



The World Federation of KSIMC  
SENIORS ADVISORY BOARD

## *E-Book of 12 Personalities*

*February 2006 / Muharram 1427*  
*(Printable Version)*

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*"And as for those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them in Our ways, and Allah is most surely with the doers of good." (Holy Qur'an, 29:69)*



*The Apostle said to Jesus: "O spirit of God! With whom should we keep company? He said, "he the sight of whom reminds you of God, the speech of whom increases your knowledge and the works of whom makes you desirous of the other world."*



*O Allah! Award dignity and peace of mind to old people. (Imam Al-Mahdi, as)*

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## *Opening* by Tahera Kassamali

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Human beings pass through different stages in life. Each stage of childhood, youth, maturity, and old age, has its potential for growth and ability. At each stage the human being plays a different role in society and has unique contributions to offer others. The period of old age is when he reaches the zenith of his potential. Years of growth and maturity, coupled with a plethora of experiences, enable him to make the most useful contribution to society. Old age may be the time when physical prowess declines but the emotional and spiritual powers reach their peak. That is why the Holy Prophet (s) says: *An old person among his people is like a Prophet among his community.*

The history of Islam is resplendent with great personalities who have contributed much in their old age. Strong believers like Abu Dharr al-Ghaffari did not let their age hinder them from carrying out their responsibilities towards Islam, even in the face of harsh opposition. Many of the companions of Imam Husayn (a) were advanced in years, but their valor was outstanding. It was these aged companions who insisted that even if Allah granted them many lives, they would be ready to sacrifice all of them for Islam.

A vivid example of an aged but strong personality is the revered companion of Imam Husayn (a), Habib Ibn Mazahir, who sacrificed his life at Karbala at the age of seventy-five. Habib was the childhood friend of Imam Husayn (a). He had seen the Holy Prophet (s) and has been recorded by Shaykh al-Mufid to be among the disciples of Imam Ali (a). When Hazrat Ali moved the capital to Kufa, Habib also moved to Kufa. He became a well known and respected citizen of Kufa. The first letter which Imam Husayn(a) received inviting him to Kufa was signed by Habib.

After Muslim bin Aqueel was killed, Kufa was sealed off. No one could get in or out of the city without the Governor's permission. Habib was heartbroken because he could not join the Imam. He did not even know where Imam was until he received a letter from Imam telling him he had reached Karbala. Habib slipped out of Kufa and rushed to Karbala where Imam greeted him with great affection. On that fateful day of Ashura, this aged companion sacrificed his life for Imam Husayn (a). He is buried near the Imam, being on guard for him in death as he was in life.

The Khoja community has been blessed with many seniors who have contributed their services to the growth and progress of the community. These older members of our community have identified and addressed important issues and have passed on the teachings of Islam to the younger generations. This book is a compilation of the lives of some of these great members of our community.

## *Introduction* WHY BOTHER WITH WHAT HAS BEEN? By Hasnain Walji

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Numbering less than 150,000 souls, the percentage of prominent personalities produced by the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri Community, who have impacted the Shia society at large, is quite remarkable. Amongst the most illustrious of them is the founder of Pakistan, Qaide Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

This collection of 12 personalities, from Haji Najji to Mulla Asgher is but a beginning of the long process of capturing our history through personalities, spanning some 150 years. It was the likes of Haji Dewji Jamal and Haji Khalfan Ratansi amongst others, who under the guidance of Ayatullah Zainul Abedin Mazandarani and the tireless efforts of Mulla Kadar Husain Karballai, who were instrumental in our community for accepting the pristine teachings of the Ahlul Bait (AS). There are many unsung heroes who had to undergo considerable difficulties in this process of finding the true path. There are also, martyrs like Lalji Sajan, Hirji Alarakhya and Killu Khataw who made the ultimate sacrifice during the turmoil that ensued our forefathers who sought to be on the true path.

As we explore the lives of these personalities, one will ask: "given all of the demands that confront us today and as we try to live in the present rather than anticipating what is yet to come, then why bother with what has been?" The answer to this simple: because we virtually must - to gain access to the laboratory of human experience. For instance, how did a community that has almost lost a language that it can call its own, which has never had a land it could call its own, subjected to a multitude of conflicting influences through different cultures and that has had a nomadic existence from continent to continent, managed to survive for so long as a homogeneous unit? Surely we must have some interesting and invaluable lessons in self preservation.

What is it that we can we learn from our past to preserve this for the future? A closer look at social, intellectual, political and cultural events in history will highlight the pattern in which our institutions and organizations endeavored to cater for the needs of the community. It will reveal the thought processes of the personalities of the time in dealing with conflicting forces within the larger society. Such a study will enable the community to understand the actions of the present and future leadership in combating such forces, whether these are in the form of an alien set of values or dividing elements in the name of Islam.

