

My Zanzibar Recollections

Abdulrazak Sheriff Fazal





My Zanzibar Recollections

Abdulrazak Sheriff Fazal



Dedicated to my dearest mother
Mariambai Sheriff Fazal
nee Khamis Damji



Contents

No. 1	Author's Preface	2
No. 2	Zanzibar	9
No. 3	The Zanzibar Khoja Shia Ithnashries	27
No. 4	Nai Misit.....	44
No. 5	Chehlum in Zanzibar.....	62
No. 6	The Zanzibar Mehfil.....	81
No. 7	Khushali Bankro & Husain Day	92
No. 8	Khoja Ithnashries' Ismaili Connections	100
No. 9	The Aghas and Bahrainis of Zanzibar.....	108
No. 10	The Nai Misit Mystique	115
No. 11	The Khoja Nasser Noormohamed Dispensary	121
No. 12	ESM & King George VI Schools	126
No. 13	Journeying Zanzibar to Bombay	136
No. 14	Zanzibar's Indian Settlement	152
No. 15	The Zanzibar Vendors, Eateries & Artisans	161
No. 16.	Zanzibar Ithnasheri Gymkhana.....	169
No. 17	Changing Times	177
No. 18	That fateful day half a century ago (Khoja Perspective)	187
No. 19	The End of an Era. A tribute to my mother	193
No. 20	Epilogue	205





AUTHOR'S PREFACE

As a Zanzibari born and bred commoner of Indian descent, as were both my parents, I am proud to belong to a century and a half old Jangbari Khoja diaspora and to have lived in close proximity to the mosque, imambarā, mehfīl and the Fēz school. The surrounding, the social set up and the interaction between the community members instilled a curiosity of a sort, and thus developed obsessions and an inquisitive mind. The post Zanzibar phase of my life therefore has been reminiscing and researching about the past. My stay with the National Bank of Commerce in their 'Directorate of Research' also provided an impetus for me. Most of my writing is a memoir and obviously nostalgic. Before one is assigned any write up one finds it not all that easy but once one puts oneself into it everything flows. The mind races, images explode and the retentive memory creeps up.

Islam is said to have been brought to the Subcontinent (India/Pakistan) through Mohamed bin Kassim and Mohamed Gaznavi by force. The Khojas however were not the product of forcible conversion. They were converted to Islam by an Ismaili Pir in the fourteenth century. They were said to be Hindu Lohanas and a fraction of whom were influenced by Pir Sadrudin, a disciple of the Ismaili Agakhan, who had fled Persian persecution to Sindh, Kutch and Kathiyavad. Thus the Lohana converts came to be known as Khoja, the term derived from the Persian word 'Khwaja' meaning mister or gentleman. Pir Sadrudin converted these Lohanas into Ismailis, a Shia Nizari sect of the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt and from where the Nizaris had shifted to Iran after the collapse of their Caliphate. Pir Sadrudin presented Islam in a somewhat Hinduised form and let the converts retain some of their customs. All the Khoja names with suffix 'ji' or 'ni' are basically Lohana names such as:-



Ji - Ramji, Kanji, Mawji, Manji, Dhanji, Lalji, Damji, Somji, Samji, Premji, Gangji, Nanji, Nagji, Dewji, Mulji, Murji, Ravji. Bhanji, Hirji

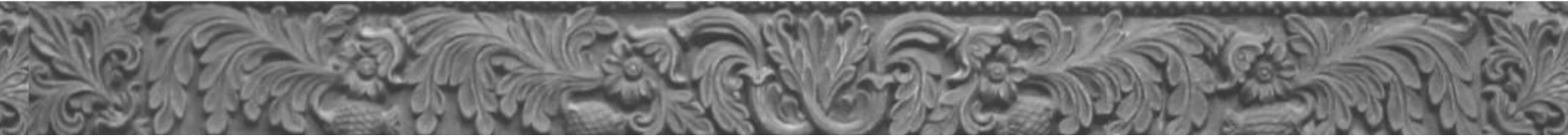
Ni - Hemani, Dewani, Lalwani, Lalani, Dhirani, Bhimani, Nayani, Nathani, Mirani, Hirani, Jivani, Virani, Rajani, Pirani, Tejani.

Pir Sadrudin's teachings fitted in with some of the Hindu concepts and incorporated in the Ismaili doctrine of *ginan* (holy verses in Indian languages) that the Khoja Ismailis chant in their prayers. Imam Ali was presented as the *avatar* of Vishnu. The Ismailis say "Ya Ali" while greeting each other. Pir Sadrudin established prayer halls (*khana*) and appointed its headman (*mukhi*) vesting executive powers in him. Historically this is the general belief though there are contradictory versions too. Anyhow, the crux of this narration is ZANZIBAR's involvement in this Khoja episode.

The Khojas were enterprising. They enjoyed good rapport with the Hindu Bhatias and along with them were in the forefront of venturing abroad. The Kutch & Kathiyavad/Muscat trade route was expanded resulting in the exploration of the East African shores and in particular the tiny island of Zanzibar. Zanzibar with its trade and the arrival of European explorers was found flourishing in the era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A large number of Khojas set off by dhows to greener pastures of Zanzibar. The East African Railway settlement was a long way off.

At a later stage, certain control and interference within the Khojas led to dissent and a number of Khoja families in the Subcontinent as well as in Zanzibar were ousted from the jamaat khana. Eventually they converted themselves to the main Shia faith 'Ithnashri' and some even opted for the Sunni faith. Zanzibar's Khoja Shia Ithnashri Kuwatul Islam Jamaat registered in 1881 (hijra 1294) became the first ever Khoja Shia Ithnashri jamaat in the world.

The *hijra* date 1294 stated in the document at Zanzibar Archives may not be accurate. There is a 4 year difference in the hijra date if the AD/hijra conversion on internet is to be applied (1294/1877). It could be that the



committee was formed 4 years earlier (1877) and the mosque made *waqf* only in 1881 after it was built.

Incidentally in 2005 there was a Reunion of Zanzibar Khoja Ismailis in Zanzibar to celebrate 100 years of the jamaat khana. A query was put against the jamaat khana's date of 1905 for verification. The jamaat khana was probably renovated and refurbished in the year 1905. The initial structure must have already existed on the same site long before 1905. If at all the jamaat khana was built in 1905 then there must have been a jamaat khana at other location in the stone town. If the convert Khoja Ithnashries had their mosque in 1881 and the Khoja Ismaili 'Esmail Ramji' *musafirkhana* at Malindi (opposite Safari Lodge) had been established in 1892 (as inscribed on the plaque there) then the jamaat khana in the stone town must have been in existence much earlier. In fact there is a list of *mukhis* and *kamadias* from as far back as 1838 just by the stairs as one enters the jamaat khana. The first *mukhi* of the jamaat khana reads Kassambhai Pirani (1838). During a few of my outings to the Zanzibar Archives there was very little that I could gather about the Khoja Ismailis in the pre secessionist days.

Zanzibar's cosmopolitan atmosphere with the presence of Arabs, Waswahilis and Persians in their midst influenced the Khojas a lot. Some even integrated with the locals and hence some people of mixed race among the Khojas. Also the era of the British Protectorate Rule that imposed its administrative and educational system on Zanzibar had its effect. All this made the Zanzibar Khojas quite distinct. Zanzibar had become their home. They built their lives on this sense of their belonging. India was no more a motherland for the Khojas. Personally I was a fourth generation Khoja and had missed out the experience of the dhow voyage in stormy monsoons, the world wars and black outs. I was born around the 'subcontinent partition' time. The Khojas with their loyalties to the Aga Khan, H. H. Sultan Mohamed Shah, and Qaide Azam Mohamedali Jinnah showed leaning towards Pakistan and distanced themselves further away from India.

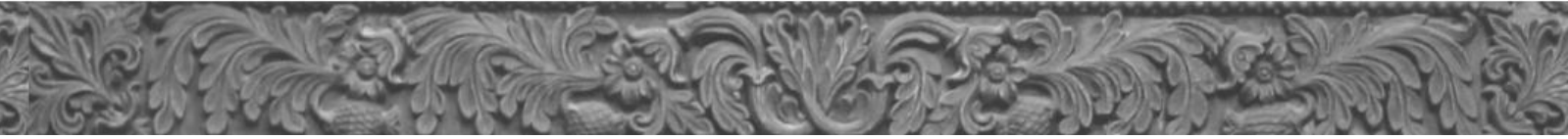


My Zanzibar was that of the 1950s and 1960s. Times were changing. The level of education had gone high and inventions like telephone, radio, electric iron, cooker, heater, refrigerator, camera and movie theatre were becoming more prevalent. Bicycle was the best form of commuting. Motor car was a rarity and luxury. Also the African nations had started seeking independence from their British Rulers. The voices of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta and Tanganyika's Julius Nyerere could be heard loud and clear. Obviously political changes in the neighbouring Zanzibar seemed in the offing.

These recollections are from the perspective of Zanzibar's Asian settlement and in particular the Khoja Ithnashries. They are in the form of a compilation of my various write ups. The narrative meanders through events and life in Zanzibar and its sanctity interspersed with reflections. What emerges despite the trials and tribulations the Khojas had to undergo is the beautiful Zanzibar of bygone days. Sadly with the passage of time political rupture had an effect on its endearment resulting in dispersion of the communities. I too had a short stint in Dubai, UAE, where its Zanzibar Association was meant for only Zanzibaris of Afro Arab descent. Such a rebuff had to be met with a spontaneous retort "Whatever your interpretation of a Zanzibari, you cannot take Zanzibar out of me!" Now the slogan 'You can take a Zanzibari out of Zanzibar but cannot take Zanzibar out of a Zanzibari'.

Today the ideology, mentality and attitude have undergone drastic change to suit the present day materialistic tendencies. The *nouveau riche* and negative elements are looked upon with rave admiration and respect. One fails to understand good from bad when viewing it from a religious point. In the good old Zanzibar there were no people with extreme riches but merely 'well to do' ones who were pious and knew where to draw the line.

Sadly time ticks away and memory keeps fading. Today's computer age has revolutionized the world. Fortunately I have had a web site set up



for me by my son Nabeel to retain some of my write ups a few of which I reproduce over here. The response to it has been phenomenal, in particular the Non Ithnashri Zanzibaris from different parts of the world. Amazing! They are testimony to their deep love for Zanzibar and some coming up with startling revelations. What is striking is that through their email addresses old acquaintances have been able to reconnect with each other. That was remarkable pouring abundant blessings. It is heartening to be appreciated and receive accolades from people of calibre and all walks of life. I owe them my gratitude and provide here (under 'Epilogue') select posts including the one from His Excellency Don Patterson, former US Ambassador to Tanzania.

I am not a professional historian. My writing is based on historical facts, written as well as oral. It is also based on the discussions (some even heated) by knowledgeable Khoja elders in my father's shop in the 1950s, my own experience, insight and hearsay, and enquiring about various aspects from sources and people whose opinions matter to me. Readers may not agree with all that I say but it has its semblance of some reality. There is repetitiveness in some instances demanded by its relevance to the situation portrayed. Also there is no standardization in the oft used vernacular terms and names since spellings as they appear in the original draft have been retained. Names like Husain, Sayed, Mohamed or tems like Ithnashries, Koran have been spelt differently at various stages. I apologise for this apparent anomaly, and also for using nick names wherein actual names were not known or for easy identification. I am sure there are other discrepancies too, language shortfall, spelling mistakes, grammatical errors but please ignore them. Regrettably the contents also accentuate too much 'I' and 'My' as necessitated by 'My Recollections' and hence the readers to bear the monotony. The book would certainly have benefitted from some professional editing but not so as to mar Zanzibaris' keenness on what little it has to offer.

For presenting this book my gratitude to Hassan Ali Mohamed Jaffer, a man of great intellect for whom I have tremendous respect. I was always a great admirer of his power of oratory but it was our exchange over an



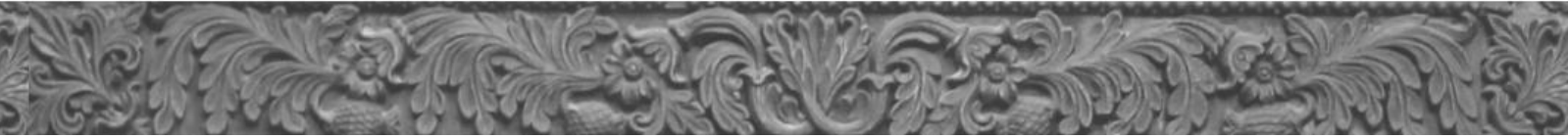
issue relating to Jinnah that set the rapport between us. He has been a real moral support and always encouraged me to release this book. How can I ever forget the late Maalim Muhsin Alidina? Our joint effort yielded 'Chehlum in Zanzibar'. He was a gem of a person. I am grateful to Mohamedraza Dungersi too, another great intellect and an old pal since the Zanzibar days. He had been advocating presentation of my research work for a doctorate thesis. That might have been implied somewhat jokingly but he always insisted on compilation of my write ups lest others take credit for them. Some of the write ups are decades old and quite a bit has been snatched but as long as it is for a good cause in memory of the good old Zanzibar I feel honoured.

I am also grateful to the highly knowledgeable Non Ithnashri Zanzibaris the Lodhi brothers Mohamed & Abdulaziz (Sweden), Mrs. Bhadra Vadgama (UK), Mrs. Anne Chappel (Australia), Amir Rashid (Canada), Jasant Mehta (Canada) and the late Abdul Mohamed Nuralla (USA) for the exchange we have had on Zanzibar that provided real enlightenment.

My thanks are also due to Maalim Najafali Tejani (Marhum), Baqer Alloo (Marhum), Fidahusain Hameer (Marhum), Shenny Meralli, Mohamed Khalfan, Sajjad Musa and my brother Husain for allowing me to refer to them on issues relating to Zanzibar. And of course to my dearest mother who from her bed kept visualizing Zanzibar with nostalgic recounting of its glorious days, and whom I pay my tribute in this book.

My sincere thanks to my niece Roxanne Damji for reviewing the write ups and for her useful suggestions, my daughter Sameera for her helping hand and Mrs. Sajida Tejani for her assistance in the final setting of the book and designing the cover page.

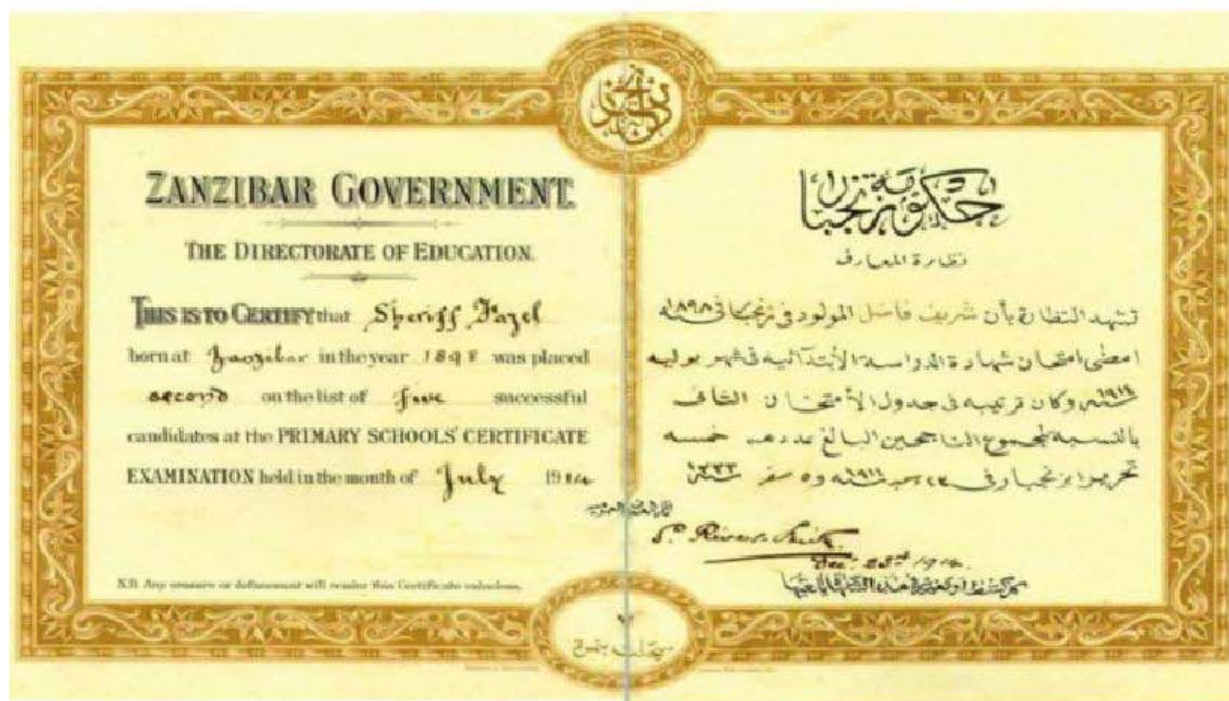
Special thanks to Surendra Naik, the Kassam Brothers (of Zanzibar's Ramju Stores), Jaffer Manek, Nasir Fazal and Master Mohamedhusain Baker Dharamsi for providing the photographs, and to Mahmood Fazal for encompassing all these and the 'Recollections' in his Dewani Family Tree'.



In the end my salute to most of the indigenous lot of the time, my fellow Zanzibaris, who were the humblest human beings. Their etiquette and pious nature were truly extraordinary. I am reminded of Mze Ibrahim, my father's Makunduchi contact, who would pay a courteous visit to our house every Sunday with *zavadi* consisting of fruits and vegetables, even after my father had passed away. My father refused the lucrative government job offered to him. He was in the cloth business, especially braid and fine fabrics. His marginal profit did not have to exceed a few percent. He also dealt in *kafan* (shroud) for which his clientele was classified into two, the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. While the 'have' paid its mere cost price the 'have not' paid nothing. In an emergency the indigenous African could knock on the door even late at night and would be served readily and without reluctance.

Abdulrazak Sheriff Fazal

September 2014



The Certificate of a century ago (1914) issued by the Directorate of Education, Zanzibar Government. That attainment was the highest level of education in those days in Zanzibar.

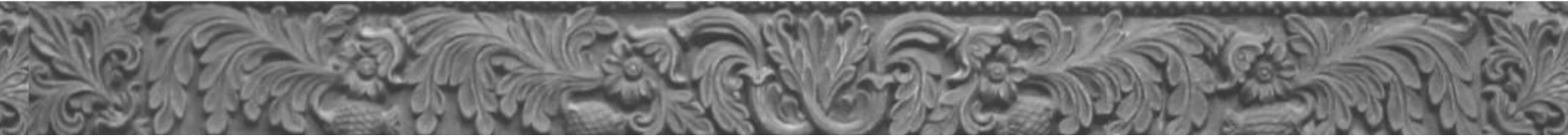


2

ZANZIBAR

The tiny island of Zanzibar with its insular position was a prosperous place where the Omani settlers had imposed their Sultanat 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.

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 *jamaatkhana* others abandoned it on their own. They adopted the main brand of Shiaism calling themselves *Ithnashries* (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.

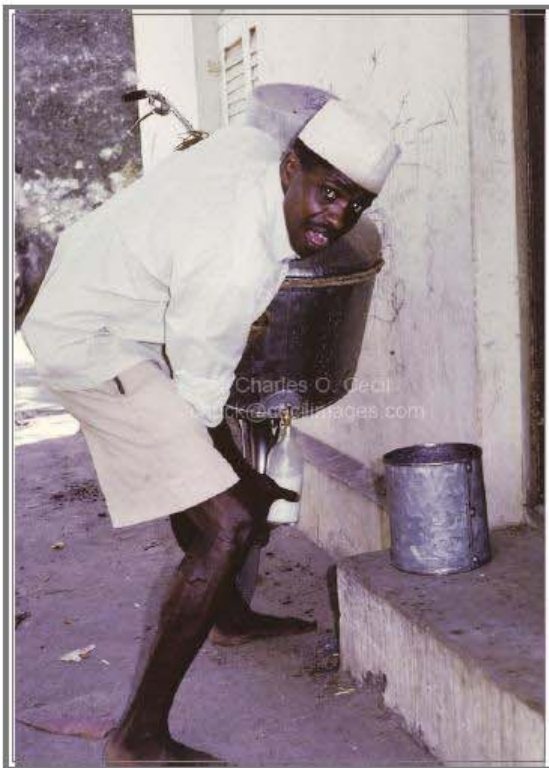
Zanzibar had a prosperous Khoja community and it was quite forthcoming into this secession. In fact the *Kuwwat Jamaat* (communal society) of Zanzibar became the first ever Khoja *Shia Ithnashri Jamaat* in the world in 1881 when the *Khojas* elsewhere including the subcontinent were still facing opposition 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 *jamaatkhana* 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 the 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 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 life style was an exemplar to the rest of the world.

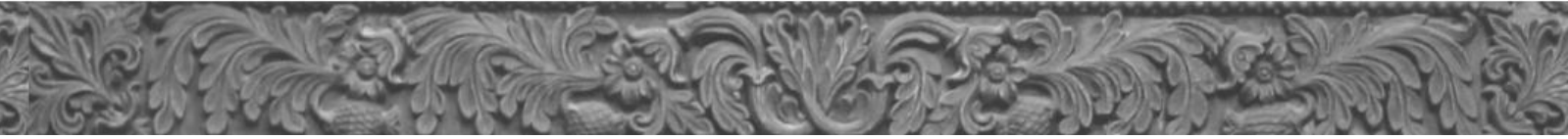


The Milk man



The Coffee seller

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 were Zanzibar's eateries and some of them still forming part of my consistent reminiscence. Those *masis' baja*, *Abedi's mix*, *Adnan's mbatata* (potatoes) and *Maruki's haluwa* (sweetmeat) tasted exceptionally good. Zanzibar was just one of its own, its vendors like Ali hawking "Adanda" to sell off his *baja*, 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 *dorani*, *shoki shoki* and *matufaa* were unique and besides Zanzibar could 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.



Doriani



Shoki shoki



Matufaa



Mabungo

In the evening people gathered at *Forodhani* or Jubilee garden by the sea side 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

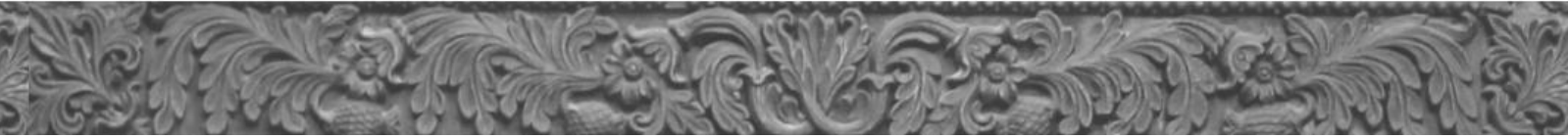


admiringly at each other. In one corner stood Habib Pira's 'fruit & ice cream' stall while in the centre vendors stretched themselves in a row selling *mohogo* (cassava), *mishikaki* (roasted meat), mango chips (*keri*), nuts (*jugu, jugu mave, daria, bisi*) in paper cone, cut sugar cane (*miwa* or *ganderi*), *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 the old 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 tarbush 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 to light street lamps. Zanzibar by night though dim was inviolable and had its serenity, sanctity and also liveliness.

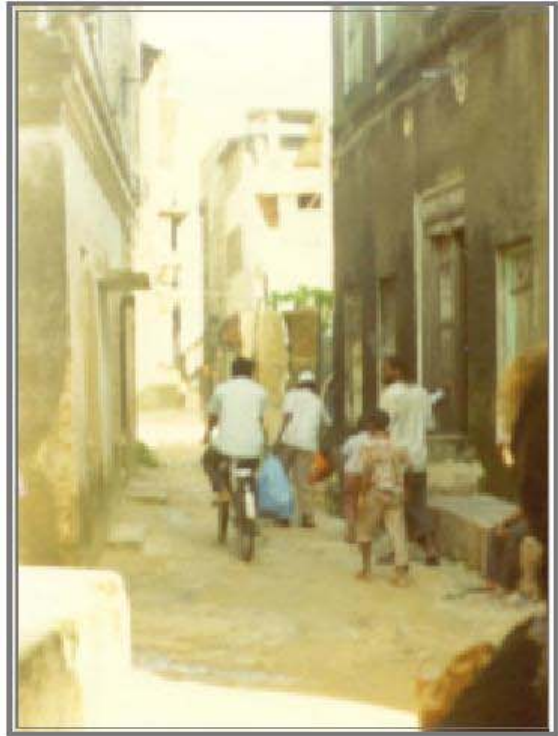
I was the sixth of my father's seven children. My father was strict and a thorough disciplinarian. He would wake up my elder brother Husain for morning prayers with a cane. Sadly he passed away in 1956 when I was only eight. I very well remember that sad night when a certain relative had the guts to 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.

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 mansion on Kiponda Road
opposite Junni mosque



The Mailindi building (dark) that
was confiscated

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 pajamas and rushing to the *Junni* mosque for prayers. Habib Rashid Jetha and Mohamedali Premji taught me how to say *namaaz*. Opposite the mosque was a small barber's shop where the barber *Toto Hajam* cut our hairs and also provided the latest gossips. The *barza imamwaro* (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 21 gun salute. Its hectic evenings generated tremendous pace. The vendors abounded selling the Zanzibar speciality like *kitumbua, kalimati, mkate ya kumimina, mkate ya ufuta* and *mkate ya mofa*. 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 hai suhurka, khana lukma noorka kum karo huzurke, roza rakho Ramzanka lanat karo shaitanko, jago, jago..*' of one Farjalla (Uthoyaro) who went around with his stick and dimly lit lamp. The *Washihiri* drummers followed and the Asian Bawo who eulogized the Muslim Saints and mocked the fashion trend. Eventually at two o'clock sharp exploded the 'one gun fire'.

Personally I would look forward to '*darsa*' (recitation of *quran*) 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. The *kahawa* and *sharbat* (juice) followed as you awaited your turn for the *quran* 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 21 gun 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 *haluwa* (*haluwa ya Mmanga*) and everywhere on *eid* day visitors would be relished with *haluwa* 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.



Kahawa



Haluwa ya Mmanga



Mnazimoja was also the venue for Prophet Mohamed's 12th *Rabiul awwal 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*. The proceedings were broadcast live over *Sauti Ya Unguja*. *Marashi* (rose water) was sprinkled on the people and an urn containing *udi* was passed around. Also *haluwa* and *kahawa* were served and late at night towards the end, *pilau* feasted on.

Before I was enrolled into the primary school at the age of seven I had to attend *quranic* 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 Indianness. Some of our teachers were *Parsi* including our principal Master Arjani. The portly Master Kanga was a *Parsi* too. 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 staunch Bakar Taki Walji (Master Baker) under whose tutorship the *Ithnashri* boys had field day.

Zanzibar's government secondary school was one of the best in the whole of East Africa. The new one at *Sateni* was known as 'King George vi School (now Lumumba College). Its teachers were mostly British seconded all the way from the United Kingdom by the Colonial Government. There



were other reputable schools too like Technical School (now Gamal Abdel Nasser) at *Beit El Raas*, some three miles from the town. Also beside 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 programs broadcast on *Sauti Ya Unguja*. The broadcast commenced with Quran recitation by one of the following - Sheikh Yahya Hussein, Hassan Sheikh, Abdulrasul Bandali, Hashim Abdulla, Murtaza Bandali, Amirali Abdulrasul (later Minister in the Mohamed Shante Government) and Abdulhusain Marashi. Each of them was allotted a particular day of the week.

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 Zanzibar's financial network controlled by the private banker Jetha Lila and the Standard Chartered and National & Grindlays banks operated.

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 included 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, Magistrate Husain Rahim and Registrar Husain Nazarali. Zanzibar boasted a Secular Court and a *Sharia* Court. Sheikh Omar Smet and Abdullah Saleh Farsi were Chief *Kadhis* 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.

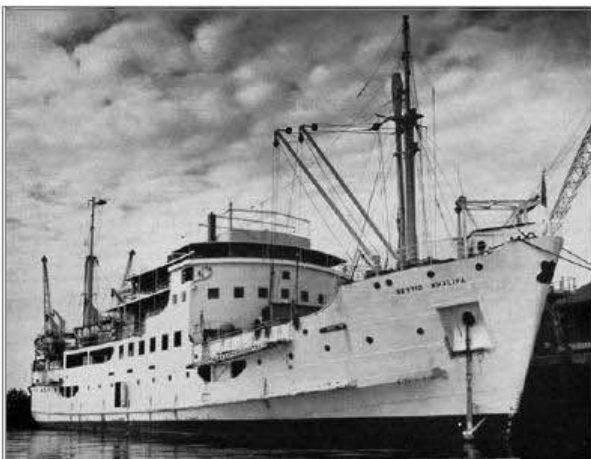
Zanzibar's oldest newspaper was a weekly *Samachar* published by Fazel Master whose establishment dated back to 1901. The bilingual (English and Gujarati) paper was circulated on Sundays only. Such another was 'Zanzibar Voice' by Ibrahim Kassam. Also Rati Bulsara entered with his very own *Adal Insaaf*.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

Portuguese street converged on Hurumzi (*Vaddi Bhajaar*) where grocers abounded and the public bustled in purchasing their requirements. The shop/residence of my maternal, Khamis 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 outskirts 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 fish net lay on quay and dhows and schooners were sheltered.

Al Hazra and *Al Said* formed Zanzibar's passenger ships and journeyed to and from 'Zanzibar-Dar es salaam-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.



S. S. Sayed Khalifah
(Later S. S. Jamhuri)



Zanzibar Airport



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!

In Zanzibar we had several football teams but *Malindi* was my favourite, the team of our locality. The entrance to the stadium cost ten cents and the encounter between *Malindi* and *Vikokotoni*, *a la Simba* and *Yanga*, would be the talk of the town. Whenever *Malindi* won, the shop of one by the name of Ashur in a corner of *Malindi* distributed freely a glass of mixed fruit or fresh orange juice. I remember once as a child to have followed my maternal cousin, the late Mohamedraza Damji, who was a member of *Malindi* club to its party at Sheriff Musa. *Malindi* that season had won all the trophies that were displayed there and its supporters danced to the tune of *tarab* as the celebrations continued right through the night.

East Africa's most prestigious tournament was 'Gossage' and Zanzibar was the underdog. Zanzibar's most popular footballers were Hija Saleh (Malim Hija) and Shioni Mze. Once sometime in 1959 when I was at my aunt's place I had the privilege of accompanying her brother in law, the late Roshan Master, who was the editor of the weekly 'Samachar' to a Gossage match between Zanzibar and Kenya at the *Khalifa* ground (now Mao Tsetung Stadium). He held a special pass and we sat in the VIP section just behind the British Resident and the Sultan's family members. Zanzibar's Majham and Boti displayed thrilling football but eventually Kenya prevailed. Elijah Lidonde, Kenya's star footballer scored twice to beat Zanzibar 2-1.



From the mid fifties onwards African colonies had begun detaching from their colonial rulers. Such 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. There were Saturday night rallies by Hizbu or ZNP at *Darajani* and ASP rallies on Sunday evenings at *Kiswandui*. ZNP had *jogo* (a cock) as its symbol and the crowd agog with excitement for the occasion chanting 'voti umpeni jogo'. ASP had *kisima* (a well) as their symbol and their supporters aplenty. 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 quranic 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 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 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 but lasted just a month. The dawn of 12th January, 1964 struck Zanzibar with a bloody Revolution. 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 that shattered the Asian community's nerves. Zanzibar was no more as before. Hundreds of Asians literally fled in utter despair. 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 Zanzibar Asians ever experience such a lifestyle again.





The lily pond at Marhubi



The resort at Chwaka





The market in Zanzibar stone town



The sun set at Forodhani



3

THE ZANZIBAR KHOJA SHIA ITHNASHRIES



The Kuwwat mosque/imambara (*Junni Misid*).

Zanzibar abounds in the history of the Khoja community. It was here that our forefathers had first landed in the mid nineteenth century abandoning the shores of 'Kutch' and 'Kathiawad' in look out for greener pastures, and in their lingo proclaiming Zanzibar as 'Jangbar'.

When old timer Khoja Ithnashries settled abroad visit Zanzibar they carry with them weighty emotions. As they alight from the ship they hope to get a glimpse of their ancestral houses in the stone town, the schools where they had studied and the narrow streets and corners where they had played as children. Some may wander at *Forodhani*, *Mnazimoja* or even



take a drive to *Chwakah* or *Jambiani* where many an evening of olden days had been leisured out.

On landing, the ghost stone town is imbued with nostalgia and traversing through *Malindi's* narrow lanes *Kiponda Road* is reached where the small '*Sabil*' monument built by Janmohamed Chattu in commemoration of 1300th anniversary of Imam Husain's martyrdom becomes evident. Opposite it stands the new *Fez School* building (*Ithnashri School*) which was built in 1958 by Husain Dharamsi Gangji replacing the old *Fez School* across the narrow passage, and it is this old *Fez School Building* which takes one down the memory lane. Today it may not seem of any significance but it was here sometime in the 1870s, away from the *Jamaatkhana*, that our revered elders used to gather and resolve decisive issues. Eventually their religious zealot paved the way to dissidence from the main Khoja group whose redoubtable leader, Tharia Topan (later knighted and a street named after him), was unforgiving and tolerated no uprising.



The Sabil Monument

It must be noted here that prior to the dissident movement our ancestry had enjoyed the right of adapting itself to all the normal Islamic precedence such as *namaaz*, *rozah*, *kissas (majlis)*, *niyaz* etcetera. It was only later when restrictive measures were imposed and the faithful debarred from performing normal rituals that the

revolution within the *Khojas* erupted, both in Zanzibar as well as India.

The likes of Dewji Jamal invited the faithful to the old *Fez School Building* where they prayed *namaaz*, recited *majlis* and served *niyaz*. Leading among





Dewji Jamaal

the revolutionaries were the two Walji Rawji brothers, Mohamedali and Janmohamed. Heedless of any threats after receiving moral consent from the British Resident in 1880 Mohamedali built the mosque adjoining the old Fez School Building while the other brother Janmohamed procured the Kabrastan Plot at Rahaleo. Obviously the predecessors lie buried in the Khoja Ismaili Kabrastan at Mnazimoja beside the Coopers ground. Incidentally Mohamedali Rawji was buried by the side of the mosque and his grave now lies inside the imambara built later. The Sheriff Dewji family went on to acquire a plot at Mkunazini, converted it into bustan where they buried their family members and held majilises on Sundays.

According to Marhum Haji Karim Allarakhia's report "The *Kuwwat* mosque and early *imambara* were built by donations from among the original (founding) members of the community which numbered some 250 souls in 1880. The donation included about Rs.8000 which Dewji Jamal and Allarakhia Walli, both formerly of Mumbai, had mobilized from Mumbai. Other large donors were Mohamed Walji Rawji and Walli Nazerali. During this period Janmohamed Walji Rawji also bought a piece of land for burial."

By the year 1881 the mosque was completed and later the *Imambara* (ground floor level) built by its side. The plot for the *Imambara* could be obtained through the good office of Major Mohamed Ahmed Khan (Kalbe Ali Khan) who was one of the wazir of Sultan Majid Bin Said. He also initiated the inclusion of *Ashhaduanna Aliyun Waliyullah* in the *azan* from the mosque. The *Imambara* was partly financed by Rehemtulla Tejani and carpeted by Mohamed Walli Dharsi. The stage was thus set in Zanzibar in 1881 for the formation of the *Khoja Shia Ithnashri Kuwwatul Islam Jamaat*, the first ever *Khoja Shia Ithnashri Jamaat* in the world, with Pira Walli as its first President.



The *Mujtahed* of the time Sheikh Zainul Abedin Mazindarani was contacted and Agha Sayad Abdulhusain Jawaad Marashi Musawi dispatched to Zanzibar as Residential *Alim*. He inculcated upon the faithful the true version of the *mazhab Shiaism*, thus giving momentum to the faith.

There goes an interesting anecdote that once sometime in 1900 Zanzibar was hit by a severe drought. All the communities were called up to pray for the rains. Sayad Abdulhusain assembled all the *Ithnashris* at 4:00 a.m. in the sahan of the mosque where they said their *Fajar* prayers and then were led to *Mnazimoja* where in the open *Namaaze Istiska* was said. As soon as the prayers were over the skies opened and it rained incessantly. Sultan Humud was impressed and wanted to meet in person Sayad Abdulhusain who had to be collected from his residence. The Sultan became so overwhelmed by the presence of the impeccable *alim* that he accompanied him all the way back to his residence in the chariot ridden by two horses. Such was the grandeur of the old *ulema*.



Agha Sayed
Abdulhusain Marashi



Agha Sayed Husain
Shustari

Also around that time a leading *ulema* from Hyderabad, Aqa Sayad Gulamhusain, paid a visit to Zanzibar. His sermons, eloquence and charisma drifted away a section of the community who formed their own *Jamaat* (*Khoja Shia Ithnashri Hujjatul Islam Jamaat*). They went on to build their own mosque, a huge *Imambara* and even acquired a *Kabrastan* plot across *Mwembeladu*.



The cynosure of the *Hujjat* Mosque is its minaret built by Mohamed Rehemtulla Merali (Mamu Hariri). The *Hujjat* Jamaat also benefited a lot from the generous Dattoo Hemani and Nasser Noormohamed whose immense property was entrusted to it. The Dattoo Hemani Kanyashara was the school for girls while Nasser Noormohamed Dispensary provided medical facilities. The dispensary was a huge architectural monument but sadly its trusteeship was taken over by the government from the community. The dispensary ceased to operate as the object of the Trust and in its stead today stands an ostentatiously displayed Cultural Centre. There were recreational spots too, *Saun Bagh* on Hollis Road (once the Dr. Livingstone House) and *Kursum Bagh* on Kilimamgu, where often a large gathering met, recited *majlises* and held feasts.

Interestingly the Zanzibaris refer to *Kuwwat* as *Junni* and *Hujjat* as *Nai*. Those keen on history may know that while the members of the *Kuwwat Jamaat* consisted mainly of *Kutchis* with the interlinkage of few *Kathiawadis* those of *Hujjat Jamaat* comprised mainly *Jamnagris* with few *Kutchis*. In fact, some of those few *Junni Kathiawadi* families included the prominent ones of *Jamalias* (Sheriff Dewji) and Mammu Walli Dharsi who were originally *Bhavnagri/Mavai*.

One of the *Kutchi* was a youthful and enterprising Ali Nathoo who had emerged on the Zanzibar scene in 1886 from the remote Nagalpur. He went on to succeed Pira Walli as the President of *Kuwwat jamaat* and reigned the presidency for a record 23 years. He amassed wealth and his charity knew no bounds. The *Kuwwat imambar* built upon the old one was fully financed by him and done on a grand scale.

Ali Nathoo's charity after the First World War and during the famine in Zanzibar was unsurpassable. The British Resident offered him knighthood but he declined the title 'Sir'. The Resident was so much impressed by his nobility and selflessness that he enquired of him if he could be of service to him. The great man requested for public holidays for *10th Muharram* and *21st Ramadhan*. His wishes were granted and these two sacred days were marked as public holidays for 45 years from 1920 to 1964. In fact



Zanzibar had been the only place besides Iran where *21st Ramadhan* was observed as public holiday. Even today Zanzibar has a street known as *Kwa Ali Nathoo*.



Peera Walli



Ali Nathoo

Another notable President of the *Kuwwat jamaat* was Husain Allarakhia Rahim, the Public Prosecutor with the Zanzibar Government and hence referred to as PP. He went on to become a Magistrate in the High Court. Husain Rahim was dedicated to serving Islam and the community. After the Second World War he introduced the *Ithnashri* Voluntary Corps with Ibrahim Husain Shariff as its Chairman, Ali Jivraj as Secretary and Abbas Tejani as Treasurer. There were other Presidents too of the *Kuwwat jamaat* and these included Husain Sheriff Dewji, Fazel Nasser Mawji, M.D.Kermali, M.A. Saleh, Husain Nazarali, Abdulrasul Khakoo and Sherali Ahmed Ladha.



Husain Rahim



M. D. Kermali



In regard to Resident *Alims* Agha Sayad Abdulhusain who passed away in Mecca in 1905 was succeeded by his son in law, Agha Sayad Husain Habibullah Shustari Musawi. Sayad Husain was a very pious and humble man. He was also the most popular having remained the Residential *Alim* for 40 years till his death in Zanzibar in 1945. He was buried in *Chunga Khan* along *Rahaleo*, the burial ground for the *Aghas* and *Bahrainis*. There after followed Agha Sayad Mohamedhusain Nashirul Islam Musawi, Sayad Jabir Hassan, Tahzibul Hassan and a few others.

Agha Husain and Agha Abdulhusain had built up big families. The household of *Aghas* in Zanzibar was their progeny and held in very high esteem by the *Khoja Ithnashris*. Also there were *Shia Bahrainis*. They had a *mehfil* known as *Matemni* in *Kiponda*. Their *Alim* was Sayad Abbas who was famous for his *Kiswahili* idiolect.

Zanzibar as compared to other towns in Africa had the highest population of *Khoja Ithnashris* and they numbered almost 5000, as a result of further conversion and the influx of more arrivals from *Kutch* and *Kathiawad*. Such had been the impact of Zanzibar on the community that eventually *Kiswahili* became the mother tongue (not necessarily the ancestral language but the language one speaks and thinks in) of most of them though with typical dialect and intermixture of *Kutchi* here and there.

In fact the settlement on the mainland Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda took place much later, sometime after 1920s though the Coastal towns of Bagamoyo, Kilwa, Tanga, Mombasa and Lamu had small settlements earlier.

The Zanzibaris were well known for their *imandari*, *azadari* and *khatardari*. The building referred to as old *Fez* School Building was transformed into school in 1928 after the consent of Sayad Abdul Hassan Isfahani was sought. To begin with it had three tutors in M.M. Jaffer (Mulla Asgar's father), H.M. Rashid and Hassanali Rashid who themselves had earlier been sent to Luknow by a samaritan, Husain Rashid Nathani, for *dini talim*. The *Fez* became a fully fledged night school where besides *dinyat* the languages *Arabic*, *Farsi* and *Urdu* were taught. Abdulrasul Alidina



Saleh became its first principal followed by Gulamhusain Sachu Lalji, Mohamed Jivraj and Mohamedhusain Sachu Lalji. The school had some highly knowledgeable *malims* in Agha Mehdi Shustari (grandson of Agha Husain), Mohamedjaffer Nathani (Malim Miya), Gulamhusain Peera, Najafali Tejani, Ahmed Issa and many more. During daytime Malim Maulidi, Malim Rajabali (Malim Rajabu) and Mulla Suleman (Mulla Karo) rendered selfless service providing *quranic* lessons to the children.

The publication of *dinyat* and various *mazhabi* kitaabs by Mohamedjaffer Sheriff Dewji and the periodical *Salsabil* by Gulamhusain Mohamed Walli Dharsi and Mohamed Jivraj enlightened Zanzibaris and enhanced their *imandari*. As a matter of fact it was *Salsabil* which provided impetus to Federation inviting articles on it and offering prizes. All these were published at Fazal Janmohamed Master's 'Husaini Printing Press' that was established in 1901. The press published the Sunday weekly 'Samachar' that was leading in imparting publicity to the Khoja Ithnashris.

Azadari in Zanzibar was second to none. People from outside travelled to Zanzibar during the months of *Ramadhan*, *Muharram* and *Safar* specifically to participate in the *azadari*. The Zanzibar *shabihs* and *julus* assumed a pattern of their own and were later adopted by the other Africa *jamaats*, some of which even emulated the staging of 'Husain Day' that used to be an annual event observed with solemnity at Old Fort (Portuguese Fort) at night. It was attended by a mass cosmopolitan public and among the dignitaries included the Sultan and the British Resident, and its proceedings broadcast live on *Sauti Ya Unguja* (Radio Zanzibar).

The *majlises* by Mulla Abdulhusain Mohamed Walli, Abdulrasul Lakha, Abdulrasul Dato, Hassanali Dori, Ali Khakoo Rajpar, Fateh Ali, Abdulrasul Dewji, Husain Rahim, Ahmed Lakha, Ahmed Dato, Mohamed Sheriff (Master Sheriff), Gulamhusain Peera, Raza Panju and the *bandh* (rhythmic melody) reciting three generation of Mulla Raza Kasam, Hassanali Raza and Jaffer Hassanali Raza were heartrending. The *quran* and *dua* recitation by Malim Abdulrasul Bandali, Sheni Juma and Murtaza Bandali had ethereal quality.





The packed audience at the *Junni Imambara* listening to *majlis* by Allama Akil Turabi-1960



The desolate Junni mosque that once had the entire space filled with the devotees

The *majlises* resounded on microphone from various *mehfils*. It was at Taziakhana under the watchful supervision of the fervent Kassamali Mohamed Walli Dharsi (Bha Kassamali) that *azadari* was at its most stimulant. Another ardent azadar was Abdulla Saleh of Mehfile *Shahe Khurasan* (Kiwanjani) where *saf matam* continued long after midnight.



The *mehfil* at Mtendeni run by Abdulrasul Peera and frequented by the members of the other sect joining their dissident counterpart came to acquire the name Mehfile Private. Interestingly the *Hazrat Abbas' ladu* occasion that we observe annually is an event that dates back to the *Ismaili* days (*Abbasali ja laddu*) and to date given lot of sanctity by them. Likewise the official positions *Mukhi* and *Kamrio* are traditionally *Khoja* designations to which we adhere even today.

The opening of the Haji Rehemtulla Tejani *Dharamsara* (guest house) was inaugurated by the British Resident in the year 1901. The *dharamsara* was meant for the guests visiting Zanzibar. The *dharamsara* in usage today was in fact the *Bewakhana* (house for widows) built in 1935 by Mohamed Alarakhia Shivji (Mamu Chiku).

When it came to *khatardari* the *mahemangiri* (hospitality) of the Zanzibaris was exemplary and their *khana* (food) sumptuous. The *imambara* kitchen was catered by Gulla Dawood whose delicious *Khoja* cuisine of *kalio pau* (*aab ghosh*) and *khichro* (*haleem*) still gets talked about. The pavement outside the *Imambara* was the famous *barza Imamwaro*, and the road alongside converted into '*Khushali Bankro*' (spread over with wooden benches and chairs) on the occasion of *khushalis*.

Even in the field of sports the community did not lag behind. Husain Rahim was a respected member of Zanzibar Sports Control Board and made Chairman of its Cricket Sub Committee in 1933. Zanzibar *Ithnashri* Gymkhana is said to have existed long back and had a formidable cricket team. Mulla Raza Nathani, Maalim Mohamedjaffer Nathani, Sherali Meghji, Gulamali Kermali (Kabana), Noorali Jessa, Gulamhusain Dharamsi, Baker Tejani, Akbar Gulamhusain and Bashir Nasser featured prominently in cricket. Even the mainland stalwarts like Amir Yusuf, Yusuf Kermali, Amir Gulamhusain, Bashir Tejani and Mohamed Nathoo had learnt and begun their cricket careers from Zanzibar. The Gymkhana also had football as well as volleyball teams.





The 1933 Ithnashri Gymkhana Cricket Team

The history of Zanzibaris is littered with emotions. They were simple, peace loving and God fearing people. There was immense brotherhood and people cared for each other. The standard of education was extremely high and the community boasted of a number of intellectuals. Economically people were contented and mostly *Ithnashris* worked in Government Offices where administration was excellent. Those who had business retained only minimum margin of profit that resulted in very high purchasing power and generally a good standard of living. The *Ithnashris* mostly resided in *Malindi* and *Kiponda* though a sizable number also occupied the *Hurumzi*, *Mkunazini* and *Gambo* areas. There was no fear of theft or hooliganism and ladies could even walk all alone after midnight.

