Malaya while their family in India suffered; Tāvutṣā 1925: 342-3; cf. also Syed Mohamed 1973: 46, 96. Chan's claim that polygamy was not widely accepted among Muslims in Singapore is thus difficult to maintain for Indian Muslims and their 'transnational' polygamy; cf. Chan 2003: 63-4.

[108] Cf. Subrahmanyam 1990: 78-81.

[109] The Muslim shop-keepers of Melappalaiyam, said by the District Gazetteer to spend most of their time in cities such as Singapore, Penang or Rangoon, present a clear contrast in migration patterns to the poorer weavers of the District; cf. Pate 1917 (vol. 1): 485.

[110] Ludden [1985] 2005: 46, 137-40, map 8. Pate 1917 (vol. 1): 99, 215-7.

Figure 2: Street in Tenkasi (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Figure 3: Weavers' cooperative in Tenkasi (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Tenkasi and Kadayanallur were two of the more important Muslim weaving towns, both displaying the typical features of weaving settlements in the district, "[w]ide streets lined with double rows of trees to give shade to the workers at the long line of outstretched warp…" [**Figures 2-4**].[111] In both towns, cloth was produced that was exported to the Straits Settlements, Ceylon, and Kerala, and a specific variety of checkered cloth produced by Muslim weavers was even known as 'Singapore Cloth'.[112] Men were engaged in weaving or in the even less profitable tasks of dying, bleaching and washing the cloth, while women also engaged in wage-labor in addition to doing household chores and collecting firewood. The staple food was millet gruel, with rice being eaten only twice a week. Conditions worsened after World War I, when famine struck the district. It was under these circumstances that many weavers decided to follow their products and move to the Straits Settlements.[113]

Figure 4: Old houses in Kadayanallur (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

[111] Pate 1917 (vol. 1): 215. In Kadayanallur, the trees are largely gone, but the long straight roads remain.
[112] Pate 1917 (vol. 1): 216-7, 458-9, 467-9.
[113] Meytīṉ 1989: 1-3.

While their occupational and regional background set these migrants apart from the Muslim traders of the coastal regions, it was the pattern of migration that marked the greatest difference between the two groups in Singapore. In contrast to the circulatory movement of Tamil Muslim traders, the weavers of Tinnevelly District usually migrated as families and settled down permanently in their new homes.[114] This made their communities more stable in the long run, and incidentally may have served to strengthen a Tamil identity, as intermarriage with Malays would have been less frequent.[115]

Figure 5: View of the town of Thuckalay (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Apart from these two larger regional groupings, Muslims from other parts of the Tamil-speaking regions settled in Singapore during the prewar period. Tamil Muslims who were already settled in Southeast Asia seem to have moved to Singapore in the

[114] There were instances of single male migrants at least from Kadayanallur, many of whom returned to India after some time. Incidentally, the Singapore evidence modifies Mines's assertion that "Tamil Muslim merchants migrate as family units", and that "[m]igration of single males is associated largely with poverty…"; Mines 1976: 301. There were many rich single migrants, while the poorer Tinnevelly migrants often came with their families; cf. also Syed Mohamed 1973: 38-9; 120-1.
[115] Cf. Mani 1992: 340-1.

early decades, yet such migrants are not prominent in the record, perhaps because they tended to 'Malayize'.[116] The connections of Tamil Muslims in Pulicat to the Straits Settlements were noted in a publication of 1923.[117] In addition, Tamil Muslim migrants also seem to have come from the Muslim towns on the Fishery Coast. Pate mentions that traders from Kayalpattinam as well as the inland town of Melappalaiyam went to trade in the Straits Settlements, who would have been very similar to those from the Tanjore coastal areas in occupation and migratory patterns.[118] Regarding the town of Kilakkarai, Thurston quotes one authority to the effect that "…a large proportion of the Musalmans of Kilakarai have visited Penang and Singapore".[119] Finally, the establishment of the Thuckalay Muslim Association in 1939 and the Thiruvithancode Muslim Union in 1952 marks the modern-day Kanniyakumari District, then part of Travancore State, as another area from which Tamil Muslims migrated to Singapore [**Figure 5**].[120]

Economic Activities

In order to make their living, Tamil Muslims in prewar Singapore engaged in a variety of economic activities. Most of these activities can be subsumed under the categories of shipping, trade, and unskilled labor.[121] It is important to note that these categories are not clearly delineated from each other, but rather form a triangular

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[116] Abdullah 1960: 292; regarding the similar situation in Penang, cf. Fujimoto 1988: 35; Lee K.H. 1995: 235 n. 29.
[117] Quoted in Pandian 1978: 149; cf. Mariam 1989: 103 n. 96.
[118] Pate 1917 (vol. 1): 99, 485.
[119] Quoted in Thurston 1909 (vol. 3): 201. Kin-center associations have recently been registered for both Kilakkarai and Kayalpattinam.
[120] Cf. Mani 1992: 345; interviews held by me in Thuckalay in March 2005 suggest that most migrants from this town worked in food-related businesses such as canteens, a branch of trade common among both Tamil as well as Malayali Muslims; the same seems to have been true for people from Thiruvithancode; Syed Mohamed 1973: 52.
[121] In 1890, *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* distinguished trade, professional employment, and menial work as the typical occupations of all Tamils; cf. "Ciṅkappūril nayamuṇṭā? (Ceṉṟavārat toṭarcci.) Viyāpāramakattuvam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 24 Feb 1890: 133-4.

space that defines the range of occupations engaged in by Tamil Muslims. Shipping and trade often went hand in hand in this period; many of the more menial tasks related to shipping, such as unloading cargoes, were typical occupations of unskilled laborers; finally, laborers often augmented their income by petty peddling and hawking, thus forming a kind of 'business proletariat'; employees in shops aspired to become independent shop-keepers themselves.[122] Individuals could engage in various activities, shifting between these separate but interrelated spheres. A good impression of occupations among well-to-do Tamil Muslims in Singapore can be gained from lists of subscribers for the Tamil newspaper *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* published in 1887 (cf. appendix 3). The majority of the 57 Muslim subscribers from Singapore were engaged in trade. Especially conspicuous are cloth-traders, money-changers, cattle-traders, as well as gem-traders and keepers of provision-stores. The remainder consists of clerks, agents, and peons, as well as a few skippers and pilots of light native vessels.

Given what we know about Tamil Muslim interaction with Southeast Asia, their engagement in shipping is hardly surprising. As has been mentioned above, Indian Muslims had played an important role in shipping between India and Southeast Asia. There is enough evidence that this situation continued well into the 19th century. On 7th of June 1823, Raffles wrote to the new Resident of Singapore, John Crawfurd, that piracy in the Straits of Malacca had become so frequent "…that the square-rigged vessels of the Chuliahs…are…precluded from coming further than Pinang or Achin, and thus the trade of fifty or sixty brigs and ships are [sic]…lost to Singapore…".[123] A number of court-cases throughout the 19th century show the involvement of Tamil

[122] Cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 111.
[123] Quoted in Buckley 1902 (vol. 1): 119.

Muslims in shipping as owners, captains, and officers of trading vessels.[124] The majority of these cases are from Penang, yet it is clear that ships owned and manned by Tamil Muslims also went to Singapore.[125] It seems that the crews of ships under the command of such captains largely consisted of Tamil Muslims, too. Buckley mentions a race of Malay sampans manned by “Kling boatmen” in Singapore in 1839, and Muslim ‘Kling’ boatmen were commonly mentioned in *The Singapore Free Press*.[126]

In the late 19th century, references to Tamil Muslim overseas shipping become scarce.[127] The opening of the Suez Canal and the increase in steam-shipping in the Indian Ocean may have been the single most important cause of this decline.[128] Yet despite this decline in overseas shipping, we still see Tamil Muslims involved in shipping business on a more modest scale, viz. as lightermen, wharfingers, and owners of cargo-boats. In Singapore, there is considerable evidence for Tamil Muslims owning and letting out cargo-boats and tongkangs.[129]

The importance of mercantile activities in the economic profile of Tamil Muslims in Singapore is hardly surprising, too, given their historical trajectories in Southeast Asia in earlier centuries. We are able to get a glimpse at the range of commodities traded by Tamil Muslims from contemporary sources. Trade in cloth had been a mainstay of Tamil Muslim commercial activities since the 18th century.[130] In 1855, a Malay resident of Singapore complained about the fraudulent practices at “…the cloth

[124] Kyshe 1885: 64-5, 350-1, 467-8; Leicester 1877: 237-9; cf. also Fujimoto 1988: 57.
[125] Cf. Kyshe 1885: 350-2.
[126] Buckley 1902 (vol. 1): 332; “Criminal Session”, *The Singapore Free Press*, 3 May 1866; “Local”, *The Singapore Free Press*, 17 May 1866; “Local”, *The Singapore Free Press*, 7 Jun 1866.
[127] The case of a Tamil Muslim being involved in a dispute about the insurance of a ship in 1940 is exceptional; S.S.L.R. 1940: 173-6.
[128] Buckley 1902 (vol. 2): 723-4. In India, Tamil Muslims became involved in steam-shipping as agents of the British India Steam Navigation Company; cf. More 1997: 37.
[129] “Local”, *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 Oct 1866; S.S.L.R. 1928: 45-52; S.S.L.R. 1937: 260-3; in the first case, the owner may have been a Hindu; cf. Dobbs 2003: 38-43.
[130] “Ciṅkappūril nayamuṇṭā? (Ceṉṟavārat toṭarcci.) Viyāpāramakattuvam”, *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 24 Feb 1890: 133-4.

shops of the Klings…", where simple Malays and Bugis were tricked into buying low-quality cloths in near darkness.[131] Whereas these shops seem to have been rather small, the "…wholesale and retail cloth-shop business…" of Ahna Mohamed Hussain & Co. was a substantial enterprise.[132] The firm obviously had fairly long-standing contacts with Bali, to judge from the fact that in 1905 a representative of the firm collected a debt of $3,218.80 from that island. After the shop burned down in 1905 the assets and outstanding book debts of the business still realized $34,666.[133]

Figure 6: Part of the mansion of 'Cattle King' Kader Sultan in Still Road (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Cattle-traders were similarly common among Singaporean Tamil Muslims. In the 1920s, two cattle-traders appeared as witnesses in the trial of the Singapore Muslim

[131] Buckley 1902 (vol. 2): 626-7.
[132] S.S.L.R. 1929: 3; cf. S.S.L.R. 1928: 83.
[133] S.S.L.R. 1929: 6-7.

Libel Case.[134] The proceedings of this case also contain a picture of what may have been the richest Tamil Muslim livestock-merchant in Singapore at that time – Moona Kader Sultan from Karaikal in French India, still known to locals as 'Cattle King' or 'Mutton King', who imported cattle not only from India, but also from Australia. Kader Sultan had established the 'Straits Cattle Trading Co.' in 1912, and by 1921 dominated the cattle trade in the Serangoon Road area [**Figure 6**]. During the 1920s, Tamil Muslims seem to have controlled the cattle trade to a considerable extent, though this dominance does not seem to have lasted into the 1930s, at least in Little India.[135] Traders in other commodities, such as tobacco and areca-nut, are also mentioned in the sources, though their trade was obviously more circumscribed than that of the cloth- and cattle-merchants.[136]

Tamil Muslims not only shipped commodities between India and Singapore, they also had their own shops in the city.[137] In 1843, complaints were voiced about Klings blocking the verandahs with their goods in many places. Maideen mentions a variety of shops owned by Tamil Muslims, such as money-changers, general merchandize stores, groceries, and "knife-shops" (*kattikaṭai*), selling everything "…from cloth to fragrant oils…", but being called "knife-shops" on account of dealing in all kinds of penknives.[138] A Tamil Muslim operated a shop selling "…piece-goods, provisions and general merchandize" at Woodlands Road in the late 1930s, employing a salesman and a cook.[139] Another author mentions shops selling books, stationary items, or medicine.[140] Tamil Muslims were also active in gastronomy, running small cafés and

[134] Mallal 1928: 60-4, 129-30.
[135] Mallal 1928: vii; Syed Mohamed 1973: 95; Siddique & Puru Shotam 1982: 58, 77.
[136] For tobacco, see S.S.L.R. 1928: 19; for areca-nuts, see S.S.L.R. 1898-9: 54-7; cf. also Meytīṉ 1989: 8.
[137] Tyabji lists a range of businesses run by Tamil Muslims today, which seem to be in general agreement with the prewar situation; Tyabji 1991b: 59-60.
[138] Meytīṉ 1989: 7.
[139] S.S.L.R. 1941-2: 282; cf. also S.S.L.R. 1940: 250.
[140] Sayed Majunoon n.d.: [4].

food-outlets, such as the Madras Café at North Bridge Road, whose owner ran afoul the law for permitting prostitutes to frequent his café.[141] At the lower end of the scale of shops were small food- and cigarette-stalls, operating on a rather modest level.[142]

The business activities and financial situation of Tamil Muslim traders oblige us to address the question of continuities and discontinuities in the patterns of Tamil Muslim activity in Southeast Asia. Some scholars have argued that the 19th century marks the end of successful Tamil Muslim trade in Southeast Asia and the beginning of a period when "…Indian immigrants were almost exclusively labourers and petty traders…".[143] I contend that this negative assessment is highly problematic and methodologically unsound. Firstly, much of the argument is supported by comparing the Singaporean evidence exclusively with a few politically influential 'merchants of standing' of the 18th century;[144] these were exceptional cases to start with, and were always a tiny minority among a much larger number of less affluent compatriots.[145] Secondly, the claims are not firmly based on documentary evidence. Thus the 1849 census quoted by Turnbull mentions only 17 Indian merchants out of 4,937 Indian professionals in Singapore, but the percentage of merchants among the Indians was not much lower than among the Chinese (0.34% against 0.4%).[146] Other evidence suggests that Indian Muslims did play an economically important role. As mentioned, Raffles himself noted the losses Singapore incurred because Chulia ships avoided Singapore for fear of piracy. In a report of 1824, Resident Crawfurd called Klings "…respectable as traders", and affluent Tamil Muslims are mentioned occasionally in

[141] S.S.L.R. 1933: 518-20.
[142] E.g. S.S.L.R. 1940: 181-3; cf. also Syed Mohamed 1973: 87-8, 95-6, 113-6.
[143] Turnbull 1972: 8; cf. B.W. Andaya 1978: 34; McPherson 1990: 44; More 1997: 37.
[144] Turnbull 1972: 8; cf. B.W. Andaya 1978.
[145] Cf. the remarks by William Petrie, Governor of Penang, that the Chulias settled in Kedah were "…all shopkeepers and Coolies…"; quoted in Lee K.H. 1995: 235 n. 29.
[146] The census actually lumps merchants together with clerks, which prohibits drawing general conclusions from the figures. It should also be noted that the majority (42.8%) of Indians appear in the 'miscellaneous' section, precluding us from gaining a clear picture of economic activity at this time; Jackson 1850: Table II.

mid-19th century sources.[147] Finally, the presence in the early 20th century of wealthy Tamil Muslim cloth-merchants is better interpreted as a case of continuity, rather than revival after an assumed rupture. An individual like Kader Sultan exhibits some parallels with the royal merchants of the 18th century, in that his influence did not only extend over a specific economic niche, but also into social and religious affairs – he was patron of the Anjuman-i-Islam, a religious association, and a Chevalier de la légion d'honneur, i.e. he held the highest civilian honor of France.[148] Similarly, Kader Sultan's influential position, like that of his 18th century predecessors, was not taken over by a family member or similar heir, suggesting a peculiar continuity in discontinuity.[149]

All in all, it thus seems to be exaggerated to claim that Tamil Muslims "…vanished as an economic force in the Malay peninsula".[150] What seems to have changed primarily was their relative standing vis-à-vis other ethnic communities, rather than the scope and character of their business-ventures per se. There is no doubt that Europeans and Chinese were able to wrest a considerable share of trade from Tamil Muslims. The main limitation of 19th and early 20th century Tamil Muslim business activity in Singapore seems to have been the failure to come to terms with European business practices which now dominated the mercantile sphere.[151] This may have put Tamil Muslim traders at a disadvantage. An at least partial explanation for the peculiar patterns of Tamil Muslim business activity in Southeast Asia, which is marked by a general continuity as far as the range and kind of economic activities is

[147] Buckley 1902 (vol. 1): 154; "Local", *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 Aug 1866.
[148] Mallal 1928: vii; cf. www.legiondhonneur.fr [accessed on 16 September 2005].
[149] Cf. B.W. Andaya 1978: 30-1; Bes 2001: 557-8; Shulman & Subrahmanyam 1993: 518-9; Siddique & Puru Shotam 1982: 77.
[150] McPherson 1990: 44.
[151] European judges often made dismissive comments in court on Tamil Muslim trade as well as on the maladministration of estates; Kyshe 1885: 65; S.S.L.R. 1895-6: 28; S.S.L.R. 1928: 19; S.S.L.R. 1929: 145.

concerned, but which rarely shows any generational continuity, may be provided by patterns of inheritance. The Law Reports contain ample evidence of conflicts about inheritance, pitting kin versus non-kin, different branches of a family versus each other, and administrators versus beneficiaries.[152] The constant redistribution of shares in firms and immovable property was certainly not conducive to allow a business being carried on over generations. Yet the capital was not lost, but rather applied by the heirs and beneficiaries for their own purposes and business ventures in Singapore and elsewhere.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that many Tamil Muslims in Singapore made their living not by trade, but by performing various jobs in the employment of others. The British town-planners seem to have foreseen a largely servile Indian population – the 'Chuliah Campong' was to be at a location "…where their services are most likely to be called for",[153] and a "…Chuliah and Dhoby encampment near the Sepoy Lines…" was removed in 1823.[154] The boundary between boatmen and dockworkers will have been porous, and the "…noisy Klings…" who manned the cargo-boats would have also loaded and unloaded the cargo.[155] In 1849, laborers made up almost 40% of all working Indians, many of whom must have been Muslims.[156] Another apparently quite common occupation for Tamils, Hindus and Muslims alike, was that of syce, i.e. a groom looking after draft-horses.[157] Several Tamil Muslim syces are mentioned on the pages of the *Free Press*

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[152] All these tensions are aptly demonstrated in a series of litigations concerning the inheritance of Ahna Mohamed Hussain; S.S.L.R. 1928: 82-97; S.S.L.R. 1929: 3-22; S.S.L.R. 1931: 55-7; S.S.L.R. 1931: 118-29.
[153] Quoted in Buckley (vol. 1): 85.
[154] Quoted in Buckley (vol. 1): 86.
[155] Buckley (vol. 1): 312.
[156] Jackson 1850: Table II.
[157] Cf. Yule & Burnell [1903] 1969: 885-6.

in 1866 alone.[158] Indeed, the owners of carriages were frequently Indians as well.[159] Indians were also employed as servants. 8.41% of all working Indians made their living in this way in 1849,[160] and it is likely that this will have included Muslims, such as 'Butler Mastan', the butler of the governor of Singapore in the 1870s, who is said to have been from Mutlur.[161] Already during the 19th century, Tamils worked as office peons. They were apparently so common that the *Free Press* simply spoke about the "office Tamby",[162] and there were peons among the police and the courts who may have been Tamil Muslims.[163] Straddling the boundary between unskilled worker and trader were those Tamil Muslims who were employed as salesmen in the shops of others.[164]

The migrants that arrived from Tinnevelly District in the early 20th century took up many of the occupations that their compatriots had been engaged in before. Men found employment as laborers in the harbor, in warehouses, and at construction sites.[165] Though Maideen does not mention it, some respondents mentioned that their forefathers also worked as peons in offices. Few men from the region seem to have engaged in any trade apart from hawking,[166] yet women over thirty years of age ground and sold spices to shops, restaurants, and private homes. Women had contributed to the family income already back in India; despite the importance of their

[158] "Local", *The Singapore Free Press*, 28 Jun 1866; "Local", *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 Aug 1866; "Criminal Session", *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 Oct 1866; cf. also Kyshe 1885: 201.
[159] Cf. Buckley 1902 (vol. 1): 364.
[160] Jackson 1850: Table II; cf. "Local", *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 Aug 1866; S.S.L.R. 1893: 6-7.
[161] Syed Mohamed 1973: 45-6.
[162] "The case which…", *The Singapore Free Press*, 8 Feb 1866.
[163] *Supplement to the Singapore Free Press*, 26 Apr 1866; S.S.L.R. 1893: 7; a few Tamils seem to have worked as translators and clerks for the British courts and lawyers in the 19th century, as has already been mentioned with regard to the *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* subscribers. Most notorious among these clerks was the homicide Hajee Saffer Ally and his similarly delinquent son Akbar Ally; Buckley (vol. 2): 557-9; a certain Dubash Mohamed mentioned in 1866 may also have been a Tamil; cf. "Criminal Session", *The Singapore Free Press*, 19 Apr 1866.
[164] E.g. a certain Mahomad Gouse in *Supplement to the Singapore Free Press*, 10 May 1866; cf. also S.S.L.R. 1941-2: 282.
[165] Meytīṉ 1989: 4-7.
[166] Shah 1996: 14; Meytīṉ 1989: 37-40.

contribution to the family income, their work was a source of embarrassment to their husbands.[167] On the whole, the occupations engaged in by Tinnevelly Muslims were not uncommon among Tamil Muslims in Singapore, even though Tinnevelly Muslims were only marginally involved in mercantile activities. The main differences between them and those from the coastal areas were in the spheres of kinship and settlement patterns rather than occupation.

Religious Life and Activities

The sources do not only reveal something about the economic standing of Tamil Muslims in colonial Singapore, but also about their religious institutions and activities. Probably the central institution for any Muslim society is the mosque. While the nature of Islamic ritual prayer leaves little room for the articulation of ethnic or linguistic difference, other mosque-related activities, such as sermons and religious education, require the use of language for communication. Therefore, it is not surprising that many mosques in colonial Singapore had a quite clearly defined ethnic character. At least seven mosques were founded by Tamils in the prewar period: the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) (est. 1826-27), the Masjid Al-Abrar (est. 1827), the original mosque on the site where the Masjid Malabar is located nowadays (est. after 1848), the Masjid Abdul Gafoor (est. 1859), the mosque of Kampong Payah Goyang (est. before 1899),[168] the Masjid Kassim (est. before 1919), and the Masjid Khadijah (est. 1920).[169] Other mosques at least included Tamils among their founders, such as

[167] Meytīṉ 1989: 4, 9-10, 15-6; it is telling that Maideen does not consider the peddling of spices or hawking when claiming that Kadayanallurians only rarely engaged in trade; ibid.: 8.

[168] I have no information where this mosque may have been located, or whether it still exists; cf. Ahmad 1965: 56-7.

[169] Dates of establishment refer to the construction of a mosque at the site, not to the construction of the present building or the establishment of endowments supporting the mosques; cf. Ahmad 1965: 43-61; Lee G.B. 2002: 80-93; http://cmsweb.mosque.org.sg/English/home.aspx [accessed on 2 December 2005].

the Coronation Road Mosque (est. 1905, nowadays Masjid Al-Huda) and the Masjid Mydin (est. 1935), or may have included Tamils among its congregation, such as the Masjid Bencoolen (est. 1845).[170]

Figure 7: The Masjid Jamae (Chulia) in South Bridge Road (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

That the majority of mosques founded by Tamils in the period were *shāfiʿī* mosques suggests that adherents of this law-school were the majority among Tamil Muslims in colonial Singapore. The first, and apparently only, *ḥanafī* mosque founded by Tamil Muslims was the Masjid Abdul Gafoor, though *ḥanafī* Tamil Muslims will likely have frequented other non-Tamil *ḥanafī* mosques like the Masjid Bencoolen, and are sometimes mentioned in the Law Reports.[171]

Some of these mosques are still perceived as 'Indian' mosques today, as will be discussed in chapter 4. Particularly the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) seems to have been seen as a Tamil mosque [**Figure 7**]: when in 1887 the front part of the mosque had

[170] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 47, 53-4, 59-60; regarding the ethnic composition of the Masjid Bencoolen's congregation, see chapter 4.
[171] E.g. Kyshe 1885: 421-6.

become so decrepit that it threatened to collapse, the newspaper *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* published an appeal, pointing out that the mosque was a site "…for our Kling Muslims…" and that "…our Muslims…" frequented this mosque above all others.[172] This does not mean, of course, that only Tamils prayed in this mosque; an Arab staying in 'Campong Malacca' was noted to pray at the 'Kling Musjid' in 1865.[173]

At least the bigger mosques were also endowed with properties for their upkeep, and had a body of trustees attached to them that were supposed to manage the expenses of the mosques.[174] The performance of these trustees was open to criticism, and disputes over the management of mosques seem to have been not uncommon. A reader's letter of 1887 published in connection with the decrepit condition of the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) criticized the conduct of earlier managements, and seems to suggest that at the time of writing, there were actually two bodies of managers, the members of the 'Panchayat' (*pañcāyattār*) and the 'trustee-attorneys' (*tiraṣṭi okkīlkārar*).[175] It has already been mentioned that Indian Muslim trustees and administrators had a low reputation in the eyes of the British, and it comes as no surprise that by 1965, of six endowments that had been taken over by the Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Board due to 'mismanagement', five were endowments made by Tamil Muslims.[176] Among these five endowments are the Jamae Mosque Endowment, which covers not only the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) but also the Masjid Al-Abrar and the Nagore Durgah, and the Gafoor Endowment. Thus all important mosques frequented by Tamils came to be under the control of the government.

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[172] "Cavuttu piriṭciṟōṭ kuttupāp paḷḷivāyilaippaṟṟiya potuviṣayam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 15 Aug 1887: 29; cf. also "Cavuttu piriṭciṟōṭ kuttupāp paḷḷivāyilaippaṟṟiya potuviṣayam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 22 Aug 1887: 33; Tiṇṇappaṉ 1999: 226-7.

[173] "On the 15th instant…", *The Singapore Free Press*, 21 Dec 1865.

[174] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 41-61 for details on the endowments.

[175] Cf. "Periyappaḷḷivāyil", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 29 Aug 1887: 40.

[176] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 42; Tyabji 1991a: 206; cf. footnote 151.

But the mosque and congregational prayer were not the only elements of the religious life of Tamil Muslims in colonial Singapore. The author of the 1887 reader's letter on the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) conjured up an image of the mosque "…as an abode for those who worship God (praised is He and exalted), for those who make *dhikr*, for those who engage in other religious acts, for the scholars and savants,[177] and for the ascetic[178] fakirs…".[179] This may partly have been an idealized description, but there is no doubt that there was more to the religious life of Singapore's Tamil Muslims in the late 19th century than a few mosques frequented by traders and shopkeepers.

'Popular' religious practices are fairly well documented in the sources, which is slightly surprising as such practices often tend to be underrepresented in historical evidence. One such practice is ritual feasting, known as *kantūri* in Tamil and *kĕnduri* in Malay. The term derives from a Persian term for tablecloth, but has since come to refer to feasts given on various religiously significant occasions. In South India, it is mainly feasts given on the occasion of the holiday of a saint or the birthday of the Prophet that are called *kantūri*, and often the term is employed to denote the holiday as such, which is more generally known by the Arabic term *'urs*.[180] In the Malay world, in contrast, also feasts given on life-cycle events like circumcision, marriage, death, or the commemoration of the deceased are referred to as *kĕnduri*.[181] It was the more inclusive Malay definition that was apparently also adopted by many Indian Muslims in Singapore, as is evident both from contemporary sources as well as the statements of my respondents.

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[177] The letter has *ālī mulamākkaḷukkum*, "…for the *'ālims* and *'ulamā's*…", apparently being ignorant that *'ulamā'* is simply the plural of *'ālim*.

[178] *paratēciyākiya* could also be translated as 'foreign', 'traveling', or 'begging'.

[179] "Periyappaḷḷivāyil", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 29 Aug 1887: 40.

[180] Bayly 1989: 143-7; McGilvray 2004: 277 n. 9, 281-2; Shu'ayb 1993: 70-3; 736-9.

[181] McAllister 1990: 27-30.

Our main sources for the practice of feasting are remarkably the Law Reports. Some Muslims had included clauses in their wills that created trusts in order to pay for an annual feast, usually in their own honor and on the day of their death. As these trusts were established for perpetuity, the British judges felt compelled to decide whether the trusts were charitable, as only charitable trusts could be established for perpetuity. Following a decision taken in Penang in 1871, the courts generally came to regard these feasts as not charitable, and declared the establishing of trusts for them to be void.[182] Many of these cases were decided in Penang and may have involved Jawi-Peranakan, i.e. Muslims of mixed Indian-Malay parentage, rather than Tamils, but at least two cases from Singapore suggest that feasts for commemorating the dead were also "…a pious custom among Mohammedans" of Indian extraction, too, even though the feasts are not called *kantūri* in these cases.[183]

In all likelihood, feasts in honor of important saints were also part of the religious practices of Tamil Muslims in Singapore. In December 1887, *Ciṅkai Nēcan̲* reported about the feast at the birthday celebrations of the Prophet and noted the upcoming *kantūris* of ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore. The next two years, it recorded the celebration of ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī's *kantūri*, and noted the distribution of food (*an̲n̲atān̲am*) in the ceremonies of 1889.[184] A will of a Tamil Muslim from Penang contained detailed instructions for the staging of three annual feasts in honor of the Prophet, ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, and Shāh al-Ḥamīd without calling them *kantūris*. By that time, the British had already grown accustomed to consider only feasts commemorating the dead to be *kantūris*, and the judge thus

[182] Kyshe 1885: 269; cf. also ibid.: 580-1; Kyshe 1890: 212-3.
[183] S.S.L.R. 1911: 79-80; S.S.L.R. 1941-2: 286 [source of quote].
[184] "Mavulitu", *Ciṅkai Nēcan̲*, 12 Dec 1887: 98; "Ciṅkappūr", *Ciṅkai Nēcan̲*, 10 Dec 1888: 90; "Ciṅkappūr", *Ciṅkai Nēcan̲*, 2 Dec 1889: 86.

permitted the trust as a charity of the advancement of religion, explicitly denying that the ceremonies constituted *kantūris*.[185]

Saints and holy men were obviously an important part of the religious life of Singaporean Tamil Muslims all throughout the colonial period. The 'fakirs' of the 1887 reader's letter were and in some places are still a common sight in South India.[186] It is in no way surprising that they existed among Tamil Muslims in Singapore as well. In August 1866, *The Singapore Free Press* noted the demise of "[a]n old Kling man, who has been reckoned as a prophet [sic] by the Mohammedans in this settlement for the last 50 years…", who was buried in Tanjong Pagar.[187] It was noted that he could take goods and even money freely from shops and money-changers, and that carriages were free for him, due to "…the awe with which he inspired…" sections of the Muslim population. On the day of the burial, a syce was murdered, allegedly because he had asked for money to transport the corpse, though the charge could not be proven. The holy man's followers seem to have been mostly Malays and he was noted in another article to have been "…a great man amongst the Malays…".[188] What makes this case particularly interesting is the possibility that this holy man, called Nabi (i.e. prophet) Noah, was none else but Habib Nuh (Nuh = Noah), Singapore's most celebrated saint, generally believed to have been an Arab nowadays.[189]

About sixty years later, holy men called *taṅkaḷ*, *cāyapu* or *mastāṉ*, played an important role in the society of Muslim migrants from Kadayanallur. As will be discussed in chapter 3, Kadayanallur Muslims were then segregated into various factions each of which claimed allegiance to a different spiritual preceptor in Kerala.

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185 S.S.L.R. 1936: 107-13.
186 Cf. Jaffur Shurreef [1863] 1991: 160-1; Saheb 1998: 61-72.
187 "An old Kling man,…", *The Singapore Free Press*, 2 Aug 1866.
188 "Criminal Session", *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 Oct 1866.
189 "Criminal Session", *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 Oct 1866; cf. Metzger 2001.

Not only were these factions taken over to Singapore, but migrants continued to take discipleship with holy men here. According to Maideen, it was believed that one could attain heaven just by following the preceptor's injunctions and reciting an Arabic formula called a *ṣēk mantiram*.[190] Similar traditions seem to have been en vogue among migrants from nearby Tenkasi, according to my respondents.

The respect for holy men easily translated into veneration for their tombs on their death. Saint-veneration was and to a certain degree still is a common practice among Singapore's Tamil Muslims. One of the oldest Muslim buildings in town is a replica of Tamil Nadu's most famous shrine, the Nagore Dargah. Singapore's 'Nagore Durgah' was constructed between 1828 and 1830 in Telok Ayer Street, then almost directly on the beach. Similar replicas were constructed in other parts of Southeast Asia, such as Penang.[191] According to Jaffur Shurreef, Muslim sailors and captains made vows to donate a certain amount of money to the saint of Nagore when in distress at sea, and the Southeast Asian replicas may have been set up at first to allow these seamen to fulfill their vows on safe arrival in the port.[192]

Together with the Prophet and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī,[193] Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore was certainly the most venerated individual among Tamil Muslims in Singapore, as the references to his *kantūri* mentioned above attest. Yet he was certainly not the only saint venerated. According to my respondents, the custom of an influential Tamil Muslim family to celebrate the holiday of Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī annually was instituted before World War II, and an association floated by one of the Kadayanallur factions in 1940 was named after the 14th century saint Gīsū Darāz

[190] Meytīṉ 1989: 21.
[191] Lee G.B. 2002: 80-1; Ghulam-Sarwar 1989.
[192] Cf. Jaffur Shurreef [1863] 1991: 161-2.
[193] The Masjid Jamae (Chulia) was apparently also called the 'Mosque of Kuttūpmīṟāṉ Mukiyittīṉ Āṇṭavar', apparently in honor of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī; "Paḷḷivāyil pañcāyam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 23 Jul 1888: 14.

'Khwāja Banda Nawāz' who lies buried in Gulbarga, Karnataka.[194] Tamil Muslims also expressed their veneration for local and Southeast Asian saints. In 1886, a poem written in Singapore called *Malākkāp piravēcat tiraṭṭu* ("Compilation on the Gateway to Malacca") eulogized Shaykh Ismā'īl, who is buried on the island of Pulau Besar near Malacca.[195] Another collection of religious poems published in 1896 contains, among others, poems on the Singaporean saints Habib Nuh and Sikandar Shah as well as on a saint called Cālimcāyapu who was buried in the compound of the Masjid Jamae (Chulia).[196]

As becomes clear from what has been said above about *kantūris*, people not only venerated but celebrated important religious personalities. This would include among other things the recitation of panegyrical poetry (*mawlid*), feasting, and, in case of saints, flag-raising ceremonies.[197] On 5th of February 1857, a small riot in Telok Ayer Street left two people dead when an overzealous police inspector tried to remove "…obstructions in the shape of stakes and plantain trees stuck in the ground",[198] to the chagrin of the Kling Muslims who had assembled there to celebrate a festival. The location at the intersections of Telok Ayer and Boon Tat Street (then Japan Street), and the date make it clear that the people were celebrating the holiday of Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore at the Nagore Durgah: the evening of 5th of February 1857 corresponded to the early hours of the 11th of Jumādā al-Ākhira in the Muslim calendar, marking the climax of Shāh al-Ḥamīd's annual festival.

[194] Meytīṉ 1989: 24, 27.
[195] Jāpar Muhyittīṉ 1990:118.
[196] Mukammatu 1896: 45-6; there is still a shrine for a saint with a different name on the compound of that mosque.
[197] Cf. "Mavulitu", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 12 Dec 1887: 98-9; Meytīṉ 1989: 18, 26.
[198] Buckley 1902 (vol. 2): 645.

It is not clear whether processions were held on the holidays of certain saints, as they were in Penang and still are in Nagore.[199] But processions in commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein, the Prophet's grandson, in the month of Muharram were common in 19th century Singapore, in which miniature representations of Hussein's tomb, called *tābūt* or *ta'ziya*, were paraded around the town. Despite the fact that Tamil Muslims are usually Sunnite rather than Shiite, they apparently participated avidly in the processions, both in Singapore as well as in India, where in the late 19th century an important Tamil religious scholar warned his coreligionists of participating in *tābūt* processions in honor of Hussein or saints.[200]

In Singapore, the colonial government was apparently always wary of processions and their potentially disturbing character. In 1842, it refused to allow *tābūt* processions to the Klings, who went into a short strike on that account. Yet the processions were apparently resumed shortly thereafter, for in 1849 the Grand Jury claimed that processions were allowed to the Klings and (Indian) convicts, but not to the Chinese, and should be banned completely in public streets. The conflict about Muharram processions went on, with processions being banned and allowed again intermittently at least until 1864.[201] In 1864, a serious incident happened during the procession. By that time, the Muharram processions had apparently become the preserve of two Indian secret societies, the 'White Flags' and the 'Red Flags', whose processions were kept strictly apart, though the 'White Flags' usually went first on their circuit through the business district and Chinatown. During the 1864 processions, members of the 'Red Flags' society entered the building where the *tābūt* of their rivals was kept and destroyed it, setting in motion disturbances and court trials

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[199] Cf. Ghulam-Sarwar 1989: 33; Saheb 1998: 65-8.
[200] Sayyid Muḥammad 1963: 505-6; cf. also Bjerrum 1920: 174; cf. Jaffur Shurreef [1863] 1991: 112-23 and Nambiar & Narayana Kurup 1968: 56-8 for descriptions of Muharram as celebrated in Madras.
[201] Cf. Buckley 1902 (vol. 1): 375; Buckley 1902 (vol. 2): 505, 657, 723.

which document the practice of Muharram processions in the mid-1860s. After that, the processions seem to have been discontinued.[202]

In contrast to such popular customs, the presence of Islamic scholarship and learning among Tamil Muslims in Singapore is much less documented for the prewar period. Nevertheless, there is evidence that people with at least basic religious education lived in Singapore. Some Tamil religious scholars in India supported themselves by engaging in trade with Ceylon or Burma, and there is no reason to assume that this could not also have been the case with Singapore.[203] The Imams working at the various Tamil mosques would in all likelihood have had a religious education of some sorts.

Literacy was fairly high among the Muslim trading communities of the Coromandel Coast, and Tamil was used by those Tamil Muslims living in Singapore from at least the late 19th century onwards for newspapers, panegyric literature, wills and handbills.[204] It thus comes as no surprise that the written word was used to transmit religious information: *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* for example regularly published articles and reader's letters containing religious information, such as a letter containing advice on the proper performance of prayers, or an article on the reformer Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838/9-1897).[205] The newspaper also reported copiously about Muslim states like Afghanistan or the Ottoman Empire, and once included a lengthy article on Cairo.[206]

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202 Cf. "The following is…", *The Singapore Free Press*, 23 Nov 1865; "Criminal Session", *The Singapore Free Press*, 19 Apr 1866, 26 Apr 1866, 3 May 1866 & 10 May 1866, as well as *Supplement to the Singapore Free Press*, 26 Apr 1866 & 10 May 1866.
203 Cf. Shu'ayb 1993: 587-8.
204 Cf. Birch 1879: 51; Hemingway [1906] 2000 (vol. 1): 160; Jāpar Muhyittīṉ 1990; Mallal 1928: 1; S.S.L.R. 1931: 4.
205 "Kaṭitam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 25 Jul 1887: 20; "Ceyku Jamāluttīṉ", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 17 Oct 1887: 68.
206 "Kaiṟōppaṭṭaṇam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 28 Nov 1887: 91-2.

Our knowledge about the transmission of religious knowledge becomes more secure in the first decades of the 20th century. The Arab Street Educational Trust was created in 1919 by the Indian Muslim Society of Singapore with the object "…to impart religious education to Indian Muslim children".[207] In the 1920s, the Society employed at least one teacher who had studied at Vellore in India, most probably at the Madrasat Bāqiyyāt al-Ṣāliḥāt.[208] With more Tamil Muslims bringing their families along to Singapore, the need for religious education in Tamil would have increased.[209] Many of my older respondents mentioned religious schools run by Tamil Muslims, though few could remember any details. Even among the poor migrants from Tinnevelly District, religious schools sprang up. Maideen reports a dispute among some Kadayanallurians about whether to use a common fund to register an association or to start a *madrasa*. He also mentions that tensions arose between members of the registered Muslim Apiviruttic Caṅkam ('Muslim Improvement Association') and the supporters of a religious school called Matracattul Muhammatiyā in Tanjong Pagar. Maideen himself had received basic religious education, as well as elementary knowledge of English, at a simple 'school' operating on a verandah (*tiṇṇaip paḷḷi*), where both boys and girls were taught.[210]

This upsurge in religious education, combined with improving communication with India, had some important consequences for the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore. On the one hand, associations proliferated among Tamil Muslims in this period, a process that will be discussed further in chapter 4. Tamils also participated in pan-Muslim committees and associations. When new trustees were appointed at the

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[207] Ahmad 1965: 44.
[208] Mallal 1928: 37; cf. Tschacher 2006a: 204-7.
[209] In Penang, a school "…for the learning in English, Hindoostanee, Malay, Tamil, Malabar, and the Alkoran…" was apparently in existence by 1870; Kyshe 1885: 268. On Islamic education in colonial Singapore in general, cf. Chee 2006: 7-13; Hussin Mutalib 1996: 233-5; Zahoor Ahmad 1967: 37-41.
[210] Meytīṉ 1989: 6, 11-13.

Masjid Sultan in 1915, Tamils were one of the communities represented among the trustees, together with Arabs, Malays, Bugis, Javanese, and other Indians.[211] An important association, the Anjuman-i-Islam, which had links with the controversial Aḥmadiyya movement,[212] also had many Tamil members. Indeed, Tamils seem to have been among the most influential individuals in this association. In 1926, the Vice-President of the Anjuman was a Tamil cattle trader from Porto Novo, and among its patrons was none less than 'Cattle King' Kader Sultan.[213]

Another effect of the greater dissemination of religious knowledge was an increase in religious disputes. This is best illustrated by the controversy generated by the visit of Daud Shah to Singapore. Not only was this visit widely reported in India, both in Daud Shah's own journal as also in a rival one,[214] it also led to considerable tensions among the Tamil Muslims of Singapore. Daud Shah, like the Anjuman-i-Islam, which hosted him in Singapore, had links to the Aḥmadiyya movement. Some of Daud Shah's supporters among the Anjuman wrote articles and handbills in his support. This provoked three religious scholars, who had come to Singapore just to raise opposition against Daud Shah, to pen a handbill attacking Daud Shah and his supporters as 'infidels' for associating with 'Qādiyānīs'.[215] The handbill was published under the name of a local merchant, while the scholars who penned it retreated to India. Two of those attacked by the pamphlet went to court, suing the merchant who published it for libel. The case, which ended in the victory of the plaintiffs, came to involve not only many influential Tamil Muslims, but also North

[211] Ahmad 1965: 51.
[212] The Aḥmadiyya is a movement going back to the Punjabi Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad Qādiyānī (1839-1908). Part of the supporters of the Aḥmadiyya maintain that Ghulām Aḥmad was a prophet, making them heretics in the eyes of most Muslims, while another faction, to which the Anjuman was linked, came to reject this claim; cf. Friedmann [1989] 2003: 147-162.
[213] Mallal 1928: plate facing p. vi, 61; most accounts seem to put more stress on the North Indian members; cf. Khoo 1993: 269.
[214] Cf. "Malāy nāṭṭil namatu āciriyar*", Tārul Islām* 7-6, Jun 1925: 277-8.
[215] A term used for Aḥmadīs especially among their opponents.

Indians, Arabs and Malays, showing the disruptive potential of religious disputes in the community.[216]

The case shows how much Tamil Muslims in Singapore had come to be integrated into discourses linking them with the wider Muslim society on the island and even beyond. At the same time, they maintained peculiarly Tamil networks and institutions that linked up with Tamil Muslim society and debates in India. When the British army surrendered Singapore to the Japanese on the 15th of February 1942, Tamil Muslims were an established and important part of Muslim society in the city.

TAMI MUSLIM SOCIETY AFTER WORLD WAR II

As there is considerable continuity between many aspects of pre- and postwar Tamil Muslim society, and detailed discussions of some contemporary issues will be taken up in later chapters, there is neither need nor space to present postwar Tamil Muslim society in the same detail as was done with prewar society. It will suffice here to discuss some broad trends in the way Tamil Muslims were affected by postwar developments. When I draw on oral history for information in this section, I tend to use information supplied by my own respondents rather than the interviews conducted by the National Archives of Singapore.[217]

The Japanese occupation of 1942-5 had a strong impact on Tamil Muslims in Singapore, as it had on other communities. Some were able to escape from the city to the relative safety of India. Those who remained had to bear the indignities of

[216] The proceedings of the trial were published by Bashir A. Mallal, himself one of those attacked in the handbill, in 1928; cf. Mallal 1928; the case is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.
[217] As the summaries of the six interviews with Tamil Muslims by the Archives make clear, there is very little in these interviews that has a direct bearing on the topic of the thesis. Furthermore, the longest interview is with Maideen, and the information supplied seems to be largely the same as that contained in his memoirs; cf. Oral History Centre 1994: 1-3, 10, 43-4, 67-9, 73-4.

Japanese rule, such as disease, starvation, abuse by Japanese soldiers, arbitrary executions, and being 'conscripted' into the labor force building the Siam Railway.[218] The lower classes among Tamil Muslims tried to make their living by hawking or by joining a labor unit working for the Japanese known by the Japanese term *kutai*.[219] According to Shankar, the merchants were first able to make a living of their savings, but due to inflation and the lack of merchandize, these were soon used up.[220] Maideen's judgment of the merchants was much more critical: according to him, the merchants exploited the lower classes by cheating and inflated prices, claiming that their greed was stronger than their fear of the Japanese, while the lower classes did not betray their fraudulent practices to the Japanese because of pity and a sense of common identity with the merchants.[221]

One important element of the Japanese occupation was the Indian National Army (INA) under the leadership of S.C. Bose. Relationships between the INA and Indian Muslims were tense. The Muslim League and other Muslim associations were under the suspicion of supporting the British, and the Japanese and their INA allies closed down or suppressed Indian Muslim associations.[222] In how far other Tamil Muslim institutions, like mosques, continued to operate does not become clear from the available sources. Muslim and other Indian merchants also came into contact with the INA by being 'asked' to contribute funds to the outfit.[223] But there were also Muslims who supported the INA, most notably M. Karim Ghani (Karīm Kaṉi), who came to Singapore in 1943 as Propaganda Minister of the Provisional Government of Free India proclaimed by Bose. Ghani would come to play an important if notorious role in

[218] Cf. Meytīṉ 1989: 34-44; Arasaratnam 1979: 102-11.
[219] Meytīṉ 1989: 37.
[220] Shankar 2001: 31.
[221] Meytīṉ 1989: 35.
[222] Shankar notes that the All India Muslim Club of Singapore was closed down by the Japanese during the war, but unfortunately he does not state his sources; Shankar 2001: 34.
[223] Shankar 2001: 32; cf. "Muslim Accusation", *Indian Daily Mail*, 13 Apr 1946: 2.

Singapore a few years later, after British control over the island had been reestablished in 1945.[224]

The primary development that impacted on Tamil Muslims in postwar Singapore was the process of decolonization, rapid in the case of India and Pakistan, which attained independence in 1947, more gradual in the case of Singapore, which developed from crown colony to part of Malaysia in 1963 to independent country in 1965. Decolonization affected Tamil Muslim society in Singapore in various ways. The two most discernible effects are the decline in importance of the role played by the merchant and trading elite and a simultaneous rise in influence of the poorer sections of that society. While the rise of independent states formed obstacles for the circulatory regimes of merchants by forming borders where none had been before, the more settled communities of labor migrants and petty shopkeepers could easily transfer their loyalties to an increasingly independent Singapore.[225] Their greater numbers and the presence, in many cases, of their wives and children, gave these communities greater stability and greater leverage to participate in the public sphere through the founding and maintenance of associations.

As has been mentioned before, the founding of associations by Tamil Muslims had begun in the early 20th century. In the late 1930s, several migrant groups began to form associations on the basis of their hometown or kin-center. These associations seem to have been mainly formed by lower class Tamil Muslims, like labor migrants and small shopkeepers. The six kin-center associations founded until 1952 all represented towns whose inhabitants were employed largely either in menial jobs or

[224] Pātucā 1996; Singapore Riots Inquiry Commission 1951: 10-1; Fakhri 2002: 14.

[225] Cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 39, 112; this may seem to contradict Sandhu's claim that it was mainly non-laboring Indians who seem "…to have first sunk its roots in Malaya…"; Sandhu 1969: 298. But the contradiction can be resolved if the circulatory patterns of migration of Tamil Muslim traders are taken account of, who in contrast to other South Asian mercantile groups migrated without their families.

in low-level trade, whereas the affluent merchants of towns like Porto Novo or Karaikal did not found such associations. Furthermore, at least four such kin-center associations survived the war, while none of the kind of association represented by the Indian Muslim Society, the Anjuman-i-Islam or the All India Muslim Club seems to have done so.[226] Through these associations, the kin-center communities could engage in activities that their members would not have been able to organize individually, such as the funding of schools. The Umar Pulavar Tamil School, which was founded in 1946 by the Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League, and operated between 1960 and 1982 as the only Tamil-medium high school in Singapore, is a good example of the rising impact these kin-center associations had on Tamil Muslim society in Singapore.[227]

Debates on religious and quasi religious issues occurred frequently in the two decades following the war, sometimes with violent consequences. The most burning issue in the immediate postwar period was the demand for Pakistan and the partition of India in 1947. Support for Jinnah and the Muslim League had already existed in the immediate prewar period.[228] No detailed study of the issue has been undertaken until now, but material collected by Shankar shows that there was considerable debate among Tamils in Singapore and the rest of Malaya regarding partition after the war. In Singapore, there were even cases of arson and rioting among Hindus and Muslims, though these were claimed by some to be unrelated to communal issues.[229] But it would be wrong to reduce the issue simply to a religious conflict. On the one hand, not every Muslim supported partition, while on the other hand some prominent non-

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[226] Some of these had apparently become defunct already before the Japanese occupation.

[227] For a history of the Umar Pulavar Tamil School see Palanisamy 1987, as well as Maideen's reminiscences throughout the second half of his biography.

[228] Cf. Meytīṉ 1989: 25-7.

[229] "S'pore Disturbances", *Indian Daily Mail*, 26 Jun 1946; "Incidents Not Connected with India Disunity", *The Malaya Tribune*, 27 Jun 1946: 8; Shankar 2001: 34-8, 57-72.

Muslim South Indian politicians did support the creation of Pakistan.[230] Shankar is probably right when he asserts that most Indian Muslims in Malaya had supported the Pakistan movement without intending to shift their allegiance to the new state, especially as many may have envisioned Pakistan as well as Hindu India as part of a larger Indian federation.[231] Yet for Singapore, the debate was the first real confrontation between Tamil Hindus and Muslims.

The immediate postwar period was a time of intense debate with various strands of both pan-Islamic and nationalist ideologies intersecting with and contesting each other. One of the best examples of this intellectual milieu was Karim Ghani, who had been shortly imprisoned, but released in 1946. Karim Ghani took over as the editor of the Tamil newspaper *Malāyā Naṇpaṉ*, and later also edited an English newspaper, *Dawn*, as well as its Malay version, *Sinaran*.[232] He was elected President of the Singapore Muslim League in 1949 and is also claimed to have been president of the All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society, better known as Jamiyah nowadays.[233] Ghani's career presents an almost paradoxical engagement with various political forces. Despite his engagement in the INA, Ghani also supported the Dravidian movement as well as the demand for Pakistan and the Palestinian cause.[234]

Ghani's career in Singapore ended with the Nadra/Maria Hertogh controversy and the ensuing riots, which ensued from the conflict over the guardianship of a Dutch-Eurasian Christian girl, Maria Hertogh, who had been separated from her parents in

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[230] Cf. "Local Muslims Protest against Pakistan", *Indian Daily Mail*, 12 Apr 1946: 4; More 1997: 216.

[231] The idea of 'Pakistan in India', which was espoused by Karim Ghani, was neither new nor original, as Shankar claims; cf. Cohen 2004: 29; "Jinnah Prepared for a Compromise?", *Indian Daily Mail*, 13 Apr 1946: 2; Shankar 2001: 35.

[232] Cāmi 1994: 314; Fakhri 2002: 14; Singapore Riots Inquiry Commission 1951: 10; Shankar also mentions that he edited an English weekly, *The Comrade*; Shankar 2001: 35.

[233] Singapore Riots Inquiry Commission 1951: 10; Hughes, who was later involved in the Nadra/Maria Hertogh controversy, denies that Ghani held any of these posts, but his election as President of the Muslim League is confirmed by a newspaper article; "Muslims Elect Leader", *The Malaya Tribune*, 25 Apr 1949: 3; cf. Shankar 2001: 67; Hughes 1980: 50.

[234] Fakhri 2002: 16; Shankar 2001: 35, 60-1.

World War II and raised by Muslims in Singapore, who called her Nadra. Karim Ghani, as well as a number of Malay and Arab leaders, formed the 'Nadra Action Committee' on 9th of December 1950 to fight for the return of Maria/Nadra to her Muslim foster-family. Ghani had used his newspapers as well as his apparently considerable rhetorical abilities to whip up Muslim sentiment. On the 11th of Decembers, riots erupted, in which Muslim rioters killed nine Europeans and Eurasians, while the police itself shot nine rioters. Ghani and the 'Nadra Action Committee' were detained, and on his release Ghani was ordered to leave the colony and finally ended up in Pakistan, where he died in 1978, as the British saw in him the 'moving spirit' in the agitation that led up to the riots.[235] In any case, the 'Nadra Action Committee' was probably the last instance of a Tamil Muslim taking a leading role in a public debate involving Islam in Singapore for a long time.

