Challenges

BK/Fiji has not experienced any hostility from co-religionists, non-Hindus or any other religious group. In its view, there are different teachings but no conflicts. In compliance with its teaching, BK/Fiji regrets that there is so much consciousness of the body at the expense of the purity of the soul. For the achievement of purity a celibate life is suggested, though this is not a precondition for joining Brahma Kumaris. The organization does not run any special social programmes: in its view the proper approach to social problems is by meditation. Meditation on the environment, on peace, and on social problems, will effect changes in individual souls and thus indirectly contribute to the betterment of humankind. BK/Fiji looks at the future optimistically; though particular aspects may look negative, the overall picture is bright. This view, again, is in accordance with Brahma Kumaris cosmology, which holds the belief that “the old has to finish and the new to come” (Sister Arveena 2003, interview by author).

Conclusion

Like some other organizations and movements with a Hindu background, Brahma Kumaris conceives itself not so much as a ‘religion’ or as a specific tradition in a religion but as a philosophy and a lifestyle training. This is not to say that the programmes offered by Brahma Kumaris are concerned just with technique. Instead of focussing on doctrine, however, the organization puts its major emphasis on ‘spirituality’ and spiritual guidance. Furthermore, the Brahma Kumaris approach is extremely individualistic, heading towards the transformation of the world through the transformation of one’s own individual soul. In design and content, Brahma Kumaris is very ‘modern,’ with its brochures and programmes targeting modern people who are looking for ways of coping with the modern world by modern means. In Fiji, Brahma Kumaris has had hardly any impact, at least numerically, and the courses and programmes offered seem to be of no major significance for the religious scene. Despite the individualist and spiritual approach, there is also a political dimension in the activities of Brahma Kumaris, insofar as specific programmes (on community development, the environment and inter-religious co-operation, etc.) are concerned. So Brahma Kumaris leaves an ambiguous impression: on the one hand, and on an individual level, awareness is raised for the manifold problems in society; on the other, it is by this very approach that its programmes has a de-politicizing effect, as these problems are dealt with on a purely spiritual level. In the context of Fiji we cannot expect a significant growth in the near future. Indeed Brahma Kumaris does not expect a major intake of new members or an increase in the number of people interested in its programmes. So we can suppose that BK/Fiji will continue to be one feature in the religious landscape of Fiji among many others — but not one that is of any significance for the overall spectrum of religions in the nation.

Shri Sathya Sai Baba, Fiji (SSB/Fiji)

General Background and Development in Fiji

The Sathya Sai Baba movement was founded in India by Shri Sathya Sai Baba (born 1926) — Sai meaning “mother God” and Baba, “father God”. The founder claims to be the second avatar (that is, incarnation of God), after the first avatar Shirudi Sai Baba (1838-1918), who is said to have prophesied that God would be reincarnated eight years
after his death. When Shri Sathya Sai Baba was 14 years old, he left his home and founded an *ashram* (a religious centre), to which over the years a growing number of adherents came as pilgrims, longing for his teaching and his blessings. In Sai Baba’s understanding the purpose of his work is to serve humankind, a purpose made evident through preaching and teaching as well as through healing and the performing of miracles.

It is important to be aware of the fact that SSB/Fiji does not necessarily regard itself as a religious organization: “we are not a religious body”; we are “strictly ... service oriented,” with “people of all different faiths” joining (Naidu 2003, interview by author). On the other hand, SSB/Fiji is a member of “Interfaith Search,” whose major survey (Bushell 1990) presents it as a Hindu organization along with the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji and the Fiji Hindu Society. Perhaps this points more to the academic difficulty of conceptualizing and categorizing what is ‘religion’ and ‘religious’ than to the question of how the members of SSB/Fiji view themselves. We should therefore accept SSB/Fiji’s view and try to understand the organization as it understands itself: a service-oriented spiritual movement that cares for human betterment by trying to put the teachings of Sai Baba into practice.

SSB/Fiji started just before independence, in 1969 — not as an official group but as a group of people who tried to live according to the principles of Sai Baba. In 1988 the group became a recognized body officially affiliated with the world body of the Sathya Sai Baba movement.

**Basic Beliefs and Practices**

The teachings of Sai Baba are based primarily on “The Five Principles” and a “Nine Point Code of Conduct”. The five principles — truth, righteousness, peace, non-violence, and love — are expressions of the insight that there is only one true essence underlying all great religions and philosophies: it can be summarized and characterized as the commission to love all and to serve all. As a religion ‘beyond’ or ‘inherent in’ all religions, Sathya Sai Baba teaches against the converting of others. Instead, one should transcend the boundaries of particular religions. Devotees are expected to lead a life in accordance with a “nine point guideline” that gives spiritual guidance for everyday life: meditation, chanting hymns, spiritual education, community work, a devotional gathering once a week, studying religious texts, relating in a friendly way to others, not speaking ill of others, and setting aside food for the needy (Bushell 1990:48f).

A small pamphlet containing information on the basic teachings of Sai Baba is given to anyone interested in the movement. Two other books are suggested as containing ample information and are recommended for readers who want to delve more deeply into Sathya Sai Baba’s philosophy (Gale-Kumar 1991; Krystal 1990), and there is a journal, *Sai Sandesh*, for keeping the adherents of the movement informed.

**Organizational Structure and Resources**

The national structure of SSB/Fiji, which was officially founded in 1988, is made up of a Central Council with six districts at a regional level, each consisting of local centres or branches. Each unit has five wings — education, youth, women, service, spirituality — and sends reports on its activities to the Central Council. Women have equal rights, and both women and young people are well represented in the general organizational structure as well as in the Central Council of SSB/Fiji. Though SSB/Fiji does rely mainly on books as
the principal medium for communicating the teachings of Sai Baba, generally, and at the international level, other modern media are used and not considered a danger.