The dream of peace always beckons and never remains forever. The sad events of 1960s led to the exodus of the community and its members dispersed here and there. Mohamedali Ismail Dharamsi, Abdulrazak Chandoo and Hassanali Husain Ali Nathoo despite tiny *jamaat* and hardship endeavoured to preserve the legacy and traditions of Kuwwat *jamaat*. Likewise today's President Mohamedraza Dharamsi and his bench of officials are also doing their needful but the once glorious Zanzibar for the Khojas is mere history now.





The 1962 Kuwwat Jamaat Committee



The Zanzibar Khoja Ithnashri Volunteers-1961

Seated L to R - Harub bin Abdullah, Abdulla Fundikira, Mohamed bin Abdullah, Mohamed Shamte, J.M. Jaffer

Standing L to R - Unidentified, Police Inspector, Mohamedali Sonara, Abbas Chattu, Husain Rahim, Yahya Shustari, Akber Jessa, Muslim Jivraj, Husain Bachu, Mohamed Jivraj, Abdulhusain Jaffer, Gulamhusain Saleh.



The majority immigrants of the 19th century and their descendants having settled in the towns of Zanzibar, Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, Mozambique and Madagascar adopted these countries as their home. They lost all the traces of relatives and other contacts in India after three generations. It was the hospitable nature of the indigenous people and the cosmopolitan policy of the government of the day, a legacy which still continues, which gave the community the confidence of staking its future for good or worse in these countries and cultivate loyalty towards them.

Of the former Zanzibaris who have since settled in UK, USA and Canada they still find themselves attached to Zanzibar culturally. They speak *Kiswahili* among themselves when they meet in the mosque for prayers and *majlises*. The photo albums fattened by the old photos taken in Zanzibar are some of their precious possessions with sentimental attachment. It is said that one belongs to where one's pleasant memories are and these are the childhood ones. Those with means do visit the island to refresh the past while others continue to cherish the fond memories.

Indeed this must be the most extraordinary *Khoja Shia Ithnashri Jamaat* in the world. It has its paradoxes and surprises as well as moments of glory and despair.





The Zanzibar Khoja Ithnashries - 1950s



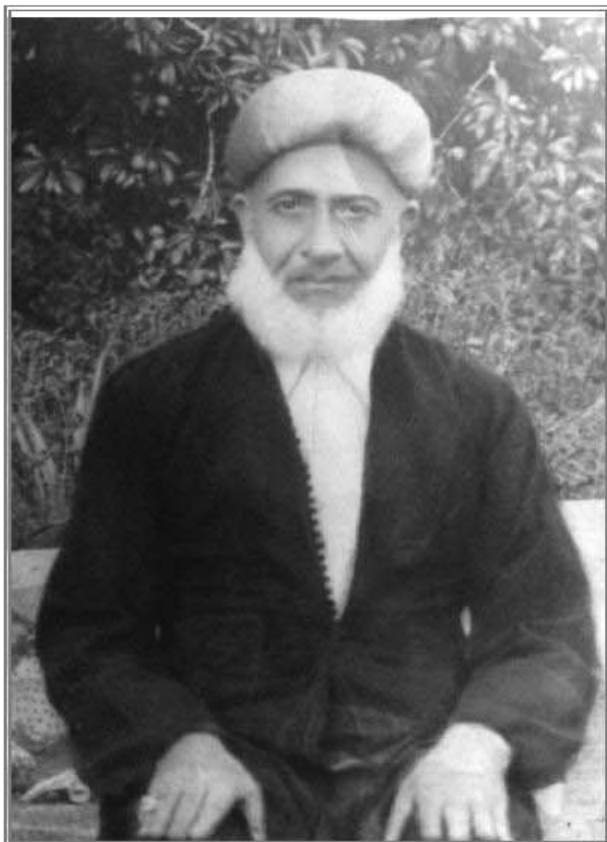


Downstairs at the Junni imambara the grave of the hard line revolutionary
Marhum Mohamedali Walji Ravji





The dilapidated Haji Remtulla Tejani Musafarkhana in a Malindi corner built in 1901



Haji Remtulla Tejani

Respected Sahab: Seth Haaji Remtulla Alarakhia Tejani.
We, the undersigned, members of the Shia Ithna-Asheri Jamat of Zanzibar have heard of your intention to go to the pure sites for the holy ziyarats, (pilgrimage) and from the bottom of our hearts congratulate you, and take permission to present to you this Letter of Respect.
In this short writing it is difficult to mention your uncountable virtues, but at this time we should at least say that in the life you have spent so far a large portion has been spent in the service of the community. You have also spent a large portion of your income for the benefit of the community. The existence of the Musafarkhana (Free Guest House) proves this. Truly you deserve congratulations that you used the generosity of your heart and took into account the need of the community and made this musafarkhana a fact. At that time you certainly used your generosity which was an act to make the community proud. Not only us but all Indian brothers see this virtuous act of yours with respect. You are going to the pure places for holy ziyarats. For that we are congratulating you and with that we are praying to God that this journey be a successful one, all your heart's desires be fulfilled and that with full health and happily you return to unite with your family. That is our prayers.

Aameen O Nourisher of The Worlds (Ya Rabbal Alameen)
The Writers: We are your humble servants
Khoja Ithna-Asheri Jamat's members.

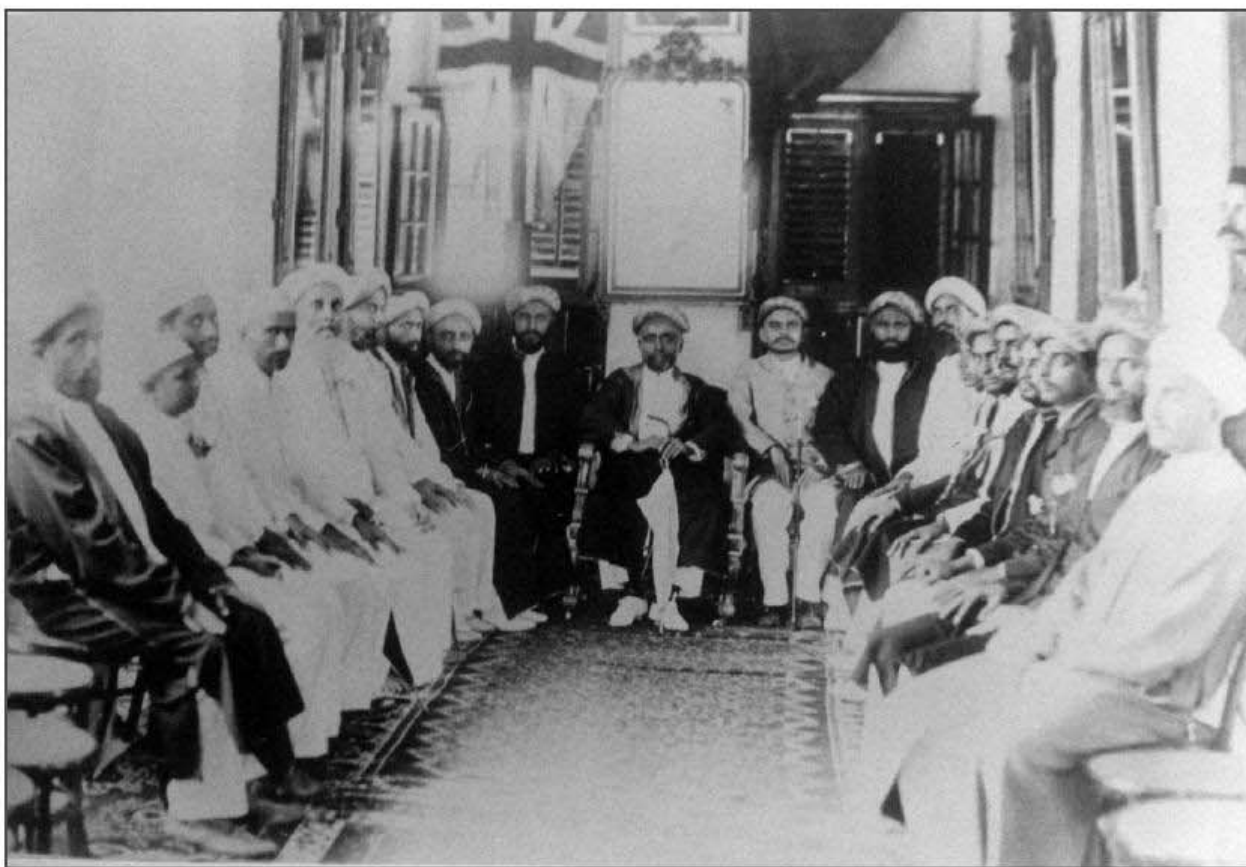
The 1901 letter by the Kuwwat Jamaat in recognition of Haji Remtulla Tejani's





Sitting from L to R:

Agha Aliakber, Unidentified, Agha Sayyed Hussain, Haji Remtulla Tejani, Agha Mohamedali



The Haji Remtulla Tejani Musafarkhana inauguration in 1901





NAI MISIT

We were seated at the breakfast table in the lobby of International Hotel, Zanzibar (formerly the Popat Mitha *Chambavima Dello*) when my sister from the States raised the alarm, “soon we’ll be departing and we’re yet to see *Nai Misit* (probably the Jamnagris pronounced ‘d’ in *misid* as ‘t’) and visit *Nai Chungani*. ” There upon we rushed off.

The early morning showers had left the streets sodden and an overcast sky gave a rather gloomy and sleepy look. Passing through the narrow lanes remarkable for their unevenness, depressive stone houses, shabby graffiti and Indo-Arab multiculturalism we found ourselves amid mounds of the dilapidated Dattoo Hemani Girls School that once had been under the trusteeship of Nai Mist. My sister sighed for the school in which she had studied. It was difficult to believe that once this very place was our own *Jangbar*.

Further down through the gully of Dr. Menezes’ clinic (of the colonial days) and via the once bustling *Golarana Dello* the *Nai Misit minara* in all its loneliness glared longingly at us, and also evident was the forlorn ladies *imambara* evoking sadness. Its memory lingered on.

On the eve of seventh night of Muharram the ladies *imambara* would be a hive of activities with the organizers busy threading jasmine and rose petals, preparing *mehndi*, arranging *thals* and lighting candles. Then little girls carrying green flags, candles and *mehndi* plates over the sides of which hanged jasmine *sehras* would walk to and fro while the ladies with *thals* of fruits, dry fruits, *siro* and coconut pieces along with boiled



grams and sugar lumps moved around encircling the girls, and chanting 'Mehndi bane Kassimki, Jo lati hai Sakina'. It used to be so ceremonial and moving, and done in grand style. Ah for those days of Nai Misit in Zanzibar!

Nai Misit or *Hujjat Jamaat* had a mysterious aura about it. Even today to many its foundation remains mysterious. We need to dig deep into this. Basically Khojas are of Hindu Lohana origin from *Kutch* and *Kathiawad* converted by Pir Sadruddin into the Muslim Sect of Shia Ismailis. Later dissidence erupted within the Khojas and the devout Shias separated themselves from the rest adopting the main version of the Shia mazhab-*Ithnashrism*. Incidentally the *Kuwwat Jamaat* of Zanzibar was the first ever Khoja Shia *Ithnashri Jamaat* founded in 1881 when the Khojas of the subcontinent were still facing stiff opposition to establish their separate identity.



The three Nai Alims (left to right):

Agha Muravvij, Aqa Raza and Agha Najfi listening to majlis by Junni's Husain Rahim



Initially the Zanzibar Khoja Ithnashries numbered only a few hundreds, and considering their new national and religious status having emigrated from India and also proclaimed the new faith, they ought to have had a strong bond and unity among themselves. It was therefore ironic that they split within a few years.

Perhaps the *Jamnagri* Khojas had felt insecure as they were outnumbered by the other Khojas who also dominated the *Kuwwat Jamaat* Committee under the auspices of Seyyed Abdulhusain Marashi. Around that time appeared on the Zanzibar scene Molvi Ghulamhusain (Seyyed Aqa) from Hyderabad, India, whose personality and preaching power emotionally overwhelmed the Khoja Ithnashries, and in particular the Jamnagris who found solace in him. Untowardly a series of unwarranted misunderstandings resulted in the eventual formation of *Hujjatul Islam Jamaat*. It was the indelible mark. Its initial membership was hardly 100 members, and prominent among them were the Jamnagar families of Lakha Kanji, Ali Mohamed Khalfan, Abdulrasul Dato, Mohamed Sheriff Dewani, Ali Dungersi, Karim Allarakhia, Dewji Dhanji and some others.

A vast plot was obtained in one corner of Sokomohogo/Mkunazini over which the Nai mosque structure found its place and its foundation stone laid in 1890 by none other than Molvi Ghulamhusain. Attached to the mosque were two huge *imambaras*, for ladies and gents respectively which were built later. One of the highest donors was Lakha Kanji who is believed to have spent his entire wealth on financing Nai Misit. Its kabrastan plot around Mwembeladu was acquired later.

Initially there was nothing like a president but trustees or *mutwallis*, and a *mukhi*, who were powerful and held in very high esteem. It was only later on the formulation of the constitution that the post of president and other office bearers came into being. Some of Nai's presidents included Abdulrasul Hassan Virjee, Abdulrasul Khalfan, Abdulla Khalfan, Ahmed Lakha, Ahmed Dato, Ramzan Khamis Damji, Anwer Hassan Virjee, Hussain Hassam Nasser, Yusuf Hassam Nasser, Mussa Ghulamhussain



Lakha, Yusuf Salehmohamed, M.A. Rasool, Hussain Remtulla, Pyarali Giga, Akbar Nasser Thawer, Yusuf Karim Allarakhia, Jaffer Karim Jetha and Abbas Mohamed Sheriff.

Such was the intensity of misunderstandings between the *Nai* and *Junni* members initially that they not only boycotted each other's mosques but even avoided to enter into wedlock. There was even dispute over a certain property. After the Second World War things improved and when *Nai's* president Abdulrasul Khalfan died in 1944 while still in office, both *Nai* and *Junni* in rare unity, closed business on the funeral day.

The *Nai* folk with his sobriety exuded a lot of discipline. Some *Nai* progeny rose to great prominence. Ahmed Abdulrasul Lakha and Anwer Hassan Virjee became members of the Zanzibar Legislative Council, Ahmed Abdulrasul Datoos was made the Commissioner of Customs and Abdulrasul Dewji Dhanji the Secretary at the Secretariat.

Nai Misit assumed this air of nobility, a la *Shahi Darbar*, which some mistook for snobbery. There was an event, which produced a strong feeling of dissatisfaction among a few members over a sensitive issue, and this even resulted in a few prominent families like Nasserali Fazal Sheriff, Mohamedali Fazal Sheriff, Yusuf Nanji Kara and Takki Nanji Kara (Takki Dactar) joining the *Kuwwat Jamaat*.

However nobody could deny *Nai Misit's* discipline which lent quality to it. Its best example was the office downstairs. Rajabali Nathoo (Rajju) was *Nai Misit's* head clerk and Saleh Issa its accountant. *Nai Misit's* religious activities and immense properties demanded lot of administrative and accounting work. All credit therefore to them, in particular the indefatigable Rajju whose almost 40 years of devotion and dedication inspired real admiration and respect for him. The board downstairs would be promptly chalked with notifications of the events and also listings of various expenses. It was just remarkable. Even today some of the records still lie about there. Interestingly Rajabali Nathoo was a *Kutchi*, and so were a



few of the *Nai Misit* office bearers (*Mutwalli/Mukhi/ Kamrio/President*) like Khamis Damji, Ramzanali Khamis Damji, Hassanali Khamis Damji and Yusuf Salehmohamed Karachiwala, and the man who gave *Nai Misit* its fabulous *minara*, Mohamed Rehemtulla Merali (Mammu Hariri), too. They all had linkages with the *Jamnagris*.

The long flight of wooden steps ascending to the corridor and *imambara* generated an awe inspiring feeling. The corridor gallery from the top viewed the ample *sahan* beneath it. The immensely oblong *imambara* with its row of windows provided *Nawabi* spectacle resembling those of Luknow and Hyderabad. The *imambara* would be whitewashed regularly and its spacious floor laid with brand new Persian and Kashmiri carpets of varied colours and designs, and also with straw mats. Its ceiling displayed its row of fans, elaborate lights and gorgeous chandeliers with the captivating range of engravings and tinkling glass pendants. The front corner occupied probably the largest replica of the Karbala mausoleum with *zarihs* of Imam Husain and other *Shohadas* donated by Ismail Subzali Thawer.

Muharram was always emotionally charged. The *imambara* emanated air that was filled with the fragrance of *attar*, *udi*, *asmini* and roses. Noticeable from the second night were the white *alams* of varying size fixed to the two embroidered horizontal black velvet banners in such a way as to project a semi circular shape, and placed on either side of the *mimber*. On the fifth night appeared bigger *alams* with varieties of *panjas*, like those seen in Hyderabad *imambaras* and probably brought over from there, and wrapped in colourful satin and velvet with silver and golden threading that gave them a glittering look. The audition, the colour, the pattern, the effects and the fragrance provided splendors to the fully packed *imambara*, and its audience spellbound, listening to the *majlis*. What glory! From seventh night onwards the *laash*, *alam* and *julo shabihs* took shape, and awaited with fervency. The *gam* and the wailing thereby heartrending.





Nai Misit's external view, unlike yester years when it used to be whitewashed on regular bases.



The emotionally charged Muharram at Nai Imambara.

The climax was *Ashura* day when amid cries of '*Ya Husain*' Imam Husain's *laash shabih* with two pigeons placed on it and *Zuljanah* wrapped in blood splattered white cloth adorned with arrows, armour shield and a heavy pure gold sword would be brought in to the *imambara*. Thereafter the *alams* would be removed and brought into the middle while the *circum saf* moved around briskly. Later the *alams* gradually one by one would be taken away and lowered through the *imambara* window onto the *sahan* below where they were declodhed, their *panjas* detached, and wrapped in a white cloth like *kafan* over which attar was sprinkled (*alam thanda*). It was so emotional and moving. The dim lit *Shame Gariba* saddened the proceedings further culminating in a processional rite of '*Wa Askara*' yells by the small girl with her hair loosened and a *kuza* in her hands while the other ones holding candles walked behind her. The older boys carrying flags followed and the audience chanted '*Ay Shiaun imshab, shame garibanast*' in unison. The joint recital '*Bade katle shah garduse atithi sada, shamia bastando bazu Zainabo Kulsum*' by Husain Datoo and Yusuf Karim Allarakhia marked the end.



Another eventful month was Ramadhan. On entering *Nai Misit* there is another smaller staircase on the right leading to the mosque, which is on the lower level compared to the *imambara*. After dipping the legs into the water the larger marbled *hoz* (fountain) containing an attractive black fish and reflecting light blue water is reached, and from where we step onto the *sahan* that leads to the beautifully architected mosque which always reminded of Ramadhan when it would be humming with excitement and buzzing with activities. As usual after *darsa*, *dua* would be recited. Thursday nights feasted off *dakhu* consisting of *pilao* or *bhunni khichri* and *dahi* (curd) right there in the *sahan* unlike the *amaal* nights when the *nyaz* were held in the *imambara*. On the *amaal* nights the packed mosque and *sahan* echoed with the chants '*Astagfirullah rabbi wa atubu ilayh*' and leading among those who chanted the loudest were the elders Habib Karani, Ramzan Khamis Damji and Musa Dato. It had a vibrating effect. Even today when an old timer visits the mosque it ought to remind him of those nights, and the echo felt. On the 23rd night 100 *rakat namaaz* was as good as a must and during its half session fresh orange juice and tea served. The *shabe qadr amaal* stretched up to 27th Ramadhan when Ismail Subzali Thawer traditionally volunteered *dakhu* as well as *iftar* for both *Nai* as well as *Junni* members.



The ample *sahan* outside the beautiful architectural mosque.



The *hauz* for *wuzu*



The *minara*, built in the 1940s and raised on the corner of the sahan is Zanzibar's landmark and in fact one of its highest structures. It was built by Mohamed Rehemtulla Merali (Mammu Hariri). The minaret commanded a spectacular view. The devoted Habib Karani climbed up to its top twice daily, noon and dusk, to deliver the call for prayers (*azan*). The *minara* would become the centre of attraction on the eve of *eid* when many climbed it to sight and view the new moon. Even then the *dakhu* spree did not end. The final one came on the *eid* night itself from Jaffer Mohamed Sheriff Dewani and later Hassanali Dossa who treated the gathering after the *eid amaal* with *biriani* na *halua* (later *pilau* and *halua*). On *eid* morning after the *eid namaaz* the humble Agha Muravij would mildly start his *khutba* in *Gujarati* with the delivery "Aje *eidno divas che*, aje *khushino divas che*". The *khutba* was followed by *ziyarat* Warisa by the lovely voiced Hassanali Dhalla. Then the usual *eid* greetings began in the mosque and the sahan with mostly the kissing of hands among each other rather than the mere shaking of hands.

Another event celebrated with great festivity in the earlier days was *eid e Zahra* or the ninth Rabiul awwal *khushali*. A grand feast used to be held at *Saunbaag* on Hollis Road which was under the trusteeship of *Nai Misit*. *Saunbaag* was a recreational spot where many community members gathered on *khushalis* and holidays, recited *maulud* and held feasts.

Zanzibar was really amazing. While *Junni* was reputed for *Julus*, *Husain Day* and *Khushali Bankro*, *Nai* was renowned for its inner extravaganzas. One of those was the Hazrat Abbas *nyaz* that had to coincide with the Hindu month of *Asad*. It was customary of *Nai* or the particularity of the traditionalist *Jamnagris*. In fact on that day *Nai* would be bursting with curiosity and projected a different look as the gathering abounded in *Junni* members. In the earlier days the sumptuous *thal* contained as many as seven types of *mithai* - *ladu*, *mesu*, *jalebi*, *santa*, *gagan santa*, *monthar* and the garnished *gevar* along with *vara chatni* and *biryani* or *khao saag*. What *jahojalali*! All those who donated towards the *nyaz* fund would later receive *mithai* in accordance with their contribution, the higher the contribution the more the *mithai*. Rajabali Nathoo and Mohamedali Merali accompanied by the workers Musa and Mbrisho who carried those big *kikapus* (baskets) went from house to house delivering the *mithai* packet.





The architectural beauty of Nai Misit mosque



The Nai Minara commands a spectacular view



Probably the largest replica of the Karbala Mausoleum occupying the pride of place at the Nai Imambara



The extraordinary *Nai* kitchen located downstairs at the back was an institution in itself. It gave off a fragrant aroma. With its *dhegs*, kitchenware and cutlery, and its chief chef Musa and assistants Mbrisho, Hamisi and others, it was bustling with activity all the time. The workers peeled away vegetables, grinded spices and grains, received fresh supplies of meat deliveries and carried out all sorts of cooking activities. Once the food was cooked the crane lifted up the *dheg* through a hatch made for the purpose onto the corridor at the far end of the *imambara*, and Rajabali Nathoo and Mohamedali Merali would then dish it out. The *Nai* kitchen served mouth watering delicacies, which to this very day remain unmatched, be it the delicious *khichro*, tasty *kalio* or appetizing *biryani*. One of *Nai*'s specialities was its saffron *sharbat* served with *nyaz* during noontime and which we used to sip from the thick and coloured metallic bowl, another *Nai Misit* peculiarity. Also peculiar were the dark brown coloured metallic mugs for drinking water, and the solid metallic *thalies* in which food was served.

Throughout the twelve nights of Muharram *thalies* were served at *Nai Misit*, either *siro dengu* or *kalio pau*. The afternoon *nyaaz* provided other varieties including the ever popular *daal gosh*. Notable among those who served included the father and son pair of Karim Allarakhia and the jovial Gulam Karim Allarakhia. Even aged 80 and plus Karim used to be so active and hectic running here and there that he shamed the youths. There were other elders also like Mukhi Fazal Kassam Chandoo or *Mukhi* Fazal Meghji or *Mukhi* Nasser Thawer or *Mukhi* Ismail Virjee who with a bucket of *saag* moved round the *imambara*. There was even the Abbas Volunteer Corpse. What is heartening today is that even 40 years since then the volunteers Murtaza Ahmed Lakha and Jaffer Rajabali Nathoo can still be seen wholeheartedly serving *nyaz* till the very end, wherever they may be.

Then there was Yusuf (*Chuchu*), another of those Karim Allarakhia sons, who specialized in *sharbat*. His preparation of thick creamy milk



(*sharbati ya maziwa*) and juices made from oranges and *madafu* came to acquire a taste of their own. The highly flavoured hot tea, coffee and cocoa were served in beautiful Chinese or English cup saucers which on different occasions varied in size and shape. On *khushali* nights *attar* would be applied to the hands and the solid silver container with burnt *udi* (sandalwood) in it taken to one and all who raised their hands over it palming the fragranced smoke which spiralled upwards. The children would look pleased with the handkerchief presented to them. Indeed everyone had his presence felt, and towards the end offered hot saffron milk stuffed with pistachio and almonds in a colorful cup saucer or the choicest ice cream with wafers in a glass goblet. It was a *shahi* treatment that lent credibility to the status of *Nai Misit* and its arty crafty crockery.

One of the contributors to *Nai Misit's* immense wealth was Nasser Noormohamed Kasmani who boosted its coffers tremendously. At one stage *Nai Misit* had about 100 houses under its trusteeship of which more than 50 belonged to Nasser Noormohamed. No doubt Zanzibar's *Hujjatul Islam Jamaat* then was the richest *jamaat* in the Khoja Ithnashri world. One of the properties under *Nai Misit's* joint trusteeship was the magnificent Nasser Noormohamed Dispensary. The functioning and administration of the dispensary was testimony to its discipline. The dispensary was meant for all Khojas. For that matter the members of the other sect also frequented *Mehfile Muhibbane Husain* at Mtendeni, which thus came to acquire the name *Mehfile Private*. It was also run by a member of the other sect, Abdulrasul Pira, who converted only later on joining *Nai Misit*, and hence the *mehfil* came to be associated with *Nai Misit*. Eventually the *mehfil* was managed by the residents of *Alladinjo maro* who held majlises there in the late afternoons of Muharram.





A group of Bahrainis ascending the long flight of wooden stairs on their way to Nai Imambara



Downstairs at Nai Imambara the water taps for washing hands

Another *mehfil* to be served with the members of *Nai Misit* was *Mehfile Panjatan* located on the outskirts of the stone town. It was run by the Kermali Dharamsi brothers initially and later the brothers Mohamedali and Abdulrasul Karim Jetha. Its evening *majlises* in Muharram recited by Mulla Suleman (Mulla Karo) were well attended. The *mehfil*'s speciality was *vara chatni nyaaz*. However, the favourite of all was its delicious *muthia*, which drew a bigger crowd. Another striking feature of *Mehfile Panjatan* was Mohamedhusain Kermali Dharamsi (Babu Dharamsi) standing beside the water filled drum and graciously offering water in the metallic cups. From there many packed themselves inside Mohamed Pira's (Golo Tumbo) *matwana* to be dropped at *Junni Chungani* for *majlis* and *chai na Marie biscuit*.

The *Nai* members always exalted at the *majlises* of the three generations of Seyyed Aqas, Ghulamhusain, Nisarhusain and Raza. I vividly recall



Seyyed Aqa Raza's visits sometime in the late 1950s and later in the early 1960s when his highly emotional rendition had the *Nai imambara* vibrating, and the congregation spellbound. It was extraordinarily out of this world. Strangely Seyyed Nisarhusain was succeeded as *peshimam* by the majestic Agha Seyyed Najafi Marashi who became associated with Nai Misit when he happened to be the son in law of Agha Seyyed Abdulhusain Marashi. Eventually came the humble Agha Muravvij who unlike all the other Aghas of Zanzibar had no inherent connection whatsoever with Seyyed Abdulhusain Marashi or Seyyed Husain Shustari.



The progeny of Nai Misit pioneers pictured around 1925 at 'Saun Baag.'

Back row (L. to R.)

Unidentified, Mohamedali Merali Rehemtulla, Rajabali Nathoo, Jaffer Ali Dungersi, Ahmed Abdulrasul Lakha, Ahmed Dattoo, Ali Meralli Rehemtulla (Maro Maro) and Musa Gulamhussein Lakha

Centre (L. to R.)

Unidentified, Karim Allarakhia, Sayyed Aqas Molvi Gulamhusain and Nisarhusain, Nasserli Fazal Sheriff, Mohamedhusein Ali Dungersi.

Front (L. to R.)

Unidentified, Gulamali Dewji, Mohamedali Fazal Sheriff, Abdulrasul Dewji, Yusuf Mohamedali Fazal and Mohamedhusain Saleh Lakha.



The *majlis* reciters besides Seyyed Aqas through *Nai Misid's* long history included Abdulrasul Lakha, Abdulrasul Dato, Dewji Dhanji, Hassanali Dori, Abdulrasul Dewji, Ahmed Lakha, Ahmed Dato, Mohamed Sheriff (Master Sheriff), Raza Karim and Sheni Lakha. In Muharram the services of Mustafa Bhallu and Abdulrasul Bhallu (Datchu) of *Junni* were sought to fervently lead the *saf matam*.

In the very early days veteran Karim Allarakhia excelled at the recitation of *jiski majlises* held at the deceased's residence on the night of the burial and attended by almost everyone. The death announcement was heralded by the Jinnah capped, half khaki trousered and powerfully voiced Dharamsi's frightful and loud cry of "*Makamte halo bhai*" which sent shudders down our spines (prior to Dharamsi the announcer was Remu Walji [Bi Remi's husband] who had his own way of making announcements). Downstairs at the residence white cloth was covered on the wall or furniture and *matanga* held for three days attended by the community members who paid their respect reciting the *quran juzu*. There was nothing like a *mawayat* committee at *Nai Misit*. Individuals merely volunteered to give *ghusle mayyat* and notable among them were Husain Meghji and Ladhu Gariali. The *ghusal* was normally given at the residence and also the *janaza* cortege proceeded from the house rather than the mosque. The lonely widows with no kith and kin or no means of support were made to live in *bewakhana* located in a corner of Kiponda/Malindi built in 1935 by a prominent *Nai* member Mohamed Allarakhia Shivji (Mammu Chiku).

The marriage ceremonies called for elaborate preparations and ceremonies like *veeaji majlis*, *mandvo*, *maulud*, *doodhpino*, *vannai*, *sargas*, *cheracheri*, *ponkhnu*, *bukhbharani*, *shindha*, *sattaro* and *chandar*. Also *udi*, *asmini*, *hina*, *vanjas*, *dalias*, *vikubas* and *langilangis* consumed aplenty by the family members, friends and acquaintances. On the eve of wedding the bridal parties feasted off '*machi bhat*' (fish biryani). It was considered '*shukan*' (good omen). At night the garlanded groom was escorted to the mosque for nikaah and then back to his house by a large group chanting *asalamualaik* under the direction of Maalim Saif. In the very early days the groom was made to wear *sherwani* and golden



satined *pagri* (turban), hold a sword and ride on a horse, and also the *jamaat* elderly made to wear the *pagri*. The ladies gathered at the bride's residence from where at around midnight they accompanied the heavily clad bride to the groom's house. It was a slow march through the Zanzibar gullies and the neighborhood awakened by the ever youthful Bi Remi led *mamas'* loud shrieks and cheery singing of '*maso maso manangu usimone maso*'. The *mamas* also carried on their heads the precious *dej* that included costly ornaments. And imagine that without any form of security! That was Zanzibar at its best.

We were entirely lost in the past and right there before us stood the desolate *Nai Misit*. It was haunting and provided fundamental pathos. Our eyes were filled with tears. Cruel time had brought the end to the glory in *Nai Misit*. Its great decors may still be there but the old touch is missing, in fact they are now falling into decay. Its tiny *jamaat*, which is reduced to almost nonentity, still abides by its legacy and traditions. It is run by Abbas Mohamed Sheriff and patronized by Zulfiqar Habib Karani who from Dar es Salaam finances *nyaaz* every now and then. The small attendance comprises mainly Bahrainis but that liveliness of the past when there were some 800 to 1000 members remains no more.

Time was running short and we had to reach *Nai Chungani*. In the olden days we walked towards Mwembeladu hospital from where a narrow lane took us to the *kabrastan*. That route has disappeared now and we had to be driven to Gamboo Police Station from where one elderly African man escorted us to the site of the once *Nai kabrastan* which had a number of graves on both the sides of the narrow passage that passed through it. We visited it every Thursday, *Ashura* evening and the early mornings of *eid*. In the past there stood the sheltered spot in a corner where *namaaze janaza* was performed. On Thursdays *hadise kisah* and *marshia* were recited there and *chai na samosa* served when the neighboring African children collected themselves to fetch their share. By its side was the well from where the caretaker Mze Husaini drew water into the buckets to be poured over the graves. Around there were trees and their leaves fluttered, and the birds twittered. All of that remained no more and the entire site



transformed. In its place is laid a new mosque built by the nearby African residents. All the graves had disappeared except one or two broken ones with their bricks scattered here and there, and that was where we recited *fateha* and *yasin*.

As we sailed off from Zanzibar its picturesque scenery was apparent and even affording us the view of the *Nai Misit* minaret in the far distance that seemed to bid us adieu. Interestingly today many Zanzibar Ithnashries, wherever they may be, are in complete ignorance of their ancestry. What an irony that the Zanzibar influence after three generations succeeded in obliterating the supposed ancestral feud but failed even after the lapse of six generations to resolve the *Nai-Junni* differences. We are about to see the millennium end and seemingly the concerned authority also intent on *Nai's* merger. Whatever that is, it is a humble plea from the old timers to whosoever to preserve its sanctity and guard its memorabilia.

What a remarkable history! Just like its *Junni* counterpart *Nai* also has its paradoxes and surprises.



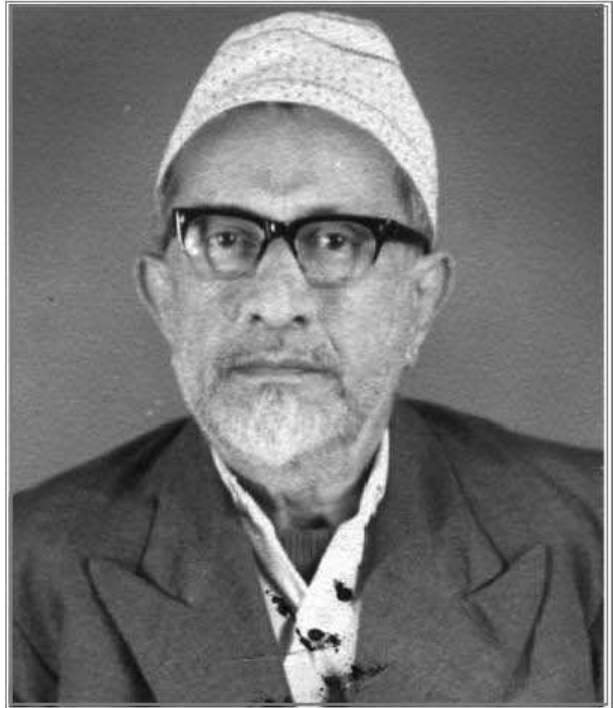
The crane lifts up the *dhag* through a hatch from the *Nai* Kitchen.



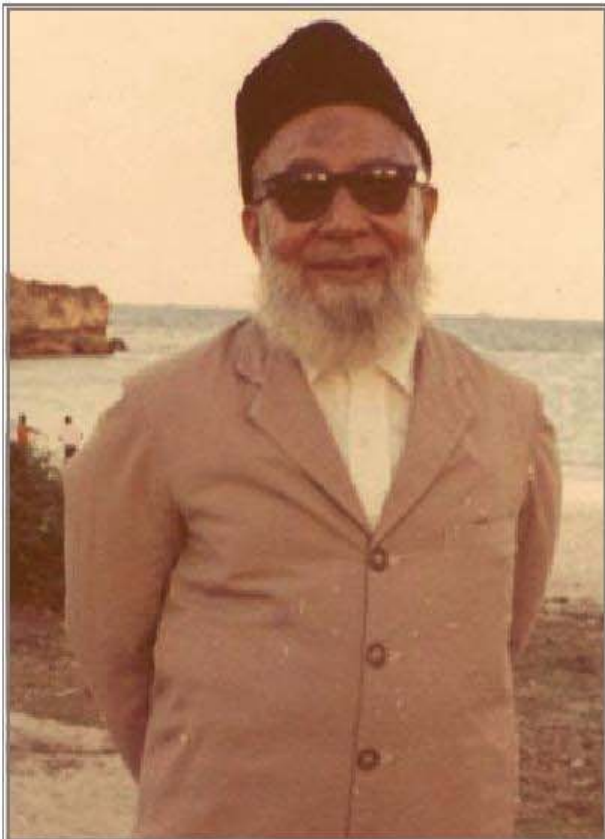
'THE NAI MISIT MULLAS'



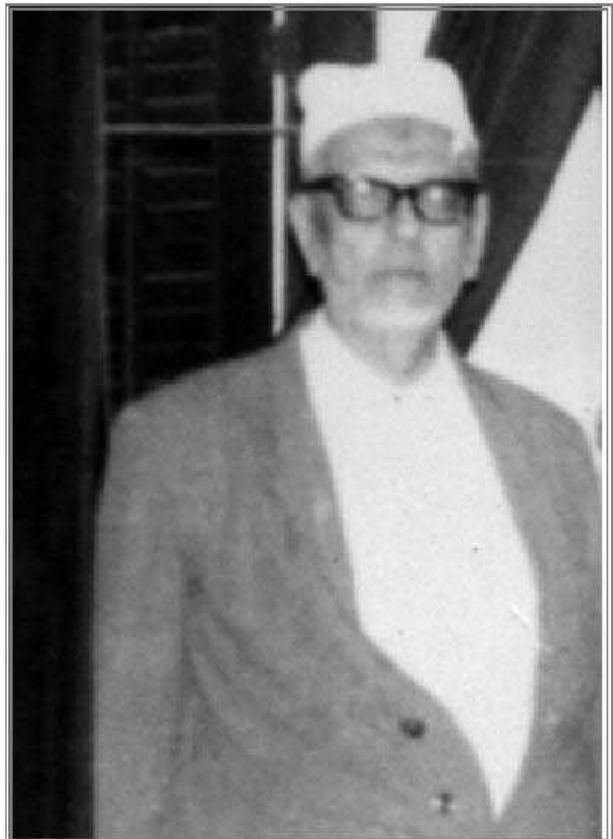
Sayed Aqa Raza



Mulla Abdulrasul Dewji



Mulla Ahmed Lakha



Mulla Ahmed Datoo



ખોજા શીઆ ઈસ્નાઝાશી
 પિઘવાશ્રમ
 મરહુમ હાજી મહમદભાઈ અલારખ્યા શીવજી
 તરફથી ખોજા શીઆ ઈસ્નાઝાશી
 પિઘવા બેફનો મારે વડક
 તા.૨૫ મી જાન્યુઆરી ઈ.સ.૧૯૩૫
 તા.૧૯ મી સપ્તાહ ઈ.સ.૧૩૫૩



The Hajj Mohamed Allarakhia Shivji Bewakhana in a Kiponda/Malindi corner
 (now transformed into Musafarkhana)



5

CHEHLUM IN ZANZIBAR



The placard, the banner and the sizable alam that symbolized Zanzibar *julus*

It is the time of *Chehlum* of Imam Husain A.S. It marks the culmination of the mourning period for the valiant band that laid down their lives at Karbala to save Islam.

Many mourners descend on Zanzibar from mainland Tanzania, Kenya, UK, USA, Canada, Gulf States and elsewhere. Some for the first time, others on their annual pilgrimage so to speak. They spend two full days in *azadari*. Almost non-stop!



What is it that pulls so many people to Zanzibar during *Chehlum*? It is certainly the atmosphere there. The memories of those old days come flooding the moment one talks of *Chehlum* in Zanzibar.

Chehlum in Zanzibar did not descend or also go away as suddenly as it did in other places. The leisurely pace of Zanzibar had a lot to contribute to its gradual build up.

For ten nights before *Chehlum*, there used to be *Ashrae Muharram* (ten days of *Muharram*) repeated at Saleh Hassan cum Baker Taki Walji's (Master Baker) place (now the Annexe to Narrow Street Hotel, Kiponda). The *Baraza ya Master Baker* and *Baraza ya Imamwaro* were the main sitting area for the large audience that listened to *majlis* intoned by Raza Rashid Panju.

The tenth night is *Ashura* (Kwa Master Baker) and the scene of *Zuljanah* brings live the memory and moments of *Ashura* night of a month back. The next night is *Chehlum* night and the atmosphere emotionally charged. It is black everywhere, for there is hardly anyone without at least a black shirt on. All the *alams* are draped in black and so are the *mehmils*.

The day preceding the eve of *Chehlum* witnesses a hive of activities at Taziakhana. The revered figure of Kassamali Mammu Walli Dharsi (Bha Kassamali), the staunchest of devotees, busy directing preparations for the *julus* at night. It is the scene of threading flowers, applying scent and sharpening *zanjeer* blades as flags, *alams*, *jhulos* (small *tabuts*) and *mehmils* also take shape.

The *Chehlum* night activity starts with the sad recital *Arbainke sogwaro alwida, akhri majlis hai yaro alwida* by Murtaza Abdulrasul Bandali at the *Imambara* followed by *majlis*. After that at around eleven o'clock commences the *julus* from the *Imambara* compound with Abdulla Mohamedali Premji (Toti) way in front, just behind the placard and banner bearers, carrying the unique and sizeable *alam*. The *alam* symbolizes



Zanzibar *Julus*. Then follow little girls in a long stretching row carrying *jhulos* and chanting *Sayyade abrarka aaj hai chaliswa, Zehrake dildarka aaj hai chaliswa*. Also the *Zuljanah*, draped in black velvet unlike the blood spotted white piece on the occasion of *Ashura*, and adorned with arrows, armour and sword, is being brought out by Gulamhusain (Golo) Saleh Allarakhia, Raza Karim Box and Husain Ali Dawood.



Little girls in a long stretching row carrying *jhulos*



The *zuljanah* with Raza Karim Box and Gulamhusain Saleh (Golo Saleh)





Murtaza Bandali reciting nauha

The black *alams*, *mehmils* and *tabuts* are in evidence everywhere, with also groups of *Chupki Julus*, *Matami Julus* and *Saf*. Towards the end is the *zanjeer matam* with *azadars* vehemently beating their breasts with *zanjeer* and bleeding profusely, and chanting *Chutke kaidse ayi hai Zainab, majai hai Zainab* under the baton of Jaffer Rajabali Jaffer (Kibete).

The Cosmopolitan Zanzibar public -The Africans, the Arabs, the Asians and the Europeans line up the route to witness the *julus*. The atmosphere is awash with doleful *nauha* chants and the beating of the breast, and the public watches in respectful silence. There is *sabil* of *sharbat* in every corner and everyone offered to drink it in memory of the martyred Imam.



Two-hand matam led by Maalim Abdulrasul Bandali





Saf Matam



Zanjeer Matam



The first stop of *julus* is Matemni or Matam Bahrani which held *majlises* in Arabic or Kiswahili for Shias hailing from Bahrain, and the reciter Seyyid Abbas whose Kiswahili idiolect was well known. Matemni was a small inconspicuous *mehfil* near the imposing Ruwehy building, but inside it was all *azadari*. Alas today it is closed down and the only trace is the plaque outside indicating its history.

The *julus* moves on to its next stop which is Mehfile Abbas situated in the vicinity of Bohora Mosque and Ismaili Jamaatkhana. The Mehfile Abbas has a long history. It was a carpeted majlis hall with chandeliers hanging and the replica of Hazrat Abbas' musoleum occupying the pride of place. Its *Chai-Khana* was a famous institution and as school boys we would not miss it for anything. We would rush there during recess and Gulamhussein (Golo) Ismail Dharamsi, that famous Zanzibar Cricketer and the chief volunteer, would ensure that we were served fast to get back to school in time. Sometimes we were late and caned, but the next day it was Mehfile Abbas again for *chai na toss*.

The *mehfil* still operates but tears well down one's eyes when one visits it for it is desolate and bereft of the huge audience that once crammed every inch of it.

The *julus* does not go up to the hall but stops on the road at the main gate where Husain Allarakhia Rahim gives a brief but emotional rendition of the suffering of *Ahlul Bait* after Karbala, their imprisonment in Damascus and the subsequent release after the death of the orphaned, beloved daughter of Imam Husain, Bibi Sakina whose plight shook Yazid's throne. The climax of the narration is the description of arrival of the decimated *kafela* to Karbala where Imam Zainul Abideen narrates the woeful tale of the tragedy of Karbala and its aftermath. It is then Jaffer Hassanali Mulla Raza's heartrending *Kabre Husain alvida, Ahle watan alvida* as tears, loud wails and *Wa Husaina* fill the air.





When the *julus* reached Mehfile Abbas Husain Rahim delivered the speech at its doorstep.

The procession then moves through one of the narrowest streets. Women from the nearby houses peer at the *julus* from windows and terraces. It ends at Kiwanjani or Mehfile Shahe Khorasan served by generations of Abdulla Saleh family, with the old man, Mohamed Jaffer Khaki (Mammu Jafu) seen sitting on the bench. Inside the mehfil are placed the replicas of zarihs of Imam Husain and Imam Raza. It is then *majlis*, *saf* and *kalio pau nyaz*. It is late at night and some return home but for others the night continues. There are *majlises* here and there well into the wee hours of the morning.

In the morning there is again a *julus* procession but this time to *Mehfile Bibi Zainab* run by the *Mulla Safia* clan in a far corner of Malindi / Funguni. When it reaches at the *mehfil* Mohamed Ebrahim Jivraj renders *Zainab meri behna, dukhia meri behna, tum fatheha sharbat pe dilana meri behna* in a poignant voice as *azadars* pound on the stairs to climb up to the *mehfil* for *majlis* and *matam*.



The *julus* reassembles to move towards *Mehfile Bibi Fatima*, in another corner of Malindi, where Mulla Bibi Zara of Agha Seyyed Husain family held sway. Eventually the *julus* disperses at Taziakhana.

By then it is noon and after the namaaz the *azadars* gather at Mehfile Ali Makam for *majlis*, *matam*, *ziyarat Arbain* and *nyaz*.

The day wears on but it is far from over. The biggest procession gathers at the Imambara from where chanting in unison *Chehlumko katlagahme jab aye mubtila, sadate Karbala* the *azadars* move on to *kabrastan* at Mchangani by the side of Sauti Ya Unguja, Rahaleo. Here the drooping sun and gradual spread of the evening adds to the poignancy of the situation as relatives sit on the graves of their dear and near ones to recite *fateha* while *majlis* and *matam* is resounded on microphone. The Janmohamed Rawji *kabrastan* accommodated hundreds of graves of Khoja Ithnashries, a few of whom had migrated to Zanzibar from the shores of Cutch and Kathiawad as far back as late eighteenth century.