The decline in importance of Tamil Muslims can also be seen in their loss of control over the mosques they had founded in the last 120 years. As mentioned, already before the war the major Tamil mosques had come under the control of the Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Board. The Coronation Road Mosque and the Masjid Kassim followed in 1961 and 1962, respectively, and both have by now lost any Tamil character they may have had in the past.[236] Other mosques founded by Tamils gradually received Malay or Arab trustees, while one Tamil mosque fell into disrepair and was taken over by Malayali Muslims in the 1950s.[237] Conversely, the congregation of the Masjid Bencoolen seems to have been transformed from a predominantly Urdu-speaking one to a Tamil one after the 1950s.

The merger of Singapore and Malaysia in September 1963 and independence from Malaysia in August 1965 finally forced Tamil Muslims in the city to decide

[235] Singapore Riots Inquiry Commission 1951: 13-4.
[236] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 46-7.
[237] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 52-3, 57, 61.

between transferring their loyalties to the new state or to keep on to consider Singapore mainly as a place where to work and make money, and to return to India in due time. Debates about the issue of loyalty to this or that state had ensued ever since the end of the war, though more heatedly in those areas that were to become Malaysia, as the transition to independence happened earlier there than in Singapore.[238] As I have already mentioned, the decision for India or Singapore was easier to make for the laborers and petty shopkeepers who had settled down in Singapore with their families than for the traders and laborers who were on their own or had their family in India. One of my respondents admitted that in the first place he had taken Singaporean nationality because it made traveling and thus also trading easier for him, as Indians needed visas for many countries.[239] Many respondents in Singapore and India confirmed that *shāfi'ī* migrants from Kadayanallur, who had usually arrived in Singapore with their families, were more ready to settle down in Singapore than *ḥanafī* migrants from the same town, who more commonly arrived as lone male laborers; even among *ḥanafī* families, the participation in the Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League remained lower than among *shāfi'ī* Kadayanallurians.

Tamil Muslims and their institutions and associations do not figure prominently during the first twenty years of Singaporean independence. The last major Tamil Muslim association was founded in 1964, and it was not until the 1990s that new associations came to be formed. A number of important developments took place during this period which helped to obscure the presence of Tamil Muslims in Singapore. These are the growing importance of the so-called CMIO-paradigm (see next paragraph) in counting, policing and representing Singaporeans, the resettlement of a large part of Singapore's population in housing estates, and the establishment of

[238] Cf. Shankar 2001: 33-43; 57-72 for examples.
[239] I am not sure in which year this respondent became a Singaporean.

the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) as the statutory board on religious matters for Muslims in Singapore. As the latter point will be discussed in chapter 4, it may suffice here to point out briefly the impact of the first two developments.

The term CMIO-paradigm refers to the initials of the four official 'races' that came to be recognized in independent Singapore for census purposes, viz. Chinese, Malay, Indian, and 'Others'. This paradigm has a great impact on the way Singaporean identity is perceived, so much so that Siddique has claimed that "…belonging to and conformity with the norms of one of the CMIO categories, cannot be considered as conceptually separate from Singaporean identity".[240] These categories grew out of the census categories employed by the British,[241] yet their strongest impact on Tamil Muslims was to develop from features peculiar to the post-independence period, viz. the method of determining an individual's 'race', and the importance of the CMIO-paradigm in representing and policing Singaporean society.

Contemporary Singaporeans are not free to choose the racial category they belong to, as they were in the prewar period,[242] but are generally supposed to follow the 'race' of their father.[243] The results of this simple principle for Indian Muslims in Singapore were far reaching. As mentioned, marriages between Indian Muslim men and Malay women were and still are a common occurrence.[244] In the prewar period, the offspring of such marriages, who mostly would have spoken Malay at home, would have come to be counted as Malays and Jawi-Peranakan.[245] But the post-independence practice to trace a person's 'race' through his or her father has given

[240] Siddique 1990: 37.
[241] For a discussion of the development of the census categories, cf. PuruShotam 1998.
[242] Much to the frustration of the Superintendent of the 1931 census! Vlieland 1932: 73-4.
[243] Siddique 1989: 574; Wu 1982: 32; cf. Siddique 1990 for a case-study of the way these categories are manipulated in practice.
[244] In the late 1960s they formed the largest section (12.8%) of all interracial marriages; Hassan 1974: 20.
[245] The 1931 census, for example, does not mention any Malay-speaking Indians; cf. Vlieland 1931: 83.

rise to a large section of Muslims speaking Malay, but being considered ‘Indians’. In 2000, 11.6% of all Indians used Malay as primary household language, and indeed Malay seems actually to be spoken by more Indian Muslims than any South Asian language.[246] The presence of a ‘Malay’ Indian Muslim community has influenced the organization of and debates on religion among Indian Muslims in Singapore, as will be considered in chapters 5 and 6.

Another aspect of the CMIO-paradigm that has generated a lot of debate, and indeed problems, among Indian Muslims is the stereotyping it engendered. As Benjamin has pointed out, it is to be expected that in a society following the ideology of ‘Multiracialism’ there would be “…a tendency to make social reality fit an ethnic, or even racial, theory of causation”, by “…replacing reality with stereotype…”, by “…reaffirming…the notion of ‘traditional’ unchanging cultures…” and by having “…great concern for boundary definition…”.[247] Religion did not escape this process of racial stereotyping. Islam and Hinduism came to be intrinsically associated with Malays and Indians,[248] respectively, even though the situation is quite different in the two cases. While almost all Malays are Muslims, not every Muslim is a Malay (about 15.5% are not). Conversely, while almost every Hindu is an Indian, not every Indian is a Hindu (44.6% are not).[249] Nevertheless, in Singapore Muslims are usually expected to be Malays and Indians to be Hindus. This is particularly obvious in the representation of the three main ‘races’ in publications and cultural displays.[250] Even scholarly projects rarely escape racial and religious stereotyping. Thus, the project paper for the oral history interviews with Indians conducted by the Oral History

[246] Leow 2001b: ix.
[247] Benjamin 1976: 119.
[248] Cf. Tong 2004: 305-6.
[249] Cf. Leow 2001b: viii, 112.
[250] Cf. the title-images of a moral-education textbook in the Tamil and Malay versions, where all Indians are marked as Hindus and all Malays as Muslims; Jeyarājatās Pāṇṭiaṉ [1993] 1996; Mohamed [1993] 1999. Cf. also PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 81.

Centre only lists questions aimed at Hindu religious practice, such as which temples an individual visits or which deities he or she worships.[251]

It is hardly surprising that under these circumstances, Tamil Muslims have tended to vanish in the interstices of the CMIO-paradigm after independence. Similarly, some policies aimed at maintaining racial harmony have contributed to obscuring the presence of Tamil Muslims in Singapore. This is especially true with regard to the resettlement of large parts of Singapore's population to suburban housing estates after independence. The resettlement broke up the small enclaves of Tamil Muslim communities in areas like Tanjong Pagar, and dispersed them over the island. As the government was keen to prevent the formation of ghettos dominated by one ethnic group, care was taken to prevent concentration of one ethnic group in specific housing estates.[252] This means that Tamil Muslims always form a minority in specific housing estates, and especially in the congregations of local mosques.

Yet it may have been the same tendency to formulate policies in accordance with the CMIO-paradigm that may have contributed to a new assertiveness of Tamil Muslims in the 1980s and 90s, as they increasingly began to feel marginalized by such policies. In recent years, Tamil Muslims have increasingly pressed claims especially in the religious and social fields, and a new phase of forming associations has set in during the 1990s. These developments and the ensuing debates have interesting repercussions for the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore, and it is these developments that form the basis of most of the discussion in the following chapters.

[251] Oral History Centre 1994: 240.
[252] Teo & Ooi 1996: 261-4.

Chapter 3

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

At the surface level, the term ‘Tamil Muslims’ seems to suggest a quite clearly demarcated community unified by language and religion. Yet as the foregoing discussion about the history of Tamil Muslim society in Singapore has already suggested, the term ‘community’ should be used with caution. Apart from the already mentioned fact that most Tamil Muslims in Singapore seem to prefer imagining an ‘Indian Muslim’ rather than a ‘Tamil Muslim’ community, there exists a great deal of heterogeneity and difference among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore.[253] This has had a visible impact on the organization of religious life among Singaporean Tamil Muslims, and thus needs to be addressed in order to comprehend debates and discourses current among Tamil Muslims.

To understand how various segments of Singaporean Tamil Muslims are differentiated from each other, it is first necessary to briefly discuss what can be said on the basis of our sketchy data about Tamil Muslim society in Singapore in general. In particular, what is of interest here is which of these social characteristics have been

[253] Lamentations over the fragmented nature of the Tamil or Indian Muslim ‘community’ were among the most common comments made by my respondents; cf. also Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 42-3.

employed in the construction of a homogenous 'Tamil Muslim' community by individual Tamil Muslims and scholars alike.

The main part of the chapter will then deal with delineating the actual fault lines that differentiate various segments of Tamil Muslim society from each other. For the most part, these fault lines reproduce distinctions characteristic of Tamil Muslim society in India, viz. sub-groups, kin-centers, and various religious groupings. It is thus necessary to compare the situation in Singapore with that in India to gain an understanding of the operation of these differences and the way they are employed in the social imagery of Singaporean Tamil Muslims. Another aspect that has to be considered in this context is the question of 'Malayization'.

Different segments of Tamil and indeed Indian Muslim society in Singapore do not simply exist side by side, but actually inform constructions of status within this society. As the claim that a kind of caste-system is operative amongst Indian Muslims in Singapore is an important part of the (negative) stereotyping of Indian Muslims, it is necessary to evaluate this claim and to assess on what basis it has been made. These questions of hierarchies and the way they are interpreted shall be discussed in the final section of the chapter.

TAMIL MUSLIMS AND SOCIETY IN SINGAPORE

In 1997, the then President of the Federation of Indian Muslims, E.S. Ebrahim Marican, lamented that it was "…difficult for us to determine, statistically, how our community is faring in terms of educational performance and in other areas".[254] This situation has not changed since then. Practically the only indisputable figure available

[254] Quoted in "Indian-Muslim leaders pushing to know more about community", *The Straits Times*, 19 Apr 1997.

is that in 2000, 45,927 or 25.6% of all Singaporean Indians over the age of 14 were Muslims. Even more problematic for our purposes, the census makes only very general statements about languages spoken by various groups of Indians. Data on religion has only been collected since 1980, and it is usually only cross-listed with the general category of 'race', but not with language. Estimates of the number of Tamil Muslims in Singapore have ranged from 30,000 to 45,000.[255] In reality, the figure seems to be much lower. According to the 2000 census, which seems to be the only one to provide comparable data, 17.9% of all Tamil-speakers aged fifteen and over professed Islam. This figure cannot be put into absolute figures exactly, as the absolute figures for Tamil-speakers include everyone aged five and over, yet the total of Tamil-speaking Muslims would probably be below 20,000. While Tamil is probably the most commonly spoken South Asian language among Indian Muslims, 24,434 Indians returned Malay as their primary household language, and assumedly most of these would be Muslim. This means that the majority of 'Indian Muslims' enumerated in the census may be speakers of Malay.[256]

That Malay-speakers may form the majority of Singaporean 'Indian Muslims' has an important impact on the way figures relating to Indian Muslims have to be read. For instance, it may explain why a higher percentage of all registered Muslim marriages in 1998 were marriages of Indians with Malays than of Indians with other Indians: presumably, the majority of the 'Indians' marrying Malays were Malay-speaking Indians.[257] As a result, even the few figures that are available have to be treated with utmost care when one is interested in the social conditions of Muslims speaking Tamil or another South Asian language in Singapore.

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[255] Syed Mohamed 1973: 25 (41,000); Mani 1992: 342 (30,000); "Tamil Muslim chief defends right to participate in subsidy debate", *The Straits Times*, 5 Sep 1989 (45,000).
[256] Cf. Leow 2001a: 39; Leow 2001b: 98.
[257] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 53.

Figure 8: A garment store in Kadayanallur named 'Singapore Readymade', reminder of continued links between Singapore and South India (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Statements about the social life of Tamil Muslims in existing studies are thus indicative of the way a Singaporean Tamil Muslim community is perceived and constructed rather than depictions of reality. In the economic domain, the image of Tamil Muslims as traders and shopkeepers is pervasive. Mani, in his section on economic participation, exclusively discusses Tamil Muslim businesses, such as jewelers, general stores, and hawkers, but fails to mention the economic activities of those Tamil Muslims who lack mercantile backgrounds, even though he does mention the low involvement of some migrants in commercial activities.[258] Similarly, Tyabji points out that Tamil Muslims were recognized as "…skilled and shrewd shopkeepers

[258] Mani 1992: 349; cf. also Syed Mohamed 1973: 2.

and traders…", and notes their "…prominence in trade…".[259] There is of course no doubt that trading is an important economic activity engaged in by Tamil Muslims [**Figure 8**].[260] But it is hardly justified to focus solely on mercantile activities at the expense of all other forms of economic engagement. There are still many Tamil Muslims who earn their money as employees.

Nevertheless, it is understandable that the image of a community of traders is rarely contested; in the Singaporean context, mercantile activity is seen as a positive trait. Furthermore, it helps to differentiate Tamil Muslims from the image of the unskilled laborer that often still attaches to the Tamil community at large. As one respondent said about the migration of Tamils to Singapore in the colonial period: "Whenever the Muslim comes from there [India; T.T.], they [sic] will say: 'I want to be rich'. The Hindu will say: 'I want to earn a living'…So all the Indian Muslims are rich people".[261] One of my respondents even went so far as to deny that in the past, Tamil Muslims had engaged in anything but commercial activities, and he was furious about a statement by Yaacob Ibrahim, then Acting Minister of Community Development and Sports, which in his opinion depicted Tamil Muslims as 'coolies'.[262]

Education is another domain that is often commented on even though there are practically no detailed figures regarding it. Discussions of Tamil Muslim education usually focus on one of two things, viz. the attitude towards education by traders and shopkeepers, or the efforts of some non-mercantile groups at establishing schools. It is often noted that Tamil Muslims exhibit a high literacy rate, but lack higher education.

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[259] Tyabji 1991b: 59; cf. Mines 1972a: 7-8.

[260] An overview of Tamil Muslim business practices can be found in Syed Mohamed 1973: chapter vii; cf. also the advertisements in e.g. Mashuthoo 2000; Shaik Alaudeen & Kamal 1996.

[261] Cf. also Mines 1972b: 343 for differing attitudes towards work among Tamil Hindus and Muslims.

[262] In fact, Ibrahim had referred to Singaporeans in general, not only to Tamil Muslims; cf. Sankaran 2003: 8.

The common explanation for this situation is that traders require basic literacy for bookkeeping, but have little use for further education.[263] Similar statements were made by some of my respondents, and the need for education is a common topic in the Tamil Muslim associations' souvenir magazines and in speeches.[264] A problem with this discussion of attitudes towards education is that it focuses again primarily on the mercantile communities, and that it is completely unclear in how far these attitudes still have an impact today. Similarly, accounts of the founding of Tamil schools by Muslims is largely a historical issue that does not tell us anything about the current situation, as the last of these schools was closed down in 1982.[265]

Indeed, the discourse on education again tells us more about the way a Tamil Muslim community is perceived and constructed than about the de facto educational attainments of Tamil Muslim students in Singapore. Debates about education are nothing new among Tamil Muslims in Singapore. Already in 1887, *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* praised the government for its attempts at instituting schools in the colonies, and chided Singaporean Tamils for their attitudes towards education.[266] Almost forty years later, Daud Shah severely criticized both the government as well as the Indian community at large for the 'educational deficiency' (*kalvikkuṟai*) of the Indians. The government, Daud Shah alleged, did nothing to further Tamil-medium education in Malaya, while Indians in Malaya "…consider higher education unnecessary for trade. They consider it to be enough to earn money even if they cook or do menial work [*'tampi' vēlai*, lit. 'younger brother work'; T.T.]".[267] These examples show how much the educational discourse is embedded in wider discourses about the Tamil Muslim

263 Cf. Mani 1992: 349; Mines 1972a: 106-7; More 1997: 50-2, 82-3; yet cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 110.
264 Cf. e.g. Mashuthoo 2003: 41; Sayed Majunoon 1996.
265 Palanisamy 1987: 16-26.
266 "Government Schools. Kavarṉameṇṭu pāṭacālaikaḷ", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 21 Nov 1887: 85-6.
267 Tāvutṣā 1925: 344.

community and is employed strategically by various sides to bolster their respective visions of community.

Another social domain occasionally discussed with regard to Tamil Muslims in Singapore is that of marriage, family, and gender relations. Few studies fail to mention marriage patterns, and almost inevitably comment on the intermarriage of Tamil and other Indian Muslims with Malays.[268] Again, the matter is largely treated as a historical issue, as authors discuss it mainly in the context of early Tamil Muslim migration to Singapore, but largely fail to discuss current marriage patterns apart from some very vague and generalized statements.[269] Another topic that is sometimes mentioned in the context of marriage and gender relations is the negative image of Indian Muslims "…as abusive and domineering husbands".[270] Even though rarely discussed in the scholarly literature, the sensitivity of the issue became glaringly apparent in the controversy around the drama *Taláq*, which shall be treated in greater detail in chapter 5. It should be noticed that conversely, some of my Hindu Tamil respondents thought of Tamil Muslims as caring and loving husbands. Again, there is little data available to investigate how common this phenomenon is among Tamil Muslims.

THE BASIS OF DIFFERENCE

Subgroups

It has become common in studies of Tamil Muslims to claim that Tamil Muslim society is divided into various subgroups or –divisions. The most influential

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[268] E.g. Bibijan 1976/77: 120-3; Mani 1992: 347-9; Mariam 1989: 102; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 25-6, 65-6.
[269] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 65-6 is the main exception.
[270] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 66; cf. also ibid.: 71-2.

classification has been that of Mines, who distinguished four such divisions, namely Labbai (*ileppai*, also Lebbai etc.), Marakkayar (*marakkāyar*, also Maraikkayar, Marakkar, Merican, etc.), Ravuttar (*irāvuttar*, also Rowther, Rauther, etc.), and Kayalar (*kāyalar*).[271] While authors vary in the number of subgroups they distinguish, practically all scholars include Labbai, Marakkayar, and Ravuttar.[272] Such subgroups are said to be defined by a set of shared characteristics, including adherence to a specific law-school, regional background, common economic activities, and most importantly a common origin. Thus, Marakkayar are said to belong to the *shāfi'ī* law-school, settle in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu, are successful traders, and descent from Arabs who married Tamil women.[273] Surprisingly, even though in descriptive terms, these Muslim subgroups sound deceptively like castes, most authors deny that they constitute caste-groups, even though some admit that there is a hierarchy of subgroups, a topic to which we shall return below.

The similarity in descriptive terms of these subgroups to castes becomes understandable when we consider the origin of this taxonomy, viz. the influential seven volume work *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* published by Edgar Thurston in 1909. As Thurston himself acknowledges, he relied heavily on District Manuals and other secondary sources in compiling this work.[274] Though Mines does not quote Thurston in his bibliography of his original study, he mentions exactly the same four Tamil Muslim groups as Thurston does, for the information contained in Thurston and

[271] Cf. Mines 1972a: 23-8; this taxonomy was subsequently popularized through articles like Mines 1984 & 1986.
[272] Cf. Bayly 1989: 73-103; Bjerrum 1920: 172-3; Fanselow 1989: 274-81; Kamāl 1990: 37-55; More 2004: 3-27.
[273] Cf. Bayly 1989: 79-81; Bjerrum 1920: 173; Fanselow 1989: 275-6; Kamāl 1990: 47-9; Mines 1984: 431-2; only More assumes that the Marakkayar migrated from Kerala, but else agrees with the other authors; More 2004: 14-8.
[274] Thurston 1909 (vol. 1): xi.

the District Manuals is widely known in India – these works are commonly reprinted, and often reproduced in Census Reports or Tamil publications.[275]

Given its origin in colonial census ethnography, it is surprising that the general applicability of this taxonomy is practically never questioned. Yet there are serious problems with the applicability of this model for all of Tamil Nadu. For example, it has been mentioned that adherence to the *shāfiʿī* law-school is a characteristic of Marakkayars, but when I related this information to an Indian-born Marakkayar respondent in Singapore, he denied it, pointing out that both his mother and his daughter-in-law belonged to the *ḥanafī* law-school even though they were also Marakkayar. Geographical differences emerge most clearly when we compare Mines's study conducted in the utmost north of Tamil Nadu with Fanselow's research on the far south. For example, the Kayalar subgroup mentioned by Mines seems in fact to be a kin-center community[276] which came to be identified with certain low-class occupations in Madras and surroundings, and which is absent from practically any other account except Thurston's.[277] On the other hand, the Tirunelveli subgroup of the Tarakanar (*tarakaṉār*) mentioned by Fanselow is absent from Mines's accounts.[278]

The appearance of terms like 'Marakkayar' or 'Labbai' in the names of individuals in the pre-colonial period has prompted many scholars to assume that the subgroups were already a feature of Tamil Muslim society in the past, yet the argument is inconclusive. The terms are simply assumed to mean the same that they are supposed to mean nowadays, and contradictory evidence is either ignored or

[275] Cf. e.g. Kamāl 1990: 210-2.
[276] The term *kāyalar* simply means 'people from Kayalpattinam'.
[277] Mines 1972a: 26; cf. Thurston (vol. 3): 267; in fact, in Tirunelveli District, people from Kayalpattinam are regarded as Marakkayar with a reputation for business and Islamic 'orthodoxy'; cf. Fanselow 1996: 204-7; Pate 1917 (vol. 1): 499-501.
[278] Mines 1984 & 1986; cf. Fanselow 1989: 276-7.

discussed away by ad hoc explanations lacking evidence. Thus, Subrahmanyam uncritically identifies the term 'Chulia', which as discussed appears in records from Southeast Asia, as another term for 'Marakkayar', despite the fact that Arasaratnam refers to individual 'Chulias' who carry 'Labbai' as part of their names, and that a certain Shakkarai Rowter is referred to as a 'Chulia' as late as in a 1927 court case from Penang.[279] Similarly, Bhattacharya attempts to explain the common occurrence of both 'Labbai' and 'Marakkayar' in the same individual's name in 18th century Dutch records by suggesting that 'Labbai' was a more inclusive term of which 'Marakkayar' was a subgroup.[280] Yet there is strong evidence that Tamil *ileppai*, like its Malay cognate *lebai*, originally referred to nothing else but a type of religious official or a pious person. This is not only evidenced by the continued use of the term in this meaning in many parts of Tamil Nadu nowadays,[281] but also by historical records.[282]

The evidence from Singapore, both past and present, indeed provides valuable insights for a critique of the subgroup taxonomy and its importance for Tamil Muslim society. The terms associated with particular subgroups appear already during the colonial period, and forms of 'Marakkayar' or 'Ravuttar' are still part of names of Tamil Muslims and their descendants. The subscription-lists of *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* often mention individuals whose names contain one of the subgroup titles, as do the Law Reports, with versions of Marakkayar being the most common (cf. appendices 3 & 4). Yet as has been mentioned, evidence from names is inconclusive, as it does not tell us anything about the understanding of the terms involved. Indeed, one encounters many

[279] Subrahmanyam 2001: 95; cf. Arasaratnam 1987: 135; S.S.L.R. 1928: 25.
[280] Bhattacharya 1999: 288.
[281] Cf. Fanselow 1989: 274-5; Shu'ayb 1993: 76-7; my respondents both in India and in Singapore similarly used the term in this meaning.
[282] Cf. Kamāl 1990: 52-3; Pate 1917 (vol. 1): 97; S.S.L.R. 1936: 108-10; More 2004: 123; More contradicts himself by insisting in another passage that the term was used "…on the whole…to identify a group or clan of Tamil Muslims…"; ibid.: 21.

of the same problems that have been mentioned above with regard to Tamil Nadu.[283] One court case even suggests intermarriage between 'Ravuttar' and 'Marakkayar'. The cloth-merchant Ahna Mohamed Hussain had a brother by the name of Sinnatamby Rowther, as well as a cross-cousin or brother-in-law[284] called Moona Mohamed Eusope Marican.[285] On the whole, one gets the impression that the subgroups did not play a significant role in Singaporean Tamil Muslim society in the colonial period. Apart from the absence, as far as I can see, of any reflections by the British or Indians on the issue, this is most strongly suggested by the interesting fact that no Tamil Muslim association in Singapore ever seems to have been formed on the basis of one of the postulated subgroups.[286]

Mani, the only contemporary scholar on Tamil Muslims in Singapore who seems to be aware of the subgroups and Mines's work, thus may be correct when noting that "…these divisions are not significant in the context of Singapore for family formations, marriage and kinship".[287] Other authors do at times mention one or the other subgroup name, but their remarks, echoing the opinions of their respondents, show how ill-defined the concept of subgroup appears to be in Singapore. Bibijan claims that 'Maricar', 'Rowther', and 'Mani' are "family names".[288] Mariam's respondents named 'Rowthers' and 'Mutlers' as the two most important castes among Indian (read: Tamil) Muslims.[289] Similarly, Noorul Farha discusses the "family names" 'Marican', 'Rauther' and 'Sahib' as caste-like categories.[290]

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[283] E.g. names combining two 'subgroups', like Shaik Lebbai Maricar; S.S.L.R. 1929: 141-6.
[284] The Tamil term *maccāṉ* can mean both.
[285] S.S.L.R. 1928: 83, 89.
[286] This seems similarly to be the case in India; cf. Mines 1983: 113.
[287] Mani 1992: 347; but cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 45.
[288] Bibijan 1976/77: 100.
[289] Mariam 1989: 109.
[290] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 43-6.

If there is one domain where the subgroups do seem to play a certain role in Singapore, it is for the formulation of origin myths. One author for example tried to construct an Arabic ancestry for both Marakkayar and Ravuttar by deriving the former term from the town Marrakech in Morocco and claimed that the latter were the descendants of Arabic horse-traders.[291] One of my respondents recounted that his father claimed that the Ravuttar were descended from Turkish cavaliers.[292] On the other hand, a publication by the Thopputhurai Muslim Association derived the term *irāvuttar* from *iravu tattarkaḷ*, 'those who hop through the night', explaining that the Ravuttar were merchants trading goods from the coast to the hinterland who preferred to travel by night to avoid the heat of the day – an ingenious, but unfortunately linguistically impossible etymology![293]

The foregoing discussion may lead to the question of why the subgroups have been so relatively insignificant in the Singaporean context. Yet perhaps it is more prudent to ask whether the Singaporean case actually presents a contrast to India, or whether scholars of Tamil Muslim society in India have not put undue stress on the concept of subgroup. After all, though subgroups are claimed to be endogamous units, they are not particularly evident in the 'Matrimonial' sections of South Indian newspapers, usually the best source of information on which groups are considered endogamous in India. Tamil Muslim marriage ads generally only know two divisions, 'Tamil Muslim' and 'Tamil Muslim Ravuttar', which do not distinguish subgroups, but the *shāfiʻī* and *ḥanafī* law-schools, respectively.[294] Even Mines admitted that subgroup-endogamy may be quite accidental and result from the tendency to marry

[291] Mohamed Mustapha 2003: 75; cf. Kamāl 1990: 37-9; actually, *marakkāyar* is generally assumed to derive from *marakkalam*, 'ship', while *irāvuttar* comes from a word denoting a mounted trooper rather than a horse-trader; cf. Fanselow 1989: 275-7.
[292] The Ravuttars are often linked to Turks because of the use of the probably Turkish-derived kinship-term *attā*, 'father'; cf. Mines 1972a: 27; Shuʻayb 1993: 59.
[293] Cf. Muhammatu Meytīṉ 1989/90: 23.
[294] Cf. Shuʻayb 1993: 76-7.

among relatives or people from the same village, who often would be homogeneous with regard to subgroup.[295] Indeed, what emerges from Mines's own writings is the importance of a concept which definitely *is* salient in the Singapore context, viz. that of the kin-center.

Kin-centers

The kin-center is among the most important concepts for understanding the imagination of difference among Tamil Muslims in Singapore. At the most basic level, kin-centers simply are "…the towns or villages which the [Tamil; T.T.] Muslims commonly name as their native places. For some it is where they were born. For others it is from where their people, their kinsmen, come".[296] Yet for Tamil Muslims, the importance of the kin-center goes far beyond the simple notion of hometown. Mines observed that most marriages occurred within the kin-center community, even though there is no bar on marrying outside the kin-group. The kin-center also supplied merchants with a reliable source of employees, and with a far-flung net of business contacts.[297] The importance of the kin-center is thus not as a physical location, but as the focus for the maintenance and recreation of a geographically dispersed social and economic network. Yet for Mines, the most important aspect of the kin-center is that it endows Tamil Muslims with an identity. "In urban society organized around corporate caste the Tamil Muslims have retained the only corporate identity they ever have had, their village identity".[298]

The presence of kin-center identities and their perpetuation through various institutions are highly visible in the Singaporean context, and it is no surprise that this

[295] Mines 1978: 164.
[296] Mines 1983: 99-100.
[297] Mines 1983: 104-11.
[298] Mines 1983: 114; cf. also ibid.: 111.

element of Tamil Muslim society has received a fair amount of attention.[299] Most of the authors seem to be unaware of Mines's and similar studies on Tamil Muslim society in India. This has the advantage that these studies allow a glimpse of the way divisions within Tamil Muslim societies are perceived in Singapore, yet it has the disadvantage that no analysis of the data is undertaken except vague assumptions about the operation of a caste system among Singaporean Tamil Muslims, a notion which we shall have the opportunity to critique.

As mentioned, kin-center affiliation is visible in at least four domains. One is the domain of marriage. Marrying within the kin-center community still seems to be the preferred practice in many cases, at least in the eyes of the elders. One respondent told me how her father had tried to keep her brother away from his Malay girl-friend as well as the company of members of another kin-center, and how he had encouraged his children to get married in India to someone from the kin-center. Especially for those kin-center communities whose numbers in Singapore are low, marrying someone from the kin-center community often means marrying to India. I have attended several marriages in the town of Porto Novo in India where either bride or groom came from Singapore. For larger kin-center communities, spouses are more readily available within Singapore itself, and some associations actually engage in 'match-making'. Of course, suitable spouses are not always found in the kin-center community, and so 'mixed' marriages do occur. In these cases, marriages with individuals from a comparable background in terms of region, religious affiliation and occupation are preferred. Thus, it is not uncommon for people from the Kadayanallur and Tenkasi communities to intermarry. It is also in the context of intermarriage that hierarchical stratification and rank become most visible. The most salient barrier

[299] Cf. Mani 1992: 344; Mariam 1989: 102-9; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 42-6.

seems to be between Tamil Muslims from business communities, especially the *ḥanafī* business communities, on the one hand, and the mainly *shāfi'ī* descendants of the Tinnevelly migrants (lumped together as *teṉkāciyar*, 'Tenkasis') on the other.[300]

There is also a certain amount of stereotyping current among different kin-center communities, for example with regard to the 'traditional' occupations of the various communities. One person from Tenkasi told me that Muslims from the trading towns were more willing to take risks and to be active in business in contrast to the risk-averse people from Kadayanallur and Tenkasi.[301] Other elements of stereotyping concern food, Tamil dialects, 'Malayization', or dress.[302] Like marriage, stereotyping is closely connected to notions of status, and shall be considered again in that connection.

A third, though much less salient way of recreating the kin-center community is through rituals. Mines relates that his respondents used to go back annually to attend festivals at their kin-centers, especially for the *'urs*, i.e. the festival at the shrine of the kin-center's patron or some other saint.[303] This practice does exist in Singapore, though people may not return to the festivals as regularly as in the case of Mines's Indian respondents due to constraints on money and time. These visits to shrines will usually also be used to spend time with the family, to arrange marriages, or similar forms of social networking. The attendance of an *'urs* in the kin-center is largely an individual affair, i.e. not everyone will return for the occasion, and often it is indeed just an individual member of a household, not the whole household, who returns for the *'urs*. Within Singapore, the kin-center's *'urs* is not usually publicly observed, the main exception being the annual commemoration of Pīr Muḥammad (Pīr

[300] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 43-5.
[301] Cf. also Sayed Majunoon n.d.: [3].
[302] Cf. Mariam 1989: 102; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 43-5.
[303] Mines 1975: 411-3.

Muhammatu), the patron-saint of the town of Thuckalay, by the Thuckalay Muslim Association.

Indeed, the most visible institutions of kin-center identity in contemporary Singapore are the kin-center associations. More than half of the associations in the Federation of Indian Muslims are based on kin-center communities. Currently, there are ten kin-center associations in Singapore, some of which go back to prewar days, while others were founded only a few years ago. These associations and the role they play in the organization and contestation of religious life among Tamil Muslims in Singapore will be discussed in subsequent chapters. It suffices here to point out that in contrast to marriage and the attendance of kin-center festivals and rituals, which require travel to and presence in the physical kin-center, the associations are a thoroughly Singaporean phenomenon. Practically all of their activities relate to the kin-center community here, whereas the maintenance of direct linkages is left to individual members of the kin-center community. The kin-center is transformed in these associations into an idea that helps to create and maintain community among the members of the kin-center community in Singapore quite apart from its physical manifestation in India.

In a way, the kin-center association is thus a peculiarly Singaporean (and Malaysian) phenomenon. Mines claims that "[s]ince [Tamil Muslims] never faced strong opposition to the pursuits of their interests, they have never formed associations".[304] The associations in which Tamil Muslims in Mines's study area participated were based on economic interests or religion, not on kin-centers,[305] though I am aware of something like a kin-center association in Chennai, so that Mines's case may not be extendable to Tamil Nadu as a whole. Yet the difference

[304] Mines 1983: 116.
[305] Mines 1983: 112.

between Singapore and India seems to be that at some point in history, kin-center associations in Singapore started getting registered, providing a blueprint for a type of association that was successful in public activities precisely because it could build on established social networks. Recent events, such as the recognition of such associations implicit in the cooperation of MUIS with various kin-center associations, have helped to stabilize this peculiar Singaporean model even further.

Figure 9: Two examples from Koothanallur of mansions built partly with money remitted from places like Singapore and the Gulf States (Photos: Torsten Tschacher)

Yet while the kin-center concept is very much alive in Singapore, at the same time it is being claimed that the parochialism represented by the concept and the kin-center associations is outdated and undermining the unity of the larger imagined community of Indian Muslims.[306] How this discourse is played out in the institutional context will be discussed in chapter 6. Several of my respondents claimed that it was difficult to

[306] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 42-3.

get young people interested in participating in kin-center activities and associations. Some, but certainly not all, younger Tamil Muslims themselves declared that they were not able to identify with the concept and preferred to cut any ties with India whatsoever. Few of the younger people have actually been to the kin-center, and have only hazy, largely negative, notions and prejudices what the 'ancestral village' was like.[307] Those younger people who actually visit their kin-center are often surprised by its appearance, such as in the case of one respondent who was struck by the large mansions in his kin-center, built by successive generations of successful migrant merchants [**Figure 9**]. Yet even if the physical kin-center has very little meaning for today's Singaporean youth, the associations see participation of teenagers in activities, and the Tenkasi association even has a football team organized by the youth subcommittee of that association. Thus, a reduction of identification with the Indian kin-center does not necessarily have to result in a reduction of the importance of kin-center associations, a further indicator of how far the idea of the kin-center has become divorced from its physical location in the Singaporean context.

Religious Differences

Beside the distinctions of subgroup and kin-center, there are a few religious distinctions that also bear on the construction of community and difference among Singaporean Tamil Muslims. The most basic is the distinction of the two law-schools of Sunnite Islam that Tamil Muslims belong to, the *ḥanafī* and *shāfi'ī* schools. The

[307] The term 'village', often used with regard to kin-centers, is misleading. It is obviously used to render the Tamil term *ūr*, which, depending on the context, can mean anything from a hamlet to a nation-state. Yet it is clear that the associations of the English term 'village' with a small, rural and somewhat backward settlement often inform the images kept by Singaporeans about their ancestor's home; but 'village' is hardly a proper description for a municipality like Kadayanallur, which in 2001 had 75,604 inhabitants; cf. http://www.censusindia.net/results/town.php?pl=20688&submit=Next&stad=A&state5=98765 [accessed on 26 January 2006].

presence of these two law-schools among Tamil Muslims has often been seen as the product of two different processes of Islamization in South India, viz. through the conquests of North Indian Muslim states in the case of *ḥanafīs*, and through Indian Ocean trading networks in the case of *shāfiʿīs*.[308] There is on the whole not much discussion on the impact of this difference on Tamil Muslim society. Bibijan claims that adherents of the two law-schools freely intermarry in Singapore, with either both spouses remaining with their respective law-schools, or the *ḥanafī* partner turning *shāfiʿī*.[309]

Discussions of the difference between the two law-schools in the Singaporean context usually do not touch upon the manifestations of that difference among Tamil Muslims themselves, but rather 'ethnicize' the difference in law-school as a difference between *ḥanafī* Indians and *shāfiʿī* Malays.[310] The fact that there are practically no Malay or Arab *ḥanafīs* in Singapore makes adherence to that law-school a peculiarly 'Indian' feature. Being *ḥanafī* plays a role in the construction of an 'Indian' Islam in Singapore. In contrast, Tamil *shāfiʿīs* often are assumed to be highly 'Malayized'.[311] My respondents seemed to assume that the majority of Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore are *ḥanafī*, though there is practically no data to prove this. Indeed, many of the more prominent kin-center communities in Singapore are actually dominated by *shāfiʿīs*, such as Kadayanallur, Tenkasi, Thuckalay, Kilakkarai, Kayalpattinam, Thopputhurai, Karaikal, etc.

One argument which was sometimes given to prove the higher number of *ḥanafī* Tamil Muslims in Singapore was that of six mosques employing Tamil in contemporary Singapore, five are *ḥanafī* mosques. Yet indeed, the case of the

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[308] Fanselow 1989: 265-73.
[309] Bibijan 1976/77: 113-4.
[310] Cf. Mariam 1989: 103-4; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 61-2.
[311] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 61-2.

mosques is a showcase of how structural constraints impact identity discourse regarding Tamil Muslims in Singapore. First, as has been mentioned in chapter 2, seven mosques were founded by Tamil Muslims in the prewar period, of which only one was a *ḥanafī* mosque, viz. the Masjid Abdul Gafoor. Of the six *shāfiʿī* mosques of that period, only two are nowadays still associated with Tamil,[312] showing that Tamil *shāfiʿī* mosques in Singapore were always in the danger of getting Malayized, while *ḥanafī* mosques were not. Second, of the five *ḥanafī* mosques in contemporary Singapore, only the Masjid Abdul Gafoor was founded as a mosque for Tamil *ḥanafīs*. Three of the other *ḥanafī* mosques were founded by or for the benefit of North Indians and Iranians, yet they have become Tamilized over the years. Finally, the Masjid Al-Abrar, though originally *shāfiʿī*, received a *ḥanafī* Imam in the 1980s.[313] The larger number of *ḥanafī* mosques among the Tamil mosques of Singapore is thus not because of a majority of *ḥanafīs* among Tamil Muslims, but because of factors limiting the role of Tamil in the Malay-dominated *shāfiʿī* domain, but strengthening it in the Indian-dominated *ḥanafī* domain. This in turn has intensified the identification of Tamil Muslims with the *ḥanafī* law-school in public discourse.

The *shāfiʿī* – *ḥanafī* distinction also plays a role in stereotyping.[314] One of the most important aspects of this is food; my respondents told me that seafood like crabs, squid, and mussels were prohibited according to *ḥanafī* law,[315] but permitted to *shāfiʿīs*. In the words of one Indian-born *ḥanafī* respondent: "They [the *shāfiʿīs*; T.T.]

[312] These are the Masjid Jamae Chulia and the Masjid Al-Abrar; regarding the subsequent fate of the latter, see below.
[313] This was done to protect the Indian character of the mosque – it would have been difficult to justify bringing a *shāfiʿī* Imam from India, because there are many *shāfiʿī* Imams available in Singapore. Yet these Imams are all Malay, and so it was seen as more prudent to get an Indian *ḥanafī* Imam instead; cf. Mariam 1989: 103-4.
[314] Cf. also Mines 1978: 161.
[315] According to one respondent who is a religious scholar, they are *makrūh taḥrīm*, 'highly reprehensible', in *ḥanafī* law, but not absolutely forbidden.

eat that fish. Fish, especially the prawns. We are not like much [sic]. The coastal people eat some fish. But generally they [the fish; T.T.] are not good for health. The Marakkayars, they eat; the seashore people, they eat some fish. We avoid". At least some *ḥanafīs* see this consumption of seafood by *shāfiʻīs* as a sign of low status (*kēvalam*), as one respondent put it. Yet such stereotyping extends to spheres other than food as well. One *ḥanafī* respondent claimed that the *ḥanafī* law-school was more tolerant. Conversely, a *shāfiʻī* respondent said that he considered the *shāfiʻī* law-school was easier to follow, putting less restraints on acts like ritual prayer in his opinion. Interestingly, awareness of the differences between law-schools seems to be higher among *ḥanafīs*, perhaps reflecting the minority status of *ḥanafī*s in Singapore.

There are a few further religious divisions that have or have had an impact on Tamil Muslim society in Singapore. A highly pervasive division, which we shall return to in chapter 6, is that between the supporters of Sufi practices and anti-Sufi groups. This conflict has been dividing Tamil Muslims since at least the mid-19th century, and it has never been resolved in any way.[316] Given the highly volatile nature of these tensions, they nevertheless seem to have had fairly little impact on community formation within Tamil Muslim society; rather, the fault-line between these theological positions runs right through families and kin-groups.

On the other hand, affiliation to a particular holy man did result in social divisions at least among Kadayanallur and Tenkasi migrants in the early 20th century, as has been mentioned in chapter 2. According to my respondents, *shāfiʻīs* in Kadayanallur were at that time divided into four 'factions' or 'parties' (*kaṭci*), viz. the 'West Party' (*mēlakkaṭci*), the 'East Party' (*kīḻakkaṭci*), the '*Taṅkaḷ* Party'[317] (*taṅkaḷkaṭci*), and the

[316] Cf. More 2004: 119-31.
[317] In Kerala, the term *taṅkaḷ* is used as the equivalent of the Arabic *sayyid*, denoting a descendant of the Prophet. Yet according to my respondents, the term had no such connotations in Kadayanallur. The TL glosses it as 'head-priest of a mosque'; cf. Miller 1992: 42 n. 12.

'Kuṇṭūṭi Party'[318] (*kuṇṭūṭikaṭci*).[319] Each of these parties owed allegiance to a holy man (called *taṅkaḷ* by all the four parties), who resided in Kerala. The four parties were endogamous, and tried to outdo each other whenever possible, yet they do not seem to have been hierarchically ranked. In contrast, each included people from various subgroups, occupations, and classes, who did intermarry with each other within one party. In Singapore, these divisions were finally overcome with the registration of the unified Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League (SKML) in 1941, but in Penang, they apparently persist to this day.[320]

Finally, a remark has to be made about the role played by claiming foreign descent in the structuring of Tamil Muslim society. Claims to connections or even descent from Middle Eastern Muslims are common elements in subgroup stereotyping. Some authors have suggested that such claims to Middle Eastern descent were linked to maintaining status boundaries, yet More has claimed that such notions were absent from Tamil Muslim society.[321] Nevertheless, the evidence collected by anthropologists and British administrators suggests that foreign descent was advanced as status claim at least since the colonial period, when the settlement of Tamil Muslims in Singapore began.[322] It is important not to make the mistake and homogenize Tamil Muslim society to an unacceptable degree. J.B.P. More is correct in asserting that such claims have had only a very limited impact on the creation of status hierarchies or larger communities in the region; it seems that they are mainly used to bolster already existing status, rather than to claim high status from the outset.

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[318] Perhaps derived from the town Kondotti, a Muslim-dominated town in Malappuram District, Kerala; cf. Miller 1992: 258.

[319] In addition to the 'West', 'East' and '*Taṅkaḷ*' parties, Maideen also once mentions a 'Big Party' (*periyakaṭci* [sic]) and a 'Small Party' (*ciṉṉakkaṭci*). The 'Kuṇṭūṭi Party' is absent from his account; Meytīṉ 1989: 17, 20, 24.

[320] Personal communication from Mr. Syed Sultan, president, Persatuan Nurul Islam, on 8th of April 2003.

[321] Bayly 1989: 80-2; Fanselow 1996: 205-10; cf. More 2004: 22-3.

[322] See e.g. Bayly 1989: 82-3; Fanselow 1996: 204-10; Francis 1906: 87; Pate 1917 (vol. 1): 98.

In Singapore, one usually encounters such claims in origin myths, whereas claims to superior status are usually based, as will be discussed below, on distinctions in occupation, gender relations, language, or food. Indeed, in many cases claims to Arab or Turkish descent may be aimed at non-Tamil Muslims who project images of Tamil Muslims as low-status half-Muslims rather than at fellow Tamils.[323]

Linked to these claims of Middle Eastern descent is the position of descendants of the Prophet, known as *sayyids*. Indeed, there are *sayyids* among Tamil Muslims, yet there is little to suggest that *sayyids* in Tamil Nadu have formed separate sections of society.[324] The important 19th century Tamil scholar Sayyid Muḥammad stated unequivocally that, even though the concept of 'equality' (*kafā'a*) in status between the husband and wife should be maintained when possible, a woman from the tribe of the Prophet, i.e. of high status, could nevertheless marry an Abyssinian, i.e. someone of low status, if both she and her guardian agreed to it.[325] As a result, it is often not possible to tell whether a person is a *sayyid* or not. This process has been amplified in Singapore and Malaysia by what seems to be a virtual monopolization of the *sayyid*-title by Arabs. As Nagata notes, Malays and Arabs mocked Indian Muslims claiming Arab descent as "…Indian Muslims 'born on Friday'".[326] Most of my respondents who claimed descent from the Prophet revealed this fact only when the conversation somehow turned to the topic, and seemed not to be overly interested in projecting this status. Being *sayyid* is thus of no consequence for community-formation within Tamil Muslim society in Singapore.

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[323] Such as Urdu-speakers in 19th century North Arcot District, who claimed that the Labbai were descendants of their African slaves; cf. Cox 1895 (vol. 1): 206-7.
[324] Such as e.g. among Ḥaḍramī Arabs; Mobini-Kesheh 1999: 24-8.
[325] Sayyid Muḥammad 1963: 432-3; usually, marriages between *sayyid* women and non-*sayyid* men were rejected on the basis of the *kafā'a*-concept; cf. Mobini-Kesheh 1999: 25, 94.
[326] Nagata 1993: 520.

Malayization

The process of 'Malayization' is probably the most discussed aspect of Tamil Muslim social life in Singapore. Besides a full length article by Bibijan, Noorul Farha devotes a whole chapter to the issue, and most other authors discuss the topic in their treatments of Tamil Muslim society.[327] Bibijan distinguishes between 'structural' and 'behavioral' Malayization; while the former implies the complete takeover of a 'Malay' identity in ideal and practice by an individual, the latter signifies the selective adoption of 'Malay' traits such as language or dress.[328] Both Bibijan and Noorul Farha propose that Malayization forms a continuum, and that individuals are able to actively manipulate the degree to which they emphasize or deemphasize 'Malayness' according to the situation.[329] Yet there are several problems in adopting this model of Malayization-by-degree which have to be addressed in order to avoid a misrepresentation of Tamil Muslim social and religious life in Singapore.

The first problem is that to talk about 'Malayization', one first has to identify notions and practices as either 'Malay' or 'Indian', a process which is difficult to accomplish without a certain amount of essentializing. While it seems common sense to call the adoption of the Malay language by someone formerly speaking Tamil 'Malayization', to identify a dress or a religious practice as 'Indian' or 'Malay' is a far more problematic issue, and reveals a lot about the assumptions the commentator brings to bear on the issue.[330]

If no 'essential' ethnicity is inherent in a practice, it follows that practices are imbued with such identities in specific contexts and by specific actors. Whereas the

[327] Cf. Bibijan 1976/77; Mani 1992: 352-3; Mariam 1989: 109-12; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: chapter 5; the only author who gives the topic a very short shrift is Syed Mohamed 1973: 121.
[328] Bibijan 1976/77: 99.
[329] Bibijan 1976/77: 99; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 69-71.
[330] E.g., garlanding a couple at the wedding, which Bibijan seems to associate with 'Malayization', is common part of Tamil Muslim traditions; cf. Bibijan 1976/77: 112; More 2001: 34.

integration of certain marriage customs by Tamil Muslims is widely interpreted as a sign of 'Malayization', few would argue that the widespread adoption of Indian dishes such as Roti Prata by Malays has led to an 'Indianization' of Malay cuisine or culture. That the former instance is seen as transforming the actors' culture, while the latter is not perceived to have that effect, has nothing to do with any inherent difference between the two, but rather with the meaning observers invest in these practices. In other words, 'Malayization' is more a discourse rather than a social process.

As a result of its discursive nature, 'Malayization' can be a deeply contradictory phenomenon at a closer look. For instance, some sections of Tamil Muslim society perceive the 'Tenkasis', i.e. those Tamil Muslims coming from Tenkasi and Kadayanallur in former Tinnevelly District, to be more Malayized than other Tamil Muslims in terms of dress or even sometimes language.[331] Yet in contrast, it appears that intermarriage with Malays is much rarer among these Tinnevelly migrants, mainly on account of the fact that they usually migrated with their families. Indeed, their engagement in supporting Tamil in the public sphere through schools or literary activities is much more salient than that of any other group among Singaporean Tamil Muslims. The claim that 'Tenkasis' are more Malayized than other Tamil Muslims seems to be made primarily by certain sections among the *ḥanafī* businessmen, who seem to intermarry less commonly with Malays than their *shāfiʿī* counterparts. Statements about Malayization should thus not be seen as reflecting social processes on the ground, but rather as a means to express difference and imbue it with meaning.

Closely connected to these expressions of difference is the fact that statements about the relative 'Malayization' of a person are usually value judgments. For example, the wearing of a sari is generally interpreted as a sign of a very low degree

[331] Cf. e.g. Mariam 1989: 108; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 44; some of my respondents stated the same thing.

of Malayization. Those who value their Indian heritage often claim that the sari is "…the proper attire for women", as one respondent put it. On the other hand, Malays and people who are supposedly strongly Malayized often consider the wearing of the sari to be improper.[332]

Despite the attention that the topic has received, one should be cautious about its importance for our purposes. One interesting aspect is the fact that 'Malayization' does not seem to have been an important issue for Tamil Muslims in the colonial period. I have not come across any indication of the matter in the admittedly sketchy records of the period. Even Daud Shah, as an 'Indian' observer of 'Malayan' Tamil Muslims, does not make any comments on 'Malayization'. Daud Shah's report includes harsh criticisms both of Tamil Muslim traders in Malaya as well as the 'unrefined' and 'shameful' customs (*anākarikam*, *avamāṉam*) of the Malays,[333] yet he only mentions in passing Indians who have adopted the Malay language because they have been living in Malaya for ages.[334] His concern is not 'Malayization', but the imitation of European culture by the majority of Indians in Malaya.[335] This does of course not mean that in this period, there were no Indian Muslims adopting the Malay language or other practices now identified as 'Malay', but rather that there was as yet very little of the 'Malayization' discourse. Ethnic boundaries seem to have been more permeable in those days. An Indian Muslim could live with his Malay wife and her relatives in a completely Malay setting, and have his children raised as Malays, whereas back in India, he would reintegrate into a Tamil environment.[336]

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[332] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 63-4.
[333] Tāvutṣā 1925: 341-6.
[334] Tāvutṣā 1925: 346.
[335] Tāvutṣā 1925: 344-5.
[336] That ethnic boundaries were less fixed and people may have been more free to identify as either Indian or Malay may be borne out by the fact that generally very few 'Jawi Pekans' (i.e. people of mixed Indian/Malay parentage) turn up in the census reports for Singapore (never more than 700), suggesting that people of mixed parentage often simply passed as Malay.

Yet there is also evidence that the issue of 'Malayization' may be less central in contemporary terms as well. Many of Noorul Farha's respondents, for instance, seem to have been speakers of Malay themselves.[337] On the contrary, my respondents did rarely touch on the issue of Malayization, and then it was commonly those who spoke Malay rather than Tamil as their household language. The possibility that the research topic accounts for these differences should not be neglected – after all, Noorul Farha dealt with identity, whereas I was more interested in religious practice. As a phenomenon creating difference in Singaporean Tamil Muslim Society, Malayization can be neglected. Malayization does not lead to the formation of distinct 'communities' within Tamil Muslim society, but only outside it – to identify as a distinct 'Malayized' group of Indian Muslims usually means to break with any identification as Tamil Muslims. Individuals considered to be highly 'Malayized' can of course opt to remain part of, e.g., a kin-center community, and claims to greater or lesser 'Malayization' may be employed in the stereotyping of communities. But in these cases, the 'Malayization' discourse serves to bolster claims to difference rather than cause that difference in the first place.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND THE QUESTION OF CASTE

The foregoing discussion should have made it clear that despite the existence of unifying elements and a common discourse on 'Indian Muslim' identity, differences between various groups of Tamil-speaking and indeed other Indian Muslims are not only recognized, but indeed have an impact on the organization of social and religious life and on the imagination of community. Furthermore, such differences often reify

[337] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 58-63.

and are reified by notions of hierarchy and social stratification. To put it differently, differences in occupation or domestic behavior are employed to argue the supposed superiority or inferiority of a group, and the resulting ranking serves to underscore the differences existing between groups.

