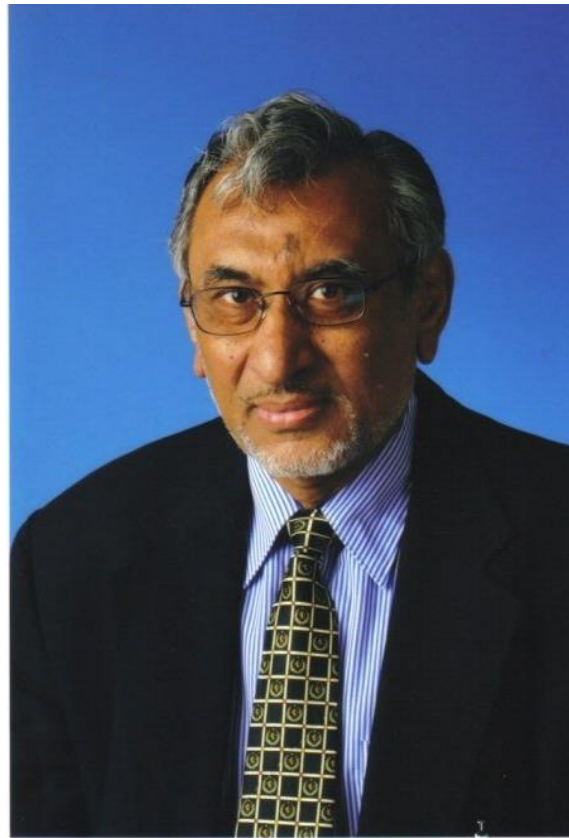


TRIBUTE TO MOHAMED HUSSEIN KASSAM ‘JAMES’



By Abdulrazak Fazal Updated: October 2020



The condolence offering lecture by Br Mohamedraza Dungersi in New York recalling a youthful Mohsin Alidina emerging in the class at School Fez as ‘substitute *maalim*’ to replace the regular *maalim* evoked nostalgia, for I too was a student in that class. But Maalim was one among us, though a few years older. **We** were prompt in our *darsa* attendance in Ramadhan and would rush to the Junni mosque immediately after *iftaar*. That was way back in the 1950s. In the 1960s he was our prefect at King George vith School where he was also a prominent member of its Debating Society. His fluency and oratory power amply heralded the mastery and command of his languages we were to witness in the later phase.

The late Nisar Sheraly (Jorgy) was his best pal. Some time back Jorgi on the occasion of the Zanzibar Reunion in Toronto had come out with a magazine in commemoration of the good old Zanzibar days and that entailed a bit of research involving us. While Maalim and Jorgi penned their thoughts from America (daytime then) I’d be scribbling mine from this end in the middle of the night. How time

elapses! It was just a few years back and now both of them remain no more. So sad!

The wonder of the 'net' had also placed the two of us on a forum 'Namaskar' meant for the East Africans. As usual Maalim with his wit and humour would prevail over us. Just a glimpse into it:-

Maalim - "Yes *ndizi mbichi* is cooked in *tui* rather than *mbata*."

Abdulrazak - "Maalim, *na muhogo wa nazi vile vile. Ndizi mbichi* and *mohogo wa nazi* cooked in *tui* is a must with us *Jangbaria*. It forms a perfect *futari* in Ramadhan, and tastier if *nyama* or *samaki* added in it. *Sawa? Vipi Maalim, mbona kimya? Husemi chochote. Wengine wetu tunaku miss.*

Farouk - "*Nime furahi sana leo, kuu soma hi Kiswahili saafi ya Nguja / pwani ongeza basi.*"

Abdulrazak - "Farouk, *ahsante, kwa kweli, kama nikiendelea zaidi naweza kukwama au kuvuruga*. Truly speaking i'm not good in Kiswahili, unlike so many other Zanzibari Khojas who actually speak Kiswahili at home. I speak Kutchi. I was merely trying to make an impression on Mohsin Alidina who is a master in Kiswahili. We call him Maalim. He was a Professor of Kiswahili at the University of Daressalaam. You should listen to him speak, both Kiswahili and English, elocution at its best!"

Anyhow, it was Union's incredible cricket phase that stirred us up. I would refer to him as my Guru. I just loved his writing skills & style. During my tenure as Chairman of its Publicity Section I always looked forward to a write up by Maalim and he would be perfectly in tune with my thoughts and feelings on the subject. Here is an illustration of a few paragraphs from his write ups:-

'But...the ball begins its descent, on the boundary line. Akber Gulamhusein stands still, eyes riveted on the ball descending from a height, palms at full stretch close to the chest, ready to take a catch. Muslim Jivraj with heart thumping, nay, all Ithnashery xi fielders filled with anxiety watch. For a moment, the whole ground falls into silence. Silence! Akber Gulamhusein waits for the ball! Will it come to him or go over!