The international centre of the movement is at Prashanti Nilayam, south of Bangalore, in South India, where the secretariat of the movement’s World Council is to be found (for details, see the organization’s official website: http://www.sathyasai.org). At an intermediate level there are regional coordinators supporting the work of the national Sathya Sai Baba organizations in a number of countries.

SSB/Fiji is a non-profit organization, although information on finances is not shared: “we don’t talk about money… only the trustees do” (Naidu 2003, interview by author). There is no membership fee or obligatory contribution of any kind, and no specific payments are expected from SSB/Fiji’s members. No money comes from the international body, and there are no specific fund raising activities for the organization itself. Even to potential donors, SSB/Fiji does not talk about money but about projects, and what the organization is doing. There are voluntary membership contributions, however, and the finances are thoroughly accounted for. Though there is no official membership fee, SSB/Fiji keeps records of its membership for communication purposes. At present there are about 2000 members registered with SSB/Fiji, though there has been and still is a slight decline in membership due to continued emigration. Membership is not exclusive, and participation in SSB/Fiji’s activities is open to everybody irrespective of their religion.

Activities

The focus of SSB/Fiji’s activities is on ‘services.’ This refers to all kind of social as well as spiritual services. For example, in the field of formal education the organization runs a primary school, and in the medical field, one of the projects very high on SSB/Fiji’s agenda at present is organizing blood donations. The organization is also engaged in the area of social care. In early 2003 there was a project for distributing wheel chairs free of charge to people who needed them. SSB/Fiji has also provided programmes for street kids, but “we are not heavily involved because we have other commitments” (Naidu 2003, interview by author). Apart from these programmes, the basic “mission” of SSB/Fiji is spiritual. However, there are neither outreach programmes nor door-to-door propaganda nor any other such activities. It is expected that people will come whenever they feel interested in issues that concern SSB/Fiji, or whenever they feel somehow challenged by Sai Baba’s teaching. All that can be said is that there is a kind of ‘silent witnessing’: “We have to show our love to them so that they know there is something in this organization...” (Singh 2003, interview by author). It is spiritual guidance that seems to be at the very core of SSB/Fiji’s activities: in its view, most people do not practise what they are taught in temples or churches. So SSB/Fiji wants to “teach people what is right” and to put it into practice in everyday life. The foundation of all its activities is an individual approach starting from the view that “everyone as a human being is part of the divine” and has to be empowered to ‘transform’ himself or herself: “We don’t go and transform other people … we do it ourselves …” (Singh 2003, interview by author). To effect ‘self-transformation’ on an individual level is thus at the very heart of SSB/Fiji’s activities. Against this background, engagement in other areas of life is in a way a result of this ‘self-transformation’: “to change the world, you have to start with an individual … Even ten … will bring an effect on the whole society. That’s what we are looking into” (Naidu 2003, interview by author).
Challenges

The challenge of Christian fundamentalist and Pentecostal churches is not perceived as a threat. The reason for the rise of new religious groups in the Christian context is guessed to be "disunity there — but it really doesn’t concern us" (Singh 2003, interview by author). Generally, the organization's co-existence with other religious groups is regarded as very cordial, though SSB/Fiji hopes for more co-operation. The impact of modern culture is felt but is likewise not seen as a threat. More controversial issues, however, like homosexuality, which is considered 'unnatural,' are regarded as "very sensitive issues ... we don’t discuss these things" (Naidu 2003, interview by author). The major concern of SSB/Fiji is the effect of emigration on their constituency. But this is in a way compensated for by the organization's individualistic approach and by its preference for quality above quantity, as well as by its optimistic perspective. The future is seen as "quite positive," at the moment: "... our membership will increase! We have to change ourselves, we must transform ourselves ... we are not too concerned about the number of our members ..." (Naidu 2003, interview by author). It is also seen as a challenge that SSB/Fiji has hardly any impact on indigenous Fijians. This is interpreted as being due to their different cultural background, though representatives of SSB/Fiji emphasize at the same time that there is no conflict between Fijian culture and the Sathya Sai Baba movement: "whatever the Fijian culture, we can’t look at it from the negative point of view ... we try to understand them" (Naidu 2003, interview by author).

Conclusion

With its strictly individualistic and spiritual approach, which is not even identified as 'religious' by its members, SSB/Fiji is, despite its Hindu origin, open to all members of society and therefore to a certain extent an 'inter-religious' or even 'trans-religious' phenomenon. In its own understanding, SSB/Fiji is "a spiritually based service organization, in service to humanity irrespective of religion, caste, creed," and based on the conviction that all human beings are "a spark of the divine" (Naidu 2003, interview by author). Nevertheless, most of its constituency is drawn from (non-Christian and non-Muslim) Indo-Fijians, and there are hardly any indigenous Fijians engaged in SSB/Fiji's work — with a few exceptions that prove the rule. To live a life according to Sai Baba's principles is regarded as potentially also providing 'worldly' success. This can be seen from the story of a businessman who claimed: "... since I came to know Sai Baba ... following his teachings ... my business has been expanding" (Singh 2003, interview by author). However, to conclude that this is analogous to teachings like the 'gospel of prosperity' or the 'health-and-wealth preaching' that can be found among some of the new religious groups in the Christian context, would be an over-interpretation. Rather, SSB/Fiji provides moral-spiritual 'techniques' that are directed not only at the individual's success and elevation but also at the betterment of humankind. Whether this may produce a de-politicized attitude among its followers can be neither proved nor disproved. It is more likely that the latter is the case: despite its individualistic approach, the individual transformation is expected to have a positive impact on society as a whole, and as soon as society as a whole comes into view — with its social, educational, and other dimensions, which are all addressed by SSB/Fiji — the political dimension cannot be totally excluded.
MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Fiji Muslim League (FML)