Despite attempts to do so by some authors and their respondents,[338] it is practically impossible to draw up a representative list of ranked groups. The reasons for this are manifold. First of all, different respondents name different groups. For example, one of Noorul Farha's respondents mentioned 'Marican' and 'Sahib' as status-groups, while both these groups were missing in the response of Mariam's informants.[339] Secondly, even if there is agreement on the inclusion of a group, the status ascribed to that group can vary tremendously. Thus, Mariam's respondents named the 'Rowther' as one of the two top 'Indian Muslim' 'castes', while Noorul Farha's respondents claimed that this group were laborers of lower descent.[340] Practically the only thing that respondents seem to agree upon is to assign a low status to 'Tenkasis'. Indeed, the very characteristics that are seen as evidence of low status by one person may indicate high status for another. For one of Mariam's respondents, a *ḥanafī* 'Pathan',[341] speaking or at least knowing Urdu was a sign of high status,[342] whereas one of my respondents from coastal Tamil Nadu actually sneered at Urdu-speaking South Indians.

As will be obvious from the foregoing, there is also great variation in the way hierarchy is being argued, yet a few important constants emerge. One prominent basis for claiming superior status is confirming to religious standards. Thus, one respondent

[338] E.g. Mariam 1989: 105-9; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 43-6.
[339] Cf. Mariam 1989: 109; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 45.
[340] Mariam 1989: 109; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 45.
[341] A term used in parts of Tamil Nadu to denote Urdu-speakers of supposedly Afghan descent; cf. Fanselow 1989: 281-3.
[342] Mariam 1989: 108-9.

told me that among the reasons why 'Tenkasis' were considered to be of lower status was that their women worked in public as spice-sellers and that they ate 'prohibited' seafood. Interestingly, as we have seen, the consumption of certain seafood is seen as absolutely proper by members of the *shāfi'ī* law-school, to which most Muslims from Tenkasi and Kadayanallur belong. Implicit in marking this feature as low status is a claim to the superiority of the *ḥanafī* law-school. The question of women's 'modesty' also underlies many constructions of hierarchy. Women's dress and their visibility in public were mentioned fairly frequently by my respondents as factors influencing the ascription of high or low status.[343] This factor may also partly explain why Malays and 'Malayized' Indians are ascribed a low status by some Tamil Muslims. Already Daud Shah harshly criticized the 'loose' behavior of Malay women.[344] One respondent told that Tamil Muslim women used to walk about fully veiled when he was younger, while Malay women did not even cover their hair. "Now both wear a headscarf, but no veil – we have met in the middle". At least some sections among the Tamil Muslims seem to have the opinion that Malay and 'Malayized' Indian women are too visible in public. These concerns about religious propriety as a marker of status reminds one of what Fanselow has termed 'competitive Islamization' with reference to an article by Mines.[345] Both authors see 'Islamization' among Tamil Muslims as a result of status competition, with more highly 'Islamized' individuals occupying higher ranks. Yet they fail to take into account that the standards of what is considered 'proper' Islamic behavior may vary amongst groups, e.g. perceiving seafood as either proper or improper. Status gained through 'Islamizing' is thus always in danger of being destabilized by varying interpretations of Islam.

[343] Cf. Mariam 1989: 106-8.
[344] Tāvutṣā 1925: 343.
[345] Fanselow 1996: 217; cf. Mines 1975: 414.

Besides religious propriety, various other factors play a role in determining status. Occupation plays an important role. It is this notion that obviously underlies the attempts to portray Tamil Muslims as a mercantile community as a whole, and which at times engenders emphatic denials of the presence of menial laborers among the earliest migrants.[346] Yet another, more diffuse category is 'cultural refinement'.[347] This category partly informs notions about the propriety of certain dress-habits and foods, as well as ideas about language. As mentioned, some Tamil Muslims (predominantly *ḥanafīs*) consider Urdu a more refined (and more 'Islamic') language than Tamil. Among Tamil-speakers, dialectal variation and the influence of the 'Singapore linguistic area' (i.e., the presence of particles like *lah* in an individual's spoken Tamil) similarly serve as indicators of refinement and status. One respondent noted that people from her kin-center considered the spoken Tamil of 'Tenkasis' to be deviating from their own, 'pure' Tamil.[348]

In what way do these status hierarchies impact social life among Tamil Muslims in Singapore? Their influence is most visible in the sphere of marriage. This emerged clearly both from the statements of my own respondents as well as the information presented in the works of other authors.[349] Status-groups are often claimed to be endogamous, yet marriages between members of different groups of roughly the same status occur.[350] More importantly, the statements of various respondents indicate that it is not so much endogamy, but hypergamy[351] that characterizes marriage arrangements among Tamil Muslims.[352] This is not unimportant in the discussion

[346] Cf. also Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 45.
[347] Cf. Mariam 1989: 108; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 44.
[348] Cf. also Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 44.
[349] Cf. Mariam 1989: 106-7; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 43-5.
[350] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 45.
[351] I.e. the prohibition for a woman to marry below her status, whereas men may opt for a wife of lower status.
[352] Cf. Mariam 1989: 107; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 66.

about the existence of caste among Singaporean Tamil Muslims that we will consider shortly. Status considerations also impact the social networks of individuals. Most importantly for our purposes, it may restrain a person's choice of participating in certain religious activities, if these happen to be organized by a lower status-group. Thus, one respondent told me how her father had tried to stop her brother from participating in an important Singaporean Muslim organization because most of its members were Malays and low status Indians.

This brings us to the one question that has vexed discussions of Tamil Muslims in India and Singapore, viz. whether social stratification among Tamil Muslims can be said to constitute caste. Regarding India, I am not aware of any scholar explicitly arguing for the existence of caste among Tamil Muslims. At the same time, only Mines and Fanselow actually employed methodologies to test their assumptions regarding this issue.[353] Indeed, Fanselow's argument is highly important for our purposes, because it has a direct bearing on the Singaporean case. He argues that to ask whether Muslims have caste simply means to ask the wrong question. From the anthropologist's point of view, the outcome of the answer is determined by the definition of caste employed. Yet because the concept of caste "…was developed into a 'gate-keeping' concept of Hindu civilisation…",[354] to state that Muslims have caste is often perceived by Muslims themselves as a claim that 'Muslims are Hindus', which is either seen as paradoxical or as offensive.[355] Indeed, the accusation of trying to maintain caste in an Islamic society was leveled by low status communities against those Tamil Muslims who claimed higher status.[356]

[353] Fanselow 1996; Mines 1972a: 27-8.
[354] Fanselow 1996: 224.
[355] This explains the harsh reactions of scholars like More and Syed Mohamed against suggestions of Tamil Muslim castes or even stratification; cf. More 2004: 22-3; Syed Mohamed 1973: 27-8.
[356] Cf. Fanselow 1996: 216-25.

What does that mean in the Singapore context? The notion that there are castes among Indian Muslims is in fact not only asserted by some studies, but actually enjoys a certain circulation in the general population. A Malay taxi-driver once told me that about all he knew about the Indian Muslims was that they have castes. It is interesting to note that among the scholars mentioning the issue, the Indian authors seem to deny the existence of Indian Muslim castes at least for the contemporary period,[357] while the Malay authors seem to affirm the relevance of at least caste-like stratification, though noting its decline among youngsters.[358]

This raises questions about how the term caste is defined by both scholars and respondents. Though this is an important question, for as we have seen the evaluation of the existence of caste changes with the definition employed, it is nowhere addressed in the literature. Yet it becomes immediately clear that both respondents as well as scholars see caste as a fundamentally 'Indian' or 'Hindu' phenomenon. Social stratification among Tamil Muslims is generally seen as the 'vestiges' or 'residue' of a social system brought over into Islam on conversion from Hinduism.[359] The basis of this argument seems to be the oft repeated claim that Islam is an egalitarian religion and thus knows no caste.[360] Consequently, the origins of Indian Muslim social stratification are located by respondents and scholars alike in the 'Indian' part of their heritage, and are thus identified with the caste system. This in turn leads to a reaffirmation of the difference of Indian Muslims from their non-Indian coreligionists in Singapore.

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[357] Cf. Bibijan 1976/77: 122; Syed Mohamed 1973: 27-8; Mani does not even seem to mention castes.
[358] E.g. Mariam 1989: 106-9; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 43-6.
[359] Cf. Bibijan 1976/77: 122; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 43-6.
[360] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 46; Syed Mohamed 1973:27-8; Fanselow has rightly criticized this image (present also e.g. in More 2004: 4) as "…not only a simplistic view of Muslim societies and their history, but also a reductionist, essentialist and ahistorical theoretical approach"; Fanselow 1996: 223-4.

Consequently, social stratification among Indian Muslims is never compared to that of Arabs or Malays. Yet many of the features of that stratification, especially the tendency towards hypergamy rather than endogamy, actually seem to indicate an impact of the Muslim legal concept of *kafā'a* on ranking among Indian Muslims.[361] It is noteworthy that one of just two references to caste in connection with Indian Muslims in the colonial Law Reports relates to *kafā'a*: An Arab girl intended to marry an Indian Muslim against the wishes of her uncle and guardian. The judge noted that the Indian husband would be inferior to the Arab wife "…in point of caste, she being the daughter of an Arab father,…".[362] What is surprising is that the term caste here applies to both Arabs and Indians, a usage that is difficult to imagine in contemporary Singapore. The answer to the question about the presence of caste among Tamil and other Indian Muslims in Singapore thus has to be rephrased. What is important is not to ask whether there is caste or not, but to notice the impact that racial and religious stereotyping has on the discourse concerning Tamil Muslim society in Singapore, a feature that we will encounter again in chapter 6.

[361] It is striking that any discussion of *kafā'a* seems to be absent in the historical and anthropological literature on Tamil Muslims. J.B.P. More appears to be vaguely aware of it, but denies that it existed among Tamil Muslims, thereby completely ignoring the evidence from Tamil Muslim religious literature such as Sayyid Muḥammad's statement mentioned above; cf. More 2004: 22.

[362] Kyshe 1885: 422; the other mention of caste in the Law Reports is from the English translation of a French translation (!) of a Tamil will executed in Karaikal, in which the testator calls himself "…Chulia by caste…"; S.S.L.R. 1940: 75. 'Choulia' was the census category for Tamil-speaking Muslims in French India; cf. Bédier & Cordier 1988: 149-50.

Chapter 4

THE ORGANIZATION OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

INTRODUCTION

The religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore does not exist in an institutional vacuum. Rather, there is a plethora of institutions, associations and fraternities which structure, organize, perform, and contest religious activities. To understand the debates and tensions about religion and religious activities among Tamil Muslims in the republic, the institutional framework has to be delineated and the key players in it have to be identified. The various agencies and associations in this framework are interlinked by a complex network of formal and informal connections between their members, and have to interact and cooperate with or contest each other at various levels. It is at the interstices between the various groups that the outlines of a distinctive religious life of Singapore Tamil Muslims are formulated and debated.

One of the central actors in this organizing framework is the Singaporean state. The state actually defines the rules and boundaries of 'proper' interaction between different religious groups by framing public policies with regard to religion. But the state does not only provide the legal framework for organizing religious activities, it is itself an active player in the arena of Islamic religious life in Singapore through the

Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), or Islamic Religious Council of Singapore. As the single most important institution with regard to Muslim public life in the republic, practically all associations and fraternities organizing religious activities have to engage and interact with MUIS.

Besides MUIS, there are a number of institutions closely linked to MUIS and other state agencies. Mosques play a central role in providing services and activities to Tamil Muslims, especially a number of so-called 'Indian' mosques, where activities are usually conducted in South Asian languages. Another important body in the administration of Muslims and Islam in Singapore is the self-help organization MENDAKI (Majlis Pendidikan Anak-Anak Islam, or Council on Education for Muslim Children). Though primarily concerned with secular education, MENDAKI has had an important, though largely negative, impact on the formation of the Federation of Indian Muslims (FIM) in 1992.

Yet existing beside these state- and state-sponsored bodies and organizations is a large number of more independent associations which have an impact on Islamic religious life and activities in Singapore. Most of these organizations, with a few exceptions, are dominated by Muslims of Malay and Arab descent. In contrast to these, and of prime importance for Tamil Muslim religious life in Singapore, are various Indian Muslim associations, reflecting different ethnic, social and religious backgrounds. Of particular importance among these are several associations based in and catering to different kin-center communities. Finally, there exist more informal fraternities and religious groups which organize religious activities for their members and adherents. Most prominent among these are Sufi brotherhoods, which form an important part of religious life for many Tamil Muslims.

These different groups and institutions interact with each other in various ways. MUIS is in close contact with the FIM, and both the Indian mosques as well as the larger associations receive funding from this source. Members of the different associations visit each other's functions, and mosques often serve as venues for activities organized by Indian Muslim associations. Individual members may actually be active in different organizations, and complicated networks of friendship and kinship interlink institutions, associations and informal brotherhoods.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF ISLAM IN SINGAPORE – HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Administration of Islam in Singapore before World War II

The system of administrating Islam and Muslim practice current in Singapore has not come into being overnight. Rather, it grew out of practices and policies of the British colonial period, and to a much lesser degree of the short period between 1963 and 1965 when Singapore was part of Malaysia. Several issues of contention between the Tamil Muslims and the Singaporean administration actually result from decisions taken during the colonial period. A survey of British administrative policies with regard to Islam in Singapore is therefore necessary to understand some of the contemporary disputes.[363]

Muslims were a minority in most of the Straits Settlements with the exception of Province Wellesley during most of the colonial period, and in contrast to the Malay states, there was no established system of administration and legislation relating to Muslims in either Penang, Malacca or Singapore. This situation exercised an important influence on the way the development of British policy towards Muslims

[363] Cf. Siddique 1986: 316-7.

and Islamic institutions did develop. Firstly, due to the large number of Chinese in the Straits Settlements, there was greater urgency to adjust policies towards Chinese social practice than to create a coherent administrative and legal policy towards Muslim practice.[364]

Secondly, the British policy tended to be aimed at 'races' or 'nations' rather than religions almost from the founding of the Straits Settlements. Muslims were thus separated into Malays, 'Klings', and other ethnic groups.[365] Administrative measures tended to be taken with regard to race rather than religion, even though, as the director of the 1931 census noted, most of the Asian population of Singapore had "…no clear conception of race, and commonly regard[s] religion as the most important, if not the determinant, element".[366]

Finally, due to the absence of a local Muslim political order in the Straits Settlements, the British felt no compulsion to institute a separate law for Muslims as they did in India. Even though the Straits Settlements had been subject to the Governor-General of India until 1867, the Anglo-Muhammadan law as practiced in India was not considered to be generally applicable there. Though judges were prepared to make exceptions in cases where English law clashed with local realities and would cause undue hardship, "…the propriety of general application [of English law; T.T.] was never in question".[367] This led to a rather confusing situation in which matters relating to marriage, divorce and intestacy were often settled according to Muslim practice, but all other cases according to English law, a practice that came to be criticized harshly in the later 19th century.[368] The legislature did subsequently pass

[364] Cf. Yegar 1979: 95.
[365] Cf. Nagata 1993:518-22; Yegar 1979: 146; for the construction of Malays as a 'race' see Reid 2004: 10-8.
[366] Vlieland 1932: 73.
[367] Hooker 1984: 87; cf. Yegar 1979: 128-30.
[368] See e.g. the remarks made in 1879 by Justice Wood of Penang quoted in Yegar 1979: 129.

bills and ordinances that regulated the application of Muslim law in an English framework, but the application of Muslim law in the Straits Settlements extended to less spheres than in India or the Malay states.

It is not necessary to go into the details of British administration and legislation with regard to Islam and Muslims in the Straits Settlements here. It will suffice to outline the most important developments in the administrative sphere. The first major legislation with regard to the administration of Islamic practices in the Colony was the *Mahomedan Marriage Ordinance* of 1880, which regulated the registration of marriages and divorces and the effect of marriage on women's property.[369] In 1908, this ordinance was replaced by the *Muhammadan Marriage Ordinance*, which made the registration of marriage and divorce compulsory, and extended the authority of Muslim judges. It furthermore provided for the appointment of a 'Registrar of Muhammadan Marriages' in each of the three major towns of the Straits Settlements.[370] In 1936 a chief judge was appointed, but Muslim requests for the appointment of a *muftī*, i.e. an official charged with giving *fatwās*, 'legal opinions', were not conceded until the independence of Singapore.

But legislation did not remain limited to matrimonial matters. The *Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Ordinance* of 1905 made possible the setup of the Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Board a year later. The Board's main powers consisted in taking over the administration of an endowment when it either seemed to be mismanaged, there were no trustees appointed for the endowment, or the Board felt that the endowment would benefit from being administered by the Board. Furthermore, it could enquire into the management of any endowment, and request written accounts. Though the Board was concerned with Muslim and Hindu religious

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[369] Ahmad 1965: 17-8; Hooker 1984: 95-6; Yegar 1979: 149-50.
[370] Ahmad 1965: 18-9.

endowments, no Muslims or Hindus were appointed to it until 1948. The *Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Ordinance* survived virtually unchanged[371] until the independence of Singapore and the passing of the AMLA in 1966.[372]

It has already been mentioned in chapter 2 that Tamil Muslim notions often collided with British understandings of endowments. Even before the establishment of the Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Board, this became apparent with regard to the practice of creating trusts for *kantūris*, and it is even more obvious when we consider the endowments that were taken over by the Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Board in the course of time. The Jamae Mosque Endowment, for instance, was lost to the Board due to the circulatory regime of its trustees – trustees left to India without informing the administration, which led to the discontinuing of accounts and general mismanagement. The endowments and the proper use of the funds generated by them are still points of contention between Tamil Muslims and MUIS, as will be discussed in chapter 6.[373]

A further important development was the establishment of the Muhammadan Advisory Board in Singapore on 10th of June 1915. The immediate reason for this move was the so-called 'Singapore Mutiny' of the 5th Indian Light Infantry regiment in February 1915, which consisted exclusively of North Indian Muslims.[374] The main purpose of the board was to advise the government on matters pertaining to Muslims, but it had no power beyond the issuing of recommendations. Furthermore, it met with opposition from some quarters of the Muslim community. The advisory function of

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[371] Except for the replacement of 'Mahomedan' with 'Muslim' and the extension of the Board's responsibilities to the Parsi religion; cf. Ahmad 1965: 41-2.

[372] Ahmad 1965: 41-2; Hooker 1984: 101; Siddique 1986: 323; Yegar 1979: 205-7.

[373] Ahmad 1965: 44.

[374] Cf. Harper & Miller 1984; Tarling 1982 for accounts of the mutiny.

the board makes it to some degree the forerunner of MUIS, though it was never to achieve the dominance in Muslim affairs that MUIS yields nowadays.[375]

This survey of British policies with regard to Islam and Muslims in the Straits Settlements reveals that there was no coherent policy taken towards Islam and Muslims in the prewar period. While marriage and endowments were regulated, other aspects, such as the alms tax (*zakāt*) or religious education, were not. Yet even though many of the administrative measures taken during the British period were piecemeal, they have had a significant impact on further policies regarding Muslim affairs in Singapore.

The Administration of Islam in Postwar Singapore

Despite the far-reaching changes in the administrative setup of Singapore after Japanese occupation, developing from crown colony to part of Malaysia to independent nation, "Singapore's constitutional history has had no effect on the Muslim law administered in the State".[376] When the British regained possession of Singapore, they reinstated those bodies which had already administered Muslim affairs in pre-war Singapore. The Muhammadan Advisory Board, then renamed Muslim Advisory Board, and the Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Board, similarly renamed Muslim and Hindu Endowments Board in 1952, were reconstituted. In 1948, two members of the Muslim and Hindu communities, respectively, were finally admitted to the Board. By 1965, the Board consisted of three Muslims, three Hindus, a Parsi, and the Public Trustee, who acted as secretary.[377] The only major piece of legislation in this period was the *Muslims Ordinance* of 1957. This *Ordinance* regulated the setting up of a Shariah Court, centralized the appointment of

[375] Siddique 1986: 323; Yegar 1979: 99-100, 104-5.
[376] Hooker 1984: 102.
[377] Ahmad 1965: 41-2.

Muslim Registrars and Judges, and regulated the registration of marriages and divorces. The Court's languages were to be English or Malay, thus excluding Arabic and South Asian languages from its dealings.[378]

As M.B. Hooker has stated, "[t]he main achievement of the *Ordinance* was to transfer Muslim family law matters from a secular European judiciary to a Muslim Court staffed by persons whose qualifications were religious rather than purely legal in the technical sense".[379] With the setting up of the Shariah Court, most of the different ingredients that would be combined in the *Administration of Muslim Law Act* (AMLA) in 1966 were in place, even though few could have foreseen in the 1960s what impact this Act would have on Muslim practice in Singapore. Indeed, the passing of the AMLA in 1966 was in many ways the logical outcome of an administrative system long in the making. The AMLA combined the Muslim Advisory Board, the Muslim section of the Muslim and Hindu Endowments Board, and the provisions of the *Muslims Ordinance*, and added several new elements like the office of the Mufti to create a comprehensive body for the administration of Islam and Muslims in independent Singapore.

Though the AMLA was the result of a provision which Singapore agreed to on joining Malaysia, the Singaporean government nevertheless thought it wise to implement the Act after the immediate cause for its implementation disappeared with Singapore's secession from Malaysia in 1965.[380] The fact that Singapore's neighbors Malaysia and Indonesia are both predominantly Muslim countries, whose national languages are variants of the Malay language, certainly influenced the government's

[378] For details of the Muslims Ordinance, see Hooker 1984: 102-9.
[379] Hooker 1984: 109.
[380] Siddique 1986: 315-6.

decision to clearly define the domain of Muslim law and to establish a single body for the administration of Singapore's largely Malay-speaking Muslim community.[381]

The main provision of the AMLA was the constitution of the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), or Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, to advise the President of Singapore on matters pertaining to Islam as well as to fulfill the administrative functions described in the act. The Council consists of a President,[382] the Mufti of Singapore, up to five members who are appointed on the recommendation of the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, and at least seven members who are appointed from a list of nominees nominated by Muslim societies in Singapore. Members must be Muslims above the age of 25 who are Singaporean citizens.

A large part of the AMLA is dedicated to provisions regarding Muslim marriage, divorce and property, detailing the powers of the Shariah Court and providing for the appointment of a Registrar of Muslim Marriages,[383] and detailing the responsibilities of Muslim judges. New is the introduction of the office of Mufti, who is appointed by the President of Singapore after consultation with the Council, and the setup of a Legal Committee which is charged with the task of issuing *fatwās*. Another new aspect is the compulsory registration of conversions to Islam.

The AMLA also makes MUIS heir to the Muslim and Hindu Endowments Board by vesting in it all property held under Muslim charitable trusts and by appointing MUIS to administer such trusts under much the same provisions as those enacted by the *Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Ordinance*. Much the same rules apply for mosques, which are all to be administered by MUIS. No new mosque may be erected in Singapore without written permission by MUIS. Control of religious schools and their curricula by MUIS is another important activity provided for in the AMLA, and

[381] Cf. Metzger 2003: 34.
[382] The current MUIS President is Mohammad Alami Musa, who took over the office in 2003.
[383] Zuraidah 1994: 76-7.

the Council has the right to close down any schools that do not operate in a satisfactory manner. Furthermore, the AMLA provides for the establishment of a General Endowments Fund administered by MUIS. In contrast to the situation in the colonial period, it also makes MUIS the sole collector of *zakāt* in Singapore, and charges it to dispose of this capital in accordance with Muslim law.[384] MUIS has since developed into the main administrative body dealing with Islam in Singapore.

NON-ETHNIC MUSLIM INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

The Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS)

When MUIS was set up in 1968 "…few foresaw the hegemonic role which MUIS would play in the development of the Muslim community in Singapore…".[385] Since its inception, MUIS has steadily established control over most aspects of Muslim public life in Singapore, including domains that had not been part of the original AMLA. The transformation of MUIS from an understaffed statutory board to the dominant Islamic institution in Singapore is best exemplified by the development of the Mosque Building Fund (MBF) and the administration of mosques.[386] Until the early 1970s, most mosques were small structures that were managed by the local Muslim communities they served.[387] Yet the development of new housing estates by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) since the early 1960s dispersed traditional communities and created the need for new mosques.[388] After some unsuccessful attempts to raise money from the local communities, the AMLA was

[384] Detailed descriptions of the AMLA and its provisions can be found in Hooker 1984: 110-8 and Siraj 1967.
[385] Siddique 1986: 326.
[386] General overviews of this topic are Che Man 1991: 12-4; Metzger 2003: 40-3; Siddique 1986: 327-8; Tyabji 1991a: 207-17; Zuraidah 1994: 59-64.
[387] Cf. Siddique 1986: 327.
[388] An overview over these developments can be found in Waller 2001: 47-53.

amended in 1975 to establish the MBF. Under this scheme, Muslim employees could pay 50 cents per month of their contributions to the Central Provident Fund (CPF) into the MBF, which was later raised to S$1, even though many Muslims voluntarily contribute more to the fund.[389]

The first 'new-generation' mosque was inaugurated in April 1977. By the end of 2004, 21 mosques have been constructed with money from the MBF. A MUIS publication proudly proclaimed the MBF to be the "jewel in MUIS' crown".[390] While many Singaporean publications stress the success of the 'self-help' policy represented by the MBF, it should not be overlooked that this success has been predicated on the strong support of the government for the scheme, for example by supplying land for the mosques at nominal prices.[391]

MUIS furthermore was able to establish control over the remaining 'old-generation' mosques. MUIS has continuously assisted in renovating, upgrading, or in some cases even reconstructing existing mosques. Several funds are maintained by MUIS to assist in the maintenance of both 'old-' and 'new-generation' mosques, though donations play an important role in the renovation and maintenance of mosques in Singapore, especially in the case of 'new-generation' mosques which have no *waqf* properties set aside for their maintenance.[392] Yet nevertheless, MUIS's funding and control over the endowments attached to some of the older mosques serve to reinforce the control MUIS exerts over the mosques.

Each mosque is managed by a Board of Management. The members of these boards, as well as the Imam, are appointed by MUIS and can be removed from their office if MUIS perceives their performance as unsatisfactory. This allows MUIS to

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[389] Zuraidah 1994: 62; the CPF is a compulsory retirement scheme formed by monthly deductions from an individual's income.
[390] Zuraidah 1994: 59.
[391] Tyabji 1991a: 207; Zuraidah 1994: 62.
[392] Metzger 2003: 42; Tyabji 1991a: 207-15.

remove anybody from his or her post who does not comply with official policies. Given its potential for shaping public opinion, MUIS also exerts strong control over the Friday sermon (*khuṭba*). MUIS determines the topic for each week's sermon and provides a basic text, and while the preachers may write their own sermons in accordance with MUIS's guidelines and add to and embellish the MUIS text, in many mosques this text is simply read out.[393]

Despite the strong amount of control exercised over the mosques by MUIS, the mosques are given greater freedom in organizing a host of activities and events. Individual mosques may furthermore establish links with one or the other independent association. In this regard, mosques are independent actors in the organization and administration of Islam in Singapore, as we shall discuss below. Nevertheless, MUIS maintains the sovereignty over mosques and their activities, and is able to interfere with their affairs at any time.

The management of endowments presents a slightly different picture. In 2001, MUIS managed just 53 of 90 Muslim endowments registered.[394] Yet until the early 1990s, not much development had taken place. In 1985, MUIS managed just eight endowments under the 'Wakaf Fund'.[395] It was not until the late 1980s that plans to improve the existing *waqf* properties became more tangible, and the first endowment was redeveloped in 1991. Redevelopment had actually been hindered by existing legislation, especially the Control of Rent Act which tied down the rental rates of *waqf* properties. The repealing of this act in 2001 and the amendment of the AMLA in 1999 have allowed MUIS to extensively develop its properties and to raise their value

[393] Che Man 1991: 13-4; Metzger 2003: 43-4.
[394] "Did You Know… What Is a Wakaf?", *Warita Kita* 132, Mar-Apr 2001: 2. The most important organization managing Islamic endowments in Singapore besides MUIS is the Muslimin Trust Fund Association (MTFA), cf. Ahmad 1965: 47-9; Tyabji 1991a: 224-5.
[395] Cf. MUIS Annual Report 1985: 46-51.

significantly.[396] The Kassim Fund, for example, was developed at an expenditure of S$25 million.[397] Whereas this fund generated a surplus of just S$106,804 in 1996, before the redevelopment began, in 2003 it generated a surplus of S$608,695.[398]

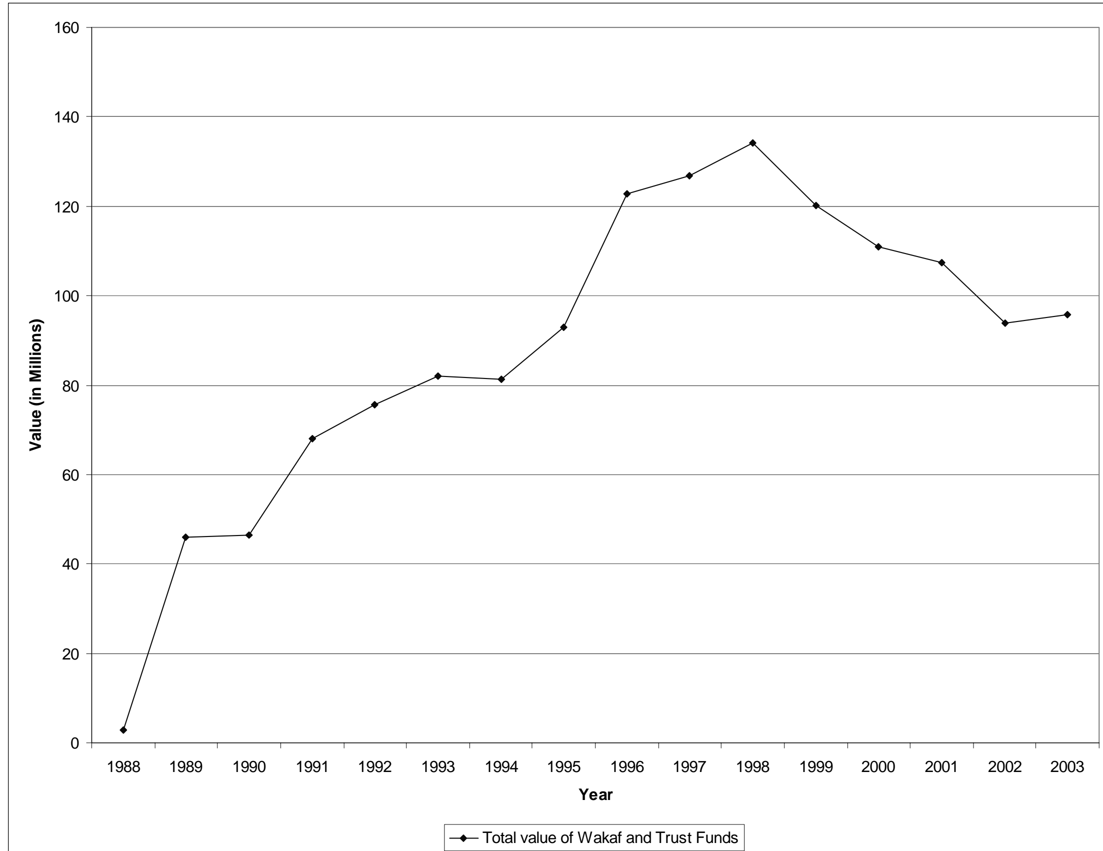

Figure 10: Total value of MUIS Wakaf and Trust Funds 1988-2003 (Source: MUIS Annual Reports 1988-2003)

MUIS's success in managing charitable endowments can be glimpsed from the development of the total value of the Wakaf and Trust Funds. From 1988, when several funds which were then kept separate as Miscellaneous Funds were added to the Wakaf Funds, until 1998, the value of the funds kept on rising. From 1999, it fell again due to the redevelopment of several endowments, for which money from the funds was spent [**Figure 10**]. The value can be expected to rise again with the completion of the redevelopment projects. Yet it should also not be forgotten that this

[396] Metzger 2003: 60-1; Tyabji 1991a: 206; "Wakaf Awakening", *Warita Kita* 132, Mar-Apr 2001: 3.
[397] "Did You Know… What Is a Wakaf?", *Warita Kita* 132, Mar-Apr 2001: 2; Zuraidah 1994: 72.
[398] MUIS Annual Report 1997: 68; MUIS Annual Report 2003: 131.

success was only possible after legal reforms. That even MUIS with its governmental backing was not able to develop properties before these legal reforms were effected should make us more cautious when assessing reports of the earlier 'mismanagement' of endowments.

As has already been pointed out, there was no centralized effort on part of the state to collect *zakāt* in the pre-independence period, and MUIS thus had to develop mechanisms for its collection from scratch. These mechanisms were established during the late 1960s-early 1970s, by drawing upon the expertise of similar institutions in Malaysia and other parts of the world.[399] While payment of the *zakāt al-fiṭra*[400] has been made statutory, payment of the ordinary *zakāt* is not, and MUIS is apparently not satisfied with the numbers of Muslims paying *zakāt* to it. It should be pointed out that failing to pay *zakāt* to MUIS does not mean that a person does not pay *zakāt* at all. Individual Muslims, including Indians, still seem to prefer paying the tax to a recipient of their choice.[401]

The control over full- or part-time religious schools and *madrasas* was already part of the original AMLA in 1966, but amendments made in 1990 apparently gave MUIS more powers over the structure and organization of these institutions which are officially regulated by the Ministry of Education.[402] Efforts have been made to regulate the management of the *madrasas*, to standardize curricula, and to raise the quality of teachers. Most of this effort is directed towards the six full-time *madrasas* which exist in Singapore.[403] Much attention has been paid to ensure that *madrasa*

[399] Cf. Zuraidah 1994: 57.
[400] An obligatory gift made annually on the occasion of the 'Īd al-Fiṭr at the end of the fasting-month of Ramadan, usually called simply *fitrah* in Malay.
[401] Metzger 2003: 61-2; Tyabji 1991a: 200-3; cf. also Mak 2000: 37-8.
[402] Zuraidah 1994: 72.
[403] Metzger 2003: 130-4; Tyabji 1991a: 218-20; Zuraidah 1994: 72-4.

education remains compatible with non-religious education, and that students can switch to state-based schools if they wish so.[404]

MUIS is furthermore active in several other spheres, such as missionary activities, coordination of the pilgrimage, and *ḥalāl* certification.[405] In addition to its domestic activities, MUIS has also linked up with various international bodies, especially the Meeting of Ministers of Religious Affairs of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (MABIMS). MABIMS is a forum which allows these four Southeast Asian states to coordinate their religious policies with regard to Islam, such as determining the date for Islamic festivals or finding common lines in the administration of Muslim law.[406] Yet it is precisely MUIS's involvement with MABIMS that should alert us again to a fundamental aspect of MUIS's existence, viz. that it is a state agency, administering Islam and Muslims on behalf of a non-Muslim state. It is important to keep this aspect in mind when analyzing the activities of MUIS. To say that Islam is the most heavily and most directly administered religion in Singapore is no exaggeration. Recently, Singapore's Mufti has pointed out that no religion in Singapore has such a supreme official body except for Islam.[407] MUIS's policies have certainly done a lot to improve the standards of Muslim institutions in Singapore, but it has also allowed the state to keep a close check on all kinds of activities of which it disapproves.

One important element in this control over the Muslim public sphere has interestingly received much less attention in standard accounts of the administration of Islam in Singapore than mosque building or the development of endowments, viz. MUIS's power to take measures against 'false doctrines' and 'deviant teachings'.

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[404] Metzger 2003: 137-46; Zuraidah 1994: 74

[405] Metzger 2003: 54-64; Tyabji 1991a: 225; Zuraidah 1994: 66-75.

[406] Zuraidah 1994: 75-6.

[407] Syed Isa 2003: 1-2.

MUIS has acted in concert with MABIMS against groups and teachings which seem to threaten the state and religious harmony as propounded by the state, and has organized a forum in 1994 on the issue.[408] In recent years, tensions between MUIS and other sections of the Muslim community have become more pronounced, as the recent debates over the status of religious schools, the use of the headscarf in public schools or certain web-pages attest.[409] As the measures taken against 'deviating' groups have until now been directed largely against groups perceived to be radical or terrorist, they have had relatively little impact on the Tamil Muslim community as Tamils, and thus are of relatively little concern for us here. Yet it should be noted that MUIS's responsibilities in this regard are not limited to questions of dogma, but also to questions of practice. The AMLA provides for MUIS to take measures against persons who "…teach or publicly expound any doctrine or perform any ceremony or act relating to the Muslim religion in any manner contrary to the Muslim law…".[410] It is thus theoretically possible for MUIS to penalize Muslims for participating in popular religious practices which are perceived by some to violate Muslim law, or to take measures against groups defending such practices. This has to be kept in mind when we shall discuss the issue of custom and popular religious practice amongst Tamil Muslims in Singapore.

Mosque Administration and Indian Muslims in Singapore

As has already been mentioned, the AMLA conferred to MUIS the control over mosques and their managements. MUIS appoints a Board of Management in each mosque which manages its day-to-day activities. The Board is supposed, among other things, to manage the mosque and organize its activities, and to promote inter-

[408] Metzger 2003: 51-54.
[409] For an overview over these issues cf. Metzger 2003: chapters 5-8.
[410] Siraj 1967: 36.

religious harmony. The Board consists of nine to fifteen members. Only citizens or permanent residents of Singapore who are at least 21 years old and of "sound moral and religious character" may be appointed as members of the board. Members are appointed for a two years term. More important for our purposes is that the Board is empowered to allow "registered non-political Muslim organizations or businesses" to use its facilities.[411]

Besides their normal tasks of providing space for praying and organizing Friday sermons, mosques in Singapore organize a number of activities. Especially the 'new-generation' mosques offer ample facilities for a wide range of activities. Conference- and classrooms, halls, and auditoria are part of most 'new-generation' mosques, and are increasingly added to 'old-generation' mosques in the context of redevelopment and renovation. In MUIS publications, the activities of mosques are usually grouped under three headings, namely 'Educational', 'Religious', and 'Family and Welfare'. Educational activities include kindergartens and religious classes for both children and adults. Religious activities comprise of prayer and the Friday services, but also include special prayers during Islamic holidays, sacrifices during the month of Ramadan, religious lectures, and the like. Finally, Family and Welfare activities include the solemnization of marriages, marriage counseling, or 'exhibitions' on drug-abuse.[412] These activities are coordinated by MUIS, and have helped to transform mosques into the Islamic equivalent of the secular 'community centers' of Singapore. Indeed, one author has pointed out the danger that this development may adversely affect the integration of Muslims into the wider society of Singapore, as many

[411] http://cmsweb.mosque.org.sg/English/Manual/Manual_Regulatn/Manual_Regulatn.aspx?pMenu=5 [accessed on the 10 November 2004].

[412] Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 1991: 9; see Mansor 1982: table 2 for the extent of participation in various mosque activities in 1981.

Muslims might prefer to attend activities of their mosques rather than the non-Muslim community centers.[413]

While the role of mosques as centers of the Muslim community is a point reiterated again and again by MUIS, another aspect of mosques and the communities attached to them is conspicuously absent from most official publications, viz. the ethnic background of a mosque's congregation. As has been mentioned in chapter 2, ethnicity did play a not unimportant role in the establishment and management of mosques in the prewar period, and consequently ethnic identifications are more common in the case of the 'old-generation' mosques. One case in point is the Masjid Ba'alwie, which is generally identified with Singapore's Arab community.[414] Another example would be the by now demolished Masjid Bawean, which catered to that part of the Malay community which hailed from the Indonesian island of Bawean.[415] But most important for our purposes are a number of mosques often collectively glossed as 'Indian' mosques, which still cater to a largely Indian congregation.

Usually, the number of 'Indian' mosques in Singapore is given as seven: these are the Masjid Abdul Gafoor, the Masjid Al-Abrar, the Masjid Angullia, the Masjid Bencoolen, the Masjid Jamae (Chulia), the Masjid Malabar, and the Masjid Moulana Mohammad Ali.[416] All of these mosques are located in Central Singapore, and are thus fairly remote from the housing estates where most of the Indian Muslims live. What makes these mosques 'Indian' is the fact that in all of them religious activities are conducted in a South Asian language, usually in Tamil. Furthermore, most of them are *ḥanafī* mosques.[417] The ethnic identification of the mosques is thus neither

[413] Cf. Mansor 1982: 32; Tyabji 1991a: 217.
[414] Cf. Abaza 1997.
[415] Cf. Abdullah Baginda 1967: 52; Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 1991: 5, 19.
[416] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: appendix B; Sankaran 2003: 128 [section not paginated].
[417] Only two of them, the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) and Masjid Malabar, are *shāfi'ī*; the Masjid al-Abrar is theoretically also a *shāfi'ī* mosque, but currently has a *ḥanafī* Imam.

predicated on the composition of the congregation nor on the ethnic background of the mosque's founder, but on language. In other words, that these mosques are considered to be 'Indian' and have a congregation consisting largely of South Asians is a result, not the cause, of conducting activities in South Asian languages.

The 'ethnic' history of these mosques is also noteworthy. Though most of the 'Indian' mosques have indeed been founded by Indians, not all mosques established and endowed by Indians are still perceived as 'Indian', as is the case for example with the Masjid Kassim.[418] It is furthermore significant that in almost all cases the language used is Tamil. The only exceptions are the Masjid Malabar, where Malayalam is used, and the Masjid Angullia, where both Tamil and Urdu are in use.[419] It is noteworthy that Urdu is used besides Tamil in only one mosque, and other North Indian languages, such as Bengali, do not seem to be used at all. Of course, Tamil is an official language in Singapore, and it is not surprising that it dominates in most of the Indian mosques. But other languages are not barred from use, as the case of the Masjid Malabar shows, and it is significant that North Indian languages seem to be so little represented in Singapore's mosques, especially as some of the mosques were founded by North Indians.[420] A case in point would be the Masjid Bencoolen, which according to my respondents was built at the initiative of the British Government for its North Indian soldiers, while its construction in 1852 was financed by an Arab merchant.[421] The names of later trustees seem to point to a largely Indian congregation, and the fact that the mosque was officially recognized as *ḥanafī* from at least 1906 onwards substantiates this. There were South Indians as well as Gujaratis

[418] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 46.
[419] Furthermore, the Masjid Moulana Mohammad Ali is one of the mosques where English sermons are sometimes delivered.
[420] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 6, 54-5; Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 2000: 35.
[421] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 53-4; "Peṉkūlaṉ paḷḷivācal tiṟappu viḻā", *Ceyticcuṭar* 31, Jun 2004: 3.

among the trustees at that time.[422] Today, activities of the mosque, which has recently been redeveloped and completely reconstructed, are conducted in Tamil.

If it is interesting to see how some of the mosques came to be perceived as 'Indian', it is also telling that some mosques are not generally included in that category though they share some features with the 'Indian' mosques. The most obvious case is the Masjid Dawoodi Bohra. Even though all the members of the Bohra community are of South Asian background, the mosque is not usually named as 'Indian'. This is probably due to the doctrinal differences between the Shiite Bohras and their Sunnite counterparts, and perhaps also to the non-Tamil character of the Bohra community, given that 'Indian' is often conflated with 'Tamil' in Singaporean discourse.[423] Another mosque, the Masjid Naval Base in Sembawang, was originally built in 1968 for Muslim personnel of the British Navy, which included, according to my respondents, many Indians.[424] Religious classes for Indian Muslim children were held at the mosque on Sundays until recently, when the Masjid Naval Base was replaced by the 'new-generation' Masjid Assyafaah.[425] This mosque was likewise not considered as 'Indian', apparently as many activities were delivered in Malay rather than an Indian language.

The 'Indian' mosques are significant for the South Asian Muslim communities in Singapore for various reasons. First of all, they are symbolic reminders of the existence of South Asian Muslims in the city, and of their contributions to its religious landscape, especially as three of these mosques are also national monuments. But they are also important because they offer services to South Asian Muslims that would not

[422] The language of the congregation seems to have been Urdu; cf. Ahmad 1965: 53-4.
[423] Cf. Ahmad 1965: 60; Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 2000: 48; the languages used in the Masjid Dawoodi Bohra are Gujarati and Arabic; information supplied by Mr. Ameer Ali, 19th of November 2004.
[424] According to PuruShotam, the congregation consisted mainly of Malayalis; PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 93.
[425] "Cempavāṅ paḷḷivācalkaḷ - oru pārvai", *Ceyticcuṭar* 31, Jun 2004: 11.

be available otherwise. This is especially the case with regard to sermons, but some of the 'Indian' mosques also offer religious classes for children and adults, services that are otherwise only offered by some Indian Muslim associations. The relationship between some of these mosques and Indian Muslim associations will be discussed below, while their role for preaching and teaching in Tamil will be taken up in chapter 5. Here it may suffice to stress their agency in the organization and administration of services for Tamil Muslims in Singapore.

MENDAKI and the Ethnic Self-Help Paradigm

When talking about the different government bodies and associations which define and contest the administration of Islam in Singapore, mention has to be made of MENDAKI.[426] Even though its main aim is the improvement of the educational standards of Malays/Muslims in Singapore, MENDAKI has engaged in a number of activities which relate much more closely to Islam and Islamic practice. Yet even more importantly, its activities have led to a certain polarization of ethnic identity among Indian Muslims, especially after MENDAKI's Indian counterpart SINDA was set up in 1991.

MENDAKI was registered in October 1982, after the census reports of 1980 had indicated the stark underperformance of Malays in the educational system.[427] Yet despite being founded in reaction to *Malay* educational underperformance, the main object of MENDAKI, according to its constitution, surprisingly was stated to be "to promote the education of *Muslims* in all fields…".[428] Already in newspaper articles published during the formation of MENDAKI, the term Muslim was actually replaced

[426] The acronym MENDAKI means 'to ascend' in Malay.
[427] Rahim 1998: 211-3; Saat 2002: 131; Yayasan Mendaki 1986: 2-4; "Accelerating the Climb to Success", *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1982.
[428] Yayasan Mendaki 1982: 2-3 (quote on p. 2, emphasis added).

by the juxtaposition 'Malay/Muslim', which soon started to appear in official MENDAKI publications, too.[429] This juxtaposition is interesting insofar as it is not really clear what is meant by it. It might be taken to mean "all Malays, no matter of what religion, and all Muslims, no matter of what ethnic background". Yet all of MENDAKI's activities relate to Muslims and it clearly sees itself as an organization for Muslims alone.[430] The composite 'Malay/Muslim' is thus rather a concession to Malay sentiment and the common Singaporean equation of 'Malay' and 'Muslim', without running danger to compromise MENDAKI's Muslim identity.

During the 1980s, MENDAKI drew most of its funds from a scheme similar to MUIS's MBF. This was augmented by donations and an annual grant by the government.[431] A restructuring of the organization in 1989 allowed it to start its own business activities, though most of MENDAKI's ventures into business have been rather unsuccessful, and have consequently drawn considerable criticism.[432] Yet despite these efforts in setting up various enterprises, MENDAKI's main focus of activity remains education. This is done through a variety of means, like tuition classes, bursaries, awards and scholarships.[433] Awards are given to those students who excel in their exams from the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) onwards.[434] Other programs were initiated to assist students in the normal education stream and 'underachievers'.[435]

The model of an ethnic self-help organization which draws on CPF contributions to further the educational and economic standing of a specific community has actually

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[429] Cf. e.g. "Accelerating the Climb to Success", *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1982; Yayasan Mendaki 1986: 15.
[430] One of my informants claimed that MENDAKI was indeed wary that non-Muslim Malays could actually apply for help from the association, as there would be no way to turn them away, and MENDAKI would have to compromise its Muslim identity.
[431] Metzger 2003: 71-2; Rahim 1998: 228 n. 7; Saat 2002: 132-3; Tyabji 1991a: 223.
[432] Metzger 2003: 79-83; Rahim 1998: 214-5; cf. Yayasan Mendaki 1992: 181-2.
[433] Metzger 2003: 74-8; Yayasan Mendaki 1986: 12-3.
[434] Rahim 1998: 217; Yayasan Mendaki 1986: 14.
[435] Cf. Rahim 1998: 222-6.

led to the proliferation of several such organizations in the early 1990s. In 1991, the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) was set up, and was followed soon after in 1992 by the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC) and the Eurasian Association (EA).[436] The creation of SINDA has made a further self-help association available to Indian Muslims, if they are willing to contribute to both MENDAKI and SINDA.

The ethnic self-help paradigm in general and MENDAKI in particular have been subject to much criticism. There is no need to enter into this discussion here.[437] What is noteworthy for our purposes is that supporters and critics alike treat MENDAKI primarily as an organization supporting *Malays* and dealing with *Malay* educational deprivation. This tendency was of course already perceivable when MENDAKI was established, but it has been reinforced by the establishment of other self-help organizations on the basis of race. Given that there are organizations for Chinese, Indians and Eurasians, it is only natural to perceive MENDAKI as a Malay organization. The fact that MENDAKI officially claims to represent all Muslims seems to be generally ignored or not deemed important. This attitude, as we shall see in chapter 6, has had an important impact on the way Tamil Muslims relate to MENDAKI, and has served as a catalyst for recent changes in the way Tamil Muslims have reacted towards it.

Non-ethnic Muslim Associations

Beside MUIS as the statutory board charged with administering Islam and MENDAKI as the major government-supported organization, there exist a plethora of Islamic associations in Singapore which are officially registered, yet independent

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[436] Metzger 2003: 71; Rahim 1998: 233.

[437] The most verbal academic critique is Rahim 1998: chapters 10 & 11; but cf. also Li 1989: chapter 11. For a generally positive evaluation of the official approach cf. Metzger 2003: chapters 2 & 8.

from direct state control. Among these, of prime interest for us are a number of associations catering specifically to Singapore's Indian Muslim communities. Yet before we turn to these ethnic associations, it is necessary to briefly discuss the general state of affairs regarding Muslim associations in Singapore.

The number of Muslim associations in Singapore is considerable, though only a handful is of greater significance for Muslim society at large. Among the more important ones are the AMP (Association of Muslim Professionals), Darul Arqam (The Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore), Jamiyah (Muslim Missionary Society of Singapore), PERDAUS (Association of Adult Religious Class Students of Singapore) and PERGAS (Singapore Islamic Scholars & Religious Teachers Association). As Laurent Metzger has pointed out, the spheres of activities of many of these associations actually overlap with each other and with MUIS and MENDAKI.[438] Education, social services, and missionary work are among the most common activities.

There is no need to discuss the activities of these associations in any detail here.[439] The different associations seem to be rather uncontroversial among Tamil Muslims. In contrast to MUIS and the semi-government MENDAKI, individual associations were almost never criticized by my respondents for neglecting Tamil Muslims. While state-institutions are expected to cater to all Muslims equally, independent associations are not, especially given that there are a number of associations specifically for Indian Muslims. Thus, even though some associations are almost exclusively Malay, this does hardly affect Indian Muslims. Many of the associations indeed see little participation by Indian Muslims, and some are acutely aware of this fact. On its internet website, PERDAUS freely admits to "…have been unable to tap and utilize

[438] Metzger 2003: 93.
[439] For overviews, cf. Metzger 2003: chapter 3; Yayasan Mendaki 1992: 191-215; Zuraidah 1994: 82-95.

the expertise of the Muslims within the Chinese, Indians [sic], Caucasian and others groups within Singapore…”.[440] It will thus be sufficient to limit the discussion to some groups which play a role for the organization of religious life among Tamil Muslims in Singapore, viz. the Muslim League of Singapore, Jamiyah and PERGAS.

The Muslim League is discussed as an Indian Muslim association by many authors, though it actually aims to represent all Muslims in Singapore, which is one reason why the group did not join the FIM in 1992. It was a very active organization in the 1950s, but afterwards declined, and now has only 30-40 members.[441] For most of its history, it seems to have had close connections with the Tamil Muslim Jama‘at (both organizations being headed by Karim Ghani in the early 1950s) and later the South Indian Jamiathul Ulama, and its current president is a high-ranking member of both these associations. Despite its considerable historical importance, the Muslim League thus plays practically no role in Tamil Muslim religious life nowadays.

Jamiyah, on the other hand, is easily one of the most multi-ethnic Islamic associations in Singapore, and the strong involvement of Indians in it is no surprise, given that the association’s founder, Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddique (1892-1954), hailed from Meerut in North India.[442] Jamiyah was formed in 1932 as the All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society. The founding committee reflected the multi-ethnic composition of the association. Among the seventeen founding committee members were at least six Indians.[443] It is noticeable that two of the Tamil Committee members, and a further Tamil in the Management Committee, were trustees of the Masjid Jamae (Chulia).[444]

[440] Cf. http://www.perdaus.org.sg/about/index.html [accessed on 9 December 2004].
[441] Cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 53-7.
[442] Cf. Muslim Missionary Society of Singapore 1985a: 31; Weyland 1990: 247.
[443] Four of whom were Tamils; cf. Muslim Missionary Society Singapore 1985a: 21.
[444] Cf. Muslim Missionary Society Singapore 1985b: 20-24.