In a flash it was all over...for Arabs...The ball landed plump into Akber's safe pair of hands. The Ithnashery captain caught the Arab captain on the boundary and with it the KJ Cup for the second consecutive year. Both Akber and Jawad were great cricketers, on opposite sides on the field, but friends and brothers off it. Both have left the world. May Allah rest their souls with His Chosen Ones.'

'Union were 92 all out by lunch time. Union fans refused to eat and faces downcast, waited with thumping hearts, almost without hope for defeat at the hands of the arch rivals. Dar Cricketers were all smiles, anticipating easy win. 92 was no frightful score for 50 overs with such a batting line up!

The early session belonged to Dar Cricketers. Shiraz Sumar was going great guns. Trumpets blared at every single taken. After tea Yusuf Kabana resumed bowling against Sumar. His off stump went flying. He was bowled by Kabana! That was the beginning of the end. Union camp erupted. Suddenly hopes rose! Dar Cricketers became subdued. Union had their ace in Sajjad Lakha. Soon their score read 68 for 7 and Sajjad sensed blood. He struck! 8th wicket caught by Liyakat Khimji on the boundary. 9th wicket stumped by Sikander, last wicket lbw – a hatrick and Union had done it, pulled the impossible. Won a convincing victory. So near, yet so far for Dar Cricketers! Yusuf Kabana let his hair down, for once, as a skipper, and allowed himself to be carried shoulder high! I was the proudest Chairman of the Selectors that year! Union were the Champs! 1980 was the greatest year for Union!’

Another incident worth recalling about Maalim’s brilliance. It was a Saturday game and Union on the verge of defeat against Burhani when Mohamed Nathoo’s whirlwind knock came to its rescue. As I was preparing my column the joyous Maalim burst out poetically:-

‘Like a lion roaring, Nathoo scoring,
Aged two score and six he still is a terror,
For opponents and to fumbling bumbling teammates,
A divine censure and a daring , brave exemplar’.

However, what will always etch in my memory is our write up on ‘Chehlum in Zanzibar’. I happened to be at Media Holdings and its Managing Director, Riyaz Gulamani, calling me to show a ‘Muharram In Haydrabad’ article in an Indian magazine. “Why don’t you come out with one on ‘Muharram in Daressalaam’?” It was around Chehlum time then. I said to Riyaz that Muharram was over long back. Why not Chehlum? That too not Chehlum in Daressalaam but Zanzibar, my birthplace and an evocation of the past. But time was against me as it was Tuesday and the write up had to be submitted by Wednesday besides the 2 cricket columns to appear on Thursday. I’d just a day. Instantly I thought of Maalim. At night after the Ashrae Zainabia majlis we met, and I put to him the challenge thrust upon me. Mutually we decided to come up with our respective piece. That night was devoted to the write up. Following morning we met, discussed the two versions and edited it out. The product was ‘Chehlum In Zanzibar’. Thursday, the 20th of August, 1992, was the day of Chehlum and that day’s Express edition splashed 'Chehlum In Zanzibar'.

Maalim was simplicity personified. The 'khanzu' clad Maalim briskly making his way to the mosque was a common sight. He was humble and pious with no air of haughtiness whatsoever. Despite his tight schedule at the University of Daressalaam where he was a Professor, he devoted considerable time into the services of the community, be it in the field of jamaat affairs, education, religion, literature or sports.

It was in the field of sports administration that I felt Maalim impacted a great deal. The audience at the USC gatherings or DSC meetings would be all spell bound as

Maalim speechified his way to the crux of the issue. Some shuddered at the mere mention of Mohsin Alidina. That unequivocal quality of his made him our hero. Union succeeded in solving most of its problems through him. He had been Union's great architect and saviour in all its intricate matters. At the time of complexity, he was all there to smoothen out things. He had framed and restructured the Union's constitution. He was Union's most effective spokesman and a member of its Management Committee on a number of instances. In 1980 he happened to be the Chairman of Union's Selection Committee and it need be stressed that never Union projected better team spirit and discipline than at that particular time. They won all the trophies and in Maalim's own words after Union's memorable victory against AK Club in the league, "I am the proudest Chairman of Selectors this year. Union are the Champs and we have won all the trophies."

Maalim's presence at the ground enlivened the proceedings as he would shout at the top of his voice "Come on Champions!" and gave a real boost to our cricketers right there on the ground. Later Maalim left for the States and in his absence, one could sense lull and his cry of 'champions' echoing all around.

Occasionally he turned up in Dsm. It was the morning of 'Eid al Fitr' and as I entered the mosque compound 'dua' resounded from the microphone. I said to myself, "this sounds Mohsin Alidina. Maalim seems to be in Dsm. We must meet after 'eid namaaz', hardly realizing that by then he would remain no more. He had arrived just a day earlier from New York where he headed Khui Foundation. Sadly, he succumbed to a massive heart attack in the mosque during the 'eid khutba'. May Allah rest his soul with Eternal Bliss in the vicinity of Ahlulbait.

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