General Background

While it may be true that in the Pacific as a whole the spread of Islam was facilitated by the oil boom of recent decades (Crocombe 2001:233; cf. idem 1989:78), so that today, Muslims are found nearly everywhere in the Pacific islands, at least in small immigrant groups (Khan 1989), the situation in Fiji is different in that Islam is represented by long established communities. From the very beginning of Indian immigration to Fiji, there were Muslims among the indentured labourers’ communities (for the early period see Brennan, McDonald and Shlomowitz 1992), making up 14.6 per cent of the immigrants and originating mostly from Northern India (Gillion 1977:105). Though the indentured labourers were aware of their religious differences, and religious teachers were already working among both groups, Muslims and Hindus lived side by side and met socially. Both communities participated in the festivals of both religious traditions, although Muslims evidently had more reservations about this. Interestingly, although Shi’i Islam was ‘heretical’ to strict Sunni tradition, to which most Fiji Muslims subscribed, it was a Shi’i festival that attracted Muslims in Fiji, and Hindus too: the tazia of Muharram, the tazia being an edifice made of tinsel, paper and bamboo, thought to represent the mausoleum of Husayn, the third of the Shi’i Imams, and erected during Muharram, a month of fasting (Garrett 1989:156f). This custom of participating jointly in a festival was possible because the origin of the celebration was not understood (Ali 1979:55f and passim). In the course of religious differentiation and standardization, however, tazia was banned in the 1930s, following Muslim protests against its supposed or real ‘frivolity.’

A growing alienation can be observed between the two Indian groups, with the increasing formation of free farmers’ settlements founded by indentured labourers when their contracts expired. This development “gave way to ominous distancing of religions from each other, in preparation for open confrontation on a broader scale in the years between 1920 and the very recent past” (Garrett 1989:157). In the 1920s, intra-communal tensions in the Indian community brought about a growing differentiation between Muslims and Hindus as well as between Muslims and Muslims. As a result the ritual and doctrinal parameters of religious affiliation became more standardized. This was both a consequence of developments towards the rise of a more complex society and a reflection of similar processes in India. It is important to recognize, however, that these tensions “derived more from modern politics, organization and mass communication than from traditional religion” (Gillion 1977:106).

Against this background, an annual General Conference was instituted, and the Fiji Muslim League (FML) was founded in 1926 after the amalgamation of smaller local Muslim groups that had been only loosely (if at all) coordinated (Bushell 1990:56ff). This was in line with a general tendency towards the formation of numerous new Indian organizations. From the 1930s onwards, Fiji witnessed the proliferation of various organizations founded by Fiji Indians, some of them existing for just a short period, others developing into sustainable bodies (for example, the Young Men’s Muslim Organization, an equivalent of the Christian YMCA). In those years, the FML was instrumental in safeguarding Muslim
interests vis-à-vis those of the Hindus, who similarly organized themselves in various coordinated bodies. The FML pursued more or less open political aims and objectives, lobbying for separate political representation and recognition of Muslim personal law — neither of which was granted, thanks to the intervention of the Indian Government (for more details see Gillion 1977:102ff. and passim). “Thereafter some Muslims continued, as they do even to this day, to seek special representation which would give them a political status distinct from the rest of the Indians in Fiji” (Ali 1980a:126). In 1938 a breakaway section of the FML formed the Muslim Association, which included both Ahmadis and Sunnis. This indicated, once more, that “rows within the Muslim community continued over personalities and political ambitions rather than doctrines” (Gillion 1977:113).

Basic Beliefs and Practices

FML is not a religion but an umbrella organization par excellence. It represents Sunni ‘mainstream Islam’ in all its diversity, from the most liberal spectrum to groups that are more inspired by Wahhabi tradition, that is, a Sa’udi influenced rigorous interpretation of Islam. These various ‘side streams’ (or ‘sects,’ as they are sometimes called) are not affiliated to FML as sub-units. Rather, individual affiliates may lean to one direction or the other without being part of FML as official representatives of their respective more or less sectarian traditions, which are anyway not large in numbers although quite vocal. Consequently, FML is not much concerned about doctrines and basic beliefs. One may even dare to say that within the framework of FML there is room for diversity and plurality.

Consequently, FML abides by all the basic principles of Islam: faith in the one and only God and His prophet, Muhammad; the five principles of belief in God, His angels, His revealed books, His messengers, and the Day of Judgment; the five “pillars” of Islam (witnessing that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is His messenger; five daily ritual prayers; an obligatory social tax; pilgrimage to Mecca; and observance of fasting during the month of Ramadan); and living a life in accordance with the Qur’anic directive to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong (Su. 3:104 etc.).

All in all, FML holds a comparatively ‘liberal’ view on many aspects of faith. In questions of ethics, there is an awareness that many things are open to interpretation or are of such marginal importance that they can be left to individual decision. Against this background, for example, FML has decided to opt against a strict separation between the sexes and for co-educational schools. This is even considered to be of benefit to the Muslim community, as it makes it possible for young people to relate to each other and to find their partners in their own faith community.

Organizational Structure

The organization of FML is modern in all respects, displaying the typical structure of a ‘Western’ institution (for details, see Annual Report or the FML’s website: http://www.fml.com.fj). Women are fully represented in the Council, and there are no restrictions against their full participation in FML’s activities; theoretically a woman could become the president of the organization. Similarly, youth are very well represented, making up about 40 per cent of FML’s membership. Annual Reports of the FML and of its youth branch are easily accessible.