Especially since a change in leadership took place in 1970, Jamiyah is a highly active society. It runs a clinic, a home for the aged, an orphanage, two kindergartens, and the center for the rehabilitation of drug addicts, and offers a wide range of social and religious services.[445] Even though the Malaysian and Singaporean branches of Jamiyah have been separated since 1965, the association maintains strong connections with Muslim groups outside Singapore, and has at times incurred the government's suspicion therefore.[446] At the same time, Jamiyah is actively engaged in inter-religious dialogue, and most of its services and institutions are open to everybody regardless of creed.[447]

Conversely, the relationship of the Singapore Islamic Scholars & Religious Teachers Association PERGAS with the Tamil Muslim community are more recent and of a very different nature. Founded in 1957, PERGAS primarily caters to religious education, offering part-time *madrasa* classes and courses in Arabic.[448] PERGAS is largely Malay in nature,[449] yet in 1999, it has opened an English unit, which offers religious and Arabic education to those Muslims who do not speak Malay. Most important among these courses are the teacher training classes, which are designed to train adults in imparting religious knowledge in English.[450] Many of the assistant teachers in Tamil religious schools have received training from PERGAS, so that only the main teacher has to be recruited from India.[451] Thus, in contrast to Jamiyah, PERGAS links to the Tamil Muslim community are not based on participation by Tamil Muslims in the association itself, but by providing skills that

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[445] Further information on Jamiyah's activities can be found in Metzger 2003: 94-100; Muslim Missionary Society Singapore 1997; Weyland 1990: 233-45.
[446] Cf. Bedlington 1974: 496, esp. note 85.
[447] Cf. Metzger 2003: 98-9.
[448] For PERGAS's activities, see Metzger 2003: 110-2; Yayasan Mendaki 1992: 203-4.
[449] Cf. www.pergas.org.sg [accessed on 9 December 2004].
[450] Cf. www.pergas.org.sg/dept.html#english [accessed on 9 December 2004].
[451] Cf. Metzger 2003: 111.

can be utilized by those associations which specifically address themselves to Tamil Muslims.

INDIAN MUSLIM ASSOCIATIONS

Overview

As mentioned, most of the larger Muslim associations in Singapore are not rooted in specific ethnic communities and cater, at least in theory, to the needs and demands of the Muslim population at large. Nevertheless, there are also a sizeable number of organizations and associations whose ethnic background is more circumscribed. Among these, Indian Muslim associations clearly dominate the scene. When talking about Indian Muslim associations in Singapore, one has to admit that the term is not as facilely defined as it may seem. The most straightforward cases are those where the association in question clearly identifies itself both as South Asian and as Muslim, as in the case of the Malabar Muslim Juma-ath, the South Indian Jamiathul Ulama or the Thuckalay Muslim Association. Yet in other cases, the identification is more problematic. The Rifayee Thareeq Association of Singapore, for example, lacks any explicit ethnic identification, and the basis for considering it to be an Indian Muslim association is the fact that its members are mostly South Asians, and that it is a member of the FIM. On the other hand, there are a number of associations whose membership consists primarily of South Asian Muslims, and which may address themselves explicitly to South Asian communities, but which nevertheless make no explicit reference to Islam or Muslims in their names. Such is the case, for example, with the Dakhni Urdu Association or the Muthupettai Association.

In the following discussion, I will restrict myself largely to those associations which a) are explicit about both their South Asian and their Muslim background, or which b) are members of the FIM. On the other hand, I have excluded groups which may have clear South Asian Muslim backgrounds, but are not or only peripherally connected to religious affairs, such as the trade associations mentioned by Mani.[452]

Given the total number of Indian Muslims in Singapore, the number of Indian Muslim associations is surprisingly high. What is even more surprising is that the ethnic background of most of these associations is clearly Tamil, and that those which are not are still South Indian. It is striking that there are no associations representing North Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi Muslim interests interacting with these South Indian organizations, especially as language and culture associations catering to these Muslims exist, such as the Singapore Bangladesh Society, the Bangladesh Language and Cultural Foundation, or the Singapore Pakistan Association.[453] That these groups are not participating in a forum like the FIM may be due to Tamil linguistic dominance, which severely limits North Indian participation (cf. chapter 5 & 6).

Typology of Indian Muslim Associations

The various Indian Muslim associations differ substantially from each other in regard to the date of their foundation, the size and character of the communities that they claim to be representing, and also, to a lesser extent, in the aims and activities pursued. Some of the contemporary associations were founded before World War II, but most were registered in two distinct periods in the postwar era, viz. the two decades immediately after the war from 1945 to 1965, and then since about the mid-1990s. Mani has claimed that the spur of registrations of Indian Muslim associations

[452] Cf. Mani 1992: 344-7.
[453] Cf. Government of Singapore 2005: 21, 196, 215.

in the decades just before and after World War II was linked to British efforts in countering communist activities through the registration of all voluntary societies.[454] Yet if British fear of Communism contributed to the registering of associations, fear of Indian Nationalism had the opposite effect. Maideen relates that the efforts at registering an association called Aikkiya Muslim Caṅkam ('United Muslim Association') were frustrated because rivals had denounced the founders as supporters of the Indian National Congress, who were therefore denied registration by the British. Only by changing the association's name to Muslim Apiviruttic Caṅkam ('Muslim Improvement Association') and by hiding their Indian identities were the founders finally able to register the association in 1926.[455]

Associations also vary in size. Some consist effectively only of a handful of members, while membership among the largest goes into the hundreds. Yet the most important distinctions relate to the character of the communities to which the various associations cater. For convenience, it is possible to distinguish different types of Indian Muslim associations in Singapore on this basis as either pan-Indian, ethnic, religious, or kin-center associations (cf. appendix 5).[456]

Despite frequent exhortations from various sides for Indian Muslims to unite, there are and have been surprisingly few associations that claim to represent all Indian Muslims in Singapore. In the prewar period, the Indian Muslim Association would be the prime example, even though it seems to have concentrated mainly on Tamils. Nowadays, there are only two such associations. The United Indian Muslim Association (UIMA) was originally known as Pasir Panjang Indian Muslim Association, a group representing, according to Mani, primarily Tamil Muslims who

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[454] Mani 1992: 344.
[455] Meytīṉ 1989: 11-2; Daud Shah similarly deplored the harassment of Indian Nationalists by the Secret Police in Malaya; Tāvutṣā 1925: 345.
[456] These are largely, but not exactly, the categories employed by Syed Mohamed 1973: 29-30.

lived in the Pasir Panjang area of Singapore. This association had become defunct, and was taken over by M.K.A. Jabbar, a former Member of Parliament, in 1991, who had the name changed to UIMA and widened the activities of the association.[457] The Indian Muslim Social Service Association, on the other hand, was registered only in 2004. It was actually formed as a result of differences between the Singapore Tenkasi Muslim Welfare Society and its religious teacher hired from India, who formed this new group with the help of some Muslim businessmen.

The 'ethnic' associations might perhaps better be called 'ethno-linguistic' associations, as they address themselves to various Indian Muslim communities on the basis of a shared language. Currently there are four such associations in Singapore, with two associations catering to Tamil-speakers, and one each to speakers of Malayalam and Dakhni-Urdu. The Malabar Muslim Juma-ath was the first ethnic association in Singapore, dating back to the prewar period.[458] Another ethnic association, the Tamil Muslim Jama'at (TMJ), is claimed to have been established by none other than Karim Ghani in 1950.[459] In contrast, the other two associations are of more recent origins. The Dakhni Urdu Association has been formed only a few years back with the aim to represent those South Indian Muslims who claim Urdu as their mother-tongue.[460] An intriguing case finally is provided by the Thiruvithancode Muslim Union (TMU). This association was originally a kin-center association, representing Muslims from the small town of Thiruvithancode in Kanniyakumari District, which grew out of an informal society of young men for the recitation of *mawlid* in 1939.[461] The association was in the process of deregistration as all its members were returning to India in the 1990s when it was taken over by a group of

[457] Mani 1992: 346.
[458] Cf. http://www.mosque.org.sg/malabar/default.asp?ID=aboutus [accessed on 22 January 2006].
[459] Syed Mohamed 1973: 29, 32-7; cf. Mani 1992: 345, though, who has 1958 as date of registration.
[460] Cf. Schmidt 2003: 302.
[461] Cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 48-9.

Tamil Muslims who wanted to start an educational association for Tamil Muslims. The organization retained its name even though there is nothing anymore linking it to Thiruvithancode.

Calling an Indian Muslim association 'religious' may seem to constitute a tautology, yet it serves a purpose in the case of the two associations under consideration here. While most of the other associations address themselves to groups of people that happen to be Muslims, without necessarily limiting themselves to religious activities and services alone, the Rifayee Thareeq Association (RTA) of Singapore and South Indian Jamiathul Ulama (SIJU) are defined by representing two more narrowly religious groups. The RTA is, as far as I know, the only branch of a Sufi brotherhood (*ṭarīqa*) that has been officially registered as an association in Singapore. Even though membership in the brotherhood is not limited to a particular ethnic group, the Rifāʻiyya brotherhood seems to be more popular among South Indians than among Malays or North Indians. It is thus not surprising that the RTA of Singapore thus identifies itself as an Indian Muslim association, expressed for example by its participation in the FIM. On the other hand, the SIJU, an association representing religious scholars (*'ulamā'*),[462] is explicit about its regional background. Originally founded as an association mainly for religious scholars,[463] it has later had some problems because it came to consist largely of 'lay-men' rather than fully accredited *'ulamā'*, as one high-ranking member told me. This problem was solved by inserting a clause in the association's regulations that *'ulamā'* refers to any pious Muslim that the association's committee decides to accept as such.[464]

As already mentioned, kin-center associations account for more than half of the voluntary associations maintained by Indian Muslims in Singapore. Though several

[462] Syed Mohamed 1973: 30 calls it an "…alumni [association; T.T.] of religious scholars".
[463] Syed Mohamed 1973: 60.
[464] This is in contrast to SIJU's policies in the 1970s; cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 60.

kin-center associations became deregistered over time,[465] they still form the single most important element among Indian Muslim associations in Singapore as a whole. All kin-center associations were formed by Tamil Muslims. That no similar organizations were founded by Muslims of other ethnic groups may be a result of the relatively smaller size of these groups rather than the absence of the kin-center concept among these groups. There are currently ten kin-center associations in Singapore, excluding the TMU.

We are fortunate to have an account of the founding of what is probably the largest Indian Muslim association in Singapore today, the Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League (SKML), in the memoirs of Maideen. SKML got registered in 1941. As has been mentioned in chapter 3, Kadayanallur society was at that time fractured into various 'parties'. When the 'East Party' had an association registered in 1940, sections of the 'West Party' and the 'Taṅkaḷ Party' united and attempted to establish their own association. Fearing a further fragmentation of their community, concerned community leaders in all the different 'parties' decided to unite and found a single association for the whole Kadayanallur community. On 8th of August 1941 the SKML was formed, with two widely respected religious personalities as president and vice-president. Yet moves to found further associations on the basis of 'party'-membership continued, and where only brought to an end by the Japanese Invasion.[466]

The emergence of the SKML from the efforts to unite a fragmented community seems to mirror events that led to the establishment of other Indian Muslim associations in Singapore. Respondents told me that the Singapore Tenkasi Muslim Welfare Society (STMWS), which was registered one year before the SKML, was also founded to overcome faction fighting in the Tenkasi Community. It is indeed

[465] Syed Mohamed mentions four kin-center associations which are not in existence anymore, cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 28-9.
[466] Meytīṉ 1989: 24, 27.

probable that the foundation of the STMWS had an impact of the formation of the SKML, given the geographic, economic, and socio-cultural proximity of the two communities, and the fact that Maideen does not mention the STMWS at all should alert us to possible gaps in his account.

An interesting development is the founding of new kin-center associations since the mid-1990s. Whereas those associations that were registered during the 1930s-50s were predominantly founded by labor migrants rather than merchants, most of the associations founded during the last ten years are linked to wealthier merchant towns like Kilakkarai or Muthupettai. This suggests two things: Firstly, we may take it as an indicator that more Tamil Muslim merchants come to settle permanently with their families in Singapore,[467] and secondly that the kin-center association continues to provide a model for the foundation of voluntary associations among Singapore's Tamil Muslims.

Activities and Programs

Indian Muslim associations offer a wide range of services in the field of religious education as well as religious and social counseling.[468] In addition, they organize special functions on Muslim holidays, annual family days to maintain ties among the geographically dispersed members of the kin-center community, and receptions for members returning from the Hajj. The activities of the larger associations like SKML and STMWS practically cover this whole spectrum, while many of the smaller associations may confine themselves to a few annual functions. The following

[467] This was also suggested to me by some members of merchant families from Porto Novo who are settled in Singapore, though Porto Novo (as yet) lacks a kin-center association.

[468] Information about the activities of the associations is derived from interviews with members of the associations, activity reports, and web pages; useful information on the activities of some associations in the 1970s can be found in Syed Mohamed 1973: 32-63.

overview will be confined to the activities of associations with predominantly Tamil membership, as these are of greatest relevance for our purposes.

Probably the single most important field of activity is education, an early example of which is the operation of the Umar Pulavar Tamil School by the SKML from 1946-1982. With the schooling system taken care of by the state, the Tamil Muslim associations concentrate on supplying religious education, even though some organizations offer computer courses or give out bursaries to needy students.[469] Both STMWS and UIMA also run child- and student-care centers.[470] The religious classes conducted by the associations will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, so that it is sufficient here to remark on the central importance Tamil Muslim associations play in offering religious education in Tamil.

Associations also arrange religious speeches and preaching, and 'Koran-conferences' are regularly organized by several of them [**Figure 11**]. Islamic materials, publications and books are borrowed, distributed and/or sold at reduced prices by some associations. TMU runs a postal library, lending tracts about Islam to Muslims as well as non-Muslims. The scheme was inspired by a similar scheme of the Islamic Foundation Trust in Madras, whose publications are among those distributed by the TMU.

[469] Cf. United Indian Muslim Association 2006a: 3.
[470] Cf. United Indian Muslim Association 2006a: 3.

Figure 11: Imam Rafiq Ahmad Baqawi, Imam of the Masjid Abdul Gafoor, speaking at a function organized by the United Indian Muslim Association on the occasion of Prophet Muhammad's birthday on 30th of April 2006 (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Closely connected with the programs for religious education are preparatory classes for persons embarking on the Hajj. The purpose of these courses, which are conducted under the general supervision of MUIS as the central authority in matters relating to the pilgrimage, do not only aim at imparting the necessary religious knowledge for performing the Hajj, but also convey advice on all kinds of problems that may arise in conjunction with it.

A second important branch in which Indian Muslim associations are active is counseling. For example, SKML conducts marriage guidance courses sanctioned by the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which are designed to impart information on marital duties and possible conflicts to the would-be couple. One of the aims of such courses, which are offered by a number of Muslim organizations in Singapore, is to

reduce the high rate of divorce among Muslim couples.[471] Some associations also offer medical or legal counseling to their members, or organize Health Fairs.

Many of the associations organize tours, excursions and other events like book releases or competitions, and SKML even conducted an Islamic song festival.[472] Other functions are held on Islamic holidays, for example during Ramadan or on the occasion of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. Another type of function, though of a very different kind, that is taken care of by some of the associations are funerals, with SKML even having bought a vehicle for this purpose in 1997.

Figure 12: Members of the Thuckalay Muslim Association reciting poetry by Pīr Muḥammad at the Masjid Bencoolen on 30th of August 2004 (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

In at least one case, a kin-center association continues to celebrate the holiday (*'urs*) of its kin-center's patron saint. The Thuckalay Muslim Association (ThuMA) observes the *'urs* of the 17th century Tamil poet and Sufi Pīr Muḥammad, who is

[471] Cf. Mashuthoo 2003: 12.
[472] Cf. Mashuthoo 2000.

buried in Thuckalay. On the *'urs*, which is conducted on the 14th of Rajab,[473] members of the association meet to recite poems by Pīr Muḥammad, usually in one of the Indian mosques [**Figure 12**].[474] Similarly, the RTA observes the annual anniversary of Aḥmad al-Rifāʻī, the founder of the brotherhood, by reciting poems in his honor.[475]

Most of the kin-center associations also conduct some activities that are aimed especially at perpetuating a sense of identity among people hailing from the same kin-center. The most common activity of this kind is an annual family day.[476] These family days are often held in a park or some similar venue. The association provides buses from different pick-up points to the venue, as well as food, games for the children and several other activities. Everybody can participate, but the family days are specifically meant to provide a possibility for families from the same kin-center to meet and to renew friendships. The family day thus serves to perpetuate a common identity, which has increasingly become difficult after the kin-center communities became geographically dispersed through resettlement. Yet it is interesting to note that few of the activities relate to the kin-center directly. Specifically, there seems to be no effort on part of the organizations (as opposed to individual efforts) to fund mosques, schools or other institutions located at the Indian kin-center, or to maintain any official contact with organizations there.[477]

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[473] The 7th month of the Islamic calendar.

[474] Cf. "Ñāṉamētai Pīrmuhammatu Appā peruviḻā", *Ceyticcuṭar* 30, Aug-Nov 2003: 10, and "Takkalai tavañāṉi Pīr Muhammatu Appā niṉaivu viḻā", *Ceyticcuṭar* 32, Oct 2004: 3; I was able to participate in one of these functions on 30th of August 2004.

[475] Cf. "Rifāyi tarīkkā caṅka mavlūtu", *Ceyticcuṭar* 32, Oct 2004: 11; I have participated in this function on 22nd of August 2004, which had actually been postponed for more than a month that year as some of the members of the association had been too busy to participate in it on the proper day!

[476] Information on the family days is based on my participation in SKML's Annual Family Day on 7th of September 2003. Family days are often featured in the FIM newsletter *Ceyticcuṭar*; cf. e.g. "Takkalai Muslim Caṅkattiṉ kutūkalamāṉa kuṭumpatiṉa viḻā", *Ceyticcuṭar* 27, Jan-Apr 2002: 7; "Kuṭumpa uṟuppiṉarkaḷukku Intirāṇi vēṇṭukōḷ", *Ceyticcuṭar* 26, Aug-Dec 2001: 17.

[477] Yet cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 31.

Funding

As becomes clear from the above discussion, associations play an important role in providing religious and social services for the Tamil Muslim community in Singapore. Yet most of these activities require funding to pay teachers and counselors, cover the rental of rooms (both for occasional functions as well as for offices and classes) and buses, or the provision of food and drinks. The question of funding has an important impact on the way associations relate to state agencies and the wider Tamil Muslim society in Singapore.

Subscription fees tend to be very low, and in some cases, they hardly contribute to the funding of the association at all.[478] Furthermore, subscriptions in some associations, like SKML, tended to be collected personally until recently. This was viable in the early days as members of the associations resided in close proximity to each other, but with the dispersal of people on account of the housing programs this became increasingly difficult as well as uneconomic. Members were thus encouraged to pay their dues via giro, in order to streamline the inflow of subscription fees.[479]

In any account, the associations are not able to function solely on the basis of subscription fees. The biggest problem for them, as the treasurer of SKML succinctly put it in an article is "[l]ack of cash, cash and more cash!"[480] Some funds can be raised through donations, which is probably the most common way of funding activities among the smaller associations. In addition, there are fees for *madrasa* classes and other services. Participation in family days is also not free of cost (a ticket

[478] Thus, in 2005, UIMA gained a meager S$48 from subscriptions. Given that subscriptions for UIMA are S$12 per annum (S$6 for retirees) it follows that not more than eight members paid subscriptions! Cf. United Indian Muslim Association 2006c; United Indian Muslim Association 2006b: 5.
[479] Cf. Abdul Kader 2000; Raja Mohamad 2000; United Indian Muslim Association 2006a: 5. Cf. Meytīṉ 1989: 13-4 regarding funding and expenses of the Muslim Improvement Association in the 1930s.
[480] Raja Mohamad 2003: 23.

for SKML's 2003 family day cost S$10). MUIS is another source of funding, especially for larger associations, as shall be discussed below.

As SKML is the largest kin-center association in Singapore, taking a look at its sources of income and its expenditures will provide us with a clearer picture of a Tamil Muslim association's role in financing religious services. **Table 1** and **Table 2** list the top sources of income and expenditures for the years 2000-2002.[481]

Sources of income	**2000**		**2001**		**2002**	
Grants from govt. orgs.	$20,000.00	62%	$25,000.00	60%	$0.00[482]	0%
Donations	$8,000.00	25%	$11,500.00	28%	$14,900.00	52%
Members' subscriptions	$2,271.00	7%	$2,879.00	7%	$5,871.00	20%
Total	$32,271.00	100%	$41,380.00	100%	$28,773.00	100%

Table 1: Main sources of income of SKML, 2000-2002 (Source: Raja Mohamad, treasurer, SKML)

Expenditures	**2000**		**2001**		**2002**	
Rental and conservancy	$19,876.00	60%	$20,086.00	64%	$15,818.00	59%
Functions	$9,200.00	28%	$8,387.00	27%	$7,000.00	26%
Newsletter	$3,800.00	12%	$3,000.00	9%	$4,000.00	15%
Total	$32,876.00	100%	$31,473.00	100%	$26,818.00	100%

Table 2: Main expenditures by SKML, 2000-2002 (Source: Raja Mohamad, treasurer, SKML)

[481] I have to thank Mr. Raja Mohamad, treasurer, SKML, for supplying me with these figures.
[482] In 2002, due to a delay in submitting the financial report of the association, no money was disbursed to SKML from MUIS, yet the money was granted together with the grant for 2003 a year later. Nevertheless, the money was not available to SKML in 2002, and was thus not considered by me in this discussion.

Looking at the income figure first, the importance of government funding becomes evident. Yet it should not be neglected that SKML has been able to almost double its income from donations within just two years. This is important as the associations have few possibilities to influence the amount of government grants received. Moreover, lapses in the procedure of appealing for grants may delay their disbursement, as happened to SKML in 2002. The donations are thus an important security if for some reason the association should be unable to procure a sufficiently large government grant. In contrast, the subscriptions are much lower, though even here SKML was able to enlarge the amount in 2002 by almost $3000.

On the side of expenditure, the largest share is taken up by rental and conservancy charges. The lower expenditure in this category in 2002 was due to a government subsidy. At the same time, less money has been spent for functions in recent years, though this is probably the most elusive figure, as it can easily go up again when the association decides on organizing a seminar or similar event.

The picture presented by the sources of income and expenditures of SKML seem to correspond roughly with that of the other large Tamil Muslim associations in Singapore. STMWS for example has the same sources of income as well as the same types of expenditures.[483] Yet it should be noticed that some of the larger associations expand rapidly. UIMA was able to receive a net surplus of $96,586.00 in 2005, with most of the money coming from funds raising collection ($204,350.00) and the net income from operating a child care center ($52,573.94). Bursary expenses made up the largest point of expenditure ($80,238.89).[484] UIMA plans to change its constitution in order to create an economic unit to fund its social activities and become "…a social provider organization contributing to the larger Singapore

[483] This rough outline was supplied to me by Mr. A.S. Sayed Majunoon, STMWS.
[484] Figures according to United Indian Muslim Association 2006c.

mainstream society".[485] UIMA's case may be special, but it shows that the larger associations are capable of raising considerable amounts of money for their activities.

On the other hand, many of the smaller associations have much lesser expenditures, as their activities are more limited and they usually have no separate offices for which rent would have to be paid. Conversely, these associations do not receive any government grants at all. The ThuMA, for example, has two main points of expenditure annually, namely the celebrations for the Prophet's birthday and a function marking the *'urs* of Pīr Muḥammad, Thuckalay's patron saint. For each function about $700-800 are needed, which can usually be raised through donations. If this should not be enough, committee members supply the balance. The total annual budget of ca. $1500 is thus a far cry from the budgets of the larger associations like UIMA or SKML.[486]

The role of donations for the funding of associations should not be overlooked. This is especially important as it may be assumed that these funds would not be available for religious activities at all if the associations would not exist, as the ability to mobilize these funds depends largely on the personal networks of the associations involved. It is highly improbable that an organization like MUIS would be able to tap this resource, both because of its impersonal character and the fact that the donors (who are usually Tamil Muslims) might fear that their donations will be of no benefit to the Tamil Muslim community if it is given to a large Malay dominated organization.

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[485] United Indian Muslim Association 2006b: 4; cf. United Indian Muslim Association 2006a: 2.
[486] These figures were communicated to me by Mr. Pakir Maideen, president, ThuMA.

The Federation of Indian Muslims (FIM)

Prior to 1992, the different Indian Muslim associations operated independently from each other. There was no attempt to coordinate activities, nor any forum that might have facilitated contact and exchange between the associations. The lack of cooperation and unity among Indian Muslims was repeatedly criticized by Malay Muslim leaders and the government, who called for Indian Muslims to adopt a common agenda and speak with one voice.[487] The registration of the FIM on 18th of April 1992 came at a time when discussions about the identity of the Indian Muslims and their relation to the wider Indian and Muslim communities in Singapore had gained greater salience in the wake of the establishment of SINDA. The FIM was originally conceived by six associations, but these were joined by three further groups while the registration process was going on. In 2005, the number of members rose to sixteen; most of the new members are recently formed associations.

The FIM is run by a group of 23 officials, headed by a president, who is elected from representatives of those associations that have not yet held the post for a two year term. This modus of determining the leadership of the FIM has been criticized by many of my respondents, among them some former presidents of the FIM, as the constant change of leadership was said to prevent any long term policies to be implemented. In addition to the officials, the FIM is supported by a board of advisers, which includes important community leaders and government officials.[488] Funds for the FIM come from the affiliated associations, which have to contribute membership fees. In addition, MUIS irregularly grants S$10,000-20,000.

[487] "Work together, Dr Mattar urges Tamil Muslims", *The Straits Times*, 27 Mar 1983; "Indian Muslims urged to reconcile their feelings about identity", *The Straits Times*, 24 Feb 1992.
[488] Cf. "9 Indian Muslim groups form own federation", *The Straits Times*, 22 Apr 1992; Yayasan Mendaki 1992: 196-7.

The FIM was formed with the aim to represent Indian Muslim interests and to coordinate MENDAKI and SINDA policies towards the community. Education has been the prime focus, even though the FIM did not aim to duplicate any of the existing self-help organizations. The FIM also publishes a biannual newsletter for Indian Muslims in Tamil on behalf of MUIS, called *Ceyticcuṭar*, which covers information of particular interest for the Indian Muslim community.[489] Yet while the FIM has become the prime interface between the Indian Muslim community and official bodies like MUIS, MENDAKI and SINDA, it has not been able to replace its constituent associations as the prime source of religious services and activities for Indian Muslims in Singapore. Most activities are still organized by the associations themselves, and even high-ranking members of the FIM considered its programs and functions to be unproductive. Much of this seems to be due to frictions and debates among the constituent associations. The acceptance of the seven new members to the FIM was in fact delayed for more than a year as some of the older members felt that the admission of new groups would just increase factionalism. In addition, some of my respondents voiced the suspicion that the recent increase in newly registered associations was politically motivated. As only associations can be members of the FIM, any individual wishing to participate in it has to be part of an association. Whatever the reasons, the FIM has until now largely failed in providing the Indian Muslim community in Singapore with a united leadership, despite its support from government bodies and self-help organizations.

[489] Yayasan Mendaki 1992: 196-7; Zuraidah 1994: 94.

INFORMAL INDIAN MUSLIM GROUPS

All of the institutions and associations surveyed so far are official in that they are either maintained by the state or registered as associations according to Singaporean laws. Yet even though they are by far the most important agencies for the organization of religious life among Tamil Muslims in Singapore, there exist also a number of unofficial, informal groups which come together for the purpose of various religious activities.

Due to their informal nature, it is impossible to say how many of these groups exist in Singapore. The members of one particular Sufi brotherhood estimated that their *shaykh* alone had roughly 100 followers in Singapore, divided into about seven to eight different branches. The total number of informal religious groups in Singapore may thus be rather high.

The activities of such groups are quite diverse. Some may meet to discuss religious topics with each other and their friends. Others organize cultural activities, such as music concerts. Quite a few Tamil Muslims seem to be engaged in the Tablīghī Jamā‘at, a lay-missionary movement aiming at deepening piety and the proper performance of religious practice among Muslims, which was founded in the late 1920s in India and has since become a worldwide mass movement.[490] This movement has adherents among Singaporean Muslims of all ethnic backgrounds, and groups of adherents will often reflect this ethnic mix. Yet the vast majority of informal groups among Tamil Muslims in Singapore are branches of Sufi brotherhoods, and the following discussion of such brotherhoods may be taken as one example of informal Muslim groups in Singapore.

[490] See Syed Mohamed 1973: 69-72 for an overview of the movement among Singaporean Tamil Muslims in the early 1970s; cf. Mines 1972a: 96; regarding the movement in general, cf. Sikand 2002.

Allegiance to a Sufi *shaykh* is not uncommon for Muslims in Singapore, and even some of the larger associations, such as Jamiyah, have connections to Sufi traditions.[491] Such brotherhoods are common among all the different ethnic groups in Singapore, even though there are clear ethnic preferences for various brotherhoods. Many of my Indian informants claimed that the Malays actually prefer the Naqshbandiyya; among South Indians the Qādiriyya, Rifāʿiyya and Shādhiliyya are common, among North Indians the Chishtiyya, and among the Arabs groups like the ʿAlawiyya.[492] The historical spread and influence of various brotherhoods in different parts of the Muslim world is certainly one of the factors that have contributed to these ethnic preferences. Linguistic preferences and family ties to specific brotherhoods furthermore help to perpetuate the connections between ethnicity and membership in a brotherhood.

The exact size, composition and organization of informal groups vary. Sufi brotherhoods are hierarchically organized, with usually one member leading the group who is either the immediate *shaykh* of the group or a person close to the *shaykh* and is regarded by the members of the group as being spiritually accomplished. Many of the brotherhoods among Tamil Muslims in Singapore actually owe allegiance to a *shaykh* back in India. Indian *shaykhs* regularly visit Singapore and Malaysia, and initiate new disciples there. Interestingly, in the cases I am familiar with, the headquarters of the brotherhood or branch-brotherhood are actually not located in Tamil Nadu, but in the Deccan, and the respective *shaykhs* spoke Urdu as their mother-tongue.

Branches of Sufi brotherhoods usually meet at least once a week for *dhikr*, lit. the ʻremembranceʼ of God through communal recitation of certain formulas. On such occasions, eulogies (*mawlid*) on the Prophet may also be recited. In some cases,

[491] Admittedly, since the change of leadership in the 1970s, Jamiyah has no obvious links with Sufi traditions anymore; cf. Weyland 1990: 248.
[492] Cf. Abaza 1997: 77-82; Clammer 1990: 161.

groups also read and discussed Islamic books together. Such meetings may be attended from five to twenty people, at a variety of venues ranging from private homes to tomb-shrines or offices. Members of such Sufi groups are also likely to assemble when the *shaykh* comes over from India, and may even accompany him on tours to Malaysia.

The only Indian Sufi group which is registered is, as mentioned, the RTA. Other groups keep a lower profile, which may give them slightly greater freedom in organizing their activities, but also severely circumscribes the kind of activities which can be pursued at all. Some of the groups interact with registered associations, while others remain outside such interaction. Nevertheless, due to their grassroots character, such informal groups cannot be simply ignored by the registered associations, but have to be engaged at different levels.

NETWORKS OF ASSOCIATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

Official Relations of Religious Organizations

The different agencies and associations involved in the organization of religious life among Tamil Muslims in Singapore do not operate in isolation. While it was necessary to detail the institutional setup and the activities of different groups and institutions separately, in reality government bodies, associations and informal groups are involved in a complex web of relationships. Groups engage each other at various levels, at times cooperating and supporting each other in their activities, at other times contesting each other's claims at representing various sections of Tamil Muslim society in Singapore.

The most salient and most regulated form of official networks and relationships is that between various associations on the one hand, and government bodies, primarily MUIS and individual mosques, on the other. Tamil Muslim associations have much to gain from good relations with MUIS. Support from MUIS does not only take the form of funding, but also validates the propriety (in an Islamic sense) and legality (in a secular sense) of the associations' activities, as well as providing the association with greater publicity. Conversely, cooperating with Tamil Muslim associations allows MUIS to demonstrate both its willingness to support the Tamil Muslim community and its suzerainty over the Muslim public sphere in Singapore.[493]

The most immediate benefit to be accrued by associations in linking up with MUIS is funding. As Muslim associations can be recipients of *zakāt*, good relations with MUIS may allow associations to draw upon considerable funds from this source. Many Muslim associations in Singapore receive part of their funding from MUIS. Unfortunately, MUIS's annual reports do not identify individual Muslim associations as recipients of *zakāt*. The published data is sketchy, and is only able to convey a general idea of the amounts paid to Indian Muslim associations. Sometimes, tables which offer a more detailed breakup of organizations funded are published in the MUIS-newsletter *Warita Kita*. I have come across three such lists that are summarized in **Table 3**.

[493] Cf. the message by the MUIS President on the occasion of the organization of an Islamic song festival by SKML, contained in Mashuthoo 2000: [page nos. not indicated in source]. This is the only of sixteen messages contained in the souvenir magazine to stress not only the entertainment value and the fund raising potential of the festival, but also its "…wholesome and educational" character. This statement not only legitimizes the festival from the religious point of view, but also bolsters MUIS's claims as the prime authority to define what constitutes proper Islamic practice.

	AH 1417[494]	**AH 1419**[494]	**AD 2001**
Total amount given to Muslim associations	S$582,620	S$1,671,520	S$1,536,012
Total amount given to Indian Muslim associations	S$22,000[495]	S$45,000[495]	S$120,000[496]
Percentage of total amount given to Indian Muslim associations	3.8%	2.7%	7.8%

Table 3: *Zakāt* received by Indian Muslim organizations from MUIS[497]

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from such sketchy figures. It remains to be seen whether the relatively greater share received by Indian Muslim organizations in 2001 is indicative of a larger trend or a singular event. What can be said, though, is that the absolute amount of money received by the organizations has risen considerably. In 1996-97 (AH 1417), the three funded associations received on the average about S$7,000 each, while in 2001 this figure had risen to S$24,000 each for five associations. These figures indicate that Indian Muslim associations are increasingly able to draw more and more funds from *zakāt* payments, and thus are able to expand their programs and activities.

On the other hand it should be noticed that only three to five Indian Muslim associations did receive any funding from these sources, which means that most associations are not accessing MUIS's *zakāt* funds. Among these are mainly smaller groups with more limited activities, which are able to raise the funds needed for such activities on their own accounts.

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[494] Until AD 2000, MUIS's annual reports related to the Islamic Hijri era. AH 1417 relates to the period from the 19th of May 1996 to the 7th of May 1997, AH 1419 to the 28th of April 1998 to the 16th of April 1999.
[495] For three Indian Muslim associations (SKML, STMWS, UIMA).
[496] For five Indian Muslim associations, no details given.
[497] Figures taken from *Warita* 110, May-Jun 1997: 13; *Warita Kita* 120, Mar-Apr 1999: 4; and http://www.muis.gov.sg/english/zakat/zakat_recipients/Zakat_Disbursements.aspx?pMenu=3#fisabilillah [accessed in March 2004; page has since been removed; the page gave slightly varying figures, but the overall pattern was clear].

To be recognized by MUIS and to receive its support and assistance may also assist Indian Muslim associations to advance their own claims at representing a specific segment of Singaporean Muslim society. MUIS's interaction with Indian Muslims in matters where ethnic identity has played a role has made substantial use of the mediation of associations and 'community leaders'. Cooperating with MUIS allows associations to project themselves as legitimately representing the Indian Muslim community, or a section thereof, and to be recognized by MUIS for this.

Yet cooperation between MUIS and the associations also holds benefits for the former. Already in 1978, the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs noted in a parliamentary speech that only by maintaining good relations could MUIS be kept informed about the operations and problems of the associations and be able to utilize them for explaining government policies to the Muslim public.[498] This point is of particular importance with regard to Indian Muslim associations, as the networks of the non-Indian Muslim elites of Singapore usually do not extend to the general Indian Muslim population.

As has already been mentioned above, Indian Muslims have repeatedly been criticized for lack of unity and have been urged to adopt a common agenda by politicians and Muslim community leaders. Apart from the ideological ramifications of such an appeal, this call for unity among Indian Muslims by Malays and Arabs also reveals the difficulties government bodies face when dealing with Indian Muslims. Due to the limited influence of MUIS leadership among Indian Muslims, the Indian Muslim associations emerged as the prime mediator between government agencies and the larger Indian Muslim communities. This enables MUIS to address Indian Muslim grievances more effectively, while at the same time establishing its authority

[498] Quoted in Tyabji 1991a: 225-6.

over religious activities by Indian Muslims. At the same time, however, MUIS had to acknowledge the diversity of associations and community leaders among Indian Muslims, for no single association can reasonably claim to have the support of all Indian Muslims in Singapore.

The foundation of the FIM in 1992 has certainly simplified the situation from MUIS's point of view. The FIM has become MUIS's prime link to the Indian Muslim communities in Singapore. Prior to the establishment of the FIM, MUIS risked getting involved in the squabbles between various Indian Muslim associations if it appointed a member of one of the associations to the executive council. Now, with the FIM in existence, one of its members is usually appointed to represent the interests of Indian Muslims in the executive council. This has not brought quarrels between associations to an end, but now the task of choosing the representative falls to the members of the FIM, not MUIS, which can thus stay aloof from inter-association hostilities. Nevertheless, the foundation of the FIM has not relieved MUIS of the need to deal with particular associations. This is mainly due to the fact that the FIM is a federation of associations, with little independent funds and personnel. This severely limits the sphere of influence of the FIM, and makes it necessary for MUIS to turn to the constituent associations if it wants work to be done at grassroots level. Indeed, even though the FIM has simplified procedures for MUIS, one may argue that it has also removed MUIS from the Indian Muslim base by yet another level of mediation.

An overview over official relations between Tamil Muslim associations and government bodies would not be complete without mentioning the links associations maintain with individual mosques. We have already noted that mosques may permit registered Muslim associations to use their facilities. Especially the 'new-generation' mosques offer a range of facilities which associations can draw upon for their

activities, like auditoria, class-rooms, and the like. Associations draw on these for conferences, speeches or religious classes they organize, rather than using similar facilities in community centers. STMWS has in the past cooperated with several Indian mosques, such as the Masjid Abdul Gafoor and the Masjid Jamae (Chulia), in organizing religious classes.[499] Yet such official links between mosques and Indian Muslim associations are not limited to Indian mosques. For instance, there is an especially close relationship between SKML and the Masjid Mujahidin in Queenstown, and the association uses the mosque and its facilities for a number of activities, from conferences to *ifṭār* ('fast breaking') receptions [**Figure 13**].

Figure 13: *Ifṭār* reception organized by the Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League at Masjid Mujahidin in 2003 (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

[499] "Religious Knowledge Upgrading Course for Indian Muslims", *Warita* 92, Jan-Feb 1994: 16; cf. also Syed Mohamed 1973: 61 for SIJU.

In contrast to the often substantial cooperation between government bodies and individual associations, there is almost no cooperation amongst the associations themselves outside the FIM. To the contrary, there exist considerable rivalries between associations over policies and activities, some of which will be addressed in chapter 6. Official friendly relationships between different associations outside the forum offered by the FIM tend to be minimal, and limited to the president or secretary of one association attending another association's functions and conferences. Furthermore, in many cases these contacts are precipitated on private links between the leaderships of the associations involved, and are thus difficult to distinguish from the personal networks of individuals.

In the case of interactions between registered associations and informal groups, it is even more difficult to distinguish between official links between groups and informal, private links between individuals. Very often, members of a Sufi brotherhood may also be engaged in an association, or have ties of kin- and friendship to those active in a specific association. It is thus difficult to talk of 'formal' or 'informal' ties between associations and informal groups, as the line between the two types of links is blurred.[500] At times, though, associations may recognize 'informal' groups in a more public way. For example, such groups may be asked to recite *mawlid* on the occasion of important holidays, or to participate in other ways in an association's functions. Conversely, associations may support informal groups in certain ways. In at least one case an association allows a branch of a Sufi brotherhood to use its premises for its *dhikr* sessions. Yet in many cases, informal groups operate without any support from an association, and most associations may not even be aware of the existence of such a group.

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[500] One may even argue that it is hardly possible for the associations to have 'formal' ties to 'informal' groups.

Informal Networks and the Role of the Individual

Despite the fact that it is officially associations and other public institutions that enter into relations with one another, the precise nature of these relations is strongly influenced by the networks and actions of individuals. In some cases, these relationships become so important that the line between official and informal, corporate and individual networks becomes blurred. The strength of an association is at least partly determined by the type of personal networks its leadership has been able to establish. Individual networks can provide an association with political leverage, funding, administrative benefits, and popular support; on the other hand, an individual may be able to derive considerable advantages through the manipulation of these networks. Such informal, private linkages are themselves of various types. Kinship, friendship, patronage, or business acquaintances may all be involved. Furthermore, individuals may hold office in more than one group, especially since the establishment of the FIM; thus, it is not always possible to tell in what capacity a person acts at a certain moment, and indeed, the person may not be able to tell him- or herself.

As mentioned, the nature of networks across institutions and associations can be of various types. Kinship is one of these linkages that tie individuals active in different institutions together. Given the fact that a large number of Tamil Muslim associations are kin-center based, kinship linkages are more common 'vertically', i.e. tying an association to an informal group or a government institution, though there are of course cases where members of different associations are tied by kinship. Thus, I know of several cases where the leadership of associations is linked by kinship to members of Sufi brotherhoods. In some cases, it seems that such linkages help to facilitate relationships between associations and informal groups. In the above

mentioned case of a Sufi brotherhood's branch which uses the premises of a kin-center association, some of the members of the Sufi group are fairly closely related to persons among the association's leadership, though I am not able to say whether this fact has motivated the association to allow the Sufi group to use its premises. The same association also maintains links with another Sufi group, which similarly includes members of the association's kin-center community. Interestingly, in this case the Sufi group also has members which are closely linked by kinship ties to another kin-center association, yet these ties apparently have not led to any cooperation between that association and the Sufi group.

Perhaps even more important than ties of kinship are friendships established across organizational boundaries, for such links are in a way much more facilely established than kinship linkages. Such ties can operate in a variety of ways. On the most basic level, they may be expressed by individuals attending the functions and activities of other associations, sometimes as representatives of their associations, sometimes simply as private individuals. Yet such connections of friendship can have a much greater impact on the associations that the respective individuals are involved in. Let us take the example of two individuals, Shaik Omar and Ashfaq Naina.[501] Both are high-ranking members of their respective kin-center associations. The two are close acquaintances, and commonly visit each other on the occasion of holidays and other functions; this sometimes includes functions organized by their respective associations. Yet the relationship does not end there. At times, Ashfaq Naina, who belongs to a merchant family, financially supports events organized by Shaik Omar's association. At other times, Shaik Omar mobilizes his own professional networks for the benefit of Ashfaq Naina or his relatives.

[501] Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Conversely, of course, the relationship between associations can also suffer from rivalry or enmity between high-ranking members. Indeed, in some cases it seems that it is primarily personal rivalry rather than differences between the associations as such that cause tensions. This type of negative relationship appears to be the stronger the more influence an individual wields in an association, as the interest of individual and association overlap in these cases to a considerable degree. As such individuals often have connections not only with other associations, but also with high-ranking functionaries in government bodies, rivalries between the leadership of various associations can lead to considerable tensions as the competing individuals mobilize their respective networks of support.

Organizations can not only be linked by the personal networks of their individual members, but also by one person holding offices in multiple associations and institutions. In some cases, this multiple office-holding is directly linked to the nature of the post. The President of the FIM naturally has to be a member of one of the member-associations, and usually he[502] will be a leading member of his association. Similarly, there is usually a representative of Indian Muslim associations on the MUIS executive council, who nowadays usually represents the FIM, leading to a triple engagement of the individual with various organizations: as member of an Indian Muslim association, as representative of the FIM, and as member of the MUIS executive council. Whereas in case of MUIS and the FIM, such multiple office-holding is unavoidable, there are also other cases where individuals are simultaneously members of several official bodies. Thus, there are cases where individuals hold positions both in an association and a mosque's Board of Management, which is certainly a boon to the association if it needs to make use of

[502] I am not aware of women in the highest echelons of associations or the FIM.

the facilities offered by mosques. Yet there is only one case that I am aware of, viz. that of the Masjid Malabar and the Malabar Muslim Juma-ath, where the link between mosque and association is so close that the association actually helps in facilitating the mosque's administration. In some cases, an individual may even hold high-ranking positions in several associations. For example, there are close connections between SIJU and TMJ, due to the fact that SIJU split from TMJ in the late 1950s, and I have talked to several respondents who are or have been members of both associations. The leadership is still closely linked, which explains the close cooperation between the two associations during the *Taláq*-controversy.[503]

It is interesting to note that most of the last mentioned cases of multiple membership in Indian Muslim associations and other Muslim bodies apart from FIM and MUIS involve members of non-kin-center associations. As has been mentioned in chapter 2, it was largely the kin-center associations that had survived the war, and the postwar period saw a steady rise in the influence of such associations and former laborer communities on the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore, with a simultaneous decline of 'big men' represented by individuals like Kader Sultan or Karim Ghani, who had dominated the organization of Tamil Muslim religious life until the early 1950s. Yet it is important to stress that this does not mean that individual initiatives play no longer a role in the religious life of Singaporean Tamil Muslims. Rather, individuals had to adapt to the wider changes taking place in the landscape of religious organizations. While lacking the broad support that larger kin-center associations derive from their communities, groups that were not linked to a specific kin-center community still allowed individuals to impact on the organization of religious life. It seems that these individuals make up for the often rather small size

[503] Cf. Liew 2001: 174-5.

of their associations through diversifying their activities by participating in the organization of multiple religious institutions, thereby preserving a role for the individual in the organization of Tamil Muslim religious life in Singapore.

Chapter 5

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION

INTRODUCTION

It has been claimed that "[l]anguage is always involved in ethnic relations…".[504] Given that the section of Muslim society we are concerned with is defined through the use of a common language, viz. Tamil, we will have to consider what role language plays in the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore, and how it affects the ability of Tamil Muslims to participate in the Muslim public sphere. We shall consider three aspects of the role of language in the religious domain. The first aspect concerns the relation of language and community for Tamil Muslims. What needs to be considered in this context is in how far Tamil Muslims' relationship with their religion as well as the larger non-Muslim Tamil society is reflected in the imagination of the Tamil language. Furthermore, it is necessary in this context to consider the role of other languages for the Tamil Muslim community, viz. Malay, Urdu, and English.

Secondly, we will have to address a vital point of Tamil Muslim religiosity, viz. the use of Tamil for religious purposes. There are three main domains where the use of Tamil is conspicuous in the religious sphere – teaching, preaching, and publishing, ultimately all related to the transmission of religious knowledge. Preaching in Tamil

[504] Haarmann 1999: 63.

is common in a number of contexts, most notably of course in the weekly Friday sermon, and less commonly on religious holidays or during functions and ceremonies. The formalized transmission of Islamic knowledge in religious teaching is a central issue in demands made regarding Tamil Muslims' capacity to participate in the Muslim public sphere in Singapore, and religious classes are among the most common activities organized by Indian Muslim associations and mosques. Finally, Tamil is also used in transmitting religious information through publications, whether as journals, books, or more recently through audio recordings. Furthermore, in this section we have to address the problems that Tamil Muslims face in employing Tamil for the abovementioned purposes. In particular, what needs to be addressed is the reliance on Indian religious scholars and publications.

The final section shall take up the last point, and address the question in how far the use of Tamil impacts Tamil Muslim involvement in Muslim discourse in the Republic. This shall be accomplished by briefly considering two debates that originated among Tamil Muslims, and evaluate their impact on wider Muslim discourse in Singapore. The two debates to be considered are the so-called 'Singapore Muslim Libel Case' of 1925-6, and the '*Taláq*-Controversy' of 1999-2000. By contrasting these two debates, it will be possible to assess under what conditions and in which ways debates within Tamil-speaking Muslim society have been able at various points in time to permeate the wider Muslim public sphere in Singapore, and how they came to be perceived.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNITY

In has been stated that fluency in one or the other language impacts ideas about 'community' among Indian Muslims in Singapore. Noorul Farha comments: "The language one can speak may…influence one's choice of ethnic affiliation".[505] As the ability to communicate is an important aspect of interacting meaningfully with other persons, it is hardly surprising that proficiency in a given language also gives access to networks composed of the speakers of that language. Furthermore, inability to speak a certain language may raise the awareness of difference on part of a person when faced with the need to communicate. As we shall see in this and the next chapter, language is an important part of the problems faced by Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore.[506] But it is important to avoid determinism when discussing the relationship of language-use and images of community – various factors constrain and influence identification with a given speech community. In this section, we will therefore outline the role Tamil and other languages have played in imagining community among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore.

Tamil Muslims have actively participated in the Tamil public sphere in Singapore, and it is not uncommon to encounter statements to the effect that the shared language would naturally predispose Tamil-speaking Muslims to identify with the wider non-Muslim Tamil 'community'.[507] As one respondent put it: "I am very proud I am, still I am a Tamilian. My mother-tongue is Tamil, my religion is Islam".[508] Fakhri has claimed that the diaspora-situation has been conducive to the creation of a Tamil Muslim identity through print-media in 19th and early 20th century Singapore and

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[505] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 60; cf. Bibijan 1976/77: 101-2.
[506] Cf. also Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 60.
[507] Cf. "Abdullah to help Indian Muslims in identity conflict", *The Straits Times*, 31 Oct 1993; Mani 1992: 352.
[508] Cf. Shankar 2001: 22.

Malaya.[509] Furthermore, according to him a salient feature of this early print-culture was "…the primacy of language as a cultural signifier and the consigning of religion to the margins of social relations", i.e. that 'Tamilness' superseded 'Muslimness' in this context.[510] Indeed, the editors of *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* in the 1880s clearly aimed to address both Hindus and Muslims among the Tamil-speakers. Thus, the title-page of the first issue proclaimed in English that the newspaper was started by "…the Mohamedan and Hindoo residents in [sic] Singapore…", and even claimed that 'Allah', 'Shiva', 'Vishnu' and 'God' were just different names for the same divinity.[511] Yet at the same time, *pace* Fakhri, the religious differences remained salient, and while Tamil-speaking Muslims were perceived as part of a wider Tamil-speaking community, they were similarly seen as part of larger Singaporean Muslim community which included "…Arabs, Malays, Bengalis, Klings, and others…".[512]

Tamil Muslim participation in various Tamil-nationalist movements as well as in anti-Hindi agitation has received some attention in recent years.[513] Tamil nationalist leaders generally exhibited a rather positive attitude towards Muslims and Islam.[514] Similarly, Tamil Muslims in Singapore participated in nationalist associations and movements. Thus, in 1956, a Muslim was the Vice-chairman of the Tamils [sic] Reform Association (Tamiḻar Cīrttiruttac Caṅkam), which was one of the main Tamil associations in Singapore at that time.[515] Muslims also participated in the Singaporean DMK (Tirāviṭa Muṉṉēṟṟak Kaḻakam, Dravidian Progress Association), the local avatar of Tamil Nadu's prime nationalist political party. One respondent, who had

[509] Fakhri 2002: 7.
[510] Fakhri 2002: 8.
[511] "Dedication" & "Kaṭavuḷvāḻttu", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 27 Jun 1887: 1; cf. also "Paḷḷivāyilkaḷum tēvālayaṅkaḷum", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 25 Feb 1889: 134.
[512] "Cavuttu piriṭciṟōṭ kuttupāp paḷḷivāyilaippaṟṟiya potuviṣayam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 15 Aug 1887: 29.
[513] Cf. More 1993; Ramaswamy 1997: 174-6.
[514] Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1984: 105-6; Ramaswamy 1997: 191.
[515] Irācaṉ 2001: 72; for the Tamils Reform Association, cf. Arasaratnam 1979: 127-9, 172-4; Haridass 1976/77.

earlier been member of the Tamils Reform Association, joined the Singaporean DMK when asked by a Hindu friend. The respondent stressed that the Singaporean DMK, in contrast to the Indian DMK, was "…not a political association", and that he participated primarily in cultural activities.[516] Another example of active identification with a wider Tamil community would be the establishment of the Umar Pulavar Tamil School by SKML in 1946, especially as there were latent conflicts within the association over transforming the school into a *madrasa* for the teaching of Arabic and religious education. Interestingly, it had been a non-Muslim, Ca.Cā. Ciṉṉappaṉār, who had suggested naming the school after the most important Muslim poet in Tamil.[517] Nowadays, there are still Muslims active as teachers for Tamil at several schools. According to one respondent, there are currently (2006) about twenty Muslims among the Tamil teachers in Singapore.