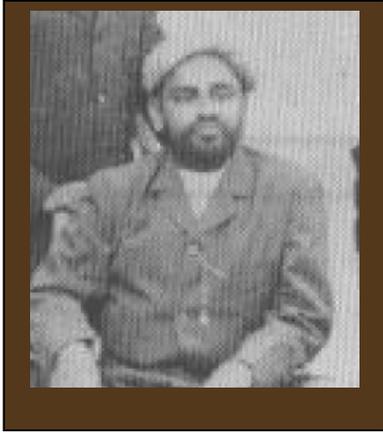
Having been a keen observer of the development of our Community for almost a quarter of a century, I can not but help recall the quote by Angeles Arien's: *"People who share a common direction and sense of community, can get where they're going quicker and easier because they are traveling in the thrust of one another."*

Today, more than ever, we need to ponder over our history as we look forward. For example, if the community were faced with similar choices that were made by Lalji Sajan and Hirji Alarakhya, where in the interests of preservation of its values and beliefs they had to knowingly sacrifice lives, relationships as well as material possessions, would we too remain steadfast and make that conscious choice? In the modern context, spread across the globe, faced with the issues of globalization, informatization and pluralism how well can we manage to remain intact in our faith and values?

It is this kind of evaluation that will enable us to deal with contemporary challenges and plan for the future. In the absence of such evaluation, we will be relegated to becoming mere joy riders on a merry-go-round controlled by outside influences. This then is the value proposition of this dynamic publication by the Seniors Advisory Board (SAB). The concept of this publication, the *Book of Personalities* is the brainchild of its Chairman, Dr. Akber Mithani, and I commend him and the SAB for their efforts in initiating this project, which will one day be a compendium of the effective personalities of the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri Community.

## Profile 1: Haji Mohamedjaffer Sheriff Dewji

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By: Syed Saeed Akhter Rizvi

Birthdate: 1889/1306

Deathdate: 1960/1379

Dewji Jamal, the grandfather of Alhaj Mulla Mohamedjaffer Sheriff Dewji, was a leader of the Khoja community who openly disassociated himself from Aga Khan I as a result of which the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri community came into being in Kutchh, Kathiawad, Mumbai and Karachi.

Sheriff Dewji, the son of Dewji Jamal, gave full backing to his father in this movement. He had three sons: Mohamedjaffer Sheriff Dewji, Husein Sheriff Dewji and Mohamedali Sheriff Dewji – who were residing in Zanzibar. In 1922, when Madrassa-tul-Waizeen was established in Lucknow, India, and Preachers were being sent to Africa, these brothers undertook to look after the allocation, accommodation, programs and welfare of these preachers.

On his own volition, Haji Mohameadjaffer learnt the languages of Urdu, Farsi and Arabic (later on English also). Taking into consideration the welfare of the community, several times he traveled at his own expense throughout East Africa and visited Madagascar also. He recited Majalis in Gujarati – albeit reciting Masaeb in Urdu. His lectures were thus very effective and were very well grasped especially by the ladies and children.

The process of reformation was however not restricted by him to delivering lectures only. Taking into consideration the needs and requirements of the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri community, he wrote and published 26 books in Gujarati of which 4 were in the form of Textbooks namely: 'Sham-e-Hidayat' and 'Diniyat parts 1, 2 and 3' - which by the year 1976 were in use in almost all the Gujarati Madrassahs. In addition to the above, publications entitled: 'Al-Musawat', 'Tohfah-e-Rizviyyah', 'Tohfah-e-Jafferiyah', 'Rooyat-e-Hilal', 'Al-Mahasin' and 'Imam-e-Zamana' are noteworthy. The book 'Imam-e-Zamana' has been translated into Urdu and published by Al-Jawad Book Depot, Banaras, India. Other important books written and published by him are: 'Shaheed-e-Islam', 'Yadgar-e-Husein', 'Dalil-ul-Zaireen', 'Najasat-ul-Mushrikeen', 'Rooh (Aatma)' and 'Kamli – Waale'.

Mulla Mohamedjaffer was born in 1889 in Zanzibar and died over there in 1960. He resided in Mombasa, Kenya, for quite some time where he carried out his business. Whilst in Mombasa, he established Husayni Night School, also known as Madrasah-tul-Faiz-e-Husayni (*now known as Husayni Madrasah*). In December 1959, the writer happened to meet Mulla Mohamedjaffer for few hours on board the ship 'State of Bombay' on way from Mombasa to Zanzibar. View of the fact that he had read my articles published in 'Al-Jawad' magazine, he recognized me the moment I introduced my name to him and he greeted me with great warmth and respect. Thereafter we remained in touch via correspondence till his expiry a few months thereafter.

Haji Saheb left behind two notable children – a daughter who was the mother of Alhaj Mulla Asgharali M. M. Jaffer and a son Haji Ali Mohamedjaffer Sheriff who was my close friend and an ardent supporter of Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania, and, when he migrated to Mombasa, Kenya, he served Bilal Muslim Mission of Kenya with utmost dedication.

## Profile 2: Haji Gulamhusein Valimohamed Dharsi (Salsabil)

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By: Syed Saeed Akhter Rizvi

Birthdate: 1887/1304

Deathdate: 1961/1380

Haji GulamHusein Valimohamed Dharsi (who later on became famous by the name of 'Salsabil') was born in Zanzibar in the year 1887. Initially he grew up under the care of his maternal uncle Haji Saleh Hassan. He obtained his Primary education in one of the best schools in Zanzibar where he learnt the languages of English and Gujarati. With perseverance, he acquired proficiency in Urdu, Farsi and Arabic languages.

