

MEMOIRS – CHAPTER 1 - ZANZIBAR



By Abdulrazak Fazal Updated: September 2020

➔ Abdulrazak Fazal's Chapter 1 - Zanzibar Photos collection

Hardly anybody knows me, the simple, low profiled and unassuming commoner. Also, dull, dumb, and introverted. Besides, panicky, and scary, in my childhood the sight of a *maskini* (beggar) scared me to death and I would hide myself under the cover of my mother's *chadar* (veil). All that makes me a real complex personality. I was born on the 18th of February 1948 into a highly religious and orthodox family of Indian ancestry in that tiny island of Zanzibar off the eastern coast of Africa. My father, **Sheriff Fazal Mohamed Sheriff** was also born in Zanzibar in 1898 and so was my mother, **Mariambai Khamis Damji**, in 1911. I therefore consider myself a pukka *Jangbario* (Zanzibari or Zanzibarian) though my command of the language Kiswahili is substandard unlike the other *Khoja Ithnashris* who had inhabited the island.

Zanzibar with its insular position was a prosperous place where the Omani settlers had imposed their Sultanate but owed allegiance to the British Colonial Government. The one sad aspect of Zanzibar had been its cruel slave trade that scarred an otherwise remarkable history. The once 'slave trade market' by the side of the Protestant church at *Mkunazini* and those isolated, scattered and ruined graves (*makaburini*), especially those bordering the big baobab tree (*mbuyuni*), at several spots in the stone town bore testimony to the tragic past. Perhaps the Zanzibaris' notoriety for their fixation with *mashetani* (ghosts) could be ascribed to such spirits haunting around there. The Portuguese had also earlier ruled the island as evidenced by their old fort. Zanzibar fascinated the Indians from *Kutch* and *Kathiawad*, and in particular the *Khojas* who emigrated in hundreds by dhows in the nineteenth century. At a later stage even the Agakhan, H.H. Sultan Mohamed Shah, patronized the island and made it his headquarter for a brief period of time in the 1940s. Other initial settlers were the *Hindu Bhatias* who provided merchandise and financial acumen. Moreover, Mahatma Gandhi en route from South Africa to India, paid a visit to the Bhatia Mahajanwadi at Ziwani. Years later in 1948 Gandhiji was assassinated and sadly this time his ashes brought to Zanzibar when a large number of Asians gathered at the dock as a mark of respect for this great *Mahatma*. The ashes were then taken to Jinja (Uganda) to be scattered in the Nile.

My ancestors being *Khojas* had landed in Zanzibar from Jamnagar as far back as 1850s as *Ismailis*. The *Khojas* around that time had their own brand of *Islam* and they seemed a confused mass. Their beliefs had thrown them into disorder. The devout ones with their orthodoxy could not bear and accept the changes and modernity that seemed creeping into their system. They revolted and while some were debarred from the *jamatkhana* others abandoned it on their own. They adopted the main brand of Shiaism calling themselves *Ithnashris* (twelvers). They even recruited the priestly Persians to guide them through, hence the origination of an *Agha* (Persian) community in Zanzibar. Alongside were the *Bahranis* (Arab *Shias* from Bahrain) whose inspirations emanated from Major Mohamed Ahmed Khan (Kalbe Ali Khan), a *wazir*(minister) to Sultan Majid/Bargash. He proved a great influence and helped out the *Khojas* to secede.

Zanzibar had a prosperous *Khoja* community and it was quite forthcoming into this secession. In fact, the *Kuwwat Jamaat* (communal society) of Zanzibar became the first ever *Khoja Shia Ithnashri Jamaat* in the world in 1882 when the *Khojas* elsewhere including the subcontinent were still facing opposition to establish their separate identity. There were stirring events and emotions got roused as the dissidents fervently built up their mosque. Initially the connection between the two *Khoja* groups hanged on for a while and even a couple of *dhegs* (large pots) used to be dispatched to the *jamatkhana* from the mosque during *jaman* (feast). Social traditions also prompted the two counterparts to meet each other. Later restrictions became severe and even family members separated disconnecting ties between each other or the two met in hiding at a secret place.

