

## ZANZIBAR'S ANGELIC MAALIM KASSAMALI CHANDOO – OUR VERY OWN 'MOTHER TERESA'



**By Abdulrazak Fazal** *Updated: November 2020*



### ◆ **Tribute by Alhaj Hassan Ali M Jaffer of Mombasa (Kenya)**

The presence of the noble and angelic Maalim Kassamali Chandoo in Zanzibar amidst us was heartening and a matter of great pride for us. Residing with his maternal grandparents, the Ali Satchus (opposite Abedi), he was my neighbour, just a few houses away from mine. As my Maalim in Lumumba College (formerly King George vi) I treasured the book 'Koran in English' by Pickthall that he had presented to me. Humility was his best quality; irrespective of race, religion, or creed he was accessible to one and all.

Maalim Kassamali was always a very religious man. The first thing he did when he went to Oregon, USA, in the early 1960s was to go to see the bank manager and ask if he could keep his scholarship money in the bank without receiving any interest that is forbidden in Islam. The manager was surprised and considered him whimsical, but he respected his customer's religious beliefs. After completing his studies post the Revolution Maalim returned to Zanzibar where he taught at Lumumba College for

many years. Maalim left an everlasting impression on all of us who knew him, He was no ordinary person but a symbol of virtue, nothing less than a saint, and a shining example to others. He was a down to earth person. He lived a very simple life. He needed only a couple of white 'khanzu' and his characteristic white Zanzibari hat which he would wear regardless of the occasion.

Whatever Maalim saved he shared with other less fortunate ones without anybody knowing, he was of the belief that charity was a duty and done in such a way that the left hand does not know what the right is doing. In one instance he had given a loan to somebody in difficulties. Later when that person came to repay Maalim refused to take it saying that it was not a loan and he should offer that money to somebody who was in need. Maalim had won the respect of Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Professor Abdul Sheriff's friend Maalim Salum Mzee had described Maalim Kassamali as 'Walee', and according to the Muslims that is really a great honour. He would stop at any mosque at the time of prayers without considering the sect, because he considered all mosques houses of Allah.

Later Maalim went to work in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and undoubtedly must have performed as many 'Haj' as he could. According to Brother Mohamed Sultan Gulamhusain (now in Toronto, Canada) who happened to be in Jeddah Maalim on receiving his salary kept aside household money and a bit for his wife and daughter while the rest he distributed among the needy including his colleagues at work. His home in Jeddah was very simple. He did not even keep a sofa. He had an ordinary carpet and cushions along the wall where he entertained his visitors. This despite the fact that he was entitled to furniture expenses allowance. He simply gave away the extra money to the poor. He used to volunteer to clean the mosque that was near his house. He had taken it upon himself ensuring the cleanliness of the mosque, ablution area and the toilets. He woke up early in the morning to go to the mosque for 'namaaz' irrespective of the climatic condition. After office hours he would take his poor neighbours' children for a drive in his car.

Maalim was a Senior Manager of Jamjoom Consulting Architectural Corporation. One incident at the time of the meeting for appraising staff performance and salary rise that Mohamed Sultan relates was the management proposing a certain rise in Maalim's salary but Maalim refused it. The GM viewed that Kassamali might not have been happy with the amount and suggested a further increase to which Maalim stated that whatever salary he received was in fact more than sufficient for his needs. He therefore suggested apportioning his rise to the lowly paid staff members. Maalim was highly respected for his honesty and nobleness, and always given preference to lead 'jamat namaaz'.

All along Maalim was being persuaded by the Al Muntazir Administration to come to Daressalaam to teach the community children. Eventually Maalim tendered his resignation with Jamjoom whose owner tried very hard to persuade Maalim to change his mind, but he said that he had given his word to Al Muntazir and must

honour it. Maalim left a well-paid job and returned to Daressalaam to serve Al Muntazir School. According to Professor Abdul Sheriff what impressed most about Maalim was that he was utterly nonsectarian. He taught children religion in a nonsectarian way that some narrow-minded co-religionists thought was misleading the children and he was told to resign. In fact, the students loved him. Brother Sajjad Tejani who was a student then writes in a tributary article that the best gift he received on his wedding day was Maalim Kassamali's presence at the mosque in Stanmore, London.

Without any rancor and fuss Maalim Kassamali returned to Zanzibar. His wife Bai Marzia started losing her eyesight but the two never complained. Whenever anyone would meet them, they were cheerful and gracious to Almighty. Maalim never spoke against anyone. If he heard somebody talking backbiting others, he would try to change the subject and in case the person continued with his talk Maalim would keep repeating 'Astagfirullah'. During his illness despite obvious pain he never complained about it. Professor Sheriff during one of his visits reminded him of the stamp that was issued on the occasion of Zanzibar's Independence Day and designed by our Art teacher Maalim Abdulla Farhan showing Muslim Sunni and Shia mosques, Catholic and Anglican Christian cathedrals as well as a Hindu temple on the theme of religious tolerance in Zanzibar. Maalim's eyes suddenly brightened and he thanked Allah for it.

Sadly, Maalim succumbed to the inevitable. Indeed, a remarkable and endearing personality. There never shall be anybody like Maalim Kassamali Chandoo again.

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