Yet the example of the Umar Pulavar Tamil School also reveals that Muslims did not always feel comfortable with non-Islamic aspects of Tamil language and culture. Besides the controversy over funding religious rather than secular education, the school had to face a controversy with the newspaper *Malāyā Naṇpaṉ*, which alleged that Muslim pupils had been made to participate in 'un-Islamic' activities during the Educational Week celebrations of 1952, such as greeting with folded hands like Hindus, using the greeting *vaṇakkam*, and having Muslim girls perform on stage.[518] Earlier, the handbill of 1925 that caused the 'Singapore Muslim Libel Case' advised Muslims to use the Arabic rather than the Tamil script when translating the Koran into Tamil in order to "…obviate the possibility of the Tamils with Tamil script slighting our religion".[519] While there was support for Tamil nationalism from some quarters

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[516] Cf. Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1984: 193-4.
[517] Meytīṉ 1989: 55-7.
[518] Palanisamy 1987: 32.
[519] Quoted in Mallal 1928: 22; admittedly, the handbill was penned by a scholar resident in India.

among the Muslims, others remained critical about it. One issue between Tamil Muslims and non-Muslim nationalists was the latter's elevation of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, a highly popular collection of moral maxims possibly dating to the 5th-6th century, over the Koran.[520] A controversy ensued in the mid-1950s when the then editor of *Malāyā Naṇpaṉ*, Em.Em. Tāvūtu, published a tract written by a Hindu with the title *Tirukkuṟaḷ apattak kaḷañciyam*, 'Storehouse of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ'*s Mistakes'.[521] The tendency of Tamil nationalists to promote the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* as a moral work on par if not superior to the Koran definitely concerned some of my respondents, who expressed their doubts about these claims in informal conversations. One of them even supplied me with a Muslim refutation of the nationalists' claim entitled 'Which is the Universal Scripture? The *Kuṟaḷ* or the Koran?'.[522] Another issue mentioned by my respondents was that at least until the 1980s, special programs on Muslim holidays were only broadcast in Malay radio and television stations, while the Tamil stations only broadcast Hindu programs. One Indian respondent commented on the issue:

> We cannot meet, eh, mix [sic] with the Malay program, because of the language, different language. So we want separate. Suppose we go this side, means Tamil program, […] they celebrate only Deepavali and Pongal, their own festivals. […] They cannot spare for us […] separate time. I think that's a problem.

By now, the two Muslim holidays have become more conspicuous on Tamil television in Singapore, and the local Tamil radio station actually has several

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[520] Cf. Zvelebil 1995: 669-71; for the debate between Muslims and non-Muslims on the issue in India, cf. More 2004: 170-4.
[521] Irācaṉ 2001: 55.
[522] Mataṉī 1974.

programs on each of the holidays, so that is seems that a solution has been found in this regard. As we shall see in chapter 6, such frictions are often seen as signs of a supposed tension between being 'Muslim' and being 'Indian' or 'Tamil'.[523] Yet I would rather suggest that the tensions arose over conflicting perceptions of what it means to be Tamil, with Muslims protesting any move that may make Tamil culture appear as if it was in opposition to Islamic principles. The frictions thus arise in order to avert creating tensions between being 'Muslim' and being 'Tamil' rather than from a primordial identity conflict, and are an expression of Tamil Muslims' desire to identify as Tamil.[524]

In everyday life, though, there seems to be little need for most Tamil Muslims to actively project or contest their 'Tamilness'. Most comments from my respondents regarding that matter did occur in the context of discussing the role of other languages in their religious life, where the contrast with Tamil would become most obvious.[525] To be an Indian and to speak Tamil is often seen as interchangeable by Singaporean Tamils, especially given Tamil's official status in Singapore. It is this tendency to use 'Tamil' and 'Indian' interchangeably that gives rise to the tendency to speak about 'Indian Muslims' when one actually addresses Tamil-speaking Muslims.[526] When asked about how far FIM could represent all Indian Muslims in Singapore given its strong South Indian character, one community leader expressed it in exactly these terms:

[523] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 37-9.

[524] Admittedly, this may not be true in all contexts, as the refusal of Mariam's respondents to call themselves 'Tamil Muslims' suggests, but as mentioned in the Introduction, I have not encountered such sentiments; cf. Mariam 1989: 102.

[525] Similarly, Mariam discusses the role of Urdu, Malay, and English for Tamil Muslims, but not of Tamil itself; cf. Mariam 1989: 108-10, 120-2.

[526] Cf. "I'm flattered Indian Muslims like me were counted in", *The Straits Times*, 25 Mar 1992; Mariam 1989: 102.

> It's because Tamil is one of the major language[s] and primary speaking [sic], and government has emphasized [it] and we felt that the Tamils, eh, Tamil-speaking [sic] in the Federation of Indian Muslims is a majority. So I think it is fair that, you know, they have a better say.

Given that my research concentrated on Tamil-speaking Muslims, it is not surprising that I rarely encountered statements to the effect that people felt inadequate as 'Indians' because they did not speak Tamil well as related by Noorul Farha.[527] Yet as mentioned in chapter 3, the perceived quality of the Tamil spoken by various groups within Tamil Muslim society was considered as a marker of refinement and status, though of course it was usually the respondent's own variety of Tamil that served as a marker to judge the quality of Tamil spoken by others. On the level of the individual, being able to employ different registers of the language was a highly regarded skill. The Tamil language is characterized by diglossia, i.e. there is considerable difference between the language of everyday communication and the language of literature, speeches, and other 'higher' discourse. To be able to give speeches in Tamil, or even more importantly, as we shall see, to preach, is a skill that not every Singaporean Tamil possesses. This is furthermore compounded by the fact that the modern literary language furthermore differs from the language employed for literary works until the 19th century, making the latter unintelligible for Tamil-speakers without proper training. The members of a branch of a Sufi brotherhood told me that they had originally planned to read Umaṟuppulavars *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, the most important Islamic poem in Tamil dating to ca. 1700, together, but even years later were not capable to do so, as they did not understand the poem. For those people who do

[527] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 35.

situate themselves in a Tamil discursive tradition, such linguistic skills are highly desirable, even though only a limited number of people possess them.

To understand the patterns of use of and identification with Tamil in an Islamic context in Singapore, one also has to take account of those languages that in a sense compete with the use of Tamil in these contexts. In Singapore, these are mainly Malay, Urdu, and English. Malay is of course ubiquitous in the Muslim public sphere in the republic. Religious education, preaching in mosques, publications, as well as communication among Muslims is predominantly carried out in Malay, prompting Clammer to call it the 'Muslim vernacular'.[528] It is in this context that some authors have located the tendency of Tamil Muslims to 'Malayize', to adopt the Malay language and with it also aspects of Malay culture.[529] It should be noted that adoption of Malay by Tamil Muslims was and is not always made unconstrained. The wish to grant children access to a wider range of religious education may influence parents to have their child take Malay in school. Similarly, difficulties in finding a marriage partner, and even the mundane fact of living in a predominantly Malay neighborhood, act as constraints to 'Malayize'.[530] One of my elderly respondents related why his mother, who grew up in a Malay *kampung*, did not speak Tamil with her children, though both her parents were from India: "It is shameful for us to talk in our own language in a Malay kampong in those days. Unprestigious, to talk our language in the midst of Malay [sic]. […] As a result, my mother forgot the language [Tamil; T.T.]".

The tendency to identify Islam and the Malay language is widespread in Singapore and is perceived by some to be commonsensical.[531] It is not surprising that

[528] Clammer 1985: 34.
[529] Clammer 1985: 61; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 60-1; PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 151-2.
[530] Bibijan 1976/77: 120-3; PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 152.
[531] Cf. Clammer 1985: 34; PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 151-2.

this identification and the resulting pressure to conform is strongly resisted by many Tamil-speaking Muslims. One of my respondents noted his annoyance with constantly facing the question in school why he, as a Muslim, did not speak Malay. Similar complaints were made by other respondents, and were also noted by scholars.[532] Often these complaints were coupled with pointing out how the emphasis on Malay in the Muslim public sphere disadvantages Tamils in the fulfillment of their religious duties. It is also in this context that protests by Tamil Muslims regarding the choice of Malay as the medium to teach Islam at schools in the Religious Knowledge program in the 1980s should be seen.[533] Generally, negative reactions to Malay by Tamil Muslims are perceived as attempts to safeguard their 'Tamil' identity against being assimilated into the Malay community.[534] While there is no reason to contest this assertion, one should also note another dimension. In contrast to the tendency by some, usually Malay-speaking, Muslims who consider this behavior as a sign that for Tamil Muslims, 'Indian' identity is more important than 'Muslim' identity,[535] the contestation of Malay in the Muslim public sphere by some Tamil Muslims should rather be seen as motivated by the wish not to build up an opposition between 'Tamil' and 'Islam', which inevitably results when 'Islam' is being too closely identified with 'Malay'. It may thus be a reaction paralleling the contestation over certain aspects of Tamil identity such as the evaluation of certain texts which were discussed above.

Another possible linguistic choice for Tamil Muslims, and for an even larger Indian Muslim community, would be Urdu. Urdu is often considered to be "…a symbol of cultural and religious identity" of South Asian Muslims,[536] and is even claimed to have "…become the culture language and lingua franca of the South Asian

[532] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 37; PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 152.
[533] Cf. Mani 1992: 353; Siddique 1989: 567.
[534] Cf. PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 151-2, 180.
[535] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 38; PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 152; Saat 2002: 159.
[536] Schmidt 2003: 301.

Muslim diaspora outside the subcontinent".[537] While the last statement needs to be strongly modified in the Singaporean context, the perception of Urdu as *the* language of South Asian Muslims is certainly present. When asked what were in his opinion the main differences between Indian and Malay Muslims, a Malay respondent pointed out that "…of course, the Indian Muslims have their own language – Urdu", even though most of the Indian Muslims around us at the time were Tamil-speaking. While some Tamil Muslims have not much regard for the language, as mentioned in chapter 3, Urdu seems to command a certain amount of respect among Tamil Muslims in Singapore. One respondent noted that more and more Tamil Muslims were trying to learn Urdu, in order to access Islamic literature written in that language. The members of the Sufi-group mentioned above who had originally wanted to learn how to read the *Cīṟāppurāṇam* had found a substitute in learning Urdu.

Yet there seems to be some ambiguity in the attitude towards Urdu among many Tamil Muslims – while the language is respected and studied, there is no move towards pushing the language as a medium of communication for Indian Muslims in Singapore as a whole. As mentioned, Tamil is seen by most Tamil Muslims to be the proper language for Indian Muslims in Singapore. The same community leader who had defended the dominance of Tamils in the FIM noted that the Malabar Muslim Juma-ath and the Dakhni Urdu Association were included mainly because "…more or less, these people would understand Tamil". Indeed, as mentioned in chapter 3, the South Indian speakers of Dakhni-Urdu are perceived negatively by some Tamils, who see them as Tamils who adopted Urdu due to pretensions to higher status. At the same time though, these Urdu-speaking South Indians do not threaten the hegemony of Tamil among Singaporean Indian Muslims, as on the one hand their Urdu is perceived

[537] Schmidt 2003: 303.

to be substandard – even one Dakhni respondent claimed that, in contrast to Dakhni-Urdu, North Indian Urdu was "…so pure you can't understand it!" – and on the other the speakers of Dakhni-Urdu seem to be content to use Tamil in the wider Indian Muslim public sphere, knowledge of which gives them an advantage over Urdu-speaking North Indians lacking that skill.

The most recent addition to the languages competing with Tamil in the religious life of Singaporean Tamil Muslims, yet possibly the most challenging, is English. Twenty years ago, Clammer considered it to be unlikely that Indian Muslims would turn to English, but this has become increasingly the case in the last two decades.[538] Two factors favor the increasing use of English for religious purposes among Tamil Muslims in Singapore. Firstly, the majority of Singaporeans, especially the younger ones, know some English, and almost all younger Tamils have gone through English-medium education.[539] To judge from the census figures, English is more readily available to Tamil Muslims than Malay.[540] Secondly, Nielsen has recently pointed out that "…English is becoming an Islamic *lingua franca*".[541] Muslim intellectuals have been turning to English to an increasing extent lately, and there are several English Islamic bookshops in Singapore which sell not only original works on Islam in English, but also translations into English of works originally written in other languages. The increasing use of English in the Muslim public sphere is also signaled by the decision of MUIS to have the Friday sermon read in English in selected mosques. MUIS explained the move by pointing out that there was a significant number of Muslims in Singapore who do not understand Malay, obviously

[538] Cf. Clammer 1985: 42.
[539] Cf. PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 113-7.
[540] Leow 2001b: 81.
[541] Nielsen 2003: 42.

anticipating resentment on part of the Malays.[542] Many of my Indian respondents, in contrast, welcomed the increasing use of English. A substantial number advocated that English rather than Malay should be the main language of the Singapore Muslim community, as English was more widely understood. This opinion was not only voiced by Indian Muslims who spoke languages other than Tamil but also by Tamils. For these respondents, English has the advantage of being the 'mother-tongue' of only a small number of Muslims in Singapore, and is therefore untainted by any ethnic parochialism. In addition, of course, English's image to be a 'modern' and 'universal' language may make it appear more favorably as a language of Islamic discourse than Malay or Tamil. Yet despite this positive attitude by many Indian Muslims towards English, very little is done on the side of Tamil Muslim associations and informal groups to encourage the use of English rather than Tamil in the Muslim public sphere, and it seems that to many Tamil Muslims, a model that favors Tamil among Tamil Muslims and English in interaction with non-Tamil Muslims seems to be preferred to the wholesale replacement of Tamil by English.[543]

PREACHING, TEACHING, PUBLISHING – THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN RELIGION

By focusing on language as a marker of identifying with a given speech community, one easily overlooks a much more basic aspect of religious language use, viz. that the transmission of religious knowledge largely happens through language. What type of religious knowledge an individual is able to access depends on what language(s) he or she is proficient in. Similarly, ignorance of a certain language makes it difficult, if not impossible for an individual to access knowledge transmitted through that language. It

[542] Metzger 2003: 44.
[543] But cf. Mariam 1989: 121.

is my contention that this simple aspect is more important to understand Tamil Muslim religious life in Singapore than the question of identity. As Malays form the largest ethno-linguistic group among Singaporean Muslims, it is understandable that Malay is the most salient language in the Muslim public sphere in the Republic. It is the main language of preaching, formalized religious education, and religious publishing, and widely used by MUIS, MENDAKI, and other Muslim institutions and organizations. Yet there is a significant section among Singaporean Tamil Muslims which is not or only rudimentarily proficient in Malay. The Census of 2000 only gives figures on literacy rather than general competence in different languages, and even these figures are not particularly clear with regard to our question, but it may not be too far fetched to assume that probably less than half of the Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore have enough proficiency in Malay to be able to utilize it for the transmission of religious knowledge.[544] There is therefore a need for Tamil Muslims in Singapore to rely on their own networks and initiatives in order to attain religious knowledge, as they are unable to participate in the wider Malay speaking Muslim public sphere.

The focus in this section will be on language use in the transmission of religious knowledge in public. Most of this transmission takes place through three types of activities: through sermons and lectures, through formal religious education, and through religious publications, mostly in print, but increasingly utilizing the potential of new media. Of course, the family and other social networks also act as conduits for

[544] Cf. Leow 2001b: 81; these figures seem to be contradicted by figures from the 1970s according to which 95.9% of all Indians could understand Malays; cf. Clammer 1985: 34. But these figures are highly problematic – apart from the time gap between the two sets of figures, it is not clear what ‘to understand’ Malay means in this context – understanding a fruit vendor and understanding theological discourse are two different things. Many of my respondents stated that they were not proficient enough in Malay to participate in religious activities that required use of Malay, and the continued existence of ‘Indian mosques’ is a clear indicator that there is a demand for the transmission of religious knowledge in South Asian languages.

the transmission of knowledge in certain circumstances, such as the elementary education of children. But it is in the Muslim public sphere that language use in the transmission of religious knowledge becomes a salient marker of difference between ethno-linguistic groups, and it is here that exclusion from formalized transmission of knowledge has the greatest impact on the religious life of individuals.

Sermons and lectures are an important part of this formalized transmission of religious knowledge. The Friday sermon (*khuṭba*, Ta. *piracaṅkam*), as well as sermons and talks delivered on other occasions, performs a variety of functions, such as reminding Muslims of and exhorting them to perform their duties towards other human beings as well as God, recall the sacred history of Islam, interpreting scripture and providing Muslims with guidelines of how to respond to the world around them as Muslims. Mariam noted with a hint of disapproval that the devotees at the Nagore Durgah in 1986 exhibited "…a general lack of interest in listening to the sermon (that is, to learn about Islam)…".[545] As has been mentioned in chapter 4, the general topic of the weekly Friday sermon, as well as the basic text in Malay and English, is provided by MUIS. In 'Indian' mosques, this basic text of course needs to be rendered into a South Asian language, a task that requires a certain amount of religious knowledge as well as rhetorical skills. The preacher also has to be careful in recreating the basic sermon in a South Asian language because, though he has some freedom in embellishing it, he has to avoid sensitive issues – the Singaporean state is deeply aware of the political and disruptive potential of sermons and lectures, which is obviously the reason why MUIS provides the basic text in the first place.[546]

Apart from the sermons, delivered every Friday and on the important holidays in the 'Indian' mosques, religious lectures in Tamil (*ca<u>n</u>mārkka urai*, *co<u>r</u>po<u>l</u>ivu*) have

[545] Mariam 1989: 45.
[546] Cf. Kuah-Pearce 2003: 148-50.

for a long time formed an important part of the activities organized by mosques and associations.[547] Such lectures may be delivered by both laypeople and religious scholars, though the latter are commonly regarded to have greater rhetoric skills, which seems to be justified from my own experience. To understand the role played by lectures and sermons in the religious life of Tamil Muslims, one has to take note not only of the content of the talk, but also the different techniques used by the preacher or speaker to transmit the intended information. Knowledge about Islamic values, doctrines, practices, and history is communicated to the audience by using scriptural exegesis, storytelling, exhortation, and explanation. This does not only require a sound knowledge of Islam, but also, as mentioned, considerable rhetorical skills. Preachers are expected to employ different registers of the Tamil language, e.g. literary Tamil when rendering verses from the Koran or colloquial Tamil when reporting conversations. As anecdotes and stories form an important part of Tamil preaching, the preacher also needs to be a good storyteller. Stories serve not only the transmission of religious knowledge, but also edify the audience, and the preacher needs to know a large number of episodes from the sacred history of Islam for his lectures and sermons. Humor is an important part of such storytelling, and the capacity of a preacher to include humorous yet still religiously edifying episodes in his lecture is greatly appreciated. In one instance, the person sitting beside me turned to me after the preacher had told a particularly amusing anecdote and commented: “That’s what I like [that particular preacher] for”. Finally, other rhetorical skills, such as modulating volume and speed of the voice or the use of gestures and facial expressions, are employed in preaching [**Figure 14**]. It is thus important to keep in

[547] Cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 35-6, 43, 47, 59-62.

mind that lectures and sermons are performances, and that the performative aspects play an important role in the transmission of knowledge in these speeches.[548]

Figure 14: Moulana Moulavi Hafiz Qaari Ha Meem Uthman Faizi speaking at a function organized by the Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League on the occasion of Islamic New Year AH 1427 on 30th of January 2006 (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

If religious lectures and sermons provide the most frequent opportunities for Singaporean Muslims to acquire religious knowledge, religious education provides the most comprehensive transmission of such knowledge. Generally, the literature distinguishes full-time and part-time Islamic education in Singapore. Full-time Islamic education is offered at six 'madrasahs' in Singapore. Students at these institutions do not attend secular schools – they receive training that enables them to become "…religious teachers, religious officials and religious leaders for the Muslim

[548] For a short example from a Tamil religious lecture cf. appendix 6.

community".[549] These full-time Islamic schools play an important role in providing Singaporean Muslims with a religious elite. Yet the main language of instruction in these institutions is Malay – none employs Tamil or any other South Asian language. The results of this are far-reaching, as South Asian Muslims without knowledge of Malay are excluded from studying at these institutions, and those who do know Malay do not receive any training that would allow them to employ South Asian languages effectively in Islamic contexts. Consequently, South Asian Muslims are lacking a locally trained body of religious scholars conversant in their own languages and are largely excluded from the religious (in the more narrow sense) elite of Singapore. This makes them dependent on religious scholars from South Asia, as we shall discuss below.

In contrast to full-time Islamic education, part-time religious classes offered by mosques and associations are available to South Asian Muslims. The existence of Tamil religious schools before World War II has been mentioned in chapter 2. In the 1970s, only the TMJ and some of the mosques offered religious classes.[550] The move towards introducing more religious classes seems to have come during the 1990s, when the question of education for Indian Muslim children had gained in salience through Indian Muslim dissatisfaction with the exclusive use of Malay in the classes on Islam under the Religious Knowledge program in the 1980s and the debates surrounding MENDAKI, SINDA and the FIM around 1990. In addition to classes offered at mosques, such as the Masjid Abdul Gafoor,[551] more and more associations came to offer such classes when the demand for religious education in Tamil was realized. By 2005, religious classes in Tamil were offered by seven different institutions at twenty different venues, catering to almost 1,700 students, both minors

[549] Chee 2006: 6; cf. also Metzger 2003: 127-30.
[550] Cf. Syed Mohamed 1973: 35, 77.
[551] Cf. Sankaran 2003: 63-5.

and adults (cf. appendix 7). Teachers are usually hired from India, supplemented, as mentioned in chapter 4, by assistants trained locally by organizations such as PERGAS. Commonly taught subjects were the reading of the Koran and the recitation of Arabic prayers supplemented by basic religious practices and explanation of fundamental doctrines. While some rely exclusively on Tamil, other classes also employ English beside Tamil. The classes at the now demolished Masjid Naval Base for example made use of English publications approved by MUIS for teaching the basics of Islam. As one of the coordinators explained to me, this was done in order to enable children to explain Islam to their non-Indian friends.

The success of these religious classes underscores the importance attached to religious education by many Tamil Muslims in Singapore. The need to have proper knowledge of religious matters was stressed by many of my respondents. One respondent noted that the lack of religious education exacerbated social problems such as an increased rate of divorces:

> The reason [for divorce] is lack of religious studies. […] So we have to educate them. Indian Muslim [sic] – Tamil; Malay Muslim in Malay; Urdu Muslim in Urdu; […] Everybody can read Koran, but they must know the meaning. Then they know how to go by *sharīʻa*. Then the divorce won't be there.

Religious education also has led to increasing interaction between MUIS and Indian Muslim associations. Offering religious classes allows associations to tap into MUIS funding out of *zakāt* funds. Conversely, MUIS has raised its involvement in Islamic education in recent years, and is increasingly working towards the creation of a

common curriculum for Islamic religious education in Singapore.[552] This has led to the formulation of a plan for Indian Muslim religious classes by MUIS and FIM.[553] Yet it is unclear how effective such policies can be as long as they fail to tackle the main problem: the absence of facilities for training religious scholars (*‘ulamā’*) conversant in Tamil locally and the resulting dependence on India for the supply of such scholars.

The topic of a Tamil-speaking religious elite needs some elaboration. *‘Ulamā’* from India have apparently served the needs of the Tamil Muslim community in Singapore for a long time. There is little information extant on the topic, but mosques like the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) would obviously have a Tamil-speaking Imam attached to them. Furthermore, scholars on a visit from India would be asked to preach and deliver speeches, as evinced by the report of such a visiting scholar giving the Friday sermon in the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) during Ramadan in 1889; similarly, Daud Shah delivered four lectures and three Friday sermons while being in Singapore in April and May 1925.[554] At the same time, as mentioned in chapter 2, the Indian Muslim Society employed a religious teacher from Vellore. Even though progressively more *‘ulamā’* settled down in Singapore in the postwar period, they had still received their education in India.[555] Most *‘ulamā’* serving the religious needs of Indian Muslims in Singapore are still hired from India. The Imam as well as the *bilāl*, i.e. the person calling to prayer, in ‘Indian’ mosques is generally brought from India,

[552] Cf. Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 2004.
[553] “Intiya muslim amaippukaḷiṉ mukkiya ceyal tiṭṭaṅkaḷukku Muyis ātaravu”, *Ceyticcuṭar* 35, Nov 2005: 2-3.
[554] “Kōṭṭār, Hāji Ceyku Mukiyittīṉ Ālīm ipuṉu Ceyku Mukammatu Leppai Ālīm Cākipu”, *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 13 May 1889: 178 [mistakenly given as 179]; “Malāy nāṭṭil namatu āciriyar”, *Tārul Islām* 7-6, Jun 1925: 275 & *Tārul Islām* 7-7, Jul 1925: 326-7.
[555] Syed Mohamed 1973: 58-68.

as are the teachers for the religious classes offered by Indian Muslim associations.[556] Currently, there may be about twenty to thirty Indian nationals serving in Islamic religious occupations in the Republic.

This arrangement of having Indian nationals serve the religious needs of the community is highly problematic. First of all, the Singaporean state is obviously wary of foreign preachers. Several times during the 1970s and 1980s, Indonesian and Malaysian preachers who had delivered inflammatory speeches on sensitive issues were barred from ever reentering Singapore.[557] Consequently, all *'ulamā'* from India are tested by Singaporean officials before they receive employment passes, and even those visiting only temporarily have to sign a declaration that they will not preach about political and sensitive matters. If they are found to have violated any of these rules, they can be deported and barred from entering Singapore again.[558] Employers of Indian *'ulamā'* also have to justify why they can not hire religious scholars locally. The lack of facilities for training *'ulamā'* in the *ḥanafī* law-school is one reason generally accepted for bringing *ḥanafī 'ulamā'* to Singapore. In contrast, language seems to be perceived to be a weaker justification – as mentioned in chapter 3, in one case Singaporean Tamil Muslims agreed to hire a *ḥanafī* Imam for a *shāfi'ī* mosque because they wanted to make sure to get a Tamil-speaking Imam, but feared that no permit would be given solely for that justification.[559]

Apart from these official barriers, the hiring of *'ulamā'* from India creates difficulties both for the scholars as well as the Singaporean community. Housing is

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[556] A respondent claimed that the reason why the *bilāl*, who does not require a religious degree, is hired from India is simply that it is difficult to find Singaporean Indian Muslims to do the job, whereas in the Malay community it would mainly be done by old men after retirement.
[557] Kuah-Pearce 2003: 149-50.
[558] One respondent pointed out that due to these regulations, the Singaporean government is actually able to exert a much greater control on foreign *'ulamā'*, who can be easily disciplined, than on local scholars.
[559] Cf. Mariam 1989: 103-4.

provided by the employer, in case of mosques usually a small and simple room on the mosque's premises. Financial constraints do not permit the *'ulamā'* from India to bring their families along, so that they are separated from kith and kin for long periods at a time. Furthermore, the lack of integration of the Indian *'ulamā'* into Singaporean society was a concern brought up by several respondents, and also recognized by MUIS.[560] During one dialogue session between MUIS and Indian Muslim community leaders, the suggestion was made to consider *'ulamā'* from India as 'talents', i.e. as migrants possessing skills desirable for the Singaporean state, yet it is rather unlikely that this proposal will meet with success, given the official distrust of the government. Those *'ulamā'* employed by associations to teach elementary religious knowledge furthermore have to come to terms with the rather unchallenging nature of their occupation – as one of them admitted, he would prefer to teach higher aspects of doctrine and theology rather than training children in reading the Koran.

It should also be noted that the relationship between Indian *'ulamā'* and Singaporean Indian laymen is not without frictions. In 1958, such frictions led to the *'ulamā'* splitting off from TMJ to form SIJU. A respondent who was a member of TMJ at that time commented:

> *'Ulamā'* is entirely different. […] Actually we give respect that one. Because they know religious [sic]. […] But all the time he cannot manage us. What he like [sic], we cannot do that one. That time we are young also, we know what's good, what is bad. […] But those people are like old time people, conservative. They say: "Only this way only we can go". That time we cannot obey to them.

[560] Cf. http://www.muis.gov.sg/english/media_releases/presspeech_perwakafanbencoolen_may04.aspx [accessed on 20 March 2006].

Almost fifty years later, some of my respondents similarly lamented the conservative attitude of many of the *'ulamā'* hired from India, which in their opinion was not feasible in the Singaporean environment. It was also mentioned that the scholars from India had difficulties in relating to the problems faced by Tamil Muslims in Singapore, being used to Indian rather than Singaporean discourse. Some associations have become more reluctant to employ *'ulamā'* from India, though they are still dependent on them for their religious classes. Tensions between STMWS and a scholar employed by them over the links this scholar had established with individuals outside the association's sphere of influence led to a split between the association and the scholar, who went on to form IMSSA. As a result, an increasing number of local Tamil Muslims are advocating a break with religious scholars from India.[561]

Despite such tensions, Tamil Muslims in Singapore are still dependent on *'ulamā'* from India, primarily for linguistic reasons. While several local Tamil Muslims have attained religious degrees and are capable of teaching in English or Malay, they often feel that they are not able to transmit knowledge properly in Tamil. In the case of preaching and delivering lectures, they plainly lack the rhetoric skills necessary to effectively convey religious information to Tamil-speaking audiences, as many readily admitted. Similarly, in order to teach Islam in Tamil, scholars need not only have a good grasp of Islamic principles but also need to know how to translate these principles properly into Tamil. Consequently, Tamil Muslims in Singapore are caught in a difficult situation. On the one hand, more and more Singaporean Tamil Muslims advocate a break with *'ulamā'* from India and Indian discourse. This is also the ultimate goal of MUIS and the public administration of Islam: none other than the Mufti of Singapore plainly told Indian Muslims in a dialogue session that the

[561] Cf. also Mariam 1989: 113.

recruitment of *'ulamā'* from India could not go on forever. Yet on the other hand, Indian Muslims in general and Tamil Muslims in particular are dependent on such Indian *'ulamā'* as long as no facilities for the training of Tamil religious scholars exist in Singapore. Without them, Tamil Muslims would be excluded even further from religious knowledge – the lack of local Tamil-speaking scholars already means that Tamil Muslims are largely excluded from the religious elite among Singaporean Muslims. To remedy this situation, some associations have recently developed plans to train proper *'ulamā'* locally by employing their Indian-recruited teachers. SKML has begun such a course in 2005. The course follows the syllabus employed in most Arabic Colleges in Tamil Nadu leading to the *'ālim*- (pl. *'ulamā'*) degree.[562] Over twenty students, both minors and adults, have enrolled for the course, yet as the course takes several years to complete, its impact remains to be seen.

In order to round out our discussion of the use of the Tamil language in the transmission of religious knowledge in Singapore, mention has to be made of religious publishing. This includes the publication of journals and religious books, including literary works in a more narrow sense, as well as the increased use of new media during the last five to ten years. As already mentioned in chapter 2, religious publications in Tamil from Singapore are extant from the late 19th century onwards. Tamil Muslims were pioneers in the establishment of Tamil-language newspapers in Singapore. The earliest two Tamil newspapers from Singapore that we know of were *Ciṅkai Varttamāṉi* and *Taṅkai Nēcaṉ* in the 1870s, the former published by the same press as *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* in the 1890s, the latter by the publishers of the Malay-language journal *Jawi Peranakan* – in both cases, the publishers were Muslims.[563] *Ciṅkai*

[562] Cf. Tschacher 2006a: 204-7, 212-5.
[563] Birch 1979: 51; Jāpar Muhyittīṉ 1990: 118; cf. also "Kaṭitam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 2 Jul 1888: 4; this letter also mentions a Singaporean journal called *Ñāṉacūriyaṉ*, which according to Cāmi 1994: 206 was also published by the same editor as *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*.

Nēcaṉ, the oldest extant Tamil newspaper from Singapore, regularly published articles of religious interest for Muslims, e.g. by providing special coverage of Muslim holidays,[564] and even republished articles from *Muslim Nēcaṉ*, a well-known reformist weekly published in Kandy, Ceylon,[565] thereby participating in what Fakhri has called a 'transnational social field'.[566] Tamil Muslims continued to be active in publishing. Cāmi mentions twelve Tamil journals and newspapers published from Singapore between 1900 and 1990, though most of them existed only for a short time, and little information is available on them.[567] In 1984, the then Acting Minister of Social Affairs, Ahmad Mattar, urged Tamil Muslims to publish a magazine in Tamil, Malay, and English to strengthen brotherhood among Singaporean Muslims, but such a plan did not materialize.[568] For some time in 1990-1991, Tamil items were published in the MUIS-newsletter *Warita*, but with the establishment of FIM, the task of publishing a Tamil Islamic newsletter was passed to that organization. This newsletter, *Ceyticcuṭar*, is currently the only Islamic journal in Tamil published in Singapore, apart from the newsletters published by the associations for their members, such as SKML's *Nam Kural*. Apart from these newsletters, the only other Islamic Tamil journals available in Singapore are published in India, and even these are not easily procured. A survey conducted on 27 April 2006 at newspaper sellers in Singapore's Little India turned up copies of only one Islamic journal, *Camanilaic Camutayam*. Notably, the editorial board of that journal includes Singaporean resident

[564] "Ītul aluhā veṉṉum hajjup perunāḷ", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 29 Aug 1887: 37; "Ītul aluhā veṉṉum hajjup perunāḷ", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ Anupantam*, 5 Aug 1889; the first few paragraphs of the two articles are identical.
[565] E.g. "Kiyāl", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 11 Mar 1889: 141-2.
[566] Fakhri 2002: 18.
[567] Cf. Cāmi 1994: 109, 122, 152, 260, 271, 295, 302, 314, 320, 337, 389. Some more journals are mentioned in Jāpar Muhyittīṉ 1990: 119-22.
[568] "Tamil Muslims urged to publish bulletin", *The Straits Times*, 6 Feb 1984; I am not aware that Malay Muslims were ever urged to include Tamil in their publications to foster unity.

J.M. Sali (Jē.Em. Cāli) and features a column by S.M. Rafiuddeen Baqawi (Es.Em. Rafīuttīṉ Pākkavī), who was Imam of the Masjid Bencoolen until 2005.

The situation regarding the publication of literature in the more narrow sense is similar to that exemplified by the journals. Islamic Tamil literature began to be produced in Singapore from the late 19th century onwards. Some of the works produced in Singapore actually show the extent to which Tamil Muslims had integrated the city into their ideas of home. A collection of religious songs called *Kīrttaṉattiraṭṭu* published in 1896 does not only include hymns to the triad Prophet Muhammad, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, and Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore, but also to a number of saints from various towns in the Kaveri-delta as well as three Singaporean saints: a Tamil buried on the compound of the Masjid Jamae (Chulia), Habib Nuh of Tanjong Pagar, and Sikandar Shah of Fort Canning Hill – the latter poem in Malay using Tamil letters![569] Yet since the late 19th century, the number of Islamic Tamil literature produced in Singapore has steadily gone down.[570] Even though the local Muslim community includes some well known writers such as K.T.M. Iqbal, J.M. Sali, or A.R. Mashuthoo, these writers either focus on secular literature, or tend to publish their works in India. A biography of A.N. Maideen recently commissioned by SKML similarly got published in India.[571] Currently, it seems, Singaporean Tamil Muslims are greatly dependent on India when it comes both to the supply of religious publications as well as finding outlets for their own Tamil writings. Yet this situation may improve in years to come not by an extension of print-culture, but by increasing

[569] Cf. Mukammatu 1896: 45-8; J.M. Sali informed me that the collection had already been published in 1872 under the title *Muṉājāttuttiraṭṭu*, but I have until now only seen a copy of the title-page of that publication. Incidentally, this title page proves that *Muṉājāttuttiraṭṭu* was published in Singapore fifteen years before Ilaṅkaic Catācivap Paṇṭitar's *Ciṅkai nakar antāti* (1887), often claimed to be the first work of Singaporean Tamil literature; cf. Tiṇṇappaṉ 1999: 223.
[570] Cf. Jāpar Muhyittīṉ 1990, whose account mentions progressively more special issues of journals and souvenirs in comparison to books and collections of poems in the postwar period.
[571] Cf. Tivāṉ 2004.

use of new media, like audio recordings or the internet. Several associations have their own internet pages now, which sometimes serve not only to represent the association on the web, but also link up to other Islamic web-pages and offer information on Islam.[572] Some associations also have started to produce audio publications. Thus, SKML has produced not only recordings of sermons of its Indian-hired religious teacher, but has also recently released a recording of questions and answers on Islam in Tamil and English.[573] While it is too early to comment further on the role new media a going to play in the religious life of Singaporean Tamil Muslims, the potential of these media for furthering the transmission of Islamic knowledge in Tamil has to be noted.

DEBATES AND THE SPEECH COMMUNITY

The differences in language between various sections of Singaporean Muslim society raise the question in how far discourse concerning issues connected with Islam is able to permeate these linguistic boundaries. More specifically, what role do debates and tensions among Tamil-speaking Muslims play in Singaporean Muslim society at large? This section will therefore focus mainly on the issue in how far debates among Tamil Muslims have been able to spread to the wider Muslim society in Singapore. Asking the question about the impact of debates among Tamil Muslims on the wider Muslim public allows us to investigate in how far debates among Tamil Muslims are perceived as part of a common Muslim discourse or as peculiar problems of a sub-community. Given the current state of research, especially with regard to historical developments, the question shall be addressed by looking more closely at two

[572] Cf. e.g. http://web.singnet.com.sg/~tenkasi/index.html; http://www.skml.net [accessed on 8 May 2006].
[573] Cf. Faizi n.d.; Raj Mohamad 2006.

exemplary debates which originated among Tamil Muslims: the so-called 'Singapore Muslim Libel Case' of 1925-6 and the '*Taláq*-Controversy' of 1999-2000.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the 'Singapore Muslim Libel Case' was a direct result of Daud Shah's visit to Singapore in 1925. Daud Shah's links with the Aḥmadiyya movement had become the object of intense debate in Singapore, and some of his supporters found it necessary to defend him publicly: a notice and a handbill in Tamil were published by Meeran Lebbaik Muallim and K.C. Marican, respectively, and Bashir A. Mallal, nowadays praised as one of the pioneers of the Singapore legal system,[574] wrote a letter in English in defense of Daud Shah to the *Malaya Tribune*.[575] In answer to these three publications, a Tamil handbill was written by *'ulamā'* from India calling these three supporters of Daud Shah *kāfirs*, 'infidels'. Yet the handbill was published under the name of a Singaporean merchant named J. Mohamed Ismail Marican, against whom Meeran Lebbaik Muallim and K.C. Marican initiated a suit of libel. Mohamed Ismail Marican was personally acquainted with both plaintiffs, and he happened to be the brother-in-law of the cattle-trader who had hosted Daud Shah in Singapore.[576]

It is thus clear that the origins of the dispute lay in two social contexts rather removed from that of the general Singaporean Muslim society – on the one hand, the theological disputes among 'traditionalist' and 'reformist' *'ulamā'* in South India, and on the other the frictions in the social networks of some Singaporean Tamil Muslim traders. Yet the trial came to involve large numbers of Singaporean Muslims from various ethnic groups. During the trial, twelve Muslim witnesses were heard, among them four Tamils, three Gujaratis, two Punjabis, two Malays and one Arab. The

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[574] Bartholomew & Tan 2005: 157.
[575] Mallal 1928: 11-19; a Tamil translation of Mallal's letter was published in "Malāy nāṭṭil namatu āciriyar", *Tārul Islām* 7-6, Jun 1925: 276-7.
[576] Mallal 1928: 62-3, 112-9.

majority of them were merchants, religious scholars or legal professionals, all obviously respectable members of their societies. This 'internationalization' was a result of the Defense's strategy to prove that the Aḥmadiyya movement and its followers were indeed 'infidels', and that the handbill's statement thus was not libelous, but simply true. In addition to the mentioned witnesses, the Defense also marshaled Urdu books for its cause as well as legal opinions from respected Islamic educational establishments, thereby completely removing the case from the context in which it had originally developed. In the end, the Judge found the Defendant guilty.[577] The importance of the case for the development of Singaporean Islam still needs to be investigated further, but it becomes clear from the trial that the Aḥmadiyya movement was hotly debated at that time in Singapore, quite independently from the trial.[578] The trial also addressed the tricky question of authority among Singaporean Muslims. In the process of the trial, the authority of most traditional institutions, such as the Islamic educational institutions mentioned above, was as much undermined as that of the Mohammedan Advisory Board – the latter's opinions on banning the Aḥmadiyya movement were not admitted into court because the chairman of the Board was a European rather than a Muslim.[579] In the end, it was the British secular court and a few English-educated Muslims who were able to establish themselves as authorities in Islamic matters.[580] While the supporters of the Aḥmadiyya celebrated the judgment as "…so admirable a decision…" and a "…deterrent to others who might have the intention of condemning the Ahmadies…",[581] in the long run, the opposition to the movement triumphed. It is possible that the establishment of the All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society in 1932 was partly inspired by countering the influence of the

[577] For a transcript of the trial proceedings cf. Mallal 1928.
[578] Cf. e.g. Mallal 1928: 78-9, 84-96, 129.
[579] Cf. Mallal 1928: 129.
[580] Cf. Mallal 1928: 65-77, 122-5.
[581] Mallal 1928: v-vi.

Aḥmadiyya; in contemporary Singapore, the Aḥmadiyya is not accepted as a Muslim community.[582]

In contrast to this case, the '*Taláq*-Controversy' did not lead to a court-case, but it occupied a much more visible space in the public sphere nevertheless. *Taláq* is a Tamil drama that combines the stories of twelve Tamil Muslim women who were subject to severe abuse and rape by their husbands into the story of a single woman, who was played by one of the twelve women themselves. Not only did the play depict the abuse and maltreatment of the women, but also pointed to the complicity of the husbands' male and female kin in the abuse, and the failure of community elders to help the victims. The drama was first staged in Tamil in 1998, and already generated a great amount of interest and controversy. The actress and the author of the play received death threats. MUIS expressed its concerns about the play, and some Tamil Muslim associations, most prominently SIJU and TMJ,[583] called for a ban or at least a substantial rewriting. Matters came to a head when English and Malay translations were about to be staged in October 2000. In the end, the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit (PELU) refused to grant a license for the staging of the translated play.

The reactions and interpretations of this controversy were highly variegated. The Western media largely reported the controversy as an example of "…the repressive policies of the authoritarian Singapore government".[584] More importantly for our purposes are the tensions about community identity that the play generated. On the Muslim side, "MUIS had strongly objected to the play as it contained Quranic references and religious connotations that might give the audience a wrong

[582] Mariam 1989: 37; Yegar 1979: 103 n. 29.
[583] Incidentally, both associations are under the leadership of the same person.
[584] Liew 2001: 178.

impression of Islam".[585] Opposition to the play often claimed that Indian Muslims were unfairly singled out as abusive, and that the play tarnished the image of the community. One of my respondents, who was directly involved in the affair, stated: "That particular man [the husband as depicted in the play; T.T.] may be a beast. That doesn't reflect all the people". One of the more restrained objections to the play by one Faris Osman noted:

> […] It may not have been the intention of the playwright of the play but by making the subject the Indian Muslim community, the impression thus formed by the audience is that the problems of marital violence is [sic] pandemic in that community and the cause is religious.[586]

A Malay observer replied to Osman's objections by pointing out "…that in the anxiety to suppress the ossification of stereotypes…another stereotype appears: that of a community that is intolerant and censorious".[587] Indeed, already in the play itself, an elderly man (*periyavar*) is quoted as saying: "You are an Indian Muslim girl. Don't bring any shame to our community", in order to convince the main character to abstain from bringing the matter of her husband's infidelity to the Shariah Court.[588] It is important to note that the author and the actress of the play both denied that the play criticized Islam, but rather that it was directed against an interpretation of Islam that subordinates women to men.[589] The Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) pointed out in a press statement that in the case of *Taláq*,

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[585] http://www2.mha.gov.sg/mha/detailed.jsp?artid=385&type=4&root=0&parent=0&cat=0&mode=arc [accessed on 9 May 2006].
[586] Quoted in Focas 2001: 203-4.
[587] Quoted in Focas 2001: 202.
[588] I use the author's translation rather than my own; Elangovan 1999: 42; original Tamil ibid.: 84.
[589] Cf. "The Rights of Marriage", *Asiaweek*, 26 Mar 1999, http://www.pathfinder.com/asiaweek/99/0326/feat3.html [accessed on 9 May 2006].

"…men have used race and religion to silence…" women's rights.[590] Indeed, many aspects of the play remained undiscussed, not only the general question of gender oppression, but also the way Singaporean families exploit and mistreat Indian-born wives.[591] Yet the main question for us in this context is in how far one can compare the controversy that developed around the play with the earlier one around the Libel Case, and how it relates to the question of the role of language communities in such debates.

In comparing the two cases, several parallels become obvious. First of all, even though the controversies originated in Tamil-speaking communities about Tamil-language documents, they could permeate a wider public only through the medium of English. In the Libel Case, these were the translations of the allegedly libelous handbill. They completely replaced the Tamil original to such a degree that the translation became the sole point of reference even for the Tamils involved in the issue, thereby obliterating certain aspects of the original documents. For example, during the Libel Case, there was a debate among the British legal experts on whether it is permitted in Islamic law to translate the Koran into another language. Yet the handbill had nowhere raised that issue – in the handbill, not the *language* of the translation was the issue, but the *script* used to publish a Tamil translation, i.e. whether in Tamil or Arabic script. This becomes clear even from the two English translations – the Tamil original has not been published anywhere – but it obviously escaped the British lawyers and judges; a closer look at the original handbill, especially given the fact that it was itself published using the Arabic script, might

[590] Quoted in http://www.newsintercom.org/index.php?itemid=141 [accessed on 9 May 2006].
[591] Cf. Elangovan 1999: 83-6; translation ibid.: 42-4; the translation of the term *ūrkkāri*, which is used several times by Singaporeans to abuse the Indian-born wife, as 'country-girl' rather misses the tension between the Singaporean environment and the Indian kin-center/homeland (*ūr*) implied in it.

have cleared the issue.[592] In the case of *Taláq*, it was largely the English-medium press reports through which the controversy reached a wider audience.[593] Furthermore, it is perhaps not incidental that the matter came to a head not during one of the Tamil productions of the play, despite the already considerable amount of tension, but when it was about to be staged in English.

In both controversies, questions of who has the right and authority to represent a community are prominent. In the Libel Case, this community was plainly the world-wide Muslim community. One of the most important questions during the trial was who in the Muslim world possessed the authority to declare somebody an 'infidel'. The Judge made this objective clear when he asked impatiently on the ninth day of the trial: "You must have a person like the Pope…to decide such questions?",[594] even though he had been told already on the sixth day that such an authority did not exist.[595] Documents from all over the Muslim World were presented as evidence for the alleged 'infidelity' of the Aḥmadiyya movement, only to be summarily rejected as immaterial by the Judge, who was obviously waiting for the opinion of the 'Muslim Pope'.[596] 'Mohamedan Tamils' were only mentioned when the background of the case was recounted, but they played practically no role in the context of authority and representation of Muslims.[597] Indeed, they were rather demoted – even the Tamil religious scholar who was called as a witness and authority on the first day was not referred to again in the course of the trial, even though his answers had largely been sound and reasonable.[598] On their part, the plaintiffs and defendant similarly seem to

[592] Cf. Mallal 1928: 19-22, 171.
[593] Presumably, these were at least partly based on the English translation, which was published in January 1999; cf. Focas 2001: 183.
[594] Mallal, 1928: 104.
[595] Mallal, 1928: 66.
[596] Cf. Mallal, 1928: 43, 79, 88.
[597] Cf. Mallal 1928: 154-5.
[598] Cf. Mallal 1928: 37-48.

have been content to see the whole issue solely as a Muslim one. The handbills, notices and articles that created the controversies all addressed themselves simply to 'Muslims' – the Tamil aspects of the dispute were only of interest as background information.[599] It is at present not possible to assess the impact of the debate on Malay-Muslim society, though the fact that it is mentioned either only in passing or not at all in accounts of Islamic society and law in the Singapore of the 1920s may indicate that it did not have much impact on Malays.[600]

In contrast, in the *Taláq*-controversy, the question of community representation was much more muddled. The problem was not so much about who was the main authority for Muslims – this was obviously MUIS – but about which 'community' needed representation here. Both Muslims in general and Indian Muslims in particular were presented as having been portrayed negatively by the play. The result was that both MUIS as well as SIJU claimed to represent communities which had allegedly been offended by *Taláq*. The president of the theatre group staging the English translation actually pointed out the paradoxical nature of the situation – that SIJU as a religious group was on the one hand undermining the authority of MUIS, which alone was the authority regarding questions of Islam, and that it on the other hand claimed to represent Indian Muslims *tout court*, including women, though it had no women members.[601] The claim that the play misrepresented Indian Muslims, made parallel to and partly independent from the claim that it had misrepresented Islam, paradoxically seems to have had the opposite effect in public that its proponents wished for: for many, it was a clear endorsement that the play was really about Indian Muslims, and

[599] Cf. Mallal 1928: 11-23.
[600] Cf. Yegar 1979: 101 n. 23; other authors simply ignore the issue, e.g. Hickling 1986.
[601] Focas 2001: 184-5.

not about domestic violence, as AWARE had argued.[602] It may also have had another effect, for though MUIS reacted sharply to the play, the response from the Malay-Muslim community seems not to have been overly strong, despite the fact that some of the themes of the play would have had the potential to generate such a response. An example would be the final scene, when the protagonist takes of her headscarf and black overcoat to reveal a white dress below.[603] Yet even though the '*tudung*- (Ma. 'headscarf') controversy' was to erupt in 2002, showing that the topic had controversial potential, this scene did at that time not cause as much trouble outside the circle of MUIS and some Indian Muslim associations.[604] In this case, the strong emphasis on 'Indian Muslim' sentiments in the response to the play may have prevented Malays from identifying to closely with the issue – in any case, it shows in how far a debate on the identity of 'Indian-Muslims' had at that time attained discursive dominance in the debates on ethnic difference within a religious community, if compared with the Libel Case in the 1920s. It is these debates that shall concern us in the next chapter.

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[602] Cf. "Silenced Cries", Asiaweek, 10 Nov 2000, http://www.pathfinder.com/asiaweek/magazine/2000/1110/as.arts_sb1.html [accessed on 9 May 2006].

[603] Cf. Elangovan 1999: 50, 91.

[604] The issue needs further investigation, but I have found little evidence that the controversy had much of an impact on Malay society. One of the most recent publications on Muslim society in Singapore also fails to mention it altogether; cf. Metzger 2003. For the *tudung*-controversy, cf. Gabrielpillai 2004; Metzger 2003: chapter 6; Narayanan 2004: 52-5; admittedly, this controversy occurred in the context of a heightened sensitivity to Islamic issues in the wake of the debates around 'Islamist terrorism'.

Chapter 6

CONTESTING AND REPRESENTING DIFFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

As the last chapter has shown, the religious life of Singaporean Tamil Muslims is no seamless and harmonious whole. Rather, religious life is contested and negotiated between various groups among Tamil-speaking Muslims as well as among Tamil Muslims and various external agencies, most importantly the institutions which administer Islam in the Republic. It is in discourses about Islam and Islamic practice, that ideas and concepts of religion, ethnic identity, and their relation with each other are formulated, challenged, and (re-)negotiated. It is also in these discourses that the difficulty to clearly separate the religious and ethno-linguistic domains becomes salient, and where the impact of the latter on the former becomes most apparent. This chapter will therefore attempt to describe these discourses and to contextualize them.

There are two aspects to this contestation of ethnic difference in the religious sphere, one concerned with the impact of ethnic difference on the practicalities of religious life, the other with the formulation of that difference. The first of these aspects relates to the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of institutions to deal with ethnic difference in the organization of Islamic life in Singapore. On the one hand, Tamil

Muslims have increasingly lamented since the 1980s that their access to religious services and funding is inadequate. It has been contended that the official bodies charged with the administration of Islam in Singapore have not taken proper account of the needs of Tamil and other Indian Muslims in the state. Tamil Muslims are contesting the specific institutional setup within the community and its linkages to government institutions. This involves in particular the workings of the associations and informal groups, and the way this work is perceived by the public as well as rival groups.

The second aspect of the contestation of ethnic difference among Singaporean Muslims relates to the formulation of that difference. While certain religious practices are perceived to be fundamental to Islam and performed more or less homogeneously across the Muslim World, other practices are more localized in character, and it is these practices that can act as ethnic-boundary markers in certain contexts. It thus comes as no surprise that religious practice and the formulation of ethnic difference are closely connected. But ethnic difference is not only formulated in practice, but also in discourses about identity. There has been a tendency among Indian Muslims, public institutions, and also among scholars of Singaporean Islam to assume a degree of homogeneity in the formulation of an 'Indian-Muslim' identity in Singapore. What I will attempt in this section is not so much to describe this formulation of a common identity, which has been accomplished elsewhere,[605] but rather to show how the tacit assumptions made about this identity impact Tamil and other Indian Muslims in Singapore.

[605] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000.

RELIGION AND INSTITUTIONS

Access to Services

As has been outlined in chapter 4, the practice of Islam in Singapore involves a number of institutions and organizations, run by both the government and private individuals. It is hardly surprising that the performance and legitimacy of these institutions is commented upon and contested in public and private. Such debates are of course not confined to Indian Muslims alone; Muslims of any racial or ethnic background may voice discontent, critiques, and suggestions for improvement of specific institutions or the general institutional setup. What shall concern us in this section are not these general challenges to religious institutions, but the particular debates and contestations among Tamil Muslims regarding the peculiar challenges faced by Tamil Muslims in the context of Muslim religious institutions in the Singaporean context. More general debates, controversies and critiques concerning the Muslim institutional setup in Singapore, such as the controversy around the Fateha webpage or Rahim's criticism of MENDAKI are largely outside the scope of this discussion.[606]

There are predominantly two types of criticism that are raised by Tamil Muslims in connection with institutionalized religion. One type of criticism concerns the particular problems that Tamil Muslims face when interacting with religious institutions in Singapore; the other type aims more generally at the institutional setup itself. Most of the criticism of the former type is directed at the government institutions, and in particular at MUIS, while the second type of criticism commonly concerns the various Indian Muslim associations, their interaction and their

[606] Regarding the Fateha issue, cf. Metzger 2003: 191-204; regarding the critique of MENDAKI, cf. Rahim 1998.

performance. Whereas the general framework for the administration of Islam in Singapore is largely accepted as instituted by the state, the non-official nature of most Indian Muslim institutions exposes them to debates over the ideal setup and purpose of these institutions.

