

**A SHORT HISTORY AND GENEALOGY OF AN INDIAN
INDENTURED LABOURER IN GUYANA:**

**HAJI MCDOOM AND HIS DESCENDANTS
1884 – 2008**

First Edition

In memoriam

Shahabudin Mohamed McDoom
December 29th 1945 to March 8th 2008



A proud Muslim, a staunch patriot, and our beloved papa
Indeed to God we belong, and indeed to God we shall return¹

¹ Holy Quran, Surah II, Verse 156

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Introduction

When a young Muslim man from a village in Uttar Pradesh, India stepped off the boat onto the soil of British Guiana in 1884, aged all of twenty-one, he probably had little idea how much further his descendants would eventually travel.² Haji McDoom was one of nearly 239,000 Indians who left the economic distress of nineteenth century India in search of better opportunities and who traveled through the indentured labour system to plantations within the British Empire in need of workers.³ Like many of his compatriots of that era, after Haji McDoom served his five-year term he chose not to return to the land of his birth.⁴ He instead elected to take ten acres of land in Peters Hall, the sugar estate where he had worked, in lieu of his passage home. He married twice.⁵ With his first wife Mariam he fathered four children and then with Mahadaya, or Zhora, he raised another three.⁶ This book records the story of the seven branches of the family that descended from each of these children: Caramat Ally, Sultan Ali, Rojan Saban, Om Kulsum, Altaf Husain, Ahmad Kamal, and Aziman.⁷ Save of course for those who married into the family, all of you mentioned in this book share the genes of Haji McDoom.

² The Guyana National Archives yielded a document (an emigration pass) that indicates this village was called Dargah. This same document provides several other clues as to the identity of this man: (i) his name was recorded as 'Muckdoom'; (ii) his father's name was Jharoo; (iii) his next-of-kin was listed as his brother Chanshaw; (iv) his caste was described as 'Shanee'. There is a complex caste system among India's Muslims as well but my research did not reveal any more information about this particular caste; (v) his geographic origins were listed as Lucknow for the 'Zillah' and Baharai for the 'Pergunnah and Thannah'. 'Zillah' refers to the administrative district, 'Pergunnah' refers to a smaller administrative unit, and 'Thannah' refers to the police district; (vi) he had a birthmark on his right arm and was a mere 4ft 11in tall; (vii) his immigrant number was 23779; and (ix) the name of the ship was the 'Bann'. A transcription of this document is on file with the author.

³ We do not know Haji's first name(s), if indeed he had any. He earned the title 'Haji' after visiting Mecca as a pilgrim and it appears on his headstone. Upon his return he handed the family businesses over to his two eldest sons, Caramat and Sultan. Source: Napha Bacchus (née McDoom). Indentured labour began in 1834 with the transport of Indians to Mauritius following the Emancipation Act that ended slavery within the British Empire. Abuses led to regulation of the practice in 1844, which is also the year in which emigration to British Guiana was first sanctioned.

⁴ Plantation owners wanted the indentured workers to remain as long as possible within the territory and various incentives were created in order to encourage them to do so.

⁵ Haji's first wife, Mariam, also came from Uttar Pradesh, India, but in 1885. Her emigration pass indicates the Zillah was Bareilly, the Pergunnah was Saloon, and the village was Jaico. See footnote two above for a definition of these terms. There is an oral account that the two met on the ship from India and married before it landed. However, as the official records show they traveled in different years (he in 1884, and she in 1885) and on different ships (he on the Bann, and she on the Howrah), this seems unlikely. Haji's second wife, Mahadaya, also from India, was a widower and originally a Hindu. Contrary to a popular story, she was not Mariam's full or half-sister. More about her life can be found later in the book.

⁶ The accurate spelling of names is of course always difficult, especially for the first two generations. However, wherever possible I have relied on official records. For example Caramat Ally McDoom is the spelling given in his British Guiana passport. I list his second brother's (Sultan) middle name as 'Ali' as this is how one of his sons, Shaukat McDoom, believes it was spelled. But I have seen no official record to corroborate this.