Thereafter, he joined his father in the family business of cloth merchants. In 1923, upon return from Ziyarat to Iraq, his father breathed his last. Mulla GulamHusein remained in business with his brothers up to the year 1930.

He developed a personal library which consisted of about two thousand books at the time of his death. He was a permanent subscriber of the monthly magazines: 'Islah' (Khajwah), 'Shia' (Khajwah), 'Al-Waez' (Lucknow) and 'Muslim Review' (Lucknow). Using the pen name of 'Salsabil', he wrote important articles on various topics in Gujarati and English and got them published in the magazines: 'Rah-e-Najat', 'Noor-e-Iman', 'Chaud-vhin-Sadi' and 'Muslim Review'.

In 1942 he started a monthly publication on religious topics under the name of 'Salsabil'. Haji Mohamed Jivraj (*Mahrumbha*) was appointed the editor. Most of the articles appearing in this publication were written by Mulla GulamHusein. With his death in 1961, the publication ceased to exist.

Haji saheb was the editor of the weekly newspaper "Zanzibar Samachar" from 1938 till the time of his death. He had deep affinity towards Azadari and showed keen interest in developing Islamic courses and propagation of Islam. He developed contacts and friendship with the leading literary and religious figures of the time which included: Allamah Kantoori, Haji Gulam Ali Ismail (Haji Naji), and Muayyan-ul-Islam ValiMohamed Moamin

He authored and published the following notable books in Gujarati:

1. Biography of Allamah Kantoori
2. History of the Mausoleums of Kerbala
3. Islam and the Caliphs of Islamic Government
4. The Outstanding Memoirs of Ahl-ul-Bayt
5. Shaheed-e-Kerbala
6. Biography of Imam Jaffer Sadiq (a.s.)
7. The Famous Prophets of the World
8. Chehlum

## Profile 3: Haji Gulamali Haji Ismail (Haji Naji)

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By: Hasnain Walji  
Birthdate: 1864/1297  
Deathdate: 1942/1362

“From a third class compartment of the train alighted a five foot tall person with a black cap, long beard on a radiant handsome face. He was wearing country style shoes and had a walking stick in one hand, a bag and a basket in another.” Moonis Vartejwala describes his arrival at one of his extensive visits to remote towns and villages of Kathiawar, as this unassuming great muballigh of the Khoja Community traveled delivering sermons and guiding the community toward the path of Ahlul Bait (AS).

It is said that during the visits he was fond of exhorting his listeners to repeat the Salawat loudly and the he would pray: “O Allah ! may I live to see a mosque and an Imambargah in this town, and see my fellow men offer prayers. O Allah! May I see a madressa here – Amin” Not only were his prayers answered during his lifetime; I believe that it is these prayers that have blessed the Khoja Shia Ithnaasheri Community with the tawfeeq to establish mosques, imamabargahs and madressa around the globe.

To crown his sincerity and erudition, this savant emerging from the nascent Khoja Shia Ithnaasheri Community, popularly known as Haji Naji, had unique qualities of leadership, with a clear vision and a goal. It was not easy to practice the faith in those days, let alone preach. His mentor and teacher, Mulla Qader Husain Karbalai had been threatened with his life and three people had to give their lives for accepting the Jaffari faith. Yet this lonely traveler, against all odds, carried his mission with persistence and tenacity.

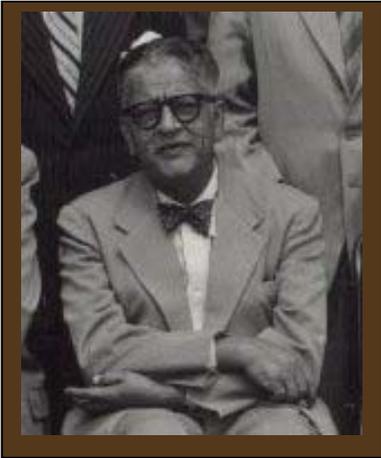
Gifted with persuasive oratory and a lucid pen, his sermons were simple but touched hearts of men. Through the columns of *Rahenajat*, which remains an instrument of tabligh even today, ably maintained by his grandson and great grandson, and the hundreds of books in Gujarati, his words have transcended generations as much as oceans.

In addition to towns and villages of Kutch and Kathiawad, his *Dua no Majmuo* and Gujarati *tafseer* of the Quran are still read in Africa, Europe and North America. Paying tribute, Mulla Asgherali M.M. Jaffer, another towering figure of the Community writes “ It is a known fact that that a number of Khojas converted from Ismailis to the Shia Ithnaasheri faith after their arrival in East Africa. Thus one can safely conclude that most of these Khojas were novices in complete sense of the word: new to the place, new to the faith. .... The only source of guidance and constant contact with religious knowledge was *Rahe Najaat*, which came regularly every month”

Just as his '*Majmuo*' runs parallel in importance to *Mafathul Jinan*, in many a Khoja home, his translation of *Meraju Sa'adah* is thought to have had major impact in the lives of many of our brethren in East Africa at the time. Having avidly read the translation in my youth, I can very much relate to that. It would not be an overstatement to record that his was amongst the first and perhaps the foremost contribution for the preservation and promotion of the Shia Ithnaasheri faith in the Khoja Society in its early days when the Community needed it most. Over a century after his birth, Allama Haji Naji lives on, through the continual advancement and progress of the worldwide Khoja Community as a diligent and a practicing Shia Ithnaasheri community. That is the greatest living tribute we can pay him.