There were certain institutions like Nasser Nurmohamed dispensary which were meant for all *Khojas* despite religious differences between them. Not all the dissidents converted themselves at one time but rather gradually. Worse followed when *Khoja Ithnashris* split among themselves and formed two separate *jamaats*, *Kuwwat* and *Hujjat* or *Junni* and *Nai*, with their respective mosques and cemeteries. Zanzibar was witness to all the chaos and entanglement that had befallen the *Khojas* of that era.

Zanzibar was extraordinarily different. Its narrow streets, laid with stone houses adjacent to each other and almost clinging to the opposite ones, formed an unusual sight. The hustle and bustle in its streets and bazaars created buzz and livened the atmosphere. The tinkling bicycle bells sent aside passersby as cyclists made their way through those narrow lanes. The milkmen knocked the doors of the residents and delivered milk that had to be filled through a tap from the bulky churn placed on the back of their bicycles. On the way people would be seen drinking *kahawa* (black coffee) which was habitual of the Zanzibaris. The *Washihiri* (Yemeni) *kahawa* sellers with their brass *dele* (cone shaped containers) went around juggling and rattling their small cups.

They had peculiar and methodical way of pouring coffee into those cups. The Zanzibaris were pious and highly affectionate people, and their impeccable lifestyle was an exemplar to the rest of the world.

There were several Asian communities in Zanzibar, and they had their own places of worship. What was striking was the spectacle of their processions such as *Ithnashris' julus*, *Ismailis' dhan dhan*, *Hindus' marriage* or *Goans' funeral* procession. Also striking was Zanzibar's eateries, and some of them still form part of my consistent reminiscence. Those *masis' bajia*, *Abedi's mix*, *Adnan's mbatata* (potato) and *Maruki's halua* (sweetmeat) tasted exceptionally good. Zanzibar was just one of its own, its vendors like Ali hawking “Adanda” to sell off his *bajia*, the Asian *gubiti* (candy) seller or *Mamdu Bi* (Mohamedhusain Virjee) selling *malai* (*barafu* or ice lolly) were special in their own way.

Zanzibar's fruits like *doriani*, *shokishoki* and *matufa* were unique and besides Zanzibar can be found in certain parts of South East Asia only. The crowded market at *Darajani* was the source of Zanzibar's abundant supply of fresh meat, vegetables and fruits including the exceptional mangoes, *shomari* and *muyuni*. The *Suri* (Yemenis) and *Somali* formed Zanzibar's seasonal traders and among the many items that they brought were the popular *ubani maka* (chewing gum), *ghonda* (dried fish) and *kismayu* ghee. The little Zanzibar was also famous for its cloves, copra, carved wooden doors embossed with metals, man drawn rickshaws and the popular picnic resorts of *Chwaka*, *Oroa*, *Fumba*, *Jambiani*, *Beju*, *Paje*, *Mkokotoni* and *Mangapwani* beaches.

In the evening people gathered at *Forodhani* or Jubilee garden by the seaside sitting here and there on the ground, benches or at its fountain which was in the middle. Many formed small circles and chatted or played cards. The group of boys and girls strolled along there and even glanced admiringly at each other. In one corner stood Habib Pira's 'fruit & ice cream' stall while in the centre vendors stretched themselves in a row selling *mohogo* (cassava), *mishikaki* (roasted meat), mango chips (*keri*), nuts (*jugu*, *jugu mave*, *daria*, *bisi*) in paper cone, cut sugar cane (*miwa* or *ganderi*), *chana bateta*, different kinds of juice (*machungua*, *mabungo*, *ukwaju*, *ndimu*, *anenasi*, *miwa*), various coconut and tropical fruits (*joya*, *kichwa nazi*, *mapera*, *kungu*, *kunazi*, *mbuyu*, *zambrao*, *fu*, *chavia*, *embe kizungu*) and all sorts of eatables. Children played ashore with sand at *Forodhani Mchanga* adjacent to the garden. On Tuesday evenings the police band played its orchestral music at the Jubilee memorial and entertained the public. *Forodhani* commanded spectacular view of the monumental *Beit al Ajaib* (House of Wonders), Sultan's Palace and Portuguese Fort.