It is time for the return leg of the procession to imambara and the devotees replying *nauha* in unison. The sun has set in Zanzibar and the *julus* is approaching the *Imambara* when the powerfully voiced Mohamedhusain Hassanali Ahmed (Khokoni) recites *Kehtethe Zainulaba, leke alam aya hun, utho Rasule Khuda, leke alam aya hun*, and the emotions of the devotees raised at fever pitch. After a brief *majlis* the devotees burst into spontaneous *Ya Husain* followed by a couple of hours of non stop *saf* under the direction of Jaffer Ali Chandoo.

It is the night of *Shame Watan* and tears flow abundantly. The *majlis* is short followed by a small procession from Imambara to Taziakhana. The *Chehlum* is over and the devotees return home, but the mournful proceedings keep lingering in the mind and a few more tears shed.

Ah for those days of *Chehlum* in Zanzibar!





The return leg of the *kabrastan julus*.

Most of these continue today but the past is mere nostalgia. The huge Imambara evokes memories of those days when it was always full. Now but for a few devotees the place is hauntingly empty. But the most soul-tearing scene is the dilapidated, fallen ruin of Mehfile Bibi Zainab. Its memory is haunting, a majestic place humming with activity is now a silent ruin. The visitor cannot but bewail the glorious past of the place.

Also Mehfile Bibi Fatima where ladies frequented all the time no more remains a sacred place. Its days of splendour are gone and today it bears a forlorn look. The old *kabrastan* is a residential site and the *julus* to *kabrastan* is now in trucks and buses to Mwanakwerekwe.

But even then for *Chehlum* it is anytime Zanzibar!





The spectacular seafront view





The Sultan's Palace (now Peoples Palace)





Along Port & Customs Office/Government Secondary School for Girls





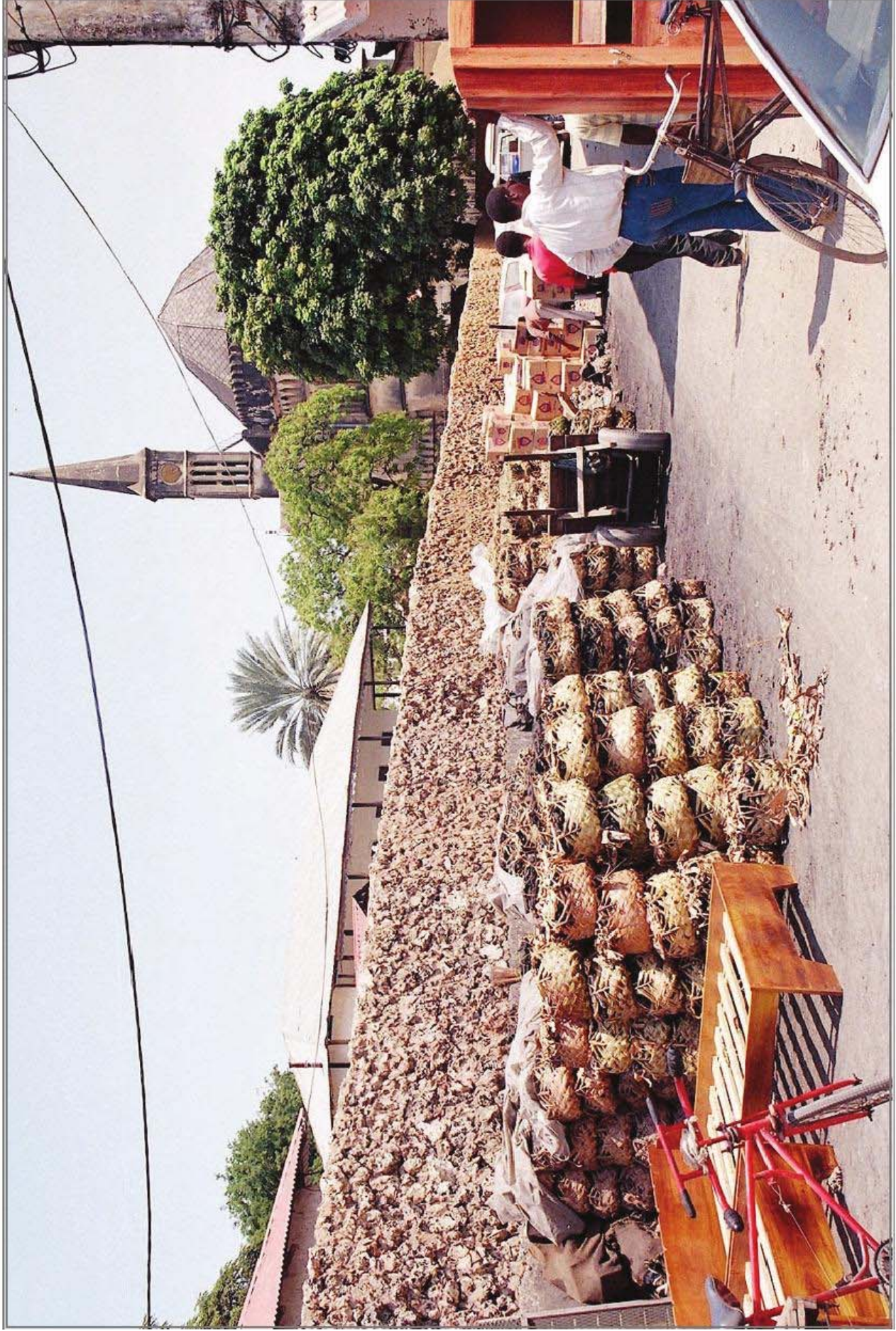
Victoria Garden/High Court





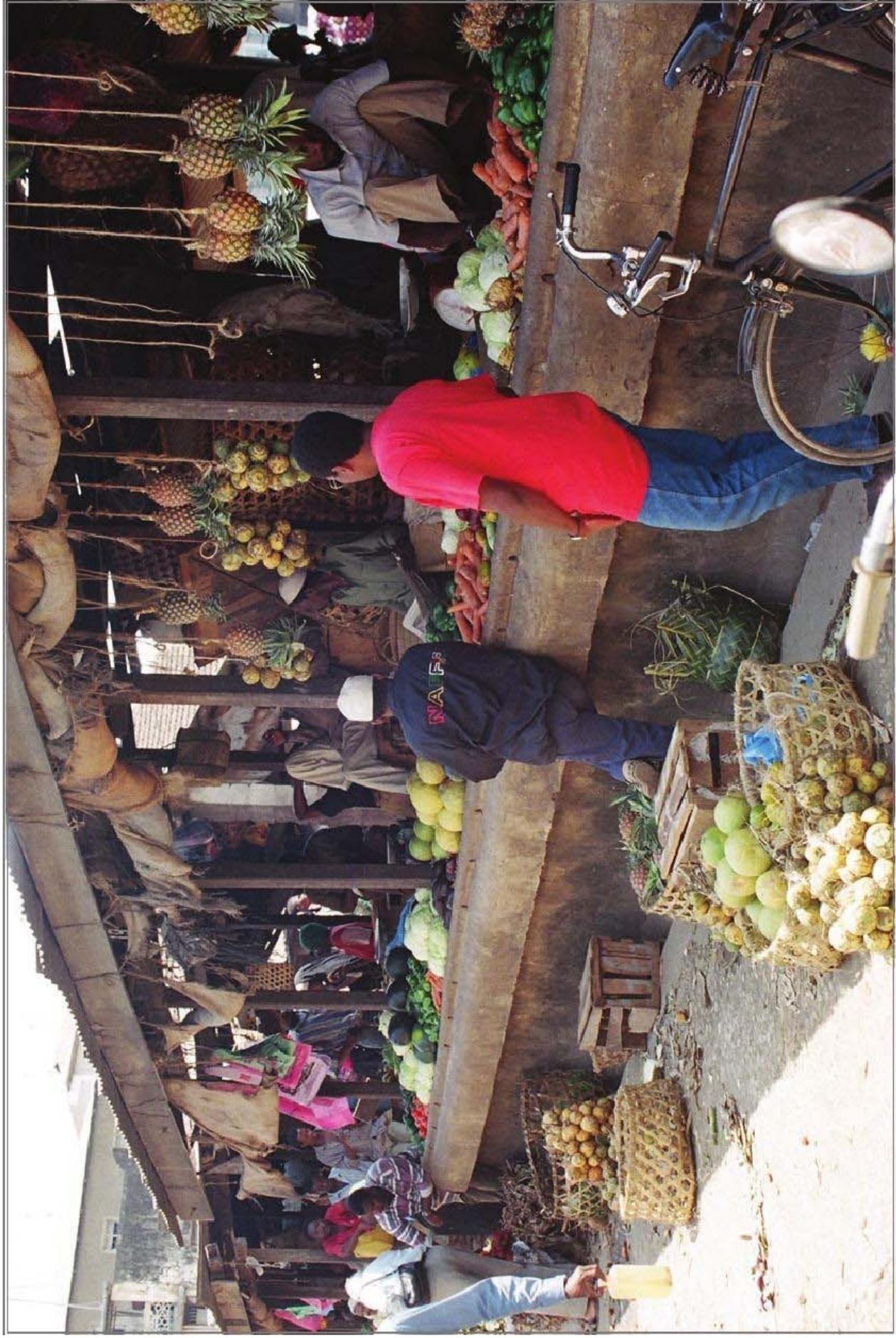
Majestic Cinema/Aga Khan School





The makaa pakachas (charcoal in straw baskets) at the back of the Cathedral





The fruit and vegetable Market in the stone town





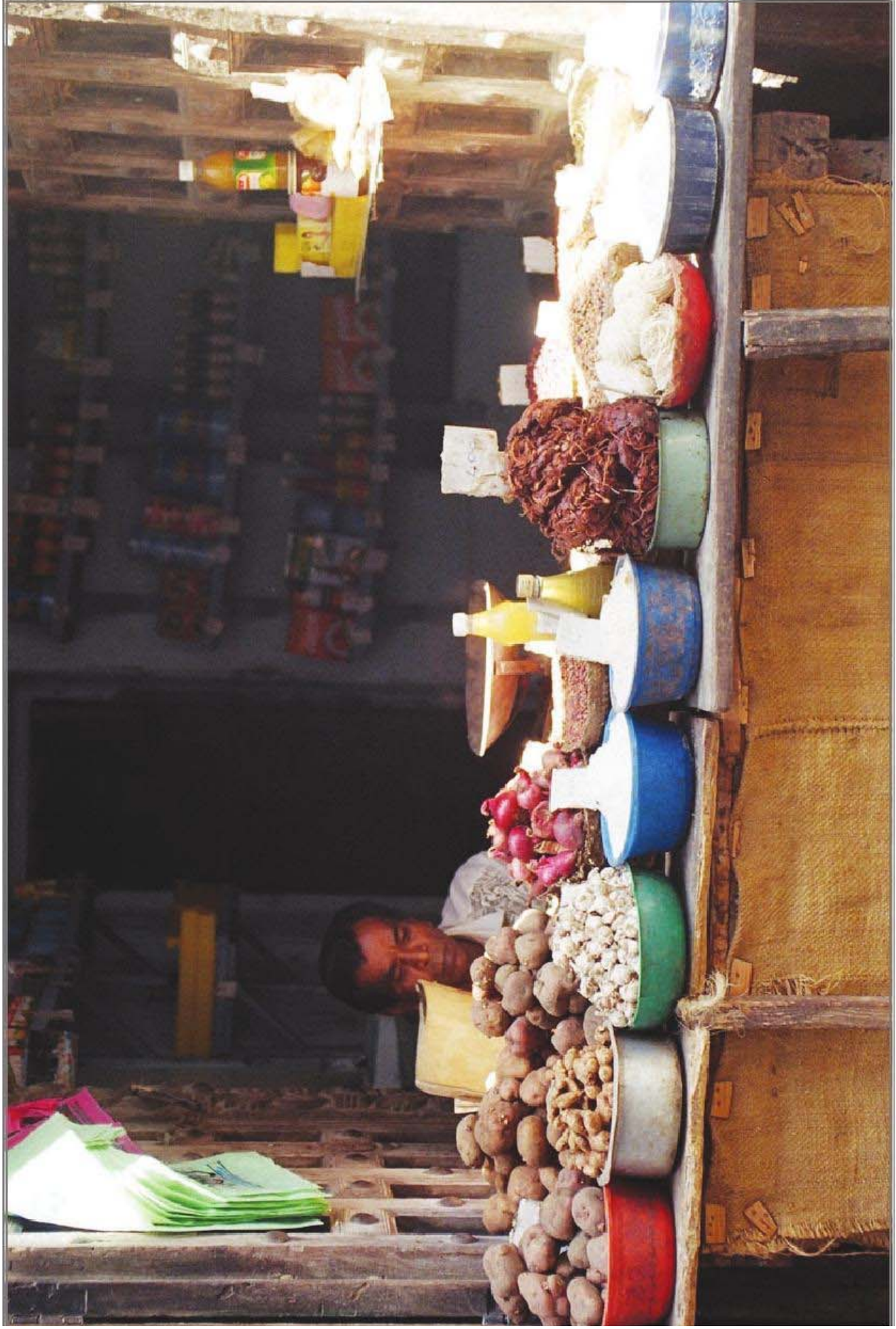
Along Shangani





Portuguese Street





The Zanzibar dukawala

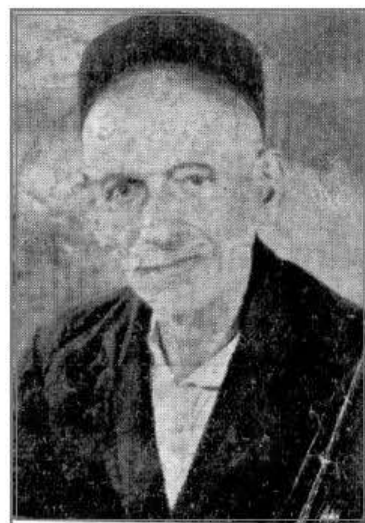


6

THE ZANZIBAR MEHFILS



Taazia Khana



Bha Kassamali Mammu
Walli Dharsi

There is sentimental yearning for the Zanzibar *mehfils* of the past that was so different from today's time. The elderly in my family often referred to our house on Kiponda motorway (opposite Takim Travel Service and the mosque, and beside the Ithnashri School) as the first Mehfile Abbas in the late nineteenth century. During the same period, the Bohora house (Ratan's) opposite ours was *Tazia Khana*. Remtamasi (our Bohora neighbor then in her nineties) vouched for it. The stained glasses in our windows were indicative of it. The formation of Hujjat Jamaat is said to have led to the change in its venue. After the conversion to the Ithnashri Sect of Mammu Walli Dharsi who was a person of rank at the Jamaatkhana, the property that he owned around there became disputed. Eventually part of what was apportioned to him got converted into *Mehfile Abbas* and the small room downstairs made into *Tazia Khana*. It was understood that the property was then bought up by Saleh Lakha Kanji but later reverted to Mammu Walli Dharsi.



Mehfile Abbas was famous for the Kiswahili *majlis* by Sayad Abbas and its 'Chai Khana'. We would rush there during recess and Gulamhusain Ismail, the famous Zanzibar cricketer and the chief volunteer, ensured that we were served 'chai na toss' (tea & toast) fast to get back to school in time. At times we were late and even canned.

While the *mehfil* was run by the families of Hassanali Mulla Raza and Mohamedhusain Saleh Lakha (in particular Bai Jhena Hassanali Mulla Raza's devotion to the *mehfil* duties must get a mention) who resided in the adjacent apartments, Tazia khana or 'Tazia' was in the hands of Kassamali Mammu Walli Dharsi (Bha Kassamali). Bha Kassamali was an ardent *azadar* and personally saw to it that everyone there did *matam* and responded to the *nauha* chant. Tazia was full up with *julos* (small *tabuts*) that the girls carried in *julus* or 'Matam Njiani' as we used to say. The *julus* on the *Ashura* and *Chehlum* mornings, and in the afternoons of 8th Muharram and 17th Safar, commenced from Tazia. The eve of *Ashura* and *Chehlum* witnessed a hive of activities at Tazia which was the scene of threading flowers, applying scent, sharpening *zanjeer* blades and shaping up of *alams*, flags, *julos* and *mehmils*.

Tazia was pivotal in promoting awareness of a good religious cause, a source of *nauha* and *marshia* books compilation and publication ('*Makhzane Matam*' being a perfect example). In one instance we had gathered at Tazia to endorse our signatures in blood on a sheet of paper as a protest to lodge complaint against the killing of Shias in a certain country.

The community will never forget the sad night when a certain person entered Tazia amid *ziyarat* recitation by Sayad Abdulmuttalib and shot dead right there four among the attendant crowd including Sayad Abdulmuttalib. That event must be marked as the blackest in the history of the community.

After Bha Kassamali's death his nephew Husain Habib Dharsi took charge of the place. He had lost his right arm and dedicated himself to Taziakhana



till recently when he shifted from Zanzibar to Dar es salaam. Presently both Mehfile Abbas as well as Tazia are run by the brothers, Hasnain and Baker Dharamsi.

Then there was the simple but spacious Mehfile Ali Makam that was looked upon reverentially. Its entrance was through the Mamdu Bi (of the *barafu* shop) gully by the side of *imamvaro* (*imambara*). A noticeable feature of Zanzibar stone town was this Khoja vicinity that stretched from Jamaatkhana via Ismaili School, Mehfile Abbas/Tazia, School Fez, Mosque, Imambara, Mehfile Ali Makam and across from there to Kiwanjani and Khoja Ismaili as well as Khoja Ithnashri bewakhana / musafarkhana. This evidences the predominance of the Khoja settlement in Zanzibar during that era.

Mehfile Ali Makam served as *imambara* for men during the afternoon *jaman* while the ladies had theirs at the *imambara* itself. Staying in the same vicinity, the ladies *majlis* resounded from the *mehfil* in the evening and leading among the reciters were Fatubai Mulla (Mrs. Fatmabai Peera Ukeru) and Fatubai Magawa (Mrs. Fatmabai Panju). As a child I used to attend the Saturday night *majlises* for men (*ravivar ratji majlis*) at this *mehfil*.

The space beneath on the narrow Kiponda motorway provided a 'Reading Room' where community members could read books, periodicals, magazines and papers. Also the Ithnashri Gymkhana meetings were held there. It is said that in the earlier days prior to 1928 and the commencement of School Fez this place was used by M.M. Jaffer, H.M. Rashid and Hassanali Rashid to tutor youths of the community.

Kiwanjani was just around there. The Khoja Ithnashries in Zanzibar had their mosque (Kuwat) by 1881 but the *imambara* was yet to be built. It was believed that initially the *majlises* were held at the old School Fez building. It is sad that today this old building is in a state of dilapidation. It is a historic building and needs preservation. However, around that time a zealous *azadar* Mulla Abdulla Saleh Sachedina searched for a bigger place where a large number could congregate to hear *majlis*. A *mehfil*



was found on an open ground at Sokomohogo and it came to be known as Kiwanjani (*kiwanja* means an open space or piece of land in Kiswahili). Temporary shelters were built over it and separate place reserved for the ladies to take part in the *majlis* which were regularly performed under the leadership of Abdulla Saleh. The Persians and Bahrainis also participated in the *majlis* and *matam*. The Khojas emulated the Persian way of doing *matam* and probably since then the commencement of the fervent *saf matam* in Zanzibar and thereafter followed by other East African towns (unlike *matam* in the Subcontinent).

Sadly the devout Abdulla Saleh's outspokenness resulted in discord within the Kuwwat set up. He was summoned and deported from Zanzibar in 1903. After his departure the *mehfil* was run by his brother-in-law, Mohamed Jaffer Khakhi (Mammu Jafu), who then shifted the *mehfil* to another place at Changa Bazaar and eventually in 1926 it was moved to its present place at Kiponda. Later on Mehfile Shahe Khorasan (known after the name of the Eight Apostolic Imam of the Shias) was amalgamated with this *mehfil* retaining to the present day its original name "KIWANJANI" Also extensive repairs and improvements were made to provide better facilities and more seating accommodation.

Many old timer Zanzibaris would remember that night in 1960 when an impressive and grand opening ceremony of *zareeh* of Imam Reza was performed at Kiwanjani. The *zareeh* was brought from India and inaugurated in the presence of hundreds of devotees who availed themselves of the opportunity of admiring the beautiful workmanship and praying before the *zareeh* which stands on the left side of the pulpit. To the right side of the pulpit stands another *zareeh* of Imam Husain. The *mehfil* was beautifully decorated for the occasion. After the preaching by Maulana Farooqui who was specially flown to Zanzibar and the recitation of *maulood* a sumptuous feast was provided.





Majlis by Akil Turabi at Mehfile Shahe Khurasan 'Kiwanjani'-1960

In the month of Ramadhan *darsa* was held under the direction of Habib and Mohamedali (Dhali) Rashid Jetha and attendees served '*istekhan*' (black tea) in shapely small sized cups. Besides, throughout Ramadhan Kiwanjani hosted *iftaar* feasted by various individuals upon their invitees. Also the ninth Rabiul awwal ladies *khushali* was a time of great rejoicing and celebration at Kiwanjani where they set fire to a dummy stuffed with crackers amid shrill laughter and cheers.

Today only few Ithnashries remain in Zanzibar but Kiwanjani still abides by its legacy and traditions. It still observes the 17th Safar as day of Imam Reza's *wafat* as in the past unlike the other East African jamaats. It is funded by the J.M. Jaffer family, and Jafferbhai Karmalli Hasham entrusted to look after it.

Another place of reverence in Zanzibar was Mehfile Bibi Zainab. At first it was located at Maalim Ibrahim Kassam's residence in Malindi (above Mulla Raza Panju's perfumery shop in the neighbourhood of the Agha residents) and run by his mother, another ardent *azadar* Mulla Bai Safia (with Persian links). Later it was shifted to a far end corner of Malindi (opposite Agha Sayed Mir's residence, along 'Safari Lodge' hotel) where



it was run by her daughter, Bai Nuru (Mrs. Nurubai Mohamed Jaffer Sheriff Dewji). The *mehfil* was a stopover for the day time *julus* with the devotees carrying Bibi's *Alam*. The *Alam* was symbolic of the kafela in the aftermath of the Karbala tragedy. The *julus* would come to a halt with the typical Maalim Mohamed Jivraj's '*Zainab meri bena...*' rendition before the devotees stepped into *saf matam*.

The *mehfil* held evening *majlises* for ladies, (hectic during the *Ashre Zainabia/Chehlum* time). The *majlises* were mostly recited by Fatubai Mulla (Mrs. Fatmabai Ukeru/the other Mulla Bai Safia daughter) whose proficiency in recitation was highly acclaimed. The *mehfil* was also famous for its Khoja cuisine cooked by Chef Haji Gulla Dawood (himself a Lawaty, emigrants to Muscat from Medina) who also provided service to the *imambara* kitchen. Haji Gulla was regarded as the finest chef and it is said that even the Sultan sought his services during feast at the palace. The Khoja cuisine of *kalio* and *khichro* (favourite delicacies of both Ismailis & Ithnashries in those days) were his speciality. After Haji Gulla the kitchen was allotted to Jaffer Chandoo and then Mohamed Walji (Biremi) who excelled equally at these preparations.

Kalio is actually *aab gosh* (watery meat curry). In today's time its delicacy has faded considering the spicy *masalas* from Pakistan that go into it. In fact what we say *khichro* is termed *haleem* (rich in meat) by the Indians and Pakistanis. In the early days in India '*daal* like stuff' (poor man's meal) was served as *nyaz* on the Ashura day and dubbed *khichro*, and rightly so for Ashura impels solemn observance and calls for the intake of simple food.

While the talk is on Mehfile Bibi Zainab what comes to mind is going there to collect *diniyat* books (part 1, 2 and 3) from Mulla Mohamedjaffer Sheriff Dewji who resided there. The presentation of part 2 & 3 was subject to correctly answering the questions he would put before us. He was highly knowledgeable (having written a number of books on religion) but a humble and down to earth sort of a man.



The *julus* from Mehfile Bibi Zainab continued to Mehfile Bibi Fatema located in the Malindi lane (that stretched to the Khoja Nasser Noormohamed dispensary). The *mehfil* was run by Mulla Bibi Zara (Mrs. Sayad Ali Akbar Shustari) of the famed Sayad Husain Shustari family of Persian descent. The *mehfil* was frequented by our ladies for the evening and night *majlises*. It was said to have existed since the days of Agha Sayed Husain and signified the merger between the Khojas and the Aghas (Persians). The famous '*kiejemu*' (Persian/Farsi) *matam* are attributable to this great Shustari clan.

One of the oldest *mehfil* was Mehfile Muhibbane Husain. It was run privately by those Khojas who till then had not converted themselves to the Ithnashri Sect but professed love for *Ahlulbait*. The *mehfil* which was in Mtendeni near '*Alladinjo Maro*' thus came to acquire the name '*Mehfile Private*'. Leading among them was Abdulrasul Peera who converted himself much later joining the Hujjat Jamaat. The *mehfil* was later run by certain members of Nai Misit. The *mehfil* is now being used by Bilal Muslim Mission of Zanzibar.

Further down along Mbuyuni/Mchangani was Mehfile Panjatan which was initially run by Kermali Dharamsi's sons (Babu Dharamsi's father/uncle) and later by the brothers Mohamedali and Abdulrasul Karim Jetha. The *majlises* at the *mehfil* were mainly recited by Mulla Suleman (Mulla Karo). It was famous for the '*vara chatni*' *nyaz* and in particular '*muthia*' which drew a big crowd. From there most of the attendees packed themselves into Mohamed Peera's (Golo Tumbo) '*matwana*' to go to *Chungani* (kabrastan).

Matam Bahrani or *Matemni* located in Kiponda below Husain Nazarali's residence and adjacent to the Ruwehi Building was run by the Bahrani led by Sayad Abbas and his son Sayad Kazim. There is a plaque outside on the wall which is said to indicate its history but it is in Arabic. In fact the *Ashura* and Chehlum night *julus* taken out with great fervour and grandeur had its first stop at *Matemni*. It is said that prior to this Matam Bahrani was



the old building (later girls primary school) behind the Sultan Palace (now People's Palace) and the grave yard along the road leading to Hurumzi Street. The house had been allocated by Sultan Sayed Bargash on the request of his wazir Major Mohamed Ahmed Khan (Kalbe Ali Khan).

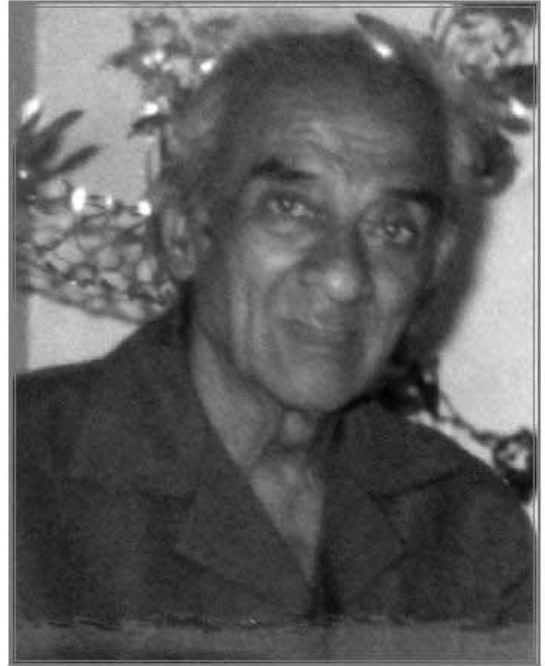
There were other *mehfils* too like Mehfile Husain at the residence of Rashid Ismail in Kiponda/Malindi across Haji Remtulla Tejani musafarkhana, and Mehfile Bibi Kulsum at the residence of Mohamedali Rehemtulla (Mohamedali Rama) in Malindi. Mehfile Bibi Sikina housed in the Kermali Hasham mansion (opposite the mosque) was formed much later (late 50s or early 60s). Leading among the Kermali Hasham family who ran this *mehfil* was Mohamed Kermali (Babu wa Lelu) who also runs Mehfile Bibi Sikina in Dar es salaam. The Kermali Hasham mansion was brought down and in its place the new Mehfile Bibi Fatema is built. Today the old Mehfile Bibi Fatema and Mehfile Bibi Zainab buildings are deserted spots and no more sacred. Their days of splendor are gone. They bear a forlorn look and their memory haunting. Also the buildings that housed Mehfile Panjatan, Mehfile Hussein and Mehfile Bibi Kulsum remain no more *mehfils*.

Zanzibar *mehfils* are old historical establishments founded on faith and zealotry. The only old establishment in Dar es salaam was Mehfile Abbas started by Mrs. Fatmabai Punja (Fatu Membei, nee Mohamed Sheriff Dewani) in the 1930s. On the eve of every *Chehlum* she flew along with an *alam* and a few of her colleagues to Zanzibar to participate in the *Chehlum azadari*.





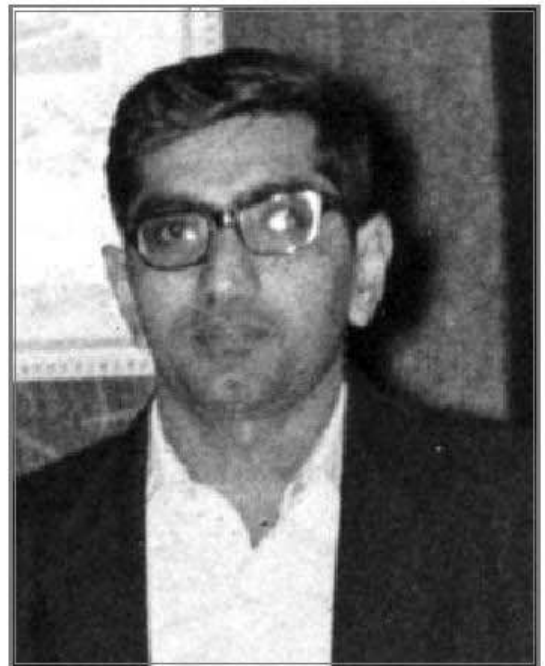
Maalim
Abdulrasul Bandali



Mulla
Raza Panju



The golden voiced
Murtaza Bandali



The melodious
Jaffer H.M Raza

Their haunting melody mesmerized the Zanzibar audience.





Mehfile Ali Makam



Mehfile Abbas





Mehfile Bibi Fatema



The Mehfile Bibi Zainab Entrance



7

KHUSHALI BANKRO & HUSAIN DAY



Rabiul Awwal is the month of festivities. After the *maulidi* at Mnazimoja we looked forward to the *khushali* and in particular the children awaiting their favourite '*Khushali Bankro*'. That was one event that obviously comes to mind during the *khushali* days. It had an attraction of its own.

On the eve of *Khushali Bankro* there would be a buzz of excitement all around. The long pavement outside the imambara was the famous *Barzaa Imamwaro* and alongside it the road that transformed into *Khushali Bankro* (where the street was lined with wooden benches and folding wooden chairs) on the eventful *khushali* of the prophet and imams.



Khushali Bankro was always held on the second night of the khushali. Its celebration dated back to the late 1930s pioneered by youths like Mamsen Khokoni (Mohamedhusain Ahmed), Golo Saleh (Gulamhusain Saleh), Akbar Jessa, Abdulhusain Meghji, Mohamed Biremi (Walji) among others. They made the preparations beginning in the afternoon placing wooden benches, folding wooden chairs and decorations, erecting a high dais with steps and fixing bunting and coloured bulbs which brightly lit the area stretching from my house on the Kiponda motorway through Barzaa Imamwaro to the old School Fez. The veteran elder Abdulla Bhimji functioned as the electrician.

There were as many as 50 rows of wooden benches and chairs spreading from the ladies *imambara* entrance or Mohamedhusain Virjee's (Mamdhu Bi) *barafu* stall to the old School Fez or Taki (Kara) *Daactar's* dispensing shop/house off Kiponda Road. '*Bankro*' is a Gujarati word for the mobile thick wooden bench long enough to seat five to six adults. The children and youths rushed to occupy their places. There were children galore and they came in with their fathers or followed their elder brothers. They put on their best clothes. Some boys dressed in Arab attire, others donned a police inspector uniform or sailor uniform. The little girls wore colourful dresses and a variety of hairdos. The atmosphere was very lively indeed. The function started at about 9 pm and lasted an hour or so. It commenced with the recitation of Quran by Maalim Abdulrasul Bandali or Murtaza Abdulrasul Bandali followed by *kasida* by youths (prominent among them were Murtaza Bandali, Kassamali Chandoo, Ashiq Kermali and Husain Bandali). Then there was a brief lecture by one of the *mulla* and finally *munajat*. The elderly people and *Jamaat* leaders were seated in front of the podium on comfortable chairs. The recitation resounded on loudspeakers amid the cheering noise created by the children throughout the function. They eagerly awaited the gift which was presented to them towards the end (a box of face powder, a hair pin, pencil and eraser, sharpener, purse, wallet, comb etc) along with the distribution of sweets or confectionary. The Zanzibar Khushali Bankro was markedly different from the khushali celebrations elsewhere.



In the earlier days *khushali bankro* was also held in the Hurumzi gully where Rashid Manek, Khamis Damji and Khaku Rajpar families resided. They were the organizers of the Hurumzi *khushali bankro* along with the other Hurumzi families like Saleh Alarakhia, Bandali Hasham (Bhandha), Remu Thakro (Bapa Nana who also provided service to the Junni imambarā kitchen along with Gulla Dawood), Abdulla Hameer, Kasam Manji (Sukari Mawe), Jaffer Hirji (Jafu Saruji) and others. They even erected 'Sabil' during the month of Muharram and offered water and sharbat to passersby in the memory of Imam Husain.

HUSAIN DAY

The venue is now shifted from Barza imamvaro to the Old Portuguese Fort opposite Jubilee Garden. The occasion is 'Husain Day' in commemoration of Imam Husain which is observed with solemnity and great religious fervour. The volunteers would be all set up and rush there to participate in the activity.

After the 12 days of Muharram a 'Husain Day Committee' was formed to stage 'Husain Day' at the Old Fort and to select a 'Guest of Honour', mostly a non Ithnashri to preside over the function.

All the credit to the volunteers who did a wonderful job. The occasion demanded strenuous effort to facilitate the gathering of Zanzibar's cosmopolitan public in commemoration of the sacrifice of Imam Husain and his band of 72 martyrs.

A shamiana, marquee and a high dais with steps were erected and the entire fort illuminated with bright lights. People from Zanzibar's different areas and various communities would start pouring in and take their place on the wooden chairs arranged by the volunteers. The children were made to sit on the mats spread on the floor. The proceedings were broadcast live over 'Sauti Ya Unguja'. The occasion was graced by the Sultan, the Royal family, the British Resident, various Foreign Diplomats and other dignitaries including the heads of various religious communities. They



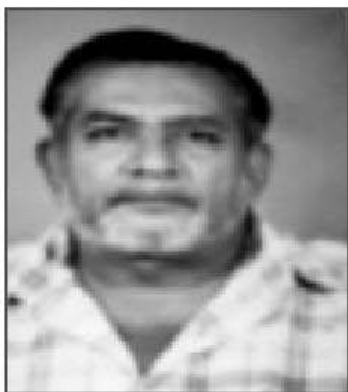
were received at the gate of the Old Fort by members of the Husain Day Committee and escorted to their seats.. The public would stand up to welcome the Sultan and the British Resident who were then made to sit in the front row under the canopy. The Guest of Honour would also be seated in the front row. In fact one of the tasks assigned to the volunteers was to collect antique chairs and sofa sets from the nearby Ithnashri residencies to seat these guests.

Climbing the dais, the reciter Maalim Abdulrasul Bandali or Murtaza Bandali recited verses from the holy Quran. Then the Chairman of the Committee delivered his welcome speech and the Guest of Honour also addressed the gathering. They were followed by speeches from eminent members of other communities such as Sheikh Abdullah Saleh Farsi (Arab), Sheikh Omar Abdullah (Comorian), V.S.Patel (Hindu), Rustam Sidhwa (Parsee) and also Ithnashri members like Hussein Rahim and Ahmed Lakha. They conveyed that in the martyrdom of Imam Husain there was a message and that message was to fight oppression to mankind and Husain Day was such an annual commemoration.

Towards the end of the program the gathering was treated to creamy milk (sharbati ya maziwa) with almonds and pistachio in it served by volunteers who went around holding wooden trays with glasses. The gathering waited for the VIPs to make their exit and then they dispersed.

In tribute to the two great volunteers:-

GULAMHUSAIN SALEH ALLARAKHIA (GOLO SALEH)



In the annals of Zanzibar Khoja Ithnashri history the name 'Golo Saleh' (Gulamhusain) is inscribed with golden letters. He was born to the family of Saleh Allarakhia (Saleh Madawa) whose spices/herbal medicine shop in a corner of Vaddi Bhajar (Hurumzi) was a household name. Such was its impact that to date shops dealing in herbal medicines in Zanzibar are referred to as 'Saleh Madawa'.



Interestingly Ithnashri zealots of yesteryears in Zanzibar nicknamed their sons 'Golo' out of fervency and devotion to their Imams. Incidentally Gulamhusain was born on the day of 10th Muharram (Ashura). His devotion to *azadari* and pioneering feats in the services of the community were some of the contributory factors to the popular acclaim Zanzibar had attained as the staunchest in the Khoja world. No doubt the name 'Golo Saleh' remains synonymous with Zanzibar's spectacular *Matam Nijani (Julus)*, *Khushali Bankro*, *Husain Day* and any community related event since the days of 1930s. The Zanzibar *julus* scene wherein the '*Zuljanah*' in all its majesty was being brought out to the accompaniment of Golo Saleh has had an everlasting impression on old timers.

Gulamhusainbhai remained Honorary Secretary of the Kuwwat Jamaat from 1962 to 1970 and was a regular member of its 'Mayyat Committee'. His presence at the Night School Fez where he was a '*maalim*' exuded discipline and made him role model for the youths. Mostly seen in a coat and red tarbush cap he projected an imposing personality. He worked for the Motorboat Association at the Zanzibar Port. Recording *majlis/marshia/nauha* was a passion with him and his shelf was stacked with his collection of tap spools. The visits to Zanzibar by Allama Rashid Turabi, Abbas Rizvi and several others had an overwhelming effect on the islanders and Gulamhusainbhai covered on his tap recorder all their *majlises* which were later relayed at the Taziakhana amid huge gatherings.

In his 80s Gulamhussein passed away on the 24th of June (10th Rajab), 2010.

MOHAMEDHUSAIN AHMED (MAMSEN KHOKONI)



Perhaps the mainlanders will remember Mohamedhusain Hassanali Ahmed as an old timer reciting '*Ya Husain na bewatan...*' at the *kabrastan* on the *Ashura* day or being brought to the mosque or mehfil in a wheel chair hardly realizing that in his hey days he was the very epitome of Zanzibar Khoja Ithnashries' zealously.



The Zanzibaris had a penchant for calling people by way of a nick name and that made Mohamedhusain *Mamsen Khokoni* as he resided in the Khokoni corner of Malindi. Since childhood he exuded great confidence and was even adjudged Zanzibar's best scout in the British colonial days that won him a gold medal. He along with Golo Saleh formed the community's most imposing personalities. Their names remain associated with Zanzibar's spectacular *Matam Njiani (julus)*, *khushali bankro* and *Husain Day* since the days of the 1930s.

He was one of the most ardent *azadar*. From the first of Muharram onwards he would attire himself in black till the twelfth and always availed himself of his leave during the 12 days to devote it to *azadari*, even whilst with NBC in Dar es salaam where he was a Security Officer and resided on the top floor of the famous City Drive Building.

One of Mohamedhusain's most distinguished features was his extraordinarily powerful voice. His rendering of *kalema* during a funeral procession in Zanzibar generated tremendous emotions and the scene is still etched on the memory. His recitation of '*jab akhri rukhsatse Husain ae haramme...*' and '*Ya Husain na bewatan....*' to this day remain unmatched. In *saf matam* his presence was striking. His rendition of '*ghalie Madina...*' climaxed the *saf matam* and then the final stanza '*ruswaio*'.

How could we ever forget Mohamedhusain's soulful '*kehte hai Zainulaba leke alam ayah u, utho Rasule Khuda leke alam ayah u...*' resounding through the *Kiponda* vicinity in the return leg of the *Chehlum julus* en route from *kabrastan* to *imambara* as the sun would set in the Zanzibar of by gone days and the emotions of the devotees raised at fever pitch!

Mohamedhusain, aged 86, passed away on the 9th of June (6th Rajab), 2011.





The VIPs seated inside the shamiana at the 'Husain Day' function



The Hurumzi residents at the Sabil Monument erected in their locality 1930s





The Old Fort where 'Husain Day' was held



The 'Khushali Bankro' passage along Barza Imamwaro



8

KHOJA ITHNASHRIES' ISMAILI CONNECTIONS

It is a known fact that Khoja Ithnashris were converts from Khoja Ismailis. Our ancestry originates among the Khoja Ismailis who earlier had belonged to the Lohana Hindus. It is not all that easy to encapsulate their story but briefly speaking, conversion was the result of the Khoja beliefs weighing heavily on the conscience of some of the Khojas. They firmed up their instinctive knowledge of the Ithnashri faith to establish and register their own community and the honour for this went to the tiny Zanzibar. That was in the year 1881, 133 years ago, when the converts of the Subcontinent (India/Pakistan) were still facing stiff opposition to establish their separate identity. All our ancestors who had died in Zanzibar prior to 1881 were buried in the Khoja Ismaili cemetery (the cemetery along Coopers ground, opposite Mnazimoja).



Mukhi Tharia Topan

The Khoja revolution had actually begun earlier in the Subcontinent in the period that dominated the Khoja migration by dhow from Kutch/Kathiawad to Zanzibar and the shores of East Africa (much before the advent of the East African Railways). Hence Zanzibar was in the forefront of the Khoja dissident movement. In the Subcontinent the Agakhan's influence with the British Colonials hindered the progress of the faithful who could neither form a jamaat of their own nor put up a



mosque while Zanzibar despite its 'Ibaazi' Sultanate' paved the way for a jamaat of its own. The conspicuousness of the rift within the Khojas in Zanzibar could be evidenced since 1870s when the authoritative Khoja Mukhi Tharia Topan wielded a lot of influence but eventually the converts prevailed. The British Resident at that time and the likes of Major Mohamed Ahmed Khan (of Baluch/Bahrani descent) had a role to play amidst fierce opposition. The Bombay and Karachi jamaats were formed much later.

The date in the Zanzibar jamaat registration document at the Zanzibar Archives reads 1881 (1294 hijri) and it was signed by Khoja Dewji Jamaal, Wali Nazerali (hand writing of Sheriff Dewji), Nanji Gulamhussein (hw of Kassam Nanji), Daya Punja, Jafferbhai Kassamali, Peera Walli, Saleh Sachedina, Versi Advani (hw of G. Gangji), Remtulla Nurmohamed, Janmohamed Rawji, Saleh Mohamed Hassan and Harjibhai Jamal. The hardline revolutionary Mohamedali Walji Rawji was the main contributor to the building of the mosque. It was said that his head was at stake but the then British Resident stood by him. He must have died before the eventual jamaat was formed and hence his name did not appear among the signatories on the document mentioned above. Also, he being an outcast, he could not be buried in the Ismaili *kabrastan*. The grave that lies downstairs in the Junni *imambara* is his. The *imambara* adjacent to the mosque was built later. That led to the eventual procurement of the Chungani plot (Junni *kabrastan*) at Rahaleo by his younger brother Janmohamed Ravji. Sadly in the wake of the Zanzibar Revolution the cemetery remains no more. Another outcast Dewji Jamaal had to bury a child in his family in a land that he had bought at Sokomohogo (around Aga Khan School) and bequeathed waqf to serve as a family graveyard that came to be known as 'Bustani' which still exists.

There was a lot of confusion at that time of the conversion (around 1880). There were stirring events and emotions roused. There were instances of fist fighting, stone hurling and stick fighting in some funerals as family members and attendees yelled "maro, maro". A certain family was even nick named 'Maro Maro'. Try to visualize one brother changed his faith



while another did not, or the in laws not seceding. Imagine the mix up in maternal and paternal factors! This implied splitting of the families and severance of relationship between the immediate kith and kin. The special bond all along between brothers, sisters, relatives and friends just vanished. These were issues of great concern and occupied the minds of early converts. What mental stress! It was socially devastating and Khojas feared the wrath of the jamaat in associating with ousted members and their families as that could result in social boycott. The custom was that when an ouster took place, a man went round the streets of Khoja localities declaring the expulsion of the member from the community. Thus quite a few pious Khojas could not submit themselves to conversion due to this fear of social boycott.

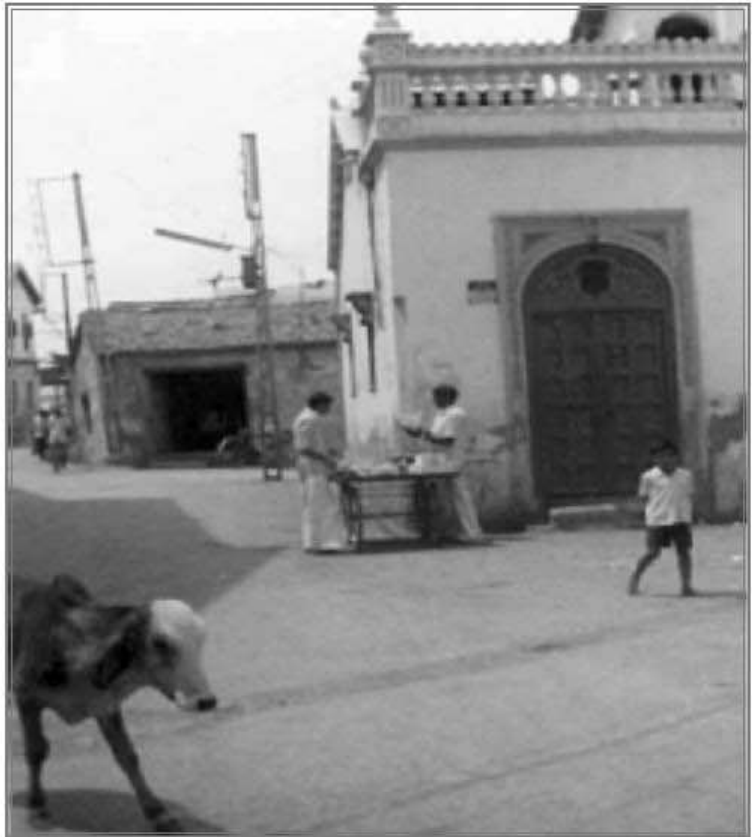
Initially the connection between the two *Khoja* groups lingered somewhat for a while. Social traditions also prompted the two counterparts to meet each other. Later restrictions became severe and even family members separated disconnecting ties between each other or the two meeting surreptitiously in a secret place. One such meeting place was Mehfile Muhibbane Husain on Mtendeni run by the Ismailis (not yet converted to Ithnashris) where they were joined by the converts Ithnashris. Hence the name 'Mehfile Private' was given to it. There were also institutions like Nasser Nurmohamed dispensary which were meant for both the Khoja sects, Ithnashris as well as Ismailis. Conversion was a gradual process. The converts did not become Ithnashries in one go. It took place between 1881 and 1930. Even thereafter, conversion to a small extent continued. Amid claims and counter claims the mansions and *shambas* (resorts) of converts' forefathers assigned to 'Khana' became disputed properties. It was chaotic.