Financially, FML has some income from commercial activities (especially cane farms and rental properties), from schools, and from donations. There is also an official annual
individual membership fee of about F$25 per person. The finances are fully accounted for according to the usual procedures. Occasionally, some grants from overseas have been provided for the work, for example a grant of one million US dollars from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) for the Islamic Institute of the South Pacific (an institution of higher Islamic learning which is mainly funded by the IDB), medical centres or the extension of high schools. Other foundations such as the Kamil foundation also contribute to these projects. Then there are scholarships provided by the IDB for studies overseas — mainly Pakistan — “but nobody wants to go to Pakistan any more, so we have diverted those to local ones…” (Khan 2003, interview by author) — Malaysia, and Egypt. These funds are mostly given on a trust basis and have to be refunded. Generally, however, this support has dwindled: According to its president, FML “…has not had any substantial money over the last ten years” (Khan 2003, interview by author). Higher education is provided by the above-mentioned Institute, which combines Islamic studies and commercial studies, but it seems that only a minority is attracted by Islamic studies.

As to its international relationship, FML is affiliated to all major international Islamic bodies, from the Muslim World League to the Islamic Development Bank, and good regional co-operation (Khan 1989:79) is provided by the Regional Islamic Da’wah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (RISEPAP).

Due to continuing emigration, there has been a significant decrease in the Muslim population in recent years — from about 75,000-77,000 about ten years ago to about 55,000-65,000 now (these are internal statistics but they may not be absolutely reliable). Nevertheless, FML possesses a solid structure that makes it the Fiji Muslim body.

Activities

The major activities of FML are in the field of education. There are no outreach programmes and schools are not used for this purpose. According to its president, “…35 to 40 per cent of our school populations are non-Muslims, … but the schools are not really used as platforms for conversions. We just provide education. We have our own religious classes, but they are only compulsory for our own students.” FML also supports the publication of brochures and periodicals such as al-Islam, Muslim Voice, and so on, with Muslim youth and Muslim students being especially engaged in this field (FMYO News). Furthermore, FML is planning to put more emphasis on social care: “Our greatest thrust at the moment, at least mine, is the social welfare work, education work” (Khan 2003, interview by author). For example, it is stated that from April 2003 onwards FML would be running a “Housing Assistance Scheme” constructing low cost houses for poor families.

FML has a low profile, perhaps a reluctance to engage in outreach programmes, and a hesitation about if not rejection of activities aiming at conversions from non-Muslim groups. According to the president,

Most of our members are from within the system. We have some converts, but our rate of conversion in Fiji has been very minimal, mostly from marriages of non-Muslim Indo-Fijians. So the Muslim League has been very sensitive to the Fijian community’s aspirations and desire to remain Christians. We have been very careful and sensitive because the Fijians are very strong about this country being indigenously held by them … that it will always subscribe to the Christian faith. The Muslims over the years have always related well to the Fijians, and we have always, politically, also aligned ourselves with them. In respect of that, it also explains a lot of why we have not … tried to make huge inroads into the Fijian community of Christians in Islamic propagation (Khan 2003, interview by author).
Similarly, FML is fully prepared to co-operate with the Fiji government. Participation in the national reconciliation process is seen as an important contribution to the further development of a peaceful Fiji: “We have made it clear that we continue to be with the mainstream government as well as the mainstream Christian groups and we participate in all this … national reconciliation process that had been made, to make sure that our point of view is understood” (Khan 2003, interview by author). This co-operation with the government is considered as being related especially to aspects of security, anti-terrorism, and the stability of the country: “We as Fiji Muslims are obviously very jealously guarding this peace we have in the country. So we are very … aware that we want to participate in any process that eliminates … any elements of terrorism or anything that de-stabilizes the country” (Khan 2003, interview by author). Supporting all attempts to improve the economic situation is seen as crucial for the positive future of Fiji, especially in view of the social situation: “The only way this can improve … is … if the economic pie becomes bigger. The economic pie has to grow, … and in that area we can … participate and help the government make it work …, make an environment that is conducive to stability and peace” (Khan 2003, interview by author).

Challenges

At the time this survey was undertaken, there was major concern among Muslims in Fiji about the war against Iraq — not because Muslims were concerned with Saddam or with anti-American sentiment, but because of the “thousands and thousands of lives destroyed … and the growing … fear: where does it stop?” (Khan 2003, interview by author).

Considerable concern was raised when in February 2003 the Fiji Government expelled a Sudanese Muslim teacher, Sheikh Abdul Majid, after his work permit expired. This was generally criticized by Fijian Muslims as being a hasty and unjustified move, and in an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, FML’s president Hafizud Dean Khan complained that any concerns should have been shared with the FML “because as employers and a responsible national organization, we would like to have been aware of what … the concerns were”. He made it clear, however, that he did not see this decision as “a result of anti-Muslim sentiment on the part of the Government” (quoted from http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/s793452.htm).

Certain aspects of modern culture are regarded as posing a serious challenge to the Muslim way of life. Such concerns include free access to alcohol, the growth of night clubs, the rise in prostitution, and the abuse of drugs (even some FML-run schools had some cases of the latter). The FML is reacting to these matters by proposing to the government that control of access to alcohol be greater, relevant laws be applied more strictly, and counselling on these issues be increased in the schools.

Despite a generally positive view of the situation of Muslims in Fiji, there seem to be some concerns and challenges which are more outspokenly addressed by the FML than by any other non-Christian group or organization. One such challenge is ongoing emigration, which is seen as a serious blood-letting of the organization. On the other hand, there are close relations with the migrant communities, especially in New Zealand and Australia. There the young emigrating Muslims seem to become more ‘religious’ than those in Fiji itself, as the president of the FML observed: “The very encouraging thing to us is that despite the Western influence in those countries, and the high level of education, our kids
have remained very strong” (Khan 2003, interview by author).