⁷ There was in fact an eighth child, Sproston McDoom, a third son from the union with Mariam, who was born after Caramat and before Sultan. Sproston married and had one daughter, Rakyun. All three died, however, at a very early age as a result of an influenza epidemic some time between 1914 and 1921. They were buried in Peters Hall and have no descendants. Sources: Napha Bacchus and Nizam Ali.

I tell this story not out of some exaggerated sense of the family's importance. In several ways this tale would also resonate with the many thousands of Indians whose indentured ancestors chose to settle in Guyana. I tell it simply because it is the story of our particular family.

Haji then had a humble beginning. With the help of his children, his small family businesses did well. Through the rice farm, the grocery store, and a tailoring service the two eldest brothers, Caramat and Sultan, were eventually able to save enough to buy land closer to the capital Georgetown. In 1921 they moved their families further down the East Bank of the Demerara river and settled an area that was to become known as McDoom Village.⁸ Much of the family's early history took place there. The brothers divided the land comprising McDoom Village into lots on which houses for the expanding family were built.⁹ Being staunch Muslims they also built a mosque at the same time that they broke ground. McDoom Mosque stands today.¹⁰ Through these efforts to build a single community, aunts, uncles, and cousins lived and grew up alongside each other. Many were also buried alongside each other in the McDoom cemetery.¹¹ Those alive who remember this time share a special bond.

Haji's entrepreneurial spirit passed on to his children and the McDoom family prospered. As the eldest son by ten years, Caramat assumed primary responsibility for the family businesses. He purchased several important estates on behalf of the family: Mahaicony Ranch in 1931, Hampton Court in 1940, and finally Blankenburg in 1950, the year in which he passed away.¹² On all three estates they grew rice and cattle, whilst

⁸ The land was originally part of the Houston Sugar Plantation.

⁹ The houses were built from a hardwood known as 'greenheart', native to the Guianas and renowned for its durability. Caramat's house was the first to be built and still stands today, though it is half of its original size. Caramat's eldest son, Mohamed Ali McDoom, demolished part of it to build a petrol station for his eldest son, Faizudin McDoom. The station was eventually sold to the Esso Petroleum Company and today, due to its strategic location near the entry to the capital Georgetown, is one of the highest-selling petrol stations in the country. It is also the bane of the current occupants of CA McDoom's house. Sultan's house, affectionately called Kashmir House, was the second to be built, opposite Caramat's. It was destroyed in a fire in October 1944. Conflicting stories exist as to the cause of the fire. Sources: Shaukat McDoom and Khalilul McDoom.

¹⁰ It was the first stone mosque to be built in the country and served the Muslim community within the area. Until it was completed the community prayed inside Caramat's house. The mosque underwent a major renovation in 1951 when it was also handed over to a Board of Trustees. Source: A hand-written history of the mosque written on July 29th 1951 upon completion of the renovation. Copy on file with the author.

¹¹ The McDoom graveyard is listed as a cemetery in the Guyana Land Registry and is located towards the Demerara-river side of the village. Some of the names and dates of birth and death in this book were taken from headstones in the cemetery.

¹² The Mahaicony ranch was originally owned by the British Crown and comprised somewhere between 2000-3000 acres when Caramat was first granted a long-term lease on the land. However, the British government expropriated the land in World War II following the capture of Burma by the Japanese, leaving the family with 300 hundred acres. The British needed the land to make up for the resulting shortfall in rice production. The Mahaicony-Abary Rice Scheme thus became colloquially known as Burma. Hampton Court, purchased from a British plantation owner, comprised rice and coconut estates. Tenant farmers grew rice that the McDoom family then milled. Blankenburg was a purchase of 1200 acres of rice and coconut land in 1950 that caused some controversy within the family as Caramat's mental faculties and financial judgement were at that time in question. When Caramat died in that same year, his eldest son, Mohamed Ali McDoom, and his brother, Sultan, continued to run the family businesses but divisions within the family led to a final sale of all the lands and a financial settlement made among the family in the late 1950s. The saw-mill was sold to the Fredericks

