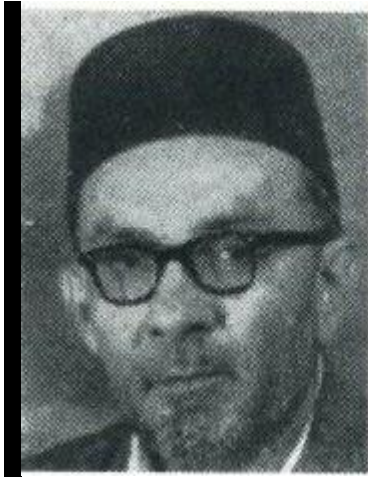


A TRIBUTE TO MU'ALLIM ABDULRASUL BANDALI



By Abdulrazak Fazal Updated: August 2020



BANDALI, Adbul Rasul; born in Zanzibar; educated Government Central School Zanzibar; Teacher Training School Zanzibar; Teaching Cert. 1931; Teacher Government 1932-37; seconded to Debts Settlement Dept. 1937; Food Control Office then Economy Control Board 1939-44; Clerk Secretariat 1945; Establishments Asst. 1953; Office Superintendent 1959; Estimates Officer 1953-59; Coronation Medal 1953; now on retirement leave; Address P.O. Box 1016, Zanzibar.

27 Ramadhan 1441
20 May 2020

In the still of the Ramadhan night amid these trying times I reminisce the serene Zanzibar evenings of more than 60 years back and my thoughts turn to Mu'allim Abdulrasul Bandali.

In Zanzibar Ramadhan had an aura of its own. After the earlier lull, the evenings heading for the 'iftaar time' livened up. The old man Hassanalibhai Juma (Mze Juma) holding those bulging 'mkate wa mofa' (baked mill flour) made his way towards the mosque and striding along there passed the tall figure in long overcoat and red tarboosh hat of Mu'allim Bandali heralding the 'maghrib adhan' and 'iftaar'.

My dad with a pinch of salt immediately turned into his 'namaaz' while the rest of us would be seated at the 'iftaar table' awaiting 'adhan'. The melodious proclamation of Mu'allim Bandali's 'Allahu Akbar....' on the loudspeaker from the opposite Junni mosque ascending the openness of Zanzibar skies and its gullies re-echoing his adhan. Personally, it was my first experience of melody at its best. Mu'allim Bandali's strikingly simple and solemn chanting melody that to this very day etches on my mind.

Of all the East African nations ZANZIBAR was a different domain. Its language, people, culture, religiosity, food, habits, ethnicity, and norms differed considerably from the rest of the East African nations. The Kutchis had dwelt on the tiny ZANZIBAR (JANGBAR in their lingo) as far back as eighteenth century and attributing their distinct status to the influence of Waswahilis, Omani Arabs, Yemeni Arabs, Comorians,(Wangazijas), Bahrainis, Persians and such other groups, and hence people of mixed race among us. We had undergone an era of the Omanis' Sultanate and the British Protectorate rule. Most of their accent was noticeable unlike the thick vernacular of those who moved much later.

One of these rare Jamnagri species was the Zanzibar born Khoja Mu'allim Bandali who with his accented vowels had evolved himself into a linguist of a sort. 'SAUTI YA UNGUJA' (Voice of Zanzibar) at Raha Leo was launched around 1951 and Mu'allim Bandali, the only Indian along with Amirali Abdulrasul, an obvious choice for reciting the Quran in its melodious form. In fact, the older timer Zanzibaris would remember that during Ramadhan 'Sauti Ya Unguja' program used to be relayed live from Bayt Al Ajaib (House of Wonders) and Mu'allim's rendition featuring prominently. Interestingly the son Murtazabhai following in the footsteps of his father also started reciting Quran at the tender age of 16. The Sauti Ya Unguja program presenter in his humorous tone referred to the reciter as Master Murtaza Bandali. Also, it must be noted here that among the Asians Mu'allim Bandali and Murtazabhai were the only father & son pair to have recited BARZANJI in Maulidi at Mnazimoja, Zanzibar.

My father had very high regard for Mu'allim. He himself was a voracious reciter of Quran and early in the morning after opening the shop his first task would be to recite a 'juz' of Quran. I could sense the mutual respect they had for each other.

What comes to mind is Mu'allim's majestic figure occasionally emerging at the 'Sheriff Dewji Darsakhana' and momentarily there would be a pin drop silence. Mu'allim Agha Sayyid Mehdi Shushtari under whose guidance the 'darsa' was conducted would then draw everyone's attention by requesting Mu'allim "Tafazzal Maalim" and there followed melody at its best.