The invention of the terminology 'Ithnashries' has to be accredited to the Khoja converts. There are over a hundred million Shia Ithnashris in the world but interestingly none subscribes to the name Ithnashri except us Khojas (and we hardly make up 120,000). We hear of Shias from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain and other places or the affix 'Shia' to say Punjabi



Shia, Kashmiri Shia, Pathan Shia, Luknowi Shia, Haidrabadi Shia and others. The term 'Ithnashri' has been our identity since those days of the secession, and to differentiate ourselves from the Khoja main group we had tagged ourselves Ithnashri meaning 'twelvers' (the Arabic term being 'thnasher'). Hence our institutions are named Ithnashri Jamaat, Ithnashri Gymkhana, Ithnashri Club, Ithnashri School, Ithnashri Dispensary or Ithnashri Magazine.

Typical of India (Kutch, Kathiavad and Bombay) is its concentration of Khojas in one place known as Khojawad where side by side stand the mosque and jamaatkhana. The Khojas there are referred to as 'Vaddi Jamaat' (Ismailis) and 'Nindhi Jamaat' (Ithnashris) rather than Ismailis or Ithnashris. In Kutch Kero I had stayed at a certain place where strangely one brother was Ismaili while another Ithnashri. In the evenings when one visited the jamaatkhana another went to the mosque. Interestingly both Ithnashris and Ismailis pay visit to the 'Peer' resorts in Kero and Mundra, that is Gurmali Peer and Hassan Peer respectively, to show their reverence for the Peers.



The Khoja mosque at Jamnagar built by Haji Jaffer Mohammed Sheriff





Khoja Mohamedali Jinnah & Gandhiji

The one Khoja Ithnashri who stands out and of whom the Khojas are proud was Qaide Azam Mohamedali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. The Jinnahs hailed from Gondal (around Jamnagar/Raajkot) though Mohamedali was born in Karachi (Sindh). Many refer to him as an Ismaili as a few of his relatives are Ismailis. There is no denying the fact that Jinnah's background was Ismaili, as were our forefathers'. We are the product of this sectarianism. Definitely somewhere in the line a distant nephew or cousin exists. Anyone keen on

the socio communal aspect of this Khoja conversion needs to read '**THE ENDANGERED SPECIES**' by Hassan Ali M. Jaffer.

Here below are a few interesting posts relating to this interconnection between the Ithnashries and Ismailis:-

Zaheer Bhaloo of Mombasa (a Ph D in Khoja History) – I continue pursuing my researches into our colourful Khoja history. Some time ago I decided to write a small family history. I wonder if you might be able to recall anything from your days in Zanzibar. My ancestor Bhaloo Walji came from Jamkhambalia outside Jamnagar and he married Nurbai Sheriff Dewani (sister to Mohammed Sheriff Dewani). He had four sons Rashid, Jessa, Kassam and Kermali. Rashid and Kassam converted to Ithnasherism while Jessa and Kermali remained Ismaili. Later Kermali Bhaloo's son Mohammed converted to Ithnasherism (their family known by nick name



'KABANA'). I know that Jessa Bhaloo was an extremely prominent Ismaili in Zanzibar with the rank of Alijah. He opened a maternity home in the 1920's at Mkunazini opposite the Cathedral Church. Somebody even told me that the lane where the maternity home and Jessa Bhaloo's residence were located was called 'Bhaloo Street'.

Zain Gokal of Karachi (Pakistan) - Our family is also termed as HEMANI because our forefathers were in hem business, that is 'goldsmith'. We are also called GOKAL because Jetha's father was Gokal Khimji who was Agha Khani. Another important thing is that Gokal Khimji's brother Lira Khimji had connections with the Jinnahs through his daughter Mithibai.

In early twentieth century, around 1905/1910, Jetha Gokal called a great 'Mela' in Jamnagar and invited all Shia Ithnashri people because they had just changed their religion from Agakhani due to their studies and the efforts of Haji Ghulamali/Haji Naji (a prolific Shia writer and founder of Rahe Najat). In that 'Mela' Haji Naji was also invited. Jetha Gokal's wife's name was Mongi Bai who also became Shia Ithnashri but her parental family remained Agakhani.

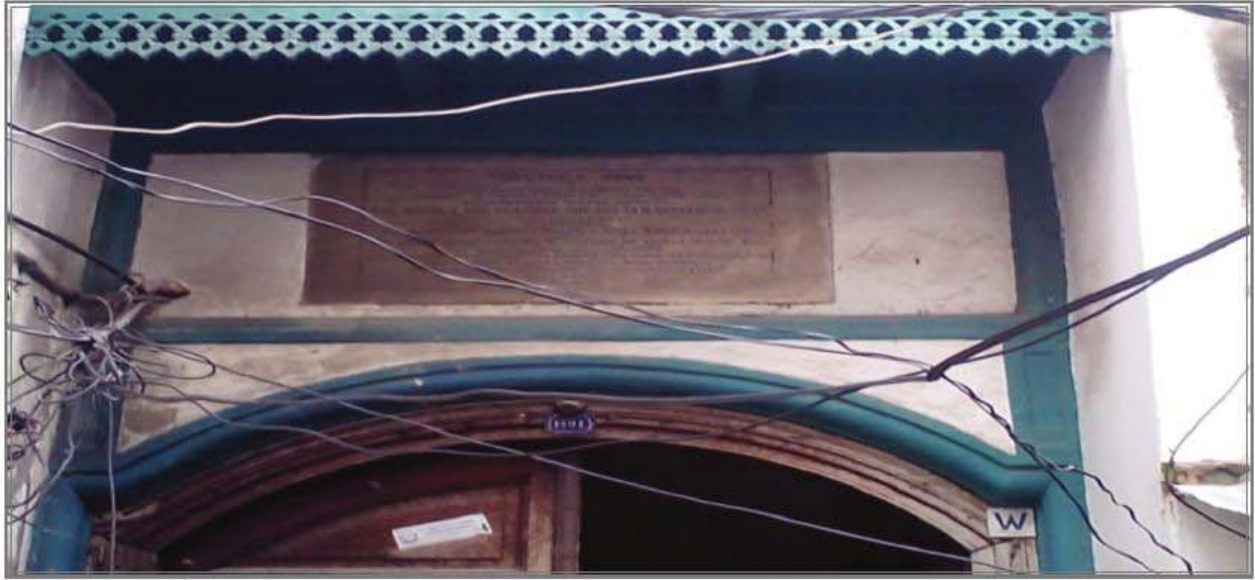
Mrs. Audrey HGA Dewji of London (UK) – My husband Hussein Gulamali Abdulrasul Peera (Shenny) Dewjee, a Khoja Ismaili, was born in Zanzibar in 1936. Peera Dewjee was an Ismaili, Abdulrasul was Ithnashri, as was Gulamali (my father in law) when he was young. However, Gulamali was converted back to Ismaili by his wife's family. Abdulrasul was one of five sons of Peera Dewjee. Were the other 4 Ithnashris?





The Khoja Ismaili 'Esmail Ramji' Musafarkhana opposite Safari Lodge built in 1892





The Khoja Ismaili Bewakhana along Barza Tharia (beside Topiwala, opposite AM Dattoo) built in 1905



9

THE AGHAS AND BAHRAINIS OF ZANZIBAR



The Marashis & Shustaris

We need to picture the scenario when the Khoja converts in Zanzibar adopted their new Shia faith and registered their community. Their religious rituals demanded rigid observance. The Mujtahed of the time Sheikh Zainul Abedin Mazindarani had to be contacted and Agha Sayad Abdulhusain Jawaad Marashi Musawi dispatched to Zanzibar from Iraq around 1881 just like Mulla Kadir Husain who was sent to Bombay. But



while Bombay was in the doldrums Zanzibar despite some hiccups made steady progress. Sayed Marashi inculcated upon the faithful their new version of the Shia mazhab. His two sons in law, Agha Sayad Husain Habibullah Shustari Musavi and Agha Sayed Hassan Najafi Marashi, later followed him to Zanzibar. The priestly Aghas of Iranian descent (WaSharifu in Kiswahili) had arrived and the Khoja Ithnashries were taking shape in Zanzibar. Thus the special bond between the two prevails since that time.

Here mention must be made of Major Mohamed Ahmed Khan (Kalbe Ali Khan) who was a Shia of Baluch/Bahraini descent. He might have been instrumental in the formation of the Zanzibar Jamaat considering his status and thus the British Resident standing by the side of the converts to give his consent to the building of the mosque corresponding with the formation of the jamaat. The plot for the imambara built later was acquired through Major Mohamed. He was a close confidant of Sultan Majid. Despite the row between the brothers, Majed and Bargash, Major Mohamed was retained as major or wazir when Sayed Bargash ascended the throne after Sayed Majid. In fact the title Kalbe Aly Khan was accorded to him by Sayed Bargash.

Around that time a small number of Bahrainis probably inspired by Major Mohamed or the Omanis emigrated to Zanzibar and thus the establishment of the Bahraini community in Zanzibar. They had their Matam Bahrani or Matemni located in Kiponda below Husain Nazarali's residence and adjacent to the Ruwehi Building. There is a plaque outside on the wall which is said to indicate its history but it is in Arabic. In fact the Ashura and Chehlum night julus taken out with great fervour and grandeur had their first stop at Matemni. It is understood that earlier Matam Bahrani was the old building (later girls primary school) behind the Sultan Palace (now People's Palace) and the grave yard along the road to Hurumzi Street. The house had been allocated by Sultan Sayed Bargash on the request of Major Mohamed Khan. Could that have been before the formation of the Khoja jamaat? It is doubtful or else the Khoja converts would have flocked to Matemni.



Reverting to the Aghas there is an interesting anecdote that once sometime in 1900 during the reign of Sultan Hamoud bin Said Zanzibar was hit by a severe drought. All the communities were called on to pray for the rains. Sayad Abdulhusain assembled all the Ithnashris at 4:00 a.m. in the sahan of the mosque where they said their 'subh' prayers and then were led to Mnazimoja where in the open Namaaze Istiska was said. As soon as the prayers were over the skies opened and it rained incessantly. Sultan Humud was impressed and wanted to meet in person Sayad Abdulhusain who had to be collected from his residence. The Sultan became so overwhelmed by the presence of the impeccable alim that he accompanied him all the way back to his residence in a chariot ridden by two horses.

When Sayad Abdulhusain passed away in Mecca in 1905 he was succeeded by his son in law, Agha Sayad Husain Shustari. Sayad Husain was a very pious and humble man. He was also the most popular having remained the Residential Alim for 40 years till his death in Zanzibar in 1945. He was buried in Chunga Khan along Rahaleo, the burial ground for the Aghas and Bahrainis. Agha Husain and Agha Abdulhusain had built up big families. Some like Agha Raza Kashani who was linked to them had also arrived in Zanzibar. The household of Aghas in Zanzibar was their progeny and held in very high esteem by the Khoja Ithnashris. Most of them resided in the Malindi alley behind Maalim Ibrahim Kassam's house (Mehfile Bibi Zainab in the early days). The Aghas also occupied the Mehfile Bibi Fatma building that was located in a corner of a Malindi lane. The mehfil was run by Mulla Bibi Zara (Mrs. Sayad Ali Akbar Shustari). The famous 'kiejemu' (Persian/Farsi) matam, 'saf matam', 'eki', 'bishin' are attributable to the great Shustari clan. The mehfil was a stopover for the daytime julus. Our ladies frequented Mehfile Bibi Fatema for the night and evening majlises. At the mehfil a platter of cigarettes, paan and sopari would be placed in one corner to enable ladies chew paan and smoke (common in Zanzibar among elderly ladies in those days which could have been an Afro Arab Persian custom).

Personally of particular significance is that I partly learnt my Koran at this spot from Mulla Bibi Zara who struck us with a 'pepeo' (fan wand) if



we failed to learn our sura. My very first maalim was the humblest Agha Abdulu (Abdulhusain Shustari) at the day time School Fez (after Maalim Rajabu and before Mulla Suleman [Karo]). One of the most popular and admired Aghas (in the post Sayad Husain phase) was Agha Mehdi Shustari (grandson of Agha Sayad Husain). He was highly knowledgeable and our maalim at the Night School Fez. On religious issues he was an authority, and often referred to for consultation and clarification. It was my privilege to have been of some assistance to him (then in my teens) translating his letters in Gujarati from Kiswahili at his crockery shop in a Kiponda corner (he co owned it with his uncle Agha Saleh).

A little further from Mehfile Bibi Fatma was the 'Peera Champs' building where also resided the Aghas including Mulla Bai Amena who taught children Koran, and the charismatic Agha Najafi to whom we often paid a visit. While Agha Husain Shustari's allegiance was to Junni mosque Agha Najafi associated himself with Nai Misit. He was peshimam at the mosque after Sayad Aqa Nisar Husain had exited. The Najafis were dignified and highly respectable. Among them was Abdulhusain Najafi whose recitation of Koran was broadcast on Sauti Ya Unguja. It may interest you to know that recently one of the grandsons Agha Ibrahim Najafi Marashi was awarded a grant by Oxford University to conduct research about the Aghas in Zanzibar.

At Nai Misit eventually arrived the humble Agha Muravvij who unlike all the other Aghas of Zanzibar had no inherent connection whatsoever with Sayad Abdulhusain Marashi or Sayad Husain Shustari. The Persians from Shiraz who had landed in Zanzibar centuries back came and left, those who remained merged with the locals. The Marashis and Shustaris were in no way connected to them.

A great number of Aghas seemed more attuned to Matemni run by the Bahrainis Sayad Abbas and his son Sayad Kazim. Sayad Abbas was famous for his Kiswahili idiolect. We old timers had grown up listening to him whilst attending the morning majlises at Mehfile Abbas. The episodic events of the tragedy lie inherent in us, this emanating from Sayad Abbas's



Kiswahili majlises that we had heard in our childhood. His son, Sayad Kazim was a pious and gentle person. He was well known for his power of spiritual healing and readily obliged remedy seekers with *tawiz* and *kombe* (holy water). He was considered an expert in exorcism to repel evil. Another notable Bahraini was the very amiable Sayed Abdulmuttalib who recited majlis in Arabic. The poor fellow was one of the victims of the Tazia massacre.



Maatam Bahrani (Matemni)

A couple of Aghas were restaurateurs. Agha Issa owned his restaurant opposite the Empire Cinema while Agha Mustafa had his Irani restaurant along Majestic Cinema. Some Aghas traded in dairy products. Also in the field of sports the Aghas and Bahrainis did not lag behind, in particular the Aghas. Agha Javad was Zanzibar's finest left arm spinner of his time. The irony was that the Aghas represented the 'Arabs' in cricket and not the Ithnashries. The only Agha to have played for Ithnashries was Aghuli. Arabs was Zanzibar's leading cricket team. Its strength was the presence of the Aghas. Besides Agha Javad it comprised the four talented Agha brothers – Mehdi, Jaffer (June), Hadi and Ahmed. Also Agha Mohamed Sadik (Aghuli's brother) and Agha Jaffer Javad (Javad's son) played for the Arabs. Javad, Mehdi and Jaffer (June) represented the Zanzibar Combine team. Abbas Mirza, a Bahraini, was a member of the Arabs team too. In the 1949 KJ Cup finals between Ithnashries and Arabs Mirza claimed 5 wickets to earn Arabs their first KJ trophy.





The Marashis & Shustaris





The Agha residence in the Malindi alley



The Agha wedding



10

THE NAI MISIT MYSTIQUE



Nai Misit

Nai Misit had a mysterious aura about it. Even today to many its foundation is mystifying. In actual fact the founders of Nai Misit hailed from Jamnagar and were not among the initial batch of converts. The first batch was ancestrally Kutchi and Bhavnagri/Mavai, who actually had been debarred from the jamaatkhana for their outright agitation. In contrast the Jamnagris were somewhat diplomatic and some even 'Fidai' (a staunch group among the Ismailis). But that staunchness was in reverence for Maula Ali and thus their eventual defection to the Ithnashri sect a few years later.



The Kutchi and Bhavnagri members were prominent and quite dominant in the Kuwwat set up and did not see eye to eye with the Jamnagris. Mind that there is no documentary evidence to this but rather anecdotal and from hearsay. Incidentally Molvi Gulamhusain (Sayed Aqa) from Hyderabad Deccan (India) happened to pay a visit to Zanzibar at that time. He was renowned for his majlises glorifying Maula Ali and the Jamnagris were easily drawn to him. This to an extent created friction between Sayed Abdulhusain Marashi and Molvi Gulamhusain. The eventual Hujjat members were accused of '*shirk*' and dubbed '*musavvat*'. They even prayed behind Molvi Gulamhusain in the Kuwwat mosque while the rest would be led by Sayad Marashi. They would wait till Sayed Marashi finished off the jamaat prayers to give way to Molvi Gulamhusain. The situation worsened and Molvi Gulamhusain was reported to the Authority in Zanzibar and given 'deportation order'. From hearsay Abdulrasul Lakha Kanji was his rescuer and got the 'deportation order' waived. The seeds of discontent had been sewn and eventually sometime in the 1890s Hujjatul Islam Jamaat was formed under the guidance of Molvi Gulamhusain.

Talking of the '*Fidais*' not all got converted to the Ithnashri sect but they still professed love for '*Ahlulbait*' and privately ran a *mehfil*, '*Mehfile Muhibbane Husain*', in Mtendeni beside '*Aladinjo Maro*'. The mehfil thus came to acquire the name '*Mehfile Private*'. Leading among them was Abdulrasul Peera who after a considerably long period converted himself to the Ithnashri sect and joined the Hujjat Jamaat. Hence Mehfile Private was brought over to Nai Misit

Initially there was no President or Secretary at Nai Misit but '*Mutwallis*' (Trustees) and of course '*Mukhi*' and '*Kamrio*' who were held in very high esteem (*Mukhi* and *Kamrio* are traditionally *Khoja* designations to which we adhere even today though status quo not maintained as before). For that matter it is doubtful if initially even the Kuwwat Jamaat had its President designate or Secretary designate though we do give mention to Peera Walli or Ali Nathoo as presidents in that era. This could be presumption considering that they probably headed a team of Trustees



and thus the designations '*pramukh*' or '*khajanchi*' (treasurer) ascribed to them. They could have even been '*Mukhi*' as in the Khoja set up '*Mukhi*' was the foremost authority. At Nai Misit it was only in 1932, after decades, that its constitution formulated and Abdulrasul Hassan Virjee elected the first President.

Such was the intensity of misunderstandings between the Nai and Junni members initially that they not only boycotted each other's mosques but even avoided to enter into wedlock. In rare cases when such a marriage took place the groom often shifted away to the bride's side. After the Second World War things improved and when Nai's president Abdulrasul Khalfan died in 1944 while still in office, both Nai and Junni in rare unity, closed business on the funeral day.

Nai Misit with such illustrious members as Nasser Noormohamed Kasmani and several others had come to acquire the trusteeships of institutions like the monumental dispensary, '*kanyashara*', '*bewakhana*' and property consisting of '*shambas*' and scores of houses. Hujjatul Islam Jamaat of Zanzibar was then regarded as the richest *jamaat* in the Khoja World.

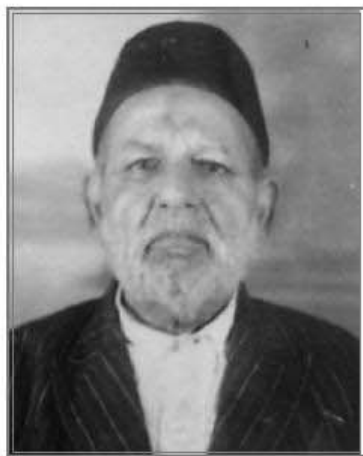
The '*Hazrat Abbas ladu nyaz*' held annually at Nai Misit was traditionally the Jamnagar/Jodia Khoja Ismaili event prior to the secessionist days. It had to coincide with the Hindu month of Ashad and was celebrated with great fervour. The Jamnagris abided by this tradition and in the early days it was always held during '*Ashad*'. Later the '*Ashad*' factor was nullified but the '*ladu nyaz*' continues till today. Also to this very day some old Khoja Ismailis seek '*Abbas Alija laddu*' nyaz when this feast is held.

There were certain Kutchi families too at Nai Misit. They had linkages with the Jamnagris. The fabulous minaret which symbolizes Nai Misit was built in the 1940s by Mohamed Rehemtulla Merali (Mamu Hariri) who was a Kutchi. It was in loving memory of his wife, a *la* Taj Mahal built by Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz. If not mistaken in the early days there was no registration or subscription of members though later a one shilling subscription was introduced by both Kuwwat and



Hujjat *jamaats*. Interestingly the late Baqar Alloo in one of his posts had stated, "My grandfather, my uncle and my father were all buried at Junni *Kabrastan* but because of the nearness to our house almost all members of our family frequented Nai Misit. We never felt that we were strangers among the Nai congregation and participated fully in the *ibadaat* such as *salaat* and *majlis*. *Niyaz* at lunchtime on 8th day of *Moharram* was from us until the revolution scattered us. My late brother Hussein was a favorite *dua* and *Quran* reader at Nai Misit and my cousin and brother-in-law Mohamedhussein known as Bwana Ali was in charge of the electrical system at Nai Misit. Remember that there was no membership system in Zanzibar at that time and the proximity played a key role to attendance, which then took the form of loyalty. If Nai Misit had been built at Kiponda, the 'membership' would have been much larger."

Sadly times have changed. Today Nai Misit's tiny *jamaat* (devoid of its past Khoja members) is reduced to almost nonentity but still abides by its legacy and traditions. To Banubai Tarmohamed's (nee Yusuf Karim Allarakhia) credit, she has all along been taking care of its activities. The Nai Misit decors had fallen into decay but thanks to its patron Zulfikar Habib Karani who renovated it to its entirety and also carpeted it fully. He funds Nai Misit on regular basis financing *nyaz* every now and then.



Mulla Habib Karani



Zulfikar Habib





The corridor gallery and the stairs



The *nyaz* being dished out





Biriani ready to be served

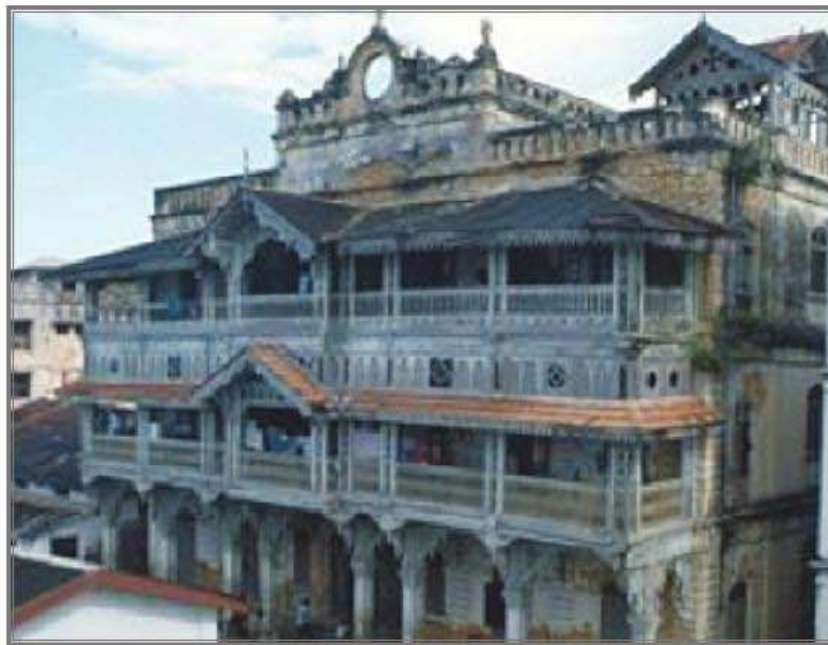


The attendees feasting biriani



11

THE KHOJA NASSER NOORMOHAMED DISPENSARY



The old dispensary

One of Zanzibar's main attractions in stone town is the old Khoja dispensary, now transformed into a 'Cultural Centre'. To us old timers it will always remain the 'Khoja Nasser Noormohamed Dispensary'. It was a huge complex and its considerable portion (a small part of its ground floor and its two storeys) allotted to tenants, the rental proceeds from which were used for running the dispensary. The two floors were occupied by Husain Raheem, Jaffer Rahim, Fazal Nasser Mawji and Yusuf Hasam Nasser. Incidentally my aunt, Mrs. Fatmabai Jaffer Ali Dungersi (Fatuma Dada), resided on the ground floor. The poor lady was restricted to her chair and bed. We had made it a point to go to see her every Sunday morning and also when paying a visit to the dispensary. The 'Cultural Centre' photograph is very much in vogue today and reproduced in



almost every tourist booklet, brochure or guide, and seeing the picture is bound to make us nostalgic.

The building located in one corner at the far end of a Malindi lane, and on the Forodhani/harbour highway was built by Khoja Tharia Topan (a prominent Khoja Ismaili) who died before its completion in 1899. The trustees of Tharia Topan parted with its ownership in 1901 by selling it to the trustees of Khoja Nasser Noormohamed Kasmani who earlier had been converted to the Ithnashri Sect but had also passed away before the deal was finalized. The building with its open roof terrace and ornate balconies and facade stood majestically in a row of other architectural masterpiece like the Sultan's Palace (now Peoples Palace) and Beit Al Ajaib along Forodhani (the Sea Front). It was believed that the building was specifically built to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Sadly Nasser Noormohamed's young son had died of a severe illness and in his memory this building was donated as a dispensary to the Khojas. The building thus came to be known as 'Khoja Nasser Noormohamed Dispensary' and both the Khoja Sects, Ithnashris as well as Ismailis, had access to it. However, Nasser Noormohamed being Ithnashri, the dispensary was under the trusteeship of Kuwwat and Hujjat Jamaats and patronized by the Ithnashries who frequented it for treatment. Those who had served there at one time or the other were Doctors Gulamhusain, Awara, Raza Khakoo, Oza and some others. Even Doctors Goradia, Mehta and Patel had worked there before establishing their own clinics.

The dispensary's administration is worthy of mention. Mohamedali Merali Rehemtulla and the bespectacled and pipe smoking Alimohamed Ahmed attentively peered through the thick register to check the patient's name, and then delivered him his card selected from the pile of cards along with the number tag that had to be strictly adhered to. The doctor very rarely injected. There was no testing of blood or monitoring of blood pressure (I doubt if the equipments existed then). The common prescription was 'puri' (powder) and white and coloured medicine. The 'compounders' Esmail Jaffer 'Popo' (a Khoja Ismaili), Husain (Madawa) and Fida Mammu Molu would grind the tablets into 'puri', prepare the mixtures into medicine



and label the doses on the bottle. The fever vanished in no time. They even handed out a pack of *malam* (ointment) if prescribed. The highly competent Hassani (the male nurse) had his small room at the far end of the dispensary. He applied yellow or red medicine on the cut or boils and then bandaged it up with his unique way of tightening the knot. The bandage had to be changed on a regular basis when he would vigorously clean the wound.

Nasser Noormohamed was an extremely wealthy person and highly charitable. He was said to own a large number of houses in Zanzibar stone town. In addition to this he had his *shambas* (countryside resorts) and a *pedhi* (company) where his business dealings were executed. Khoja Hassam Alibhai was said to be one of Nasser Noormohamed's close confidants. Nasser Noormohamed also had properties in Madagascar and Jamnagar. On my visit to Jamnagar in the 1960s I was taken to the Khoja Boarding House which had its wall adorned with huge portraits of Nasser Noormohamed, Jetha Ghokal, Dawood Haji Nasser and Jaffer Mohamed Sheriff. He had even built the 'musafirkhana' in Karbala, Iraq for the Khoja pilgrims. When Nasser Noormohamed died he had no children and being a member of the Hujjat Jamaat, the 'Estate of Nasser Noormohamed' (consisting of scores of houses) was left to the Hujjat Jamaat. Nai Misit was famous for its sumptuous feasts and religious meals, in particular during Muharram when 'nyaz' was served day and night. Most of that was funded from the 'Estate of Nasser Noormohamed'.

After the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution, the Government by a Presidential Decree vested the trusteeship of all the Waqf property with the Waqf Commission. The dispensary thus ceased to operate. Later on the Government declared it as a historical monument worthy of preservation. It is intriguing that the Agakhan Cultural Centre succeeded in securing this building on lease basis from the Zanzibar Government and converting it into a full fledged 'Cultural Centre' while the Ithnashris despite their trusteeship in the past failed in their effort to rehabilitate it as a public dispensary.





The residency at the dispensary





The old dispensary now transformed into the ostentatious 'Aga Khan Cultural Centre'



12

ESM & KING GEORGE VI SCHOOLS



ESM

Most of us Zanzibaris of Indian descent (born in Zanzibar in the 1930s, 1940s & 1950s) had our primary education in ESM (Sir Evan Smith Madressa, later known as Haile Salasi School in the post revolution era). The Zanzibari Indians (settlers) patronized ESM, in particular the Hindus, Kutchi Sunnis and Ithnashries.

Initially ESM was housed somewhere in Kajificheni. Later in the 1930s the school shifted to Forodhani (the balconied building along the old fort). S.J. Tata (a Parsee) was ESM's Headmaster and A.R.Arjani (also a Parsee)



its Assistant Headmaster. Zanzibar had a number of Indian communities and that included the Parsees. They played a significant role in Zanzibar's education system, in particular in the context of its Indian settlement. The school's Head Clerk was Takki Dhirani, a Khoja Ithnashri.

Till the fourth standard ESM functioned as Gujarati medium with the red turbaned Master Premchand Mehta (Master Kilemba) symbolizing the school's Indianness. Master Kilemba had arrived in Zanzibar in 1928. One Natha Kansar provided him with his small room at Darajani to tutor some 20 to 30 students. In his endeavour to promote ESM Sawakshah Talati (an enterprising Parsee in Zanzibar) requested Master Kilemba to take up teaching at ESM and bring along his students. He also authorized Master Kilemba to recommend new teachers from India. Amongst the new arrivals included his relatives (the Malkans, Rajgurus and others). Interestingly the nick name 'kilemba' to Master Premchand was given by Master Rajguru and made popular by the school's head peon Hamisi who could not pronounce 'Premchand'. Whenever a document had to be delivered to him, Master Rajguru would say "Peleka kwa Mwalimu Kilemba."

ESM became a good source of civil servants as envisaged by the British. Later Master Tata retired and Master Arjani became the Head Master. The school flourished and around 1950 to accommodate more students it was provided with the new building at Mkunazini/Mnazimoja, in the vicinity of the Government Boys Secondary School (later Saida Matuka Girls Secondary School/Benbella School) and Agakhan School. Eventually Arjani gave way to Master Musa Patel who became ESM's Head Master in 1960. If my memory serves me well the following teachers' presence seemed particularly notable (1955-1960). Certain names could be missing. I do not recall any Goan or Ismaili teachers at ESM though it is understood that a few of them did teach during the earlier days. Later they might have been diverted elsewhere, probably to Agakhan School or St. Joseph School. Also certain lady teachers joined the school in the late 1950s.



Arjani, Kanga, Rana, BD Mehta, Chinoy (Parsis)
Ibrahim (Jaffer), Mohamed (Sheriff), Baker (Walji), Hassanali Mulla Raza
(Mulla Hashnu), Gulamabbas (Kara) - Ithnashris
Adamji, Badru, Hasuji, Taher, Murtaza - Bohoras
Musa Patel, Hasham Ismail, Ibrahim Khatri, Husain Khatri - Sunnis
Premchand, Desai, Malkan Sr, Malkan Jr, Kapoorchand, Govind,
Chandoo, Rajguru Sr, Rajguru Jr, KB Bhat, BB Joshi, MP Joshi, Daya,
Goraria, Ranchod, Magan, LT Mehta, Dave - Hindus.

The Recess time at ESM was as good as food fair when vendors from different corners gathered in the school yard to sell their speciality. The one privilege the Ithnashri boys enjoyed by the courtesy of Master Baker was the permission to go to Mehfile Abbas during recess time in the month of Muharram, and at times even skipping a class.

Interestingly Ithnashri students who were reckoned zero in Gujarati had to incur the wrath of certain teachers. They were often referred to as "Sala....." Anyhow, the grasp of Ithnashris' Gujarati was such "*Maro ma suto che*" or "*Mari baap suti che.*"

The irony was that ESM despite its strict adherence to Gujarati with a bunch of specialized Gujarati and Parsi teachers from India right from the elementary class '*barpothi*' could not overcome the psychological barrier to this peculiar dialect. The Zanzibari Ithnashries had evolved this dialect way back from the 19th century resulting from a total blend of Kutchi Khoja ancestry, the influence of Zanzibar's Waswahili and their Kiswahili and the vernacular Gujarati of the school.

What is remarkable is that in those days the Zanzibar Khoja studied Gujarati in ESM but spoke Kiswahili at home unlike today where it is vice versa. Today grammatically correct and pure Kiswahili is being taught in schools but the medium of conversation among us is Gujarati/Kutchi.

Miraculously the older Zanzibari generation still contemplates in Kiswahili.



You must agree that this is an extraordinary phenomenon. Thinking power is innate; on the other hand a mainlander who could be a graduate in Kiswahili continues thinking in Gujarati/Kutchi despite his mastery over Kiswahili today. It is this fact that makes the older Zanzibari generation and their Jangbari dialect all the more intriguing.

Language passes through generations. It forms a sense of belonging to a particular culture. Living in the west you could easily lose your identity if your language is not strictly adhered to. Zanzibaris have created an identity of their own and would very much like this dialect of theirs to continue. Sadly this is fast disintegrating owing to a number of reasons including migration and marriages with mainlanders.

Reverting to the subject of ESM and the community's assimilation of the Afro Arab culture and the language Kiswahili, schooling of a section of the community students became a matter of complexity. This contradictory feature coupled with the naughtiness of some students and strictness of certain teachers built up a typical 'teacher – student' behavior, somewhat of a love hate relationship.

Today there is a sentimental yearning among old timers, wherever they may be, for their Zanzibari roots. At the same time they do give mention to their old ESM teachers and remember them with reverence acknowledging that whatever little Gujarati, even hotchpotch, that they had absorbed must be attributed to the efforts of these teachers.



King George VI School



The challenging 'Entrance Examination' in the month of October marked the end of the ESM curriculum. The results in December would be awaited with anxiety and announced on *Sauti Ya Unguja*. The anxious aspirants would be glued to the radios. There was elation for those who made it to the Government Secondary Schools. The Government Boys' Secondary School at Mnazimoja eventually evolved into King George vi Grammar School (now Lumumba College) at Sateni, one of the best schools in East Africa, a sister school to Prince of Wales in Nairobi.

Imagine from the entire Zanzibar and Pemba only 60 students went to King George! They formed the cream of the crop, the real intellectuals. King George was a beautiful two storied structure. It housed 3 laboratories (Biology, Chemistry and Physics with the latest equipments and the quiet Zulfikar Lakha, a Khoja Ithnashri, as Lab Technician), an Art Room, a magnificent Assembly Hall and a spacious play ground.

The sudden transition from ESM's Indianness to the sophistication of King George was a vast contrast. The teachers were mostly English seconded all the way from the UK Public Schools by the colonial Government. The students comprised Africans, Arabs, Comorians and Indians unlike ESM. The school's Head Clerk was an Arab, Mr. Faisal. In fact even the teachers were an ethnic and cultural mix. Besides the English there were also Indian, African, Arab and Comorian teachers, all with their personal quirks.

The Indians Master Qureshi, Desai, Naik, Sholapurker and Khaku spoke with a vernacular accent and some snapped with sarcasm. They taught Mathematics, Gujarati and some other subjects. Master Khaku (a Khoja Ithnashri) ended up in a school in Oxfordshire in the post Revolution phase. Mr. Peera (a Khoja Ithnashri) who taught Physics was soft spoken. Mr. Tejani (a Khoja Ithnashri) who had graduated in Arabic from Oxford University was a linguist and taught Arabic as well as Kiswahili and English (later transferred to Sayed Abdulla/Fidel Castro School in Pemba). The Goan teachers were the friendly Mr. Fernandez and the cantankerous



Mr. D'souza. They taught Geography and Mathematics respectively. The Parsee teacher Mr. Madon taught English Literature and was nick named Sidney Carton, his favourite character from Charles Dickens' 'A Tale of Two Cities'.

The frank African teacher Maalim Aboud Jumbe taught with total sincerity. He went on to become the President of Zanzibar in the post Revolution phase (and Tanzania's Vice President). The jovial Maalim Zuber Rijal was a popular Biology teacher (later transferred as Principal to Pemba's Sayed Abdulla/Fidel Castro School). The very humorous Maalim Abdulrehman (Machungua) specialized in Chemistry. Maalim Ali Farsi, the Chief Kadhi Sheikh Abdulla Saleh Farsi's son who had returned from Oxford with a masters degree in English Literature, became famous for his bombastic teaching. Maalim Abdullah Farhan was one of East Africa's renowned artists. He taught 'Art' and so did his son Maalim Idi Farhan. The school's Art Room was as good as an 'art gallery' exhibiting beautiful paintings by the two, and the students' paintings too. Maalim Kindi and Maalim Abubakar taught Arabic and Kiswahili.

But the English reigned the place. They stood out from the rest. The famous among them was the flamboyant Mr. Ellis who pounded along the school corridor and the stairs with his leather shoes. He taught Geography. The gentle Mr. Wesson loved the British history with all his heart and taught it with earnest effort. The bearded stocky Mr. Evans and the elderly Mr. Gregory were in a class of their own in English Language, and so was Miss English symbolizing the Queen's English. The other lady teachers were Miss Burney and Miss Oxby. The only Indian lady teacher was Miss Rozina Visram (a Khoja Ismaili) who is now in the UK, a historian in her own right with a couple of books to her credit. The other English teachers were Messrs Holway, Hawi, Hanson, Jameson, Lumbard amongst others. The only American was the kindly Mr. Resnikoff who spoke with his American accent, in marked contrast to the Englishmen.



The school's sports ground held football matches, cricket matches and the athletic meets. Also the PT classes for students were conducted here by Mr. Resnikoff. The Assembly Hall held the daily morning gathering of all the classes when the dignified and disciplined Principal of the school, Mr. Davis, climbed onto the stage to address the students. The school boasted of Zanzibar's star cricketers in Yusuf Kabana, Agha Hadi and Bashir Tejani. The announcement of their performances in the inter house and inter school competitions were met with clapping by the gathering. The school was made up of 4 'Houses', namely Barghash, Khalifa, Abdulla and Hollingsworth and the students divided between the houses.

The stage in the Assembly Hall holds the memories of the inter house and inter school debates excelled by Muhsin Alidina. The Shakespeare play Macbeth was also performed here when Nisar Sherali played the central role. Also the Cambridge School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate Examinations were held here marking the end of the students' career in education in Zanzibar and thence to overseas for those who pursued further.

Some of the prominent Khoja Ithnashri teachers (pre Revolution) who do not feature above and had been teaching elsewhere (primary/secondary schools) at a particular stage include Abdulrasul Bandali, Ibrahim Kassam, Jaffer Rahim, Sherali Rahim, Taki Valli (Taki Teacher). Those like the humanitarian Maalim Kassamali Chandoo and the articulate Sherali Meghji appeared in the post Revolution phase.

Earlier there was no Ithnashri School. The one built by Husain Dharamsi Gangji on Kiponda was the Night School Fez (religious) replacing the old one by the side of the mosque. Later to facilitate the boys who failed to gain admission in the Government Schools this School Fez was transformed into a secondary school during the day time. Around that time the Ithnashris also built a Nursery school somewhere on the outskirts.



Yes, there was an Ithnashri primary school for girls, the Dato Hemani Kanyashara since the 1930s. In its initial stages the teachers included Fizabai Hassan Virjee (Mrs. Mohamedhusain Kermali), Sherbanubai Jaffer Lalji and a few others, and the medium of instruction was the vernacular Gujarati. Later Arnvaz Bahen (Mrs.Arjani/Baiji Arjani) was made the Headmistress and English language introduced. Other teachers who taught at the Datu Hemani School were Marziabai Hirji (Jafu), Rukiabai Rahim (John), Mulla Bai Fiza, Hamidabai Bhallu, Marybai Kermalli, Chandrikaben, Banuben to name a few.





The balconied building along Forodhani was the old ESM



The Government Boys' Secondary School at Mnazimoja before King George VI was evolved (later Sayeda Matuka Secondary School for girls/Ben Bella School)





The old School Fez now in a state of dilapidation

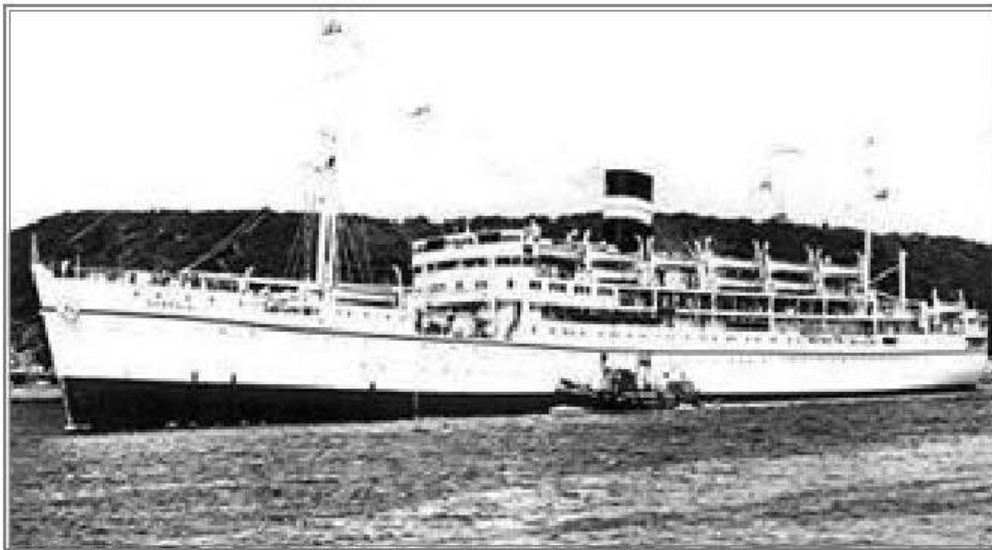


The new School Fez (later Ithnashri/Kiponda School)



13

JOURNEYING ZANZIBAR TO BOMBAY



S. S. Karanja

The significant feature of the post 'dhow journey' was the introduction of liners. Zanzibar boasted of its own ships like Alhazra and Al Sayed which were replaced later by Khalifa (Jamhuri) and Salaama (Africa). These were smaller ships and restricted to plying to and from Zanzibar/Dar es salaam/Pemba. The settlers and in particular the Hindus had a tendency to occasionally travel to India. In those days of the 1950s and 1960s British India (BI), an offshoot of the East India Company, regularly operated passenger cum cargo freighters from the East African Coast to the Subcontinent. These ships were SS Karanja, Kampala, Amra and others. They were represented by Smith Mackenzie Company in Zanzibar (now Livingston/Tembo Hotel). There were Indian liners too like State of



Bombay and Haryana which operated between East Africa and India, and were represented by Dwarkadas Morarji in Zanzibar. Mahatma Gandhi is believed to have travelled from South Africa by SS Pilsa when he visited Zanzibar en route India. Sadly after Gandhiji's assassination his ashes were brought to Zanzibar where a large number of Asians gathered at the dock as a mark of respect for this great Mahatma. The ashes were later taken to Jinja (Uganda) to be scattered in the Nile.

In all I travelled to and fro Zanzibar/Bombay six times, five by Karanja and once by Kampala. Karanja journeyed all the way from Capetown to Bombay and anchored at various ports on the way. Zanzibar was a duty free zone and the ship's arrival at Zanzibar witnessed hectic trading activity. The ship shop remained open only whilst in Zanzibar unlike other ports where it would remain closed. The ship had its order of supplies to be delivered and at the same time Zanzibar traders boarded the ship to avail their requirements not available on the island. The ship halted for three days at the Mombasa port. That facilitated me a comfortable stay with my sister Fatmabai Yusuf Jaffer Dewji at her mansion in the scenic Fish Market locality along Fort Jesus. The ship's departure at Mombasa port created overwhelming scenes as passenger activity was highest there. The service was in 3 classes. The 1st and 2nd class passengers were provided with better amenities. The 3rd class or 'Deck' had metal bunks with no mattresses. While on board the 3rd class passengers relaxed on the deck playing cards or listened to news and music on their transistor radios (Akashvani/Vividh Bharati). Sea sickness was common and there would be a powerful stench of vomiting when the sea was rough (in particular the Sokotra Sea around Seychelles). In the early morning the Deck passengers with their towels queued up outside the washroom. They also packed into the ship shop that sold items at duty free price.

At night it was a gala affair and passengers treated to film shows, music parties, *kawalis*, *bhajans* and *tombolla* on the deck. The 1st and 2nd class passengers had a ball dance. The crew were Indians, mostly Goans and Koknis. Once the ship left Mombasa there would be drill by the





Asgher Dhalu Panju

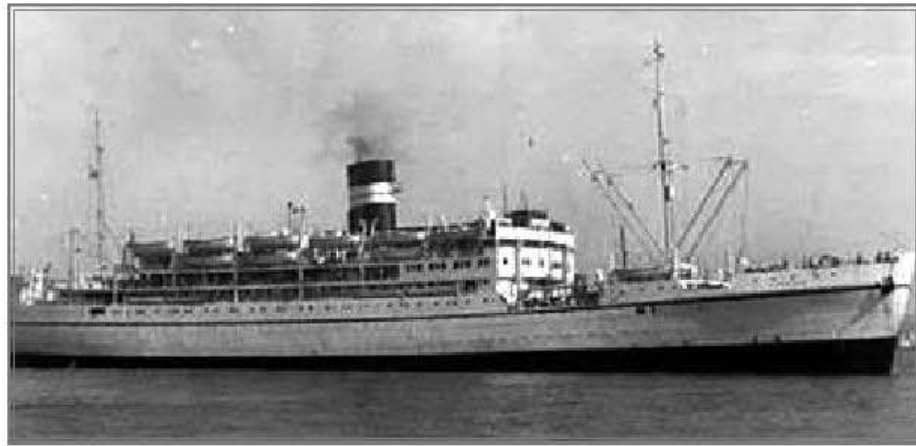
crew members. The meal (both vegetable as well as non vegetable) in the ship was sumptuous. The Catering Manager was the one and only Zanzibari, Asgher Dhalu Panju. He was a jolly good fellow and really fun to be with. I remember daily after dinner we surrounded him outside the mess hall and he would make us laugh our heads off. Occasionally he entertained us with lavish meals. During one of my journeys it happened to be '*Chehlum*' and at night we gathered in his room for a '*majlis*'. All those who had travelled by the BI liner SS Karanja ought to remember this Catering Manager. The rotund Asgherbhai endlessly chewed *paan* and wore big golden rings on his fingers that attracted every eye. He was a Zanzibari to the core. When Karanja anchored Zanzibar and Dar es salaam you should have seen his majesty as he went around the town in suit & tie receiving greetings and accolades. He had served at sea for some 25 years before retiring to Dar es salaam where he was running Al Mustafa Guest House on Sewa Street. Sadly he remains no more.

Mahe, one of the Seychelles islands, was one of the ports en route Bombay. It was an exotic place and the teenagers had great time there. When the ship reached Mahe they put on their best dress and applied Hypnotic, Intimate and Old Spice that they had bought from the ship shop. My very first visit to Seychelles was a memorable one. There was an enterprising Gujarati gentleman 'Shah' (his first name eludes me) who used to merchandise goods there and had his office opposite the harbours. He treated us (we were a group of six) to a grand dinner at his residence and then exhibited to us his veritable treasure of stamps and coins. His collection was just out of this world. He then took us in his personal motorboat sailing along the coast before dropping us at the ship.