## Profile 4: Habib Kassamali (H.K.) Jaffer

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Birthdate: February 4, 1890

Deathdate: May 20, 1973

Habib Kassamali Jaffer, or HK, as he was popularly known, was born in Pangani in the then German colony of Tanganyika on February 4, 1890. The family subsequently moved to Mombasa, Kenya where he completed his metric education and then began working with the Standard Bank. He rapidly rose to a position of trust and responsibility, qualities that became synonymous with his name in his later career.

In 1921 he decided to take up a career in insurance and the following year moved to Uganda to establish an agency of The South British Insurance Company Ltd, for which he subsequently became the principal representative in that territory. His energy, integrity and meticulous attention to detail led to rapid growth of his insurance business, ultimately reaching the point where his agency was among the largest personal insurance agencies in the world.

In 1935 HK was appointed to the Legislative Council of Uganda where he served until its reconstitution in 1962, when Uganda achieved independence. During his time on the Council he achieved the dignity of the title, "Father of the House". In 1947, in recognition of his services to Uganda as legislator and businessman, he was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) and in 1953, in further recognition of his eminence in Uganda's affairs, he went to London to represent Uganda at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

HK was also a philanthropist and maintained several families on a monthly basis. In his position as member of the Uganda Legislative Council, he was paramount in obtaining the land where the Kampala Imambara and Masjid stand today, for a peppercorn sum of 1 shilling. In addition he built and donated the Masjid in Jinja, which still is in use today. He and his wife, Rukiyabai, began the tradition of the Ashura night Juloos in Jinja, which set off from his residence in Bell Avenue every year, until 1957, when the venue was move to his brother's house.

Following the partition of the Indian sub-continent into the separate states of Pakistan and India in 1947, the Independence was celebrated by both the Muslim and Hindu communities. The Muslims celebrated at the Jamia Mosque in Jinja and to demonstrate that there was no animosity or disunity within the small Asian Community in Jinja, HK lead a procession of Muslims from the Jamia Mosque to the Indian Recreation Club, where the Hindus were celebrating, to congratulate them. In appreciation and reciprocation of this gesture by the Muslims, Inder Singh Gill led a delegation to the Jamia mosque to show unity and celebrate with the Muslims.

H K Jaffer had 3 bungalows adjoining the Jinja Imambara, which he had built as an investment for his wife, Rukiyabai. These were repossessed by his family from the Departed Asian Property Custodian Board in 1993 and have been given to the Shia community for the housing of the students of the Jinja Hawza to this day.

HK will long be remembered for his contribution to the growth of commerce in East Africa and for his ready assistance in cases where there was need for his sound advice or material sustenance. He left this world on Sunday May 20, 1973, survived by his widow and two sons, Sultan and Anwar, and three daughters, Marzia, Nargis, and Zainab.

## Profile 5: Al-Haj Mulla Asgherali M.M. Jaffer

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By: Hassan A.M. Jaffer & Sibtain Panjwani

Birthdate: April 14, 1937

Deathdate: March 21, 2000

Mulla Asghar was the first president of the World Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities. Born in Mombasa, Kenya in November 1937, Mulla Saheb was the eldest son of Mulla M.M. Jaffer. A self taught man, he was internationally recognized by the 'ulama and the public for his depth of religious knowledge and personal piety. A prolific writer and an outstanding orator, with a very approachable personality, he always had time for anyone, young and old, who approached

him for any reason whatsoever. Fluent in Arabic, English, Farsi, Urdu, Kiswahili and his mother tongue of Gujarati, he was equally at ease communicating with scholars, intellectuals, poets and the learned from any corner of the Muslim world, as well as retaining the common touch with the man in the street.

For the last two decades of his life, Mulla Asgher lived in London, England. However, during his youth, he was active in a number of social activities including school debates where he often led his team in inter-school debating competitions. In addition, he showed great interest in the educational welfare of students as he devoted his free time to coaching classes for primary and secondary students.

In 1963, Mulla played a pivotal role in launching an aid campaign (Zanzibar Relief Fund) to provide assistance to the victims of the aftermath of the Zanzibar Revolution. He witnessed firsthand this uprising and was personally involved in assessing the plight of the people. Crisis for the Community were apparently not few and far between. After Zanzibar, there were problems in Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, and Madagascar - culminating in the mass exodus of Asians from Uganda in 1972. All in all, the Africa Federation played a vital and often silent role. Throughout, Mulla Asgher, in his capacity, either as Hon. Secretary, Vice President or as the President of the Africa Federation, was at the helm of such endeavors.

During the period from the 1980's and beyond, when Islam within the UK and elsewhere in Europe was often depicted as adversarial and threatening, Mulla Saheb was able to present Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, in a manner that brought understanding and accommodation between people of different faiths. History will judge this profound role, of spreading the message of the Ahlulbait (a.s), as a force of good at a time of major uncertainty due to the distressing displacements of our own community from Uganda. This displaced and deprived community settled in Europe and North America; an event that may prove to be of benefit in the Islamic religious awakening in the West.