Hampton Court and Blankenburg were also coconut plantations. Along with saw-milling, rice-milling, and timber businesses in and around McDoom Village, these agricultural holdings were significant assets in the family's now considerable portfolio. Family members were appointed to run the various operations within this mini-empire. Caramat also met with success in the political sphere. He was nominated to Guyana's Legislative Council and became President of the Rice Producers' Association as well as a member of the Rice Marketing Board's Executive Committee. These were influential positions. However, as with all empires, this one experienced a rise and decline. Divisions within the family persuaded Caramat's eldest son and the new *pater familias*, Mohamed Ali McDoom, to make a settlement and sell the landholdings after his father's death. By this time much of the family had already moved away from McDoom Village for various reasons.¹³ But the sell-off of the estates, coupled with an unfavourable political and economic climate following independence in 1966, prompted much of the remainder to seek new opportunities overseas.

With the passage of time the family has of course expanded but it has also diversified. Whilst still mainly Muslim and of Indian extraction, it is now a kaleidoscope of other cultures, faiths, and ethnicities. British, Canadian, and American cultures have particularly impressed themselves upon the family. From the standpoint of religion, Islam remains pre-eminent but Hinduism and to a lesser extent Christianity has each now also become part of the family's complex weave. However, the family has become most diverse ethnically. There is no simple way to capture this heterogeneity. But by way of example in my own immediate family we are happy to count individuals of Japanese and Arab ethnic origin. This diversity is of course a strength. It is also reflected in the myriad of names within the family. Thus, although the story begins with Haji McDoom, we as a family are far from being only McDooms. Indeed, as you will see from the statistics section, the McDooms are in fact in a minority.¹⁴

For those of you who are reading this and who belong to the generation that, like me, was born outside of Guyana, you may not feel the same ties to your extended family as the generation that grew up together. You may perhaps have only a superficial interest in knowing this history and in this tree. This is probably the inevitable consequence of social mobility. Just as our common ancestor Haji McDoom left India to seek a better life for himself, so too have many of us emigrated in search of better opportunities. The family has in short fragmented. It may be then that you feel closer to a different blood line in your family: your mother's relatives instead of your father's, or indeed the contrary. Having spent most of my childhood and adolescence in London, England, I too belong to this

family, the Mahaicony ranch to Edgitan Udit (spelling unconfirmed), Hampton Court to Kayman Sankar, and Blankenburg to KS Jagan. Source: Shaukat McDoom.

¹³ By way of example, Caramat himself moved to Brickdam, Georgetown, to live with his second wife, Khairool Abdul, leaving his house in McDoom Village to his eldest son, Mohamed Ali McDoom. Sultan, Caramat's brother, moved his family's residence to Church Street in the capital Georgetown after his home in McDoom Village burned down in 1944. The family first lived with Caramat whilst looking for a new home. Altaf Husain, Haji's third son, went to India in 1930 where he studied Islam to return to Guyana twenty-one years later (when he learned of his brother Caramat's passing) as a 'Hafiz' (an individual who has memorized the Quran in its entirety). Rojan Saban, Haji's eldest daughter, married at the age of 15 and moved to Vreed-en-hoop, on the West Coast of Guyana, with her husband. An Kulsum, Haji's youngest daughter married in McDoom Village and then moved to Farm, further up the East Bank of the Demerara river.

¹⁴ A little less than 15% of the people named in this book carried and continue to carry the last name McDoom.

generation that grew up disconnected from the wider family. Yet through writing this book I have come to appreciate the rich heritage that we have in common as well as the importance of knowing that I belong somewhere. Despite our differences we are still one family. And we have all come a long way since Haji McDoom's humble, ten-acre farm. Nonetheless it is my hope that those of you who belong to my generation may also feel this curiosity to understand this one piece in the complex puzzle of who we each are, where we came from, and how we got here.