At the other end of stone town was the spacious *Mnazimoja* ground where Zanzibar's sports loving public participated in various outdoor games. *Mnazimoja* had three cricket pitches with a patchy pavilion, a couple of

volleyball courts and a vast football field. A little further on the right of *Mnazimoja* stretched the Coopers ground where the English had their club. They played golf, tennis and cricket. In its centre was the structure of its circular shaped pub where the colonialists relaxed and entertained themselves with alcoholic drinks.

The Sultan in his traditional *joho* (*aba* or robe) and *kilemba* (turban) went around in his vermilion coloured Austin Princess driven by chauffeur in red *kizibao* (short overcoat) and waved at passersby and acknowledged their *salaam* (salutation). At times even from his palace balcony he waved at the onlookers. The British Resident rode in his black limousine. The *askari* (police) in khaki coat, pair of half trousers and red tarboosh cap patrolled and kept guard over the island. There was absolute harmony and peace. Even petty theft was a rare occurrence while the terminology 'corruption' was unheard of and did not figure at all.

At dusk, the loud siren (*hon*) would traditionally go off and the fluttering red flag in the backyard of the Sultan's palace descended from its mast. The *azan* (call for prayers) from the mosques and the church and temple bells sounded from each and every corner. The public servant with his long wooden rod went from one street to another lighting street lamps. Zanzibar by night though dim was inviolable and had its serenity, sanctity and also liveliness.

I was the sixth of my father's seven children. He had two wives. The first one bore him three children namely **Mohamed (Master Sheriff)**, **Marzia (wife of Husain Hassam Ladha)** and **Fatma (wife of Yusuf Abdulla Jaffer Dewji)**. After the death of the first wife my father married my mother who delivered him four more children in **Zainab (wife of Fida Rashid Manek)**, **Husain**, myself and the youngest **Nargis (wife of Turab Jaffer Khamis Damji)**. My father was strict and a thorough disciplinarian. He would wake up my elder brother **Husain** for morning prayers with a cane. Sadly, he passed away in 1956 when I was only eight.

I very well remember that sad night when a certain relative had the guts to place me in the room in which my father's corpse lay and make me recite *yasin*. He was no more his sleeping form but a lifeless object. I was panic stricken and all alone in the room in which an unusual calm prevailed. Next day sometime in the afternoon amidst the crying and wailing the cortege left the house and I was made to walk under the *jeneza* (coffin) on our way to the graveyard (*Nai Chungani*) across *Mwembeladu*.

Life became a struggle as my brother **Husain** was still schooling then. It took a while before he joined the employment rank of the Colonial Government in Zanzibar. My father's death had also meant certain liberty for us. The abandoned reddish cane that hanged on the wall in the room no more evoked fear associated with it. Also, the Grundig radio found its place in our house and

along with it flowed Indian music. It paved my way to Indian cinema. Eventually in Daressalaam two decades later I became the Indian weekly Screen's casual correspondent for East Africa and at times even previewed Hindi films for TFC before they were even censored.

However, nothing could deter me from my religious traditions that were deeply rooted in me as I was brought up in an entirely sacred Zanzibar atmosphere. My father was adopted by his uncle, Jaffer Mohamed Sheriff, and his huge mansion on *Kiponda* Road where we resided was willed to us. Unfortunately, it was under the trusteeship of the Administrator General and today away from Zanzibar my brother Husain and I are left to collect its negligible rent from *Mambomsije* (Administrator General's office). My father's other properties included the three huge buildings located at *Malindi* along *Kituo cha Taa*. They all got confiscated after the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964 and their notice published in the government gazette. While one of the three underwent renovation and still exists the other two have fallen into a state of dilapidation.

