

MEHFILE PRIVATE



By Abdulrazak Fazal *Updated: August 2020*



Those old timers keen on Zanzibar's Khoja History may like to detect a fallacy about a certain bulletin that talks about Zanzibar's MEHFILE PRIVATE. Here we need to analyze our pre 1881 Zanzibar ancestry that was devout and extremely religious. It is understood that there was 'mehraab' in the Zanzibar 'jamaatkhana' built in 1838. The Khojas prayed 'namaaz', recited 'kissa' (majlis') and also served 'nyaz' in the form of 'juro' or 'naadi'. They even went to Hajj and ziyrat.

The present jk was renovated and extended in 1905. Whether it still retains the 'mehrab' is not known. Anyhow, the 1838 - 1881 period had its twists and turns. Modernity became the norm and the orthodox ones seceded. The conversion was a gradual process. Some of our ancestors before the conversion held 'kissa' (majlis) on regular bases at their residence in private. Therefore, to quote the MD Kermalli

mansion or some other places as the initial Mehfile Private is a misconception. Also, to associate Dewji Jamaal's 'Bustani' with 'Mehfile Private' as recently as 1930 is a misinterpretation. 'Bustani' was the result of Dewji Jamaal, an outcast at the time, being denied burial of a child in his family at the Khoja Ismaili cemetery. He bequeathed 'waqf' the land that he had bought at Sokomohogo/Vuga to serve as a family grave. The place came to be known as 'Bustani' and every Sunday till 1964 'majlis' were being held here. Some prominent personalities like Marhum Mohamed Jaffer Sheriff Dewji and Ibrahim Husein Sheriff Dewji are buried here.

The actual 'Mehfile Muhibbane Husain' commonly known as 'Mehfile Private' was administered and run by an Ismaili, Abdulrasul Peera Dewji who converted to Ithnashri much later in the 1940s. It was a secret place where the Ismailis and Ithnashries met surreptitiously and hence the name 'Mehfile Private' was given to it. Interestingly influenced by his wife one of Abdulrasul Peera's sons Gulamali converted back to Ismaili. Gulamali's son Shenny Dewji's wife Audrey Dewji of London seems very keen on our history. In fact, the book 'The Sultan's Spymaster Peera Dewjee' authored by Judy Aldrick is the brainchild of Audrey and initiated by her. Abdulrasul Peera of Mehfile Private was the son of the Sultan's Spymaster.

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

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