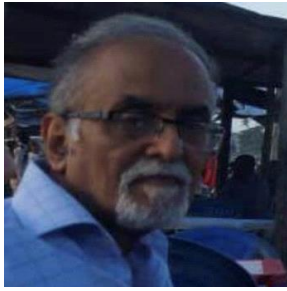


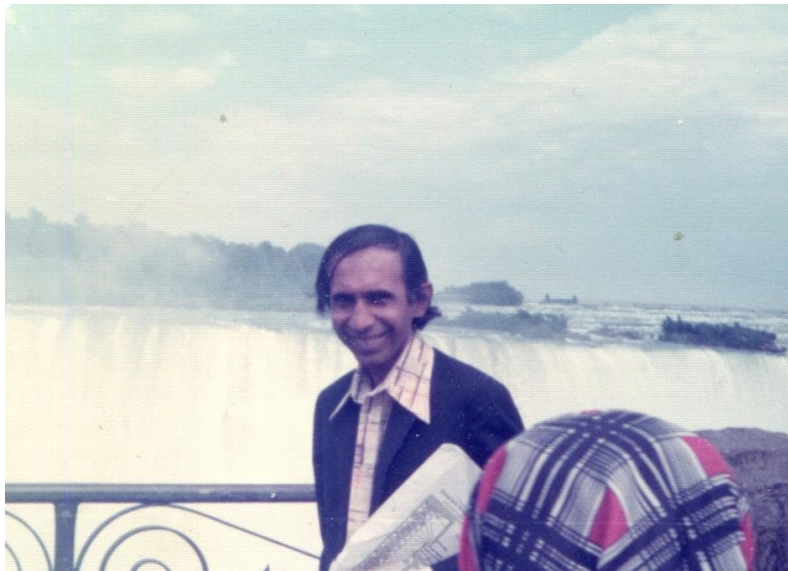
TRIBUTE TO MOHAMED HUSSEIN KASSAM 'JAMES'



By Abdulrazak Fazal *Updated: October 2020*



The late Mohamed Hussein Kassam



In the still of the night and in my somber mood I reminisce about the past, and my thoughts turn to my pal Mohamed Hussein Kassam aka 'Mashunu' (the family nickname). He was popularly known as 'James', his polished mannerism and fondness for the actor James Mason whom he used to emulate vigorously had earned him that pet name. Time has flown fast; it is 25 years since he departed but his memory still lives on.

My acquaintance with Mohamed had begun on the cozy pavement of Dewji Jamaal Musafirkhana at Omar Khadi in Bombay. That was way back in the 1960s when Mohamed had resorted to Bombay in the wake of the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution. He was gentle and humble as a padre. We built up an immediate rapport. Besides, he was sophisticated, courteous and a man of great taste. His daily commuting from the orthodox Musafirkhana at the contaminated Omar Khadi site to the sophisticated Churchgate was vastly contrasting. He would be seen sipping coffee espresso at Napoli, munching pastries at Gaylord sitting by the side of Jaikishan (of the famous Shankar-Jaikishan duo) or even jesting along with the witty IS Johar over a plate of snacks at Bombaylies. Evenings found him dining at Alibaba in Colaba or Copper Chimney in Worli or Gazebo in Bandra. Mohamed's zest for Bombay was insatiable. I recall having recommended V.S.Naipaul's 'An Area of Darkness' to him and he had remembered to buy it on one of his overseas visits. He would then compare his own experiences with those of Naipaul recollecting the good old Bombay.

Mohamed was a voracious reader. His chat would range from Shobha De and Kushwant Singh of the Indian weeklies to David Frith of the Wisden. It could even be Raju Bharatan's analytical presentation of Mohamed Rafi or Rusi Karanjia's outburst of neosocialism. He rendered the stories with his usual humorous touch. He was always relaxed and never in a contentious mood. The only time I found him in a dejected mood was once in 1984 when we had ventured into a magazine entailing exhaustive study of past cricketers. One of Mohamed's favourite was Abdul Nasser. He visited the old man, interviewed him and obtained his photograph. Unfortunately, the printers misplaced his photograph and Abdul Nasser's profile appeared without his photograph. Being a man of principles Mohamed was deeply hurt as he rightly felt that an unfair deal had been meted out to the old man.

Mohamed loved travelling. Besides Bombay another favourite spot of his was London, and with his immense literary background it was in particular its Victorian facet that he found perceivable. It was Dickens' London that he relished. He would attend plays at Royal Albert Hall and coincided his visits with summer so that he

could visit Lords for a cricket test match or Wimbledon for the prestigious tennis tournament.

Mohamed himself was a good sportsman. He was a moderate cricketer spinning off breaks for the 'B' string of Ithnashris in Zanzibar. He was a fine tennis player too. Once in a Zanzibar tournament he along with his partner were seeded one in the doubles and they went on to win the tournament. Mohamed always cherished the trophy. However, Mohamed's passion was cricket. Irrespective of the teams that played he would be often available at the ground and lauded fine and fair play. He never indulged in frivolous arguments or gave way to communal prejudice. He would sit calmly and accord his benign smile to one and all.

Mohamed's all time local favorite cricketer was Harji Mawji, Zanzibar's great left-handed batsman. Mohamed just loved him. He had offered me a couple of days' free trip to Zanzibar providing airfare, accommodation, and meals at hotel Bawani if I were to interview Harji and publish his profile. Sadly, it did not materialize as shortly then Harji passed away.

Alas, destiny had its way and Mohamed succumbed to a massive heart attack on Monday, the 30th of August 1993 at the age of 57. All along he preferred singleness and had his own philosophy of choosing bachelorhood. He served the Japanese Embassy in Daressalaam for a long time till he retired in 1992. Sadly, Mohamed remains no more, recalling one of Rafi's songs of Mohamed's favourite composer Maestro Naushad whom he admired a lot

*Ye zindagike mele'
Duniyame kam na honge'
Afsos ham nahonge*

*i.e. Along the path of life,
No fewer will dwell the world,
Alas, I will remain no more!*

By Abdulrazak Fazal

Updated: October 2020

Click below for:

➔ **Abdulrazak Fazal's Updated Zanzibar Articles**
HYPERLINK

"http://www.dewani.ca/AFzanzibararticles.htm"

➔ **More Zanzibar articles**

➔ **Tributes and more interesting articles**

➔ **Abdulrazak Fazal's original website**