Our house was right in front of *Kuwwat (Junni)* mosque and we became part of its ritualistic events. It was the era of those devout *Khoja* zealots and the house vibrated with *majlis* and melodious *marshias* and *nauhas*. Certain old and sick ones preferred to the congested *imambara* our house where besides listening to *majlis* they could also view *alams* and *shabihs* through the windows. The house was blessed with the *Muharram majlises* held in the afternoons of 5th, 6th and 7th of the mourning month and *iftaar* on the 28th of *Ramadhan*. On *Ashura* and *Chehlum* nights it would be packed with ladies who came to view the *julus*. In the evening, the ladies' *majlis* and *matam* resounded from *Mehfile Ali Makam* which was also located in the same vicinity.

Even the sight of *mayats* (dead bodies) wrapped in *kafan* (shroud) became fearfully visible. I still shudder at the memory of the 1961 Zanzibar riots. The sight of the beheaded corpses or those with amputated limbs that were being brought to the mosque for *ghusal* was just horrible. The *Ngambo* residents who had got looted and taken to *Rahaleo* for a couple of despairing days during the 1964 revolution were also seen sheltered at the *imambara*.

The *azan* meant pulling up my pyjamas and rushing to the *Junni* mosque for prayers. Habib Rashid Jetha and Mohamedali Premji taught me how to say *namaz*. Opposite the mosque was a small barber's shop where the barber *Toto Hajam* cut our hairs and also provided the latest gossips. The *barzaimamwaro* (the long-stretched pavement outside the mosque) was a meeting spot for *mazungumzo* (talks) by community members. Alongside the youngsters hanged out at *Mamdu Bi's barafu* stall to amuse themselves. In the neighbourhood the feature of attraction was Takim Travel Service's window display of a range of toy aeroplanes that held special fascination for passersby. At the Jacksi's they displayed a mannequin, and the brand *Shikibo, Double Two*,

Nylon and other variety of shirts. During my father's days the elderly led by Mulla Abdulhusain Mohammed Walli gathered in our shop(downstairs) at night and the discussion revolved around religion, *Khojas* and the communal affairs. In the holy month of *Ramadhan*, they talked late into the night.

Ramadhan in Zanzibar was unique. It would be greeted with a 21gun salute. Its hectic evenings generated tremendous pace. The vendors abounded selling the Zanzibar specialty like *kitumbua*, *kalimati*, *mkateyakumimina*, *mkateyaufuta* and *mkateyamofa*. It was also customary among its acquaintances to send each other the routine *sinia* (platters of snacks, desserts and curry [*kuku waku paka*, *samaki waku paka*]). The nights were even livelier and *Forodhani* provided the perfect resort. At around midnight the faithful were awakened for *dakhu*(last meal before the fast) by the powerfully toned 'Uthoyaro Musalmano wakt usurka, roza rakho Ramzanka lanat karo shaitanko....' of one Farjalla(Uthoyaro) who went around with his stick and dimly lit lamp. Then followed the *Washihiri* drummers and the Asian *Bawo* who eulogized the Muslim Saints and mocked the fashion trend. Eventually exploded the 'one-gun fire' at two o'clock sharp.

Personally, I would look forward to '*darsa*' (recitation of *Koran*) at night and in particular the one at Sheriff Dewji's residence where the wonderful environment inspired tremendous admiration. On arrival you would be greeted with Mohammed Sheriff Dewji's benign smile as the children with vase of *asmini*(jasmine) rushed to offer you bits of flowers. Then followed *kahawa* and *sharbat* (juice) as you awaited your turn for the *Koran* recitation under the direction of Agha Mehdi Shustari. On the 28th night a beautifully wrapped gift packet would be presented to all the regular attendants. The *darsa* at *Kiwanjani* (Mehfile Shahe Khurasan) was under the direction of Habib Rashid Jetha. It was famous for its *istekhan* (black tea) served in shapely small sized cups. Also throughout *Ramadhan* *Kiwanjani* hosted *iftaar* (fast breaking meal) feasted by various individuals upon their respective invitees.

