

## ZANZIBAR'S SCHOOL FEZ



**By Abdulrazak Fazal** *Updated: August 2020*



This building adjacent to the Ithnashri mosque in Zanzibar was once our 'School FEZ' ('Fez' being terminology used for a religious institution) where day and night we were provided religious education. The 'maalims who had taught Koran here during the daytime included Maalim Maulidi, Maalim Rajabu, Agha Abdul Shustari and Mulla Suleman (Karo). Maalim Mohamed Sheriff (Master Sheriff) and Maalim Kassam (Goth) taught 'diniat' in Gujarati. Also, Akberbhai Dharsi conducted his letter and typewriting classes here. It is said that Maalim Rajabu was a firm disciplinarian. At a later stage after his retirement he had calmed down completely. He was then running a taxi and his humanitarian act of providing free service to the poor and old ladies can never be forgotten by some of us old timers.

During Agha Abdul's tenure as 'Maalim' I used to attend the morning School Fez. Agha Abdul was humble and very kind. There would be a recess time at around 10 o'clock when we students went downstairs to buy 'bajia & mbatata' and 'njugu' from Chacha Janu (Janmohamed Kermalli) who used to station himself there along with

his handcart. I also recall the afternoon School Fez and Mulla Suleman (Mulla Karo) being our 'Maalim'. A 'majlis' would be held every Thursday afternoon under Mulla Karo's supervision and 'hadise kisa' and 'marsia' being recited. Also, a platter of Marie biscuits collected from Taki Dactar's dispensing shop that was right opposite there and distributed as 'fatya' to students. Mulla Suleman was very strict with the students. He was dark in complexion and the Zanzibarians having a penchant for calling people by way of nickname had named him 'Mulla Karo'. He recited the Muharram majlises at Mehfile Panjatan and so a 'Mulla'. He had also been entrusted with the task of winding the 'Beit al Ajaib' clock (Zanzibar's 'Big Band') key.

Reverting to the school it was the Night School Fez to which a lot of prestige was attached. Interestingly at the Night School we were made to wear a white Zanzibar hat and a shirt that did not have to be tucked in abidance by the Islamic etiquette. The maalims at the Night School Fez were in a large number and provided honorary service. Later the school shifted to a new complex built by Husain Dharamsi Gangji on the Kiponda motorway beside my house (now Kiponda School). The new School Fez was eventually transformed into a Secondary School to facilitate students who had failed to gain admission in the Government Schools. That was sometime in the late 50s. In fact, this old School Fez building seen in the photograph is very much historic. When the 'Khojas' were divided in the 1870s into 'Ismailis & Ithnashris' the Ithnashris used this building for their prayers prior to the building of their mosque that lies adjacent to it. The lane along there leads to the Ismailis' jamaatkhana.

▶ **'The Sultan's Spymaster, Peera Dewjee of Zanzibar' by Judy Aldrick**

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