The displaced Khoja Shia Ithna Asheries from Uganda arrived in the UK in 1972 carrying very little with them. They had to leave behind much of what they had owned. They were soon facing new challenges in their new environment. It was here that Marhum Mullasaheb's presence in Europe provided the necessary guidance and direction to progress. Imambadas, masjids and madressas needed to be established at a rapid pace in order to prevent unIslamic influences to creep within and divert our vulnerable community members. Work to this end began and soon centres at Peterborough, Birmingham, Leicester and

London (Hammersmith) were acquired which functioned as Imambaras. That was just the beginning.

Marhum Mullasaheb's leadership did not limit itself to the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri community in its services. Many Shia Ithna Asheries from India, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq settled in the UK, found themselves faced with similar problems as our own community. Through the WF, he helped many such communities to set up centres that have become the nucleus of their own community. Many centres now exist in London, the Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

He did not stop just at Shias. He was instrumental in advocating co-operation with all Muslims. Under his leadership, the WF has become a national member of the Muslim Council of Britain and is playing its role in dealing with problems and injustices faced by all Muslims. And, he did not draw the line at Muslims either. He became involved with Interfaith, a group that has representatives from all major faith groups in the UK. Today, because of his timely guidance, the WF is recognised as a key Muslim organisation in the UK.

Under his leadership, the WF assisted in setting up numerous Islamic centres. It is not bold to say that his leadership has gone some way in keeping our own community united and has helped us pave the way for establishing links with other Shia communities. For, the WF has become involved and has co-operated with other Muslim organisations and it has affiliated with groups that represent all types of religion to explain the message of the Ahlulbait (a.s) He became a beacon amongst many in the West for rekindling the Islamic faith from within the Muslims, consolidating and then entrenching a spiritual foundation based on the teaching and direction given to us by the Holy prophet (s.a.w). As a result, one observes the presence of an Islamic identity having the soul of Islam within it. This was his legacy to the Muslim community in the West.

Following the horrid experience of 4 months of his confinement in Iraq along with his wife, Mulla applied himself to bring up a new breed of Western educated religious instructors to impart religious education to our children. His sermons in English preceding the Urdu talks and the various lectures in English and Gujarati speak for themselves. He also conducted various refresher courses for potential Madrasah teachers.

## *Profile 6:* Haji Abdulla Kanji

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By: Hasnain Walji  
Birthdate: 1881  
Deathdate: 1944

Born in Kutch, Bhuj (India) in 1881, Haji Abdulla Kanji was well known amongst the elders as "Bapu". A pioneer of Mombassa and a passionate philanthropist, Haji Abdulla first arrived in Mombassa in 1902 on a sailing dhow along with other Indians. He was soon to make important contributions to this budding city, leaving a legacy for years to come.

Soon after arriving in Mombassa, Haji Abdulla became a successful merchant along with his brother, Bandali Kanji. As his family grew in number, he became more established in the business world - setting up and managing a flourishing real estate company and import-export business until his death in August 1944 at the age of 63.

A visionary person, with great hopes for the future of Mombassa, Haji Abdulla was instrumental in shaping this new and growing community. He made intelligent decisions that were based on ethics and morality rather than financial and self-serving. He believed in equitable allocation of business commodities and equal distribution of wealth. He imported products and shared them with other businessmen within and outside the community with the precondition that the selling price of goods remain the same without undercutting on price.

Haji Abdulla invested much of his savings in purchasing land and building residential homes and commercial properties. With this background and experience, a great deal of the city's planning and construction was done under his personal supervision. Interestingly enough, the road comprising of houses which he built was named Abdulla Kanji Road (now known as Tewa Road off Moi Avenue).

Always concerned about the welfare of others, Abdulla Kanji was an individual who benefited the people. His concern for the youth of the community was no doubt genuine as he sourced employment opportunities for them in the local shipping companies and banks through his many contacts. For those who were struggling financially and could not afford housing, he offered them free accommodation. In September 1926, he along with his associate, Marhum Fazalbhai Ladak Shivji donated a Musafarkhana.

In his lifetime, Haji Abdulla earned the nickname "Bwana Judge" as he was well known and respected for resolving disputes of all sorts. While he never took any official position in the community, leaders and elders always sought advice from him. Moreover, he always remained in the close company of Aalims – often hosting them and taking religious advice from them. In the community, he was well known for continually upholding principles and ideals without reservation and his charitable contributions to various communities were in confidence.

When Haji Abdulla left this world, the legacy that he left behind remained in the hearts of those whom he touched. Prior to his funeral and on the way to the Kabrastan, his coffin was brought to a halt three times by other communities and garlanded with shawls as a mark of respect. Today, Haji Abdulla's family continues his legacy in various ways around the world. Marhum's positive work and message is still echoed by elders within and outside the community.

## *Profile 7:* **Haji Gulamhusein Nasser Lakha**

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By: Hasnain Walji  
Birthdate: 1912  
Deathdate: ?

Marhum Haji Gulamhusein Lakha was born in 1912 and from his early youth devoted a lot of his time, with dedication, to community activities. He took active interest in identifying the needs and implementing solutions for the benefit of our community.