Tensions with Muslim ‘sectarian’ groups, especially with the Ahmadiyya, are regarded as being in the past. Nevertheless, FML feels slightly embarrassed by the fact that in the public realm the Ahmadiyya keeps an extremely high profile and that in inter-religious events the Ahmadiyya has a very visible presence: “…it becomes a very unfair representation”, and many people give “much more significance to the Ahmadiyya than they actually deserve” (Khan 2003, interview by author). In years gone by, both Ahmadiyya groups had targeted mainstream Muslims, even trying to attract members away from the FML. According to the president of FML, however, this has changed and even been reversed: “if there is any conversion at all, it’s just the other way round” (Khan 2003, interview by author). In ‘inter-confessional’ marriages between Ahmadi and Sunni Muslims, he said, it is the non-Sunni partner who ‘converts’ to Sunni Islam: “they come to us, ours will not come to them” (Khan 2003, interview by author). But the suspicion of Ahmadis seems to be quite strong; it is said that Sunni Muslims even prefer to be married to Christians than to Ahmadis.

Inter-religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims are regarded as being in the past, and those in the 1930s and 40s are attributed by the FML to the Arya Samaj and the Ahmadiyya. There seem to have been some repercussions in the 1970s when the Muslim community believed that during general election campaigns their most prominent representative, who at that time was also the president of FML, was held back by the non-Muslim part of the Indo-Fijian community. These reservations continued until the middle of the 1980s, but “a lot of that has gone now,” and if interrogated about existing conflicts, the FML refers to them as “not visible ones” (Khan 2003, interview by author).

The impact of Christian new religious groups is considered a major challenge for FML. In its view, these groups are targeting Fijian society “largely in areas of poverty stricken neglected families, because their social welfare is good … and when there is weakness amongst any religions, they have made inroads” (Khan 2003, interview by author). It is observed that it is mainly the Methodist Church which is affected by the impact of these groups. Nevertheless, FML considers this a serious concern for itself, too: “The concern to us is not so much the conversion but … that these sects may be preaching less harmony and tolerance than the other sects. The newer sects … and the North American particularly … are maybe making some vicious attacks as well” (Khan 2003, interview by author).

The coup of 1987 and its aftermath are not perceived in religious categories, at least not by the president of FML: “people of any responsible thinking would never attribute that to a Christian philosophy because that’s not what Christianity is all about” (Khan 2003, interview by author). After September 11th, 2001, there seem to have been some minor incidents in Lautoka, but they were evidently not specifically and obviously directed against the Fijian Muslim community in relation to the events of 09/11 — “who knows what it was all about?”. Nevertheless, even in 2003 incidents of that kind did not yet seem to have ceased. In May unidentified persons burgled a mosque in the western part of the country. By the end of the period covered by this report, no arrests had been made, but the burglary was viewed as an “isolated incident and widely condemned” (quoted from the US State Department’s website on religious freedom: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/23828.htm). Officially at least, violent conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims (or more specifically, Christians), are not attributed to religious sentiment: “the good thing about Fiji is … that we’ve never been a target because of religion, … it was just vandalism” (Khan 2003, interview by author). In this context, however, it is observed that although
the Methodist Church was very much engaged some decades ago in improving ‘inter-racial relationships,’ since then these efforts have ceased. The conflicts are seen as having increased because of ‘tribal feelings: … Christianity is just a tool’ (Khan 2003, interview by author).

The president of the FML even goes one step further, saying that conflicts and tensions as they became evident in the coup of 1987 and its aftermath are due to a lack of Christian faith. Many a Fijian Christian “is not very Christian in the heart” (Khan 2003, interview by author). This comment is linked to the idea that Fijians have been exposed to the influence of ‘civilization’ for only a comparatively short span of time, whereas Indians, Chinese and Europeans have been immersed in it longer and more deeply.

**Conclusion**

Signs of a ‘revival’ among the Muslim Sunni population have been observed by the FML. It sees these tendencies as ‘very strong’ and offers some quite specific reasons for them: “The coups helped. Whenever there is a calamity in any religion, there is a move to a strengthening of the faith …; 9/11 helped, unfortunately, because of … the fact that there is a lot of attack and there is a lot of vicious sentiment against Islam, so I mean there is a lot of unity, and there is a lot of revival, a resurgence…” (Khan 2003, interview by author).

For the FML, international relations with other Muslim organizations in the Pacific are of major importance: “Notwithstanding the international pressures that are on Islam, I have a lot of relief from the fact that I have a very close association with my sister bodies in New Zealand and Australia” (Khan 2003, interview by author). Whether this is mainly due to the fact that these bodies are often made up of emigrants from Fiji who have become more religious in their new environment, or to some other factor, there is definitely a Pacific outlook on Muslim identity, an outlook that is stronger than an international focus on any of the central heartlands of Islam.

Living together in peace is considered a very high value by the FML: “Unlike many Muslim communities in the world, Fiji Muslims have … become more pacific and the Fijian way of living is … very tolerant” (Khan 2003, interview by author).

**Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam (Lahore), Fiji (Anjuman/Fiji)**

**General Background and Development in Fiji**

The differentiation of the Indian community in the 1920s also brought about sectarian tensions inside the community. Looking for support from the Indian subcontinent, the Fiji community received a response first not from the Sunni Muslims but from representatives of the Ahmadiyya movement of Lahore. A modern missionary type of Islam that was considered ‘heretical’ by mainstream Muslims, the Ahmadis, in the 1920s both in India and overseas, were championing their case by attacking Christians as well as Hindus and by proselytizing among traditional Muslim communities and beyond. In the view of Ahmadiyya/Lahore itself, its missionary endeavour in Fiji was brought about by the specific situation there during the early 1930s. Following a natural disaster, the Hindus were trying to capitalize on the situation by combining rescue aid with proselytizing efforts. Consequently, certain Muslims asked for support from India: to be sent Muslim missionaries who would counteract
these pressures (Deen 2003, interview by author). One of those sent was Muhammad Abdullah, who became principal of a Muslim school in Nausori. In the 1930s, under the leadership of Maulana Mirza Muzaffar Beg, the Ahmadiyya/Lahore movement nearly took control of the FML. When they failed to do so, they founded their own organization, the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam, which was officially registered on 3 October 1934 (Bushell 1990:66ff, Gillon 1977:112ff). Today this is still the smallest organized group of Muslims in Fiji. A major event took place in 1985, however, when the Fiji branch hosted a world convention of the worldwide Ahmadiyya/Lahore movement (Iqrā’ n.d.).