Mu'allim was a devout Muslim. Personally, I'd grown up listening to his dua e Kumail, Iftittah, Ziyarat e Waritha, Ziyarat e Arbaeen and innumerable other recitals like Ramadhan A'maal and Duae Nudba. Typical of Zanzibar in those days was the brilliance of Mu'allim's duas that had the Community members attending the School Fez portion (over the top of the mosque) overwhelmed with emotions.

On Ashura Day majlis he would get up to call Shahzada Ali Akbar's last 'adhan' that moved the entire 'imambara'. Mu'allim was also an avid 'nauha reciter', in particular I remember the Persian version 'Ay Kushtae Rahe Khuda binawaa Husayna' and

'Zuljanah Akbal Minal Maidan Khali...' chant when Imam's laash made its appearance created overwhelming scenes.

Mu'allim Bandali was compassionate and caring. Never one to turn his back he would not only provide ghusl to the 'mayyit' but recite 'kalima' along the way, 'talqeen' in the qabr and then followed the bereaved family, a good example of Maula Ali (a.s) type idealism that is lacking in today's world.

Born in Zanzibar in 1912 , he was educated at Government Central School, Zanzibar whose Principal was Mr. Hollingsworth. In 1931 he was awarded Teaching Certificate and from 1932-37 taught in Govt. School, Zanzibar. He was then transferred to teach in a Pemba School where he was highly acclaimed by his students. His stay there was suddenly called off as the British Government, sensing his expertise in mathematics seconded him to Zanzibar to work in Debts Settlement Dept., Food Control Office and then Economic Control Board 1939-1944.

Being a man of principles Mu'allim was averse to any form of corruption in those days of strict rationing during the 2nd World War and implied "regardless of the status or vocation of a person if a pishi of rice for a local African then all the rest receive the same." He then served in various capacities in the Secretariat Office in Bait al Ajaib until he was promoted as Office Superintendent and Estimates Officer 1953-59. Mu'allim's noble deeds became further evident when working at the Secretariat. He fought for the 'pension rights' of the messengers. As Office Superintendent he was well conversant with the rules and basing his arguments plausibly the Financial Secretary eventually gave his approval that meant 'Pension for the Messengers'. Coincidentally both Mu'allim as well as Murtazabhai had worked for the Passport and Immigration section in the British High Commission in Dar es Salaam after the Zanzibar Revolution and again subjected to bribery attempts but they vehemently declined the offer.

Mu'allim and the Zanzibar Sultan Sayed Khalifa shared a special bond. Murtazabhai also vividly recalls accompanying his father to the Palace on the occasion of Eid Baraza. Mu'allim used to be entrusted with organizing the BARAZA on Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha. Murtaza, then a kid, was presented with the task of placing stickers of the invited guests on their respective chairs. Eventually after years when Mu'allim retired the Chief Secretary PAP

Robertson hosted a party in Mu'allim's honour at Bayt al Ajaib acclaiming Mu'allim's proficiency and indefatigable services. In his typical British humour Mr. Robertson summed up his speech saying thenceforth any shortcoming in such a function meant conspicuousness of Mu'allim's absence.



Mu'allim Bandali went on to receive the 'Coronation Medal' in 1953 awarded by the British Government in recognition of his services. He was also a recipient of the Order of Brilliant Star (Wisam al-Kawkab al-Durri) by the Sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid Sir Abdullah bin Khalifa bin Harub for his sterling services to the Government.

Sadly, Mu'allim passed away about half a century back in Dar es Salaam on 27 November 1972. It is not surprising that his funeral was attended by a large number of people. When a Hindu person inquired of such a large attendance in the funeral, he was replied that had he died in Zanzibar a considerably larger number of people of all races would have gathered for his funeral. Mu'allim was quite popular among the Waswahilis, Arabs and Wangazijas.

Rightly it is said that 'like father like son'. Today Mu'allim's sons Murtazabhai and Husainbhai, both in the UK, have a great following. Even aged over 80 & 70 their lilting melody has an overwhelming effect on the listeners. We pray to the Almighty to grant them good health and long life. Their tapes/CDS/ of du'as, marsia and nauha rendering in the Zanzibar of 50s & 60s are most sought after. In fact, Murtazabhai's 'Maula Ya Maula' recitation to this day remains unmatched and is becoming a universal feature of the Ramadhan recitals.

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