

The Asser Damani and Ramzanali Jivraj Family of Kigoma – A Journey of Destination

Asser Damani or The Asserwala family originated from Madhapar, Cutch, India. Asser had five sons and two daughters; Ladha, Jaffer, Moledina, Khalfan, Karim, Rehmat and Fatma Asser. Many of his grandsons migrated from Madhapar to Bukoba, Tanzania. It was believed that 75% of all the earliest members of Bukoba Jamaat were from this family. The first Imambargha in Bukoba was built from iron sheets in 1904 and was located at the lake shore near Duka Kubwa owned by Omar Abdul Karim.

Some of the first people from Asser Damani family to have settled in Bukoba were his two grandsons Rashid Moledina and Ahmed Jaffer who arrived from Bharapar, Cutch in 1895. They were later joined by more of the grandsons Kassamali Moledina, Gulamali Moledina, Janmohamed Jaffer, Hassanali Jaffer, Salehmohamed Jaffer, Hasham Jaffer, Ebrahim Khalfan, Jivraj Ladha and Noormohamed Ladha. Here is the story of one of the grandsons of Asser.

Jivraj Ladha

Jivraj Ladha Asser was born in 1884 in Madhapar, Kutch India. Jivraj left India for Africa in early 1913. His son Ramzanali was 3 years old at that time and was left in the custody of his brother Alimohamed Ladha Asser in Mumbai, 67 Marine Drive. In Mombasa, he worked with Rashid Moledina Asser's Company and from there he journeyed to Bukoba. In Bukoba, he worked for a company called 'Duka Kubwa' delivering essential goods to the German army. In 1916 he suffered from 'Black Water', a killer disease at that time and passed away. Jivraj Ladha Asser was the first Asian to be buried in Bukoba. His son, Ramzanali being the only child and the inheritor became an issue as to who should take his custody. Ramzanali's paternal grandfather of Madhapur and maternal grandfather of Sinugra/Nagalpur organized a meeting to resolve the issue.

The paternal grandfather Ladha Asser was the right-hand advisor to Maharao Khengarji, the Maharaja of Kutch while the maternal uncle (mama) Hirji Visram Bandali Nathwani was an appointed counsellor of Sinugra by Maharao Khengarji. Both the families were big landlords. Hirji Visram was also the Chairman of the tribal court (Panchayat). Both the parties were using their influence and finally it was resolved that both should have the custody of

Ramzanali for 6 months each. Thereafter Ramzanali used to stay 6 months with paternal family Ladha Asser in Madhapur and the remaining 6 months with his maternal uncle (mama) in Sinugra/Nagalpur.

Since Ramzanali was the only child of Jivraj he was very dear and liked by both the families. Most of the time Ramzanali preferred to stay in Sinugra with his maternal grandmother Purbai and aunt (mami) Fatmabai Kanji, wife of Hirji Visram. His grandmother Purbai used to organize Taziya of Imam Hussein (A.S) on Ashura from Sinugra to Nagalpur, a walking distance of 2 miles. Hirji Visram used to lead the jujus riding his horse in his full attire (as shown in the photo). In front of him was the flag (Alam) of Hazrat Abbas (A.S) and behind him was his mother Purbai who used to walk barefoot to Nagalpur.

Ramzanali was 2 years old when his mother Mongibai passed away in Mumbai in 1912. Mongibai was the daughter of Visram Bandali Khatau of Sinugra/Nagalpur Kutch. Her mother was Purbai Dharamsi Khatau Nanjiani of Nagalpur. Purbai had 4 brothers who were Jivraj, Manji, Kassim and Killu. Killu was the second martyr in the Khoja community after Lalan Aladin in Karachi. Killu was martyred whilst defending Mulla Qadir Hussein Karbalai, the Aalim who was sent by Ayatullah Sheikh Zainulabideen Haeri Mazandarani (R.A.) from Karbala Iraq to India for Tabligh of newly converted Shia Ithnasharis. Killu died in the year 1878 and was buried in Irani Cemetery in Mumbai after being denied burial in the Khoja Kabrastan. Killu was the great uncle of Ramzanali Jivraj.

At the age of 14 Ramzanali decided to leave Sinugra for Africa to join his uncle Nurmohamed Ladha Asser in Bukoba Tanganyika. Before the departure Purbai took Ramzanali to pay respect to the taziya of Imam Hussein a.s. She told him the following " bow your head down and she put her hands on Ramzanali's head and said, "By the grace of Allah (SWT) and the wasilah of Imam Hussein (A.S.) and my prayers I pray for you that wherever you will go you will multiply into 12 (*Tu hekre methi baro thinde*)". She also gave him some money and food (bhato) for the journey and also instructed him before leaving India he should go to Hussein Tekri in Jawra to pay respect to the replica of the Shrine of Imam Hussein (A.S). Ramzanali reached Bukoba in 1924.