Basic Beliefs and Practices

The members of the Ahmadiyya/Lahore group share the basic beliefs of mainstream Islam, such as the five pillars of Islam. Likewise, they acknowledge Muhammad as the seal of the prophets, that is, as the last of the prophets. What is specific about the Ahmadi group is the view it holds of the role of religious reformers generally, and of the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1905), specifically. They believe that after the advent of the prophet Muhammad, there was a reformer, a mujaddid, in every century, acting as an Imām, a religious leader, and calling for the renovation of Islam. Unlike the preceding 13 mujaddids, the 14th Imām as reformer of the 14th Islamic century is said to have been specifically announced by a prophecy made by Muhammad identifying him as the promised Messiah (masih mawṣūd) to the Muslims. Beyond just reforming Islam, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s special task was to defend Islam against the onslaught of non-Muslims and to proclaim Islam all over the world by means of mission work. After his death this missionary obligation was entrusted to an organization, the Anjuman, which continues to work for the spread of its message. In its religious practice Ahmadiyya/Lahore does not differ much from mainstream Islam. The major festivals are observed, as well as the Friday prayers in the mosque. Every Monday night Anjuman/Fiji holds meetings in the mosque, in which people volunteer to talk, explain from the Qur’ān, and discuss, in a more or less informal atmosphere.

Organizational Structure and Resources

Both the general beliefs shared by the Anjuman/Fiji group with mainstream Islam, and also the distinctive views of the organization, are reflected in the conditions for membership: anybody who is a Muslim can become a member (so a non-Muslim would have to convert to Islam before joining Anjuman/Fiji) by signing a pledge form signifying agreement that (1) Muhammad is the seal of the prophets, (2) Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the 14th mujaddid and Imām, is the promised Messiah for the Muslims and the founder of Anjumān, (3) a small contribution will be made for the Anjuman, and (4) the member will abide by the five principles of Islam (Deen 2003, interview by author).

At present there are about 1000 members. Anjuman/Fiji has a National President and is run by a Board with a General Secretary, who is assisted by an assistant (who at present is a woman). The various local branches of the organization send monthly reports to the Board. There is a women’s wing, of which the president is an ex officio member of the Board. All positions, including that of National President, are open for women, who have equal rights, visit the mosque and attend Friday prayer. Because of this liberal attitude there is some “pressure from the other Muslim groups” (Deen 2003, interview by author). Likewise, the Youth division (made up of people younger than 25, and centred on Suva) is
represented on the Board through its president. It meets every Sunday morning to discuss religious matters. Those who want to get more deeply involved can attend classes in Arabic and/or Urdu. There are no institutions of higher religious learning in Fiji, however, and because of its small size the Anjuman is not planning to establish anything of this kind, since it would simply not be an economic proposition.

Anjuman/Fiji is a branch of the worldwide Ahmadiyya/Lahore movement, which has its headquarters in Pakistan. During the Christmas holidays there is a General Assembly, with all the delegates from the worldwide branches coming and deliberating on policy matters. Modern information technology makes it easy to communicate, for example through e-mail.

Financially, Anjuman/Fiji is self-sustaining through contributions from its members — contributions that are obligatory in principle but voluntary as to amount. Generally, it is suggested that 2.5 per cent of one's income is contributed. As the Anjuman/Fiji owns some property and schools, there is a rental income which is used only for the running costs of the organization. There is an annual budget controlled by the board. Anjuman/Fiji supports other branches. This support is not channelled through the Anjuman's international headquarters in Lahore, but through "direct partnership," and comes from special donations. In regard to both their membership contribution and to their voluntary donations, "people are good at responding" (Deen 2003, interview by author).

Activities

The raison d'être of Anjuman is the propagation of Islam — not by forceful propaganda, but by offering the Ahmadiyya/Lahore understanding of Islam and leaving it to the hearers to decide which way to follow. In this context, modern media are regarded as a positive means for promoting the case of Anjuman/Fiji. There is a website that provides ample basic information on Ahmadiyya/Lahore's activities (http://aaiol.org/index.shtml). Anjuman/Fiji publishes a quarterly magazine in English, with a small Urdu section (Paigham-e-haqq), as well as a newspaper supplement once every three months, and it provides broadcasts in Hindi. The publications are free, financed by Anjuman/Fiji through the General Budget. This reflects the general policy of Ahmadiyya/Lahore, which places the publishing and dissemination of literature — including translations of the Qur'an, especially into English — very high on its agenda. All in all, Anjuman/Fiji tries to reach out to various sections of society in various languages by using various media. Furthermore, articles by individual members are sent to other journals around the world, and some of them are also put on the Internet: since there is no copyright on them, anyone interested may use them. So there has been a considerable output of published material: general publications that are simply re-published in Fiji (for example, The Khilafah in the Ahmadiyya Movement 1980; Muhammad 1982; and Truth Vindicated After Forty Years 1980), as well as publications by Fiji Muslims (for example, Jalal Ud Deen electronically copied a number of his publications for the present author), and various national and even local periodicals and brochures (for example, Dini Islam and The Islamic Sunrise).

Anjuman/Fiji does not practise aggressive 'evangelistic' outreach, either street preaching or house visits (except visits on request). There are successes only in very limited numbers, with only a very few becoming members of Anjuman/Fiji, and all of them from an Indo-Fijian background. Apart from its 'mission' activities, Anjuman/Fiji focuses on education and is engaged in charity — not through specific programmes but through donations. For example, it contributed $5000 for disaster relief after a major cyclone in 2002. The decision
on such a matter lies with the Board, where ‘welfare’ comes under the responsibility of the vice-president for propagation, who has his own committee to consult on matters like this. Anjuman/Fiji responds if the Government calls for help in social or environmental programmes — for instance, its members participated in a project for cleaning the beaches in Suva. Generally, such programmes are considered to be the responsibility of the government, and Ahmadi/Lahore Muslims “help as individuals, as citizens of the city” (Deen 2003, interview by author).