This project began as a family tree but has evolved into something more. The document you hold also represents a short history, a contact directory, and hopefully - and perhaps most importantly - an opportunity to re-connect with long-lost family members and to discover new ones. You will see that I have included postal addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses for as many of you as I could find and who were willing to share them.

The possibilities of what may come from knowing how you are related to each of the many other individuals in this Family Book are really limited by your own imagination. For some of you it may be enough just to know that there is a written record of the genealogy. Or else you may simply be curious to learn more about your cousins. It is endlessly fascinating to recognize traits, both physical and otherwise, in others who share your genes: linguistic dexterity, musical talents, and mathematical aptitudes to name but a few. But I suspect there may be some of you who may seek more. Perhaps you have collaboration in mind. A business opportunity beckons. Or else maybe you are willing to mentor younger members of the family. The range of professional skills within the family is impressive: doctors, lawyers, professors, dentists, accountants, and journalists abound. I hope this book may enable all of this synergy.

I should say a word about the name McDoom. Of course it has been a source of endless amusement for even well-meaning friends and strangers unfamiliar with its heritage in Guyana. The name of course was not originally McDoom. It is in all likelihood the anglicized transliteration that a British emigration agent in Calcutta recorded in a colonial register before Haji set sail for new shores.¹⁵ In fact the name could originally have been one of several possibilities: (i) Makhdoom (Arabic root letters Khay, Daal, Meem). This is connoted with the idea of serving; (ii) Maqdoom (Arabic root letters Qaf, Daal, Meem). The root meaning is to offer or to present; or (iii) Maktoum (Arabic root letter Kaf, Tay, Meem) meaning to conceal or to suppress (and is also the name of the ruling family of the United Arab Emirates). I list some of the other suggestions in the footnote below.¹⁶ Indeed a similar-sounding name is quite common in the Asian subcontinent, particularly in Pakistan

¹⁵ However, the spelling 'Muckdoom' appears on Haji's immigrant record in the Guyana National Archives and on his son's, Altaf Husain, amended birth certificate as the spelling of the father's name (interestingly Altaf's original birth certificate gives his own name as Usman Ali. It nonetheless re-affirms his father's name as Muckdoom.) Yet Altaf Husain's own family name is spelled as 'McDoom' on the same birth certificate. It is possible then that the name only came to be spelled as 'McDoom' with the second generation, Haji's children, when the family was already in Guyana.

¹⁶ Other possibilities include: (i) Makhtoum meaning 'stamped' in Arabic; (ii) Magdoum, the name of a particular Arab tribe or umma; and (iii) Maqdoum (Arabic root letters Qaf, Daal, Meem) a military rank that is no longer in use.

and Bangladesh. Nonetheless the unique spelling of the name has made those of Haji's descendants who carry it immediately recognizable and readily distinguishable from others.¹⁷

Some of you may also wonder why I have taken the time to put this book together. I began it partly out of personal curiosity and largely out of simple opportunity. I had taken a leave of absence from my Ph.D for several months to look after my father, Shahabudin Mohamed McDoom, who was ill in London. But I conclude it now in his memory. Papa passed away on March 8th 2008. It is not out of posthumous exaggeration that I write he was *extremely* proud of and loyal to his extended family. My sister and I in fact often teased him about this and sometimes even became frustrated with him for it. I would like to dedicate this tree to him. As the generation that was born in Guyana ages and passes on, so too fades the knowledge of the family's history. Just as our ancestral ties to India dissolved with the passing of Haji's generation, so too might our links to Guyana and to each other. I hope, and it is a hope that papa would have shared, that this tree may help stem the tide of time and distance on our common heritage.

