



Al-Hajj Mustafa G.R.Jaffer (1932 to 2020)

A Personal Tribute to

An Iconic Leader and a Caring Philanthropist

Hasnain Walji

My very first recollection of meeting Mustafa Bhai is forever etched in my memory. As was our practice for decades, the WF Office Bearers would meet every Wednesday afternoon at the Secretariat. On that particular day, as I walked into the office, I saw a dignified man, elegantly dressed with finely groomed hair, sporting neck hanging reading glasses, animatedly chatting with Marhum Mulla Asghar (RA).

"This is Mustafa Bhai Jaffer" said Mulla and in his inimitable style, went on to enumerate his many attributes and the contributions of the Gulamhusein Rajabali Jaffer family of Zanzibar. From the chemistry of these two men, I could tell the tremendous love and respect they had for each other. That was over three decades ago and until my last meeting with him in person, in February 2020 this year, at Albany, NY, the personal bond I had with Marhum Mustafa Bhai, remained as warm and strong as it was on the very first day, I had met him. Even his parting dua for me, invoking the intercession of Bibi Fatema (SA), had remained unchanged over the countless times I had the good fortune to have met him. Indeed, every time I met him, I could not help but notice the steadfast faith and the love of the Ahlul bait (AS), that characterized his every endeavor in the service of the Community. His passing away marks almost seven decades of philanthropy and service to humanity. Sadly, his demise is an irreplaceable loss, not just to his family but for our entire Community.

Social service and helping out in crisis are a continuing family tradition even today. This was so very evident during the upheavals of the 1964 Revolution in Zanzibar. At the great personal risk of his own life, leveraging his personal influence, Mustafa Bhai helped our families escape the tribulations, avoid forced marriages of our sisters and save community members from persecution. This act of nobility and bravery will always remain an unforgettable chapter of our Community history.

Born in Zanzibar in 1932, as a young man, he was in the service of the Zanzibar Government along with Omani Sultan's Son, Sheikh Mohamed, in the late fifties and early sixties. After the revolution in Zanzibar in 1964, he continued his government services with the Ministry of State, hosting government and religious dignitaries worldwide. From his youth to his golden years, he has continuously served the Community. Be it the Jamaat in Zanzibar or the Muslims of Zanzibar at Milad-Nabi Association, his was a life dedicated to public service. This continued upon his migration to Dar-es-Salaam in 1975, where he served the Dar-es-Salaam Jamaat in various capacities.

In keeping with the generational inclination of multiple migrations by the Khoja Community, he crossed the wide expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, just as his ancestors had traversed the Indian Ocean – this time he made New York his home in 1976. Following the family tradition of service, hardly had he settled down when he got busy in the service of the new arrivals of Community members in New York.

Now the nascent New York Jamaat had a new impetus as he began his tenure to lead the New York Jamaat for a decade. Inspiring a group of pioneers, he spearheaded the effort in finding a home for the Jamaat and helped establish the Al-Husseini Madressa Center in Queens, NY. For decades this institution remained a key steppingstone for the KSI Community in the USA. The story of the establishment of this all-important center is one of struggle, that required gumption and courage to face many hurdles. In addition to financial difficulties, there were tremendous external pressures from some influential quarters against its very establishment. I have many personal recollections of the many anxious calls from New York to London, as he doggedly struggled to bring this project to fruition. Perhaps a lesser man may have given up. But not Mustafa Bhai – who understood how central an *Imambargah* was for the very existence of the Khoja Community and how strategic it was to have a strong foundation at the gateway of North America. But then success never came to him on a plate. His achievements are a product of his own blood, sweat, and tears. For him wealth was not for status or personal luxuries, but a motivation to help others and for the betterment of our Community.

While he endeavored to give the Khoja community, a strong foundation, his services were far from being confined to the Khojas, as is evidenced by the award of a Lifetime Community Services Award from the Muslims for Peace organization in New Jersey.