The *Eid* moon attracted a big crowd at *Forodhani*, and its sighting alike *Ramadhan* moon was greeted with a 21gun salute. *Eid* was a festive occasion with three to four days of public holidays. After the usual *Eid* prayers and *barazas* the Zanzibaris shook hands and warmly greeted each other. The streets brightened up with their new white *khanzu*(robe) and *kofia* (Zanzibar cap). The *Wamanga* (Omanis) in their traditional attire chanted and paraded through the town jumping up and down with their *jambia* (swords) and sticks to display their swordsmanship. They were also reputed for their *halua* (*halua ya Mmanga*) and everywhere on *Eid* day visitors would be relished with *halua* and *kahawa*. In the evenings *Eid* was marked with fun fare at *Mnazimoja* where there would be toys' stalls, food stalls, *ngomas*, *karagosi* (puppet show) and such gimmicks.

Mnazimoja was also the venue for Prophet Mohamed's *12th Rabiulawwal maulidi* when *matwana* (trucks) carrying hundreds of natives arrived from *shambas* (villages) and distance as far as *Makunduchi* to participate in the festivity. At night, the illuminated ground would be packed with Zanzibar's cosmopolitan public including the Sultan and the entire Royal family. The *maulidi* stretched the whole night and the entire stone town echoed with its melodious *kasida*, *barzanji* and *zikiri*.

Before I was enrolled into the primary school at the age of seven, I had to attend *koranic* lessons during day time at school *Faiz* and also at the residence of *Mulla Fatu Magawa* (Mrs. Fatmabai Panju) and *Mulla Bibi Zara* (Mrs. Aliakbar Sayad Husain Shustari). The religious education provided at the night *School Faiz* continued right till I finished my secondary education. Eventually the school shifted its premises from the old one by the side of the mosque to the new one on *Kiponda* beside my residence.

My primary school was *Sir Euan Smith Madressa* (ESM and now Haile Salasi School) at *Mnazimoja* (earlier ESM was the balconied building around 'old fort' at *Forodhani*) and till the fourth standard it functioned as *Gujarati* medium with the red turbaned Master Premchand Mehta (Master Kilemba) symbolizing the school's Indianization. Some of our teachers were *Parsi* as Zanzibar had a small *Parsi* community too. They had their *Agiari* (Fire Temple) with its *Dastoor* (priest) and even '*Tower of Silence*' (cemetery) at *Kilimani/Ziwani* where they buried their dead unlike the *Parsi* way of disposing their corpse which is exposing them to the sun and vultures. Our principal Master Arjani and the portly Master Kanga were *Parsi*. The canning by the *Parsi* teacher Master Rana was really painful. The *Ithnashri* teachers included my eldest brother Mohamed Sheriff (Master Sheriff), the anglicized Ebrahim Jaffer Ebrahim and the fanatical Bakar Taki Walji (Master Baker) under whose tutorship the *Ithnashri* boys had field day. The recess time at ESM was as good as food fair when vendors from different corners gathered in the school yard to sell their specialty.

Zanzibar's government secondary school was the best in the whole of East Africa. The new one at *Sateni* came to be known as 'King George the Sixth' (now Lumumba College). Its teachers were mostly British seconded all the way from the United Kingdom by the Colonial Government. The teachers namely Hens, Davis, Evans, Pasco, Gregory, Wesson, Ellis and Howley became household names. Also, the Asian and African teachers like Desai, Naik, Kureshi, Khakoo, Peera, Zubeir, Abdulrehman and Aboud Jumbe (later the President of Zanzibar and the mainland Vice President) commanded great respect. Imagine only 60 students from the entire Zanzibar and Pemba would be selected to attend the government secondary school after passing the challenging 'Entrance' examination. They formed the cream of the product and their names broadcast on *Sauti ya Unguja* (Radio Zanzibar). They were the real intellects

unlike the elites of today who gain admission into good schools through their money.