This project has involved many people. Over the course of it I have appreciated the opportunity to hear all the stories, both tragic and comic, that people have shared with me. Thank you. But a number deserve special mention. These individuals showed an enthusiasm for this project that went beyond a willingness to provide information merely about their own immediate family members. The success of this project depended on their interest in the wider, extended family. Every family has such individuals and I was happy to connect with them in this endeavour. A special thank you then goes out to Alyah Mann, Ansari Ramjohn, Elias Hague, Faizal McDoom Jr., Farhana Ali (née Nasir), Ferial Mohamed (née McDoom), Ijaz Rahaman, Imtiaz McDoom-Gaffoor, Iqbal Gajraj, Jean Ally, Khalilul McDoom, Laila McDoom (née Chan), Leila Rookmin McDoom, Liaquat Ally, Manzoor McDoom, Meezaun Singh (née McDoom), Moenudin McDoom Jr., Mohamed Omer Abdelati, Murtaz Shaffeeullah, Napha Bacchus (née McDoom), Nilofar Singh (née Rahaman), Opheera Nasir, Opheera Meezaun McDoom, Rayaaz Khan, Raza Ally, Rehana McDoom (née Bacchus), Safoora Bacchus, Salima Khan, Shakira Nasir, Shalimar Sankar, Shanaz Sattaur (née Mohamed), Sharisa Mohamed, Shaukat McDoom, Shazeda Beharry (née Sankar), Siyaada Alli, Sophia Tapp (née Hague), Taza McDoom, Zabeida Shaffeeullah (née Khan), and Zelina Mann (née McDoom). And finally, thank you to Rachel for her support throughout papa's passing and the writing of this book.

I have tried wherever possible to publish the most reliable information and to verify information.¹⁸ But inevitably there will be errors. Please do not be offended if someone is missing, their relationship to others misdescribed, or their name misspelled. I see this project as a continuous one and I welcome your corrections. The tree has no single owner

¹⁷ In addition to the McDooms from Guyana, there is also a line of McDooms that grew up in the islands in the Caribbean. One hypothesis is that Haji McDoom had a brother who also traveled from India but settled in Jamaica. If the two brothers had indeed passed through the hands of the same emigration agent at the same time in Calcutta, this would explain why their names share the same unusual spelling. The two lines may thus be related. Source Tricia McDoom, descendant of the Jamaican McDooms.

¹⁸ I circulated an electronic draft with all names and dates to nearly 200 individuals. I received many, many corrections - for which I am very grateful - but I cannot be certain that 100% of the information was ultimately verified.

and you are all invited to share in its evolution.¹⁹ At the time that I write it counts nearly 1000 individuals over six generations. Most of these have of course now passed on. But I look to others now to help record the new departures and arrivals. I also hope that one day someone may trace our relatives in India. The task seems daunting following the country's partition in 1947 and the mass migration of 14.5 million Hindus and Muslims across the newly-formed borders with then West and East Pakistan. Yet others have been successful.²⁰ In any case I am happy to have been able to capture some of the history from Guyana onwards and I hope that this first edition of the Family Book serves as an incentive and starting point for the generations ahead of us to continue recording it.

Omar Shahabudin McDoom²¹
April 25th, 2008, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

¹⁹ This book contains much private and sensitive data. After hearing concerns from several family members, I took the decision not to make all of this information available electronically. I instead printed an individually-numbered series of books and entrusted them to one representative from each distinct family line, usually an individual from the fourth generation. I would ask then that you please do not make photocopies of the data (or post them online) and instead contact me if you wish another copy for your family. The book was also a labour of love. I would very much appreciate it if it be passed on as a book, and not merely a set of photocopies.

²⁰ One individual known to the author traveled to India and corroborated the existence of her ancestor in the village by checking local land records for that time. There is also a private service offered by a man in Delhi, India, to the descendants of indentured Indians who seek their ancestors' families.

²¹ I may be reached by email at callomar@gmail.com or else by telephone at +1 202 470 2439 if there are corrections or queries.