Challenges

For Anjuman/Fiji, the impact of modern dress and the danger of disintegrating food habits (due to the provision of industrially produced foods in the supermarkets) are areas of some concern in regard to its own constituency. Anjuman tries to create some awareness of these issues among its members but does not impose any strict rules or even sanctions on them. Some religious practices of their Muslim fellow countrymen in Fiji are criticised as being not quite in line with true Islam. But this refers just to minor customs, like the habit of making a special prayer on the third day after a relative’s death, which is regarded as being influenced by Hindu and Christian practices. Concern was raised about developments in Islam in the Near East, which are viewed critically as mixing religion and politics and thereby bringing about major problems for the whole region and beyond. Anjuman/Fiji clings to a policy of clear separation of religion and politics. With regard to its situation in Fiji, the deepest concern is expressed about developments that have caused major emigration among Ahmadi adherents during the last two decades: Anjuman/Fiji has lost about 10 per cent of its members, and the attendance at Friday prayer has been reduced by as much as 50 per cent. Indeed, the Ahmadiyya/Lahore group seems to have been more seriously affected by emigration than other religious organizations have been; this may be due to the fact that most members come from the upper middle class, which were the first to emigrate after the events of 1987 and 2000. Nevertheless, Anjuman/Fiji hopes to fill this ‘emigration gap’ by recruiting new members from the wider Muslim community. All in all, Anjuman/Fiji is optimistic about the future, hoping to continue making a positive impact on the Muslim communities by providing a living example of true Islam. For instance, an increasing number of mosques now follow the Ahmadi/Lahore Muslims’ example of allowing women to participate fully in the Friday prayer.

Conclusion

Anjuman/Fiji is a modern organization offering an interpretation of Islam that is compatible with the modern world without compromising Islamic tenets. It considers itself a kind of guardian of ‘true’ Islam, which it propagates mainly by providing living examples of what it means to live a truly Muslim life. In contrast to its apologetic roots, Anjuman/Fiji refrains from any aggressive propaganda campaigns, and as an active member of Interfaith Search it seeks dialogue with other Muslims as well as with people of other faiths. There are no conflicts between Anjuman/Fiji and other Muslim groups — just differences in some practices or doctrines — and the relationship with non-Muslims is without major problems. Likewise, Anjuman/Fiji is not targeted specifically by any of the new religious groups. Maybe due to the intellectual orientation of its well educated, mostly higher middle-class members, Anjuman/Fiji is one of the most ‘liberal’ religious organizations. That is, it is open to dialogue and leaves much freedom to its members, who are encouraged to live a
responsible life as good citizens of the country to which the organization pledges full allegiance. At the same time, however, there is also the feeling that “politically, the situation is not stable” (comment, Jamalud-Deen) — an observation that refers to the ongoing problems that other religious groups with a strongly Indo-Fijian constituency face in a similar way.

Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat (Qadian), Fiji (AMJ/Fiji)

General Background and Development in Fiji

There is a broader and also a more specific history of AMJ/Fiji. The broader history starts from the 1920s when Ahmadiyya/Lahore took up its work in Fiji by countering Arya Samaj conversion campaigns, establishing schools for Muslim indentured labourers, educating in religious matters, and propagating its version of Islam. Even today this is recognized by AMJ/Fiji as the first phase of its history in Fiji, and it is conceptualized also in religious terms: “the Ahmadiyya gave us the sense that we have to learn something about our Islam” (Cheema 2003, interview by author). The more specific history of AMJ/Fiji dates back to the advent of Qadiani missionaries in 1960, which is seen by AMJ/Fiji as a “second turn in Fiji Muslim life”. While Ahmadiyya/Lahore is said to have been “hiding something,” it is claimed that now the whole truth was made evident — that is, the understanding of Muhammad Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as seal of the prophets, concluding the message that was revealed before by the prophet Muhammad. The history of AMJ/Fiji is directly linked with the work of Sheikh Abdul Wahid Fazl from Rabwah, Pakistan, who started his missionary work in 1960. In the 1960s, this work yielded many fruits. Based in Suva, Sheikh Abdul Wahid Fazl formed an interim committee for establishing a centre there, started to publish a monthly magazine, and began to build a complex of houses on land in Samabula. In 1962 a regular committee was inaugurated, one year later a translation of the Qur’an into the Fijian language was begun (it was finished only in 1988), and in 1965 the mosque in Ratu Mara Road was completed. “According [sic] to the intensive opposition from the Orthodox Muslims, the work of the Jamaat continued to progress and the membership increased” (Ahmadiyyat in Fiji n.d.: 19ff).

Basic Beliefs and Practices

The central point in the Qadiani Ahmadi’s doctrine is the view they hold on Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Unlike the Lahore section of the Ahmadiyya movement, Qadianis believe that he was not just a reformer, a mujaddid, but the Mahdi and the Promised Messiah. It is claimed that the prophet Muhammad had prophesied the coming of the Mahdi and that it is also confirmed in the Qur’an (Sura 75:6-9). To the dismay of mainstream Muslims, Ghulam Ahmad received revelations which made him another prophet after Muhammad. He wrote more than eight books, the most important being a treatise that has been published under the title The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam and translated into many languages. Another important publication is his Jesus in India, in which the author expands one of the doctrines fundamental to Qadiani teachings, namely that Jesus escaped from the cross and after travelling to India in search of the lost tribes of Israel reached Afghanistan and finally Kashmir, where he eventually died. It is claimed that his tomb has been found in Srinagar.
The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at has extensive programmes for publishing Islamic literature (including translations of the Qur’an into various languages including Fijian), building mosques and other houses in its various centres, establishing hospitals and providing health care and social care programmes. It is especially known for its ‘missionary’ efforts. Apart from the specifics mentioned above, beliefs held by Qadiani Muslims do not significantly differ from mainstream Islam. At the very centre, indeed, is the belief in the one and only God, in angels as manifesting the will and wisdom of God, in messengers or prophets, and in life after death, where it is believed that even evildoers and unbelievers, after staying for an appropriate time in hell, will finally be pardoned by the mercy of God. Qadiani Ahmadis also hold that God determines events by ‘special laws’ beyond the laws of nature, and that he provides guidance for sincere believers. God can be addressed by prayers, and there is trust that people living in accordance with the will of God will go to a place called heaven (Bushell 1990:75ff).