The Muslim passengers exulted at the ship's arrival in Karachi symbolized by Pakistan's green flag with its crescent sign raised on the ship mast.



The beautiful Karachi then in the 1960s was lively and peaceful under General Ayub Khan. The Zanzibar family of Yusufali Salehmohamed with their kind hospitality played perfect host at their PECHS (Society) house towards fellow Zanzibaris. The poor Hindu passengers irrespective of their nationality were denied entry in those days. Many of us had felt that such an action was unwise on the part of Pakistan. I recall Kulbirsingh Gupta splashing his grievances in the Tanganyika Standard. The Muslim passengers boarded back with packets of dry fruit that was Pakistan's speciality.



S. S. Kampala

The one sorrowful incident that I witnessed in SS Kampala was the death of a small boy aged 9 years. He hailed from a Nairobi Muslim Punjabi family and was on his way back via Mombasa along with his mother and younger brother when death snatched him away. Sometime in the afternoon the ship came to a sudden halt, its flag lowered to half mast and we passengers and crew members made to gather at the deck where the shroud wrapped body was placed in the middle. There was pin drop silence, only the sound of waves crashing against the ship could be heard. The ship's captain then moved forward towards the body and removing his cap performed the salute. Everyone seemed choked up. Eventually the crew lifted the body and lowered it into the sea. The ship later sounded its siren to resume its journey and the gathering dispersed. The body floated on the endless Indian Ocean while the heartbroken mother and the sad and stunned younger brother stared at it in disbelief as it drifted away. It was a heartrending scene.



On arrival at Bombay (after 13 days from Zanzibar) it was chaotic as passengers packed their trunks and fastened their luggage while the impetuous Bombay porters or coolies in red shirts spread themselves out in every corner of the ship indulging in deals with passengers. They acted as middleman between customs officers and passengers. In fact in the aftermath of the Zanzibar Revolution in 1964, the Indian Government had sent a ship to pick up Indians from Zanzibar. The Indians were given special privileges of a 'Clove Scheme' that would enable them resettling in India. The Indian Government negotiated a deal with the new Zanzibar Government such that each family was allowed to take 16,000 pounds of cloves to be sold in the Indian market, and that fetched over 120,000 rupees at that time. All taxes on both sides were waived for the Zanzibaris of Indian descent. It is said that a special Indian Government delegation had come aboard the ship to look after the Zanzibar Indians and even interview them for job placements. The few Khoja Ithnashries who had availed themselves of the 'Clove Scheme' came to occupy the Dewji Jamaal Musafirkhana at Omar Khadi where they overstayed the period of time allotted to them.

The first impression of Bombay after the sudden transition from Zanzibar was depressing. The streets seemed filthy and stank. They were filled with stalls, shops and restaurants along their entire length. The environment was noisy as cars, buses, taxis, wagons and the leisurely paced tongas made their way through heavy traffic while passersby walked or stood in groups talking loudly. The music from the stalls and restaurants played so loudly that it really irked. Some people spat out the red juice from the paan that they chewed with great relish. On the roadway there were crippled and diseased beggars, and garbage heaped in piles where insects and rats slithered to feast off the filth.

Initially before I shifted to my hostel at Marine Drive I had to stay at Rassiwala mansion adjacent to Taki shami's residence (behind the Khoja Palagalli mosque). There it was typical moholla environment which initially put me off but then I had to adjust myself to face up to the realities of

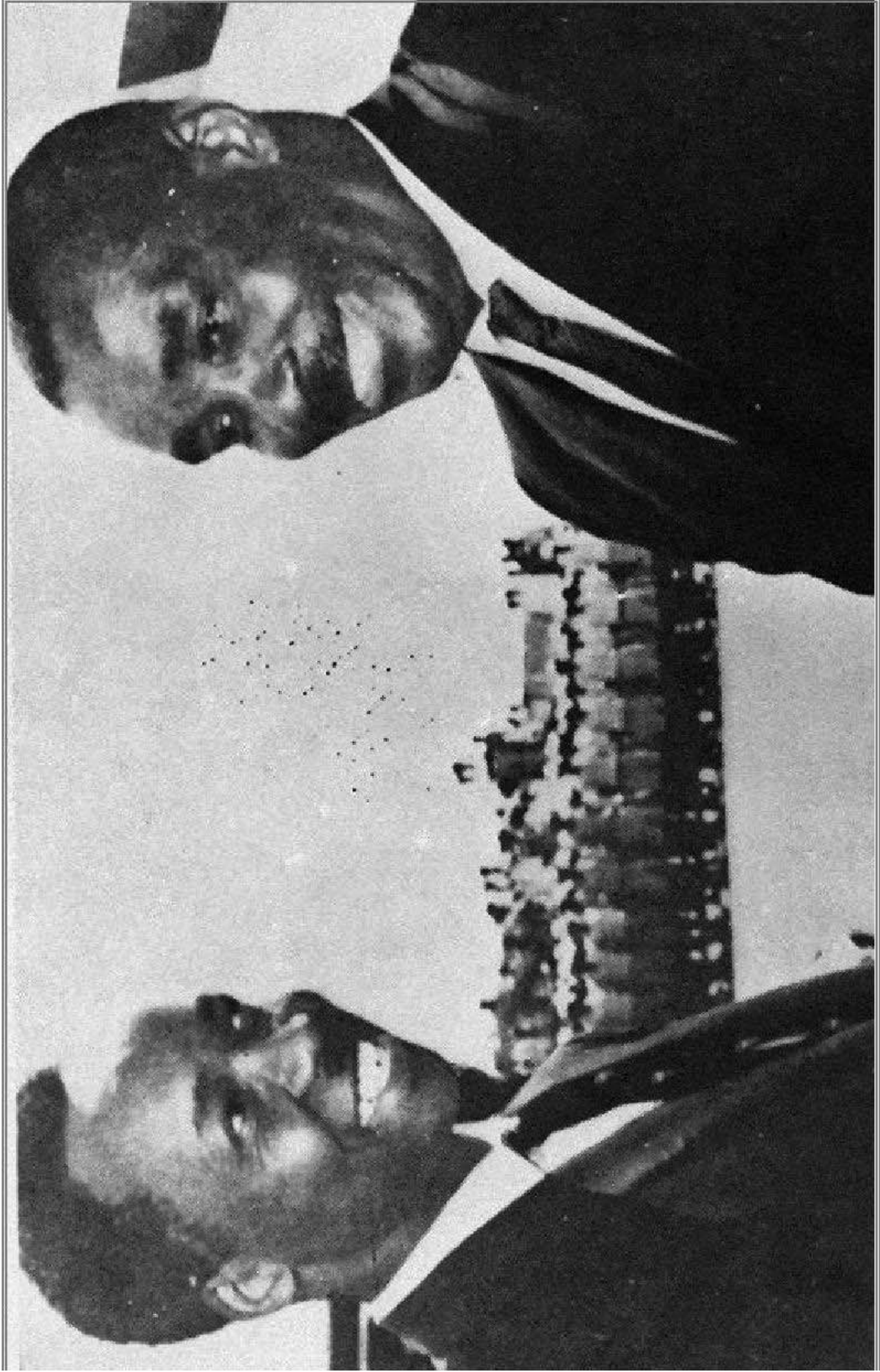


life. I would be awakened at dawn to the hawkers' yelling and beggars' pleadingly mournful songs. Opposite there was a restaurant from where the waiters delivered tea and soda to my room.

The 'Karanja Catering Manager' Asghar Panju and the in transit students to Poona and Aligarh stayed at the Panju Guest House in Bhindi Bazaar. Char Nal Dongri was at the end of the road where I stayed and the road stretching from there to Bhindi Bazaar was lined with attar (strong scented perfumes made with sandalwood) and oud shops. The crystal attar bottles of varied size and shape were arranged attractively and emanated air filled with pleasant fragrance. Around there was Memon Moholla abounding in vegetable vendors and strewn with their rubbish. Its most obvious feature was the Minara Masjid in one corner and along there a row of mithai (sweets) shops where garnished and mouth watering sweets lay in heaps. 'Suleman Usman' famed for his aflatun was located here. A little further at the other end was Masjid Bunder towards Rasikbhai's office 'Orion Traders' (my maternal Khamis Damji's Business Agent) in the lane of Narsi Natha Street which gave aroma of spices. It was here that our Zanzibaris frequented and did deals in cloves, cinnamon, cardamom and other spices.

The old timer Zanzibaris (Khoja Ithnashris) were Taki Shami (Rahim), Gullu Ali Khaku, Mohamedali Gowa, Abdulhusain Ahmed (Abulo), Pyarali Issa Hasham (Msito) and Husain Alarakhia (Siro) and they all stayed in the same vicinity. Also located around there were the Khoja Palagali Mosque, Mughal Masjid, Hindi Imambara, Babarali Imambara, Juma Lalji Musafirkhana, Dewji Jamaal Musafirkhana, the offices of periodicals 'Ithnashri' and 'Alamdar' and the hall Kesar Baag where Qaide Azam Mohamedali Jinnah once used to conduct the Muslim League meetings. I'd read about all that, and now I was right here. The donors' plaque inside the Khoja Ithnashri mosque included some Zanzibari names and the round clock at the Khoja Ismaili Jamaatkhana read 'Donated by Molu Brothers of Zanzibar'. There was history galore. I was staring at everything in amazement.





The Reverential Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and the Honourable Shekh Abeid Karume, the respective Presidents of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, who were the principal architects of Union between the two countries to form TANZANIA





The display of VIP attire at a function in colonial Zanzibar





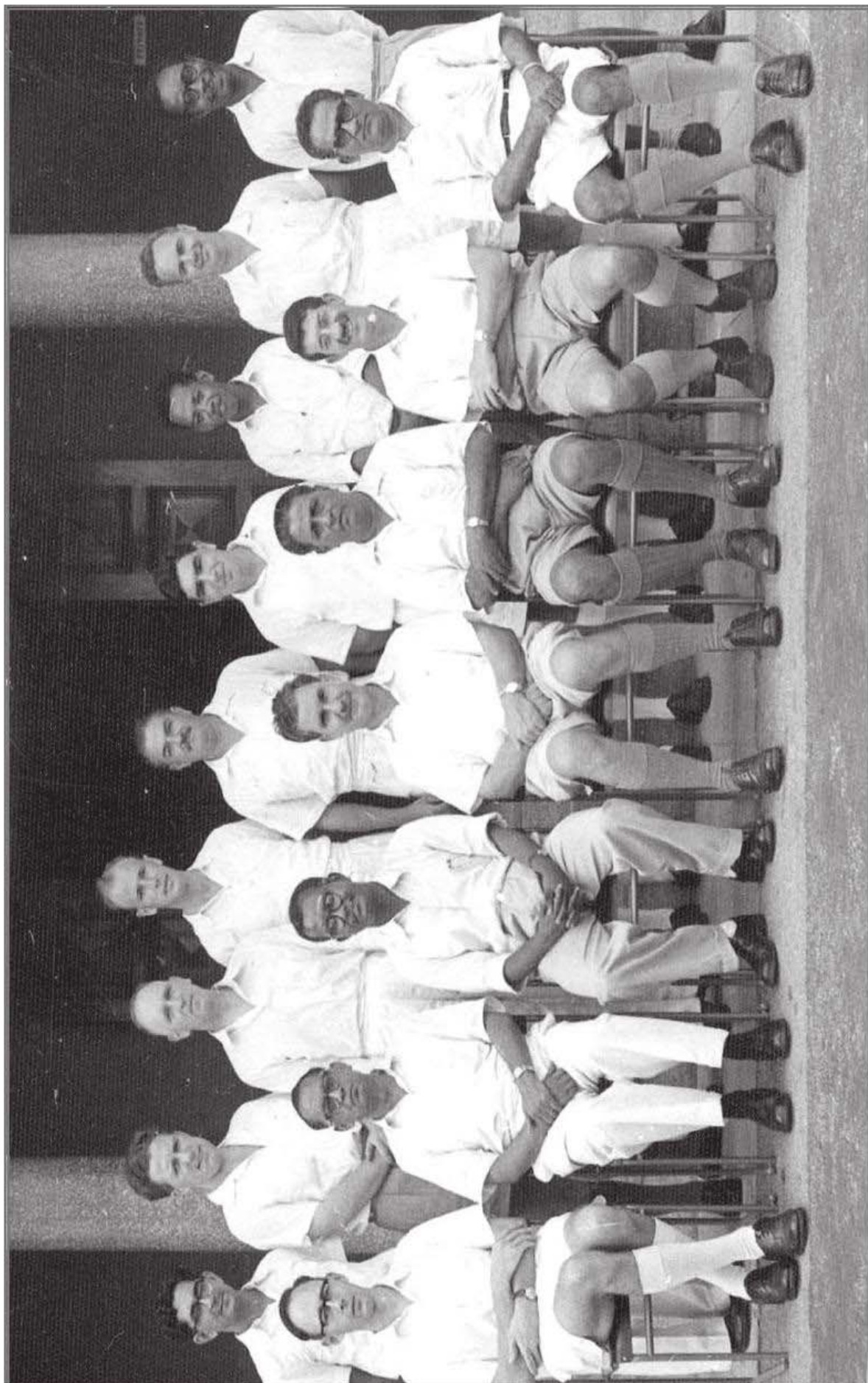
Police parade in the colonial days





Some of the ESM teachers and students in 1958
Sitting in the middle Master Musa Patel, Arjani (Principal), BD Mehta.
Standing (middle) Master Badru, Ibrahim Jaffer, KP Raiguru, Hasuji



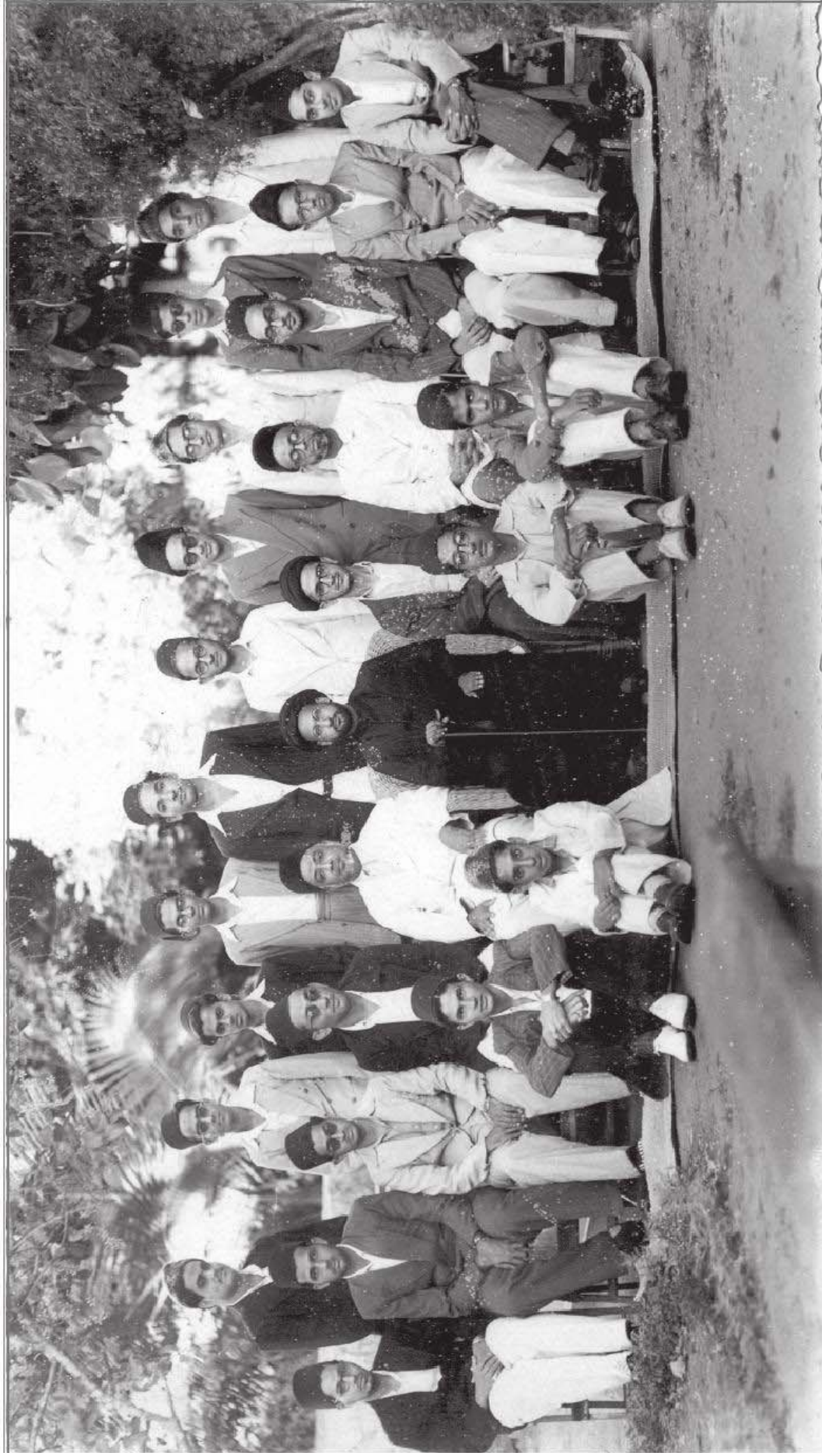


The teachers at King George vi School 1960

Sitting: Holway, Kureshi, Zuber, Davis (Principal), Desai, ____, Naik

Standing: Khaku, Ellis, ____, Lumbard ____, Evans, Abdulrehman, Wesson, Aboud Jumbe





School Fez teachers and students – 1952

Sitting on the ground L to R: Jaffer Boga, Yusuf Alidina, Abdulhussein Nathani,, Gulamabbas Kara

Sitting L to R: Gulamhussein Peera, Abbas Tejani, Mohamedhussein Tejani, Mohamed Jivraj, Raza Nathani, Sayed Jabir Hassan, Agha Mehdi Shustari, Madlim Miya, mohamedhussein Lalji, Najafali Tejani, Akbar Thaver

Standing L to R: Baker Nathani, Ahmed Bhalloo, Jaffer Tejani, Mohamed Juma, Gulamhussein Saleh, Ahmed Issa, Mohamed Khalfan, Mohamedhussein Kermali, Baker Tejani, Yusuf Sheriff Dewji



THE ISMAILI CONNECTION

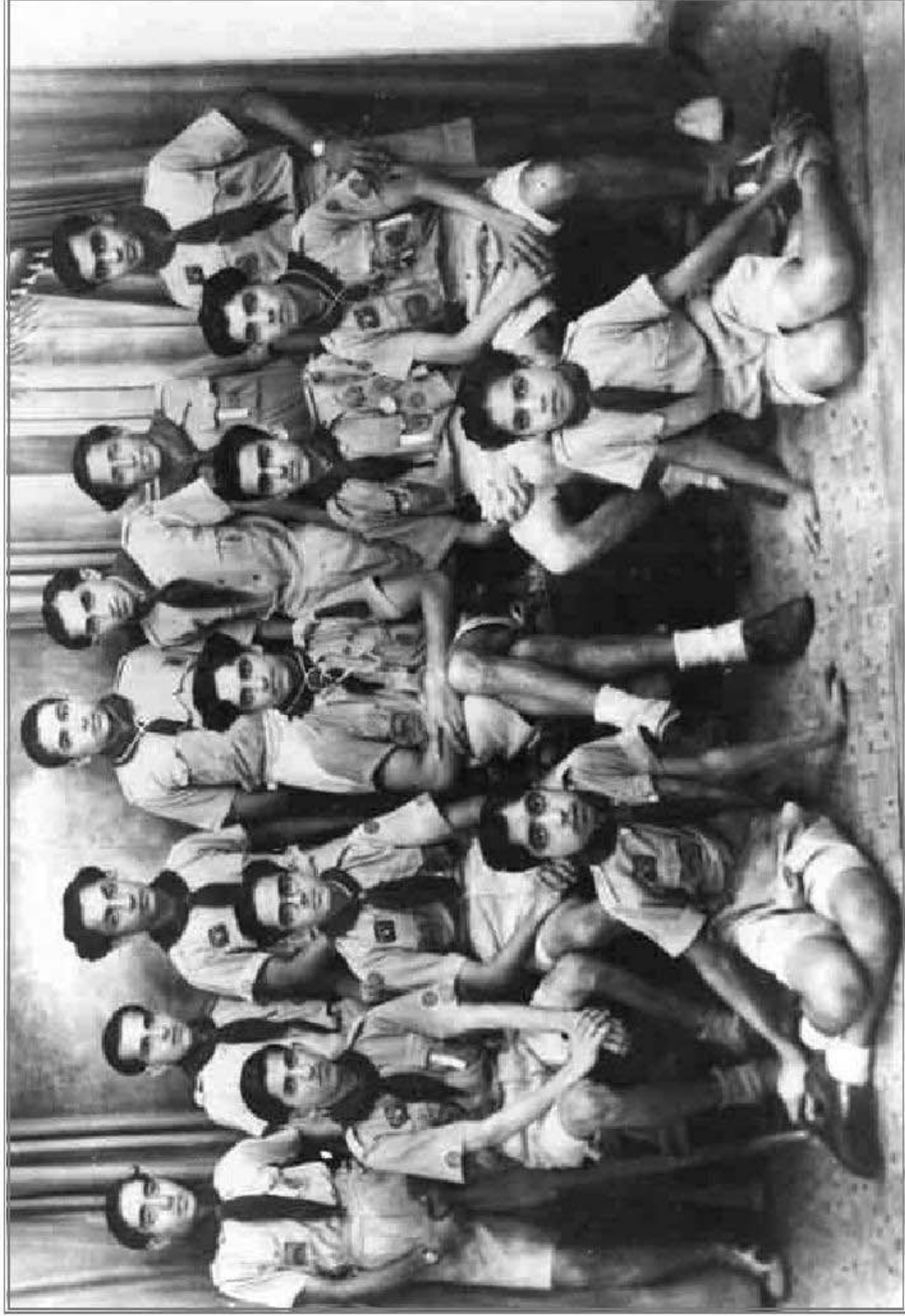


The Ismaili leaders with the Aga Khan HH Sultan Mohamed Shah in Zanzibar - 1905

Mohamed Bhanji, Gulamhussein Harji Sumar, Mohamed Rashid Alana, Alivalli Issa, Gulamhussein Karmali Bhaloo;

Centre Row: Peermohamed Kanji, Visram Harji, Varas Mohamed Remtulla Hemani, His Highness the Aga Khan III, Varas Saleh Kasmani, Fazal Issani, Gulamhussein Bhaloo Kurji; **Front Row:** Mukhi Rajabali Gangji, Varas Kassam Damani, Varas Janmohamed, Rai Mitha Jessa, Bhagat Juma Ismail, Itmadi Jivan Lalji, Saleh Valli Dharsi, Janmohamed Jetha, Kamadia Fazal Shivji.





Zanzibar's Ithnashri Scouts Group – 1946

Standing L to R: Mohamedhussein Jessa (Babu), Fida Rashid (Fee), Shuli Jaffer, Gulamhussein Alarakhia (Golo Saleh), Anver Rahim, Jaffer Shariff (Bajja), Fida Kassam Manji (Aliyo)

Sitting L to R: Abdulhussein Bhallu, Hamza Chatoo, Mohamedhussein Ahmed (Khokoni), Mohamed Darwesh, Jaffer R.Jaffer (Kibete)
Sitting on the floor: L to R: Anver Hasham, Ibrahim Jaffer Rahim





Manubha Kapadia being introduced to Princess Margaret when she visited Zanzibar in 1959





The Zanzibar Combine Cricket Team – 1962

Sitting L to R: Agha Jaffer (June), Gajendra Doshi, Tayabali Karimjee, Ahmed Lemki, Akber Dedhar
Standing L to R: Abitalib Sulemanji, Abdulkadir, Agha Mehdi, Rasik Gandhi, Hatim Mohamedali



14

ZANZIBAR'S INDIAN SETTLEMENT



Zanzibar had a number of Indian communities and that included the Parsees. Most of us who had studied at ESM can never forget the Parsees. Some of ESM's most prominent teachers including the school's principals were Parsees. Earlier the Principal was Master Tata who was followed by Master Arjani. Kersy Jassavala and Madon taught in secondary schools. Parsees who follow Zoroastrian faith are actually Iranians but had migrated from Iran a long time ago to settle in India. In Zanzibar they had their *agiari* (fire temple) with a *dastoor* (priest) and 'tower of silence' (cemetery) at Kilimani/Ziwani where they buried their dead unlike the *Parsi* way of disposing their corpse which was exposing them to the sun and vultures. Nowadays even in India some Parsees prefer cremation to their traditional method.



Parsees were affable and spoke Gujarati with a peculiar dialect. The British since their rule in India had shown special liking for the Parsees who were sophisticated. Some of them enjoyed good positions in Zanzibar's Colonial Government. In particular they played a significant role in Zanzibar's educational system, mainly in the context of its Indian settlement, and leading among them was Sawakshah Talati. The Talatis were an enterprising family with a firm of solicitors and film/theatre business.

The Parsees had a very good cricket team in Zanzibar. Some of them played for the Cosmos team. Rusi Madon was considered as one of Zanzibar's finest opening batsman. The famed rock singer Freddie Mercury (Farouk Bulsara) was a Zanzibar born Parsee. Parsees also participated in Zanzibar's politics. One of ASP's leading constituencies Rahaleo had always Rustom Sidhwa as its candidate. Rutti Bulsara on the other hand represented ZNP. Also Parvez Talati was Zanzibar's mayor and Keki Madon the speaker of Zanzibar Legislative Council before the independence. This was a great achievement for a miniature community and its role in Zanzibar's history. Zanzibar had even readership of 'Gapsap', their monthly Gujarati publication from India. It is sad that this great community is dwindling in number.

Another fairly average sized community in Zanzibar was the Goans. They were hardworking and flamboyant people. In actual fact they did not consider themselves Indians as Goa then was under the colonial rule of the Portuguese. Also with their Christian background and fluency in English they could easily connect themselves with the colonials. No doubt the Barretos and Carvalhos featured prominently in Zanzibar's banks and administrative set ups. Some were specialized as tailors. A Goan tailor shop in the stone town was a common sight. They had their twin towered cathedral with statues of Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and other apostles located in Vuga beside the Samachar Printing Press across Portuguese street. What comes to mind is the spectacle of their funeral procession in Zanzibar. There was somberness about it. The cortege would be led by a pole bearer followed by a black cart with wreaths laid over it, and then



the relatives carrying the coffin over their shoulders. The mourners in their black attire walked behind in dignified manner chanting funeral hymns.

Some of Zanzibar's prominent doctors like Demello, Menezes, D'silva and Maitra were Goans. The Goans also excelled in sports. They had their 'Goan Club' and 'Goan Institute'. The burly James D'lord was one of Zanzibar's hardest hitters of the cricket ball. The Goans along with Hindus and Comorians were dominant in field hockey. Their school St. Joseph Convent run by the Catholic Mission was one of Zanzibar's most prestigious schools that admitted besides Catholic only selective non Catholic pupils. The school was located behind the High Court which was on the main Shangani Road where many Goans resided. The road stretched up to the Post Office at the far end of Portuguese street where mainly the Hindu community resided.

The Hindus in Zanzibar were an enterprising community, and foremost among them were the Bhatias. It is said that the brothers Jeraj and Eebji Shivji were the first to settle in Zanzibar. Later their surname Shivji changed to Swaly which is derivative of the term 'Swahili'. Narandas Swaly, a reputed contractor, whose expertise our forefathers sought in having their walls and ceilings bricked up, and Vinod Swaly, a very popular teacher at the Agakhan Secondary School, were the descendants of Eebji Swaly. The other prominent Bhatias were Manubha of Kapadia Motor Mart and the Bablas. The Bhatias were held in very high esteem by the Sultan and some even acted as advisers to him. The Jetha Leela private bank located in Portuguese street may be recorded as one of the oldest financial institutions in East Africa.

Here we need to point out a significant and historic incident. It was the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Zanzibar's Bhatia Mahajanvadi at Ziواني en route from South Africa to India. There is an interesting anecdote relating to this episode. Gandhiji refused to enter the Bhatia Mahajanvadi building as there was a notice saying '*Bhatia sivay koine andar aavavani raja nathi*' (only Bhatias are allowed to enter). That really embarrassed the committee. The notice was immediately removed and after persuasion



Gandhiji consented to enter the building. 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 to receive the ashes and as a mark of respect for this great *Mahatma*. The ashes were then taken to Jinja (Uganda) to be scattered in the Nile.

The Golaranas among the Hindus were strikingly different. They were industrious and skilful. They were dark in complexion and came originally from Daman & Diu (now Indian state, earlier under Portuguese). Their gulfo (apartment complex) was located in a corner of Mkunazini/Sokomohogo along our Nai Misit. Their ladies could be seen sitting in the doorway and grinding grain into flour. They also dried off spices and vegetables in the open and at times that blocked the road. Their celebrations of Hindu festive occasions had certain grandeur. In particular I remember their Holi festival. At night on our way back from Nai Misit we would wait there to watch them set fire and perform the ritual (holika). Later they splashed coloured liquid and threw coloured powder on each other. It was real fun. There were other Hindu communities too like Vania, Lohana and others. Some of the notables among them were Anupchand Laxmichand, Manilal Mulji Suchak, Dwarkadas Morarji and V.S.Patel. Harji Mawji was probably Zanzibar's finest batsman. He also played football for the Kikvajuni team. Gajendra Doshi, the wicket keeper batsman, represented Zanzibar in cricket as well as hockey. Vasant and Vadilal Shah were Zanzibar's star volleyball players. The Hindu crematorium (ngazi mia or hundred steps) was located at Ziwani.

The Hindus' marriage procession or *varghodo* held special attention. First the children came seated in rickshaws and then the Salim band playing Indian film music. The decorative wedding car with groom in traditional turban (the car only on motorways) was the centre of attraction. Then followed the men folk and towards the end the ladies in colourful garments singing wedding songs. Even Sultan Sayed Khalifa stopped his car to let the *varghodo* pass by.

The Hindus observed diwali with great pomp and ceremony. The diwali



illumination brightened up Shangani/Portuguese/Hurumzi (Vaddi Bhajaar) streets and they burst with crackers. On the eve of Diwali *chopra puja* was held in every shop. Even Muslim shopkeepers participated in this *puja*. Every Indian shopkeeper had his *namu* (accounts) done in *Gujarati* and he closed his books to transfer the balances into the new ones on the Hindu New Year. Also the rupee was Zanzibar's legal tender. The Hindu doctors like Goradia, Mehta and Patel had their clinics in Portuguese street and were immensely popular with the settlers.

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. Their gym/club was the finest with excellent facilities. Their leading cricketers were Ibrahim Abdulhusain (Patraiwala), Mansoor Karimjee and Tayabali Goribai. Their finest volleyball players were Hatim Mohamedali and Fakhru Lambo whose smashes were unplayable. The famed Karimjee Jivanjee family belonged to the Bohora community. Two of the Karimjee brothers were honoured with knighthood by the British Colonial Government, Sir Yusufali & Sir Tayabali. The Janoowallas who owned the pharmacy at Shangani were also Bohoras. The late His Holiness Syedna Taher Saifuddin paid a visit to Zanzibar in the early 1960s. On that occasion the Bohora Scout troop displaying their classic band marched majestically through the streets of stone town. At night Mkunazini and Sokomohogo were transformed into a glitter. The spacious Bohora School compound exhibited spectacular replica of the 'Sefi Mahal' (Syedna's Bombay mansion). In adherence to the salutary advice by Syedna a great number of Bohoras staked their livelihood in Zanzibar. Presently theirs is the largest community abounding in prosperity.



The Bohora School and its
spacious compound
(Now: Hamamni Secondary School)



There was great concentration of the Kutchi Sunnis too in Mkunazini/Sokomohogo. They comprised 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). Equally early settlers were these Kutchi Sunnis. As a matter of fact our forefathers were brought to Zanzibar in dhows navigated by the Kutchi Sunnis. In the instance of Kutchi Kumbhars (a pottery class) some inhabited Makunduchi. They built up contacts with the locals there, spoke fluent Kiswahili and attended school in Makunduchi where medium of instruction was Kiswahili. The owners of 'Sura Store' and 'Muzammil' who were destined to flourish in the post Revolution phase are the progeny of this ancestry.

The most enterprising among the Kutchi Sunnis were Memons. The patron and the president of the Kutchi Memon Jamaat in Zanzibar was Haji Tayyab. His 'Haji Abdulla' on the Kiponda/Darajani corner (now Muzammil) dealt in various electrical items and was one of Zanzibar's leading shops. The owners of 'Zakaria Provisional Store' and 'Good Luck Store' located in the market were Memons. Jusbanis had a big garage along Hollis Road. Haji Omar Mithaiwala's 'mithai' shop in Mkunazini was famous for its 'halua ya badamu' (almond sweetmeat). It cost shs. 7 a pound, a lot of money in those days, but it commanded a sort of 'brand image' and was sought after even in the distant UK in the fifties and sixties. The Zanzibar Memons hailed from Kutch. There were no Kathawadi (Halai) Memons in Zanzibar. The concentration of Halai Memons was in South Africa, Nyasaland (now Malawi) and Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe).

Portuguese street also converged on Hurumzi (Vaddi Bhajaar) where the Hindu and Jain temples were located. The street extended up to Saleh Madawa's shop or the monumental Ismaili Jamaatkhana that stretched all the way from one road to another. It formed the terminus for several by-ways and lanes that headed towards the Khoja dominated Kiponda/Malindi. In the early days the Ismailis had jamaatkhana even in Sateni,



Bumbwini and Chwaka. Ismaili schools and hospitals have been some of the oldest institutions in East Africa. The likes of Tharia Topan, Seva Haji and Alidina Visram were historical figures and played significant role in Zanzibar's history. Later emerged prominent figures like Jessa Bhallu, Fazal Champsy, Fazal Bhanji (from whom descended the film 'Gandhi' actor Ben Kingsley), Jetha Kassam, Hasham Gangji, Moloo Brothers and the Bharmals.

Many old timers from Zanzibar may remember the *Dhan dhan* procession of the Khoja Ismailis on the occasion of the Agha Khan's Imamat Day which was celebrated with great fervour. The procession started from the Agha Khan Club at Sateni and ended at Darkhana in Kiponda. Members from all the jamaat khanas participated in this procession. They made floats in the form of boats that depicted gardens and fairy land. Children were dressed in colorful costumes while youths played *dandia* on the streets enroute to Darkhana.

In the post Aga Khan Diamond Jubilee a large number of Khoja Ismailis shifted to the Mainland (then Tanganyika) including the Kalyan brothers (Gullu, Shera and Hashnu) who were star cricketers. The Khojas (Ithnashries & Ismailis) formed the bulk of the settlement in Zanzibar (amply evidenced by the earlier days' census) and were scattered all over the island including Ngambu, Bububu, Mfenesini, Bumbvini, Chwaka and Makunduchi.



The signboard signifying Zanzibar's merchandise.
Also the cross-legged Musabhai Datto is seen reading Koran.
So did my father every morning in our shop, typical of the Khoja zealots in those days in Zanzibar.





The Parsi Agiari at Ziwani



The St Joseph Catholic Church at Vuga



The Hindu Temple at Hurumzi



Msikiti wa Juma at Majanini





The Khoja Ismaili Jamaatkhana (Darkhana) at the Kiponda/Hurumzi junction



15

THE ZANZIBAR VENDORS, EATERIES & ARTISANS



Zanzibar Mix

Today wherever you visit in East Africa you will come across stalls selling '*bajia & mbatata wa urojo*' dubbed 'Zanzibar mix'. Zanzibar was famous for its eateries and vendors. Who among the elder Zanzibaris does not remember Ali (the Mshihiri person) carrying *bajia* and coconut chutney in a wooden box and hawking "Adanda!" to sell his *bajias*? The plain *bajias*, *pilipili* (chillies) *bajias* and *biringani* (brinjal) *bajias* of his were liked by one and all. They were prepared by Shirinbai Premji (a Khoja Ithnashri lady, Moh'dali Premji's wife and Toti's mother) who resided in the Ali Nathoo gully in Malindi. Ali worked for her since his childhood in the 1930s and later joined hands in its preparation. *Bhajia* made of daal is a typical Kutchi Muslim snack. In Zanzibar many ladies with low income ran their household on such activities. They were referred to as 'Masi. We had several Masis who dealt in *bajias*. Personally my favourite was 'Masi Bajia' (another Khoja Ithnashri lady, Mrs. Kurumbai Gulamhusain Sheriff, Ali *Bajia*'s mother) whose residence or eatery was not much of a distance from my house, behind Sheriff Dewji's house and beside Jacksis



residence. There was also this 'Memon Masi' (mother of Siddiq and Ilyas) opposite Ali Nathoo who made delicious *bajias*. Later along there in Malindi emerged Kiwapi, an African lady, and her *bajia* a different variety altogether. While *bajia* was a Kutchi snack the coconut *chutney* served with it was pure Zanzibar variety. Mostly I frequented Malindi and Kiponda. There were several other Sunni Masis in the stone town around Mkunazini, Sokomohogo, Vuga and other places. There was Hawamasi in Mchambawima and Sugramasi behind the Empire Cinema. In fact Sugramasi passed away only recently and the business is now run by her family members.

The other famous vendor was Adnan. His *mbatata* had a taste of its own. His children have now taken over the business but that taste is missing. I recall children rushing towards him on his arrival at the ESM yard. His *urojo* was just out of this world. Talking of *mbatata urojo* reminds of Mama Tausi who was Mulla Bai Amina's maid. She would sit with her ware on the pavement outside the Peera Champsi building selling her speciality. Her *urojo* was extraordinarily good. The African lady Ma Zena used to sell *mbatata ya ukwaju* (tamarind)' at Majanini, opposite the M.D. Kermali mansion. She was also famous for her '*uji ya khunde*' (red bean soup). Then there was Abedi (Mshihiri) in Malindi, a few yards away from my house. His 'mix' was one of its own, *papuri* sprinkled over *bajia* and *mbatata*. He prepared it during morning hours and his eatery would be packed with customers. Another 'mix' specialist was Kasu, a Khoja Ismaili. He went around the town with his hand cart. He was very popular with the ESM students who loved his chana bateta. Also Hassanali Visram (Hashnu Muri) along Majestic cinema was well known for his *mbatata and ndizi ya urojo*. Opposite his shop was the popular African *mishikaki* (roasted meat) seller. The public loved his extremely tender meat and the delicious taste when the small *mishikaki* stick was dipped into a container filled with hot chillies.

The unforgettable Zanzibar *ghubiti* was a unique sugar candy introduced by the Kutchi Sunni called Ahmed ghubitwaro who hailed from Bhuj. He used to carry a metal tray like the one used for cakes and biscuits. It



consisted of varieties of *ghubitis* but the favourite of most was the white one which was hard and he cut its lumps and chunks into pieces with a metallic piece. The African Juma Chakli used to work for him and learned the trade from him. Later he left him and started preparing his own variety. He moulded the candy into a spiral pattern and also made the soft chewy gum type sweet that was wrapped around a wooden rod. He was very popular with the children who followed him wherever he went. He would pull the gum or pluck the 'chakli' and sell to them.

The Bohora Khanbhai's *daria khali* (opposite the Ahmed Lakha mansion on Tharia St.) was the ladies favourite. He squeezed lime over *daria* (gram) mixed with red powder chillies. There was another Bohora called Babra who used to make tasty 'twisted hard *ganthia*'. And the blind Taherbhai who went around hawking "*khunazi tamu papeta lamu*" to sell *chana bor* (dried cherries) and *papeta*. There were 'juguwara' like Chacha Janu (Janmohamed Kermalli, a Khoja Ithnashri) and several Washihiris who moved with handcarts selling jugu and other nuts. Alibhai (a Kutchi Sunni) near Noors in Mkunazini used to sell ice cream on his cart as well as 'sacha hira' (*barafu ya kugonga na rangi ya sharbati juu*). The small ice cream cup cost five cents. Imagine the cost/standard of living, purchasing power and profit level!

Ice cream sellers were Habib Peera (Hathiar), Taki Juma (Darajani), Hussein Juma of 'Hussein Tea Room' (Mchambawima), Gulamali Nathho at Empire Cinema amongst a few others. Habib Peera's 'fruit icecream' was Zanzibar's speciality. The elders gathered for *mazungumzo* outside his stall at Forodhani. At times even HH the Aga Khan (Sultan Mohamed Shah) would join the gathering. Habib was a great jester and it is said that Sultan Sayed Khalifa often called him over to his palace for a chit chat session. In the late 1950s Musa G. Dhalla had obtained the rights to deal in Walls (the famous UK ice cream brand) which became quite popular in Zanzibar. Bakeries were the domain of Goans. The first bakery was introduced by the Goans Almeidas and thus Zanzibar inherited the Portuguese 'Pau bread' (boflo) and not the English sliced loaf. Ismail Sabzali Thawer (a Khoja Ithnashri) had his bakery at Sokomohogo.



Hassan Bakery (Sunni Kokni at Mkunazini) was known for its toasts. The old man Farhad went around the stone town early in the mornings delivering bread. In the month of Ramadhan the humble Dharamsi, Yusuf (Mafatuma), Mohamedali and Gulamali carrying metal tray on their head went from street to street hawking "*Naan garam naan*".

Ishak Chaki introduced his unique '*mitho paan*'. Everything 'red' went inside it (red coconut, red *supari* (beetle nut) and red syrup). He stationed himself at Forodhani placing the *paan* on an ice block. Ice could be obtained from the Patwa factory at Mkunazini or Shapoorji's at Darajani for pea nuts. Chaki's *paan* stall won the first prize at the fare at the Agakhan Club in Sateni during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. He was awarded a 100 shilling note by HH Sultan Mohamed Shah himself, a lot of money in those days. One Kassambha had brought a sugar cane pressing machine from India and daily pushed it all the way from Mkunazini to Forodhani selling '*maji ya miwa*'. *Ndizi ya urojo* was the speciality of a Bohora person who would come to Forodhani with his handcart. The African fresh juice seller Saidi's *maajiya machungwa*, *ukwaju* and *ndimu* were delicious and had a highly refreshing effect. Mohamedhusain Virji (Mamdhu Bi) had his '*barafu*' stall beside the '*imambara*'. Those chunks of *ukwaju*, *machungwa* and *maziwa* were everyone's favourite. He also cycled all the way to Mtoni and Shariff Musa selling *malai (barafu)*.

In the early days the mixture made up of small dried coconut pieces (*mbata* or *copra*), tiny green leaves and *sopari* (beetlenut) was termed *masalo*. It was chewed as a breath freshener, stuffed in *paan* and offered to guests during weddings. Later, around the time of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, a special recipe of *masalo* was introduced, made by Mrs. Rubabbai Kassamali Jaffer, residing in a back lane of Malindi. It was made from sugary coconut chips of various colours and thus termed '*coronation masalo*' which is popular to this day. Today's variety of East African food mostly emanates from Zanzibar. Those elderly Zanzibaris fond of food always give mention to Zanzibar cuisine and recall Maruki's *haluwa ya Mmanga*, Haji Omar Ishak's *haluwa ya badamu*, Haji Omar Adam's *pera*, Ashur's *mandazi*, Washihiris' *mkate wa mofa* and *bokho*



bokho, Afro Arab speciality like *khuku/samaki wakupaka*, *kalimati*, *mkate yakumimina* and *kitumbua*.

We also dwell upon some of Zanzibar's remarkable artisans who were the product of its cosmopolitan society. They were very much skilled and had made a strong impression on the Asian settlement there. Topiwala across Barza Tharia made hats that were soft and fitted closely. Those were the days of the 40s and 50s when Jinnah and Nehru caps were very much in vogue. Alimohamed Ismail Mutwali in Hurumzi made red Fez or Tarbush hats. The Africans had considerable expertise in local hats or *kofia* worn by the Muslims. The hats were adorned with various embroidered designs. The more the embroidery the higher was its price. The hats were later very much in demand in the Arab countries. The Africans also learnt the craftsmanship of Zanzibar doors from the Indians. They did the carving and nailed the doors with brass studs. We used to get our shoes custom made from Hira Mochi in Hurumzi. He had installed a machine in his shop, the only of its kind in Zanzibar. Popat Mulji was a class carpenter. He used to make furniture for the Sultan and other distinguished people. The furniture on display at the palace museum signifies the work of a master craftsman. Most of the other carpenters were Kutchi Sunnis like Mzee Osman (Baghani), Esmail Star (Mkunazini), Ali Mohamed Dada (Mkunazini).

Zanzibar's most reputed tailor was Gopal Samji whose shop was across Barza Tharia. 'Gopal Samji' meant Zanzibar's best tailoring brand. It had a name for quality. The brand commanded status, a la 'Marks & Spencer', for if you said 'Gopal Samji' it meant something. His clientele was distinctive. It is said that even Zanzibar's royalty and diplomats frequented his shop. The other tailors were Babu Darji (opposite Karim Allarakhia's shop), Yusuf Darji (a Muslim Punjabi) Abdulla Darji (a Khoja Ithnashri) and several other tailors like the Goan Miranda and Ali Barwani who had qualified from London. My own tailor was one Chunilal whose shop was in Changa Bazaar. This Chunilal was a great cricket enthusiast. He had a black board placed outside his shop beside Muslim Dungersi's shop. During test matches we sat in Muslim's shop to listen to the cricket



commentary and then chalk scores on Chunilal's board.

The sonaras (goldsmith) were Haji Ahmed Haji Eliyas at Darajani, Rehemtulla Salehmohamed opposite Kiwanjani, Abdulrehman Sonaro among others. Dharamsi Mora specialized in silver. The Ceylonese like Ranti D'Silva and D'don Millon were in silver too, and in tourist items. The blacksmiths were Kutchi Sunnis of Mlandege (*Wagonga vyuma*) who made all the hardware for buildings, manufactured carts, matwana (buses) and the 'Mnazimoja eid fare 'merry go round'. Another black smith was Banyani Bunduki at Portuguese street. The contractors were Mawji Nathoo, Narandas Swali, Jusa Tharia and later GAK Patel. The builders were mostly Golorana, Kori and Sunnis. Painters or *wapiga choka* were Saleh Rangaro and some other Sunnis and Hindus.

There was Mohamedali Allarakhia who specialized in binding books without the use of a machine or cutter. He had transformed his small dingy room in a Malindi gully into a workshop and used his expertise to earn his meager livelihood. There were some other great craftsmen like Sumar Manyoti, Ayub Sumro, Omar Othar Nareja, Abha Khatri, Sati and the Kumbhars. The barbers included Mohan near the market, Chunilal in Shangani and Kassim Nahoo who was the Sultan's barber. Ithnashries patronized Haji Abdulrehman (Toto Hajam) whose small shop was opposite the mosque. Such was his popularity that the father of the 'to be bride' first consulted him enquiring about the character of the boy and sought his advice before giving his consent. The first photo studio was the Goan Gomez's at Shangani. The other popular studio owners were Ranchod at Shangani and Tayabali at Kiponda. The opticians were HM Rashid, Shivji, Bablas and Alidinas.

Most of those who feature here had appeared on the Zanzibar scene in the 1950s and 1960s. There could have been superior chefs and master craftsmen in the earlier time. They all contributed to the lives of settlers in Zanzibar. In the spirit of Zanzibar we are also reminded of some philanthropic gestures. The Sheriff Dewjis in one corner of Malindi provided glycerin free of charge. So did the Chakeras (Aagriwala beside Abedi on Malindi) who donated plasters.