As has been shown in the last chapter, language is a central factor in determining a Muslim's access to religious services of many kinds; most notably, proficiency in a certain language, or lack thereof, is crucial for an individual's ability to obtain religiously relevant knowledge through education, lectures and sermons. It is thus hardly surprising that the most commonly voiced criticism of the Islamic administration in Singapore by Tamil Muslims is that it does not provide enough opportunities for Tamil Muslims to obtain the necessary religious knowledge. This includes the lack of higher Islamic education for Tamil Muslims in Singapore and the resulting dearth of Singaporean Tamil Muslim *'ulamā'*; the concentration of mosques employing Tamil in the center of the city and the concomitant absence of the use of Tamil in the mosques in the housing estates; the problems faced by the Tamil *'ulamā'* brought over from India, such as separation from their families or lack of integration into Singaporean society; and the tensions between laymen and *'ulamā'* resulting from this lack of integration. These issues were brought up both by my respondents as well as by representatives of various Indian Muslims associations in question-and-answer sessions with MUIS representatives that I was able to attend. There was a common feeling among my respondents that MUIS only concentrates on Malays and neglects the needs of Muslims speaking Tamil and other South Asian languages.[607]

Most of the Tamil Muslims who were not actively involved in one of the associations or any other community institutions saw the issue mainly as a simple

[607] The few Indian respondents who did not subscribe to this view were significantly mainly speakers of South Asian languages other than Tamil.

impediment on their daily religious practice. One respondent told me that he had to attend Friday services in his local neighborhood mosque as journeying to the city-center to attend service in one of the Indian mosques there would be too time consuming. Yet as he was unable to understand Malay, he was not in a position to benefit from listening to the sermon. Significantly, this respondent advocated the general use of English rather than any of the Asian 'mother-tongues' of Singaporean Muslims in the local Muslim public sphere. Other respondents contended that translations of the basic text of the sermon into languages other than Malay could be supplied by MUIS, as sermons everywhere in Singapore are based on this basic text. In fact, English translations of the sermons are by now available on the internet, so that to supply translations into other languages, including Tamil, should not be too difficult a task.[608] Some respondents were concerned that Indian Muslim children had little access to proper religious education, though, as has been discussed in chapter 5, there is by now a burgeoning number of institutions offering basic religious education for children and adults in Tamil. In any case, the general tenor of respondents not directly involved in the organization of religious life in the community was that in the current situation, Tamil Muslims faced more difficulties than Malays in equipping themselves with the required religious knowledge, something that, as some respondents feared, could lead to a decrease in spirituality and a concomitant increase in crime and immorality among Tamil Muslims.

Only rarely did my respondents note that their disadvantages in obtaining religiously relevant knowledge also decreased their ability to contest the Singaporean Muslim public sphere at a wider level. The lack of facilities for the training of Tamil-speaking *'ulamā'* means that there are very few Tamil-speaking Muslims in

[608] The texts of Friday sermons in Malay and English are available at: http://www.muis.gov.sg/english/Sermons/Sermons.aspx?pMenu=6 [accessed on 20 March 2006].

Singapore who would be eligible for important positions in the religious administration or who could participate in larger religious debates. On the whole, the opportunity for Tamil Muslims to contribute to the debates of the wider Muslim society in Singapore is limited, and strengthens Malay hegemony over the Muslim public sphere in the Republic. Simultaneously, it leads to further isolation of Tamil Muslims and to a strengthening of an image of Tamil Muslims as religiously less knowledgeable. Noorul Farha concedes that the issue of language has led to some marginalization of Tamil Muslims in Singapore, though like many of my respondents she mentions the obvious impediments on day-to-day religious practice that Tamil Muslims face on account of their language, but then limits her discussion to the impact this has on identity formation, while not considering the structural disparities that result from this situation.[609]

In contrast to the average Tamil Muslim and most scholars, the criticism of those respondents involved in associations and other public institutions takes on a further dimension: from the point of view of these respondents, not only are Tamil and other South Asian Muslims at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing religious services, but the administration is also criticized for the way it has addressed these disadvantages and what impediments Tamil Muslims face to redress it. This critique mainly notices two aspects: the administrative measures taken by MUIS and other institutions to redress the disadvantages faced by Indian Muslims, and the way funds are allocated to this purpose. Much of this criticism is directly related to the critique of the institutional setup, and seems in many cases to be directed as much at rival associations who compete for the same funds as it is at the official administrative bodies.

[609] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 60-1.

Indeed, the important role that disaffection with official bodies has played in galvanizing Indian and especially Tamil Muslim opinion can best be illustrated by taking a look at the events preceding the formation of the FIM 1992, which were precipitated by the foundation of SINDA just a year prior to the founding of the FIM. As has been outlined in chapter 4, the nine years between the setup of MENDAKI in 1982 and that of SINDA in 1991 saw a gradual shift in MENDAKI's public image from an organization catering to 'Muslims' to one supporting 'Malays/Muslims'. This shift did not go unnoticed among Indian Muslims, and when the plans to form a self-help organization for Indians on the model of MENDAKI became public, a debate ensued whether Indian Muslims should back MENDAKI, SINDA, or both. Many Indian Muslims at that time declared that they would be ready to pay contributions to both organizations, but it was demanded that religion (referring in all likelihood to Hinduism) should be kept out of SINDA. More importantly, a sizeable number of Indian Muslims used the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with MENDAKI's policies. It was noted that no Indians were on MENDAKI's Board of Directors, and many took exception to a statement of an official to the effect that MENDAKI would focus predominantly on the needs of the Malays, even though it was an organization for all Muslims.[610]

The debates did not end with the formation of SINDA. In March 1992, one Indian Muslim named Mohd Nasser Abu Bakar complained in a reader's letter that Indian Muslims were automatically included as contributors to SINDA and would have their contributions deducted from their CPF accounts if they did not opt out of the scheme. The author of the letter contended that most Indian Muslims "…had adopted the

[610] "Indian Muslims ready to back both Sinda and Mendaki", *The Straits Times*, 21 Jul 1991; cf. also "Join Sinda or Mendaki? Identity crisis facing Indian Muslims could be boon or bane", *The Straits Times*, 26 Jul 1992.

Malay culture", and that "…my relatives and Indian Muslim friends…were angered by Sinda's approach…". More significantly, he complained:

> How many Indian Muslims here can read either Tamil or English, the two languages used in the letter? How will Sinda explain its move to those in the community who know only Malay? I can understand the shock that my fellow Indian Muslims felt when they received the letter from Sinda.

He concluded the letter by wishing "…Sinda every success in its mission of helping Hindus",[611] thereby confusing 'Indian' and 'Hindu', which is rather common in Singapore.

The letter caused a sharp rejoinder by another Indian Muslim, Ninarpillai Ibrahim, a few days later:

> [Mohd Nasser Abu Bakar] seems to assume that the whole Indian Muslim community has embraced the Malay culture and thus should not be bothered about the problems of Indians per se. It is alarming to imagine that his views could be taken by the public to be representative of the sentiments of the Indian Muslim community at large.

Ninarpillai Ibrahim also rebuked Mohd Nasser for complaining about the use of Tamil and English by SINDA:

[611] "Indian Muslims should have been left out of Sinda's check-off scheme", The Straits Times, 21 Mar 1992.

> I know Mendaki addresses its newsletters in Malay and English. I am not overly proficient in Malay, but I do not make it an issue when letters from Mendaki are not written in the languages that I am proficient in.

In contrast to the claims of Mohd Nasser, he noted:

> Though a minority [of Indian Muslims] has embraced the Malay culture…a vast majority of us are still culturally Indians – that is, we speak Tamil, we eat Indian food and we dress in the Indian style.

Ninarpillai Ibrahim also chided Mohd Nasser for his imputation of an "…unnecessary religious bias…" to SINDA and his confusion of 'Indian' and 'Hindu'. The letter concluded: "I am proud to be an Indian and a Muslim, but most of all, an Indian Muslim".[612] These two letters are significant as they illustrate yet again that any discussion of Indian Muslims in Singapore necessarily has to take account of the language question, especially of the way that different mother-tongues condition different responses. While the author of the first letter was obviously not used to be linguistically excluded in matters of concern to him, the second, Tamil-speaking author was clearly familiar with such a situation.

Negative attitudes towards MENDAKI are still not uncommon among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore. Respondents commonly expressed their frustration that though they had contributed to MENDAKI since its inception, they had not been able to reap any benefit from their participation in the MENDAKI scheme. It is of course difficult to ascertain whether this is actually the result of conscious or

[612] "I'm flattered Indian Muslims like me were counted in", *The Straits Times*, 25 Mar 1992.

unconscious neglect of Tamil Muslims by MENDAKI, whether it is due to other factors, or whether it is just the unsubstantiated feeling of a section of the population. That the evaluation of MENDAKI's policies was not always unbiased can be gleaned from the fact that some respondents contended that they were not able to benefit from MENDAKI because MENDAKI neglected Tamils in favor of Malays, while they attributed the reason why they did not receive any funds from SINDA to the fact that their children did not fit the profile that SINDA applies to determine which students are eligible for funding. As SINDA and MENDAKI apply largely similar standards to determine eligibility for funding, a student not eligible for funding by SINDA would also have a hard time receiving funding from MENDAKI. Nevertheless, the respondents ascribed to MENDAKI an ethnic bias. This does not mean, however, that criticism of MENDAKI's policies vice versa Indian Muslims are completely unwarranted. A survey by Rahim carried out in 1992 of 158 students in MENDAKI's MEP (Mendaki Enrichment Programme) and S1 Project turned up only a single student from a household using Tamil, clearly below the percentage of the Tamil-speaking segment of Singaporean Muslim society.[613] In any case, it is clear that the claim made by some Indian Muslims at the time of the inception of SINDA and recently restated by Metzger to the effect that Indian Muslims were actually at an advantage, as they could profit from two ethnic self-help associations, is a patent oversimplification.[614] As the standards of eligibility for funding applied by both MENDAKI and SINDA are largely the same, contributing to both organizations does little to raise the chances of Indian Muslim children to be selected for funding. Double funding by both organizations, which could be another advantage, is presumably also out of question, as one organization would probably refuse to fund a child already

[613] Cf. Rahim 1998: 220-3, tables 10.2 & 10.5.
[614] Cf. "Indian Muslims ready to back both Sinda and Mendaki", *The Straits Times*, 21 Jul 1991; Metzger 2003.

supported by the other organization. Thirdly, in order to profit from many of the other activities offered by these organizations, the question of language comes into play again, severely restricting the possibility of Tamil-speaking Muslims to participate in programs employing Malay, and of course conversely for Malay-speaking Muslims to profit from Tamil programs. Obviously, there is little benefit that individuals could gain from funding both organizations, apart from asserting their identities as both Indians and Muslims.

It was in the context of heightened sensitivity regarding the problems faced by Indian Muslims in the wake of the formation of SINDA that the FIM was set up. The plan dates back to 1990, when at first six associations joined together with the objective of forming "…a federation with similar objectives to Mendaki…".[615] Yet both when the plan was first mooted in 1990 and when FIM was formed in 1992, it was denied that FIM would duplicate MENDAKI's and SINDA's programs, and indeed criticism was voiced regarding such duplication from within the Indian Muslim community.[616] Since its inception, FIM has moved away from providing tuition programs to facilitate interaction between Indian Muslim associations and official bodies, especially MUIS rather than MENDAKI and SINDA. FIM's inauguration in the wake of the public debates about MENDAKI's performance with regard to the Indian Muslims clearly shows how much the issue has helped to galvanize Indian, and particularly Tamil Muslim opinion, even if Rahim's statement that the formation of FIM amounted to "…a vote of no-confidence by the Indian Muslim community in Mendaki's ability to fairly represent the interests of all

[615] "6 Indian Muslim groups to set up federation to boost community's lot", *The Straits Times*, 9 Aug 1990: 27.

[616] "6 Indian Muslim groups to set up federation to boost community's lot", *The Straits Times*, 9 Aug 1990: 27; "9 Indian Muslim groups form own federation", *The Straits Times*, 22 Apr 1992.

Muslims" may be exaggerated.[617] At the same time, not too much should be made of public statements by FIM members that Indian Muslims were content with performance of official bodies and organizations catering to Singapore's Muslims; given the occasions on which such public statements were made, their uncontroversial character should not be surprising.[618] In interviews carried out by me, many past and present FIM members voiced their own discontent with these institutions.

In recent years, some official bodies, most notably MUIS, have started to respond to the criticism they face from Indian Muslims in a more proactive way. At the inauguration of the redeveloped Masjid Bencoolen in May 2004, the MUIS President Alami Musa announced the preparation of "…a plan to further enrich the development of the Indian Muslim community".[619] On the religious side, the plan was conceived to cover development of the educational facilities for the religious education of Indian Muslims, the creation of religious elites, and matters relating to resident foreign *'ulamā'*. For the formulation of this plan, MUIS would consult with community leaders among the Indian Muslims, a process that was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2004, after which the plan would be presented. The announcement of this plan was greeted with mixed reactions by my respondents. Some respondents were generally positive about MUIS's initiative. As one respondent put it:

> I think MUIS is trying to cooperate more and trying to help out the Indian Muslims. I think they are positively coming up [with] programs for the Indian Muslims. It's now on the onus [sic] of the Indian Muslims to take

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[617] Rahim 1998: 236.
[618] Cf. Metzger 2003: 86.
[619] http://www.muis.gov.sg/english/media_releases/presspeech_perwakafanbencoolen_may04.aspx [accessed on 20 March 2006].

> ownership and participate. […] So I think more and more it's been benefiting for Indian Muslims in general…[620]

Yet not every respondent evaluated the MUIS proposal so optimistically. What was criticized by these respondents was not the proposal as such, but the context in which it came about and how it was formulated. One respondent noted: "Don't think that I'm blaming MUIS, [but] MUIS doesn't come up with that kind of ideas without our [the Indian Muslims'; T.T.] voice, you see". But it was not only the fact that MUIS as an institution had failed to see the needs of Indian Muslims for so long that bothered these respondents. Another interviewee was particularly skeptical of a passage in the MUIS President's speech that the plan would be implemented "…once a clear and unified resolution of support is obtained from the various leaders of the Indian Muslim community".[621] The respondent remarked that this amounted to saying that it would never be implemented, as the in his opinion notoriously quarrelsome community leaders would never agree on anything unanimously. This critique obviously was aimed at the Indian Muslim community leaders as much as at MUIS, but it did not absolve MUIS from taking more proactive steps if it was really serious about the enrichment plan.

As befits a bureaucratic institution, MUIS actually took until the end of 2005, one year later than planned, to announce further details of the plan. An article in *Ceyticcuṭar* identified five general points that needed immediate attention: the construction of a multipurpose hall for Indian Muslims on the grounds of the Masjid Jamae (Chulia), religious education for Indian Muslims, the necessity to formulate a development plan for the next three to five years, a reduction in the rate of divorce

[620] A similar comment was made by the then General Secretary of UIMA in 2002; cf. Saat 2002: 159.
[621] http://www.muis.gov.sg/english/media_releases/presspeech_perwakafanbencoolen_may04.aspx [accessed on 20 March 2006].

among Indian Muslims, and the need to conduct more dialogue sessions between MUIS and Indian Muslim associations. In particular, the article dwelt at length about the need to streamline and coordinate the various religious schools run by associations and mosques for Indian Muslim children.[622] Funding for children studying in these schools is supposed to come from MENDAKI, thereby addressing the challenge that MENDAKI has until now done very little to support religious education among Indians. The publication of a 'guidebook' for marriages by MUIS was also mentioned.[623] Even though this plan still is in need of more elaboration and formulation of concrete policies by which the various objectives are going to be met, it signifies a large step ahead in the administration of Indian Muslim affairs in Singapore. How affairs are going to develop from here remains to be seen.

Administering Religion

Most of the criticism considered in the last section concerned the performance of various institutions involved in the administration of religion. In a way, this form of criticism and contestation, though often incisive and massive, nevertheless is a criticism that does not contest the general framework in which those institutions operate. In other instances, though, my respondents did not only contest the performance of various institutions, but indeed challenged the very *raison d'être* of these institutions. Most of this criticism was directed at the voluntary sector of Indian Muslim associations and informal groups. When criticism was voiced regarding the wider administrative framework, it was usually criticism either of the way

[622] That religious education should be singled out as a domain needing urgent attention is certainly not only due to the importance attached to religious education in Tamil by Tamil Muslims, but also has to be seen in the light of public debates about Islamic education in Singapore in the last 15 years, as well as MUIS's development of a Singapore Islamic Education System; Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 2004; cf. Metzger 2003: chapter 5.
[623] "Intiya muslim amaippukaḷiṉ mukkiya ceyal tiṭṭaṅkaḷukku Muyis ātaravu", *Ceyticcuṭar* 35, Nov 2005: 2-3.

government-backed institutions interacted with Indian Muslim associations or of the way funds were allocated by these larger institutions to Indian Muslim institutions. But even in these cases the criticism was usually linked implicitly to the contestation of the character of various Indian Muslim institutions. The various arguments and criticism will in the following be discussed with regard to the target of the criticism, viz. Indian Muslim associations in general, various types of associations and informal groups, the FIM, and the institutions of the wider Muslim public sphere.

Despite the fact that many of the religious services offered by Indian Muslim associations would be even more difficult to access by Tamil and other Indian Muslims if the associations were not around, this does not mean that the associations were generally perceived to be a positive force in the Islamic public sphere in Singapore. Indeed, many of my respondents were highly critical of the work done by the associations, and these sentiments were not only voiced by those who remain outside the associations, but also those who participated in them. One commonly voiced criticism was that the associations were ineffective and that their performance was less than satisfactory, especially when considering the large number of associations catering to Indian Muslims. Many respondents considered this large number of associations to be limiting the effectiveness of the associations, especially as it contributed to divisiveness and rivalry between associations. At the same time, one respondent glibly remarked that the "…associations do so little that you need to have many to do much". Many respondents active in Indian Muslim associations conceded that such criticisms were at least partly true. Divisiveness and rivalry between associations were widely seen as debilitating the capacity of the associations to deliver to the community, a line of argument that we will encounter again. Another type of general criticism of the associations that I encountered were claims that the

associations, and even MUIS, were by nature social rather than religious organizations, which lacked spirituality and focused unduly on non-religious issues. This type of criticism was most commonly voiced by members of branches of Sufi brotherhoods. It should be mentioned that such views are themselves subject to criticism by other Tamil Muslims, who consider the members of Sufi brotherhoods to be overly narrow-minded and traditional. Yet such debates are probably not limited to Tamil Muslims, and I assume that they may take place among Malays and other Singaporean Muslims, too, so that this type of contestation need not concern us here.

While sweeping dismissals of the usefulness of Indian Muslim associations are far from uncommon, an equally contested issue is the nature of the claims of various Indian Muslim associations to represent certain putative 'communities'. Consequently, this is a debate about the typology of Indian Muslim association that was discussed in chapter 4. The respective debates center predominantly around the 'pan-Indian', 'ethnic', and 'kin-center' types of associations. Interestingly, the 'religious' associations seem to be much less the focus of attention, perhaps because the religious groups they claim to represent somehow remain peripheral to the project of constructing an Indian Muslim identity, neither furthering nor threatening it. Indeed, most of the debate around the typology of associations relates directly to questions of which level of 'community' is addressed by an association and which sections of society it claims to represent.

Given the dominance of kin-center associations among the Indian Muslim associations in Singapore, it is little wonder that the concept of the kin-center association is one of the most contested among Tamil Muslims. As kin-center associations ostensibly address themselves only to particular segments of Tamil Muslim society, it is little wonder that such organizations are often portrayed as

parochial, being interested only in the advancement of their own peculiar communities at the expense of Tamil Muslim and indeed Indian Muslim unity. Such criticism was commonly voiced by both, respondents of non-kin-center associations, as well as those not engaged in associations at all. One respondent, who had married a woman from one large kin-center group which was represented by its own association, lamented that these associations were directing their energies only at their own communities, thereby contributing to the fragmentation of Tamil Muslim society. Another respondent noted:

> We all have come from 300 villages from India. […] So you can say there is [sic] now about 16, [but] there will come about 300 Indian village associations. How to accommodate them? How to progress? So I have something like pride of my village, I say your village useless [sic]. […] Destructive!

Noorul Farha quotes the MUIS Secretary as saying that MUIS had problems with this situation because it made it difficult to select an Indian representative for the MUIS Council, for members of the kin-center associations would only be representative of their kin-center, not Indian Muslims at large.[624] Another respondent who was active both in an Indian Muslim mosque and an association said that he was not opposed to the kin-center associations, but that they should have no say in issues pertaining to the whole Tamil or Indian Muslim community.

The kin-center associations are very much aware of these challenges to their very *raison d'être*, not the least because the kin-center model is becoming less attractive

[624] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 43.

for Singaporean Tamil Muslim youth, and these youth tend to be attracted by other types of associations.[625] Yet the ways in which kin-center associations have reacted to this challenge vary. Some kin-center associations, most notably large associations like SKML, have opened themselves to other Tamil Muslims and invite them to participate in their activities. This is most notable in the area of religious education, where students are recruited not only from kin-center communities. Yet members and leadership of these associations are still overwhelmingly drawn from the respective kin-center community, showing that these associations have failed to project themselves as representatives for the wider Tamil Muslim community.[626] There have been debates in the associations about changing the associations' names to reflect a more inclusive approach, but this has been resisted on various grounds. On the one hand, association leaders told me that this change would have alienated and hurt the older members of the community, who still identify strongly with the kin-center. Furthermore, as the treasurer of SKML put forward in an article, it allows the associations to continue their programs "…without having to reestablish credibility and network",[627] and thus be of more use to anyone joining the association. But many in the kin-center associations are conscious of the fact that the names of these associations with their obvious references to the kin-center could serve as disincentive for people from other kin-centers to join the association. One respondent suggested using only abbreviations like 'SKML', in order to make the reference to the kin-center less obvious.

Such initiatives meet with a variety of problems and criticisms. Members of non-kin-center associations tend to ignore the opening up of kin-center associations to

[625] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 48.
[626] In part, the failure of SKML and STMWS to attract much participation from outside their kin-center communities may also be due to the negative attitudes towards 'Tenkasis' in the wider Tamil Muslim society, as described in chapter 3.
[627] Raja Mohamad 2000: [pages not indicated in source].

members from outside the kin-center and proceed to claim that these groups only represent parochial interests. For the non-kin-center associations, large kin-center associations like SKML or STMWS could emerge as competitors, as these associations usually conduct a broad range of activities. Therefore, it is prudent for these associations to continue projecting kin-center associations as representing only a narrow section of society. Interestingly, some of the non-kin-center associations have noted the problems kin-center associations have regarding their names, and are for obvious reasons highly critical of any move by the kin-center associations to 'conceal' or change their names. But criticism does not come only from the non-kin-center associations. The President of one kin-center association stressed that his association would only take donations from members of its own kin-center community. Widening the base of a kin-center association can also be seen as threatening by other kin-center associations, as they may loose their social base to such an expansive association.

But it is not only kin-center associations that meet with criticism regarding their operation in Tamil Muslim society. Associations which claim to speak for Tamil or Indian Muslims in general are similarly subject to contestations, though in their case, these contestations address the performance of these associations more than the reason for their existence. As we have seen in chapter 4, it is particularly the non-kin-center associations that still enable individuals to impact the organization of religious life of Tamil Muslims. It is thus not surprising that the role of such 'big men' in some associations is evaluated negatively by others, who claim that such individuals use the associations to further their own personal ambitions instead of the well-being of the community at large.[628] One of course has to be careful with such claims, as personal rivalries may be the main motivation for them. But such criticism points to a major

[628] As Chua has noted, the recognition of race- and community-based associations and activities has "…provided various opportunities for those who hold political aspirations of "community" leadership"; Chua 1998: 46.

weakness in the way that Tamil Muslim associations connect to the wider Tamil Muslim public. Given that any group of individuals can form an association, as long as they confirm to the laws that govern the formation of such associations, and that any association can claim to represent a specific group of people, it is actually not too difficult to form an association claiming to represent a major segment if not all of Tamil or even Indian Muslim society in Singapore. While the kin-center associations can usually count on the support of the wider kin-center community, and thus claim to represent these communities quite convincingly, the gap between claim and reality is much greater in the case of ethnic or pan-Indian Muslim associations, even large ones like UIMA.[629] This gap makes any claim to represent the Tamil or Indian Muslim community at large precarious, as became visible during the *Taláq*-controversy, when the president of the theatre group which staged the play challenged, albeit unsuccessfully, the claims of two SIJU members to represent Indian Muslims and especially Indian Muslim women.[630]

This question of representation brings us to the FIM and the critique of that institution's role in Tamil Muslim society. At the first glance, the FIM seems to be the most practical solution to the problem of representation by forming a federation of associations. Yet to the contrary, the FIM is seen by many to have failed deliver. The problems of the FIM are largely perceived to be due to the interrelated factors of conflicts over leadership, the fragmented nature of the Indian Muslim public sphere, and the continued identification of members of the FIM with their respective associations. If any two themes dominated interviews with respondents active in

[629] An example of the considerable conflicts such claims over representation can produce is provided by the prolonged conflict between the president and one of the vice-presidents of the TMJ between 1989-1992; cf. "Tamil Muslim chief has no right to make stand", *The Straits Times*, 24 Aug 1989; "Tamil Muslim chief defends right to participate in subsidy debate", *The Straits Times*, 5 September 1989; "Tamil Muslim group goes to court to settle leadership row", *The Straits Times*, 17 May 1992.
[630] Cf. Focas 2001: 184-6.

Indian Muslim associations, it was the connected issues of fragmentation and lack of leadership. One respondent identified lack of leadership to be the most important problem Indian Muslims in Singapore were facing: "We don't have a proper leadership, okay, to guide us in a proper way. We got a big […] sickness or something like ego. You know, each and everybody want[s] to become the leader". Besides ego, the main reason given for this was the supposedly fractious nature of Indians.[631] One respondent claimed: "…they are [sic] inherited certain culture from India; argumentative culture; destructive culture". This supposed argumentativeness was seen as the root cause of the problems the Indian Muslim community was facing.

In an almost paradoxical way, the majority of my respondents agreed to this characterization of the Indian Muslim community as fragmented by its own argumentativeness and the ego of its leaders. Admittedly, it also became clear that several of my respondents obviously had their own opinion about who would be the proper leader, and who was the main culprit for the current situation, thereby demonstrating the very problem they had just identified. Some respondents felt that from the very beginning, there should not have been anything like the FIM, but rather one single association representing Indian Muslims. The rivalry and debate in the FIM was seen as debilitating. One respondent lamented that "[i]n the case of [the] Federation of Indian Muslims, 23 people you have to consult, and the debate – you will be killed, you know". The fact that the presidency rotates among the associations was similarly seen as problematic, as it precluded the implementation of long-term policies and meant that most of the Federation's energies went into "unproductive functions", as one respondent put it.

[631] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 42.

It is hardly surprising that given this situation, the extension of the FIM from nine to sixteen associations in 2005 was seen as exacerbating the problem. Some respondents suspected that the main reason for these new associations to join the FIM was to take advantage of the rotating presidency. One respondent claimed openly: “All the outsider[s] want to be the president”. Indeed, a mistake in the proceedings at the time when the decision to admit the new members was first taken in 2004 led some members to challenge the decision and delayed the admission for more than a year. Yet not everyone considered the decision to enlarge the FIM to be bad. In the eyes of one respondent, “…now with more association[s] coming in, and more businessmen on board, and more professionals on board, I think it might change the whole thing, and it might be a very good prospect”. What this respondent was referring to was the fact that the FIM had problems in raising funds for its activities. The members are supposed to pay an annual fee, and MUIS does at times support the Federation, but the total amount available for such activities was not much. One respondent explained this with the lack of identification with the FIM on part of the member-associations. As a consequence, associations are reluctant to strengthen FIM, and rather keep on supporting their own programs rather than those of FIM.

While the role and performance of Indian Muslim associations may be contested by any Indian Muslim, fundamental criticism relating to the way FIM and MUIS administer religious life among Singaporean Tamil Muslims is largely limited to those individuals actively engaged in associations, as they have the deepest insights into the workings of these two institutions. As already mentioned, practically nobody I talked to challenged the role MUIS played in the administration of Islamic affairs in Singapore as such. Yet what was criticized was the way MUIS engaged with Indian Muslims and their associations, challenging the administrative structure which ties

Indian Muslim associations to MUIS. Given the competing claims over which association represents whom, it is not surprising that some individuals are unhappy with the way that MUIS relates to the associations. There appears to be some resentment especially among the non-kin-center associations that MUIS tries to interact with all the associations via FIM, rather than limit itself to those associations claiming to represent the whole Indian or at least Tamil Muslim community. As one respondent contended:

> Majlis Ugama made a great mistake. Majlis Ugama thinks cat and the tiger are the same. They don't understand village associations, and so they opened the door [to kin-center associations; T.T.]. […] Some village only twelve people, so they form an association. So the government think[s] they have a big power; super-power.

The respondent went on to name some associations he considered to be 'super-powers', all of them non-kin-center associations, while contending that even large kin-center associations should not be recognized in this way. This opinion is of course part of the discourse challenging the role of kin-center associations in the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore, directly criticizing MUIS for providing these associations with recognition. One respondent even claimed that the formation of the FIM had been particularly engineered to undermine the role of the TMJ, which was at that time the only association claiming to represent Tamil Muslims in Singapore in general. But the way MUIS interacts with the associations was also criticized in general, barring the question of kin-center or non-kin-center association. Another respondent claimed that "…they [MUIS; T.T.] appoint a member, council member,

and they put a dialogue section [sic] once a year, and they ask each and everybody, everybody like [sic] to hold the mike, they talk, that's all. Nothing materialized".

The central question in all these debates about recognition by MUIS is funding. As has been discussed in chapter 4, only relatively few associations receive funding from MUIS. Individuals active in those associations that did not receive funds at times expressed their discontent with this situation in interviews: "Particular people are getting money, only three or four associations. Not all the associations. Why don't [sic] MUIS come to FIM? 'FIM, please identify the Indian Muslim associations, what are they doing?'". Yet when this question was raised at one of the dialogue sessions, the MUIS President made it clear that Indian Muslim associations can not just expect to be funded by MUIS. They have to apply for funding, and their programs have to be evaluated, before MUIS can fund them.

Another contested aspect of funding related to the religious endowments created by Indian Muslims or for the benefit of Indian Muslim mosques. As has been mentioned in chapter 2, quite a number of such endowments were created in the colonial period, and practically all of them ultimately passed to MUIS. The existence of these endowments was constantly stressed by my respondents and apparently generated a good deal of pride. Given that the properties attached to these endowments are largely located in central Singapore, it is not surprising that they are capable of yielding a lot of revenue given proper management. This is readily seen from the MUIS annual reports. Thus, the Jamae Fund which supports the Masjid Jamae (Chulia), the Masjid Al-Abrar, and the Nagore Durgah, produced the second largest net surplus ($556,610) of all endowments in the Wakaf Fund in 2004, while the Masjid Abdul Gafoor produced the fourth largest net surplus ($62,000). A similar picture emerges when considering the total value of assets including liabilities; in this

count, the top three endowments were all created by Indian Muslims, with the MSE Angullia Fund topping the list with a value of $19,812,387, followed by the Kassim Fund ($11,523,716) and the Jamae Fund ($9,811,513).[632] Yet many of my respondents felt that despite having created these endowments and resources for Muslims in Singapore, Indian Muslims do not benefit from these. Some funds, such as the Kassim Fund, have completely passed beyond the control of Indian Muslims. Some respondents demanded that the money generated by these endowments should be utilized by MUIS to support the development of the Indian Muslim community. MUIS was criticized to not properly utilize funds for this purpose. What gets generally overlooked in this criticism is that MUIS is constrained in its use of funds from the endowments by the terms and conditions set out in the trust deeds. Furthermore, the substantial surplus that some of these endowments produce is due in large part to the recent redevelopment of these endowments by MUIS, meaning that MUIS has actually done a lot to enhance the value of such properties, as becomes readily apparent when tracing the development of e.g. the Jamae Fund in MUIS annual reports since the 1980s. At the same time, developing endowments is actually MUIS duty; given that Indian Muslims lost control over most of the endowments due to allegations of mismanagement, it is fully understandable that they critically monitor the performance of MUIS as the institution responsible for the management of these endowments.

[632] All figures from MUIS Annual Report 2004: electronic version, available at http://www.muis.gov.sg/English/publications/annual_report/others/all.pdf [accessed on 19 June 2006]; the fourth place in terms of value was taken by the Masjid Bencoolen, with $9,300,201.

Figure 15: Tablet recording the endowment of a religious school in Kadayanallur by Singaporeans (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Concluding this summary of contestations over the administration of Islam in Singapore, note has to be made of one aspect that has the potential to challenge the financial administrative setup, even though it is hardly perceived as such – the question of *zakāt*. As mentioned in chapter 4, payment of the ordinary *zakāt* in contradistinction to the *zakāt al-fiṭra* is not statutory in Singapore. This means that Muslims can choose to pay their *zakāt* to recipients of their choice, or even not to pay it at all. One recent study found that a majority of Singaporean Muslims interviewed claimed to pay *zakāt*; interestingly, the author of the study argued that this may be due to the respondents considering their contributions to MENDAKI and the MBF as *zakāt*.[633] Whatever the case, it became clear in the course of my research that the majority of my respondents preferred to choose the recipients of *zakāt* on their own,

[633] Mak 2000: 37-8.

and that many considered their donations to Indian Muslim associations or mosques to constitute their *zakāt*. This also included the financing of Islamic institutions back in India, such as mosques, shrines or religious schools [**Figure 15**]. This means that Indian Muslims are still quite autonomous in deciding who and what to support by donations, without being constrained in their options by MUIS or other official bodies.

DIFFERENCE IN PRACTICE AND IDENTITY

Popular Practice and the Formulation of Difference

Whereas the debates and contestations about Tamil Muslims' relationship to official religious institutions in Singapore are concerned with aspects of religious life which are largely shared among Singapore's Sunnite population, another set of debates concerning the relationship between religion and ethno-linguistic identity relate to practices that are often in themselves contentious and only practiced by some Muslims. For want of a better term, I will describe these as 'popular Muslim practices', though I am fully aware of the problems attached to both the terms 'popular' and 'Muslim'. When I characterize a practice as 'Muslim', I do not intend to make a statement about the propriety of the practice in reference to a putative divine and eternal order, but rather to express the fact that the practice, whether endorsed as religiously proper or resisted as un-Islamic, is part of Muslim discourse.[634] Even more problematic is the term 'popular', given that it can signify different things. Practices, beliefs and discourses permeating society on a large scale could be understood to be 'popular', and some discussions of 'popular religion' in an Islamic context certainly

[634] Cf. Roff 1987: 31-2, 48; I have avoided dubbing these practices explicitly as 'religious', because, as will be discussed below, the question of whether they are characterized as 'religious' or 'cultural' is actually of some importance in the debates regarding such practices.

do so.[635] At the same time, 'popular' often evokes beliefs and practices "…distinct from, if not in opposition to, that defined by scholars, jurists, and well-respected mystics…",[636] positing an essentialized dichotomy between elite practices based on scriptural injunctions carried out by fairly educated individuals, and popular practices based on extra-scriptural custom carried out by the uneducated masses, somewhere along the lines of Gellner's poles or syndromes of religious tradition.[637] For the purpose of this section, I will define 'popular Muslim practice' in a Sunnite context tentatively as *those practices which are not unambiguously perceived by Muslims to be enjoined by scripture and the sources of Islamic tradition*. This allows us to consider both those practices that are generally accepted not to be enjoined by scripture, e.g. the practice of employing CDs of Koran-recitals as amulets in cars, as well as those which are considered to be enjoined by some and resisted by others, e.g. certain practices connected with the veneration of Muhammad. Finally, it allows us to see popular practice as an extension of the enjoined practices, not an opposition to these.[638]

Given that popular practices are not universally perceived as prescribed by the sources of tradition, it is not surprising that they are more likely to differ along regional or ethnic lines. Such differences can be manifested in a variety of ways. The most obvious difference is of course when a practice is common in one ethnic or regional group but unknown among another. An example of this would be the annual ritual of anointing the grave of a saint with sandal-paste (*cantaṉakkuṭam*) which is practiced among South Indians. In other cases, the details of performing a certain

[635] Cf. Hammond 2005:194-234.
[636] Berkey 2003: 248; cf. Möller 2005: 51-3.
[637] Gellner 1969: 130.
[638] This is in my opinion the advantage over Möller's concept of 'lived Islam', which is based solely on a dichotomy of 'normative Islamic' and 'non-Islamic', overlooking the practices and beliefs which developed as part of an Islamic environment without ever being considered normative; cf. Möller 2005: 54-5.

practice or set of practices may vary, e.g. by reciting different poems on the occasion of *mawlid*. Finally, ethnic variation can become salient in the relative importance that different ethnic groups may attach to a certain practice. For example, one of Noorul Farha's respondents claimed that Indians are more particular than Malays about observing minor holidays such as the Islamic New Year on the 1st of Muharram.[639]

The number of popular practices is large, and it is not possible to discuss them in any detail here. In order to discuss the contestations regarding popular practice and Tamil ethnicity, it will suffice to focus on one particularly contentious issue, viz. the practices relating to the veneration of saints. Focusing on this complex of practices (and beliefs) has several advantages. On the one hand, the veneration of saints[640] is a practice found practically everywhere in the Muslim World. At the same time, despite the "…astonishing homogeneity" of this complex of practices across the Muslim World,[641] there is still considerable regional variation. This means that the complex of saint-veneration allows Muslims and scholars alike to identify differences as well as similarities in the practice across ethnic boundaries more easily, and thus offers favorable conditions for the study of ethnic difference in religious practice.

Saint-veneration is a conspicuous practice among Tamil Muslims, and few aspects of Muslim practice in South India and Ceylon have received as much attention by scholars.[642] Saint-veneration among Tamil Muslims is usually centered on a shrine, called *taikkā* or *tarkā*, that contains the tomb of a saint. Tombs can vary in size from simple graves to large shrine complexes like the Dargah of Nagore [**Figures 16-7**].

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[639] Noorul Farha 1999: 64; from my personal attendance of a function for ushering in the year AH 1427 on 30th of January 2006 at a Singaporean mosque, though, I cannot concur with this observation.
[640] The English word 'saint' is the most common translation of Arabic *walī*, pl. *awliyā'*, literally a 'friend' of God. This translation has been challenged on various grounds by a number of authors; cf. Baldick 1989: 7-8; Turner [1974] 1998: 56-62. Yet other scholars have argued for the continued usefulness of the term, and I largely concur with their views; cf. Chodkiewicz 1995: 13-22.
[641] Chambert-Loir & Guillot 1995: 389.
[642] Cf. Abdul Rahim 1973; Bayly 1986; Bayly 1989; Bayly 1994; McGilvray 2004; More 1999; Saheb 1998.

Figure 16: The Dargah of Shāh al-Ḥamīd in Nagore, South India's most important saint-shrine (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

Figure 17: Grave of a saint in Porto Novo (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

There are also shrines that commemorate a miracle performed by the saint on the site, but sometimes also only the visit of a saint or even just his (or rarely her) appearance in the dream of a devotee. Shrines commemorating the visit of the most important Muslim saint of Tamil India, Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore, can be found in many places in South India, such as at Tenkasi, where Shāh al-Ḥamīd is supposed to have relieved the people from a drought by miraculously causing rain [**Figure 18**].[643] As in many parts of the Muslim World, people attend the shrines of saints to get cured from diseases and find solutions for many other problems by praying for the saint's intercession with God and sharing in the *baraka*, God's 'blessing' that is transmitted through the saint and his or her shrine.[644] At popular sites, substantial crowds may gather for the annual festival of the shrine, commonly called *kantūri* or '*urs*.

Figure 18: Shrine in Tenkasi commemorating the visit of Shāh al-Ḥamīd to the town (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

643 Cāli [1981] 1985: 13; Kulām Kātiṟu Nāvalar [1963] 1997: 87.
644 Cf. von Denffer 1976.

When Tamil Muslims came to Singapore in the 19th century, they entered a world in which the veneration of saints was as prevalent as in their own homeland. Some shrines, or *keramat* as they are known in Malay, existed on the island even before the foundation of the British settlement in 1819.[645] Similarly, saint-veneration was also a common practice in Ḥaḍramawt, the region of Yemen that most of Singapore's Arabs hailed from.[646] Tamil Muslims adopted as well as contributed to the existing landscape of shrines on the island. Tamil Muslim saint-veneration in the colonial period has already been discussed in chapter 2, so it suffices here to stress that such practices integrated Tamil Muslims into Singapore Muslim society of the times rather than setting them apart.

I have elsewhere distinguished between two modes or trajectories of saint-veneration among Singaporean Tamil Muslims, viz. the 'diasporic' and the 'integrating' mode.[647] The former refers to the continued veneration of saints back in India by Singaporean Tamil Muslims, while the latter indicates the veneration of local Singaporean and Southeast Asian saints, Tamil or otherwise. It is the latter mode which is more salient in everyday life. Many respondents told me that they regularly visit shrines, often on a weekly basis. The Keramat Habib Nuh was singled out as a particularly important place. A Tamil Muslim foreign worker told that he visited Habib Nuh's shrine weekly because the latter was the supreme saint of the island, echoing an idea common in medieval Central and South Asia of the saint as a sovereign of a specific territory, resulting from the double meaning of the term *wilāya* as 'sanctity' and 'sovereignty'.[648] In terms of the practices performed at shrines in Singapore, there seems to be little difference between devotees of different ethnic

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[645] Cf. Abdul Wahab 1999/2000: 61; Suen-Oltmanns 1993/94: 33.
[646] Cf. Knysh 1993.
[647] Cf. Tschacher 2006b: 230.
[648] Cf. Bayly 1989: 179-86; Digby 1986: 62-3. Cf. Tschacher 2006b: 237-8 for the veneration of Habib Nuh by Tamils.

backgrounds. On the whole, those practices and ceremonies which I observed can also be encountered in other parts of the Muslim World, such as the strewing of the tomb with flowers, or the raising of flags to mark the annual holiday of the saint. In fact, the celebration marking the annual holiday of Habib Nuh on the 28th of May 2005 was one of the most multi-ethnic Muslim functions that I witnessed.[649]

The situation is slightly different when we look at the other, 'diasporic mode' of saint-veneration among Tamil Muslims in Singapore. Popular Muslim practices relating to this mode are much less salient than those that relate to Singaporean saints, as they are rarely carried out in the public sphere in Singapore. Most conspicuous and public are recitations of *mawlid*-poetry or even poems written by the saint himself, usually to mark the annual holiday. Other practices may be carried out in private, or only when visiting the saint's shrine in India, and are thus hidden from public view and of little consequence for debates about ethnic difference and religion in Singapore. As mentioned in chapter 3, Singaporean Tamil Muslims may make pilgrimages to shrines in India, both to shrines of the kin-center as well as those of important saints in other parts of the country.

The most salient case of 'diasporic' saint-veneration among Tamil Muslims in Singapore is also the most relevant for a discussion of debates over the relationship of ethnicity and religion. This is the Nagore Durgah, the replica of Shāh al-Ḥamīd's shrine in Nagore that we have encountered in chapter 2. The activities and rituals performed at that shrine during the colonial period have already been outlined. What needs to be added is that there is currently no evidence available to suggest that the practices connected with the shrine were in any way regarded improper in the prewar period. This does not mean that everyone agreed with these practices, but it seems that

[649] Metzger 2001: 161 incorrectly asserts that there is no particular holiday for Habib Nuh.

either was such criticism never put to writing, or it still remains to be discovered. It is also important to note that the Malay population in Singapore never seems to have developed any kind of attachment to the saint, and the shrine is generally not mentioned in studies regarding saint-shrines in Singapore.[650] Nevertheless, even in the postwar period, Malays seem to have participated in the annual holiday at the shrines, as one respondent now living in India reported: “All Muslims come [there]. Malay Muslims come, Tamil Muslims come, and there are Chinese Muslims, they also come”. When Mariam visited the annual holiday in 1986, she mentioned only “…very few Malays” attending the proceedings, something that she attributed to the fact that the shrine was a *ḥanafī* mosque, rather than to assume that the saint was simply less popular among Malays.[651]

Yet since the 1970s, the Nagore Durgah has been a contested site. As mentioned, the shrine was part of the Masjid Jamae (Chulia) endowment and thus inherited by MUIS from the Muslim and Hindu Endowments Board. In what Mariam interpreted as “…an attempt to control saint worship among Muslims”, MUIS is said to have demolished a concrete structure in the shrine that stood as a proxy for the tomb of the saint in the early 1970s.[652] Furthermore, MUIS transferred the management of the shrine to the TMJ, although under the condition that it would observe the annual holiday.[653] Furthermore, the shrine was officially converted into a mosque, apparently on the grounds that prayers were offered there, and the structure could not really qualify as a shrine as there was no tomb there; one of my respondents, who was close to MUIS, emphatically asserted that the Singapore Nagore Durgah never was a shrine.

[650] E.g. Abdul Wahab 1999/2000; Suen-Oltmanns 1993/94; Siddique 1979.
[651] Mariam 1989: 42; cf. also Bibijan 1976/77: 118; on the Nagore Durgah as a mosque see below.
[652] Mariam 1989: 42-3, quote on p. 43.
[653] Mariam 1989: 120; interestingly, Mariam claims to have attended the holiday during the month of Muharram, while usually the holiday of Shāh al-Ḥamīd is held in Jumādā al-Ākhira, five months later; cf. ibid.: 41.

While these may be valid reasons from the perspective of MUIS, the matter is less clear when looked at from the angle of South Indian devotees. Firstly, it does not seem to be uncommon to offer prayers in a shrine. While most shrines in South India have a separate mosque attached to them, it is not uncommon to find shrines where the distinction is less clear.[654] Secondly, as indicated above, a shrine need not necessarily be the tomb of a saint, but any place that comes to be associated with *baraka*.[655] Mariam contended that her respondents denied that the Singapore Nagore Durgah was a mosque. While my respondents did not deny this claim, it appeared that the distinction between mosque and shrine was not clearly made by them. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that certain practices linked to saint-veneration were continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[656]

Figure 19: The Nagore Durgah in Singapore after closure (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

[654] Cf. Schomburg 2003: 42-3; Tschacher 2006b: 233 n. 7.
[655] Cf. Gonella, 1995:153-260, esp. nos. 9, 48, 68-9; von Denffer 1976: 170.
[656] Cf. Mariam 1989: 41-6.

The Nagore Durgah was finally closed in 2001, officially because the structure had become so dilapidated that it threatened to collapse [**Figure 19**]. Nevertheless, it was not before 2004 that MUIS carried out strengthening works on the structure, after the Preservation of Monuments Board had requested it to do so.[657] Yet according to practically all my Tamil Muslim respondents, the immediate reason for the closure was a conflict between MUIS and an individual who claimed to be the caretaker of the shrine. Few of my respondents even mentioned the dilapidated condition of the Nagore Durgah, and then mainly in connection with what they perceived to be the failure of MUIS to preserve the shrine properly, something interpreted by a number of them as a sign of disrespect by MUIS towards Tamil Muslim traditions. Yet it appears that there were considerable tensions within the Tamil Muslim community regarding the shrine. Respondents were only giving evasive or vague answers when asked directly about the issue, but several comments in casual conversations revealed that there were actually debates about the propriety of the shrine going on. One respondent had sought for information on the main shrine in India early in 2004, in order to prove to MUIS that the tradition was properly Islamic. It should be stressed that this conflict over the shrine appears to have been an internal issue of the Tamil Muslim community; the slow response by MUIS regarding the necessary structural strengthening may have been due to reluctance on behalf of MUIS to interfere in internal matters of the Tamil Muslim community.

Finally, a compromise seems to have been reached in resurrecting a plan formulated already in 1994 to transform the shrine into a heritage center for Indian

[657] http://www.muis.gov.sg/english/media_releases/speech_jaleel.aspx [accessed on 20 March 2006]; it is slightly surprising that it took so long to carry out the needed structural works. In 2001, the accumulated fund of the Jamae endowment had recovered from the burden of redevelopment, as becomes clear from the MUIS annual reports, so that delay in carrying out structural strengthening can hardly have been due to financial constraints, especially as the structural works carried out in 2004 cost only about $30,000; cf. MUIS Annual Report 2001: 132; MUIS Annual Report 2003: 130; http://www.muis.gov.sg/english/media_releases/speech_jaleel.aspx [accessed on 20 March 2006].

Muslims.[658] The $1.8 million needed for the project are largely going to be raised through donations, while MUIS is going to contribute an initial $270,000 from the endowment towards this purpose.[659] Yet tensions are still simmering. At a dialogue session held by MUIS to present the plan to Indian Muslim community, MUIS announced that no rituals will be conducted in the renovated Nagore Durgah, and that it aims at gradually removing the perception that the structure is a shrine. Even while nobody objected during the session, respondents told me about their unhappiness with this decision in the aftermath of the meeting. At the same dialogue session, in contrast, representatives of the Masjid Jamae (Chulia), which belongs to the same endowment as the Nagore Durgah, requested that the name of the Nagore Durgah be simply changed to 'Indian Muslim Heritage Center', in order to obliterate any connections with the past of the structure, yet this proposal was declared to be not feasible by MUIS, as the name of a protected monument could not simply be changed.

The conflict over the shrine should not obscure the fact that Shāh al-Ḥamīd is still venerated by many Tamil Muslims in Singapore. One reason for the decline of the local shrine replica may well be the improved modes of transport to India. Planes link Singapore with Chennai several times a day, and a devotee leaving Singapore in the morning can be at Nagore in the late afternoon. Several respondents expressed skepticism regarding the Singapore Nagore Durgah, mainly on the basis that as Shāh al-Ḥamīd was neither buried there nor had visited Singapore, they were unsure whether the place could really be a source of *baraka*, which was necessary to qualify it as a shrine. At the same time, the sanctity of the main shrine in India was

[658] "Nākūr Tarkā marapuṭaimai maiyamākiṟatu", *Tamiḻ Muracu*, 20 May 2005: 6; cf. "Indian Muslim Heritage Centre", *Warita* 95, Jul-Aug 1994: 16.

[659] http://www.muis.gov.sg/english/media_releases/speech_jaleel.aspx [accessed on 20 March 2006]; that MUIS is going to contribute only about 15% of the total cost of the transformation of the Nagore Durgah again indicates that a simple lack of funds cannot have been the sole reason for the delay in carrying out needed repairs; if most of the funds were to be raised through donations anyway, collecting these donations could have begun already in 2002.

emphatically confirmed by these respondents, and a group of Singaporeans annually donates one of the five flags which are raised during the annual festival [**Figure 20**].[660]

Figure 20: The chariot transporting the Singapore Flag from Nagapattinam to Nagore for the annual flag-raising ceremony on 30th of July 2003 (Photo: Torsten Tschacher)

How do such debates over popular Muslim practice as encountered in the Nagore Durgah relate to the formulation of ethnic difference among Singaporean Muslims? Before this question can be addressed, a note on the participants in these debates is in order to avoid overgeneralization. It is fairly easy with regard to debates over popular Muslim practices to present the matter as a conflict between two clearly defined parties, viz. those who attack popular practices and those who support it. This dichotomy is found in the literature as well as among my respondents. The 'critics'

[660] Cf. Saheb 1998: 65.

are variously termed 'fundamentalist',[661] 'reformist',[662] 'orthodox',[663] or '*wahhābī*', the latter being the preferred term by most of my respondents who in some way defended popular practices, and even some of those who were opposed to them.[664] The supporters of popular practices are less clearly labeled, though terms like 'traditionalist',[665] 'syncretic',[666] or 'Sufi' are occasionally used;[667] some of my Tamil Muslim respondents employed the term '*barelwī*', which is often used in South Asia as an umbrella term used pejoratively for supporters of popular practices.[668] Yet it is important to bear in mind that the differences between critics and supporters of popular practices are less clear-cut than these terms suggest.[669]

A second methodological problem relates to the assumptions about the place of popular Muslim practices in Islamic tradition made by many students of Singaporean Islam. Some scholars right away call practices such as saint-veneration 'un-Islamic' or in "…doctrinal contradiction…" to Islam.[670] Even authors sympathetic to various popular practices are often unable to escape the dominant discourse. Thus, while Siddique stresses that the concept of *baraka* is part of what she calls 'Islamic folk religion', she qualifies this by claiming that this 'Islamic folk religion' actually derives from pre-Islamic Arab or Indian 'folk religion'.[671] Many authors also notice that there is little "…logical consistency between action and belief or practice and the

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661 Siddique 1979: 2.
662 Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 64; Peacock 1978: 145-74.
663 Abdul Wahab 1999/2000: 53; Suen-Oltmanns 1993/94: 7-8; significantly, Peacock reserves this term for the 'supporters' rather than the 'critics' of popular practice; Peacock 1978: 146, 152.
664 For the use of the term '*wahhābī*' in colonial India, cf. Sanyal 1996: 240-4; for some of the dangers implicit in the use of the term as an umbrella category, cf. Knysh 2004.
665 Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 64.
666 Peacock 1978: 146.
667 Knysh 2004: 4-9.
668 Cf. Geaves 1996: 170.
669 Cf. Möller 2005: 111-2.
670 Abdul Wahab 1999/2000: 51; cf. Bibijan 1976/77: 118; Shankar 2001: 49; Syed Mohamed 1973: 84-6.
671 Siddique 1979: 8, 14 n. 5.

doctrine",[672] or that justifications for popular practices were "…not…well argued".[673] Yet these scholars generally fail to spell out what they consider to be proper doctrine, and in what way the answers of their respondents were inconsistent with these doctrines, making it impossible to evaluate the statements.