There were other reputable schools too like Technical School (now Gamal Abdel Nasser) at *Beit El Raas*, some three miles from the town. Also, besides ESM there were a couple of more schools overlooking *Mnazimoja* such as Saida Matuka Girls Secondary School (now Ben Bella and formerly Government Boys Secondary School) which was in line with Khalifa Hall (now TVZ) and the shapely Zanzibar museum. There was also the white domed Aga Khan School near Majestic Cinema at the far end of *Sokomohogo/Mkunazini* streets. Majestic was rebuilt after the original building had gutted in one of Zanzibar's worst fires sometime in the 1950s. Besides Majestic the other cinemas in Zanzibar were Empire and Sultana (now Cine Afrique). They held matinee shows of Indian films charging a mere one shilling a person, and what came to be popularized as 'one shilling all-round'. The *Aapki Farmaish* (Request for Indian songs) presented by Zarina Patel and Farouq Malik, and likewise *shairi* by Bakari Abedi and *tarab* music were some of the popular programmes broadcast on *Sauti Ya Unguja* and eagerly awaited by listeners.

One of Zanzibar's most prestigious schools was St. Joseph of the Catholic Mission (now Tumekuja) that admitted only selective pupils. It was located behind the High Court which was on the main *Shangani* Road that stretched from Siva Haji/Karimji Jivanji Hospital (now V.I. Lenin) and the British Resident's Mansion (now State House) along Victoria Garden right up to the Post Office at the far end of Portuguese street where mainly the enterprising Hindu community resided and which busted with crackers on the night of *Diwali*. It also consisted of the Goans who specialized as tailors. Across there was the monumental Catholic Church with its twin towers and those sculptured statues of Virgin Mary and other apostles that really appealed to the eye. The cathedral along with the *Khoja Ithnashri Hujjat* mosque minaret at *Mkunazini/Sokomohogo* were some of Zanzibar's landmarks. Zanzibar's financial network controlled by the private banker Jetha Lila and the Standard Chartered and National & Grindlays banks operated from here.

Portuguese street/*Shangani* also housed the clinics of the well-known Dr. Taylor, Dr. Goradia, Dr. Mehta and Dr. Patel. Further down in the gully of *Changa Bazaar* was the clinic of Dr. Menezes, and on *Kiponda* that of Dr. D'silva. The *Khoja* dispensary at the far end of *Forodhani* and what now is the ostentatiously displayed 'Cultural Centre' was the most spectacular. Those who had served there were Dr. Gulamhusain and Dr. Raza Khakoo. The Zanzibaris had penchant for calling people by way of nick and a certain Muslim Punjabi doctor was named Dr. *Awara*.

The round clock protruding from the building on *Shangani* signified Zanzibar's High Court. Its Chief Justice, Sir John Grey, formed an authority on Zanzibar's

judicial system. Other prominent personalities included Judge Green and Magistrate Husain Rahim. Zanzibar boasted a Secular Court and a *Sharia* Court. Sheikh Omar Smet and Abdullah Saleh Farsi were Chief *Kadhi* for the *Sharia* Court. The Talati brothers of 'Wiggins and Stephens' and the Lakha brothers were some of Zanzibar's leading lawyers. Wolf Dourado went on to become the Attorney General.

Zanzibar's oldest newspaper was a weekly *Samachar* published by Fazel Master whose establishment dated back to 1901. The bilingual (English and Gujarati) paper was circulated on Sundays only. Such another was 'Zanzibar Voice' by Ibrahim Kassam. Also, Rati Bulsara entered with his very own *Adal Insaaf*. The Government Press besides the gazette delivered *Maarifa* on Thursdays.

Portuguese street adjoined *Sokomohogo/Mkunazini* streets which were largely occupied by the *Bohoras* who were old settlers and dealt in hardware, crockery or had tin/glass cutting workshops. They had as many as three mosques which were situated at *Kiponda*, *Mkunazini* and *Sokomohogo*. Others were *Kutchi Sunnis* comprising *Memon*, *Khatri*, *Sonara*, *Sumra*, *Surya*, *Loharwadha*, *Girana*, *Juneja*, *Sameja*, *Chaki*, *Kumbhar*, *Hajam*, *Bhadala* and such *Kutchi* artisan/smith communities. There were also *Sunni* communities other than *Kutchi* such as *Kokni* (Muslims from *Maharashtra*) and *Surti Vora* (Muslims from *Surat*, *Gujarat*).