The famed Sugramasi preparing 'bhajia' at her eatery behind empire Cinema



Zanzibar's highly reputed tailor Gopal Samji at Barza Tharia





The pau (bread) seller



The Zanzibar kofia (hats)



Haji Omar Issac's Haluwa ya badamu



The Zanzibar matwana (buses)



16

ZANZIBAR ITHNASHERI GYMKHANA

The largest Khoja Ithnashri community in East Africa was in Zanzibar and cricket was a popular game amongst them. Certain photographs of the past indicate and bear testimony to the fact that cricket was played as far back as early twentieth century. Personalities such as Haji Remtulla Tejani, Saleh Chagpar, Mulla Raza Nathani and Mohammed Jaffer Nathani (Maalim Miya) figured prominently in the game.

One of Juma Aley's write ups reads that in 1933 the Chairman of Zanzibar's Cricket Sub-Committee was Husain Allarakhia Rahim. We assume that such personalities should have been instrumental in initiating the formation of Ithnashri Gymkhana in Zanzibar. It is very unfortunate that after the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution the past records have been lost to archives and it is difficult to establish the appropriate time of the Gymkhana's formation and its founder members.

However from 1940 onwards the Gymkhana flourished under the 'Presidentship' and 'Secretariship' of MD Kermali, Sherali Meghji, Noorali Jessa, Anver Hassan Virjee, Ahmed Khalfan, Ibrahim K Manji, Mohamedhusain MD Karmali, Mohamedhusain H Nasser, Gulam Dhalla, Mohamed Kassam, Yusuf Alidina and Ahmed Dungersi. In fact Akber Gulamhusain was the last president of the Gymkhana before its automatic dissolution. Unlike Dar es salaam Ithnashri Union the Zanzibar Gymkhana had no affiliation whatsoever with the 'jamaat'. It was an independent body funded by its own members.



Ithnashries in Zanzibar reigned supreme in cricket. If the 1930s and 1940s provided Ithnashries with a monopoly over the league and the retention of Dr. Albuquerque shield for good in 1942, the 1950s earned them a series of knock out victories and the possession of KJ or Karimji Jivanji trophy in 1963, the last year of Zanzibar's cricketing history. The 'Cosmos' formed Ithnashries toughest competitors in 1940s while in 1950s the healthy rivalry with the Arabs provided a lot of excitement. The sixes of Sherali Meghji that earned him the nickname 'ndege' still get talked about while the exploits of Gulamali Kabana, Noorali Jessa and Gulamhusain Ismail (Golo) overwhelm Zanzibar's past inhabitants with emotions.

The other popular sports with Zanzibar Ithnashries were football and volleyball. Ithnashries had their own football team and at a later stage a few of them even played for 'Malindi', one of Zanzibar's most popular football clubs. The volleyball contests were made up of nine aside, six aside and three aside tournaments, and Ithnashris held a very good record of victories. Babu Gulla, Gulamhusain Ismail and Raza Sherali dominated the 1940s while Babu Rama and Husain Gulamhusain (Chikli) were 1950s key players. Their smashes were unplayable and were met with clapping from spectators.

After the 'Revolution' there was an exodus of the community to the mainland. The islanders joined Dar es salaam's Ithnashri Union. There was no merger or amalgamation of Union and Gymkhana.

Zanzibar Ithnashri Gymkhana boasted of some of Zanzibar's finest cricketers whom we briefly feature hereunder.



Sherali Meghji

The smashed clock that still gets exhibited at the Zanzibar Museum provides ample evidence of the invincibility of Sherali Meghji's shots. In that particular incident the ball was hit right from the wicket at the first pitch on 'Mnazimoja' to the tower clock of Museum across the road.



Sherali was popularly known as Sherali 'Ndege'. Ndege implied the ball soaring towards the sky. The hardest hitting batsman East Africa has ever produced Sherali was the heartthrob of Zanzibar's cricket loving public. Activity in the island would come to a halt when Sherali went in to bat. Sherali's fans closed the shutters of their shops and thronged 'Mnazimoja' at the fall of Ithnashries' fourth wicket. He always batted at number six or seven. As the majestic Sherali would walk in, the fielders desperately retreated towards the boundary line as the occasion awaited sixes. The credibility and validity of this text can be verified with his contemporaries who may come up with some more amusing narrations.



**Gulamali Kermali
(Kabana)**

Gulamali Kermali or Kabana as he was popularly known was one of Zanzibar's great bowlers. He monopolized Zanzibar's cricket scene in the 1930s and 1940s. He was a medium pacer who moved the ball in the air and also bowled 'off spins'. He used to be the major wicket taker in all the matches that he had played. He won the coveted 'ball' award, the most prestigious cricket award in Zanzibar, eleven times which was a record. In 1938 he took 9 wickets for 8 runs against Goans bowling them out for mere twelve runs. In his long career he must have bowled hundreds of overs but hardly got struck for a six of which he is very proud. Incidentally once he split with Ithnashries and joined Comorians. That particular season Comorians emerged Zanzibar's league champions.

Noorali's cricket career started at the tender age of 16 when he played for Ithnashri 'A' in Zanzibar's first division. He was a batsman of proud



Noorali Jessa

potential. He captained Ithnashries as well as Zanzibar xi for a number of years. It was under his captaincy that Zanzibar won the Pardhan Ladak shield for the first time in 1951 against a formidable Dar es salaam xi. Noorali was essentially a dependable opening bat and executed his strokes, especially his late cuts, with admirable ability. He was a sound wicket keeper too.





Gulamhussain Ismail

Gulamhusain represented Ithnashri Gymkhana from 1944 to 1958. He won the 'ball award' in his very first season in 1944 and went on to win several more. His fiery pace had the batsmen trembling. Gulamhusain represented the Combine Side in 1947. He spearheaded Zanzibar's attack then onwards till 1958 when he retired from active cricket. In 1952 in the memorable Pardhan Ladak contest Zanzibar managed to score only 101. In reply Gulamhusain

bowled out the strong Dar es salaam team for mere 86 runs by claiming 7 wickets and earned Zanzibar a remarkable victory. The contest resumed in 1953 in Zanzibar and this time the Dar es salaam side was bundled out for just 39 runs. Gulamhusain was unplayable on that day and took 8 wickets. On that occasion the Zanzibar Sports Control Board honoured Gulamhusain with a 'Special Medal' for his splendid bowling performance. It was the only instance in Zanzibar's sports history that such an honour was bestowed upon a cricketer.

Incidentally when the great Pakistan side visited Zanzibar in 1956 its game against Zanzibar coincided with *wafaat of Bibi Fatema* and Gulamhusain despite persuasion by ZSBC and prominent community members refused to play. Eventually ZSBC had to reschedule the game to facilitate the presence of Gulamhusain who rose to the occasion grabbing 4 Pakistani wickets. That episode revealed many facets of Gulamhusain, his prominence in Zanzibar cricket, his ethical values and his deep devotion to his faith.



Mohamedhassan Musa
(Babu Chinani)

Mohamedhassan was an excellent wicket keeper and a sound batsman. He was a regular choice for Zanzibar Combine. He had also the honour to represent Kenya during his brief stay there. Sadly during Zanzibar's encounter with Dar es salaam in the Pardhan Ladak tournament he was struck by a fast delivery from Alban Fernandez which brought an abrupt end to his career. He was taken for treatment to Bombay where he died in 1955





Akber Dedhar

Once in 1952 in Zanzibar Ithnashri Gymkhana 'A' lost to Arabs in a game in which a young lad was discarded from the 'A' team and made to play for the 'B' team. He took shelter under a tree and wept profusely. Incidentally the same Arabs side lost their next match against Ithnashri 'B'. They were bowled out cheaply by the same lad who took 8 wickets. What an irony! The lad was Akber Dedhar.

Akber played cricket accidentally when in 1949 one of the players was dropped out of ESM, the school side, at the last minute and Akber made to fill the gap. He went on to score 32 runs in that game and never looked back.

Akber remained one of Zanzibar's top most all rounders representing the Combine Side from 1956 to 1963. He used to open the bowling and had the finest bowling style, a perfect model for cricket aspirants. He captained Ithnashries from 1959 to 1961 and during that period the KJ Cup was won for three consecutive years. Akber's contribution in a memorable partnership of 140 with Baker Tejani against the strong Arabs team in 1959 was 87 invaluable runs. One of his best bowling performances was recorded against Mombasa Jaffries when he took 7 wickets to dismiss them for mere 40 runs.

One of Akber's regrettable moments was when Pakistan's great Hanif Mohamed was dropped twice off his bowling. Akber was also a fine volleyball player and remained Ithnashri Gymkhana's last President.



Bashir Nasser

Bashir shall always be remembered as a boy with golden arms for having bowled the great Hanif. He also bowled another star cricketer, Imtiaz Ahmed, and claimed the wicket of Wallias Mathias. Imagine at that time in 1956 Bashir had bowled almost 50 consecutive overs!

Bashir was a terrific off spinner and overall a great all rounder who used to be the architect of many victories for Ithnashris. His slip fielding was a joy to watch and his batting highly relied upon.



Once Ithnashries scored 119 runs against the strong 'Hindus' who were then bowled out for a meagre score of 29 with Bashir claiming the highest number of wickets. When it was the turn of Ithnashries to bat again Bashir opened the innings and struck consecutive boundaries off the first five deliveries. The Hindus' captain uprooted the stumps giving away the game to Ithnashries. Bashir was also a very fine volleyball player.



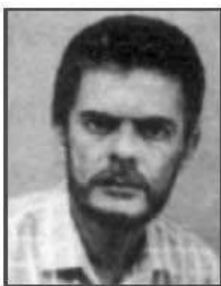
Baker Tejani

Baker was one of Zanzibar's top most sportsmen. He was renowned for his cool temperament and sportive mannerism. It was cricket that had given Baker immense popularity. In 1952 he started playing for the Government Secondary School and represented Ithnashries 'A' from 1955 to 1963. He used to be their prolific run scorer and gained instant recognition as one of Zanzibar's finest batsman which earned him a permanent place in Zanzibar's Combine Side. His highest score was 95 and it was recorded against the 'Arabs'.

Baker also excelled at tennis. He was often seeded number one and in 1956 he won both the singles and doubles. Baker was also a neat volleyball player who besides representing his school and Ithnashris had also got selected for Zanzibar Combine. The other sports to have earned Baker laurel was badminton. He remained Zanzibar's champion from 1958 to 1960 and used to win both 'singles' and 'doubles'. Baker was also a keen golfer.



**Amir
Yusuf**



**Yusuf
Kermali**



**Amir
Dedhar**



**Bashir
Tejani**



**Mohamed
Nathoo**

The remarkable cricket careers of the above photographed Zanzibar Ithnashri Gymkhana cricketers that stretched from the pitches of Mnazimoja marched on to the grounds of Dar es salaam dominating the mainland cricket.



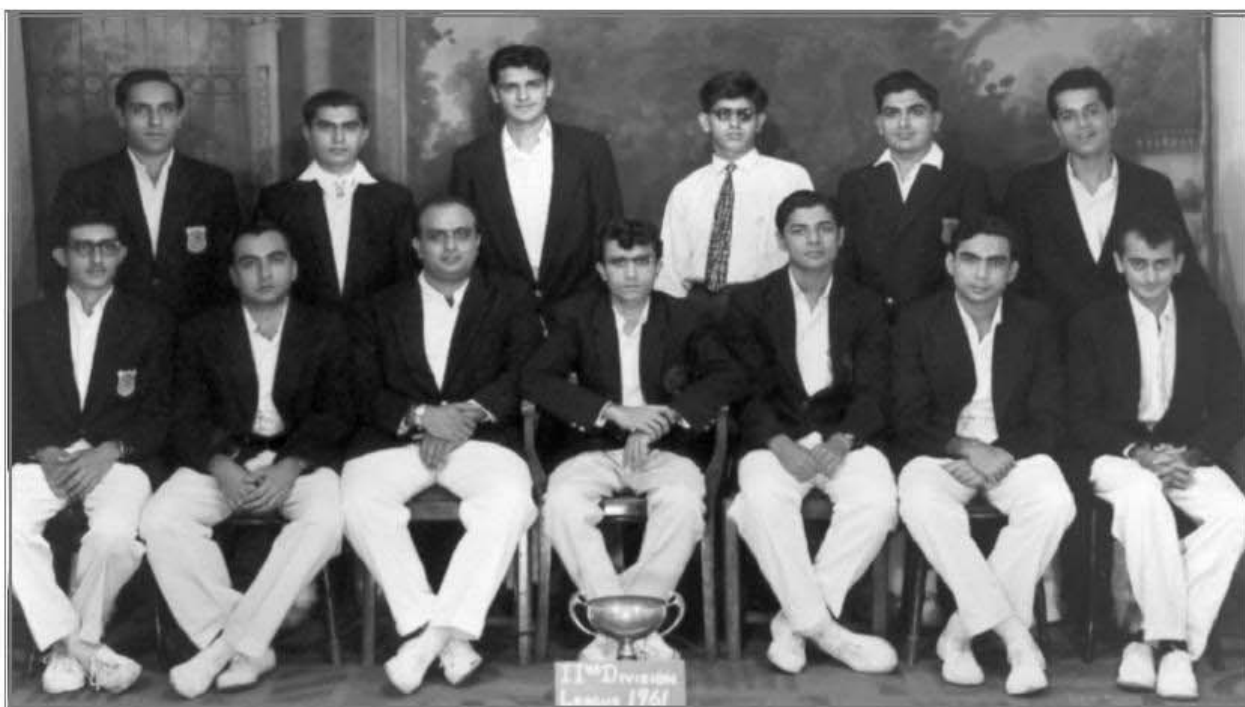


Ithnashri Gymkhana A Cricket Team (winners of KJ Cup, 1956).

Standing L to R: Gulam Dhalla, Akber Dedhar, Yusuf Juma, Shenny Dharsi,
Ahmed Juma, Ibrahim Jivraj

Sitting from L to R: Ramzan Esmail, Noorali Sheralli, Noorali Jessa, Ahmed Tejani,
Gulamhussein Ismail

Sitting down: Jaffer Peera, Baker Tejani.



Ithnashri Gymkhana B Cricket Team (winner of League, 1961)

Standing L to R: Ahmed Nathani, Sabir Dhalla, Anver Thaver, Sultan Damji,
Haider Remtulla Walli, Nazir Nasser

Sitting L to R: Mohamedhussein Jaffer (Dhushan), Amir Nasser, Yusuf Dhalla,
Shenny Dungersi, Murad Kermalli, Sajjad Mussa, Abdulrasul Bhallu (Datchu)





Ithnashri Gymkhana Volleyball Team (winner of League, 1954)
 Standing L to R: Hassan Taki, Farouk Malik, Akber Dedhar, Akber Sonara, Babu Sheralli
 Sitting L to R: Hussein Dedhar (Chikli), Babu Gulla, Noorali Dedhar, Babu Rama,
 Abdulrazak Dewji



Ithnashri Gymkhana Football Team – 1944
 Standing L to R: Abbas Dawood, Gulamhussein Ismail, Mohamedhassan Lakha,
 Ahmed Ali
 Sitting L to R: Ramadhan Ismail, Roshan Alloo, Babu Gulla, Abdul Nasser, Ashro
 Sitting on the ground L to R: Yusuf Nathoo, Raza Sheralli, Gulamali Nathoo.



17

CHANGING TIMES

We have developed a strong sense of belonging to our community when viewed in the context of circumstances in East Africa. The community besides its religious and traditional heritage also raves about sports and in particular cricket. This is clearly manifested in the indulgence of the likes of the Nathani brothers (Maalim Raza and Maalim Miya) and later the Juma brothers (Sheni, Yusuf and Ahmed) since those olden days. The picture in the Zanzibar Archives portraying our elders in turbans and Khoja attire bears testimony to the fact that our connection with sports stretches back to those days of the nineteenth century.

The Indo British influence had spurred Zanzibar's old settlement to the action of cricket. There were as many as 11 teams (Ithnashris, Ismailis, Hindus, Bohoras, Arabs, Comorians, Sunnis, Parsis, Goans, Cosmos and at times even the English) which competed in the League, KJ (knock out) and Bagban (limited overs game). The 1964 Zanzibar Revolution brought an end to its cricket and led to the exodus of the community. Though Dar es salaam did not shower bounty over them (the favour was not unlike that shown to the Somali brothers) it did provide moral support and accommodated them into its sports teams. In fact the merger did a lot of good to Dar es salaam's cricket and Union Sports Club became Tanzania's dominant cricket force.

Basically the settlement in Dar es salaam took place much later. The city itself developed in the post World War 1 phase and a cricket team or a volleyball team here and there made up of certain community members



was the only feature of our sporting activity. It therefore became a matter of great pride for the Ithnasheris when in 1946 one of the community members, Mohamed Haji, was made to play football for Eastern Service in the Sun Light Cup.

The first Ithnasheri Sports Club was launched in 1952 under the leadership of Abdulrasul Virji. Later in 1956 other clubs like Philomaths (table tennis), Twilight (badminton) and Radio Club (snooker) which had been formed to cater for the sporting needs of the community joined hands with Ithnasheri Sports Club to form the Ithnasheri Union. Along with sports it also took under its wings the literary, nursery school, volunteering and employment portfolio and Bashir Rahim elected its first Chairman.

In the fifties there was keen interest in table tennis and badminton. Individuals like Mohamed Pirbhai (table tennis), Raza Virjee (badminton) and Ahmed Ratansi (badminton) were looked upon with pride and admiration for winning the National Championship. Excelling them all was the remarkable Mahmood Noormohamed who besides winning the Students and Tanzania Open Badminton Championships also clinched the Kenya and Uganda Open on his way to become the East African Champion. He achieved this feat not once but twice. Mahmood was also a very fine cricketer and had the honour of representing Tanzania in the 60's and 70's when the country boasted of strong contenders for National selection. Our heart goes out to him on hearing recently the sad news of his youthful son Kaiz's tragic and untimely death in a train accident in Portsmouth, England.

Reverting to the scene then, it was the traditional style volleyball which Ithnasheris specialized in. From the forties onwards till the introduction of international style volleyball in the late sixties Ithnasheris dominated the Dar es salaam volleyball scene. They performed miraculously winning all the championships year after year. It is said that during the days of FHR (Fida Habib Rehemtulla Kara) in the forties and early fifties Ithnashris hardly lost a set let alone a match.



However, the most prestigious sports among the Asians was cricket which held special fascination for us. It was in the year 1954 that Ithnasheris won their first league title, otherwise league had been the monopoly of Hindu Sports Club and Agakhan Sports Club. One of the leading members of that victorious team was Hussein Bhalloo (Hussein Dogo) who passed away a few months back in London. Hussein was a jolly good fellow. In a memorable game against Goans, Ithnasheris were bowled out for a paltry 46. In reply Goans' wickets also started tumbling and they were reduced to 45 for 9 but needed just 2 runs for victory with only a wicket in hand which Ithnasheris had to capture. The skipper Pyarali Merali who was bowling that decisive over adjusted his field and came up to say to Hussein who was keeping the wicket, "*Hane tojo kam aye*". Pyarali spun the ball and Hussein rising to the occasion stumped the last Goan batsman as he left his crease to strike the ball and missing its line. Ithnasheris won that thrilling encounter and went on to achieve their first championship. Speaking of Hussein, it was at volleyball that he really excelled. He was a perfect exponent of *kabuli* service and with his all round court play a match winner on numerous occasions.

Cricket-wise it was then downwards slide and the championship eluded Ithnasheris till the seventies. In 1972, following in line with the National Sports Council's directive, Ithnasheris Sports Club became Union Sports Club and its fortunes started changing for the better. Its tremendous success was undreamt of. Never had any club enjoyed such a success. They went on to dominate the Dar es salaam scene for over two decades with a great run of championship victories. From today's perspective, local cricket in those days had a charm of its own. So much so that it created a special bond between the community and its members, and this feeling could override any other thing. Irrespective of the quality of our cricket the competition between various communities used to be so severe that it transcended the limitation of our standards (not that we had no class, had ICC been active in those days our cricket would have definitely been granted the 'first class cricket' status).



Cricket enthusiasts thronged the ground in hundreds. They had come to love the game of cricket with a rare passion and awaited eagerly the arrival of weekends when they would reach the ground at the earliest possible lest any action was missed. The folded chairs lined up the spectators' stand and motor vehicles filled up the parking space. There were even drum beats and trumpet blaring which provided festive environment. Some even ordered and arranged their lunch at the ground while tea time was a sumptuous affair as cups of tea and coffee made rounds and platters of snacks and biting passed to spectators. Cricket action led to heart beats, acclaim, criticism and even flaring of tempers. The end or climax often meant nail biting finish and forgoing the drive to Oysterbay. Such was the level of the players' competence and mastery that they came to acquire a permanent place in the hearts of local cricket lovers. No doubt it is not possible for us old timers to adjust to the different administration and changing face of cricket in Tanzania today.

When the youthful Imran Dhalla requested for this feature, the past came flooding back. The most exciting part of that time was the hosting of tournaments such as Tarmohamed or Supreme Council. A tournament with over a hundred participants in those days was not easy to organize and had to overcome a number of obstacles. It called for hard work and Union was fortunate to have some real dedicated workers who gave their energy and time to the organization. One such who easily comes to mind is Afzal Peera (Jimmy). Neat and dressed with casual elegance Jimmy was a regular feature of Union in his capacity as scorer or player. His best attribute was his ability to provide all sorts of records and statistics in those days when computer was not even heard of. You just had to refer to him and he would furnish everything that was asked for. During tournaments he bore hand to different committees and aided them in one way or another. Even today he readily assumes responsibility upon himself and delivers the goods.

One of the tasks of the committee was to come out with a brochure to elicit profiles and articles on sports personalities and events. At times certain



members would be overlooked or not accorded proper footage. Obviously emotions ran high and a feeling of guilt assumed for being oblivious of others sensitivity. The late Bali (Iqbal Damji) otherwise not much focused was highlighted in his obituary. So sad! Bali's lovely countenance, benign smile and amiable personality captivated everyone. Recalling our London visit, we made a round of sports shops to procure the flannels and GM bat of his liking for the Tarmohamed Tournament that was approaching. He had passion for cricket and aspired to perform well in Zimbabwe where the tournament was being held. He made an adorable companion during Union's tours abroad and had bought the Imran Khan hats for his team mates who displayed style on the field wearing the then in vogue hat.

That reminds of another great character, the late Hussein Ahmed, whose presence on tours abroad was greeted with hilarity. He was a real jester and fun to be with. The Union lot just loved him for his reproachful utterance and incessant chatting. When targeted by anyone Hussein would retaliate with equal ease and abruptness. It created such a comic situation that all those around would laugh their heads off.

Hussein was a keen scout and had been awarded the Queen's Scout Badge. That enabled him acquire sound knowledge on medical matters. He was thus Union's 'First Aid Officer' and always showed his presence on the ground with his medical kit. It also earned him the nickname Dr. Who. As a member of the Organizing Committee he would turn up at the meetings with his flask and during the proceedings pour out fresh orange juice for his fellow members. Sitting on the committee was Muslim Jivraj who would have Hussein worked up into an excitable state.

Sadly Muslim also remains no more. He will always be remembered for his melodious majlis in the mould of the legendary Jaffer Hassanali Mulla Raza. But it is in the context of sports that this feature talks about. In the memorable K.J.Cup final against Arabs at Khalifa Ground, Zanzibar in 1961 Muslim captured the last wicket of Agha Jawad whom he had caught on the boundary line by Akber Ghulamhussein (Akku) to give Ithnasheri a thrilling victory after more than four days of nail biting cricket. That



evening Ithnasheri supporters paraded with a replica of the cup along Forodhani. Jawad was an Agha (of Persian descent recruited to Zanzibar by the Khoja Ithnasheris in the late nineteenth century). Several of the Aghas had opted for Arabs team and hence a fierce rivalry between the teams of Ithnasheris and Arabs in Zanzibar.

Muslim died in Bombay and lies buried in the Aram Bagh cemetery. Also buried there is Mohammedhassan Musa (Babu Chinani) who had gone to Bombay for treatment after being tragically hit on the head by a fast delivery from Alban Fernandez in the Pardan Ladak Cup contest between Zanzibar and Dar es salaam in the 50's. The elder brother Ghulamhussein Musa (Sheni Chinani) passed away last year in Gloucester, UK. Once playing for Nairobi against Zanzibar after shifting there from Zanzibar, he bowled out his old mates cheaply by taking 6 wickets. Sheni was instrumental in rescheduling the itinerary of Pakistan's memorable 1956 tour to East Africa as Pakistan's match against Zanzibar initially coincided with Bibi Fatma AS's wafaat.

Another veteran who died sometime back was Abdulhussein Dawood (Babu Gulla) in Dubai, a vision of sporting delight. Decades back at the Private Sateni Club in Zanzibar could be seen this well built lad endowed with perfect physique that was the envy of onlookers. After the regular session of 'weight lifting' he would prevail over the volleyball court with his hard smashes. As a daily routine he walked all the way to Beit El Raas and back via Sateni, Marhubi and Mtoni covering almost six miles. In modern perception it is jogging, so much in fashion among today's community members.

Times have changed, and not necessarily for the better. Whilst the strange haunting of Zanzibar stone town evokes sadness to its old inhabitants, the city of Dar es salaam is transformed into metropolis. Skyscrapers adorn the city, including Kariako and Upanga. In the 50's Kariako was a slum area and bushy while Upanga was hardly inhabited and not much heard of. Leave aside the Msasani, Mikocheni, Masaki and such places which were as good as non existent. Oysterbay breathed refreshing coolness. The



spots like Slipway and Seacliff with their commercialism were unthinkable. Unlike today Acacia Avenue (later Independence Avenue and now Samora Avenue) with its Askari monument was familiarly intimate, and alongside the stretch of *Nano Dario* (sea shore) which made a lively resort and welcomed the crowd even beyond midnight.

On arrival in Dar es salaam during school holidays the first obligation was to check the local cricket fixture. The 'Osman Tea Room' beside the mosque (the building scheduled for demolition and the ownership of which being disputed) was a favourite hangout of community members. The restaurant remained open till late at night. The narrow passage therein led to the gymnasium (where now stretches the imambara) set up for gymnastic exercises. At the Ibrahim Haji Trust Building (now hospital) and the Ibrahim Ismail Trust Building Mulla Gulamhussein Dhirani and Mrs. Zainabbai Shivji conducted quranic and diniat classes for children. The openness of the spacious *lavani* (verandas) facilitated cricket and volleyball contests among youths and children. Today yielding to the demand of present time, the bulk and bulge of plastic tanks and odd construction block their openness (Damani Trust Building). The Jamaat Office Building overlies the once Ibrahim Ismail Trust Building and its ample *lavani* which commanded ethereal beauty. Historically and culturally Dar es salaam is giving way to greedy investors and developers, and obliterating its past from vision if not memory.

International cricket then was restricted to test cricket and the Dina brothers of Naaz restaurant (now Tai Huo San along Jamhuri Street) listening to the commentary on radio chalked the score on their black board. Every now and then the cricket enthusiasts kept peeping at the board to check the latest score. The feature of evening was fierce volleyball contest at Chungani Ground. At times while returning we lost our way but then resorted to the musafirkhana minaret for direction as it could be traced from a long distance away. The imposing and majestic minaret with its peculiar dome was the cynosure of public eye. It made us feel proud but the irony of time today sees the reddish brown dome indiscreetly chopped off. In the evening the elders gathered for *mazungumzo* in the



adjacent mosque compound and sat on the pavement around the lime tree while the mentally disordered 'Mithu' walked up and down as chirpy birds glided away homewards into the dusk. A line or two sparsely filled the small mosque for *maghrib* prayers (for *zohar* prayers too) but it had serene look and its smaller congregation emanated great warmth.

The community now boasts of the new complex at Boarding House which provides all the sporting facilities. It caters for indoor as well as outdoor games. The once Chungani Ground is altered out of recognition. The UWT highway pierces through it, at one end stands a row of structures while at the other end lies the sacred cemetery where once appeared only scattered graves under the ample shade of abundant trees. Today with countless graves it is devoid of space and belies the supposedly calm and unperturbed environment.

The past is all history. Even if not written it is drifting mentally from one event or impression to another in the days gone by. Nisar Sherali (Jorgi) in a snippet informs "I remember sitting on the frame of my father's (Sherali Meghji 'Ndege') bicycle with him returning home from Smith Mackenzie and he would get down to salute the Sultan Seyyid Khalifa who knew him very well through cricket. Seyyid Khalifa also used to stop his vermilion car driven by Askari in khakhi kizibao and red tarbush cap and watch my father play. They are but memories." All this constitutes history. And so does the event to witness the swift and graceful Nazirhussein Fidahusseini being presented to Tanganyika's Governor Richard Turnbull in the British Colonial days.

Time keeps flying. Even the untiring FHR has called it a day and no more turns up for his club in Poole, England. And the vision impaired Baker Tejani (probably the finest sportsman produced in the community having earned laurels in cricket, volleyball, tennis, badminton and golf), walking into the mosque with hesitant steps, is a sad sight. Time could be a big healer but also a grim reminder of life's predicaments.





The Sports visit to Dar es salaam during the 1959 Easter – Yusuf Nathoo, Bashir Nasser and Mohamed Kassam (James) about to board the East African Airways flight at Zanzibar Airport.



One of the many tennis ball cricket teams at Mnazi Moja
 Standing L to R: Aunali Versi, Amir Meralli, Shenny Dungersi, Mohamed Dhalu (Iblo), Raza Ali Khakoo
 Kneeling L to R: Akber Habib Dhalla, Aunali Salehmohamed, Bashir Dato
 Sitting L to R: Jaffer Taki, Murtaza Lakha, Murtaza Habib Dhala





The vast Mnazimoja Ground



The Cricket Pavilion at the First Pitch, Mnazi Moja.



18

THAT FATEFUL DAY HALF A CENTURY AGO (KHOJA PERSPECTIVE)



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* (*vunja 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 rushed 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 the BBC. The news of the Revolution in Zanzibar and the overthrow of its Government made the headlines. Prime Minister Mohamed Shamte's Government which seemed so confident had lasted just a month. We were aghast. *Sauti Ya Unguja* now 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 could be 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 be etched on my mind forever. The coup was led by a self proclaimed Field Marshal John Okello (a mason of Ugandan descent). His authoritative tone and abrupt commands on the radio sent a chill down our spine. The ASP leader Sheikh Abed Amani Karume was named Zanzibar's President and leader of the Revolutionary Council. Mohamed Shante and his ministers were imprisoned along with many others. Sultan Jamshed fled the island along with his entourage. Those who had gone to *Chwaka*, *Jambiani* and other resorts for picnics and the *Ngambo* residents who got looted were taken to *Rahaleo* for a couple of despairing days. The *Ngambo* residents were then seen sheltered at the *imambara* for the entire month of Ramadhan. Overall it was a horrifying experience which also determined the destinies of hundreds of Zanzibaris. They dispersed here and there, and their foundations degenerated into nonentities.

Talking of Zanzibar's Khojas, they came in dhows to Zanzibar since the mid nineteenth century (perhaps even earlier) and with the passage of time lost all the traces of their contacts in India. They were simple, peace loving and God fearing people. There was an immense brotherhood among them and they cared for each other. Economically they were contented and mostly worked in Government offices where administration was excellent. Those who had business maintained only a minimum margin of profit that resulted in high purchasing power and generally a good standard of living. They did not have the slightest inkling of such a revolution and were visibly shaken by it.

The past has flown fast and times have changed completely. The social, economic and political changes have had tremendous effect on our



lives. It is exactly 50 years since that fateful day in Zanzibar. Sadly a large number has passed away. The anniversary has awakened poignant memories of those Zanzibar days. Today only a handful Khojas emanating from our Zanzibar diaspora remain in Zanzibar.

The moderate policy of the government of the day (in line with its mainland counterpart, their merger resulting in TANZANIA) gives them confidence of staking their fortune in Zanzibar and cultivate loyalty towards it. The rest (now with a grown up generation), wherever they are settled (some prosperous, some languishing in poverty), still find themselves attached to Zanzibar culturally. They speak Swahili among themselves. The photo albums fattened by the old black & white photographs are some of their most precious possessions with sentimental attachment. Those with the means do go to Zanzibar once in a while. Others find it painful to pay a visit there, for it is no more the good old Zanzibar that they were associated with. Its Stone Town is haunting. The mosques, *mehfils* and *jamaatkhana* are desolate and bereft of the huge gathering that once filled the entire place. Your house glares longingly, you pass through those streets and gullies where you frequented and played tennis ball cricket, *sokodiko* (marbles), *nage* and other games in the past and some ghostly feeling creeps up, and in the still of the moment everything around seems sad and bleak.

Some of those subjected to displacement still harbour grievances against the authority for the unfairness meted out to them. Their modest houses were confiscated. On the contrary today outsiders are welcomed and encouraged to put up mansions, hotels, and luxurious resorts under the guise of promoting tourism. They thrive and have their ways and means.

The present day Zanzibar is more of a tourist resort. Forodhani has undergone renovation, courtesy HH the Aga Khan, but its naturalness deformed. Its eateries mostly cater to the taste of tourists who flock there in the evenings. Zanzibar is swayed by the needs of tourists. Imagine nowadays they even sell curios at Forodhani. Also every alternate shop on Portuguese Street deals in curios. The street has lost its old charm. It seems





**Rightly President Karume
banned the rickshaws**

there are certain individuals behind the chain of business. Even their mode of salesmanship betrays the normal Zanzibari etiquette. The era of quality stuff, minimal margin and cordiality is forsaken to pave way for modern commercialism. The post-revolution phase has also given boost to Darajani/Ngambo trading mainly in garments and electronics. The business is again the monopoly of certain bigwigs who thrive through their overseas and mainland connections.

The indigenous Zanzibaris are God fearing, innocent and honest people. It is pity that the prevailing inflation snatches every penny of theirs. Zanzibar's false economy and its political gimmickry is the feature of their day to day life. In all honesty ASP should have won the 1963 elections. Their share of votes was almost 55%. If the constituency representation had been apportioned in accordance with its denseness ASP would have emerged the clear victor. Bear in mind that the rapport between locals and us was remarkably good.

Our diaspora (pre Revolution inhabitants and not those integrated of recent, also prior to the East African Railway settlers on the mainland) had a congenial environment with the adoption of the Afro Arab culture in its true sense. To quote Professor Abdul Sheriff in reply to the Times of India's Dilip Padgaonkar's question "What do you make of the Indian Government's efforts to reach out to the Indian diaspora in Zanzibar?" he put it beautifully, "Feel for us. But please leave us alone; Zanzibar is our home, our past, our future."





The sultans' graves at the back of the palace



Makaburini across the High Court

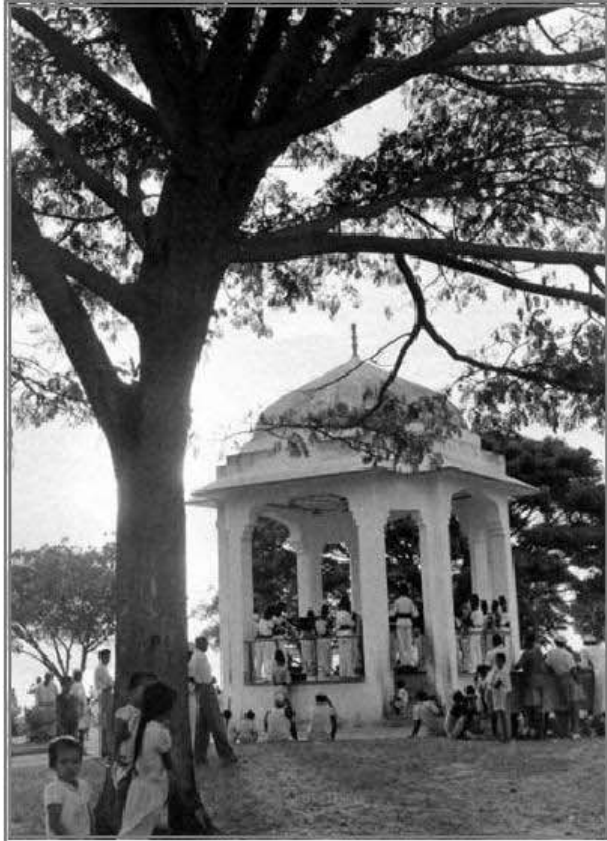


The ruins of Nai Chungani

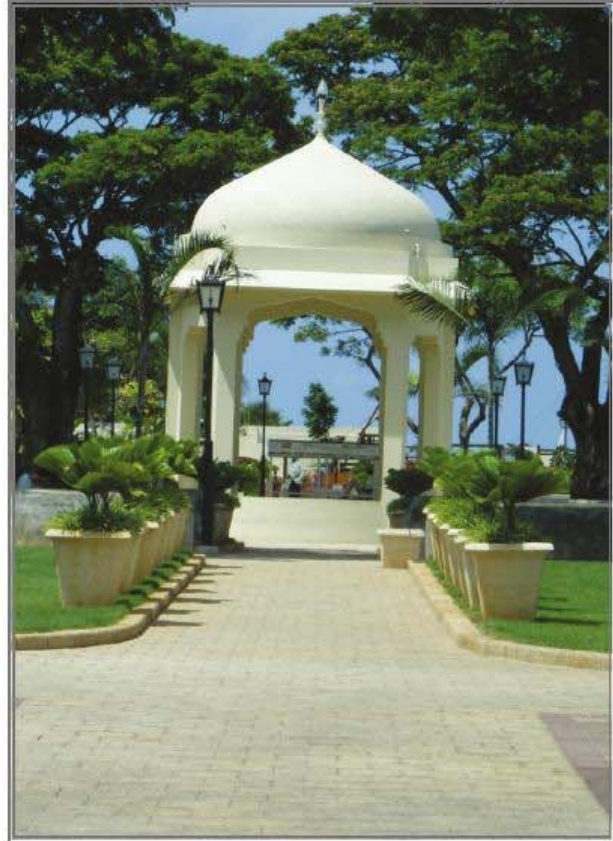


The cemetery at Mwanakwerekwe





The Jubilee Memorial at Forodhani in the olden days



The revitalization of Forodhani, the Jubilee Memorial deformed



Everyone's favourite mohogo at Forodhani



Ample sea food at Forodhani, vendors cater for tourists at Forodhani



19

THE END OF AN ERA A TRIBUTE TO MY MOTHER

Soon the Muharram moon will be sighted but for me it will be a different Muharram, for my beloved mother who all along had been with me remains no more. Just before eid she had expressed her feelings for the coming month of Muharram and reminded me to set aside her *marsia* and *nauha* cassettes not realizing that by Muharram she would be gone away from this world.

Just a mention of Muharram and she would be filled with nostalgia for the Zanzibar days. Our house in Kiponda was right in front of the Junni mosque and we were literally part of its ritualistic events. The whitewash, the volunteers doing the cleaning, the *imambara* walls adorned with black cloth and the windows hung with black flags heralded Muharram. The *imambara* emanated air filled with oud fragrance as the smoke from the burnt *oud* urn spiralled over the glittering *alams*, *mimber* and every corner of the *imambara*.

The house also vibrated with melodious *marsia* and *nauha*. It was the era of the devout Khoja zealots and the soulful rendering by Mohamedhusain Ahmed ('*bole imame umam, parda uthalo koi*', '*jab akheri rukhsatko Husain*'), Murtaza Bandali (*kyukar juda huva sare*', *arbaike sogwaro alwida*') or Jaffer Hassanali Mulla Raza (*dushmankobhi khuda na dikhaye pisarka daag*', *kabre Husain alwida*') accentuated the emotionally



charged atmosphere. The ladies who did not attend the majlis would come to our house to listen to it and even view *alams* and *shabihs* through the windows. On Ashura and Chehlum nights and Chehlum evening the house would be packed with ladies who came to see the *julus*.

Muharram evoked many poignant memories for us. The ladies gathered at our place to knead the dough and shape it into *laadus* which were then distributed as *fateha* (*nyaz*) during *majlis* in our house. It was also customary for my mother to dip stock of old cloths in a container with certain liquid to blacken them as all of us must wear black. In particular I've vivid memories of holding her finger and attending the 'Mehndi' ceremony on the 7th of Muharram at Nai Misit. She moved around with *thal* of fruits along with other ladies and encircled small girls holding *mehndi* plates and flags. A particular incident she would often relate to us was the 1947 Muharram that she did in Karbala where at the Nasser Noormohamed Musafarkhana she conducted the *mehndi* ritual on the 7th of Muharram and besides *mehndi* prepared her speciality *haluwa ya badamu* (almond sweetmeat) despite my father's hospitalization in Karbala. Her friends Fatubai Abdulla Panju (Fatu Magawa) and Kurumbai Peera Champsi who were co *zawars* always vouched for this incident.

Sadly in Dar es salaam due to ill health and old age she was bedridden most of the time. The cassettes of Murtaza Bandali with the old 'Masaebe Panjatan' *marsias* had great sentimental value for her and she would listen endlessly to them. Her selfless devotion to the services and *azadari* must get her marked out as an ardent *azadar*. In Zanzibar whenever the afternoon *julus* passed through our street she would hand an embroidered piece of cloth to me to be delivered to Maalim Mohamed Jivraj who led the *julus*. Here her younger sister Sugrabai Master who was an attendant at Mehfile Abbas would always send for *laash* and *alam* cloth to be embroidered or stitched and she derived immense satisfaction from this sacred performance.

Now her tape deck by the side of a window otherwise playing 'ghamka



paigham leke aya ye mahe muharram...'is silent. The room is a sad reminder of her final hours when throughout the night she groaned and shivered. My wife Fatma, sister Zainab and myself kept a round the clock vigil by her bedside. After the morning prayers I called my brother in Arusha to inform him that her end was nearing. I stood momentarily in the balcony to view the colour of the dawn sky of that fateful Monday, the 24th of December, 2007 and it looked grim and gloomy to me. The clock on the wall was ticking away. It struck seven. Her breathing was slowing down. We fed her with *khake shafa* and turned her bed towards *kibla*. My wife who was by her bedside tried to nudge her but her breathing had stopped. She was absolutely still and there was serene expression on her face. I bowed solemnly towards her and leaned forward to kiss her cheeks. I was crying in silent and held out my hand to my sister and wife who were wailing. They ran into my arms to hug me. The doctor who had turned up the previous day was called. He pronounced her dead.

I tried to control myself and called my sisters in London and New York. I could not talk much as I choked on my words. Outside the house it was normal as if nothing had happened. Gradually the neighbours and relatives started to gather. A little later the hearse arrived from the mosque. The door opened with a frown to give way to the stretcher that was brought in. My mother who used to pray for me silently was parting from me. A terrific sadness overcame me as I saw her being laid into the stretcher and taken away from the house. I felt myself completely helpless and could do nothing. My mother was gone forever. Nothing would ever be the same. Her bed was removed, her basket of medicine and other belongings taken away and bit by bit everything hers taken off. All signs of her have begun to vanish.

But to me her sweet smell stays in the room, the room that you saw on entering the house and where she would be lying on her bed and giving everybody her broad smile. Right from the first night of Muharram she would attire herself in black till the 8th of Rabiul awwal. Whenever I went to the mosque for a Muharram *majlis* she would take out her money and



give it to me for offering to *shabih*. She would be anxiously waiting for my return when I handed her a jasmine plucked from its bunch placed on the *shabih*. I would then relate to her what the *zakir* had recited and her eyes moistened. As a child I remember hearing the story of Karbala from her and playing with a cradle that she would make from her handkerchief whilst at the mosque. On Ashura day I would forsake my shyness and fetch *nyaaz* for her from the mosque. I would then rush home to serve it to her.

Alas, my mother is dead and gone. How can I ever forget my 'Bai'? That is what we called her. If I was late from work she besought Allah and Imams and offered up 'tasbeeh' or 2 'rakaat nammaz' for my safe return. If I had headache or slight illness and did not come out of my room she would repeatedly ask my wife for me and even send her maid to the room to check if I was alright. In the 1960s I was in Bombay for four years. During this period never a week passed without her writing a letter to me. Every Monday downstairs at the hostel I eagerly awaited the postman to deliver her letter. My colleagues envied me as they hardly received any mail. She would fill the entire page, front and back, writing from top to bottom without leaving any gap and saw to it that she covered all the stories and the latest happenings. I had made two box files out of these letters and retained them till 1990s when I destroyed them as water had got into the files and rusted the letters.

She was an avid and voracious reader of Gujarati literature. The two cupboards on the first floor of our house in Zanzibar were full of Gujarati magazines, periodicals and classic novels by Shaida and some other writers. Her brother Fidabhai from Dar es salaam kept their flow continuous. A number of her friends and acquaintances came to our house at night to have their letters written by her. They expressed their thoughts and messages and she would jot down the contents in the letter.

She was a person of great humility and in particular very kind to the poor and downtrodden people. In Zanzibar the ladies from 'bewakhana' often



came to our place to partake in the meal or we visited them to offer some food. She had palled up with non community ladies also like Safu Masi who daily in the morning came to our place to tell her woes to my mother and draw comfort from her sympathies and consolatory words.

What was striking about my mother was the simplicity of her old way of life. The material world did not attract her at all. She preferred worn out cloths to the new ones which she gave away to the needy. Characteristics such as hypocrisy, diplomacy and sycophancy were alien to her. Her honesty was her excellent quality and recognized by everybody. She never lied. At times it put us in jeopardy, for even at the Customs or as a pretext of saving certain situation she would not lie. So many ladies trusted her with their valuables which she would store for them in a safe place. We at times gave her a scolding for shouldering such responsibilities. Our neighbour and her friend *Sakubai Jessa (Saku Sukari Mawe)* while leaving for Dar es salaam had left her ornaments with her. Poor Sakubai was one of the victims of that tragic sea accident in 1970 and never returned to Zanzibar. That placed a big burden on us. Eventually her son Mohamedhusainbhai (Babu) had to be contacted upon his return from overseas and the ornaments handed back to him.

In her heyday she was held in very high regard and responsible for fixing many couples into a holy matrimonial bliss. Her untiring toil in shopping cloths and ornaments, especially for the marriage occasions, was exemplar of her unstinting assistance to her relatives, friends as well as outsiders. They would write to her from Dar es salaam and other places to make various purchases for them. Not that she worked on commission. In fact the 'sonaras' (goldsmiths) and 'darjis' (tailors) who were well known to her induced her to earn something out of it but she would vehemently decline the offer. Furthermore, she embroidered the green coloured 'Imam Zamin piece of cloth' by inscribing 'Ya Ali' on it for the bride and the groom. Also her aptness for making 'masalo' (sugary coconut chips of varied colours) had drawn popular demand.



Besides Zanzibar she used to reminisce about her time spent in Kutch and Jamnagar. That prompted my eventual visits to these places. An intriguing narrative of her anecdotes was her return to Zanzibar from Kutch by dhow. When they were about to reach the shores of Mombasa their dhow was trapped in a severe storm. The 'Maklo' (Kutchi term for the crew leader) pleaded for forgiveness saying that nothing but a miracle could save them and requested them to offer prayers. Everyone was crying. In a dizzy and hazy state she took out her 'mor' (clay tablet) and sprinkled 'khake shafa' on the traumatic Indian Ocean. After sometime the storm subsided. Indeed it was a miracle. Eventually they reached Mombasa and later Zanzibar.