He was the President of Ithna-asheri Union in Mombasa in 1945. With his friend, Marhum Haji Alimohamed Jaffer and others he was involved in the drafting of the Constitution for The Africa Federation and Supreme Council of Jamaats in Africa. He was among the pioneers in the establishment of the Africa Federation of Jamats and was Hon. Secretary from 1950 to 1959 with Marhum Haji A. H. Nurmohamed as the President. He made outstanding contributions in the fields of education, welfare and the establishment of the administration machinery during his term. He spent most of his evenings and weekends doing the work for the benefit of the community. In 1948, he arranged for the first ever Hajj travel by Air through B.O.A.C Airlines to facilitate travel for Hujjaj who normally had to undergo arduous long journeys by sea.

On a personal level he started work in his youth as a clerk and reached the highest level in management as the Manager for Mitchell Cotts, a multinational firm based in Kenya, during the colonial times. During his tenure in Mitchell Cotts he helped a lot of the community members to get employment within the firm.

He was able to achieve both in his personal life and for the community through his personal integrity, personal charm, hard work, perseverance in the face of obstacles and eloquence. He was of an amicable nature and had strong feelings for the community, of which he was very proud.

## *Profile 8:* Mulla Ahmed Abdulrasul Muhammad Lakha

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By: Hasnain Walji  
Birthdate: 1901  
Deathdate: 1989

Marhum Mulla Ahmed Lakha was one of the distinguished and pre-eminent personalities of his era. He was a moving orator, an accomplished industrialist, a dedicated social servant and a pioneer in the advancement of education for both boys and girls. Above all else, he was a long-standing zakir of Imam Hussein (a.s) for over sixty years. In recognition of the changing needs of the community, he was one of the pioneers in making the transition for majalis recitation from Urdu to Gujarati.

Mulla Ahmed Lakha was born in Zanzibar in 1901. Upon completing secular schooling, he joined his father's business, Lakha Kanji & Company (established in 1775), whilst also pursuing studies in religion, Urdu, Farsi and Arabic. Mulla performed Hajj in 1921 and was amongst the last Khojas to have witnessed the zarihs in Janatul Baqi, over the holy graves of Bibi Fatema (a.s) and the four Imams (a.s).

In 1920, Mulla Ahmed married Sugrabai Kassamali Alibhai Somji. His two daughters, Zainab Dadoo and Zehra Nasser were among the first women in the community to have completed high school education with the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC). They were contributors to the community both in East Africa and in London and are buried in the Watford cemetery, London. Like his father, the eldest son, Muhammad Hussein, joined the family business after obtaining the COSC. He too had been a zakir for over fifty years, rendered various communal services and passed away in Toronto in December 2002. His second son, Abdulrasul became the President of Africa Federation and was one of the early Khoja barristers from Lincoln's Inn, London. He practised in East Africa and is now a Court of Appeal Judge in Kenya. His third son, Muhammad Raza became a mechanical engineer and was involved in private welfare work in the Mombasa jamaat. He passed away in December 1999. His last son Murtaza also qualified as a barrister from Lincoln's Inn. He practised in East Africa and currently practices in London. He too delivers majalis in English and Gujarati, as well as making other communal contributions. Mulla Ahmed has set an example in the importance of educating children who, in turn, encouraged others to seek knowledge. He himself served as the head of private colonial school committees and was a trustee of the Dadoo Hemani communal school in Zanzibar.

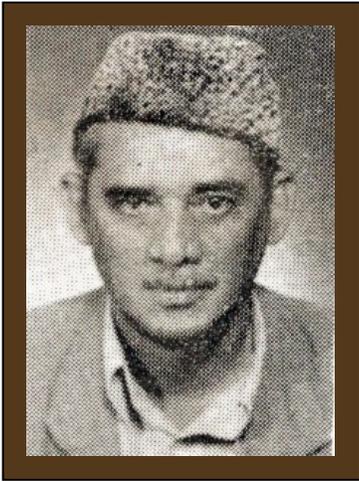
Mulla Ahmed is also known for his varied and extensive communal services, including as a long serving President of the Hujjatul Islam Jamaat in Zanzibar and for being one of the founders and the first Vice-President of the East Africa Federation. Thereafter he served for many years on the Supreme Council of the Federation. In 1970 he migrated to Dar-es-Salaam with his family, where he served on a number of Jamaat committees, in particular the Matrimonial Conciliation Committee. Mulla Ahmed was also a consultative point of reference for the Quran and Fiqh. He had ability to relate complex ideas in simple terms.

As a successful and notable industrialist, Mulla Ahmed was keen to develop industry in Zanzibar, which was predominantly an agricultural island growing cloves and coconuts. Having developed several farms, he also established a bakery and several factories for

coconut oil, soap and coir fibre. In addition to managing these industrial concerns, he was the Chairman of the Zanzibar Chamber of Commerce for a number of years.

Mulla Ahmed was devoted to public services. He served as President of the Zanzibar Social Welfare Society, the Zanzibar Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Zanzibar Society for the Blind. On the political front, he became the President of the Indian Association and was nominated as member of the Zanzibar Legislative Council. After the partition of India in 1947, he became the President of the Zanzibar Muslim Association. In appreciation of his extensive social services, in 1953 he was made a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (M. B. E.), upon the ascension to the throne by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. The Sultan of Zanzibar also honoured him with medals for public service.