Long before women empowerment efforts became prevalent in our Community, Mustafa Bhai was an early champion of women's rights. In addition to his heroic and pivotal intervention in the 1964 forced marriages, in the early nineties he funded dowries for young women to get married while simultaneously ensuring assets were in their names. His investment in the youth of the Community encompassed funding students' religious and/or secular education for room, and board because he saw education as a lifelong investment a source of sawabe jaariya.

He served as a Trustee of Masjide Ali (MFI), sharing his organizational expertise and was nominated by Ayatollah El Khoei as a Trustee of the New York based Al-Khoei Foundation. His passion for the teachings of Ahlul Bait (AS) was also evident in the establishment of Darul Tabligh in New York in the late nineties. He is also a recipient of the "Star of Service Award" by the Mulla Asgher Memorial Library and Resource Center.

Mustafabhai was one of the leading pioneers whose personal efforts in the early days of our settlement in North America have resulted in the present generations enjoying the fruits of his sacrifices. Such contributions will remain forever etched in the annals of the history of the Khoja Shia IthnaAsheri Community. As a guiding figure for NASIMCO, he was a well-respected voice of North America at World Federation conferences, both as an Executive Councilor of the WF and NASIMCO delegate. All his life he remained a close confidant of Marhum Mulla Asghar until his passing in 2000 and a lifelong supporter of the World Federation.

Beyond North America, his spirit of philanthropy carried him to many a nook and cranny, accompanying the Marhum Mulla Asghar in establishing mosques, housing projects, and helping the poor, orphans, and widows. I too had the good fortune to travel with both the towering figures on various trips. Despite his advanced years, Mustafabhai was always ready to travel under very arduous conditions. The humility and generosity I witnessed firsthand was truly humbling and inspiring as I saw the pain and empathy he felt for the poor and needy.

His signature initiative, so dear to his heart, is the Husaynia Abul Fadl in Qum – a center serving the needs of the Seminary students from the Sub-Continent. These are amongst the poorest of students who find comfort and a decent meal while attending religious events, especially during the months of Muharram and Ramadan. Ever since its establishment nearly 25 years ago, he never missed spending either Ramadan or Muharram or both each year until just a couple of years ago when he reluctantly could not due to his ailing health.

The foundation of his noble endeavors remained entrenched in his unflinching devotion to the Ahlul Bayt (AS) so vividly demonstrated by his passionate support of Azadari, through his ever-generous support in the establishment and maintenance of mehfil and Husainiyas in India Pakistan, Africa Europe and North America.

As the Chairman of the Jaffer Family Foundation (JFF) in New York, a philanthropic organization focusing on the poverty relief, medical treatment, education, housing as well as supporting religious Centers, he continued to inspire his children and grandchildren to keep the family tradition alive, by reminding them of the legacy left behind by his own father, Marhum Gulamhussein Rajabali Jaffer. I distinctly recall Mustafa Bhai reminiscing that his father, a devoted lover of the Ahlul Bayt (AS), set the bar high and was a big influence on his life and that he 'hoped that the practice of serving humanity will continue to be upheld by his children and grandchildren.' Indeed, His legacy lives on through the JFF, so ably managed by his sons and my dear friends Taki and Sadique. The JFF has become a change agent with projects on the relief of poverty, medical assistance, mokib building on the Najaf to Karbala walk route, preservation of heritage sites in India, housing projects like Al Mahdi buildings in Dar Es Salaam, women's empowerment projects in India and Pakistan, and medical projects in East Africa and Iraq, not to mention supporting Community and humanitarian projects in North America.

I feel a terrible personal sense of loss of a well-wisher and a mentor, which has left an enormous vacuum in our Community. I offer my deepest condolences to his wife, his sons, GulamAbbas, Taki and Sadique, as well as all their siblings, his grandchildren and all other members of the family. I pray that may Allah (SWT) shower the Marhum with his blessings and a place in the proximity of the Masumeen (AS) and sabre Jameel to all the family.

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