To me personally she remains a vision of a kind and extraordinary person. I still visualize her in a *chadar* (veil) that had a golden *jeek* embroidered *picho* (*niqab* or face cover) with *jumkha* (golden chains dangling from it) and buying us tidbits in the Zanzibar stone town. My dad died long back and it was she who had brought us up. She saw to it that we got whatever we desired, even if it meant restraint on her budget. Her pampering continued no end despite the fact that we were no more kiddies but oldies in our fifties and sixties. She was indeed the mother par excellence.

She was a treasure of traditional values. Her profound knowledge of Khoja customs and traditions and her insight into the Zanzibar Khoja families right through the Kutch and Jamnagar days enabled me fascinating research into our history. She was in a position to easily find out where one person/family/connection was in relation to another. She died at the ripe age of 96 years but her mind was sound and sharp. Till her last days she used to tell us very vivid account of the past and her experiences. Now I have none to respond to my queries. For us family members an era has come to an end. When she was there so many people came to our house to see her. Our contacts from abroad whilst in Dar es salaam always came to greet her. Now there won't be anybody. Her memory will linger forever. May Allah rest her soul with Eternal Bliss in the vicinity of *Chahrda Masumeen*.



ONCE MY SWEET HOME



The Jaffer Mohamed Sheriff Building
on Kiponda Motorway



The built in cupboard once laid with
piles of my mother's Gujarati books



Another built in cupboard displaying a
beautiful peacock pattern. My sister Nargis in
silent homage to my late sister Zainab who



The spacious upper storey room devoid
of its antique furniture



'VIEW THROUGH THE WINDOWS'



Abhu Ladak's house and Takim Travels



School Fez/ithnashri School and
part of the mosque



The imamwaro windows
right opposite ours



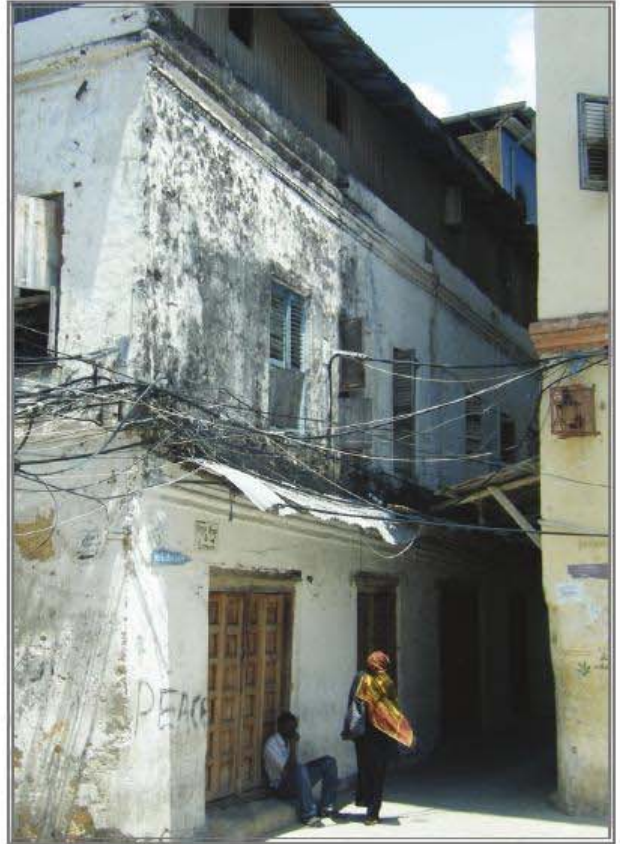
The far end of the mosque



VADDI BHAJAAR (HURUMZI)



The Khamis Damji house (my maternal)



My sister Zainabbai Fida Rashid
Manek's house



The gully where we played
tennis ball cricket

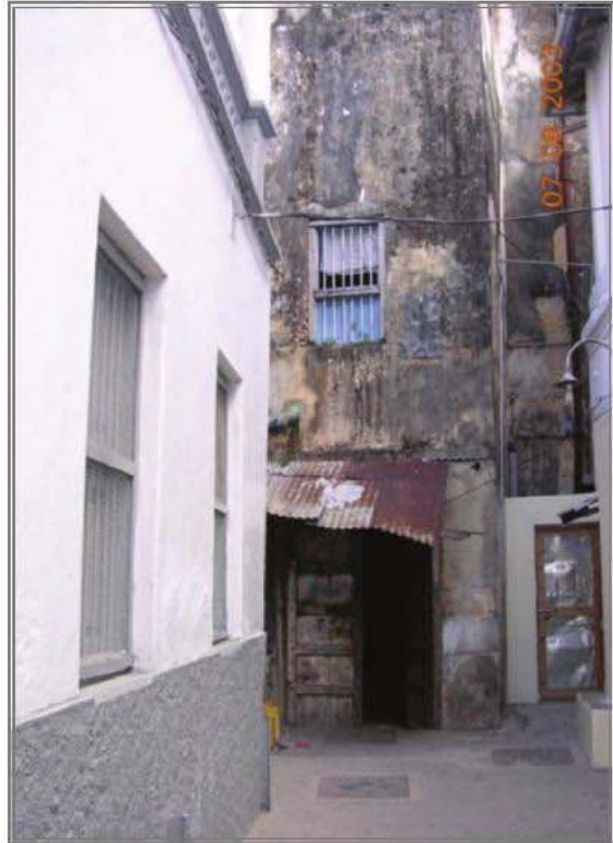


My maternal uncle Jaffer Khamis Damji's house
(the Dostmohamed Dungersi Building)





The Fazal Mohamed Sheriff Building
along Kituo Cha Taa in Malindi



The Sheriff Dewji Building in the
Kiponda/Malindi corner



The Rashid Nathani Building
opposite the imambara



Dr. D'silva Building on
Kiponda motorway



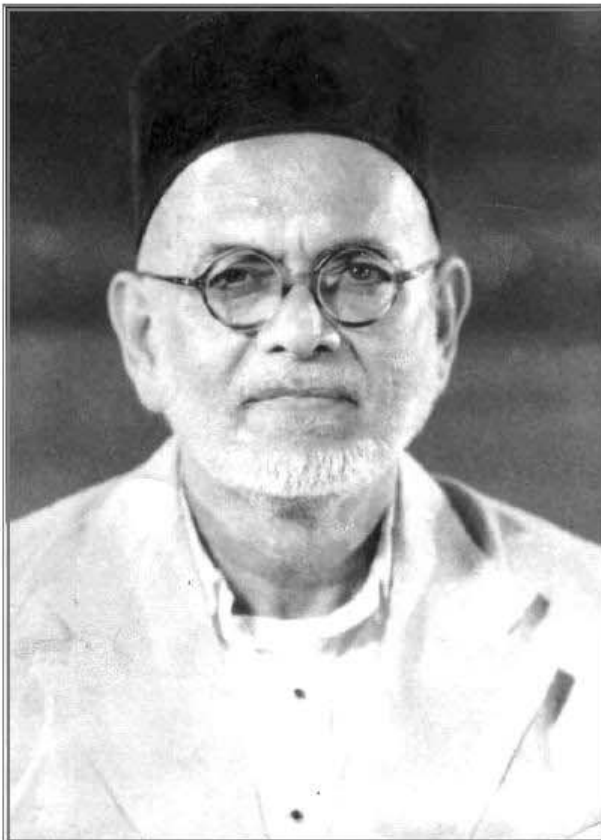
'ZANZIBAR'S 1st & 2nd GENERATION KHOJAS'



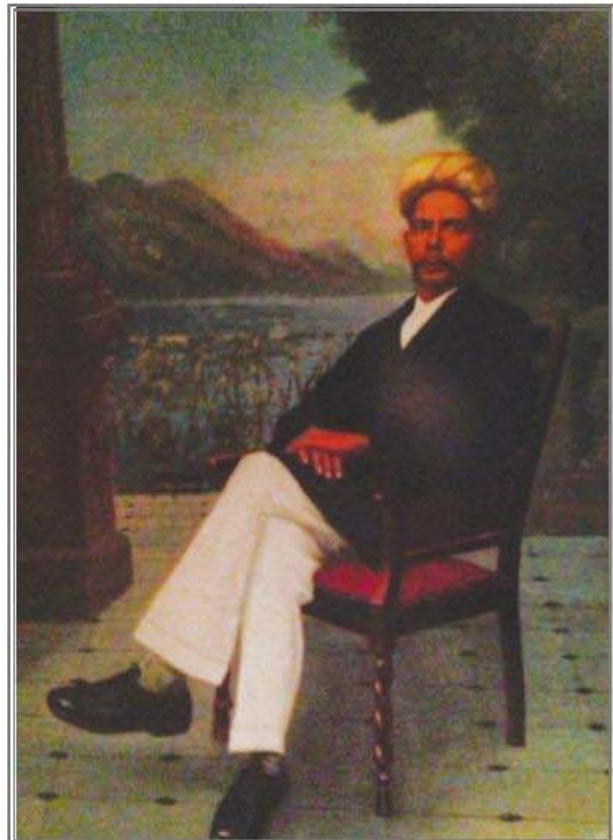
The 1st generation Zanzibar Khoja of the 1850s Hajj Mohamed Sheriff Dewani



The scholarly Mulla Mohamedjaffer Sheriff Dewji



The erudite Hajj Gulamhussein Mammu Walli Dharsi

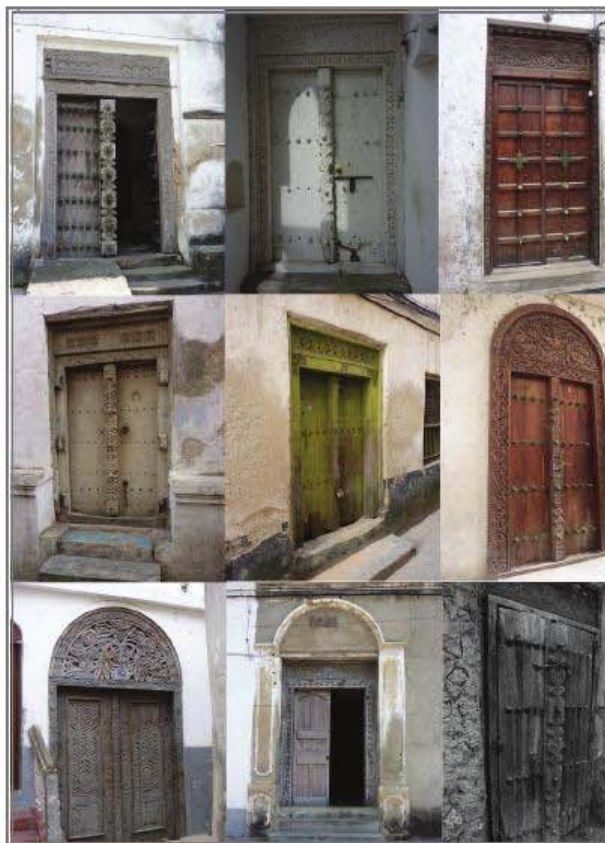


The highly knowledgeable Mulla Abdulhusain Walli

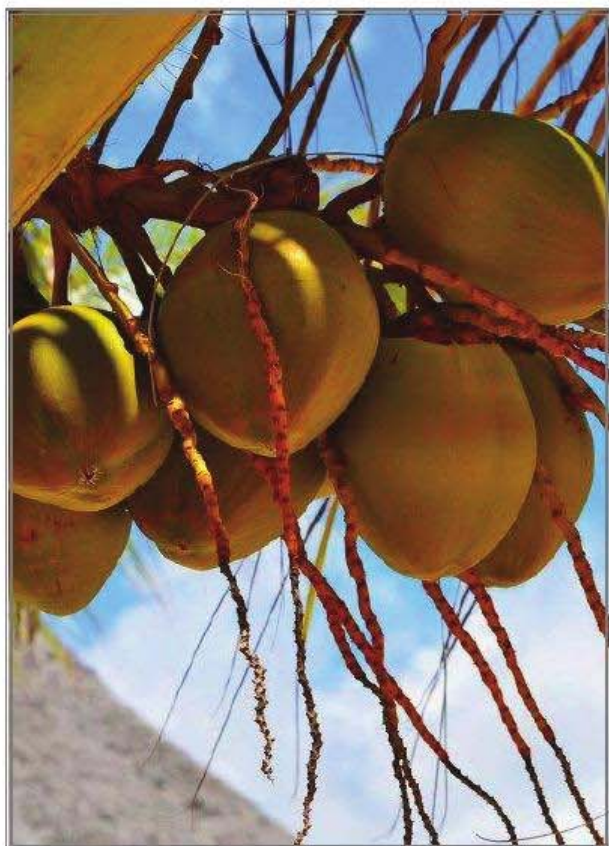




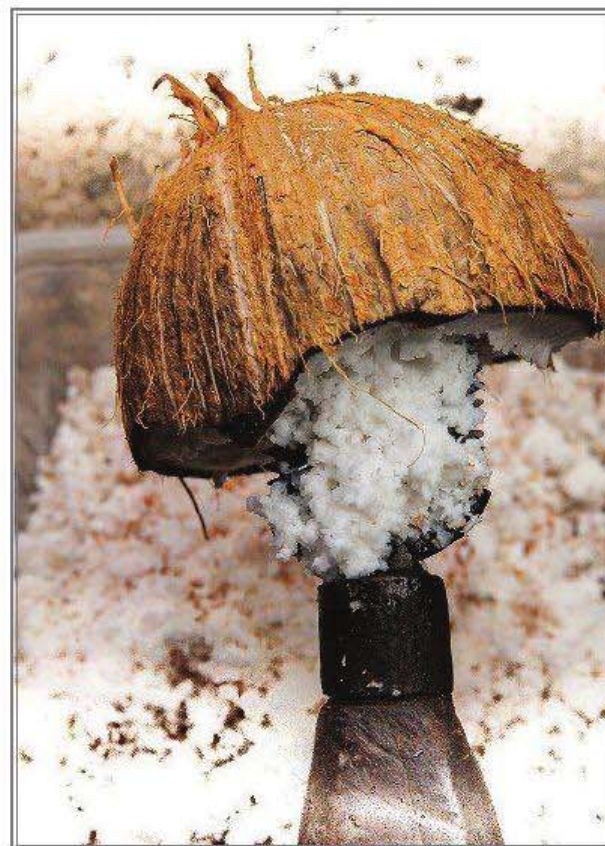
The Zanzibar Chest



The Zanzibar Doors



The Zanzibar madafu



Grated coconut



20

EPILOGUE

Don Patterson, New Hampshire, USA - A wonderfully evocative website! The memoir of your days in pre-revolution Zanzibar was highly interesting, giving me a picture of the life of the Asian community which I had not seen portrayed in the various books I have read about Zanzibar. The photographs provide vivid recollections of those days before the revolution changed Zanzibar forever. My family and I lived in Zanzibar from July 1963 until November 1965. Our second child was born at the Karimjee Jivanjee Hospital in September 1963. We returned to the island from time to time while I was the American ambassador to Tanzania (1986-1989).

Mohsin Alidina, New York, USA - This is simply exquisite and nostalgic. Your penmanship is admirable and your memory for details enviable.

Ibrahim Marashi, Oxford, UK - This site is very impressive, I recently was awarded a grant by Oxford University to conduct research about the Shi'a alims in Zanzibar and this site is of invaluable aid. I recently took a trip to Zanzibar to collect information about my grandfather Marhum Sayyid Hassan Marashi as well as my Great grand father Marhum Abdul Hussain Marashi and this site gave me information that I was unable to attain in Zanzibar itself! I will recommend this site to anyone here in England doing research on Zanzibar.

Yasmin Alibhai Brown, London, England (A columnist with The Daily Telegraph) - Wonderful wonderful memoirs, thank you. Have you read my book No Place Like Home? Virago Press? Take care. My maiden surname was also Damji.



Ramnik Shah, Surrey, England (A well established lawyer and a columnist in his own right) - Although we have `known` each other, in cyberspace, for the last 4 or 5 years, I never knew about your website until a few days ago. Be that as it may, having now visited the site, all I can say is that it brings out the flavour of Zanzibar, in all its senses. I have never been there, but as someone who was born and brought up in Mombasa, one always had a vicarious connection with the place we knew as a spice island, not least because we were taught from an early age that the coastal strip of Kenya was a British protectorate of Zanzibari territory. But apart from that, as a Mombasa person, it was not difficult to imagine what life was like in Zanzibar and your website merely confirms that. In the course of my later life, I came to know quite a few Zanzibaris of course (among them I would mention one of the Lakha brothers and Ranjit Ramaiya who were contemporaries of mine as law students in London in the early 1960s) and so as East African Asians we have always considered Zanzibar to be part of our background.

Gerhard Frost, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA - I visited your personal website and found it to be very fascinating. Also I was thrilled to read the fascinating accounts about your life and times in Zanzibar and beyond. I was also reminded of my own experiences. I was born in 1936 in Germany. I lived through World War ii. These experiences have left a permanent imprint and scar on my memory. The one and only time that I was able to visit the very intriguing island of Zanzibar was in 1976. I had been a graduate student at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo, MI, USA) in international and area studies, with Africa having been my area of particular interest at that time for my MA degree.

Zehra Peera, Adelaide, South Australia - I enjoyed going through your Memoirs. It brought back a lot of pleasant memories, in particular those of Vaddi Bhajar (Hurumzi). It was indeed a lively street and probably nicknamed "Vaddi Bhajar" by the Kutchi-speaking settlers. The rows of houses facing each other, within earshot, shops on ground level and dwellings above shops, created an atmosphere that made the early migrants feel as if they were at a home away from home. The shops in the street catered for most daily needs, such as grains, spices, and herbal medicines. Most of the goods were imported from India. Chocolates and



biscuits imported from Britain were also available in our shop on the street. Our shop carried the signboard advertising Cadbury's Chocolate over the door. In 1988 Issa, my husband visited Zanzibar. He was shown a book in the planning department about Zanzibar streets, prepared by a team of Swedes working in Zanzibar. The book had a picture of the Cadbury's Chocolate signboard over our front door. The Swedish architect who showed the book to Issa said that the signboard was a feature of such curiosity that it deserved to be included in the book.

Name-tags were common in Zanzibar as you mentioned in your Memoirs - some no very complimentary though! Mostly they indicated businesses. In Vaddi Bhajar we had Jafu Msumari who sold nails and cement, and we had Saleh Madawa who sold herbal medicines. As children we were often sent to Chacha Saleh's shop to buy herbal medicine. No sooner we named the ailment to him, e.g. constipation, he stretched his hand out and drew the right box from the shelf at the side or back without turning his head. He knew precisely the position of the box on the shelf, and its contents. He wrapped the right amount of herbs in the paper and handed it to us.

Our shop was a meeting place with Marhum Bha Taki on his chair (left on baraza day and night) presiding over the group until late at night. We had regular daily visitors from your end of the town as well as the other, Soko Mohogo. The grand chair was on the baraza for a long time after the family's departure. In 1997 though, when I visited Zanzibar, after nearly 25 years, both the chair and the Cadbury's signboard had disappeared. As to Thursday's fateha, I remember standing at our shop door chanting "Wa toto fateha" and hearing the response "Kina nani" from afar. I replied "Kina Ali Khaku". You must have been in the group of children returning from Forodhani and knew what to expect.

Besides the Wednesday Majlis at my house, one evening every year Vaddi Bhajar would be closed to the traffic for celebration of Hazrat Abbas' birthday. It was like "Khushiali Ya Bankro" at Junni Masjid. On one occasion Laila (your sister Zainab's sister-in-law) and I, together with some other children from the street, took part in reciting Kasida. I was reminded of this occasion when I was talking to Laila recently. Issa



remembers attending a function once and being given a "ladu". These ladus were made by Laila's aunt, Mami Tahakro, who lived in the vicinity.

The barazas in Zanzibar served multiple purposes. The elderly on their long walks used to sit on them for resting and the hawkers like Ali Bajia (another name-tag) put their wares on the barazas to serve their customers. As children we used barazas to play a game called "crocodile chase". The street was the ocean and the barazas were the shores where we would be safe from the crocodile's jaws. Also, to avoid being run down by fast-moving hamali carts delivering goods from the wharf to the shops, we jumped onto the baraza when we saw one coming.

The street separating the rows of houses on either side were so narrow that we could hear and see what went on inside the households around us. Neighbours standing at their windows gossiped across the street space. We threw packets of eatables to our friends through their windows. We also sat at the windows to listen to new songs from the Indian films being played in the neighbourhood, to memorise the lyrics. Growing up as children in Vaddi Bhajar, life was never dull.

During Ramadhan, as the dusk approached, someone from my household and someone from your grandparent's house would stand at the windows. Laila would be at her window from which she could see the minaret at Nai Masjid. When she saw the Muazzin reaching the top, Laila would come over to the window overlooking our house and cry, "Haya", at which we rushed to the dinner table.

We had good connection with Parsees. We were friendly with quite a few Parsee families because we attended the same school as their children, Saint Joseph's Convent School. Dara Mistry's family lived in the neighbourhood and as children we spent a good deal of time with them. According to Issa, I speak Gudjerati as Parsees did, which was somewhat peculiar.

In your memoirs you describe Washiri coffee sellers. Their style of pouring coffee in tiny cups and stopping in time to avoid overfilling the cup was a skillful performance. So was the juggling of cups to announce their arrival. A coffee seller had certain streets for his territory by common



consent with others to avoid competition. On his rounds, he would stop at the shops and pour coffee for the shopkeeper and whoever else was present in the shop. A shop was a venue for trading gossip and rumours. The coffee seller was also a purveyor of news, rumours and gossip which he picked up on his rounds. To this day, Issa brews coffee which he calls Kahawa ya Unguja every morning and drinks it from one of the tiny cups brought from Zanaibar. I even have a doll replica of the coffee seller in his traditional costume carrying his dele. Occasionally I make Haloowa Ya Manga which I learnt to make from Ukeru Kassamali Peera on one of my visits to California.

Dinesh Pandya's letter took me back to my student days in Arya Samaj, as well as my teaching days at Bait ul Raas. I remember his father's panpati shop under Arya Samaj. Harish Pandya was my student at the Teachers' College Zanzibar. I have written a couple of articles on Zanzibar too. One article was prompted by an article I had read in the local paper which opened with the words "The light died, the fan stopped, I fell for Zanzibar."

Norman Livsey, South Australia - Hi! I was in charge of the Pathological Laboratory at the Hospital in Zanzibar from Jan. 1956 to the end of the revolution in 1964. So nice to have memories of Zanzibar. I know many of the people you mention, particularly my friends Aboud Jumbe and Abeid Karume !!

I am now in my 80's. In Zanzibar I used to live at first in an old house near the Prison before shifting to the new flats that were built at Vuga, near the old Health Dept. Also after some leave stayed at Mazizini. My haunts were the sailing club and English Club near Cable and Wireless. Karimji Jivanji Club was also one of my haunts as also the Pigalle next to the cinema. I knew Dr. Mehta and Dr. Patel very well as the Path lab was the only diagnostic centre on the island.

Unfortunately I cannot find an old map of Zanzibar anywhere, all the places seem to have new names. What a pity! From what I gather people are really struggling now. I am so sorry as it was one of the happiest places I have ever lived. Everyone was happy, no matter what race. I also



worked for the colonial office, later worked for the United Nations in Baghdad, Jordan. So lovely to be able to write to someone from Zanzibar
Verry best wishes Norman Livsey.

Taha Abdulla Baharoon, Abu Dhabi, UAE - Reading Mr. Norman Livesty's posting in your 'Guest Book' made me recall my frequent visits to the hospital in Zanzibar. They used to be childish excuses to run away from school and from my arithmetic teacher, the famous Ibrahim Kassim, whom the Zanzibar school boys of three generations feared and regarded as brutal though now all of us remember him fondly and with all affection, and most of us do indeed pray for him for the hidden love he bore for us which we were too ignorant to understand then! I left Zanzibar immediately after the 1964 revolution following the detention of four of my elder brothers.

I visited Zanzibar in 1993 along with my wife and our six kids, all born Arabia, who knew nothing then of Zanzibar except very little of what they heard from their father's sensational stories! My wife isn't a Zanzibari. Before we landed the kids were quite impressed with the Zanzibar arial view and compared it with Hawai islands often displayed in Holywood films. But few days later they were disappointed and I too wasn't in a position to defend all what I have been telling my kids about Unguja since their childhood! I found everything in a mess except the weather.

Whilst there I went to visit Darajani School so as to invoke the memories of the good old days - 'kutambika' as they say in the old Zanzibar Swahili. I studied in that school from 1st to 8th standard. My heart was heavy when I saw the students writing on the floor as there were no desks at all. Everyone I met in the streets of Zanzibar was living below poverty line. One guy came close to me and whispered into my ears, saying "hizo ulizozivaa sizako tena" referring to the clothes I was wearing. I later gave him what he asked from me and more but this made tears come out of my eyes.

Bhadra Vadgama, London, UK - Your account of Zanzibar is so beautiful, true to reality and vividly portrayed. My dad had Kapadia Motor Mart in Zanzibar and we were quite well known as Kapadias. I went to



Govt. Girls Sec School near the seafront close to Customs Office before going to Makerere College. Rozina Visram and I were the only 2 girls in 1956 to get a 1st grade in Cambridge SC Exam. I went to the World Centenary Girl Guides Camp to UK IN 1957. I also taught at Seyyida Matuka School. Like you have mentioned about 1 shilling all round cinema show, we as children of 40s & early 50s, with 10 cents could buy a stick of roasted *mohogo*, a handful of *jugus*, 2 pieces of *ganderi* and a slice of *anenas/keri/matufa* or *mohogo* and *chana bateta*.

In 1999 August, my sister Kanak from Mumbai, my younger daughter Jaanki & I went to Zanzibar. We went to visit the Palace Museum. I had never been inside the palace before, so for me it was quite an experience. I was delighted to see royal portraits painted by our art teacher Maalim Farhan. We had a teenage boy as our guide and some Australian tourists in the group. The poor lad had probably learnt by heart what he was supposed to tell us. He found himself taken over by Kanak, who talked about the first ever lift in Beit-el-Ajayab and how as young children we used to go up and down in it just for fun, and what the word meant and that it was a palace before etc. etc. She described what it was like when Seyyid Khalifa had died and how she had come to pay her respect to the dead Sultan and express her condolences to Bibi Nunu.

We saw the special room of the Princess [Seyyid Barghash's sister] who had eloped with a German officer. I came to know about her when I had visited the museum in Muscat. Had not known anything about her in Zanzibar. At one point the poor Guide, frustrated by our interruption, stopped us and said, 'Please let me talk about it.' The Australians were of course delighted to hear all our anecdotes. They told us we had made history alive for them. Talking about Bibi Nunu, I remember when I was 8 or so (1948) I had been chosen to present a bouquet to Bibi Nunu for an occasion (I can't remember what it was) that was held in the assembly hall of Government Boys Secondary School. I wonder if there will be a photo somewhere in the archives of Zanzibar library!

I was chosen as the best girl guide from 7th Zanzibar Company. We were from the Hindu Girls School. So suddenly I was prepared to take all sorts of tests so I could have lot more badges on my sleeve. To be chosen I had



to compete with the Guides from other Zanzibar Companies and attend a camp with Guides and Guiders from Dar.

My first encounter with racism and awareness of my citizenship. As I had said to you earlier, I had attended the World Centenary Girl Guides Camp held in Windsor Park in England 1957. Initially, I was chosen to be presented to the Queen. I was even taken for the rehearsal and taught how to curtesy and so on. However, later in the day a very worried looking Guider came to me and said, 'I am extremely sorry, but we have just received a telegram from Zanzibar and they have asked us to replace you by Saada Khamis [an Arab Guide who was the other Guide from Z'bar to be presented to the Queen.]' The Guider thought I would burst into tears, but I was not much upset by missing the opportunity. I suppose I was too young to realize the implication.

Also, perhaps I wasn't bothered, as in Zanzibar I had the opportunity of seeing at close range many celebrities like, Rita Hayworth & Prince Alikhan, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, Princess Margaret, etc. at Garden Parties held in the British Residency grounds where we served food to the guests in our Girl Guide uniform.

Also I became aware for the first time, that although I had gone to the camp as a Zanzibari, I had chosen to wear chania-choli & odhani as my national dress. I taught other Guides a song in Gujarati & not in Swahili. I was a Zanzibari BUT culturally an Indian. At the Camp, nobody wanted to know me as an Indian, as there were about 30 Girl Guides from India [and I didn't belong to them] who performed Indian dances in the evening as part of our entertainment. Saada and I, as Zanzibaris, had not prepared anything in particular to represent our island's identity. So here I was a young 16 year old with no awareness of the implications of my citizenship or identity. I realized all this much later in my life.

On arrival back to Zanzibar, a reporter had asked me if I had seen the Queen, and my reply was, 'Yes, I saw her clearly as being short, I was in the front row.' I didn't even think of telling him about the last minute swap.

Sajjad Alidina, Florida, USA - What a memory lane you have created!!! Son of Husain Alidina (Jabir). We had a shop known as Alidina Optical



Service - opposite Sultana Cinema (now known as Cine Afrique)- as narrated by you being one of the stronghold gunfire venue on the day of Zanzibar Revolution. As our house was one of the tallest facing the harbor to the south and the Cinema to the west I personally witnessed the fleeing of Sultan Jamshed with his entourage speeding from his vehicle to the ship. I was 15 then. Now residing in Florida after living in New York for 25 years. Recently visited Z'bar after almost 25 years....shocked and awed but loved it !!! I get quite nostalgic with my childhood memories.

Sabrina Merali, Toronto, Canada - I must say this is so very touching and so is the poem, in fact I just went home to bury my late mom who passed away while visiting Toronto, indeed true. I am from Zanzibar. My mom's family was known as 'Ngozi' who owned Majestic Cinema. My aunty Shilo Bai married the late Sheikh Thabit Kombo and I'm her younger sister's (Gulshan) daughter. My mom passed away while visiting Toronto last November and we took the body back to Zanzibar for burial because she was well known in the Government circles and all the communities. The poem from the Australian person therefore really touched my heart, it's so very true. I'm so pleased that a friend of mine sent this to us.

Abdul Noorali Mohamed, Austin, Texas. USA - I was reading your memorable article on Zanzibar. It brought back to me the sweet dreams of the spice island. I was born in Zanzibar and lived in Sokomohogo street with my three uncles, Husain, Mohamedali, and Jaffer Ali Ismail Poonja. I have just one wish in my life that I be buried in Zanzibar despite the fact that after the revolution the upheavals created therefrom were very tragic indeed. The tenacious memory of Zanzibar can never be dimmed in my life for I have lived there in a very cosmopolitan society with Arabs, Comorians, Ithnasheries, Goans, etc. I used to work for the Standard Bank of South Africa limited after my schooling.

I used to also watch cricket matches especially between Agakhan and Ithnasheries teams. We would sit tight to watch Sherali Ndege with his sixers and Gullu Kalyan batting to hit centuries. Gullu Kabana was one of the best bowlers! The memories of Zanzibar will never be obliterated from my mind.



Jasvant Mehta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada - What a thrill to go thru your site, so well written with a professional touch. Thank you for nostalgia of Zanzibar. Time to put these memories in a book. Please keep me informed.

Wael Abbas, Manama, Bahrain - I've visited your site today and I was really surprised how rich and informative it was, but this is not really what made me surprised. What I really liked about your site is that I finally found somebody from Zanzibar whom I can ask about the Bahraini community there.

Abdulraouf Kassam, Kent, UK - Very nostalgic - You took me back to Mailindi once again. I am a Memon but who cares we are all Jangbaris. My dad had a shop at Changa Bazaar - Ramju's Stores and my Uncles own Haji Abdullah & Sons shops at Darajani that were looted completely. One my Uncle - Ahmed Haji Abdulla was killed at Ziwani Police Station. Through your guest book, I traced my teacher at Hindu Union and a classmate!

Abbas Hussein Dharamsi Gangji - Reading the chapter on Zanzibar brought back memories. I guess one can not turn the clock back, but I long for the kind of life we led in Zanzibar. Last time I was on the Island was in May 1964 when I visited my parents for a week before they left the Island for good.

Fatima Vellani, Vancouver, Canada - What a delight it was to read your article on zanzibar! I remember my childhood with great fondness, I wish to God life would change and get better for the African people, they were such kind, hard working people, and my! what a beautiful island it was. My sister Feeza Jessa was the first ladies hair dresser there, the African people would say "Kinyozi." My father was an Immigration Officer at the Bethlajeb Building, and then opened his own business.

Alnoor, California, USA - I have to state quite succinctly up-front that I differ, or more like, I totally disagree with one of the statements that you've made under:



"The one person Khoja Ithnashris need be proud of is Mohamedali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, for he was one of them...."

As an Nizari Ismaili Muslim I kind of felt very offended to have read such an ill-advised statements like these coming from a person of your caliber, who I thought should have been "better" informed and rather well-versed with the history of the Indian sub-continent. I don't claim to be an authority on the subject but nevertheless, I can state outright over here that the statement you've made is erroneous, simply because what you've written is just NOT true. Yes, I will somewhat agree with you that, Mr. Qaid-e-Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, did play: call it a significant, vital role in the creation of Pakistan, but to outright call him to be the founder of Pakistan, is just NOT correct at all.

In fact, today, if you were to put forth the same question to say the late Mohandas Ghandhi, or Jawaharlal Nehru, or even Mohammad Ali Jinnah, or Sir Zafrullah Khan or any of the political leaders, past or present, of Pakistan or India, as to name the ONE and ONLY PERSON who they think is responsible for the creation of BOTH India and Pakistan (look I have said both India and Pakistan and NOT just Pakistan), then I can assure with 110% certainty, that they will name none other than the one and only H. H. Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III. Look, I want to state here that the foregoing statement I've made is NOT, and I repeat NOT, based on prejudicial statement, because I'm a Nizari Ismaili and because HE was the 48th-Imam of the Nizari Ismailis sect, but rather, my statement is based on correct historial fact of the Partition History of the Indian Subcontinent.

If there was any ONE single entity in a person, Hindu or Muslim, during the British Raj in India BEFORE the Partition, who had ANY sort of influence, over the British Government - be it the King or Queen or Prime Minister - in Great Britain at that time, it was NONE other than His Highness Aga Khan III.

After having read numerous memos, speeches, articles on the movement of the Indian-Muslim League before the partition, memoirs of The Aga Khan III and his Presidency tenure with the League of Nations, the



history of the Hindu Movement in India led under the late Mohandas Ghandhi, I'm now totally convinced ever than before that this one person is His Highness Aga Khan III, the ONLY PERSON who was SINGULARLY responsible for the CREATION of the TWO nations: One India and the other: Pakistan. One for Hindus and the other for Muslims. If it wasn't for him then, I personally think that it would have taken the then-India a long time to gain independence from their British Masters.

And yet, today, His Highness The Aga Khan III, after his tireless efforts in creating these TWO nations, is NOT recognized in EITHER one of these countries. Instead, credit is given to the late: Mohandas Ghandhi as the father or creator of India, and Mohammad Ali Jinnah as the father of Pakistan - how pitiful!

The present Aga Khan IV, His Highness Shah Karim al-Husainy, the spiritual leader of the present Nizari Ismailis sect, was put forth this very same question by a reporter in India, and his reply to this question was that my Grandfather, Aga Khan III, NEVER ever asked for any kind of recognition from either of these respective governments. We, the Imams of our times, have taken upon ourselves to work for the betterment of the whole mankind! His tireless efforts in today's times when there is so much turmoil in the world is seen to bore the fruits for the whole of Mankind and not just Muslims or Hindus or any other sect for that matter.

Mussadique Jaffer Ladak, Milton Keynes, UK - You brought back pleasant memories and tears. Inshallah I intend to perform Arbaeen in Zanzibar in 2004.

Akil Guamhussein, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - I was born in Zanzibar after revolution and like many others, our family also had to leave. But I have always been entertained by endless tales of this enchanting island - it seemed almost surreal. Going through your website, it brought back all the tales and scenes I've heard since my childhood. It was a unique way of life, the one like which never existed anywhere and will never repeat again. Thank you for bringing it back to life and I will keep it for my kids to read when they grow up old enough to understand. It has reminded



me of my roots and of an era that I did not see, but, through tales of my elders, its scenes are vividly engrossed in my memory.

Murtaza Basheer Nasser, Dar es salaam - This is the first time I visited your site and was overwhelmed to see my Uncle' tribute which so accurately describes the feelings and emotions that your website invokes. We are grateful to you for the effort in setting up this website and may the Almighty amply reward you for the effort in documenting what many Zanzibaris will never forget. This message to you from my Grandfather (Abdulhussien Nasser Pira), Father (Basheer Nasser) who features in one of your photographs and myself.

Aspi Dastur, Pittsburgh, USA - Great Website! Excellent photos, with a superb write-up of the good old days. It's no wonder that many people had called Zanzibar, Paradise of the Indian Ocean. A well-deserved description. Sadly, the future was not to be when the passage of time turned this paradise disrupting hundreds of lives. I was at King George VI School in 1963 doing HSC. I had great fun participating in School debates. What a vibrant school it was. I have fond memories of our teachers; Evans, Gregory, English, Ellis, Wesson, Fernandes, and others. Your website, and also Bargash's site, which I highly recommend, not only bring back a lot of memories, but are also a great way to re-establish contacts and friendships. Isn't it ironic that the disruption and destruction caused by one Revolution is now being remedied by another revolution - the Internet Revolution?

Daras Bulsara, Ottawa, Canada - Though we dont know each other, I was thrilled to see my father's photo (Rati Bulsara) on your website. Your write up is quite interesting. It reminds me of my birthplace. Alas ! Those who had the vision of a cosmopolitan Zanzibar with peace and harmony with no animosity between caste, creed or religion, was all washed away.

Khurshed Dastur, Pittsburgh, USA - Excellent! Thanks for the many great memories. As Parsees we buried our dead in Zbar unlike our tradition in India. Our fire temple was beyond Coopers, after the Bohra Gymkhana and Goan cemetery. Our burial ground was attached to it. I am a great admirer of your community. My brother Aspi and my sister



Mahrookh and i all went to St. Joseph Convent school. I passed senior Cambridge in 1960 and then went to England to study medicine. I was lucky to get a scholarship from Yusufali Karimjee as he and his brother Tayabali were good friends of my father from their days in the Masonic Lodge. Jessa was in the lodge at the same time. I graduated from Univ of Newcastle in 1968, and then went to Canada for two years and since then have been in Pittsburgh, USA. I now practice as a neuroradiologist at one of the teaching hospitals. My father Jehangir used to work for Cable and Wireless, and i am so grateful to you for that picture in Shangani as it also shows my house opposite C&W. Our Parsee teachers masters Arjani, Kanga and B.D.Mehta have passed away. Master Rana is still alive in Bombay. Mrs. Arjani has also passed away.

I played cricket for the Parsees. I used to attend practices during the week with your Ithnashri team and also the Arab team. I once played in the Ismaili team. Soli Darukhanawala used to come and practise with various teams and he picked me up for the Parsee team where i played as the youngest man before leaving for England. The camaraderie between the various communities we had should be a lesson to our people in India and Pakistan. I never knew of any Hindu, Muslim, Arab or Parsee rivalries and i often talk of this with my Muslim colleague and friend Dr. Chaudry who hails from Kisumu. I remember Juma Aley, Tungule, Javad because they would let me practise. With our concrete and tar pitch developed reflexes i went on to represent my college and subsequently the medical school in England without any difficulty. Regarding our Parsee cricketers unfortunately Dara Daruwalla, Keki and Parvez Talati, Rusi Madon and Themton and his brother Russi Bhumgara and Rutti Bulsara have passed away. Russi Feroz Madon, the Combine player and captain resides in Toronto. He will be delighted to see the picture of Cosmos team. He was the teacher at King George. Kersy Jassavala of Technical School, Beitalras, resides in Wimbledon, London. Master Desai passed away a couple of years ago in Houston. His son is a urology physician here in Pgh and will be delighted to visit your website. He is related to master Nayak who has also passed away i believe.

For displaced people like us and especially for communities like our Parsee community which was never big but was totally wiped out in the turmoil of



independence. Great while it lasted but alas it is all over. I salute you for reviving the memories. I am sure God has a special place for you and i thank u for reminding us of our fathers and forefathers and the part they played in the history of the place of our birth.

Sakar Dattoo, Karachi, Pakistan - I am a Jangbari to the last core. I must tell you how deeply, very deeply touched I have felt reading your reflections on ZANZIBAR, *ek madhur sa Sapna jo ke Sapna hi rahe gaya*. Believe me, it has been an afternoon of Reverie, Reflection and Reminiscence!!!

Mabel Pooran nee De Souza, St. James, Trinidad & Tobago, West Indies - I was very glad to visit your website on Zanzibar. I looked at all the pics and remember when Princess Margaret visited Zanzibar. My mother Maggie was presented to her on two occasions, once as Island Commissioner for the Girl Guides and then as President of the Zanzibar Womens' Voluntary society. I used to captain the girls hockey teams and the netball teams-the latter took place in the grounds of Old Fort. My mother was an avid cricket fan.

I was blessed to have been born and brought up in Zanzibar. I brag so much about Zanzibar and i can detect the envy in some of the folks that i relate my stories. I was a student of St. Joseph Convent and then worked as Woman Asst. Insp of Police in the Special Branch and there is where we used to get reports of imminent coups on a weekly basis. A lot of my personal friends were slain during the coup. You have done a wonderful job. I lived on suicide alley, Shangani next to Tippu Tip house and next door to the Shariff family which was huge. Would love to hear from any of them. I was 21 when i left Zanzibar in 1964. It is my intention to pay a visit to Zanzibar.

Kantilal Thanki, Succasunnani, USA - It was a great joy to go through your website. Thanks for putting together such an interesting, informative and entertaining story of past and present Zanzibar. For those of us who grew up on the island and enjoyed the growing up years in what in my mind will always be remembered as paradise, it was a pleasant voyage to the past memories. In the turmoil that we suffered many of us have lost the memory and pictures of the past and yours were a pleasant gift.



I am going through parts of your story which I found very interesting. What coincidences! It appears like you and I have crossed paths many times and yet not met each other. I must have seen you at GSBS for when you joined King George the vith School in 1962 I was doing first year of HSC. I used to play cricket for Hollingsworth House and Yusuf Kabana was from Abdulla House. We represented the school also. I was also in Bombay from 1964 to 1969. In Bombay I lived in Sion for 2 years and at Marine Lines in International Students' Hostel at Kimatrai Building. From 1967 to 1969 I was at University Hostel on B Road at Churchgate next to Hotel Natraj. I too lost my passport at Cairo airport but it was recovered just before the plane was to leave. I also taught at Agakhan Secondary School in Dar es salaam for a year(1970 to 1971). I came to USA and after doing my Ph.D in Texas I have worked at different places. I work in New York now making Test Tube babies for people who have problem having babies. Keeps me busy. Zanzibar as you know will always be Xanadu for us.

Gulzar Nagri, Dar es salaam -The substantial efforts put in really localizing the real Z'bar history is really commendable. I did not realize that Khoja split in the Island. Throughout it is really lively, short, lucid, the language tone and style second to none tuning in line with the famous West Indian author V.Naipaul. On Cricket which is my favourite, Fazal's presence in our Bohora Group was by itself unique and that race barrier was totally broken. At times when he was absent, constantly it was asked where is FAZAL. Our group cherished him with vibration of internationalism.

Zahir Bhalloo, Mombasa, Kenya - Searching for the late Abbas Alloo's Vatan Se Dur, I came across your website, which I predict for a very long time will hold a special place in my favourites! I not only wish to commend your excellent and accurate efforts, but to thank-you for keeping the memories of our fore fathers alive. Knowing full well that indescribable force that all Khojas experience when referring to the events that shape their fascinating history and indeed these very same fore-fathers who defined them. If I may add, it is this "history" precisely that I am concerned with currently, and wish to record inshallah in the form of a humble book in the near future. Indeed my friends and I are very keen on publishing a



book akin to *We Came in Dhows* by Cynthia Salvadori, whom I had the good fortune to have fruitful discussions with, and who has kindly agreed to help. Considering your knowledge on the subject, I would like to enlist your help too.

Hasham Kadu Baluchi, Dorset, UK - Typed 'king george vi school in zanzibar' on 'google search' and was taken to your delightful site. I was very impressed when I was reading your web page. I could not stop reading as the old Zanzibar which you and I both knew unfolded itself by the way you described. I could imagine myself walking there in those narrow streets say at Kiponda where Gopal Samji made one of my best suits. Unfortunately that Z'bar is gone completely.

What memories of Zanzibar! I studied at the school in the early 60's and then Mr Kureishi got me a teaching job at the Hindu Union Secondary School at Shangani, where he and Mr Nayak were also teaching having retired from KG the VI school. I taught English Language, History, and Mathematics. You have done a wonderful job by putting down your unforgettable reminiscences of Zanzibar. Just an anecdote which I still remember from the old school is that Desai emphasized he purposely used to drink milk during the sun's eclipse in complete contradiction to his Hindu upbringing which forbids drinking or eating during such period. As a matter of interest in 1982 I met Mr R Evans (one of the lecturers who used to teach at the school) by chance and he invited me to his home. Mr Piggott who used to be the principal of the Technical School at Beit el Ras is well ;he is over 75 now. I spoke to him about two years ago.

Hasnain Gulamali, Morrow, Georgia, USA - We have never met nor do we know each other. I stumbled on your web site today while surfing and wanted to take the time to tell you that you have done a superb job. I actually felt I was at home going through your website. Through this website, you have provided a vehicle for Itnaasheri of Zanzibari background to get a little piece of Zanzibar while we live the fast lives in the West. It could also be a vehicle to bring us together in good causes. Even though raised in Arusha and Dar es salaam, when I first set foot in Zanzibar, I felt at home. That my ancestors were from Zanzibar may have had a lot to do with it. Your website certainly helped me keep the spirit



of Zanzibar inside me alive. Zanzibar, I love you and I miss you. You will always be in my heart. And Zanzibar, I will always come back to you. Inshallah!

Baqir Alloo, Toronto, Canada - You have put a labour of love in creating your site. To me it brought back the old days live as I was born and lived in Zanzibar till the age of 37. My grandfather Khoja Haji Jafferbhai Alloo, as he was known, was a leading member of Kuwatul Islam Jamaat. Being a very pious person he confined himself to ibadaat and was a valued disciple of Agha Sayyid Hussein Shustari and a close friend of Khoja Haji Remtullabhai Tejani. Agha Sayyid Hussein Shustari at several occasions referred Haji Remtulla as Salman And Haji Jaffer Alloo as Abuzar. My religious teacher Malim Raza Nathani once told me that my grandfather was regular at all Jamaat prayers although he lived at Sokomohogo and an announcer of program after the salaah. He said that he would make a very short announcement 'masael paraba' using pure Mundrai Katchi.

Your articles on Nai Misit and the one on History of Ithnasheries in Zanzibar is a valued document and has received a lot of acclaim from Zanzibaries here.

Nisar Sheraly, Toronto, Canada - I was visiting your site and also watching the World News on BBC when i learnt that Sir Don Bradman is gone. They say "old order changeth, yielding place to new". I did not see much of my father's (Sheraly Meghji, 'Ndege') game. I remember when he hit a six and I went to our grey Austin car 1214 and started honking and he started coming towards the pavilion. I thought he was coming to admonish me but it was his announcement of his retirement. He then went back and continued to play.

