

DARESSALAAM THROUGH THE CHANGING TIMES



By Abdulrazak Fazal *July 2020*



The journey to Dsm from Zanzibar in those days of the early 50s was mostly by the ships 'Al Said' or 'Al Hadhra'. Recalling vaguely that adventure; the early morning, docks, porters and passengers yelling at each other, boarding the ship, the siren and the ship drifting away, passengers spreading mats and placing refreshments, the open deck and then the rains. We reached Dsm in the afternoon. The ship did not anchor at the harbour. We had to be ferried in a motorboat that had come to collect us. The journey took some 5 hours unlike today.

The first sight of Dsm that comes to mind was the exquisite Ithnashri 'Musafirkhana' minaret that was opposite my uncle's house where we had put up. Dsm then was wondrous and had its ethereal beauty. There was a marked difference between its houses and the Zanzibar stone houses that were adjacent to each other and almost clinging to the opposite ones. Also, the roads were wider compared to the stone town that abounds in gullies and alleys. Oyster Bay breathed refreshing coolness. Right opposite the house was 'Osman Tea Room' where we would go to buy 'paan'. In the evening i accompanied my uncle to the 'Tanganyika Printers' across there to collect

his Gujarati periodicals. Next to it was 'Kalyanji Bhanji' where he bought the 78 rpm records. The hits then were songs from 'Barsaat', 'Awara', 'Deedar' and 'Beju Bawra'. On Saturday nights it meant seeing a film at Odeon where we'd our tickets reserved through Manubhai.

It is said that when Mehboob Khan's Aan, the first Indian film in colour, starring Dilip Kumar was being released at Odeon a procession with drummers was taken out through the streets of Dsm. The procession was led by the Aan banner carrier riding on a horse and announcing over loudspeaker the release of the film.

Today the evenings in Dsm unlike the past are uneventful and drag. Once there were as many as seven Cinema Houses (Odeon, Empress, Avalon, Cameo, Amana, New Chox and Empire besides the Drive in Cinema) that have been forsaken for some new set ups. On Wednesday evenings all roads led to the Drive In as cars and pick-ups packed with cine goers headed for the film there. Honestly speaking the 'multiplex' despite modern technology do not attract the old timers. Nothing to beat the pleasure of seeing a film in those old theaters. Also gone are those days when spectators thronged Government Service, Gymkhana and Chungani grounds to watch thrilling cricket and volleyball contests between various communities. Today Gymkhana provides membership to only the elite group that dominates its golf course and tennis courts. In the earlier days, the Isherwood Cricket Tournament played among the schools thrived. The Azania/Aga Khan encounter was always a thriller. The Azania boys were groomed by their teacher CD Patel who himself represented Tanganyika. Nowadays students no more give priority to Azania but prefer private schools like the Agakhan Mzizima, Shaban Robert or Almuntazir. The rich opt for International School run by the Americans.

Those restaurants famous for the peculiar taste of their specialties like Dsm Hotel (kachori & sambharo), Naaz ('mix'), Pandya (thali), Embassy (bhajia), Pakodiwala (bhelpuri), City (shrikhand puri) and Koyas (ice cream) have disappeared from the scene. Now appear barbeques occupying part of Jamhuri Street (formerly Ring Street). The 'A.T. Shop' and 'K.T. Shop' famous for the taste and flavour of their kabab and tea still flourish. Purnima caters to those with taste for vegetarian food. 'Raj Kapoori Paan' shop is no more there. The good old Abdulbhai is said to be somewhere in Toronto. Also, Mehta Paan and Iceland have quit the scene.

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 nonexistent. People still flock Oyster Bay but it is devoid of its past sophistication. Its supply of 'kitale with mbatata' continues. The commercially inclined Slipway and Sea Cliff also attract the public. Unlike today Acacia Avenue with its Askari monument was familiarly intimate, and alongside the stretch of 'Nano Dario' (seashore) that made a lively resort and welcomed the crowd even beyond midnight. Today Dsm is metropolis. The skyscrapers adorn the city including the once shanty Kariako and Simbazi. Dsm stretches beyond Mbezi. Msasani, Masaki and Mikocheni portray spectacular bungalows and where the affluent reside. Many have shifted from the city to these newly developed localities.

In the past children played tennis ball cricket and volleyball in the openness of the veranda (lavani). I recall the Ithnashri mosque that was small and its attendance

hardly a hundred. In the evening, the elderly gathered in groups and sat on the pavement around the lime tree. It had scenic beauty. Today it is transformed into a grand monument. The Bohoras have also grown in number. They have put up their new mosque adjoining their cricket ground at Upanga. Their major functions are now held there.

The Ismailis formed the majority and numbered more than 15,000. They reigned the place and Daressalaam's initial development must be attributed to them. In fact, full credit to them for inhabiting Upanga by putting up scores of structures. They built as many as 5 'jamaat khana' (Dur, Upanga, Karimabad, Kariako and Changombe) but the IPS retreat and their exodus mainly to Canada has left only 1500 Ismailis today. The irony of time!

The enterprising Hindu elders still sit outside their Kisutu temple. Even in today's time people visit TB Seth library to read the Indian periodicals and papers. I am reminded of the late Urmilaben Jhaveri who had shared her story of the library on our 'Namaskar East Africa' forum. Sadly, she died recently in Noida, India. Her Husband Kantilal Jhaveri, Mwalimu's associate, had passed away earlier. Today the 'navratri gharba' at 'Luhana Mahajan', 'Bhatia Vadi' and several other spots do not stretch beyond midnight unlike the past when they continued till the wee hours and 'jalebi & ganthia' feasted. The 'diwali' night illumination and firework around 'Odeon Roundabout' that attracted hundreds is a thing of the past. Now it is a limited firework display at the Patel Ground.

The Sikh gurudwara stands tall at 'Kidongo Chakhundu' along Mnazimoja. It is famous for its 'langar'. The good old pal Dr. Kulbirsingh Gupta being our main acquaintance. I understand through this forum that even he has left for the States. Most of the old inhabitants, Sikhs as well as other community members, have fled Daressalaam and emigrated to the UK, States, Canada and Middle East. The present lot is mostly from upcountry. The expatriate class that was on the rise is now declining. The US \$ costs around sh 2300 and that affects the consumers. Karibu Dsm the 'Tanzanians living abroad' but do not crave for a vision of the same time period Dsm or you are in for a disappointment.

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