In a full life, he toured the world experiencing modern air travel and the wonders of the world, as well as a camel back ride to Mecca. He migrated to Stanmore, London, in 1988 and was buried in the Brookwood cemetery in June 1989. Mulla Ahmed Lakha had an impressive personality which signified piety and nobility, a befitting legacy for a zakir of the Ahlal-bayt (a.s).



By: Hasnain Walji  
Birthdate: 1919  
Deathdate: 1970

### **Birth, Education & Occupation**

Born in Mombasa in 1919, Haji Gulamabbas had a formal education for only two years. However, with perseverance, he acquired enough knowledge to be able to fluently read, write and speak Gujarati and English and was at ease whilst conversing in Urdu and Kiswahili. He also showed deep interest in religious education and developed close friendship with Mulla Mohamed Mulla Jaffer (father of Alhaj Mulla Asghar) and Haji Alibhai M. Gulamhusein (a teacher of Hussayni Night School).

He conducted a small business and his office in the old town of Mombasa which became the hub of activity during the nights of Mahe Ramadhan where religious discourses would be held under the banner of '*Anjuman-e-Saa-e-meen*' ('Group of those who fast') led by Mulla Mohamed Mulla Jaffer and chaired by Haji Mohamed R. Valli. In the last decade of his life, he joined Gulamhussein Rahemtulla Walji as partner in the business of insurance brokage. Gulamhussein Rahemtulla Walji became his right hand man in his welfare activities.

### **Contribution to the Community**

On the socio-welfare scene, initially he joined Ithna Asheri Volunteer Corps and later on he became an active member of the Managing Committees of Ithna Asheri Young Men's Union (established in 1945) and Mombasa Jamaat. As a delegate and councilor representing Mombasa Jamaat, his presence was recognized at the meetings of the Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaats of Africa and views and opinions expressed by him in a soft but emphatic tone were given due importance.

In 1953, together with Mulla Gulamhussein Dattoo (Bishon) and Mulla Mohamed Mulla Jaffer, he floated the idea of inviting reputed Ulema to recite Majalis in Mahe Muharram and also as resident Aalims. This resulted in the visits of Mufti Jaffer Hussein, Allamah Rashid Turabi, Syed Mohammed Naqui, Syed Mohammed Ijlal, Khwaja Mohammed Latif Ansari and other leading Ulema from Indo-Pak sub-continent as Zakereen during Mahe Muharram and as resident Aalims.

From 1960 to 1970, he dedicated almost all of his time in serving Faiz-e-Husseini – the then subsidiary body of the Ithna Asheri Young Men's Union (formed in 1945 to cater for the needs of Hajis, Zuwwar, other travelers, the sick and the poor). He extended the services of Faize Hussein to Nairobi whilst accompanying patients to Nairobi for medical treatment.

At the time of revolution in Zanzibar in 1964, he was attending the funeral of Haji Ebrahim Hussein Sheriff Dewji (the then Chairman of the Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaats of Africa). From the very first night of revolution, he displayed the qualities of a fearless leader and worker in organizing distribution of food, medicine and clothing to the

affected people. He stayed back in Zanzibar for almost a month and was a solace to the people.

In 1966, he initiated the idea of amalgamation of the two Jamats then in existence in Mombasa and mobilized the youth of both the Jamaats in raising their voices. The idea was immediately welcomed by Alhaj Mulla Asgharali M. M. Jaffer (who was at that time Hon. Secretary of the Africa Federation). With assistance of the then Chairman of the Africa Federation Haji Mohamedali Meghji, and Mulla Saheb, Haji Gulamabbas sounded the elders of the community and embarked upon the process of amalgamation resulting in the dissolution of the two separate Jamats on 18th October, 1966 and formation of a single Jamat on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1966. Haji Gulamabbas was unanimously elected as a managing committee member of the amalgamated Jamat.

### **Honours & Recognition**

The Federation of K.S. I. Jamaats of Africa awarded "*Husseini Medal*" to him for meritorious services rendered by him which award was accepted by him after much persuasion.

On 24<sup>th</sup> October 1970, Mombasa Jamat decided to establish "*Haji Gulamabbas Kassamali Bahadurali Memorial Trust*" in memory of this illustrious son of Mombasa, the proceeds of which are being utilized for academic and welfare needs through Faize Husseini.

### **Death**

He breathed his last on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1970, at the young age of fifty-two leaving a lasting impact on the community having earned the title of "*Abul Ghuraba*" i.e. "*Father of the Needy*" from the public at large.

## Profile 10: Haji Husseinbhai Haji Muraj

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Birthdate: 1911  
Deathdate: 1979

Haji Husseinbhai Haji Muraj was one of the illustrious sons of our community. He was born in Mogadishu, Somalia into a family who were champions in community service. He grew up to become a well known personality not only in Mogadishu, but among other African communities as well.

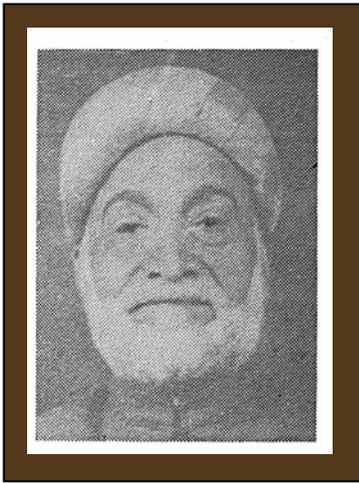
From 1930 to 1945, Haji Husseinbhai rendered various services in the Jamaat during his father's - Hajibhai Muraj – Presidency. It is worth mentioning that Haji Bhai Muraj was awarded 2 medals – the *Star of Italy* and *Count of Italy* from the Italian Government.