Ahmed HK Daya, Moshi -Your site on 'Recollections' is pure nostalgia. There was a time when the community in Moshi was also much larger than today. Alas it has now dwindled to a fifth of its former size. However, the past Moshi inhabitants, wherever they may be, ought to remember our beautiful mosque, so picturesque and serene with those splendid insertions of Allah's names inside the mosque, and outside it His naturalness and the relentless chirping of birds. Besides, the beautiful snow capped



Kilimanjaro in the background makes our mosque, though small in size, a heavenly place and one of the finest built in our community.

Hashim Saleh, Dubai - I was reading your article about Zanzibar but the same time I felt like I was there myself eating those mbatata and Bajias at Fordhani. I have to tell you that your article is worth it to read many times specially when one feels lonely.

Mohamed Lodhi, Stockholm, Sweden - You took me down the memory lane. The best site on Zanzibar I have come across. You have done a wonderful job. The majestic buildings which make Zanzibar unique were the works of Kumbharos, the Cutchi Sunnis. Who were also the seafarers on whose dhows the Asian sailed to East Africa. The Zanzibaris will always treasure the memories of Zanzibar that is no more and many of us will pass it on to future generation.

Tony Antao, Milwaukee, USA - Good writing, it made me homesick. I lived on Kiponda street, just opposite the Ithnashri mosque, downstairs there was library. My uncle had a tailoring shop across there beside Abedi, I miss those samosas of Abedi. I grew up there at my uncle's place from 1948 to 1962 going to school at St. Joseph's convent school. Oh: those good old days. I came to USA on a scholarship and stayed here. However, I did visit Zanzibar with my children in 1992. The place had changed from the memories I had when I was a kid. Presently I live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I am married to Dr. Maitra's daughter, her father used to practice medicine in Zanzibar.

Umed Hirji Gohil, Montreal, Canada - I read your memories-very interesting. I also went to ESM school. I remember during recess time Adinani would rush to the school for students to have his mbatata. Is he still alive? I used to write to him. We had a shoe repair shop at Portuguese Street (Baniani Bunduki) opposite Rati Balsara who published the paper 'Adal Insaaf' and had a lino type machine.

Abdullah AM Kindy, Muscat, Oman - Abdulrazak, welcome to Muscat, you will never get lost here, there are narrow streets exactly like Zanzibar and look alike buildings, it's amazing! Kiswahili is widely spoken here almost everywhere, not to forget Zanzibar food like sambusa, mbatata



za urojo (but not like Adinani), bajia, sugar-cane juice, haluwa etc, you name it & it's right in front of you. All types of tropical fruits are available, we get some agricultural items freshly flown from Zanzibar. Also we have Zanzibarians (Indians) those whom we lived with them side by side in Zanzibar during good old sweet days, they do various businesses, shops, restaurants, sonaras etc. and we all speak Kiswahili so that we feel a bit part of Zanzibari life here. In other words Zanzibar was Sultanate of Oman & Zanzibar at that time. It's still in our hearts & minds, though we don't live in Zanzibar but we still live Zanzibarian life style & we will continue living this civilised way till the end of this universe. Also among other Zanzibarian communities who emigrated here are Commorians(Wangazija), Washihiri, Chotaras, WaAfrica (waswahili from Unguja & Pemba), Goans, Parses, Khojas, Bohoras, Khumbharos, Iranians, I think I can't name them all. But most of them are living again here side by side like Zanzibar.

Dinesh Pandya - Rockford, USA - Zanzibar has such special meaning for so many of us...we keep in touch with some Bohora friends... Fakruddin Adamji is a physician in the Chicago area...and some Goan friends like the Maitras...I got their e-mails from your guest book and it was good to say hi to them again.....Also thanks a million I got an e-mail from Aziz Fazal, we have been able to re-connect after 37 years. No small feat in this huge world and with the passage of so much time...

Shenny Dungersi, Toronto, Canada - i always loved my country unguja. we have a business operating under unguja trading company. i have been in canada for the last 30 years but my mind and thoughts are always with zanzibar. last year i visited the island but i was very much disappointed. it is a dead place. Like its cricket teams the scout troops in Zanzibar were also communal based e.g hindus, ismailis, bohoras, ithnaasheri. i was part of the ithnaasheri troop- 10th zanzibar troop. Then Ahmed Dungersi started the 13th troop which was a cosmopolitan group consisting of ithnaasheri, boharas, ismailis, hindus and so on. The group was one of the finest on the island.

Ruksana Thawer (Moh's Masi's daughter), London, UK - Fantastic collection both your articles and the added info from the guests signing in. I would love to add my little snippet and our family's part in the history



of Jungbar. I was born 1954 and went St Joseph convent school. My grand father Abdulla Thaver introduced the first cinemas in Zanzibar. He was better known by his nickname Masi. He built Empire and Sultana Cinemas and perhaps even Majestic which after a fire he sold to Badru Gozi who rebuilt it. Masi was an amazing man. He had the rare quality of a very good businessman with a big, big heart....and we only found that out at his funeral in 1966. I was 12 and remember it vividly when countless people came to us with stories of how he helped them. He gave up his job as an accountant started with a 100 Shilling projector, a bed sheet for a screen and an open rooftop where he charged twenty cents all round for the movies...the rest is history, unfortunately not documented systematically. I am truly glad that you have made such an excellent effort in documenting what you know. More importantly I commend you for allowing open input from others to add to it...thank you so much.

My Dad Moh'd Masi who is retired in London will be thrilled to go through and recognize all the people there. Although I was 13 when I left I remember the kahawa, abedi's bajia and samosas (my favourite) and especial the crocodile game across two barazas. Its amazing how diverse a population thrived under such small proximity and how individuality was enhanced by the blending. Only in Zanzibar could such rich contrasts live in colourful harmony. My best memories were of forodhani during ramadhan...the evening fashion parades and the card games on the grass! I was only a child but the sweet memories remain....esp of the mishaki, chana bateta (uniquely made in coconut with keri) and the sugarcane juice with lime and ginger. The sights, sounds, smells and tastes of Zanzibar I will take to my grave. Thank you for creating a virtual home for Jungbaris to refresh our memories.

Mohsin Alarakhia, Hongkong - As a Khoja Shia from Dar, whose grandparents originally came from Bhuj via Zanzibar, I found your website fascinating, and your description of life in Zanzibar prior to 1964 is so well-written that it evoked a feeling of nostalgia in me, even though I was born in Dar, and never lived in Zanzibar! In a way, I can relate to what you write; I went back to Dar in 2004, after an absence of 16 years, and it seemed completely different from what I remembered. I guess you never leave the place you grow up in, it just remains within your heart.



Carol Dias, San Antonio, Texas, USA - What a memoir! I felt like I was reliving the good old times again. I am from Zanzibar and lived in Michangani where my father had a bakery. My mom was a teacher and headmistress of the Agakhan School and also the Bohora School. Her name was Gladys Dias and my dad was Alban Dias. My mom was killed during the revolution and I too was shot in my arm. Anyhow, enjoy the "present" as it is a gift from God.

Audrey Dewjee, London, UK - I have visited your wonderful website on many occasions over the past 5 years. My husband Hussein Gulamali left Zanzibar in 1951 after the death of his mother and went to live with an aunt in Dar es Salaam, migrating to England in 1961 after the death of his father. He finally managed to go back for a visit to Zanzibar in 2004, taking his family (myself and our son, then aged 16) to see where he was born and search for his "roots". (We went again in 2006.) We managed to find his father's house/shop in Hurumzi Street (now 233 Changa Bazaar) and some information about Peera Dewjee who had been the Sultan's right-hand-man in the 1880s, but we couldn't find much about the years in between. Gulamali (who was known as (Gulamali Dhabo") had a famous perfumery (attar) shop visited by locals of all communities, as well as tourists who came on cruise liners. Abdulrasul, listed as "Treasury Superintendent", was awarded the 4th class Brilliant Star of Zanzibar on 23 October 1941. I have printed off quite a few articles from your website for my husband to read and they have brought back many nostalgic memories for him. Many, many thanks for this.

Shabbar Gulamabbas Datoo, San Jose, Costa Rica, Central America - First and foremost i must say you have done a great job in keeping the history alive. My parents grew up in Zanzibar and were famous for making bread, kharabiscuits and toasts. In bringing up this site, you have brought a lot of joy and tears of memory to the people who lived in Zanzibar in those days. I still have some of my family members living in Zanzibar. Last but not least may Almighty Allah bless you in all your endeavours.

Murtaza Mustafa Karim, New York, USA - I was reading through the Nai Misid compilations that u have so carefully gathered. It brought lots of memories of stories that my father told me, and i hope to carry the legacy



to my children. After all, i m Haji Karim Allarakhia's great grandson. It was interesting to read through the history, how influential the people were. Apparently i am also blessed with the genes of Mohamedali Rehmtulla Merali, who built the magnificent Nai Misid Mnara. My grandfather married his daughter. May Allah bless them all in eternal piece. Both sides had played signifant roles in maintaining the mosque. I smiled when i read that Haji Karim, at the age of 80, outran even the youths of that time. I believe thats where he got the name Karim Kidege. You probably brought a lot of joy and tears of memory to the people who lived in Zanzibar in those days.

Kamrudin Rashid, Toronto, Canada - A superb website about Zanzibar that I have surfed so far. I was born in Zanzibar and lived in Zanzibar and Pemba. Was working for the Administrator General's office in Mambomsige and then in Wete, Pemba with the "Wakf" and "Public Trustee" Departments. Have lost touch with very many friends and people I used to work with. However, today found the e-mail of Issa Peera (who I am sure is the same Issa G. Peera, a lawyer by profession and who was the Assistant Administrator General for the Island of Pemba. I also worked with the Karmali brothers Ebrahim and Yusuf and I believe I have found Yusuf's e-mail address on your website as well. I was also lucky to find the e-mail of one of my other very old friend. In fact I visited both Zanzibar and Pemba for a week in the month of June 2002 and it was indeed my most enjoyable visit ever to these places after 38 years of absence. You deserve commendation and gratitude of each and every 'Jangbari' for such a superb site.

Salim Al Rawahi, Muscat, Oman - It is a masterpiece and a well-done work! Congratulations! I'm confident that your website will take special place in helping the revival of the highly distorted history of Zanzibar. I personally appreciate and respect your effort and talent in recalling, compiling and presenting all those events taking place at the time prior to the revolution and its aftermath. In fact, I was not fortunate enough to be around during the good times of those beautiful days that you gentlemen had experienced as I was born after the revolution (DOB:12/9/64). Your writing has immensely helped me in comparing notes with the daily drilled hearsay from our elder Zanzibari brothers and sisters, and was happy



enough to note that their sentimentalism is genuine and sincere. Make sure that whenever you happen to drop by in Oman on your trips to any other point of the globe, you give us a call (My # is +++++.) and I would like to meet with you. You are always welcome here. Sawa mheshimiwa?

Vinodkumar Premchand Mehta, Muscat, Oman - I was absolutely moved by reading your article on Zanzibar and the sweet memory it brought. It was just awesome. We are proud of you. My beloved father, Master Premchand Mehta (Master Kilemba) was a teacher at the Sir Euan Smith Madressa. He was very popular and must have taught a number of those old timers, some of whom may be visiting this website and would like to know more about him.

My father, Premchand Mehta, was born in Babra, in Saurashtra in 1898. One Bohora, Jivanji Dayaji Jasaparwalla, inspired him to go for better prospects to East Africa, especially, to Zanzibar. And he decided to migrate to Zanzibar. He came on his first maiden voyage to Zanzibar, in 1928. Before he joined ESM one Natha Kansara gave him a small room to open a private school in Darajani. At that time approximately 19/23 students (Hindoos, Shia, Memon, Ismaili-khoja and even one bohora) were studying in primary education. Within no time he not only gained his prestige and reputation as a pragmatic teacher but also established his name in the Asian community.

Muniruddeen, Surrey, England - I coincidentally came across your reminiscences of Zanzibar. Let me tell you my dear Abdul, the article/biography found deep resonance with me from several aspects, but particularly in view of the fact that I was in Zanzibar at the age of 3-4yrs. in and around 1935/6. My recollections of the time are very strange and flocculent. Although I was but a child at the time I suppose that in itself is not an earth shattering happening except for the fact that I went through fairly traumatic experience in my life. My father Camer-ud-Deen who was an inspector in the Zanzibar police was assassinated by one of the sword carrying Mangas or Mshihiris you described in your discourse. This was during a riot against presumably the Govt who it appears much to their [Mangas/Mshihiris] anger had raised the tax on cloves. The story such as



it is, goes that my father in the course of his duties went amongst them to quell the riot; being mistaken for an Englishman because of his pale complexion he was beheaded by a sword wielding Manga/Mshihiri. The reason for boring you with this bit of background information is to ask you a simple question which I suspect because of your intimate knowledge of the history of Zanzibar you may be able to answer. I would like to visit my father's grave in order to pay my respects, but would very much appreciate knowing whether the cemetery used by the Sunni Muslims in 1935/6 is still in existence? I would be extremely grateful for the information or would appreciate to know who or what authority to enquire from, and would be prepared to reimburse any out of pocket expenses you may incur in the pursuit of the answer.

Shaukat G. Dawood, Dubai, UAE - My grandfather Marhum Haji Ghulla whom you mention in your write up 'Zanzibar Khoja Ithnashris' was a Lawaty. They were those who had migrated to Muscat from Medina after Imam Mohamed A'Wahab spreaded Wahabisim, and intermarried with Hydrabadis who came from India. Also the 21st of Ramadhan in Zanzibar was made a holiday by not Marhum Ali Nathoo but General Khan who was the first non European Police Commander.

Sadru Hasham, Calgary, Alberta, Canada - Read your article with joy and sadness. Going through your vivid descriptions i'd to pinch myself to make sure i was not back in Zanzibar in that golden era which you have correctly depicted, never to come back. After 40 years, most of us have never been able to emotionally separate from the place called Zanzibar.

Simba Yahya - Dar es salaam - Flowery, very flowery indeed! Reading through this article really brings nostalgia of a "lost" era...! But it also leaves a lot of the bitter part of life that the author never had a chance to taste: the plight and suffering of the many "not-so- well-to-do" Zanzibaris, most of whom never had a chance to live in a better abode than a thatched-roofed (makuti) hut! One reads on and on about nasab, the Sharriifs, the Damji's, the Sultans, the Khojas, the Goans etc, etc, etc! Are we not saying here that these were the ones who mattered then? And the schools, best schools of the day in the whole of East Africa, what access to whom? Is it simply good reading on Zanzibar's past or else?



Of "Duty Free" zone; for goods to where? Assuredly, the many liners carried cargo not meant for the small "affording" Zanzibari population! Let's be truthful. Someone was missing the rightful duties from whatever merchandise temporarily held at Zanzibar.

As I pointed out, there is much left unsaid in the article which I believe, would make interesting reading if told with sincerity. HISTORY IS SIMPLY THE BEST JUDGE OF EVENTS PAST: PROBLEM HOWEVER IS, WHAT INTERPRETATION OF THAT HISTORY? I COULDN'T HELP BEING QUIZZICAL ON THIS ONE!

Armando Menezes, Bamsley, Yorkshire, England - I was delighted to read all the emails and find the names of Tempton Bhumgara- my father's (Dr E Menezes) tennis partner and opponent. I used to play badminton with Baker Tejani, Shavak Maddon, Abdul Lakha (sadly deceased) and Jessani. I left Zanzibar in 1954 and revisited only once in 1958 by which time my parents had moved from the house between Cowasjee Dinshaw and the Yacht Club to a house opposite Cable & wireless. I remember many of the Bohora and Isthnasheri names as my father and his uncle Dr Rudolf Demello and later my brother Ehrlich (sadly) deceased were doctors for the Bohoras and the Karimjee Family. Was the Ali Bhajia who is so often mentioned the hawker who carried his delicious bhajias in a glass case on his head? When i visited Mohomed Hasham Nasser in London a few years ago I was amazed that the bhajias were identical. Ali must rank as the most famous hawker in the world. It was wonderful to hear of the great success of so many Zanzibaris and especially of the children and memories of our teachers Mr Naik, Mr Desai, Mr Sholapurkar, Mr Khakoo, Mr Aboud Jumbe, Mr Juma Alley. A compilation of all your guest makes fascinating reading

Maryam, London, England - I love your website, i have never read information that are significant to my life as this before. I am zanzibari studying in UK. Your article reminds me of my child hood, the vast information that you collected gave vivid pictures of places and culture and many things that i didnt even know. i was born in Malindi, studied in Hurumzi, Haile Sellasie and Lumumba. The process of your schooling i was feeling like i was reading my life story written by someone else. Even



the reading out of students' who get into King George on Sauti Ya Unguja brought tears to my eyes. The Adnan mbatata, the Forodhani gathering, the Eid day celebration etc. And the ghost stories, we used to live behind msikiti wa ijumaa where before we got home we had to walk through the narrow street behind the mosque where there are a lot of makaburi, and we (my brothers and a sister) used to scare each other. You have shown Zanzibar in its true sense, original and not the way it is always portrayed to tourists. You gave true picture of stone town and life taken from Zanzibari point of view, that is genius! Soon the stone town may remain as ruins, very sad! if you ever write a book about it i would love to know about it.

Nishadali Jiwa, Houston, Texas, USA - Thank your Mr. Fazal, this is an incredible website!, you have worked so hard to bring back some great long lost memories, and nostalgia for many Cricket fans. My name is Nishad, I am a grandson of the late Badrudin Satchu (Aga Khan Cricket Club), he was known back home in Dar Es Salaam as "Tuma" and "Antonio" to his dear friends. He would have loved every section of this website, if he was still with us today, rest his soul, but thanks to websites like these, we can all cherish the memories again and again. Thanks Mr. Fazal for your warm wishes and regards, and for allowing me to get in touch with you, take care, and keep up the excellent work!..God Bless.

Jenny Ramcharran, New York, USA - My name is Jenny. I am engaged to Shiraz Sumar's son, Jaheel Sumar. I've been researching Shiraz Sumar's career online in pursuant to a Father's Day project I'm currently working on for him and I stumbled upon your writings of Shiraz Sumar. I must say, of all of the stories I've heard describing Dad's Cricketing career in East Africa, the article you wrote in 1984, entitled "Good-bye Sumar," touched my heart the most. I've always been proud of Dad's accomplishments and have been quick to brag to my friends and family of his career. When I read your article, I felt like I was in Tanzania in 1984, feeling the pain of Dad's departure from cricket. That's how much your article moved me. Your article has helped me understand and appreciate Dad's accomplishments on a much higher level. For that, I thank you. Mr. Fazal I am putting together for Shiraz for Father's day. I am trying to gather as much information, pictures, articles, and comments having to



do with Shiraz Sumar's career in East Africa. Your moving article on my father-in-law has thus helped me immensely.

Alnoor Mawji, Toronto, Canada - I was an avid cricket fan, alongside my dad, Fateh Mawji (deceased 1991), who, for the longest time, was the manager for AgaKhan Club 'B' (formerly Dar Cricketers). I was pleasantly surprised to see your reference to him in your article on Naaz Bandali. I was not aware of any acknowledgement to his efforts before reading your article online. It brought tears to my eyes to see the flashbacks to the good old cricketing days. Thank you all for the memories, and thank you for what you brought to the game of cricket, as players, management, commentators, fans, and cricket lovers. It will forever be cherished in the hearts and minds of all those you touched. The precious treasure of brotherhood and values will never be forgotten.

Ashiq Kermali, Longwood, Florida, USA - With tears in my eyes, I thank you for this wonderful gift. I wish I was in Zanzibar and spend my last days on this earth at home and be buried there. Such peace and tranquility I remember while growing up in Zanzibar. So much love and affection. Neither racism nor capitalism! I am working in the Orlando regional healthcare Center as Professional Chaplain. My job is spiritual intervention to bring comfort and peace to patients here. Alhamdulillah I am the first Zanzibari, the first Khoja Shia Ithnaashari to become a professional Chaplain in the world. Tears are flowing from my eyes as I remember the pristine Zanzibar that I left in 1962. I visited Zanzibar last in 1995. Please pray that I visit again. Please come to Orlando and be my guest.

Arif Peera, San Dimas, California, USA - This site really hits home- a grand slam home run (thanks to Brother Benhashim from Abu Dhabi for reminding me of the site)! I visited Unguja after many, many years back in 1991, and whatever my grandfather said rang absolutely true. After kissing that sacred soil as soon as I got off the "Sea Express", I clearly felt both, appreciative as well as "what's this dude doing?" glances. It was obvious that anyone who literally had the water of Zanzibar running through his veins like lifeblood itself could appreciate someone else's love for home.. this particular home. Seeing these old pictures of the imamwaro, and the



pictures of old friends and relatives is like setting foot on the island again. It was also really good reading the highlights of people like Baker Tejani (who I played golf with regularly in the early 90s at Dar Gymkhana), and my uncle Bashir Nasser. Knowing now what I know about these gentlemen, I look at them in a totally different light. If today, as they say, is built on yesterday, then these people are my inspiration. Constant reminder of our history should inspire our Zanzibari 30-somethings and the younger generations to uphold the great traditions in sports, academia, religion, and community building that the pioneers from Zanzibar began in the yesteryears. Hopefully this site will help inspire us in some way to make our Zanzibari ancestors proud of us.

Anne Chappel (nee Smithyman), Adelaide, Australia - I came across your site and was very excited to read about Zanzibar. I am a white woman, born in Tanganyika in 1947. I spent many happy childhood years in Zanzibar from 1956 till the 1964 revolution. We “escaped” from our house on the waterfront during the first day – using our yacht. I remain very connected to Zanzibar, it is in some way my homeland and its memories will never leave me. I have been back twice in 1995 and 2000. I know Kiponda Street, I stayed in a small hotel there. I would like to share some of those memories and stories with you. My father is Mervyn Smithyman and he was the Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister after Independence in 1963. My father is now 96. I see that you are interested in cricket. My brother, Michael, was a good cricketer in Zanzibar (although only 16-18) and played many times for the English Club and various teams there. Out of interest, Don Bradman lived a few miles away from us in Adelaide and was well known in our community until his death a few years ago.

I was fascinated to look at your photographs. The first one: **The VIPs at a public function during the colonial days** shows my late mother and father in the centre! How well I remember the Sultans red car. I used to bicycle around Zanzibar town for hours. Loved going to films at the Majestic and eating peanuts bought outside. Our first house was on the field at Mnazi Moja. My mother, Audrey Smithyman, taught Geography at the Indian girls’ secondary school for a time. I have many pictures and slides of Zanzibar. I find it very sad that so much was destroyed and so



many lives lost in Zanzibar. I have a considerable library about Zanzibar and the history of the coast. So I would be happy to share some memories with you.

Bhartendu Valambhia, Ahmedabad, India - What a pleasant surprise! Those days teachers were so very dedicated unlike nowadays- making money and not teaching anything unless you join their coaching classes. We consider ourselves so lucky that we had the good fortune to have great teachers, all have played their part to make us better human beings. Your brother, Master Shariff, used to teach us in the ESM. He was very particular about his teaching, and i very distinctly remember him making us recite Gujarati poems in a particular style and proper pronunciations. Actually it was he who taught me how to write properly with good handwriting, be it Gujarati or English. There were many teachers, Mr Badruddin, taught us drawings, and when i had won a prize in the Shankar's International drawing competition and my photos were printed in local papers as well as Times, I became his pet. He was a very affectionate person. Master Sanghvi, Master Malkan, Master Desai, Master Kilembha and Ibrahim Jaffer who was a tough task master and never ever allowed us to mispronounce any word. He used to tear away comics in the class saying that they would spoil our spellings. English and American spellings of certain words are very different-color and colour to cite an example. Through your column it is really a down memory lane. I had some good friends who are lost at present for me like i was informed that Azad M D Kermali is no more, such a sad news. I have traced some through your Guest Book. You are doing a great favour, all those who love Zanzibar must go through your work.

Tony Sadler, Poole, England -I was watching the Kenya game in the cricket world cup and my mind wandered to F.H.R Kara. I had the privilege of meeting him as a young bowler back in England for my local club of Poole. He was truly a wonderful man and great cricketer. In fact, even in his seventies, he would make fools of many a local batsman with his ability to make them believe that an old man could never claim their wicket... little did they know! I knew that he had represented and captained the Union Sports Club and so was directed to your website.



Sharifa Dost Al Balushi, Muscat, Oman - Very impressed by your pages and you reminded me of my own childhood days in Zanzibar until 1/1/1972 when our family too fled on a dhow to Dar es Salaam. Reading through your pages, I wish we could go back to our childhood and live again those beautiful days. Sometimes I dream of those vichochoros.

Mohamed Hasham Nasser, London, England – It was a pleasure to have seen the website. It took me back many years of memory and visualize my home country. My prayers to all members of my community who are still in the island, and may you all be blessed with Allah's mercy and hold on and preserve all that our ancestors had created and established in the island.

Daksha Patel, Houston, Texas, USA – I am Mr. Swaly's daughter and I was so proud to see he was so much loved. We lost him in 2005. I am going through your articles and really enjoying.

Abid Patwa, Bothell, USA – Being a Bohora, it is with pride I read your mention in 'Cricket Feast' the friendliness of our community. Rightly so. I was pleased to see mention of my dad (Haider Patwa) in K.T. Karimjee's obituary. Also, pleased to see my dear friend, Shaukat Raja's mentioned in one segment. I have some photos of Aga Khan vs the Rest mentioned in the Aga Khan Club profile. My dad played for the Rest. I also have photo of the Bohora team with FHR in the photo. During our youthful days, we always had youngsters from other communities play sports with us. In fact FHR Kara played for the Bohoras at one time.

Aftab Noorani, London, England – Just got acquainted with your site and look forward with great relish to reviewing all the sections. We East Africans did not write our history and so it is incumbent upon us old guards to do so for the future generation of our East African diasporas.

Leila Fazal Nasser Mawji, Canada – I am the daughter of Fazal Nasser Mawji. It was nice to read the memoir of Zanzibar. Unfortunately I lost my father when I was 10 years old. It gave me great pleasure to see my dad's photo.



Richard McIntyre, San Rafael, California, USA – I was looking up the 'big baobab' tree on the internet and came across your site. I really liked your write up on Zanzibar. I was born in Dar es salaam in 1955, grew up in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and have lived in California for 29 years.

Abbas Moaiyadi, Dammam, Saudi Arabia – My dad shifted to Zanzibar when I was a year old. We lived in Zanzibar from 1953 to 1967 and did my schooling there before going to college in Bombay. I am now in Dammam for the last 25 years. I have my fond memories of Zanzibar, my home sweet home. I will never forget Zanzibar. I lived in Sokomohogo Street. I am a Bohora and had many non Bohora friends in school. Your Zanzibar write up took me into the past. I still remember all street names and places.

A.Malik, Canada – I just wanted to let you know that the website you have created is a wonderful, thought provoking and moving personal account of your background and the history of Khoja Muslim presence in Zanzibar! As a Kenyan myself, I find your work great source of information and a valuable resource for future generations!

Husna Anwar, Blackburn, England – What a trail down memory lane. Not that I was born in Zanzibar but all that I've heard from my parents who were JANGBARIAS.. My parents and parents in law owned the blacksmiths on Mlandege. We live up to our names, we are Loharwadhas. Apparently my grandfather was responsible for the 'merry go round' for the Eid festival on Mnazimoja back in those days! Definitely spiritually connected to Zanzibar!

Muhammad Hanif Kana, Mombasa, Kenya – I was surfing web for Muslim Bhadala Jamaat and suddenly found your article. I am very much impressed with your life history and all other facts. I belong to Kutchi Sunni Muslim Bhadala family. Thanks a lot brother for your informative and impressive articles.

Mukesh Khimji Babla, Baroda, India - Queer exitment going through your website, never knew i could find such website which brings back ones dreams, kudos to you. I shall send it to all my Jangbari Bhatias, the



existence of such an effort to keep root alive. I am one of Zanzibar Bhatias and belong to Mawji Vallabhdas family. My fore fathers, Vallabhdas Ranchhordas and Ranchhordas Ramji came to Jangbar in the year 1860. We belong to Bhadreswar in Cutch and many Agakhanis are known to me. I studied in class IV in Agakhan School in Zanzibar and my principal was Mr Pasco. Very little memories lie today but even a drop makes me delighted. Ahsante, i stayed opposite D'DON'MILANS jewelry shop and next to the Brigestone tyre shop, also there was a ready made shirts shop. Thank you.

Ram Sidi Karavadra, India - I read about the Ithnashris in Zanzibar and the old memories were once more alive. I was in Zanzibar and lived there from 1948 to 1964. I studied at Sir Euan Smith Madressa and later at King George the vith Secondary School. I left zanzubar after the revolution in 1964. Going through this all about Zanzibar, now at 61, I still find it difficult to forget the beautiful island where i passed my childhood at shambha. I lived at Gambhoo and my father was a farmer/vegetable cultivator at a place now called Shamba ya Baniani opposite lake Sableni three miles from Zanzibar town on the road to Chuwaka. I had many Ithnashri friends, a few Memon, some African and a few Arabs who were either studying with me at ESM or King George the vith Secondary School. I still remember the Mnazimoja fare, Forozani, the three theatres – Sulatana, Majestic and Empire. It now seems like a dream. I crave to once visit Zanzibar, the Zanzibar I loved and still love, the unforgettable Zanzibar. My father had many friends, Ramju Zakaria and Fakira, all at the vegetable market. My father has expired and so would have many of his friends. Thank you for bringing the old memories back.

Sudhir Suchak, Troy, Michigan, USA - Just started reading your memoirs. It brought back so many memories of Zanzibar. I grew up on the the island and also went to ESM and King George VI School. Mention of the names of all those incredible teachers took me back to my school days. You forgot Miss English. She was the English teacher for Form I and II. She was a pistol. Didn't put with any nonsense.

Jane Osborne, nee Field, England -I so enjoyed reading your article. I was born in Zanzibar 1946. My father was a British Police Officer there,



but because of my mother's health we left for Northern Rhodesia before I was a year old. I have not come across anyone else from Zanzibar before, so I particularly enjoyed learning about my birthplace from someone who knows and loves it so well.

My father was very English and did not talk much about his work. What I know about my parents' time in Zanzibar, came mostly from my mother. In 1945 my parents were in Pemba where my father was involved in organizing the State Visit of Sultan Sayed Khalifa of Zanzibar to the island. I have his plans of the timetable and some photos he took of the occasion. My mother told me about the time she and my father attended a banquet with the Sultan. The Sultan asked my mother, pregnant with me, to sit on his right as she might be carrying the Messiah. When I was born he sent my parents his congratulations and commiserations and hoped they would have a boy next time. He also sent me a very solid silver teaspoon with a clove pattern on the handle. It is one of my most cherished possessions.

Marzia Nasser, Dubai, UAE - I was born in Zanzibar. I was studying in St. Joseph's Convent School. I did my secondary education in Ben Bella Secondary School. Taught in Mkunazini School for 1 year (National Service). Then left for DSM. in 1969 . Got married in 1972 and then went to stay in Tanga. In 1981 came to Dubai. Since then I am in Dubai. I visited Zanzibar during Chehlum in 1994, and again in 1999. I wish to go again. I used to show around my children- Sajeda and Salma. Sajeda (my elder daughter) passed away on 21st September, 2001 in Dubai. I was wondering if my friends who remember me can send me an email. I have no contact of any of my friends. Whenever I read about Zanzibar (my home-town). I recall back my memories. I had really a good time. But now Zanzibar is dead. It is a pity. So many buildings have collapsed.

Sultan Somjee, Canada - Informative. Keeps the connections to the roots alive. Lots of feelings in the writing.

Altaf Sadikot (Hakimji), London, England - I am a Jangbari Bohora. Your article is lucid and humble. I was greatly moved by it. It brings back wonderful fond memories of life in Zanzibar. Thank you for allowing us to share your wonderful experiences.



Mohamed Bhalloo, Toronto, England - The web site for Zanzibar is one of its kind, very professionally narrated and makes us very emotional. I would be delighted to offer any assistance you may need.

Mounir Nassor, Paris, France - I am the son of Asghar Mamodaly Nassor and Shirine Mamodaly Jivah. I belong to the Kucchi subgroup of the Gujarati Khoja Shia Ithnashri community that settled in Madagascar via Zanzibar. I currently (2005) live in Paris where I am a doctorate student interested in and studying histories and cultures of India, past and present. I was told that one of my great grand-father on my Dad's side, Nasser Sharif or his brother Vally Sharif, was assassinated in Jangbar (Zanzibar) in the early 1900s. I just wonder if any of you have heard about it and know more about it. If so, do let me know (mounirnassor@yahoo.co.in). And thank you so much for this insightful site, specially the parts devoted to the history of the Khojas and the moving testimonies of different people in your guest book.

Subodh Naik, Dallas, Texas - I saw your site. It brought back tons of sweet memories. I was in Zanzibar & Tanzania in June 2002. loved every minute of it. I came back ""home "" to Zanzibar after 36 years. Left in '64 for the UK & came back in '66 & then 2002!!! I remember you very well, we were at King George IV School. You look the same. I remember you in my mind's eye as you looked in '64. If you are ever in this part of the world we would be honored to have you & your family over. I met people who fondly remembered my father (an Arab gentleman, of all the places in Bweju) and one in Ngorongoro Serena Hotel who even remembered me. I took hundreds of photos - I plan to publish a photographic coffee table book soon. I also want to set up some clinics in Zanzibar in my father's memory. There was not a single day when my parents did not talk about Zanzibar - they truly loved it & missed it dearly. He always said that Zanzibar was haven on earth and that he was lucky enough to have lived there. He passed away on Feb 9, 1984 - 21 years ago, my mother in 2000. I keep in touch with several Zanzibaris here in Texas. You have done a marvellous job and thanks to you, lots of names, people and places are reminiscence once again.



Penrad, Jean Claude, Paris, France - As a social anthropologist working in East Africa and as a simple human being having friends in Zanzibar, I appreciate very much historical documentation and iconography you have gathered on Ithnashri people.

Aziz Virani (Mangu), Vancouver, Canada - Isn't it just wonderful to share the memories and be able to bring all Jungbaris together through your guest book?

Satyen Sanghavi, Chicago, USA - I was just surfing the internet for Zanzibari mix recipe and I got your web site. The article was very interesting to read. I had been to Dar and Zanzibar on a tour. I was quite fascinated with winding alleys, bustling bazaars, mosques of Zanzibar and colourful Kariakoo Market, Mt Kilimanjaro National Park, Ngorongoro Crater, Serengeti National Park etc in the mainland. I also remember having lots of coconut water, jugus, kawa, mangoes, Zanzibari fruits and most of all the Zanzibari mix. I was wondering if you can provide me the recipe of Zanzibari mix and the bhajias and pili pili chutney you serve along with it.

Shabbir Master Baker, New York, USA - Your web site is really fantastic and excellent. I was very pleased to see that you have acknowledged my late father Marhum Master Baker who was a staunch supporter of the azadari of our beloved Imam Hussein A.S. Every place I go, when I mention that I am the youngest son of Master Baker, people immediately acknowledge the good services that he gave to the community in Zanzibar. Here in New York, we call it the second Zanzibar. Majority of our people are of Zanzibar descent.

Abbas Murad MD Kermali, Ankara, Turkey - Though I was born in DAR I always consider myself as a Jangbari. It was excellent to go through your site, what I have seen is new but this is history that I heard from Yusufali Gulamali Dharsi (Sal sabil's son), my maternal grandfather. Believe me, my wife is Turkish, but she loves Zanzibar as if she had been there and lived there before.

Haydarali Jeraj, Dar es salaam, Tanzania – You have done a wonderful job done in creating the 'Recollections'. I also want to bring



to your attention that a few months ago I had met an old gentleman who introduced himself to me as GULLU KALYAN and immediately after that I got to read your work. I just wanted to tell you that this great cricketer of Agakhan team of yester years, once considered as one of our finest batsmen, is still alive and has a lot of information regarding the past cricketing era. I wonder if you would like to meet him. He presently stays in Upanga, very opposite the Las Vegas Casino premises. I often see him waiting for a transport to Jamaatkhana at around 6.00 pm every day. Your work has inspired me so much that I thought may be you would make some use of this grand old man's experience and add it to your work.

Prafula Khimdas, Toronto, Canada - Reading your narrative on Zanzibar brought back a lot of memories-all those familiar places and names. The pictures of all those famous beaches also brought back memories of great picnic we used to have there. We will never have that type of life again anywhere. You mention that Master Sheriff was your eldest brother, we knew him well through his daughter Fatma. Fatma and my sister Bhanu were very good friends but in the aftermath of revolution we lost touch with each other. If i remember correctly, she left for Pakistan to do medicine.

I am sure you know my family. Zanzibar was a small place and we knew each other by face if not by name. I went to Zanzibar in 1994 and i couldn't believe how many elderly people approached me, 'Mtoto wa Kashiram'. Pre-revolution there was a silent respect and understanding for everyone.

My younger brother Subhash also studied at Lumumba. My older brother Kanu is in Dar es salaam. He used to sit at Babu Panwala's shop in Portuguese Street. We used to live near Zanzibar Hotel. My father was working for Zanzibar Voice. He used to eat lots of pan with tobacco which caused him throat cancer and he passed away in 1969. You may remember me too, i walk with crutches. You have written the history in minute details. When i was reading the article i was lost in Zanzibar, could smell mohogo, karanga etc of Forodhani.

Madhursinh Kapadia, Dar es salaam - When you meet a Zanzibari you



get ""Harufu ya Karafu"" smell of Cloves. I pray to almighty God that he gives all the Joys and Happiness to all the Zanzibaris for the rest of their life span. AMEN.

Issak Esmail Issak, Oslo, Norway - Within just a few pages Mr. Fazal has captured compactly a spectacular breathtaking rendezvous to my Zanzibar, to our Zanzibar of the fifties! People, places, events all warmly recalled and made precious then and at a distance. Zanzibar remains a place not in geography, but in time, it is as if it is all there, - we just need to take a time-ride and arrive. For most of us it remains a large part of us, and we are not being sentimental or nostalgic. As Mr. Fazal has described so vividly and with such beauty, Zanzibar was a place unique, Zanzibar is a place that always will be unique. Thank you for this delicious trip, Abdulrazak!

Husain Marashi (Son of Sultanali & grandson of Sayid Hassan, Agha Najafi), Detroit, Michigan, USA - Thank you for sharing your memories of Zanzibar. I left Zanzibar with my parents few months before the revolution of 1964. All my family never went back to Zanzibar after that departure. I was only nine years old at that time. My parents have both passed away since, but I still cherish my birth place to this day. I read your mothers memories very sadly. It reminded me of my mother too. May Allah bless you for sharing your precious memories. I always dream of going back to Zanzibar, and visit my childhood memories.

Murtaza Mohamedraza Tharoo, Tanga - Mashaallah! Jazakallah! This is just awesome. As I write this my eyes are full of tears.... reminding me of back home .. of the old times..Mashaallah I pray Allah give you the Tawfiq to maintain this as well as add more information. I am a lover of archives and history, Thus this is just very touching.

Kaline Don Millan Selden, Banstead, Surrey, UK - It was amazing to read everyones comments. I was surprised how I recognized some names and wonder how many would recognize mine!! Daughter of late Mr & Mrs D.Don Millan. I visited Zanzibar this year with two other friends who were born there, Rasila Acharya and Hasina Jaffer Ali (my best friend). Had



a lovely reunion after so many years since the revolution! Zanzibar will always be in my heart. I remember Zehra Peera, Hasina's sister, and sadly she has now passed away. Very good recollections, thank you for this!!

Onaly Kapasi, Boston, USA - My father Abdulkarim Kapasi was a teacher at the Agha Khan school in Zanzibar. I spent first five fun filled years in Unguja. My dad was born in Zbar where he also taught English to the sultan's family. I remember their son Thaimur with whom we scaled the palace wall that looked over the street. I returned to Zanzibar and visited our childhood home in the stone town and it seemed that time had stood still! During our visit we stayed at Mtomi Marine a quaint place about 10 minutes off the stone town. I came to Boston on a Harvard fellowship from Nairobi where I worked at KNH and thence been in Boston. Zanzibar lives on in my mind's eye!

Surendra Naik, Dallas, Texas, USA - What a Website! You have put an amazing collection of stories, and photographs that brings memories back very vividly. To a cricketer (and the one who played cricket at the ESM and then the Gov't Boys Secondary School, Hindus, and then played for Zambia in the Quadrangular tournaments in Nairobi in 1968 and 1972), the names Rusi Madon, Tehempton Bhumgara, Rati Bulsara, Haridas Ganatra, Dara (umpire) Keki Talati, Rusi Feroz, of the Cosmos, Golo Mshamba, Kabana, Sherali Ndege, Baker Tejani who was my classmate in 1952, was just unthinkable.

I am Mr.B.G.Naik's eldest son, and left for Zambia in 1953 after finishing at the Gov't. Boys Sec.School in 1952. We are settled in Dallas,Texas for the past 26 years. My wife Urmila is the daughter of Mr. M.N.Desai (Gov't Boys Secondary School). We went to Zanzibar in 1996, and visited every street corner, and then realized that we were living in one of the finest spots of the world. The joy of meeting a Jangbari is truly unique! Words cannot express the joy that one would experience by visiting this site. Keep up the great work. Congratulations.

Les Gonsalves, Chicago, USA - I am from Zanzibar. left in 1967 and have been in the States since 1968. My dad was an officer in the Port & Marine. Just aot back from a fantastic occasion in Toronto of the ex



Zanzibaries. They called the event the ZANDO. Amazing to see the strong camaraderie that still exists within us after all the time. Guess must have been the cloves that permeated our bloodstream to allow us to bond so tightly.

Raza Dungersi, New Yourk, USA - Out of all our deeds performed in all the years we live, there are some that are so deeply entrenched in our minds that we recall them year after year. One such occasion that forms part of the core of my reminiscences is the Mahe Ramadhan Iftar program I used to attend as a youth ,with my father ,at your residence on the 28th Day of the Month of Ramadhan. What an occasion it was! Master Sharif would recite something, i think it was Khatme Quran procedure. Then I remember Habib Rashid Jetha (he use to be your dad's buddy, paying him courtesy visit every morning) he too would recite something, his melodious voice emanating from his luminous face. We would be anxiously waiting to hear Azan from Juni Misid minaret. Then would come tea, and of course, Kalio Pauu. We would come hungry, go back home happy.

Then there was that Darsa. For you it was Sharif Dewji, Kiwanjani and Nai Misit and God knows where else. You would be late, sometimes, keeping me waiting! For Fordhani! All that and more! All that now is but part of my well treasured memory That keeps me going. Age is catching up, memory is getting,misty, cloudy;night is approaching, sunlight is dissipating. What was so clear becomes blurry. Well, the laws of Nature never fail: WHEN BELLS TOLL,KINGS MUST OBEY.

Jer Udvadia, Basking Ridge, New Jersey, USA - My parents were Arnavaz and Ardeshir Arjani. My father was the headmaster of ESM. I am the youngest of 6 children. I left Z'bar after the revolution at the age of 11. Thanks for some great memories.

Rashid Al Barwani, Muscat, Oman - Hi Abdul, I am an Arab, and you are an Indian. What is the common thing between us???? We both come from the same place ""ZANZIBAR"".

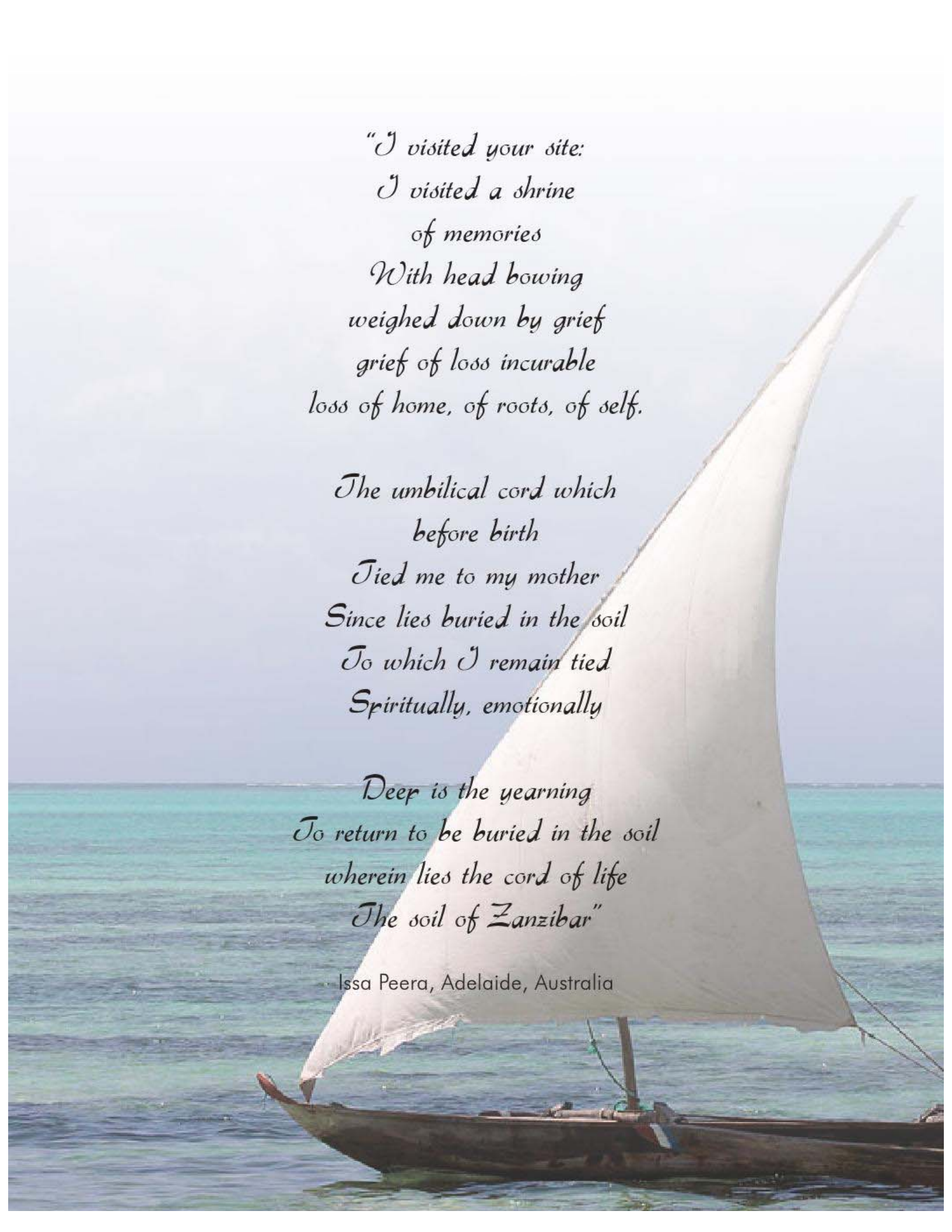










A sailboat with a large white sail is positioned on the right side of the image, sailing on a turquoise sea under a pale sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

*"I visited your site:
I visited a shrine
of memories
With head bowing
weighed down by grief
grief of loss incurable
loss of home, of roots, of self.*

*The umbilical cord which
before birth
Tied me to my mother
Since lies buried in the soil
To which I remain tied
Spiritually, emotionally*

*Deep is the yearning
To return to be buried in the soil
wherein lies the cord of life
The soil of Zanzibar"*

Issa Peera, Adelaide, Australia