Portuguese street also converged on *Hurumzi (Vaddi Bhajaar)* where the Hindu and Jain temples were located. It was also where grocers abounded and the public bustled in purchasing their requirements. The shop/residence of my maternal, RHK Damji (one of East Africa's biggest importers of onions from India and spices from South East Asia in the British Colonial days), was here and formed the point of our frequent visits. The street extended up to Saleh *Madawa's* shop or the huge *Ismaili Jamaatkhana* (prayer hall) that stretched all the way from one road to another. It formed terminus for several by-ways and lanes that headed towards the *Khoja (Ithnashris/Ismailis)* and Arabs/Comorians (*Wangazija*) dominated *Barza Tharia* (named after the *Khoja Ismaili Mukhi Tharia Topan* and where the famed vendor Ba Musa used to sell fruits), *Kiponda*, *Malindi*, *Ajam Gully*, *Khor Bhajaar* and lastly *Darajani* which marked out the end of stone town and from where emerged its outskirt or the suburban area of *Ngambo*.

The Zanzibar harbour that spread over *Forodhani/Malindi/Funguni* area was the scene of hectic activity and contributed considerably towards the economy. Zanzibar was a 'duty free' zone and overseas liners and cargo ships anchored regularly. The dockers loaded and unloaded goods while port clerks and officers hastened the proceedings. The men in white dress and black-tie symbolized Zanzibar Customs. The long handled narrow *hamali* carts with heap of gunny sacks would be seen coming out from the port and being pulled and pushed by

porters who made their way through those narrow streets. The dry dock at *Funguni (Forodha Papa)* smelt of fish. It was where dhows and schooners were sheltered, and fish net lay on quay.

Al Hazra and *Al Said* formed Zanzibar's passenger ships and journeyed to and fro 'Zanzibar-Daressalaam-Pemba'. Later these ships were replaced by the new ones which were '*Khalifa*' (*Jamhuri*) and '*Salama*' (Africa). The Zanzibar aerodrome was located some three miles from the town at *Kembe Samaki* and constituted a small air strip and an ordinary building with tiny control tower. Its flights were restricted to the neighbouring East African towns.

Zanzibar was just out of this world. It was a godsend gift. Those who had experienced its superabundance and easy life shall vouch for it. The locals or indigenous Zanzibaris were God fearing and honest people. The rapport between members of various communities and the brotherliness that prevailed was distinctly exceptional. While cosmopolitanism was at its best in Zanzibar the teams *Ithnashris, Ismailis, Hindus, Bohoras, Sunnis, Arabs, Comorians, Parsis* and *Goans* that participated in its cricket tournaments were all communal based. Even the English had their team (English Club) that played friendly matches with others. However, the best was '*Cosmos*' which was made up of players from obviously different communities. What an era!

Mid-fifties onwards African colonies had begun detaching their colonial rulers. Such an awareness was felt in Zanzibar too and as a result the political parties Afro Shirazi Party (ASP), Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) and Zanzibar & Pemba Peoples Party (ZPPP) came into being. Some closely contested elections resulted in bloody riots on the first of June in 1961. In stone town *Darajani* was the scene of stone throwing and mob violence, but it was rural Zanzibar which bore the brunt of casualties. Never before had Zanzibar experienced such outrage and the riots did raise an alarm. Eventually ZNP and ZPPP joined hands to form Zanzibar's first ever independent Government, and also agreed to the treaty to retain the Sultan, Jamshed Bin Abdullah, as monarchal symbol.

Jamshed led a fast life, contrary to the reputation his predecessors Sayed Bargash Bin Saeed and Sayed Khalifa Bin Harub had acquired. Sayed Khalifa had strong ties with the British and even the islanders seemed to like him. He died at the age of 80 after reigning for 49 years. That day impelled solemn observance and the radio broadcast live commentary and recitation of koranic verses. The atmosphere was somber, and the town lay deserted as almost its entire population had gathered outside the palace for the funeral which took place in the afternoon after *asar* prayers. He was buried behind the palace. Various communities held special prayers during the mourning period declared for him. Sayed Khalifa was succeeded by his son Sayed Abdullah who reigned for just a couple of years. He passed away after his leg was amputated. That paved the way for Jamshed to come on the scene, albeit Zanzibar then was in

the process of decolonization.