During his life, Haji Husseinbhai served as the President of the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Mogadishu, the President of the Pakistan Association and a Council Member of the municipality of Mogadishu. Moreover, during his extensive term in office as President of Mogadishu Jamaat, both the Mosque and Imambargah were extended to their present size in 1964.

In January 1969, Haji Husseinbhai was awarded the Hussein Medal by Alhaj Mohammedali Meghji, President of the Federation of KSI Jamaats of Africa. It was at this event that Alhaj Mohammedali Bhai voiced that “community members should serve the Jamaats for the sole pleasure of Allah (swt) and that the people should realize and appreciate the efforts put by Momineen who serve their communities.”

## Profile 11: Haji Janmohamed Kermali Murji Rawji

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Birthdate: 1893  
Deathdate: 1967

Born in Haryana, India, Janmohamed Kermali Murji Rawji was a distinguished Zakir who was well known for his devotion to Islam.

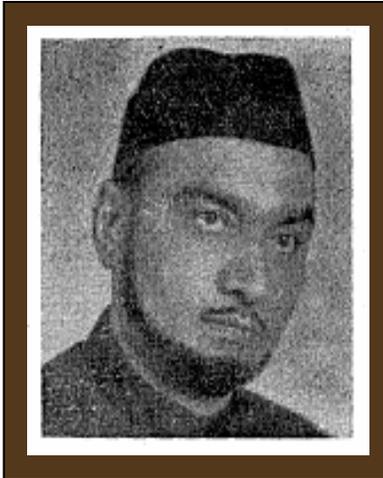
In 1895, Janmohamed Rawji's father migrated from India to Zanzibar, Tanzania and then moved to Madagascar in 1906. In 1911, Janmohamed Rawji himself came to Africa and joined his father in the family business.

Janmohamed K.R. Rawji was famous for his impressive majalises. He served the Madagascar community for 55 years and was a member in good standing with the Federation of KSI Jamaats of Africa. His daughter was married to Kassamali Bahadurali Mawji, father of active community volunteer, Gulamabbas Kassamali Bahadurali Mawji of Mombasa.

Janmohamed K.R. Rawji passed away at the age of 74 in Madagascar. He was honored with a grand funeral by the Jamaat there. In his tribute to this renowned Zakir, Haji Abdullah Tahora expressed: *"I wish I had the opportunity to learn more from Marhum Janmohamed Kermali Murji Rawji, but he left us before we could take advantage of his knowledge."*

## Profile 12: Haji Abdullah Tahora

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Birthdate: August 19, 1919

Deathdate: August 29, 1986

On August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1986 Maulvi Abdullahbhai Tahora passed away in Reunion, Madagascar. In his memory, there was a gathering in which a few individuals paid tribute to his life: The Zakir-e-Ahlul Bayt, Abdullah Bhai was well known to many people. Born in Morondava, Madagascar, Haji Abdullah Tahora acquired his basic education in Gujarati and French at Morondava School. He had an excellent command of both of these languages. Encouraged by his father, Haji Abdullah was interested in becoming a Zakir from the young age of 13.

Haji Abdullah worked very hard for the local Imambargah, Masjid and Madrasah. He learned to recite the Holy Qur'an and was trained in Islamic education from the resident Alim of Morondava, Sayyid Javad Ameli Najafi. He would also keep constant company of any visiting Ulamaa and acquire the keys to the treasures of Islamic education in this way. Haji Abdullah would collect all the wisdom that he gained from these personalities and prepare them into majalises in his own Gujarati language and present them to the Momineen of the Jamaat. He had a very amicable personality and recited majalises till his last breath.

Haji Abdullah provided religious services in Morondava from 1940 to 1953. In 1953, he went to settle in Toliara and served the Jamaat there as Honorary Secretary. After that he became President of the Territorial Council. In addition, he also served the Jamaat in Reunion. Haji Abdullah has written religious books in both English and French and has also received medals from the Madagascar Government.

Haji Abdullah no doubt loved the Ahlul Bayt and reciting majalis was his passion. He was an avid reciter in Gujarati and delivered several majalises in Africa, Madagascar, India and Pakistan among other places. In 1983, he had come to Paris to recite majalis. However, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Muharram, he became ill and could not finish the full 10 days. After some time, the Paris Jamat President went to Reunion and invited him to recite the Chehlum majalis. Haji Abdullah replied that if God willed he would certainly complete the half-finished "ashra" that he had started in 1983. Alas, his wish was not granted. When he was diagnosed with heart disease, his family and friends requested him to cut back the number of majalis he used to recite. He told them that he was prepared to give up a lot of things due to his illness, however, he was not ready sacrifice his majalises saying: "I will always recite the majalises of Sayyeda Shohoda".

The day he died, Haji Abdullah was feeling very good. He met with friends and various guests and talked in a very pleasant manner with them. Before going to sleep, he recited a majalis by himself, then pleaded to the Almighty and immediately died.