There is no need to go into most of the debates concerning popular practices in detail. What is interesting for our purposes in these debates is what impact the perception of ethnic difference has on the discourse and arguments. It has been argued in the context of Muslim diasporas in the West that culturally or ethnically specific practices tend to get discarded in order to create a homogenized set of Muslim practices when Muslims of different ethnic groups come to live together in the same place.[674] We may thus expect that ethnic difference does impact the discourse about popular Muslim practice in Singapore. This is primarily apparent in two aspects: in the claims regarding putative 'Hindu' origins of many popular practices among Indian Muslims, and in Indian Muslim being perceived as more receptive to popular practices than Malays.

It is not at all uncommon to encounter statements to the effect that one or the other popular Muslim practice is derived from pre-Islamic practice.[675] Given the strong tendency to identify 'Indian' and 'Hindu' in Singapore, it is hardly surprising that popular practices peculiar to Indian Muslims in Singapore are often ascribed to Hindu influence.[676] One of my respondents noted with regard to the practices at the Nagore Durgah: "As I understand it, they [the Tamil Muslims; T.T.] brought a lot of Hindu baggage along". It should be noted that such statements are usually based on noting

[672] Mariam 1989: 46.
[673] Bibijan 1976/77: 118; cf. also Abdul Wahab 1999/2000: 52-3.
[674] Gibb 1998: 260-1; Vertovec 2003: 317-20; cf. also Peacock 1978: 155.
[675] Cf. the literature given in Tschacher 2006b: 225-6 n. 2; for Tamil Nadu, the most accessible statement of the argument is Bayly 1989: chapter 3.
[676] Cf. Mariam 1989: 114; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 62.

similarities between 'Hindu' practice and certain popular Muslim practices. Yet most respondents possessed only superficial knowledge of 'Hinduism' and simply assumed that a practice performed by Indians must be 'Hindu' if it was not perceived to be 'Islamic'. Thus, the *kariyamaṇi* or *karicamaṇi*, a necklace of black beads worn by married women to indicate their marital status, was identified by some respondents as 'Hindu'.[677] Yet even though a similar type of necklace has "…become one of the predominant symbols of marriage worn by Hindu women…" India-wide, the notions of auspiciousness that attach to this 'Hindu' necklace were on the whole not shared by my Muslim respondents, making it difficult to see what should be peculiarly 'Hindu' about the indication of marital status through a necklace.[678] Whatever the case may be, the claim that a certain practice is 'Hindu' was generally understood by respondents to be sufficient to indicate that it contradicted Islamic precepts. Such arguments remind one of the facile ascription of a caste-system to Indian Muslims that we encountered in chapter 3.

This tendency of identifying popular practices as 'Hindu' of course generated responses from those who perceived such practices to be proper and wanted to continue performing them. While some respondents tried to argue that a certain practice was in full conformity with the precepts of Islam, most respondents tried to defend a practice by 'culturalizing' it, i.e. by claiming that the practice was 'cultural' rather than 'religious'. Such tendencies have been noted also in Muslim diasporic societies in the West, and Vertovec has even argued that the religion/culture

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[677] Cf. also Bibijan 1976/77: 113; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 62; these sources call the necklace *manik sendrum*. None of my respondents used this term, which seems to be at least partly Malay, though I am unable to comment on the word *sendrum*.

[678] McGee 2004: 351; it should also be noted that this necklace is not in any way mentioned in canonical texts on marriage ritual, making it a 'popular practice' in the 'Hindu' tradition as well, quite apart from the perennial problems in identifying 'Hinduism' in the first place; cf. Sinha 2005: 16-7.

dichotomy is typical of diasporic societies.[679] 'Culturalization' generally seems to involve a situation where ethnic differences are salient, though it is not necessarily limited to diasporic communities.[680] It is important, though, to distinguish between various types of such 'culturalization'-processes. In most of the cases noted by students of diasporic societies, the relegation of certain practices from the domain of 'religion' to that of 'culture' took place in order to dispense with these practices and retain only the 'religious essentials'.[681] In this regard, they come closer to those of my Tamil Muslim respondents in Singapore who preferred to dispense with everything 'Indian' because it was considered to be improper in the Singaporean context.[682]

Yet in contrast, some respondents used the same 'culturalization'-argument to claim that there was nothing wrong in performing certain practices. To these respondents, such practices were positive expressions of their ethnic and cultural identities which were completely removed from the domain of religion and therefore not relevant to concerns over religious propriety. Respondents usually asserted that critics of the practice in question were simply implying too much when condemning it as un-Islamic. At the same time, this strategy required that any element that might be interpreted to be 'religious' in a practice needed to be removed or at least reinterpreted, in order not to cast the neat separation of 'religion' and 'culture' into doubt. A Malaysian Tamil Muslim whom I had met at the annual holiday in Nagore in 2003 eloquently argued that the ceremonies were "just culture" and thus completely proper. The same individual became extremely upset when the devotees scrambled to touch the flags that were to be hoisted on the minarets of the shrine to get into contact with the *baraka* contained in them, as this behavior implied that there was more than

[679] Vertovec 2003: 316-7; cf. Gibb 1998: 260-1.
[680] Cf. Harnish 2006: 6-7, 193-6.
[681] Cf. Vertovec 2003: 316-7; Gibb 1998: 260-1.
[682] Cf. Mariam 1989: 113; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 46-51.

just ‘culture’ to this ceremony. Similarly, practices have to be kept clearly separate from anything which could imply a Hindu background. Thus, MUIS has been requested to reform the antiquated spelling ‘Nagore Durgah’ to ‘Nagore Dargah’, as the former spelling might lead people to confuse it with the Hindu-goddess Durgā.

From this debate over the relationship between popular practices, ‘religion’ and ‘culture’, it is just a small step to the claim that Islam as practiced among Indians is a distinct entity in itself. This ‘Indian Islam’ is supposedly, as Mariam put it, ‘saint-centered’,[683] puts more stress on rituals and ceremonies, is more influenced by ‘Sufi’ brotherhoods, emphasizes hierarchies, and tends to be ‘syncretic’.[684] Furthermore, it is closely linked with the *ḥanafī* law-school. It is indeed fairly common even among scholars to see these elements as typical of Islam in South Asia, ascribed variously to the supposed advantage of ‘tolerant’ Sufi traditions in the multi-religious environment of South Asia or to the similarly unsubstantiated valorization of hierarchy among South Asians.[685] At the first glance, this construction of an ‘Indian Islam’ follows a common tendency to distinguish between various forms of ‘ethnic Islams’, generally considered to be Sufi-inspired, saint-centered, and accommodative of non-Islamic practices on the one hand, and a transnational, austere and exclusivist ‘universal Islam’ on the other. In many ways, this distinction mirrors the dichotomy of ‘supporters’ and ‘critics’ of popular Muslim practices mentioned in the preceding section.[686]

What is unusual in the Singaporean context is not so much the dichotomy as such, but the fact that the supposedly transethnic category of ‘universal Islam’ is identified with peculiar ethnic groups, viz. Arabs and Malays. Some respondents felt that

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[683] Mariam 1989: 113; cf. ibid.: 112-7.
[684] Cf. Mariam 1989: 112-7; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 63-4.
[685] For the former argument, cf. Geaves 2005; for the latter, cf. Lindholm 1998: 224-9.
[686] Vertovec 2003: 317-8; cf. Knysh 2004: 3-9 for the inadequacy of that dichotomy.

'Malay Islam' was less tainted with pre- and therefore un-Islamic practices. Furthermore, 'Indian Islam' was associated with mindless ritualism, a trait that is generally perceived as negative not only among Muslims in the Singaporean context.[687] Finally, the continued performance of practices peculiar to Tamil Muslims was seen as a threat to the supposed unity of the Muslim community or *umma*. On the other hand, this discourse could also be reversed; some respondents saw 'Indian Islam' coming closer to what they considered to be fundamental Muslim values. One respondent claimed that 'Indian Islam' was more tolerant, and thus by implication closer to Islamic core values, than 'Malay' or 'Arab Islam'; tellingly, the respondent connected this feature with the supposedly more tolerant nature of the *ḥanafī* law-school.[688] It also became clear that many respondents did not consider 'Indian Islam' to be in any way different from the Islamic 'mainstream', even while they considered Malay practice to be deviating. One Tamil respondent claimed that "…the Naqshbandiyya [a Sufi brotherhood; T.T.] has done a lot to counter the *bomoh*- ['medicine-man'] culture of the Malays". In this view, it was Sufi practices that helped reform what was perceived as improper Malay custom.

It hardly needs mention that there is a high degree of essentialism involved in the construction of categories like 'Indian' or 'Malay Islam'. Facts that could be perceived as challenging the dichotomy, such as the presence of a 'reformist' discourse among Indian Muslims or Malay participation in saint-veneration and other popular practices, are integrated into the discourse. The presence of 'reformist' discourse among Indian Muslims is interpreted by some respondents and scholars alike as result of an exposure of these 'reformed' Indian Muslims to Malay networks, conveniently ignoring the presence of such discourse in Tamil Nadu and other parts of

[687] Cf. Kuah-Pearce 2003: 54, 217, 271; Tong 2004: 299.
[688] In a similar vein, the UIMA-newsletter of April 1994 called the shrine of Shāh al-Ḥamīd in Nagore "[t]he historical symbol of religious harmony"; cf. picture in Cāmi 1994: 153.

South Asia for at least a century, and the important role played by Indian Muslims among early 'reformists' in the Malay World.[689] An even more curious argument is sometimes encountered regarding Malay popular practices, viz. that such practices were introduced by Indian Muslims into 'Malay Islam'. While Indians may well have transmitted some popular practices from India as well as other parts of the Muslim World,[690] they have also been charged with transmitting practices that clearly originated in Malay societies themselves. This discourse seems to have started among British administrators, but obviously offered a convenient way for some sections of Malay society to free themselves of the taint of 'un-Islamic' practices.[691] A good example is provided by the Malay practice of *mandi safar*, the tradition of taking a purificatory bath in a stream or the sea during the month of Safar. This practice is often claimed to be Hindu-derived, apparently solely on the basis of its resemblance with purificatory bathing at pilgrimage sites in India. Yet even though scholars and some respondents link *mandi safar* to Indian Muslims,[692] it has to be noted that the custom is unknown in India. In 1889, *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* mentioned only Malays and Javanese participating in this practice.[693] Similarly, Daud Shah explained it to his Indian readers in 1925 together with the *ronggeng*-dance as a Malay custom, without mentioning any Indian involvement in it, and concluded: "It goes without saying that there is no Muslim seeing the disgraceful things going on at this [*mandi safar*] who does not shed blood from [his] eyes".[694]

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[689] Cf. Mariam 1989: 116-7; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 46-9, 64. Regarding Indian Muslims' participation in 'reformist' activities in the 19th and early 20th century, cf. Khoo 1993: 268-70; More 2004: 122-31; Peacock 1978: 145-6.
[690] Cf. Siddique 1979: 14 n. 5.
[691] Cf. Nagata 1993: 521.
[692] Cf. Bibijan 1976/77: 115; Nagata 1993: 521.
[693] "Ciṅkappūr", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 28 Oct 1889: 66.
[694] Tāvutṣā 1925: 346.

It has been suggested that the formulation of either support or opposition to 'Indian Islam' is related to the degree of 'Malayization' and integration into Malay networks.[695] While there seems to be some support for such a contention, one has to be careful not to award the dichotomy of 'Indian' and 'Malay Islam' any explanatory value outside the discourse in which it is formulated. In addition, not every Muslim in Singapore subscribes to this dichotomy. Several of my respondents located the emergence of 'reformist', '*wahhābī*' discourse not among Malayized Indian Muslims, but rather among recent migrants from India. When I asked one respondent who made that claim why in his opinion it was mainly recent migrants from India who espoused such views, the respondent blamed migrant workers from the Gulf States for spreading '*wahhābī*' discourse after their return from the Gulf: "So these fellows are trying to be too smart, come back to India, they act like Arabics [sic]". This way, the discourse spread among the younger generation of Indians who are now migrating to Singapore. This respondent was not the only one who noted an upsurge in '*wahhābī*' ideas among recent migrants. Several respondents claimed that MUIS was oblivious to the problem and predicted that it may lead to severe tensions among Tamil Muslims in Singapore. It is difficult to assess the extent of this phenomenon, but it should be clear that it is not possible to understand the debates about popular Muslim practice in Singapore solely through the dichotomy of 'Indian' and 'Malay Islam'. At the same time, the dichotomy is pervasive enough in public discourse to raise the question why it has been so appealing despite its obvious shortcomings. This leads us to the formulation of identities among Singaporean Tamil Muslims and the impact the resulting discourse has on religious life among them.

[695] Cf. Mariam 1989: 116-7; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 46-9.

The Fallacies of the Identity Discourse

Few questions relating to Indian Muslims in Singapore have received more attention in scholarly as well as public discourse than that of identity. It is generally assumed that Indian Muslims form a community that straddles the boundary, or falls into the gap, as the case may be, between Indians and Malays. One of my respondents stated that Indian Muslims do not know who they are, being caught between Indians and Malays while being neither fully. Noorul Farha, whose thesis is the most detailed investigation of the issue so far, posits an identity-continuum of 'Indian-Muslimness':

> At the…ends of the continuum are the individuals who have almost completely integrated into the wider Indian and Malay communities. In between are those who wish to see the Indian-Muslim community as a unique one… In most cases, being 'Indian-Muslim' requires one to negotiate…their [sic] way along the continuum…[696]

Noorul Farha employs the concept of 'hyphenated identities' to explain identity-formation among various groups of Indian Muslims in Singapore. According to her, two identity-processes, viz. 'Indianness' and 'Muslimness' join in every Indian Muslim individual, who may then "…choose to live life largely to the right or left side of the hyphen".[697] Though individuals are free to manipulate aspects of their identity in different situations, they are at the same time constrained in their choices by factors such as language, physical features, stereotyping, or popular practices.[698] There can be little doubt that this is indeed the dominant model according to which the identity of Indian Muslims in Singapore is perceived and articulated, and there is little need to

[696] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 69.
[697] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 9.
[698] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 57-63.

repeat Noorul Farha's arguments here or to reiterate statements by my respondents that echo similar sentiments expressed by hers. Rather, it is necessary to investigate what impact this debate has had on Indian, and more specifically Tamil Muslim religious life in Singapore. As I want to argue, the relative unanimity of respondents on the issue is deceptive; rather, fundamental contradictions in the way Islam is organized and conceived of in Singapore are obscured by the identity discourse in a way that has disadvantaged Indian Muslims.

One obvious characteristic of the discourse about Indian Muslim identity is the considerable amount of tension over what being an 'Indian-Muslim'[699] means. During the debate occasioned by the formation of SINDA, vastly different visions of being an 'Indian-Muslim' were put forward, as has been shown above. These tensions were generally seen as an endorsement of the 'Indian-Muslims'' position in-between Indians and Malays, and also to reveal what was considered to be an 'identity crisis'.[700] Yet these claims raise a simple question: why would somebody speaking either Malay or Tamil and adopting either Malay or Tamil culture not simply be Malay or Indian? Furthermore, how meaningful could an identity as 'Indian-Muslim' be, given the substantial differences within the category in terms of language, regional background, or affiliation to various religious subdivisions? It becomes obvious that the category of 'Indian-Muslim' cannot be understood in isolation, but has to be related to the construction of identity categories in the wider society.

Any understanding of the discourse about 'Indian-Muslim' identity in Singapore has to take account of the construction of 'races' and 'religions' in this state. One of

[699] I will use 'Indian-Muslim' in inverted commas to indicate the imagined homogenous 'community' created in public discourse, as opposed to individuals who just happen to be Indian and Muslim.

[700] Cf. "Join Sinda or Mendaki? Identity crisis facing Indian Muslims could be boon or bane", *The Straits Times*, 26 Jul 1992; "Abdullah to help Indian Muslims in identity conflict", *The Straits Times*, 31 Oct 1993; Noorul Farha allows for more agency by recognizing Indian Muslims as projecting different aspects of identities at different times, but she still sees these different aspects as being in tension; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 70.

the more problematic aspects of this identity as formulated by Noorul Farha is the claim that the identity of Indian Muslims is "…necessarily hyphenated…".[701] The problem with this statement is that it assumes that there is a natural tension between 'Indian' and 'Muslim';[702] else, most Singaporeans would have hyphenated identities – Malay-Muslim, Indian-Sikh, Chinese-Buddhist, etc. Yet there is no rational reason why an identity as Indian should necessarily get into conflict with an identity as a Muslim – after all, one is a 'racial' and the other a 'religious' identity. The problem lies in the fact that the categories of 'race' and 'religion' get confused and identified in public discourse in Singapore, as mentioned in chapter 2. Thus, 'Indian' comes to imply 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' 'Malay'. Only once the categories are thus 'contaminated' with each other does a tension between them become conceivable. This 'contamination' of 'race' and 'religion' is part of the process of 'cultural involution' as identified by Benjamin, in which "…each 'culture' turns in on itself in a cannibalistic manner, struggling to bring forth further manifestations of its distinctness".[703] In this sense, being simultaneously an Indian and a Muslim threatens the boundaries of 'race' and 'religion', for there are suddenly 'Indians' who are 'Malay' by religion and 'Muslims' who are 'Hindu' by race, so to speak.[704] This threat to the 'racial' and 'religious' categories that structure much of Singaporean cultural and administrative life needs to be controlled and disciplined. To achieve this, the threat is homogenized and naturalized by the creation of the category of 'Indian-Muslims', a category that is not defined primarily through the realities on the ground,

[701] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 9, 38.
[702] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 37-8, 70; at some points, Noorul Farha acknowledges that this proposition is problematic; ibid.: 49-50.
[703] Benjamin 1976: 122.
[704] One might argue that 'Indian Islam' as discussed in the last section is the conceptual equivalent in the domain of 'religion' to 'Indian Muslimness' in the domain of 'race' – in both cases, the distinctness of 'religious' or 'racial' categories is perceived to be threatened by the presence of an apparent contradiction within the category.

which would only reveal the meaninglessness of the category, but through recourse to the common Singaporean categories of Indian/Hindu and Malay/Muslim.

It is this imagining of 'Indian-Muslims' through existing categories that actually creates the identity crisis often ascribed to Indian Muslims in Singapore, and it is through this supposed identity crisis that Indian Muslims are disciplined.[705] To begin with, the category of 'Indian-Muslim' obscures the heterogeneity of this putative 'community'. Consequently, even legitimate claims made by a particular group of Indian Muslims can be delegitimized as the parochial claims of just one section in a larger 'community', and countered with the calls to unity that are common in speeches addressed by Muslim community leaders to 'Indian-Muslims'. Differences between various Indian Muslim groups thus come to be seen not as the legitimate expression of diversity but as a communal pathology, symptom of a primordial identity crisis compounded by the supposed 'argumentativeness' of Indians.

Furthermore, by claiming an inherent tension between being 'Indian' and being 'Muslim', it is possible to mark certain behaviors and identities as improper in a given setting. The criticism of popular practices and 'Indian Islam' is part of this disciplining process; by admonishing Indian Muslims not to 'contaminate' Islam with 'Indian' practices and identities, it is possible to obscure just how much the hegemonic construction of Islam in Singapore draws on the beliefs and mores of the elite of Malay and Arab community leaders. I was told several times during my fieldwork by high-ranking Muslim community leaders that Indian cultural practices such as the annual holiday for the Nagore saint could not be replicated in the Singaporean setting, though without giving reasons why this was not possible. Similarly, in a recent publication by MENDAKI, Muslim was unabashedly identified

[705] Regarding the use of racial stereotypes to discipline individuals and communities, cf. PuruShotam 1998: 87-91.

with Malay, and Tamil-speaking Muslims were singled out as those preferring to maintain a distinct identity, implicitly criticizing them for threatening the unity of the Muslim community.[706] Furthermore, I was told that Indian Muslims should stop identifying themselves with India, an almost paradoxical proposition given that until recently little was done by public institutions to enable Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore to organize their religious life without recourse to preachers, teachers, and publications from India. This discourse obviously forced Indian Muslims to react. Thus, during a dialogue session with MUIS, one community leader proposed that instead of 'Indian-Muslim', the term 'Muslim of Indian origin' should be employed, obviously to deemphasize the identification with India suggested by the former term.

This discourse about and disciplining of 'Indian-Muslim' identity further serves to obscure any problems sections of Indian Muslim society may be facing in Singapore. Firstly, problems encountered by one section of Indian Muslims can be downplayed by pointing out that the problem is not faced by all 'Indian-Muslims'. An example would be the statement of the MUIS Secretary quoted by Noorul Farha, in which he quipped at complaints by Tamil-speaking Muslims by pointing out the problems faced by Malay-speaking Indian Muslims.[707] Rather than conceding that the problems of diverse Indian Muslim groups need separate attention, they are qualified and relativized by playing one against the other. This is also echoed in Noorul Farha's conclusion: "Structurally, they [the Indian Muslims; T.T.] may be marginalized…and might be unhappy about that. But not all are".[708] Secondly, primordializing the supposed tensions between being 'Indian' and being 'Muslim' allows to obscure the context in which statements about identity and problems faced by Indian Muslims are made and to reinterpret such statements as expressions of a timeless identity crisis. As

[706] Saat 2002: 159.
[707] Quoted in Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 56.
[708] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 73.

mentioned in chapter 5, many of my Tamil-speaking respondents noted their exasperation when it was assumed that all Muslims would speak Malay; similarly, they were incensed by the facile equation of 'Indian' and 'Hindu'. Similar statements were apparently made by Noorul Farha's respondents; yet even though one of them explicitly noted that the problem lay with the fact that other people "…mix up race and religion",[709] Noorul Farha preferred to read them as statements reflecting tensions underlying the 'hyphenated' nature of 'Indian-Muslims' rather than as problems imposed on Indian Muslims by other Singaporeans confusing the categories of 'race' and 'religion', such as the MENDAKI publication noted above.[710] One respondent noted: "The question 'who do we align ourselves with – the Indians or the Malays?' always bothers us". But the fact that Tamil and other Indian Muslims are supposed to 'align' with one or the other 'racial' group is not a commonsensical process, but due to the imposition of specific structural constraints on them in the Singaporean context. Similarly, the debates over whether to support MENDAKI or SINDA in the early 1990s were claimed to reflect "…the underlying tension among Indian Muslims…" regarding "…their cultural and religious identity…",[711] rather than MENDAKI's own confusion about its identity as either Muslim or Malay. Thirdly, as the latter example shows, not only are problems that Singaporean Indian Muslims may be facing obscured. As they are claimed to result from a putative identity crisis, the onus to resolve this crisis – and therefore, according to this logic, the problems – is placed squarely on the Indian Muslims themselves, while public institutions are absolved from any responsibility.[712] What is most paradoxical about this is that as long as the

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[709] Quoted in Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 37.
[710] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 37-8; cf. Saat 2002: 159.
[711] "Join Sinda or Mendaki? Identity crisis facing Indian Muslims could be boon or bane", *The Straits Times*, 26 Jul 1992.
[712] Cf. "Indian Muslims urged to reconcile their feelings about identity", *The Straits Times*, 24 Feb 1992; "Join Sinda or Mendaki? Identity crisis facing Indian Muslims could be boon or bane", *The*

tacit identification of 'Indian' with 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' with 'Malay' is in place in Singapore, Indian Muslims will never be able to resolve this 'identity crisis' themselves, unless they are willing to sacrifice their identity completely by either converting to Hinduism or by identifying themselves as Malays.[713]

As Noorul Farha noted, "[i]dentity is first and foremost a historical creation of the group and must be understood as such".[714] Yet placing the formulation of various Singaporean Indian Muslim identities in their historical contexts is a difficult undertaking, as our knowledge of these contexts is sketchy at best; furthermore, few of the commentators until now have been able to access Tamil language primary sources, which would be the most important source for the formulation of 'identities' among the Tamil-speaking section of Indian Muslim society in Singapore. As mentioned in chapter 5, there is little evidence that Tamil Muslims perceived a fundamental as opposed to a circumstantial tension between being 'Tamil' and being 'Muslim'. Similarly, there is as little evidence that they saw a close connection between being 'Muslim' and being 'Malay'. When reporting his experiences in Malaya back to India in 1925, Daud Shah included a long diatribe against the Malays that could have sprung from the pen of a British administrator, dubbing them 'sluggards' (*cōmpēṟikaḷ*) who lived 'carefree' (*niscintaiyāy*) by squandering money.[715] Even worse, Daud Shah noted that "…Malay and Javanese women, even though they are all Muslim women, are very careless in the matter of chastity".[716] As noted with regard to the practice of *mandi safar*, Malay customs were also not spared from criticism. Slightly earlier, in 1923, Indian Muslims had opposed the plans of the

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Straits Times, 26 Jul 1992; "Abdullah to help Indian Muslims in identity conflict", *The Straits Times*, 31 Oct 1993.

[713] Cf. PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 152-3; given the fact that 'race' is ascribed by the state rather than chosen by the individual in Singapore, the latter would in any case be difficult to achieve.

[714] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 70.

[715] Tāvutṣā 1925: 342-3.

[716] Tāvutṣā 1925: 343.

government to appoint specifically a Malay as Muslim member of the Legislative Council, suggesting that a non-Malay could also be appointed because "…to a Moslem, nationality is not as strong as religious ties".[717] This case is particularly interesting as it seems to mirror the contemporary situation, just that it is nowadays the Indian Muslims who are criticized for placing their ethnic identity over their feeling of community with other Muslims.

This is not to suggest that there was a fixed and undisputed 'Indian Muslim' or even 'Tamil Muslim' identity in the prewar period.[718] Indeed, writers shifted with considerable facility from one identity category to the other; this element of situational identities has of course been stressed for both the past and the present.[719] Rather, what should be noted is that the postulated identity crisis did not seem to have existed in this period; indeed, it seems to have been the Indians who criticized Malays for 'un-Islamic' behavior and their growing emphasis on being 'Malay' rather than Muslim in the 1920s,[720] reversing the respective positions taken by Malay and Indian Muslims in contemporary debates. This should alert us to the fact that the current public formulation and contestation of 'Indian-Muslim' identity is the result of historical contingency caused by several factors. I would argue that most important among these factors are a) the growing institutionalization of 'race' as an ascribed rather than a chosen category, leading to the creation of a large Malay-speaking Indian Muslim community which now competes with those Indian Muslims speaking South Asian languages in representing 'Indian-Muslims';[721] b) the increasing use of 'religion' to define 'race' and vice versa, as described in chapter 2 and 3; and c) the

[717] Quoted in Yegar 1979: 101.
[718] Cf. Fakhri 2002: 4.
[719] Cf. Fakhri 2002: 13, 16; Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 70.
[720] Cf. Khoo 1993: 269.
[721] As mentioned in chapter 2, these individuals were considered to be 'Malays' by the British in the prewar period.

establishment of hegemony over the Muslim public sphere in Singapore by several public institutions lead largely by Malay-speaking individuals, as described in chapter 4. The resulting confusion over issues of language, 'race', and 'religion' came to the foreground when the formation of SINDA made these confusions glaringly apparent in MENDAKI in the early 1990s. It was in this context that an 'Indian-Muslim' identity, rather than various Indian Muslim identities, were increasingly formulated and contested in public, as a reaction to structural problems these groups were facing.[722] As Mani has pointed out: "…the dual orientation of Tamil Muslims is often guided by events outside their own group".[723]

Even while the presentation of these contestations as an identity crisis were certainly advantageous to the existing Muslim community leadership, as suggested above, one should not overlook that many Indian Muslims in Singapore seem to share the general understanding of the relationship of 'Indian' and 'Muslim' as partly antagonistic. Furthermore, the formulation of a hyphenated 'Indian-Muslim' identity has been more advantageous to some sections of Indian Muslim society than to others. Given that 'Indian' in Singapore is not only often identified with 'Hindu', but also with 'Tamil', the formulation of a common 'Indian-Muslim' identity makes it easier for Tamil-speaking Muslims to press their claims to represent 'Indian-Muslims' in Singapore, at the expense of those speaking other South Asian languages.[724] Furthermore, the common identification of 'Indian-Muslims' as belonging predominantly to the *ḥanafī* law-school obviously benefits *ḥanafī* Indians, as is evinced by the patterns of law-school affiliation of 'Indian' mosques as discussed in chapter 3. Finally, as one of my respondents claimed, it has also strengthened the

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[722] A glance over the newspaper clips collected by Noorul Farha reveals an interesting endorsement of this thesis: prior to 1989, *The Straits Times* tended to use primarily the term 'Tamil Muslims'; after 1989, 'Indian Muslims' becomes the most common term; cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: appendix D.

[723] Mani 1992: 355.

[724] Cf. PuruShotam 1998: 89-90.

position of those Malay-speaking Indian Muslims who continued to claim to represent 'Indians' vice versa those Malay-speaking Indian Muslims who happen to be classified as Indians, but who publicly identify as Malays, as the greater visibility of an 'Indian-Muslim' community could lead the Malays themselves to challenge this 'Indian'-Malay leadership.[725] The greater attention that MUIS has paid in recent years to the needs of Indian Muslims has also resulted from the greater salience of an 'Indian-Muslim' identity discourse in the public sphere and the formation of groups like FIM. Still, if the structural problems faced by Indian Muslims in organizing their religious life in Singapore are to be tackled, further attention needs to be paid by public institutions to distinguish more clearly between 'race' and 'religion' as well as between different Indian Muslim groups and the challenges faced by them.

[725] Cf. Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 56.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS – ETHNIC DIFFERENCE IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

LOCATING DIFFERENCE

Having reviewed various aspects of religious life among Singaporean Tamil Muslims and the connected discourses, we may return to consider the three questions posed in the Introduction: In which context does ethnic difference become salient in the religious domain? What practical impact does ethnic difference have on the organization and practice of religious life? And what discourses arise from the salience of ethnic difference in the religious domain? I attempt to provide some answers to these three questions and derive some conclusions from them in this final chapter.

In identifying the contexts in which ethnic differences become salient in the religious domain, we have to begin by pointing out an obvious precondition for such salience: in order for differences in religious life to be perceived, they must be public to a certain degree, so as to allow Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds to notice them. This may of course happen in a private context, e.g. when a Malay Muslim is invited to a function in a Tamil Muslim household or vice versa, but generally ethnic difference in religious life becomes most salient in public rather than private

practice.[726] Domestic practices, such as housewarming rituals and similar functions generally occur in ethnically more homogenous contexts or, to the contrary, can involve so many different ethnic as well as religious groups among the participating guests that any religious character of the function may be toned down to such a degree that it is not recognizable anymore. In any case, these practices are unlikely to make ethnic difference salient within a recognizable Islamic setting.

The evidence presented in this thesis points to two main areas in which ethnic differences play a role in Muslim religious life. One is the area of public religious practice; the other the area of language use. Differences in the first area pertain largely to the field of what I have termed 'popular practice', i.e. all practices that are not unanimously agreed to be normative. Obviously, these practices allow greater variation than the normative practices, such as congregational prayer, which are largely standardized. The main area where ethnic difference becomes salient with regard to normative practice is the adherence to a specific law-school – as Malays usually belong to the *shāfi'ī* law-school, and most adherents of the *ḥanafī* law-school in Singapore are of Indian background, this difference between law-schools lends itself to an interpretation of ethnic difference, and it has definitely influenced the discourse on 'Indian-Muslim' identity, as shall be discussed below.[727] Yet it should not be forgotten that the actual situation with regard to Tamil Muslims is more complicated. As Tamil Muslims are the only Muslim group in Singapore that includes substantial followers of both law-schools, adherence to one or the other of these schools does signify different things to different individuals. While belonging to the

[726] An interesting exception may be the situation in households consisting of both Malay- and Tamil-speaking Muslims, where differences in practice may become obvious even in the domestic sphere; yet since in most of these households Malay is the primary language and I focused particularly on Tamil-speakers, I have not come across such a case.
[727] Of course, the differences in practice between law-schools have no connection to ethnicity, only the adherence to one or the other school has.

ḥanafī law-school may be an indicator of 'Indianness' in the eyes of a Malay, it connotes specific regional and possibly class-differences to a *shāfiʻī* Tamil Muslim. Conversely, for a *ḥanafī* Tamil Muslim, adherence to the *shāfiʻī* law-school on part of another individual has different meanings depending on whether that individual is Tamil or Malay.

In terms of popular practice, ethnic differences are more salient than with regard to normative practice, yet some qualification is in order to put these differences into proper perspective. Thus, the main differences between various ethnic groups with regard to popular practice are differences in detail rather than in the actual practices performed, i.e. Tamil and Malay Muslims recite different poems in honor of the Prophet Muhammad, or commemorate the holidays of different saints; but there seem to be no ethnic differences with regard to whether such practices are carried out at all. Among both Tamils and Malays, there are those who support these practices and those who do not. Those who do participate in these practices in principle do not find it difficult to join members of another ethnic group in performing them. During the recitation of *mawlid* in honor of Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore, most Malays may not participate in reciting the poems, primarily because they may not be familiar with them. But some Malays nevertheless listen to the recitation and share in the food and flowers that are distributed at the end. Similarly, saint-shrines are attended by Muslims of diverse ethnic backgrounds, much as opposition to such shrines also cuts across ethnic boundaries. The continued performance of popular practices like visits to saint-shrines in the multi-ethnic environment of Singapore for almost two centuries suggests that the observation that such practices tend to disappear in diasporic settings needs to be modified, and cannot be applied mechanically to any multi-ethnic Muslim

society.[728] It should also be noted that the few cases of practices which are performed by one ethnic group but which differ visibly from those performed by Muslims of other ethnic backgrounds tend not to be conspicuous publicly. The main example of such a practice would be the sandal-paste ceremonies (*cantaṉakkuṭam*) performed until recently by some Tamil Muslims in the Nagore Durgah, where apparently only very few non-Tamils would have been present.[729] More conspicuous practices such as processions seem to have been banned as public disturbances already in the colonial period by the British, and thus play no role in Singaporean Muslim society anymore, nor are we able to assess their perception by the Malay or Arab population in the 19th century. On the whole, the salience of ethnic differences in the carrying out of popular practices appears to have surprisingly little practical impact for the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore; all the more surprising is that they do play a role in the discourse about ethnic difference among Singaporean Muslims, an aspect that will be discussed below.

Yet ethnic differences in Muslim religious life become most salient and pronounced when language is involved. This is in itself hardly remarkable – language is fundamental in communicating about Islam, whether in the form of the transmission of religious knowledge, in discourse, or in public debates. Which language(s) an individual is fluent in determines what information she or he is able to access, in what way, and from whom, in which debates the individual participates, and in which religious networks she or he partakes. At the same time, the lack of linguistic skills can also exclude individuals from access to religious services and participation in religious practices, when these are only offered in a language that individual is not proficient in. All these aspects are highly visible in the Singaporean

[728] Cf. Gibb 1998: 260-2; Vertovec 2003: 316-8; for a critique, cf. Tschacher 2006b: 238-9.
[729] Cf. Mariam 1989: 41-6.

context. As Malay serves as the predominant medium of the transmission of Islamic knowledge in Singapore, Muslims not proficient in Malay have to tap into alternative networks to satisfy their religious needs. An emerging Muslim public sphere using English is the most readily available alternative for smaller ethnic groups among the Muslims, as well as for increasing sections among the larger groups as well, suggesting that its importance will grow in the future. But for Tamil Muslims, these alternative networks are still largely Tamil-speaking and include mosques, associations, and a number of informal religious groups. It is most likely that the preferences for specific Sufi brotherhoods among different ethnic groups in Singapore, which was mentioned in chapter 4, has as much to do with the languages used at the meetings of particular Sufi groups as with any cultural or historical predilections towards a specific brotherhood, though these two processes obviously go hand in hand. On the whole, language use has a much greater practical impact on religious life among Tamil Muslims in Singapore than peculiarities of religious practice; when I attended the ceremonies marking the Islamic New Year on the 1st of Muharram AH 1427 (30th of January 2006), Malays and Tamils recited *mawlid* together before the night (*'ishā'*) prayers, yet afterwards separated, with the Tamils shifting to another hall in the mosque to attend a religious lecture in Tamil, which obviously would have been unintelligible for most Malays. Given this importance for language in the organization of religious life, it is highly surprising that the topic seems to be hardly ever addressed in the secondary literature on diasporic and many other multi-ethnic Muslim societies, Singaporean Muslim society included.[730] The relationship between linguistic and religious communities in any case needs to be

[730] Cf. Vertovec 2003.

investigated further, as it has an obvious influence on the way religious life is organized and ethnic difference is managed in multi-ethnic Muslim societies.

MANAGING DIFFERENCE

The salience of ethnic difference in religious life in itself of course just means that such differences become obvious to the participants in religious activities, but it does not tell us much about the practical consequences of these differences. As just outlined, the two main areas of religious life in which ethnic differences become salient are religious practice, mainly popular rather than normative, and religious language use. Of these, ethnic differences regarding the religious practice have comparatively few practical consequences. The reason is simple – as participation in popular practices is usually voluntary, an individual is free to choose whether to participate or whether to abstain form participation. Furthermore, popular practices are usually organized privately, with little outside involvement, thus leaving little scope for tensions to occur between different ethnic groups or between the organizers and official Muslim administrative bodies. Practically the only case in contemporary Singapore that I am aware of where such frictions occurred was in the context of the Nagore Durgah, but even here, there was little involvement by non-Tamils in the issue. It is well possible that the generally cautious approach by MUIS to the issue throughout the 1980s and 1990s was precipitated partly by the fact that MUIS did not want to appear as intervening in Tamil Muslim traditions, and that action was taken only because of the exacerbating tensions over the practice within the community.[731] In contrast, there is little evidence that ethnic difference in popular practice had any

[731] Mariam 1989: 119.

visible impact on Muslim religious life in the colonial period. While such differences were occasionally remarked on, for example with regard to the practice of *mandi safar* by Daud Shah, these discourses seem to have had no practical impact. Even the ban of various religiously motivated processions was due to concerns over public peace by the Government rather than objections raised by other Muslims.

Only with regard to the one difference in normative practice that is linked to the ethnic background of Muslims, viz. the adherence to the *ḥanafī* law-school, is it possible to claim that ethnic differences have practical consequences for the organization of religious life, as the differences between the law-schools have led to the establishment of separate mosques. More importantly, as outlined in chapter 3, *ḥanafī* mosques were largely protected from the process of 'Malayization', so that none of the original *ḥanafī* mosques ever came to be Malay-dominated. While this perception of a strong correlation of '*ḥanafī*' with 'Indian', and of 'Indian' and 'Tamil', has benefited the *ḥanafī* section of the Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore, it has destabilized the situation of *shāfi'ī* Tamils as well as that of non-Tamil *ḥanafīs*, whose mosques were in a more precarious situation – most *shāfi'ī* mosques employing Tamil have either become 'Malayized' or have shifted to *ḥanafī* practice, while no *ḥanafī* mosque of an unambiguously non-Tamil character survives.

The example of mosques leads us to the practical consequences of language use in the religious sphere. There are two important impacts that linguistic differences have on religious life. Firstly, linguistic differences exclude certain sections of society from practices that are conducted in a language that section is not or only insufficiently proficient in. Many Tamil Muslims are excluded from Muslim activities which utilize Malay, ranging from more narrowly religious practices such as attending sermons and lectures or higher religious education, to social services such as Malay-medium

tuition schemes for Muslims. Even though there are attempts to mitigate some of these exclusions, e.g. by providing English translations of sermons, on the whole, linguistic exclusion has served as a catalyst for the formation of separate Tamil Muslim institutions as well as the public formulation of a Tamil or even Indian Muslim identity. This has assumed an even greater significance in the context of the contemporary administrative setup, which will be considered below. Linguistic exclusion has also had the effect of marginalizing the role Tamil Muslims can play in the Muslim public sphere in Singapore. As higher religious education in Tamil is unavailable in Singapore, Tamil Muslims have little capacity to participate in those domains of Muslim society that require such skills, e.g. in questions of Islamic law. Furthermore, the resultant reliance on religious scholars from India makes Tamil Muslims more dependent on religious discourses from India; coupled with the fact that most Malay Muslims do not speak Tamil, and are thus themselves excluded from certain debates current among Tamil Muslims, this reliance on discourse derived from India helps to further set Tamil Muslims apart and to deepen the salience of ethnic difference.

Secondly speakers of different languages may form separate institutions for these purposes, provided there are enough speakers of a specific language present and the legal framework permits such separate institutions. As should have become clear in the course of our discussion, there is a surprisingly large number of institutions catering to Tamil Muslim religious needs if compared to the actual size of Tamil Muslim society in Singapore. Most of these institutions are either mosques or associations, and they provide Tamil Muslims with many services that they might otherwise be excluded from, such as religious education, sermons and lecturing in Tamil language as well as counseling. It is tempting to relate the growth of Tamil

Muslim institutions to the linguistic exclusion they were faced with in Malay-speaking institutions, though the evidence is not quite so clear-cut. Linguistic differences were probably not the only factors behind the foundation of the earliest Tamil mosques in Singapore, especially as many of the early Tamil Muslim traders would have known Malay. While the establishment of these mosques attests to the general identification with Tamil-speaking networks by the early Tamil Muslim traders, and thus casts doubts on the occasionally voiced claim that these early traders were more ready to 'Malayize' than Tamil Muslims who came to Singapore a century later,[732] there is no reason to suppose that an actual feeling of exclusion from Malay-speaking environments caused the setup of separate institution. With regard to the formation of Tamil Muslim associations, their role as providers of services that Tamil Muslims might be excluded from on the basis of language is similarly the result of a historical process rather than the original purpose of most of these associations. With regard to the few general Indian Muslim associations that existed before World War II, it is very difficult to establish the role language played in these associations, due to the scarcity of information on them. The Indian Muslim Association may have focused primarily on one linguistic group, in this case Tamils, but other associations, like the Anjuman-i-Islam, drew their membership from various ethnic and linguistic groups. In contrast, the kin-center associations that developed from the 1920s onwards were established largely for the purpose of supporting members of the kin-center community, and while religious services were sometimes part of this support, they seem to have been more an incidental part of it rather than an active response to the problems faced by Tamil Muslims as a whole in Singapore. The first and for a long time only association that particularly concentrated on supplying religious

[732] Cf. "Join Sinda or Mendaki? Identity crisis facing Indian Muslims could be boon or bane", *The Straits Times*, 26 Jul 1992.

services to Tamil-speaking Muslims was the TMJ, and to a lesser degree its split-off, SIJU.

On the other hand, the 'Indian', i.e. in most cases Tamil, character of certain mosques and associations seems to be much more pronounced at present. The reason for this is probably to be sought in the development of the administration of Islam in Singapore since about the 1920s. As establishment of Muslim institutions was largely independent from government interference in the colonial period, the responsibility to form such institutions lay solely with the respective linguistic communities; failure to establish them could not be blamed on the hegemony of another group. This situation still pertains for example in the domain of religious publishing in Tamil. The growth of institutions responsible for the administration of Islam brought with it a rise of Malay influence on the organization of Muslim religious life in Singapore, for a variety of reasons, such as the British preference of Malay candidates for posts reserved for Muslims, seen in the insistence to appoint a Malay as Muslim member of the Legislative Council in 1923, or the growing influence of independent Malay(si)a on Muslim affairs in Singapore before 1965. The decisive period seems to have been the 1970s and 1980s. This period saw the rise of the hegemony of MUIS over Muslim religious life and institutions in Singapore. The dominance of Malay-speakers in MUIS, as well as the understandable focus on establishing hegemony first over the larger Malay dominated institutions, had a double impact on Tamil Muslim institutions. On the one hand, the religious needs of Tamil-speakers did not rank high on the agenda of the newly created statutory board. On the other hand, MUIS appears to have been unwilling to interfere with the affairs of Indian Muslims, perhaps because it preferred to avoid conflict with Indian Muslims at a time when its position among Malays was anything but established. As a result, existing associations that

had been catering to specific sections of Tamil Muslim society increasingly came to offer religious services, which gave especially kin-center associations the opportunity to legitimize their existence to a community for whom the kin-center was becoming less important. This process was no doubt aided by the official recognition of 'Indians' as one of the constituent 'races' of Singapore, thereby lending the endeavor legitimacy also in the wider public sphere.

On the one hand, this seems to have allowed Indian and especially Tamil Muslim associations to maintain a greater autonomy vice versa MUIS in religious affairs by claiming representation of 'Indian-Muslim' interests. Yet at the same time, the situation also had negative effects. While in the wider Muslim public sphere a general framework for interaction was imposed via legislation, this was not the case among the various Indian Muslim groups, which had to come to an agreement on common procedures and interaction themselves. While the formation of the FIM has helped to mitigate the rivalries among groups somewhat, the FIM is still not much more than the sum of its parts. Thus, while the FIM has become MUIS's main contact among Indian Muslims, associations can still sidetrack the FIM and engage directly with MUIS. There is no institution that could act as arbiter or mediator between various competing Indian Muslim associations. This situation is actually exacerbated by the frequent exhortations to Indian Muslims to 'speak with one voice' – after all, every group wants to ensure that this 'one voice' is its own. This situation of unmitigated rivalry has furthermore served to inhibit the tackling of important issues, such as the training of local religious scholars conversant in Tamil. One of the greatest needs of Tamil Muslims in the institutional field is the establishment of such an arbitrating authority and a set of general procedures regulating the interaction of associations, but

being independent of the associations themselves. Whether the FIM can transform into such a mediating body remains to be seen.

TALKING ABOUT DIFFERENCE

The salience of ethnic difference has not only practical effects on the religious life of Tamil Muslims in Singapore, it also influences the way Singaporean Muslims conceptualize 'community'. As mentioned several times in the preceding discussion, 'Muslim' and 'Malay' are facilely equated in Singapore. Being 'Muslim' is usually seen as a precondition of being 'Malay', and there is a clear tendency to assume that the opposite is equally true, viz. that to be 'Muslim' means to be 'Malay'. The presence of Muslims who are manifestly non-Malay obviously challenges this perception. The salience of ethnic difference in a religious context therefore compels Singaporean Muslims to engage with and conceptualize these differences. As these conceptualizations are discussed in detail in chapter 6, we shall concern ourselves here with putting these conceptualizations in a wider perspective.

One common way of conceptualizing ethnic difference in religious life is the distinction between religion and culture which we encountered in chapter 6 with regard to popular religious practice. Thus, respondents often concluded that I was studying 'culture' rather than 'religion', as it was assumed that differences existed only in culture, for the 'religion' of Malay and Tamil Muslims is the same. Similarly, I was told by a Tamil Muslim in Malaysia that I should rather study 'religion' than 'culture'.[733] This distinction, as mentioned, has been noted with regard to Muslim societies in several parts of the world, including, but not limited to, the Muslim

[733] Cf. also "I'm flattered Indian Muslims like me were counted in", *The Straits Times*, 25 Mar 1992.

diaspora in western countries. The observations of several scholars raise the question in how far this religion/culture dichotomy may draw upon the distinction in Islamic jurisprudence between legal practices derived from normative religious sources on the one hand, and local 'custom' (*'āda* [Ma. *adat*] or *'urf*) on the other.[734] In contrast to what has been reported by other scholars, my respondents did not use these Arabic terms, but rather Tamil terms like *kalāccāram*, 'culture', or simply the English equivalent, depending on what language was spoken. Furthermore, it appears that to respondents, 'culture' was a domain completely separate from and sometimes in contradiction to 'religion', rather unlike the classical Islamic concept that "…*'āda* is a jurisprudentially cognizable if subsidiary element within the legal systems of all Muslims [sic] societies…".[735] More important for the religion/culture dichotomy than any 'Islamic' understanding seems to be the Singaporean 'racialization' of ethnic difference.

The separation of 'religion' and 'culture' allows conceptualizing Muslims of a South Asian ethnic background as people who share 'religion' with the Malays and 'culture' with the Indians. It is hardly surprising that 'Indian-Muslims' are consequently perceived as hybrids straddling the boundary between Indians and Malays. Yet problematically, this neat distinction fails to account for the salience of ethnic differences in the religious domain; the problem lies in the fact that these differences should according to the model be part of 'Indian culture'. But many popular practices performed by Tamil and other South Asian Muslims are too obviously 'Muslim' to be part of 'Indian culture'. Indian Muslims thus come to threaten not only the conceptual divide of 'Indian' and 'Malay', as discussed in chapter 6, but also that of 'culture' and 'religion'. The solution to this potential

[734] Cf. Gibb 1998: 261; Harnish 2006: 194.
[735] Roff 1985: 10.

disruption of the conceptualization of 'racial' differences in Singapore is to assume that 'Indian-Muslims' have their own 'Indian-Muslim culture', which, much like 'Indian-Muslims' as a whole, is perceived as a hybrid, not quite Indian anymore and not quite Malay yet. Paradoxically, the supposed hybridity of 'Indian-Muslims' then forms the basis for the formulation of a distinct identity, which, like the formulation of other 'racial' identities in Singapore, has to struggle to prove its own distinctness from other 'cultural' formulations.[736] This explains the focus on popular practices and the *ḥanafī* law-school in the discourses about 'Indian-Muslim' distinctiveness, as these features differentiate 'Indian-Muslims' most clearly from other Indians and other Muslims in Singapore, even though they are not shared by all, or even a majority of Singaporean Muslims of South Asian background. On the other hand, the use of South Asian languages like Tamil, while differentiating 'Indian-Muslims' from Malays, is easily subsumed under the heading 'Indian culture', and thus offers less differentiating potential.

It thus appears that, even if terms like *ʿāda* or *ʿurf* are used by Singaporean Muslims to refer to the religion/culture dichotomy, it seems to be the peculiarly Singaporean understanding of the English terms that informs the 'Islamic' vocabulary rather than vice versa. Thus, even while this dichotomy appears to be employed in many contemporary Muslim societies, local conceptualizations of the meanings of these terms may differ. Both the pervasiveness of these distinctions as well as their meanings in different local contexts warrant more attention in future studies – in the diasporic context(s), this furthermore raises the question of how different conceptualizations of the religion/culture dichotomy by various migrant Muslim groups are harmonized or contested in these contexts.

[736] Cf. Benjamin 1976: 122.

A further important aspect of the discourse about ethnic difference in Muslim religious life in Singapore is the tension between a primordialist view of ethnic identity and the actual context in which formulations of ethnic identity take place. Primordialism is an established component of the Singaporean conceptualization of culture, religion, ethnicity, and 'race' – the cultural and religious elements that define a 'race', as well as 'racial identity', are presumed to exist *a priori*; an individual can either comply with or deviate from these defining characteristics, but the characteristics themselves can be challenged only with great difficulty.[737] 'Hybrid' groups such as 'Indian-Muslims', which appear to be defined by characteristics linked to two different 'racial' groups, are thus generally assumed to be trapped in a timeless identity crisis. Yet the evidence presented in this thesis points to the rather unsurprising fact that formulations of identity are contextual rather than primordial. Thus, the increased public visibility of an 'Indian-Muslim' identity from the late 1980s onwards was in no way due to any primordial identity crisis, but arose directly from the structural impediments Muslims of South Asian background where facing with regard to policies framed by the CMIO-paradigm and the concurrent association of Islam with the Malay 'racial' category, whether these impediments related to issues of language use in Islamic institutions under the hegemony of Malay-speaking Muslims, the confusion of 'race' and religion by MENDAKI, or the protection of 'Indian-Muslim' popular practices from the encroachments of 'reformist' discourse. There is little evidence for a particular salience of ethnic identity in discourses prior to this period, and in any case in these earlier discourses, the identity formulated would be 'Tamil' rather than 'Indian'. The adoption of the latter term appears more as a concession to public discourse in Singapore, referring as it does to one of the official

[737] Cf. Benjamin 1976: 119-21.

'racial' categories, than to a particular feeling of unity among various South Asian Muslim groups. The adoption of the designation 'Indian-Muslim' certainly had some advantages – apart from being more meaningful to people unfamiliar with ethnic divisions among South Asians, it allowed Tamil Muslims to present themselves as the quintessential 'Indian-Muslims', due to the close conceptual connection between 'Indian' and 'Tamil' in Singapore. It also appears to have given South Asian Muslims greater license in preserving certain contentious popular practices as 'cultural' practices, an option not viable to Malays due to the near-identification of 'Malay culture' with Islam in the local context. Yet at the same time, I would contest Noorul Farha's evaluation that "…most Indian-Muslims have made full use of their hybrid identity and engage in negotiation of their identity",[738] for at least with regard to most Tamil Muslims, this identity and the very 'hybridity' that it supposedly entails has been imposed on them. The majority of my respondents seemed to prefer an identity that was simultaneously Tamil (or Indian) and Muslim by eliminating from these identity formulations the very elements that made them appear to be in tension in the popular view, i.e. the notions of 'Hinduness' with regard to a Tamil and/or Indian identity, and the notions of 'Malayness' with regard to a Muslim one.