The date 10th December 1963 was set for Zanzibar's independence. It was in the grip of festivities and the entire town decorated with flags and electric light bulbs. *Forodhani* was transformed into a glitter. The Palace and *Beit al Ajaib* with decorations emitting bright light and sparkles were the cynosure of all eyes (the like of decoration on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation, Princess Margaret's visit or Sultan Sayed Khalifa's enthronement anniversary/birthday). On the eve of independence Zanzibaris gathered at Coopers Ground to witness the ceremony. Excitement was at fever pitch. The British Rule was coming to an end and the Resident Sir George Mooring thus making an exit. The Queen was represented at the ceremony by her husband Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. At the stroke of midnight Zanzibar became independent. Amidst cheers and roars the Zanzibar flag replacing Union Jack was hoisted and 21 guns fired. The ecstatic crowd then rushed to *Forodhani* for a spectacular fireworks display. It was a great moment for them as they had their aspirations of *Uhuru* and hoped to thrive and prosper.

The new Government under Prime Minister Mohamed Shamte seemed confident and disdained Britain's offer of military assistance. Ironically, it lasted just a month. The dawn of 12th January 1964 struck Zanzibar with a bloody Revolution. It was a Sunday and the last prior to the commencement of the month of *Ramadhan*. Many had arranged a picnic to *Chwaka* and *Jambiani* (*vanja jungu*). Some had even preceded and were heedless of what was to come. We became aware of the news after my brother who had gone to buy bread whisked back when told that some disturbance was suspected in the island. Just then the old clock on the wall chimed seven o'clock, the radio was switched on and tuned in to BBC. The news of Revolution in Zanzibar and the overthrow of its Government made the headlines. We were aghast. *Sauti Ya Unguja* taken over by the rebels was also on air.

Suddenly gloom spread around, and everything seemed sullen. The town had become dead silent and only the sound of gunshots heard at intervals. The strongest resistance came from *Malindi* Police Station which was not much of a distance from our house. It was the last battalion to surrender. The battle raged throughout the night. The distinct sound of gunshots dominated the still of the night and stirred eerie sensation. The happenings of that day and the days that followed, and those of the curfew-imposed nights will etch on my mind forever. The coup was led by a self-proclaimed Field Marshal John Okello (a mason of Ugandan descent). His authoritative tone, implausible utterance and abrupt commands on radio sent a chill down our spine. The ASP leader Abed Amani Karume was named Zanzibar's President and to lead the Revolutionary Council. Mohamed Shamte and his ministers were imprisoned. Others also were imprisoned. Sultan Jamshed fled the island along with his entourage. Many got looted, some even raped, and a large number killed in the Revolution. It was a

horrifying experience which also determined the destinies of hundreds of Zanzibaris. They dispersed here and there, and their old foundations degenerated into nonentities.

The political unrest and the wind of change that had blown through Zanzibar in the wake of its Revolution coincided with the completion of my secondary education. It was a period of turmoil and the cold-blooded murder of four innocent lives at *Taziakhana* by a member of the Revolutionary Council coupled with the abduction of four *Agha* (Persian) girls who were forced into interracial marriage shattered the community's nerves. Zanzibar was no more the heaven of peace it once boasted of. Hundreds of Asians literally fled in utter despair. Some of the girls who were denied passports absconded in dhows and canoes. In a helpless state I bade farewell to my house and with hard feelings left Zanzibar. My sister **Nargis** who was a teacher at Jagombe school followed along with my mother. My brother **Husain** after being made redundant by the High Court where he was working winded up all the affairs. He was the last to part with the house and in abidance by the deed of its Trust handed over its keys to the Administrator General at their office. That was the end of a remarkable era. Never shall the Zanzibaris ever experience such a lifestyle again.

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