Ramzanali established his own business in Bukoba and later on his cousin brother Gulamhussein Alimohamed Ladha Asser of Mumbai joined him. During Second World War II he incurred a big loss. In 1939, he married Mariambai Ladha Damji of Kigoma. After the marriage he went back to Bukoba to wind up his business and thereafter he settled in Kigoma.

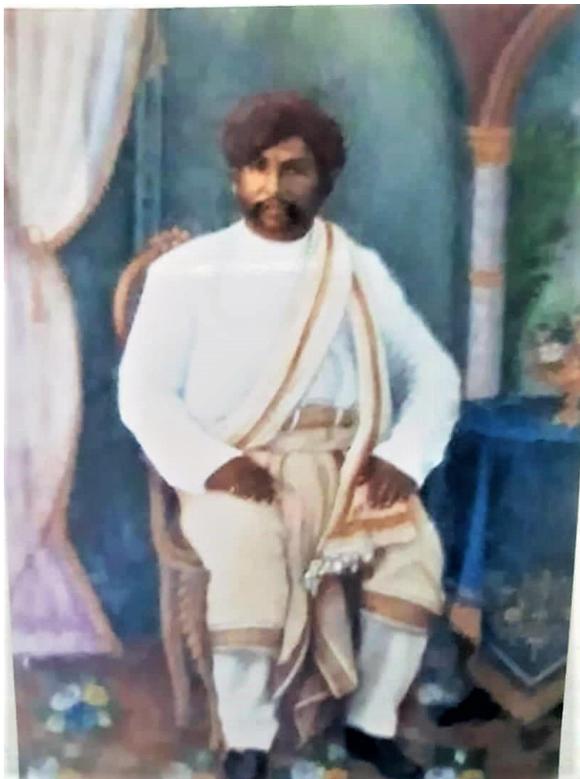
In Kigoma he started business and also was running a shop of watch repairs. The locals knew him fondly as "Ramazani Fundi Saa". Ramzanali was graced with 12 children; 5 sons and 7 daughters. Ramzanali always believed and remembered the prayers of his maternal grandmother Purbai Visram Bandali Nathwani (Nathoo).



Grave of Ladha Asser in Madhapur-Cutch, India



Grave of Jivraj Ladha Asser – First Asian grave in Bukoba in 1916.



Hirji Visram Bandali Nathwani (1881-1933) of Sinugra/Nagalpur - Maternal Uncle (Mama) of Ramzanali Jivraj popularly known as Hirji Gorio.

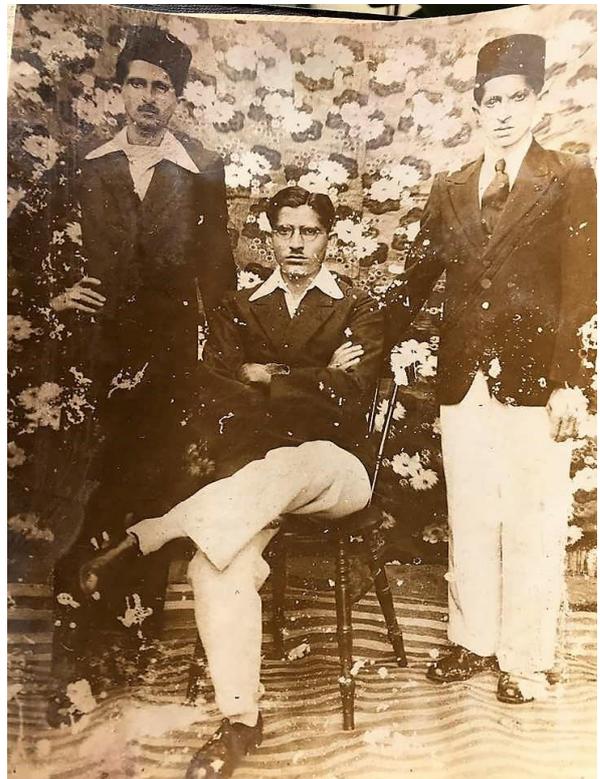


Photo taken in early 1930's.
On the right Ramzanali Jivraj Ladha Asser.
On the left Gulamhussein Alimohamed Ladha Asser and seated Nurmohamed Ladha Asser.



**Ramzanali Jivraj Ladha Asser
(1910/1981)**

We request our readers to remember the above-mentioned personalities and all the Marhumeen with Sura-e-Fateha for the maghferat of the departed souls.

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**SECRETARIAT
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