Organizational Structure and Resources

In the leadership of the organization one can distinguish between constitutional and spiritual dimensions: there is a President, an Amir and a Vice President (Na’ib Ameer), but “spiritual leadership needs dedication of the whole life…” as a missionary, you shall dedicate your life” (Cheema 2003, interview by author). From 1960 to 1990 there were National Presidents in Fiji, but in 1990 the position of National President was abolished by the then Khalifa Masih IV of Ahmadia Muslim Jamaat International and replaced by an emirship, an ‘Amarat.’ So at the head of AMJ/Fiji is an Amir, with an Amir Naib (‘Vice President’), supported by a National Executive Committee with a General Secretary as well as secretaries for specific areas (Religious Education, Finances, Publications, Audio/Video, etc.). The same organizational structure is found in the branches. There is an annual convention at both the national and the branch level.

AMJ/Fiji is divided into five units according to age groups: boys from 7 to 15, young men from 15 to 40, men older than 40, girls from 7 to 15 and women 15 and older.

There is an ‘Ahmadiyya Muslim College’ but no institutions of higher religious learning in Fiji, though AMJ/Fiji is “doing some thinking along that line”. So far only four or five people have been sent to Pakistan for further studies, but “some left,” and so the organization must rely on its basic religious educational system, which operates mainly through its age group units (see above). In the 1990s AMJ/Fiji opened a small missionary training centre in Suva with 15-20 students from Fiji, but there are complaints that “these people are not dedicated”. The centre directs itself and is financed by contributions from its members, who give between one Fiji dollar and up to 1 per cent of their monthly income (Cheema 2003, interview by author).

AMJ/Fiji is self-supporting and self-financing: “the main [income] of our jamaat is basically dependent on our regular obligatory donations: if a person wants to become an Ahmadi, he has to sacrifice one sixteenth of one month’s income… Others… used to sacrifice one tenth of a month’s income. We are totally dependent on… people’s donations” (Cheema 2003, interview by author). There is a central reserve which may be used for the support of poorer national Qadiani communities, but, generally, every country’s community tries to raise its own funds.
Activities

While AMJ/Fiji missionaries (see above) are commissioned to dedicate their whole life to their faith, there are also hundreds of Ahmadis working for three to five years in fields such as social welfare. In its own understanding, AMJ/Fiji is “a missionary community. So what we are doing is basically preaching. … From 1960, we can say, people accepted Ahmadiyya Qadiani in their thousands, not only from this Indian community, but also Fijian brothers”. Nevertheless, compared with other regions in the world, there has been only a limited increase, and the growth has not been “extraordinarily” large in Fiji (Cheema 2003, interview by author). In the context of missionary proclamation, special emphasis is laid on an appropriate understanding of jihād, that is, “to incline human beings to the creator… we incline human beings back … to spirituality” (Munshi 2003, interview by author).

There are various estimates of the number of converts to AMJ/Fiji: some talk of “400 Fijians converted to Islam, mostly to the Ahmadiyya” (Dass 2003, interview by author), others of 90 to 100 (Reuben 2003a, interview by author), and still others of “isolated cases” and a conversion rate that is “negligible” (Bhagwan 2003, interview by author). Often mention is made of a Fijian village that converted as a whole under its chief to Ahmadiyya Islam (Dass 2003; Reuben 2003b; Cheema 2003, interviews by author). But generally, there is no conversion rate comparable with that to new religious groups in the Christian context.

AMJ/Fiji puts much emphasis on literature: six magazines have been published from 1996 to date, and the Fijian translation of the Qur’an was published after its completion in 1988. Most important, however, are modern media: for Fiji maybe not primarily the Internet, where the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat is presented on an excellent website containing much information and making published texts easily accessible (http://www.alislam.org/), but the use of satellite TV. The satellite programme started by Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat in 1991 was so successful that three years later an independent TV programme, “Muslim Television Ahmadiyya,” was installed. Since 1995 it has been possible to receive this programme in Fiji (if the appropriate dish antennas have been installed) in most cases on or at the mosques, as a very visible symbol of AMJ/Fiji’s openness towards modern communication technology.

By use of a saying of the prophet Muhammad, the category of jihād is even applied to modernization and the utilization of those modern media that are considered helpful and positive from AMJ/Fiji’s perspective: “what is the greatest jihād? Upgrading, modernizing your community”. But there is also an individual dimension to the missionary message of AMJ/Fiji, directed primarily to youth, which is told: “this life has a purpose … and you can’t achieve this purpose until you incline yourself towards the creator. And if they accept this message, then you can advise them. But if they are not ready to listen to you, you can’t force them” (Cheema 2003, interview by author).

Challenges

AMJ/Fiji faces problems similar to those of Qadiani Ahmadis elsewhere. The situation is not as bad as in some countries where they are under extreme pressure, such as Pakistan, but it is not as good as in Canada and other countries, where, for example, there are no restrictions on the travel of Qadiani Ahmadis to Mecca for pilgrimage. Qadiani Ahmadis feel bitterness that mainstream Islam is so discriminatory against them: “The Muslims are