This brings us to one last interesting point. For whereas 'religion' and 'culture' are perceived to be clearly demarcatable with regard to Muslims of South Asian background in Singapore, the two concepts appear to be fused in case of Malay Muslims. In contrast to the term 'Indian-Muslim', the term 'Malay-Muslim' seems to make much less sense in Singaporean discourse, and is commonly used only when contrasted to 'Indian-Muslim'. Elsewhere, only either 'Malay' or 'Muslim' appear,

[738] Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 73.

and then these terms generally seem to be interchangeable.[739] The effect this usage has is to obscure that 'Malay-Muslims' are as much 'hyphenated' Muslims as 'Indian-Muslims'; accordingly, they emerge in the literature as the 'real' Singaporean Muslims, apparently unqualified by any ethnic or cultural baggage. This fusion of 'Malay' and 'Muslim' has far-reaching consequences. On the academic side, it occasions the neglect and sometimes explicit exclusion of non-Malay Muslims from studies on Singaporean Islam.[740] But more importantly, it allows to brand the complaints by South Asian Muslims regarding the problems they face in a Malay-dominated Muslim public sphere as potentially threatening the unity of the Muslim 'community' or *umma* and to accuse South Asian Muslims of putting their 'Indian' identity above their 'Muslim' one.[741] Conversely, the Malay 'colonization' of Islam by identifying 'Malay' and 'Muslim' seems never to be regarded as illegitimate, despite the fact that, while to be Muslim may be a necessary precondition to be Malay, 'Malayness' has no special claim on Islam. This discourse, viz. the playing down of ethnicity by a dominant ethnic group in a multiethnic Muslim society, has some interesting parallels. Earlier in the century, it appears to have been the strategy of the then dominant ethnic groups in Singapore's Muslims society to de-emphasize the role of ethnicity for a Muslim – significantly, these dominant Muslims were Indians and Arabs, faced with an increasing assertiveness on part of Malay Muslims.[742] A similar discourse appears to be employed by Turkish Islamists with regard to the formulations of their Kurdish counterparts, as described by

[739] For example, 'Malay' food-stalls on the campus of the National University of Singapore are all designated as 'Muslim' food-stalls, while 'Indian' stalls are always 'Indian', even if the proprietor is a Muslim.
[740] E.g. Mak 2000.
[741] Cf. Saat 2002: 159; cf. also Noorul Farha 1999/2000: 46-51; PuruShotam [1998] 2000: 151-2.
[742] Cf. Khoo 1993: 269-70; Yegar 1979: 101.

Sakallioglu.[743] These examples suggest that the imagination of a unified Islamic *umma* may in certain context actually be a discourse aimed at maintaining the hegemony of a specific ethnic group or groups. While there is no space to develop this point further here, it is a topic that will need further attention in future.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In his recent study of *Ramadan in Java*, Möller cautioned that in studying Muslims and their societies, "…it is all too easy for an outsider to focus on their differences at the expense of their similarities".[744] Even though Möller was referring to dogmatic differences among Muslims rather than ethnic differences, his caution nevertheless also appears to apply to this study. As mentioned, some respondents were puzzled what differences between Tamils and Malays could be studied in 'religious' life, as after all, the two groups shared the same religion. In a way, I would agree with these respondents – there is certainly little difference in the way Tamil or Malay Muslims carry out almost all of the normative (barring differences due to adherence to a particular law-school), and also most popular practices. With regard to the latter, the differences appear to be much less salient among various ethnic groups than among supporters and opponents of a particular practice within one of these groups. Yet at the same time, the impact of ethnic difference was obvious nevertheless, as Tamil and Malay Muslims employed different languages for the same purpose, congregated at different mosques, and had different opportunities of access to certain services. What was surprising for me, even though it appears as quite commonsensical in hindsight, was that the greatest salience of ethnic differences, and thus the greatest potential for

[743] Cf. Sakallioglu 1998.
[744] Möller 2005: 111; cf. also ibid.: 80-1.

tensions, occurred precisely with regard to the normative practices. As the performance of these practices is incumbent upon Muslims, the feeling that one is excluded from performing them properly due to lack of proficiency in a certain language can lead to a feeling of alienation much more profound than the differences in the carrying out various popular practices could ever engender.

One respondent noted in an email which he sent to me after a long conversation on Tamil Muslims that, despite feeling "…like a laboratory mouse whose slivers of self [were] being meticulously sliced for scrutiny under a microscope", it was nevertheless heartening for him "…to hear…of some redeeming qualities of my community and the sense of relief that comes with the realisation that after all not everything is lost". Indeed, I do not think that anything is lost; despite the factionalism evident among Indian Muslim associations, and the obvious fault-lines running through the putative 'community', there are nevertheless many institutions in place that could address problems faced by Tamil Muslims. MUIS has proven to be a highly efficient institution as far as the affairs of Malay Muslims are concerned, and the multitude of Tamil Muslim associations and mosques attest to a vibrant religious life as well as providing a pool of committed volunteers. The most important tasks are the regulation of relations between associations, facilitating their interaction amongst each other as well as with MUIS, and the recognition that ethnic differences cannot simply be wished away from religious life. Ultimately, it is necessary to recognize that 'Muslim' and 'Malay' are in no way synonymous, and that assuming them to be is at the root of many Tamil Muslims feeling like 'beached whales', as the above mentioned respondent put it in his email. This would entail the rephrasing the question of whom Tamil Muslims should align with, Indians or Malays – once the terms 'Malay' and 'Muslim' (and of course 'Indian' and 'Hindu') are disentangled,

the question simply becomes meaningless. Admittedly, many Muslims in Singapore seem to be so used to this 'identity discourse' that changing or even simply recognizing this aspect will be a difficult task, yet I am nevertheless convinced after reviewing the evidence that it is time to shift from focusing on identity to focusing on the structural problems Tamil and other South Asian Muslims face in the Singaporean Muslim public sphere. As one MUIS publication acknowledged:

> Are we Muslims? Or Malays and Indians? Or Singaporeans? Even as these identities may be fused, each component will have its own pull in the actions and attitudes of each Singaporean Muslim.[745]

As its recent initiatives regarding Indian Muslims suggest, MUIS has begun acting on that principle. After all, as one observer noted with regard to the Koranic verse which was quoted at the commencement of this thesis:

> Far from seeking to abolish ethnic feelings and identity from the human consciousness, which would be practically impossible, Islam prefers giving recognition to their usefulness in serving religion's higher spiritual and moral purpose as embodied in the above quoted Qur'anic verse [49.13].[746]

[745] Zuraidah 1994: 116.
[746] Osman 2007 [sic]: 481-2.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

PROPERTY OWNED OR RENTED BY TAMIL MUSLIMS IN LAW REPORTS

The following list is compiled from cases reported in the Law Reports as well as Mallal 1928. The table lists the location of the property, the nature of the property, whether it was owned by Tamil Muslims or rented and the source.

Property	**Nature**	**Property Owned?**	**Source**
102, Arab St.	Residence	unknown	Mallal 1928: 37
294-5, Beach Rd.	Business (cloth)	yes	S.S.L.R. 1928: 83
261, Beach Rd.	House	yes	S.S.L.R. 1933: 74-6
46-51, Buffalo Rd.	Unknown	yes	S.S.L.R. 1933: 74
60-2, Bussorah St.	Houses	yes	S.S.L.R. 1931: 122-8
7, Chancery Lane	Residence	probably	Mallal 1928: 60
52, High St.	Business (general store)	unknown	S.S.L.R. 1940: 250
?, Japan St.[747]	House	¼ share	S.S.L.R. 1895-6: 24
5, Malay St.	Unknown	yes	S.S.L.R. 1933: 74
65, New Bridge Rd.	House	yes	S.S.L.R. 1929: 143
?, North Bridge Rd.	Business (café)	unknown	S.S.L.R. 1933: 518

[747] Nowadays Boon Tat St.; cf. Savage & Yeoh 2003: 59.

636 & 638, North Bridge Rd.	Houses	yes	S.S.L.R. 1930: 213
?, Prinsep St.	Unknown	¼ share	S.S.L.R. 1895-6: 24
Land adjoining Race Course	Land	yes	S.S.L.R. 1893: 89
?, Sago St. & Sago Lane	Unknown	yes	S.S.L.R. 1933: 74
22, Sungei Rd.	Residence	probably	Mallal 1928: 129
102-6, Victoria St.	Shops	share	S.S.L.R. 1940: 75
237-9, Victoria St.	Houses	yes	S.S.L.R. 1931: 122
18-2, Wilkie Rd.	Residence	probably	Mallal 1928: 110
71-6, Woodlands Rd.	Business (general store)	no	S.S.L.R. 1941-2: 282

Appendix 2

TOWNS OF ORIGIN OF TAMIL MUSLIMS IN THE PREWAR PERIOD

The table includes towns of origin of Tamil Muslims mentioned in primary and secondary sources for the prewar period, together with the District they belonged to (taking the British District divisions and names as a basis rather than the contemporary ones), whether the information relates to individuals or an association, as well as the source from which the information is taken. This list is not comprehensive, but only includes those towns that were mentioned in the sources I perused.

Town	**District**	**Individuals or Association**	**Source**
Adirampattinam	Tanjore	Individuals	Syed Mohamed 1973: 92
B & C Mutlur	South Arcot	Both	Syed Mohamed 1973: 28-9, 45-7
Kadayanallur	Tinnevelly	Both	Meytīṉ 1989: 3; Syed Mohamed 1973: 28-9
Karaikal	French India	Individuals	*Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 24 Feb 1890: 134; Muslim Missionary Society Singapore 1985(b): 25; Siddique & Puru Shotam 1982: 58, 77; S.S.L.R. 1940: 75
Karaipakam Enangudi	Tanjore	Individuals	S.S.L.R. 1940: 250; cf. Mallal 1928: 18
Kottakuppam	South Arcot	Individuals	Sankaran 2003: 30
Koothanallur	Tanjore	Individuals	Meytīṉ 1989: 7

Martandapuram	Tinnevelly[748]	Individuals	Meytīṉ 1989: 3
Melappalaiyam	Tinnevelly	Individuals	Pate 1917 (Vol. 1): 485
Nagapattinam	Tanjore	Individuals	*Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 24 Feb 1890: 134; Mallal 1928: 20; Meytīṉ 1989: 7
Nagore	Tanjore	Individuals	*Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 24 Feb 1890: 134; Meytīṉ 1989: 7; S.S.L.R. 1940: 75; cf. Lee G.B. 2002: 80-1
Pondicherry	French India	Individuals	*Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 24 Feb 1890: 134
Porto Novo	South Arcot	Individuals	Mallal 1928: 63; Meytīṉ 1989: 7
Pulicat	Chingleput	Individuals	Pandian 1978: 149.
Sathankulam	Tinnevelly	Individuals	Syed Mohamed 1973: 87
Shenkottai	Tinnevelly	Individuals	Meytīṉ 1989: 3
Tenkasi	Tinnevelly	Both	Meytīṉ 1989: 3; Syed Mohamed 1973: 28-9; cf. Mallal 1928: 18
Thiruvithancode	Travancore (Princely State)	Individuals	Syed Mohamed 1973: 48-9
Thopputhurai	Tanjore	Individual	*Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 23rd Jul 1888: 14
Thuckalay	Travancore (Princely State)	Association	Syed Mohamed 1973: 28-9
Thiruvarur	Tanjore	Individual	*Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 10th Oct 1887: 61
Vanjoor	French India	Individuals	*Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 22nd Aug 1887: 33 & 12th Dec 1887: 97; S.S.L.R. 1893: 6-7

[748] There seems to be a village of the same name near Muthupettai in erstwhile Tanjore District (modern Thiruvarur District), but the context makes clear that the one in former Tinnevelly District is meant.

Appendix 3

TAMIL MUSLIM SUBSCRIBERS TO *CIṄKAI NĒCAṈ* FROM SINGAPORE

Between August and December 1887, *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ* published lists of its subscribers in Singapore and elsewhere, the majority of whom were Muslims. The following table was compiled from these lists by extracting all obviously Muslim subscribers from Singapore. A few subscribers were also located in other, mainly Southeast Asian towns such as Penang, Batu Pahat, Kuala Lumpur, or Medan, and in a few cases in India, predominantly in Porto Novo (Parangipettai), but these outside subscribers have been ignored in the compilation of the following list.

The first column gives the individual's name. In a few cases, the word 'Company' (*kampaṉi*) or a shortcut (*ka*, *kam*, *kampa*) indicates that the subscriber was a company rather than an individual. The second column shows the individual's occupation or the company he was working with. Due to the common occurrence of English and Malay terms and names written in Tamil script in this section it is sometimes difficult to interpret certain words. In cases where I have not been able to interpret a word, I have left it in transcription and italics as part of the translation. When my interpretation is doubtful, it is marked by a question-mark. In all cases, the Tamil original is given in transcription. It is also not always easy to determine when a place name refers to the location or the name of a business. Thus, *pōṭkī puṭaivaikkaṭai* could mean a garment store at Boat Quay, or the 'Boat Quay Garment Store'. I have generally assumed that these cases refer to the location. The common occurrence of the Malay term *kampong* probably indicates that a business was located in Kampong Glam, though only in one case is this actually spelled out. The ubiquitous word *kaṭai*, 'shop', has more commonly been rendered as 'dealer', or, in the case of *kācukkaṭai*, as 'money-

changer'. I also assume that *puṭaivai* refers to garments or even cloth in general rather than specifically to saris.[749]

Finally, the third column gives the date in 1887 when the list in which the name appeared was published. In one case, a crease in the newspaper obscured the occupation and partly the name of a Muslim subscriber. This individual is given first in the table.

Name of Individual or Company	**Occupation or Business**	**Date of Publication**
[…]ṉ Ṟāvuttar	Illegible	15th Aug
A. Akamatu Maraikkāyar	money-changer (*kācukkaṭai*)	8th Aug
Ce. Aptulkātiṟu	skipper & clerk (clerk for skippers?), Vanjoor (*caṟāṅku kiṟāṇi vāñcūr*)	12th Dec
Ma. Vi. Aptulṟakimāṉ	clerk for John Little (*jāṉleṭṭil kiṟāṇi*)	15th Aug
Mu. Ce. Aptul Vāhitu	clerk for Lawyer Donaldson (*lāyar ṭōṉālcaṉ kiṟāṇi*)	22nd Aug
Mu. Cāyapu Tiruvārūr	kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	10th Oct
Ci. Ceyku Apatulkātiṟu	broker (*taraku*)	19th Sep
I. Ceyku Aptulkātiṟu Company	cattle dealer (*māṭṭukkaṭai*)	8th Aug
Pa. Pa. Ceykumatārucāyapu	pilot for John Little (*jāṉleṭṭil campāṉōṭṭi*)	12th Dec
A. M. Ceykumukammatu	broker (*taraku*)	5th Sep
Tu. Mu. Ceyyatumukammatu	kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	15th Aug
I. Ciṉṉattampi	kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	8th Aug

[749] Cf. "Ciṅkappūril nayamuṇṭā? (Ceṉṟavārat toṭarcci.) Viyāpāramakattuvam", *Ciṅkai Nēcaṉ*, 24 Feb 1890: 133-4.

I. Cittimukammatu	kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	10th Oct
Kā. Mī. I. Cultāṉ and others	kampong money-changer (*kampaṅ - kācukkaṭai*)	15th Aug
U. Hājimukammatu	*pāñcār* dealer (*pāñcār viyāpāri*)	15th Aug
Pa. Kā. Irakamattullācā	pilot (*campāṉōṭṭi*)	15th Aug
Mu. Ishākkujakkariyyā	kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	22nd Aug
Ce. Ismāyīl	Kelang, Burma, Holland steamer agent (*kilēṉ, parmā, ulāntā sṭīmar tuppāṣ*)	12th Dec
I. Jeyiṉulāptīṉ Company	cattle dealer (*māṭṭu viyāpāram*)	22nd Aug
Cā. Kaṉicāyapumaraikkāyar Company	garment dealer at Boat Quay (*pōṭkī puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	22nd Aug
Mu. Kātarcāyapu	*ūrkappal āṭāttu* money-changer (*ūrkappal āṭāttu kācukkaṭai*)	19th Sep
Mu. I. Kātarmastāṉ	agent/interpreter (*tuppāṣ*)	8th Aug
Ne. Kātirumeyicāyapu	*meṉcipīl* (?) Company ocean steamer agent (*meṉcipīl kampaṉi ōṣiyaṉ sṭīmar tuppāṣ*)	12th Dec
Cā. Kulāmukiyittīṉ	merchant (*cavutākar*)	8th Aug
Ce. Kā. Kulāmukiyittīṉ	provision-store (*vaṅkucālkaṭai*)	22nd Aug
A. Maraikkāyarcāyapu	kampong gem trader (*kampaṅ - irattiṉa viyāpāram*)	21st Nov
O. Mastāṉcāyapu	Ladies-*lō-ṭē* Club (*lēṭīs-lō-ṭē kiḷap*)	17th Oct
Mu. Tā. Mīṟācākipu	kampong gem trader (*kampaṅ - irattiṉaviyāpāram*)	8th Aug
Ṟā. Ma. Mīṟācāyapu	head peon at Singapore Club (*ciṅkappūr kiḷap periyatampi*)	12th Dec
Ma. Mukammatu	pilot	22nd Aug

Ce. Mu. Ka. Mukammatu Ali	money-changer at Iron Bridge(?) (*irumpupālam kācukkaṭai*)	15th Aug
Cu. Mukammatu Apūpakkar	provision-store (*vaṅkucālkaṭai*)	5th Sep
Mukammatu Carīpumaraikkāyar	Cā. Ku. Company money-changer (*cā. ku. kampaṉi kācukkaṭai*)	8th Aug
I. Mukammatu Cultāṉ	money-changer (*kācukkaṭai*)	8th Aug
Je. Mukammatu Ismāyīl	head peon at Borneo Company (*pōrṉiyōkampaṉi periyatampi*)	8th Aug
A. S. M. Mukammatu Ismāyīl Maraikkāyar	cow merchant (*kāli cavutākar*)	22nd Aug
A. Mukammatukkaṉi	kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	8th Aug
A. Mukammatu Kavus	Mason(?) Company (*mēṣaṉ kampaṉi*)	15th Aug
Mī. Mukammatuleppai and others	cow merchant (*cavutākar kāli*)	5th Sep
Ce. Mukammatumatārucāyapu	money-changer (*kācukkaṭai*)	8th Aug
Nu. Mukammatumeyitiṉ	pilot for Steven Company (*istīviṉ kampaṉi campāṉōṭṭi*)	15th Aug
Mukammatumīṟā Cāyapu Company	garment dealer (*puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	8th Aug
Kā. Mukammatumīṟāṉcākipu	garment dealer at Boat Quay (*pōṭkī puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	5th Sep
Va. Mukammatu Ucaṉ	provision-store (*vaṅkucālkaṭai*)	10th Oct
Kā. Mukammatu Yūcup	skipper at Tanjong Pagar (*tañcam pākār caṟāṅku*)	15th Aug
Kā. Mukammatu Yūcup and others	Cā. Ku. Company garment dealer (*cā. ku. kampaṉi puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	8th Aug
Mukiyittīṉ Kāṉ	Kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	8th Aug

Le. Pa. Neyiṉāmucāyapu	peon at Katz Brothers' warehouse (*kāts paratar kiṭaṅku tampi*)	17th Oct
Nū. Kā. Neyiṉāmucāyapu	peon at Edgar's(?) warehouse (*ēṭkar kiṭaṅku tampi*)	22nd Aug
A. Nūṟumukammatu	cashier at Cricket Club (*kirikiṭ kaḷap kēṣiyar*)	5th Sep
Kā. Pakkīrmālīṉ	cashier at Desker(?) Company (*ṭeyiskār kampaṉi kēṣiyar*)	17th Oct
Ṟe. Pakkīrmālīṉ	cattle dealer (*māṭṭu viyāpāram*)	12th Dec
Kā. Pāvacāyapu	kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	10th Oct
A. Tīvāṉ Mukiyittīṉcāyapu	Madurai piece-good dealer (*maturai javaḷiviyāpāri*)	19th Sep
Ce. Ucaṉcāmaraikkāyar	agent/interpreter (*tuppāṣ*)	8th Aug
Yū. Vañcūṟupakkīr	merchant at Kampong Glam (*kampaṅkaḷāṉ viyāpāri*)	22nd Aug
Ki. Yāṟacūlullāpiccai Company	kampong garment dealer (*kampaṅ - puṭaivaikkaṭai*)	15th Aug

Appendix 4

LAW REPORTS MENTIONING TAMIL MUSLIMS

The following is a list of cases decided in Singapore and in some instances in Penang which involved or may have involved Tamil Muslims. The list was compiled from Kyshe (Ky) 1885 & 1890, Leicester 1877 (Lei), and the *Straits Settlements Law Reports* (S.S.L.R.). The list is not claimed to be comprehensive, but merely records those cases that I have perused in the writing of the thesis, even though not each case has been quoted in the thesis.

In the following list, the first column gives details on the source, with cases being sorted according to the date of their publication. The case is recorded in the second column. In the third column, information is given as to why the court case has been considered as involving one or several Tamil Muslims. Finally, the last column gives a short description of the issue the suit arose from.

As the identification of a Tamil ethnic background was crucial in selecting the cases, a short note is in order on the various indicators of 'Tamilness'. The most common indicators are names. Titles such as Lebbai, Marican, Mustan, Naina, Rowter, Saiboo, or Tamby for men and Ammal and Nachial for women in their various orthographic variants fairly clearly point to a Tamil background, as do, to a lesser degree, names such as Mydin or Nathersahib, referring to saints popular in Tamil-speaking South India. Another marker is a peculiar way of recording initials by taking the first Tamil letter or letters of a name and adding -*na* or -*ena*, such as Moona, Kavena, etc. In some cases, indicated by a question-mark, the name cannot be said for certain to indicate a Tamil Muslim, though in some cases (i.e., the use of the title Khan) it is at least possible to be sure about an Indian background.

Another common indicator is the involvement of Chetties in the case. Of course, this does not automatically signify that the involved Muslims were also Tamils, but especially in the case of business contacts, it is not unlikely, and often corroborated by other indicators. The use of the Tamil language in documents such as wills is another clear marker of ethnic background. Sometimes the original language of a document is explicitly stated; in other cases the presence of Tamil vocabulary betrays a translation from Tamil. In a few cases, it has to be deduced from other features that a document was originally written in Tamil, such as translations ("brother-in-law (cousin)" indicating original Tamil *maccāṉ*) or orthography ("Achee" instead of "Haji" indicating underlying Tamil orthography *āccī* or *ācci* rather than Arabic *ḥājjī*). Other indicators such as references to people, places and property in India, certain ceremonies, Tamil Hindu lawyers, and the like also provide hints to the ethnicity of a person involved in the court case. Finally, in some rare cases individuals are actually identified as 'Chulia', 'Kling', or 'Tamil'.

Source	**Case**	**Reason for Classifying as Case Involving Tamil Muslims**	**Issue**
Lei 1877: 237-9	Khu Teen v. Shiramaleh Marican	Names (Shiramaleh Marican, Mahomed Tamby, Golam Kadir)	[Penang] Negligence of captain and crew of a brig resulting in loss of cargo
Lei 1877: 288-308; Ky 1885: 255-73	Fatimah & Ors. v. D. Logan & Ors.	Names (Mahomed Noordin Mericayar, Hadjee Lebby); Testator's signature in Tamil	[Penang] Validity of testament and certain trusts contained therein; validity of a divorce

Ky 1885: 64-7	Syed Abbas bin Hussein Aideed v. Charles Scott & Anor.	Name (Mahomed Meera Lebby)	[Penang] Dispute about sale of a barque
Ky 1885: 201-4	W.E. Maxwell v. Chettyapah Chetty	Name (Nallah Mahomed); involvement of Chetty	[Penang] Chetty sold carriage mortgaged to him by Muslim
Ky 1885: 350-2	Mayandee Chetty v. Sultan Meracayar	Names (Shena Shinna Meera Lebby, Sultan Meracayar); involvement of Chetty	[Penang] Muslim ship-captain failing to go to Singapore and pay certain sum
Ky 1885: 421-7	Salmah & Fatimah, Infants, by their next friend Shaik Omar v. Soolong	Person called a "Kling Mahomedan"	Arab girl changing law-school to marry Tamil Muslim against will of guardian
Ky 1885: 467-70	Letchman Chetty v. Narainan Chetty	Ship belonging to Muslim of Porto Novo	[Penang] Dispute over insurance
Ky 1885: 580-1	Mustan Bee & Ors. v. Shina Tomby & Anor.	Name (Shina Tomby)	[Penang] Validity of trust for *kenduri*
Ky 1885: 640-7	Noorsah Bawasah Merican v. William Hall & Co.	Name (Noorsah Bawasah Merican)	Payment of Muslim lighterman
Ky 1890: 212-3.	Ashabee & Ors. v. Mahomed Hashim & Anor.	Name? (Pakir Mydin)	[Penang] Validity of trust for *kenduri*
S.S.L.R. 1893: 3-6	Kader Nina Merican v. Kader Meydin	Names (Kader Nina Merican, Kader Meydin)	Singaporean defendant indebted to plaintiff residing in Johor

S.S.L.R. 1893: 6-7	In the matter of Vanjoor Mustan	Names (Savena Gulam Meydin, Vanjoor Mustan)	Assault on a court peon
S.S.L.R. 1893: 59-64	Moona Mohamed Syed v. Kadersa & Anor.	Names (Moona Mohamed Syed, Kadersa); involvement of Chetty	Dispute over rights to chattel
S.S.L.R. 1893: 88-93	Ismail bin Savoosah Madinasah Marican & Mana Noordin v. Hadjee Ismail bin Kassim	Names (Madinasah Marican, Syed Marican)	Dispute on leases of lots on land near the Race Course
S.S.L.R. 1893: 164-5	Regina on the prosecution of Allamailoo v. Nur Mohamed & Supramanian Chetty	Name? (Nur Mohamed); Involvement of Chetty	Muslim using promissory note to induce woman to return to Chetty as mistress
S.S.L.R. 1895-6: 23-8	A.P. Ismail Saiboo v. Quah Beng Kay & N.R.M.N. Raman Chetty	Name (Ismail Saiboo); plaintiff going to India to settle family affairs; involvement of Chetties	Dispute over share in property speculation
S.S.L.R. 1898-9: 55-7	Saiboo Tamby v. Chop Kim Chin Bee	Name (Saiboo Tamby)	Defendant failing to deliver 30 bags of betel-nuts to plaintiff
S.S.L.R. 1900-1: 76-81	Kana Pana Adeyappa Chitty v. A.M. Abdulrahman & Ors.	Name (Mana Noordin); Involvement of Chetty	Dispute over promissory note

S.S.L.R. 1904: 16-8	M.A. Abdul Guffoor v. Chop "Yong Nam Hong"	Name? (Abdul Guffoor)	Cost of execution of action taken by Sheriff
S.S.L.R. 1911: 74-83	Re Hadjee Esmail bin Kassim, deceased	Testator having siblings in India; involvement of Chetty	Validity of trust in will
S.S.L.R. 1928: 14-27	M.R.E.P.Md. Ebrahim v. The British India Steam Navigation Company Ltd. & Shakkarai Rowter	Name (Shakkarai Rowter); defendant called a "Chulia"	Load of "small native tobacco [merchant]" damaged
S.S.L.R. 1928: 45-52	Aisama binte Abdul & Anor. v. Kavena Mohamed Hussain	Names (Kavena Mohamed Hussain, Layna Jackiria Hussain bin Layvusah)	Dispute over defendant's claim to cargo-boat business
S.S.L.R. 1928: 82-97	Balkis Nachial v. Achi Thayar Ammal & Ors.	Names (Balkis Nachial, Achi Thayar Ammal, Ahna Mohamed Tamby, etc.); executor and his wife in India; executor's wife has separate estate in India; translation of will suggests Tamil original	Dispute over possession of property
S.S.L.R. 1929: 3-22	Balkis Nachial v. Achi Thayar Ammal & Ors.	Names (Balkis Nachial, Achi Thayar Ammal, Ana Mohamed Tamby, etc.); executor in India; executor's wife has separate estate in India	Appeal against judgment in dispute over possession of property

S.S.L.R. 1929: 141-6	Shaik Lebbai Maricar v. Haji Mohamed Eusope & Ors.	Name (Shaik Lebbai Maricar); plaintiff & defendants said to be "Mohammedan Indian"	Dispute over administration of property
S.S.L.R. 1929: 186-9	Re The estate of Tambi bin Osman, deceased	Name (Tambi bin Osman); involvement of Chetty	Sale of property in Malacca by administrator of estate
S.S.L.R. 1930: 212-6	Re Ena Jainab Abdeen, deceased	Names (Ena Jainab Abdeen, Juliah Ammal, L.M.O. Hamed Ghouse Maricar)	Dispute between trustees and beneficiaries of estate
S.S.L.R. 1931: 3-12	In the estate of Ena Mohamed Tamby, deceased	Names (Ena Mohamed Tamby, Moona Jana Shaik Allaudin, Kavena Haji Maidin Saibu); will in Tamil; grandson of testator in India; translation of copy of memorandum showing Tamil orthography	Dispute over marriage revoking will
S.S.L.R. 1931: 55-7	Balkis Nachial v. Achi Thayar Ammal & Ors.	Names (Balkis Nachial, Achi Thayar Ammal)	Appeal for payment of sum deposited as security
S.S.L.R. 1931: 118-29	Achi Thayar Ammal & Ors. v. Balkis Nachial	Names (Achi Thayar Ammal, Balkis Nachial, Ahna Mohamed Tamby, etc.); executor's wife living in India	2nd appeal against judgment in dispute over possession of property
S.S.L.R. 1931: 202-8	Rex v. Miskin bin Mustapha	Name? (Miskin bin Mustapha)	Defendant falsely claimed to be able to procure employment on ship

S.S.L.R. 1933: 73-85	Re Ena Mohamed Tamby, deceased	Names (Ena Mohamed Tamby, Moona Jana Shaik Allaudin)	Dispute over period of limitation
S.S.L.R. 1933: 518-20	Rex v. Mohamed Ali	Defendant keeper of "Madras Café"	Allowing prostitutes to frequent café
S.S.L.R. 1933: 554-8	In the matter of the estate of Haji Tamby bin Haji Mohamed Saleh deceased	Name (Haji Tamby bin Haji Mohamed Saleh)	Validity of clauses in will
S.S.L.R. 1934: 195-8	Ranchordas Purshotam v. Ena Mohamed Ismail	Name (Ena Mohamed Ismail)	Recovery of promissory note
S.S.L.R. 1934: 281-6	In the estate of Vavena Katha Pillay Marican, deceased	Names (Vavena Katha Pillay Marican, Vavena Mohamed Naina Maricar, Vavena Gulam Mohaideen Saiboo Maricar); will left in India	Petition for assignment of letters of administration for testator's estate
S.S.L.R. 1935: 330-5	Rex. V. Moona Mohamed Hussain Maricar	Name (Moona Mohamed Hussain Maricar)	Criminal procedure

S.S.L.R. 1936: 107-13	Re Abdul Guny Abdullasa, deceased	Name (Fatima Beebee Amal); testator had property in Penang and India; Tamil vocabulary in will; ceremony for Nagore saint; trust for mosque in Nagapattinam; testator "…not a Malay"; Tamil Hindu lawyers for plaintiff and defendant	[Penang] Validity of trusts in will
S.S.L.R. 1937: 1-7	Re Ena Mohamed Tamby, deceased	Name (Ena Mohamed Tamby); translation of copy of memorandum showing Tamil orthography	Entitlement to widow's share
S.S.L.R. 1937: 33-49	Re Hameed Nachial alias Hameed Nachia otherwise spelt Hameed Natchia deceased	Names (Hameed Nachial, Abdul Hamid Maricar, Mahamood Maricar); appellant in India at time of testator's death; hostility of Indian branch of family to Malayan branch	Dispute over probate of will
S.S.L.R. 1937: 260-3	Rex v. Kavena Ismail Sahib	Name (Kavena Ismail Sahib); involvement of Chetties; boat called Siru Medina ('Little Medina')	Boats repainted to avoid confiscation

S.S.L.R. 1939: 238-41	Sakandar Khan v. Rex	Name? (Sakandar Khan)	Appellant accepting bribes from hawkers; giving false information
S.S.L.R. 1940: 74-7	In the estate of Sevatha Vappoo Maricar otherwise called Kavena Sayna Savatha Vappoo Maricar deceased	Names (Sevatha Vappoo Maricar, etc.); will executed in Karaikal; several people said to be "Chulia by caste"; properties in Karaikal and Nagore	Dispute over wording in will
S.S.L.R. 1940: 124-32	Re K. Mohamed Ibrahim & Company	Names? (K.M. Shaik Mohamed; K. Mohamed Ibrahim); business partners in India	Dispute over notice of bankruptcy
S.S.L.R. 1940: 173-6	K.E. Mohamed Sultan Maricar v. The Prudential Assurance Co., Ltd.	Name (K.E. Mohamed Sultan Maricar)	Dispute over claim to marine insurance
S.S.L.R. 1940: 181-3	J.M. Abdul Kader v. Shaw Brothers Ltd.	Name? (J.M. Abdul Kader)	Dispute over tenancy of cigarette stall
S.S.L.R. 1940: 184-5	K.M. Nathersahib & Anor. v. Meyer Brothers	Name (K.M. Nathersahib)	Dispute over promissory notes

S.S.L.R. 1940: 249-52	Re M. Mohamed Haniffa deceased	Names (Hajarabeevi Ammal, Alimabi Ammal); business known as A. Kadir M. Saiboo and Company; wife of testator resident of Karaipakam Enangudi	Dispute over will
S.S.L.R. 1940: 266	K.E. Mohamed Sultan Maricar v. The Prudential Assurance Co. Ltd.	Name (K.E. Mohamed Sultan Maricar)	Appeal by defendants regarding earlier decision
S.S.L.R. 1941-2: 75-80	A.L.M.M. Muthukaruppan Chettiar v. Haji Ibrahim	Name? (Haji Ibrahim); Involvement of Chetty	Dispute over defendant failing to quit land rented from plaintiff
S.S.L.R. 1941-2: 260-5	Ghouse bin Haji Kader Mustan v. Rex	Names (Ghouse bin Haji Kader Mustan, Isah binte Shaik Buramdeen); girl "…of the Hanafi Sect…"	Dispute over minority and guardianship of girl
S.S.L.R. 1941-2: 281-6	Mohamed Abdul Cader v. Frederick Smith	Names (Mohamed Abdul Cader, Nee Aya Abdul Karim); man called a "Tamil Mohammedan"; man born in India	Quantum for damages of loss of expectation of life

Appendix 5

INDIAN MUSLIM ASSOCIATIONS

The table was compiled from the information included in Government of Singapore 2005. Information regarding the FIM-status was supplied from interviews.

Name of Association	Registered in:	Joined FIM in:
Pan-Indian Association		
Indian Muslim Social Service Association	2004	Not member
United Indian Muslim Association	1964 (1991)[750]	1992
Ethnic Associations		
Dakhni Urdu Association	1998	2005
Malabar Muslim Juma-ath	1937	1992
Tamil Muslim Jama‘at	1950	Not member
Thiruvithancode Muslim Union	1952	1992
Religious Associations		
Rifayee Thareeq Association of Singapore	1965	1992
South Indian Jamiathul Ulama	1958	1992
Kin-center Associations		
Cuddalore Association	2002	2005
Jameyathul Muslimeen of B & C Mutlur	1936	1992
Kayalpatnam Welfare Association	2004	2005
Kilakkarai Welfare Association (Singapore)	1999	2005
Koothanallur Association	1996	2005
Muthupettai Association (Singapore)	2001	2005
Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League	1941	1992
Singapore Tenkasi Muslim Welfare Society	1940	1992
(Thiruvithancode Muslim Union)	1952	See above
Thopputhurai Muslim Association (Singapore)	1948	2005
Thuckalay Muslim Association	1939	1992

[750] According to Government of Singapore 2005: 259, the Pasir Panjang Indian Muslim Association, UIMA’s forerunner, was registered in 1964. Yet the association celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2002; cf. “Aikkiya Intiya Muslim Caṅkattiṉ muppatām āṇṭu viḻā”, *Ceyticcuṭar* 28, May-Oct 2002: 5.

Appendix 6

EXCERPT FROM A TAMIL RELIGIOUS LECTURE

The following translation of an excerpt of an Islamic Tamil lecture may serve as an example of Tamil Muslim preaching. The excerpt is taken from an audio recording of a lecture given by M. Mohamed Mohideen Faizi, one of the religious scholars employed as teacher (*ustādh*) by SKML. A compact disk of the recording was sold by SKML in 2003.[751] The Tamil portions of the lecture were kindly transcribed for me by M. Saravanan. The lecture was given at a 'Koran Conference', as becomes clear in the introductory passage of the lecture (not translated below). Obviously, a translation of a lecture given in Tamil is unable reproduce many of the performative devices used by the lecturer, quite apart from the fact that certain devices, such as gestures, were already lost when recording the speech. I have used punctuation and capital letters in order convey a bit of the speed and volume of the presentation.

Yet the translation can serve as an example of the techniques used to transmit religious knowledge. This particular excerpt deals with the conversion to Islam of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, a noted companion of the Prophet and later the third caliph of the expanding Muslim empire. It tells of the impact that the recitation of Koranic verses had on 'Umar, which he heard recited first by the Prophet himself, and a few days later by another companion of the Prophet at the house of his sister, who had herself just converted to Islam. This short anecdote, apart from serving as a piece of information about an important personality of Islamic history, allows the lecturer to engage his audience at different levels, viz.:

[751] Faizi n.d.

1. Storytelling – By telling the story about ‘Umar’s conversion, the lecturer is able to connect and embed various arguments into a single narrative, leading his audience from one point to the next through the unexpected turns of the anecdote – the Koranic ‘answers’ to ‘Umar’s thoughts, his resolve to kill the Prophet despite the impact the Koran had on him, the unexpected news of his sister’s conversion, his own conversion after his second encounter with the Koran – providing a red thread and keeping the audience interested.
2. Exegesis – As becomes obvious, the anecdote serves as an opportunity to give translations and elucidations of Koranic verses as well as to embed them in a Tamil cultural understanding, e.g. by linking up the Arabic *shā‘ir*, ‘poet’, and *kāhin*, ‘soothsayer’, with the Tamil *kaviñar* and *cōciyakkārar*.
3. Exemplum – Given that the excerpt is part of a lecture given at a ‘Koran Conference’, it also serves as an example of the power the Koran and its recitation can exert on an individual’s life, and the importance the recitation thus assumes, for if he had not heard the Koran being recited, ‘Umar would not have embraced Islam.
4. Exhortation – Following from this last point is an exhortation to the audience to engage in the recitation and study of the Koran, which is reinforced by the twist the lecturer gives to the second part of Koran 69.41, which literally means ‘how little you believe’, but which is interpreted as indicating the deficiency of knowledge about the Koran.
5. Edification – Apart from the storytelling itself, the anecdote is also edifying in the way the story works out to a good end, i.e. ‘Umar’s conversion, allowing the audience to take solace in the way that the Koran, i.e. God’s word, turns a potentially catastrophic situation (after all, ‘Umar is out to kill the Prophet

when he learns of his sister's conversion) into a benefit for the Muslim community.

I have left most of the Arabic words and phrases in Arabic in the translation, to show the profusion of these phrases and also how they are elucidated for a Tamil audience. Most Arabic phrases are translated immediately in the course of the lecture. In my English version, I have translated these 'translations' from Tamil, only indicating the meaning of the Arabic phrase when the Tamil explanation differs substantially from the Arabic one. Thus, the phrase *hādhā shā'ir*[un] – literally 'this is a poet' – is translated below as 'it is as if he is a poet', a rendering of Tamil *ivar oru kaviñar pōl irukkiṟatē*. Some commonly employed Arabic words have been translated, e.g. *nabī*, 'Prophet'. Similarly, benedictory phrases uttered after the names of certain individuals have been translated. Even though the phrase *raḍiya 'llāhu 'anhu*, 'may God be pleased with him', uttered after the names of the Prophet's companions, is often shortcut by the speaker to *raḍiya 'llāhu* or simply *raḍi* (pronounce *rali* in Tamil), I have nevertheless always translated it in full. In one instance, where I was not able to identify an Arabic word used by the speaker clearly, I have indicated this with [?]. Finally, I have sometimes indicated the original Tamil word in brackets, to show how certain Arabic terms are rendered into Tamil.

The story begins near the *ka'ba*, the cubical central sanctuary of Islam in Mecca, with Muhammad being engaged in glorifying God by repeating the phrase *Allāhu akbar*, 'God is most great', called *takbīr* in Arabic:

> The Messenger of God – may God bless him and grant him peace – who is as dear, even dearer to us than our own life, was worshipping near the *ka'bat Allāh*, repeating *takbīr* by saying *Allāhu akbar*. That being the time

when ‘Umar had not yet adopted Islam, he wanted to listen to what Muhammad was reciting in prayer. Hiding on the other side close to the *ka‘ba*, he eavesdropped. The Lord of the Prophets – may God bless him and grant him peace – was reciting the chapter (*attiyāyam*) *al-Ḥāqqa* [of the Koran]. It occurred in that; it occurred in verses (*vācaṉaṅkaḷ*) forty…forty, forty-one, forty-two and forty-three.

‘Umar said: *wa mā huwa bi-qawli shā‘ir*^{in} – ‘it is as if he is a poet’.[752] Hearing the Prophet’s recitation of the beginning of the chapter *al-Ḥāqqa*, ‘Umar said to himself: “This is not the speech of an ordinary man (*cātāraṇa maṉitar*)! As the verses recited by him are excellent, in a way suitable to attract the hearts of people, he cannot be an ordinary man. *hādhā shā‘ir*^{un} – ‘it is as if he is a poet’”! Our Master (*emperumāṉār*) – may God bless him and grant him peace – recited the next verse. ‘Umar heard it just as he had said in [his] mind: “No, no”! The next verse in the chapter *al-Ḥāqqa* included it as truth in this manner: *wa mā huwa bi-qawli shā‘ir*^{in} (Koran 69.41, first part) – ‘it is not the word of a poet! IT IS NOT THE WORD OF A POET’! *qalīl*^{an} *mā tu’minūn* (Koran 69.41, second part) – ‘but your study and pondering of the Koran is very deficient’![753] Immediately ‘Umar said: “No, no. It is not the word of a poet! *huwa* [?] *kāhin*^{un} – perhaps it is as if this Muhammad is a soothsayer (*cōciyakkārar*). That’s why the verse: ‘it is not a poem (*kavitai*)’ came up! Therefore it is as if he is a soothsayer”! Thus he spoke. The next verse came: *wa mā huwa bi-qawli kāhin*^{in} (Koran 69.42, first part) – ‘this is not the word of a

[752] This seems to be a slip on part of the speaker – as it stands, the Arabic phrase is a quote of Koran 69.41, ‘[these are] not the words of a poet’, yet the translation makes clear that the speaker intended the affirmative *wa huwa bi qawli shā‘ir*^{in}, ‘these are the words of a poet’.
[753] Literally the Arabic phrase means: ‘how little you believe’.

soothsayer'![754] *tanzīl^un min rabbi 'l-'ālamīn* (Koran 69.43) – this is a heavenly scripture (*vāṉmaṟai*) sent down by God, the Truth (*ḥaqq*) – praised is He and exalted – who creates and rules the people of the world. When 'Umar – may God be pleased with him – heard the Lord of Prophets – may God bless him and grant him peace – recite the verse containing the meaning 'this is a heavenly scripture', the verses brought about an enormous impact on his mind. However, because he thought: "I do not want to loose money, influence and rank", he did not immediately accept the Lord of Prophets – may God bless him and grant him peace –, he did not believe the Koran instantly.

Therefore, a few days later he took his sword and set out, saying: "I am going to kill Muhammad". En route, he was stopped by a friend. When [the friend] said: "Go and see your sister and her husband, they have accepted Islam", 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who had said: "I am going to kill the Lord of Prophets", – may God bless him and grant him peace – now turned his steps to the house of his dear sister. There, the companion (*ṣaḥābī*) called Khabbāb b. al-Aratt was reciting the Koran for 'Umar's sister and her husband. He recited verses gathered in *Sūrat Ṭā-hā*. Just before he entered the house, these words fell on 'Umar's ears: *lā ilāha illā anā fā'budnī wa aqimi 'l-ṣalāta li-dhikrī* (Koran 20.14) – 'there is no deity except for me, Allah; worship me in order to remember me'. Khabbāb b. al-Aratt – may God be pleased with him – recited the words containing this meaning which are included in *Sūrat Ṭā-hā*. 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who earlier at the *ka'ba* got attracted on hearing the verses of the Noble Koran through the

[754] Here, the speaker slightly misquoted the verse Koran 69.42, obviously influenced by the preceding verse. Actually, the verse is *wa lā bi-qawli kāhin^in*, with identical meaning.

sweet voice of the Lord of Prophets – may God bless him and grant him peace – now heard the divine verses (*iṟai vācaṉaṅkaḷ*) of divine scripture (*iṟai maṟai*) emanate from the tongue of Khabbāb b. al-Aratt. Was it not for this very reason that he adopted Islam immediately?

Appendix 7

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OFFERED BY TAMIL MUSLIM INSTITUTIONS

The following list of religious classes organized by different institutions was compiled by MUIS and presented at a Dialogue Session on 14th of August 2005. I am indebted to MUIS and in particular to Mr. Mohd Nazirin Abu Bakar for his kindness and promptness in supplying me with the figures and granting me the permission to use them. To this I have added information regarding the classes offered by the ThoMA, which were supplied to me by the association's president, Mr. K.M. Deen, on 18th of August 2005. Some of the smaller associations are also running religious classes nowadays, and this may have been the case also in August 2005, but I am not aware of further classes. Only religious classes organized by associations that are predominantly Tamil speaking have been included, so that similar activities conducted by e.g. the Malabar Muslim Juma-ath are not mentioned. The list mentions the institution, the venue, and the number of teachers (*ustādh*, pl. *asātidha*), facilitators, and students (student nos. are rounded).

Institution	Venue	No. of Teachers	No. of Students
IMSSA	Masjid Darul Makmur	1 *ustādh* 20 facilitators	400
Masjid Abdul Gafoor & Masjid Jamae (Chulia)	Masjid Abdul Gafoor	6 *asātidha*	400
SKML	Masjid Al-Amin (adult classes) Masjid Al-Khair Masjid Jamae (Queenstown)	2 *asātidha* 10 facilitators	200

STMWS	Masjid Al-Abrar Masjid Al-Muttaqin Masjid Kampong Delta	2 *asātidha*	250
ThoMA	Originally 27a, Campbell Lane;[755] Planned as home teaching	1 *ustādh*	55
TMU	Masjid Al-Ansar Masjid Alkaff Kampung Melayu Masjid An-Nur Masjid Ar-Raudah Masjid Assyakirin Masjid En-Naeem Masjid Haji Mohd Salleh Masjid Hajjah Rahimabi (Kebun Limau)	3 *asātidha*	250
UIMA	Masjid Darul Aman Masjid Hajjah Fatimah Masjid Tentera Di Raja	1 *ustādh*	120

[755] This venue was passed on by the ThoMA to the Kilakkarai Welfare Association, which is now itself conducting religious classes there.

GLOSSARY

(Ar.=Arabic; Ma.=Malay; Ta.=Tamil)

ācci	(Ta.) 'elder sister'; also term of address to women of higher rank or position.
'āda	(Ar.) 'custom'.
adat	(Ma.) →*'āda*.
Aḥmadiyya	Muslim reform movement founded by Ghulām Aḥmad Qādiyānī (1839-1908); considered to be 'heretic' by many Muslims.
'ālim (pl. *'ulamā'*)	Muslim religious scholar.
asātidha	→*ustādh*.
awliyā'	→*walī*.
baraka	(Ar.) 'blessing'; God's blessing power transmitted through saints or shrines.
Barelwī	Supporter of a nineteenth century Muslim reform movement; general term for a supporter of saint-veneration.
Bengalee	In British colonial parlance in the Straits Settlements: any North Indian.
bilāl	The person calling for prayer in a mosque; muezzin.
Bohra	Shiite community from Gujarat.
caṉmarkka urai	(Ta.) 'religious lecture'.
cantaṉakkuṭam	(Ta.) ritual of anointing a grave with sandal paste.
cāyapu	(Ta.) a Muslim holy man.
Chulia	Term denoting South Indians, specifically South Indian Muslims; used by Europeans in Southeast Asia.

Cīṟāppurāṇam	Tamil poem on the life of the Prophet by →Umaṟuppulavar.
coṟpoḻivu	(Ta.) →*caṉmarkka urai*.
Dakhni-Urdu	South Indian variety of Urdu.
Dargah	Muslim saint-shrine.
Deepavali	A Hindu holiday.
dhikr	(Ar.) 'remembrance'; practice of remembering God by chanting certain formulas.
Dhoby	Washer-man.
fatwā	(Ar.) 'formal legal opinion'.
fitrah	(Ma.) →*zakāt al-fiṭra*.
Hajj	Pilgrimage to Mecca
ḥalāl	(Ar.) 'permissible', according to Islamic law.
ḥanafī	(Ar.) one of the Sunnite schools of law.
hypergamy	Practice of barring women from marrying below their social rank.
'Īd al-Fiṭr	Muslim holiday at the end of →Ramadan.
ifṭār	(Ar.) first meal after sunset during →Ramadan.
Jawi Pekan	(Ma.) Person of mixed Indian and Malay parentage
Jawi-Peranakan	(Ma.) →Jawi Pekan
kafā'a	(Ar.) 'equality, suitability'; principle legitimizing the practice of →hypergamy in Islamic law.
kāfir	(Ar.) 'infidel'.
kampong	(Ma.) 'village, settlement'.
kantūri	(Ta.) feast on a holiday.

karicamaṇi	(Ta.) necklace of black stones worn by married Muslim women.
kaṭci	(Ta.) ‘party, faction’.
kattikaṭai	(Ta.) ‘knife-shop’; general store.
Kĕling	(Ma.) a person from South India.
kĕnduri	(Ma.) →*kantūri*.
keramat	(Ma.) →Dargah.
kēvalam	(Ta.) ‘low status, meanness, shame’.
khuṭba	(Ar.) the Muslim Friday sermon.
Kling	→Kĕling
Labbai	Religious title; a sub-community of Tamil Muslims.
maccāṉ	(Ta.) ‘cross-cousin, brother-in-law’.
madrasa	(Ar.) a Muslim religious school.
mandi safar	(Ma.) bathing ritual in the Muslim month of Safar.
manik sendrum	(Ma.) →*karicamaṇi*.
Marakkayar	A sub-community of Tamil Muslims.
masjid	(Ar.) ‘mosque’.
mastāṉ	(Ta.) a holy man.
mawlid	(Ar.) ‘birthday’; recitation of panegyric poetry.
muftī	(Ar.) official deliverer of →*fatwā*.
nĕgĕri Kĕling	(Ma.) ‘the →Kĕling country’.
Panchayat	Assembly.
Pathan	Term used in South India to denote local speakers of Urdu.
piracaṅkam	(Ta.) ‘sermon’; →*khuṭba*.
Pongal	A Tamil holiday.

Qādiyānī	Term for a follower of the →Aḥmadiyya used by its opponents.
Ramadan	Muslim fasting month.
Ravuttar	A sub-community of Tamil Muslims.
saudagar raja	(Ma.) ‘royal merchant’.
sayyid	(Ar.) a descendant of the Prophet.
ṣēk mantiram	(Ta.) formula whose recitation was believed to ensure attainment of paradise after death.
shāfi‘ī	(Ar.) one of the Sunnite schools of law.
sharī‘a	(Ar.) the revealed law of Islam.
shaykh	(Ar.) preceptor of a Sufi brotherhood.
Syce	groom looking after draft-horses.
Tablīghī Jamā‘at	Muslim lay-missionary movement.
tābūt	(Ar.) ‘coffin’; miniature representation of the tomb of Hussein, the Prophet’s grandson, carried in processions to commemorate his martyrdom.
taikkā	(Ta.) →Dargah.
Taláq	Title of a controversial Tamil drama on violence against women in Muslim families; literally (Ar.) ‘divorce’.
taṅkaḷ	(Ta.) a holy man.
Tarakanar	A sub-community of Tamil Muslims.
tarkā	(Ta.) →Dargah.
ta‘ziya	(Ar.) ‘consolation, solace’; →*tābūt*.
Tenkasis	Contemptuous term for Tamil Muslims from Tenkasi and neighboring towns and villages.

tiṇṇaip paḷḷi	(Ta.) ‘verandah school’; simple elementary school.
Tirukkuṟaḷ	Highly venerated Tamil collection of moral maxims.
‘ulamā’	→*‘ālim*.
Umaṟuppulavar	Poet of the →*Cīṟāppurāṇam*.
umma	(Ar.) the community of all Muslims.
ūr	(Ta.) ‘village, town, city, place’; specifically a person’s hometown or place of origin.
‘urf	(Ar.) →*‘āda*.
‘urs	(Ar.) ‘wedding’; holiday in honor of a saint.
ustādh (pl. *asātidha*)	(Ar.) ‘teacher’; in Singapore used for teachers of religion.
vaṇakkam	(Ta.) ‘adoration’; common Tamil greeting.
Wahhābī	Supporter of an eighteenth century Muslim reform movement; contemptuous term for an opponent of saint-veneration.
wakaf	(Ma.) →*waqf*.
walī (pl. *awliyā’*)	(Ar.) ‘friend’; a Muslim saint.
waqf	(Ar.) ‘religious endowment’.
zakāt	(Ar.) Muslim alms tax.
zakāt al-fiṭra	(Ar.) obligatory gift made annually on the occasion of →‘Īd al-Fiṭr.