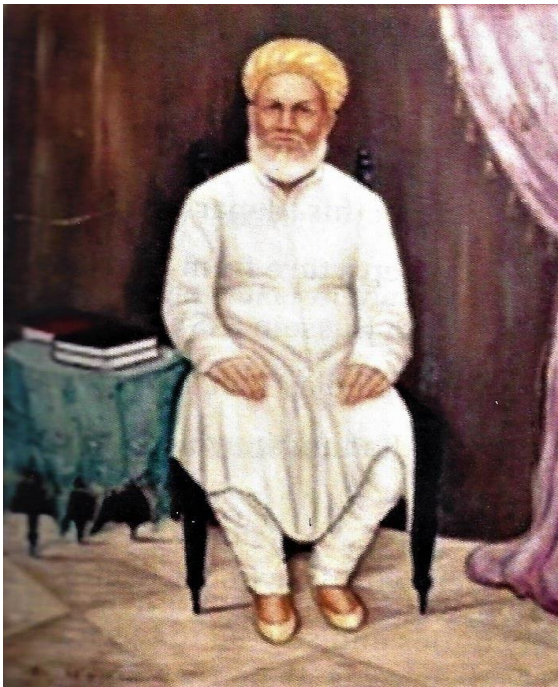


HAJI DEWJI JAMAL – 200 YEARS HAVE PASSED, HIS GREAT CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MADH'AB OF AHLULBAYT (A.S.) IN THE KSI COMMUNITY REMAINS UNPARALLELED

Haji Dewji Jamal (1820-1905)



This year marks 200 years since the birth of Dewji Jamal who is considered one of the pioneers of the Khoja Shia Ithnaasheri Community. He was amongst the founders of the Khoja Shia Ithnaasheri Community in Zanzibar in 1881.

Dewji Jamal was born in Bhavnagar, India around 1820, in a rich and mercantile family. He was an active member of the Khoja community and like all Khojas of the time, prayed Namaz, kept fasts and observed Majlises of Imam Hussain (AS). At the same time, like other Khojas, he believed in the Satpanthi ideas of reincarnation and that Imam Ali was the first Imam and tenth incarnation of God.

Around 1873, Dewji Jamal travelled from Zanzibar to Iraq for pilgrimage and at Karbala he met Mulla Qadir Hussain, an Aalim from South India who took him to the Mujtahid of the time, Ayatullah Zainul Abedin Mazandarani who explained to him that their Satpanthi/Ismaili belief of Ali to be incarnation of God was wrong. Members of the group who accompanied him also accepted the arguments by Ayatullah Mazandarani. Prior to the visit by Dewji Jamal, two other Khoja zawwars Noormohamed Meghji and Mukhi Hasham Dossa had also met Ayatullah Mazandarani who also told them that their belief about incarnation was false.

During his stay in Kerbala, one Bakshi Shujaat Baig suggested that Dewji Jamal take the services of Mulla Qadir Hussain to educate the Khoja believers and guide them about religious obligations and beliefs including the belief regarding Imam Ali (A.S.). Mulla Qadir Hussain, who was a student at Karbala was asked by Ayatullah Mazandarani to travel to India and guide the community. This led some Khojas to change their mixed Satpanthi

beliefs and leave the group which was following the Aga Khan and began to follow the Shia Ithnaasheri path. This conversion movement was the beginning of the formation of a distinct Khoja Shia Ithna-asheri Community which is now spread in India, Pakistan, East Africa, Madagascar, Europe, United Kingdom, U.S.A., Canada and Australia.

His Business:

Dewji Jamal originally operated his business in Bhavnagar. He moved to Bombay in 1850. In 1860, he opened his first East African branch in the name of Dewji Jamal & Co at Zanzibar, then a principal business centre. In about 1870 he opened a second branch at Lamu, then a principal port of Kenya, and in about 1890 he established a branch at Mombasa.

At first Dewji Jamal managed business at Zanzibar with his sons. Later Jaffer Dewji and Nasser Dewji managed the Lamu Branch while Nazerali Dewji took care of the Mombasa branch.

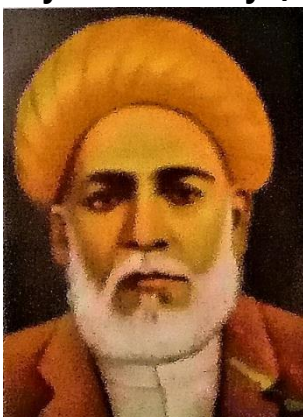
Dewji Jamal & Co. were Importers and Exporters. Their fleet of dhows transported timber, textile, all kinds of food stuff, including rice and sugar from India and exported cloves, copra, ivory, sea shells and wooden poles (Boriti) etc. from East Africa.

The profits they made were invested in landed properties in Zanzibar and adjoining islands, Mombasa and Nairobi.

They built and contributed in building mosques, community halls, Rest houses, Madressas, cemeteries and properties for rental income for charitable purposes, both in India and East Africa. The beautiful mosque on the seashore of Lamu next to the Post Office, the Hyderi Mosque and Imambada, the cemetery at Mombasa, Zanzibar and Lamu, the huge Rest House, Mosque and Madressa at Bombay and at Kurla (Bombay Suburb) - these all are their charities which today hold immense value and services to the community.

Haji Dewji Jamal died in 1905 at the age of 85 and is buried at Karbala, Iraq. He had six sons: Sheriff, Janmohamed, Peerbhai, Nazerali, Jaffer and Nasser.

Haji Sheriff Dewji (1840-1913)



In 1903, Haji Dewji Jamal asked his two sons, Sheriff Dewji and Jaffer Dewji to close the business of Dewji Jamal & Co, and form their own company, which was formed in the name of Sheriff Jaffer & Company. All the properties were valued and sold to two brothers. A gift of Rs.80,000 was made to two brothers and they were asked to collect all the outstanding debts and remit them to Bombay.

The Sheriff Jaffer & Co. were the first Bankers and first shipping agents. Sir Arthur Hardinge, British Consul at Lamu, writes in his book on East Africa that Sheriff Jaffer & Co, on some occasion, acted as Bankers to Her Britannic Majesty.

In 1912, Sheriff Dewji, who was in failing health, came to Mombasa. He suggested dissolving the partnership to avoid any misunderstanding between the heirs after his death. So, in 1912, two separate businesses, Sheriff Dewji & Sons, and Jaffer Dewji were established. Sheriff Dewji & Sons had branches at Zanzibar, Mombasa and later on at Arusha, Moshi and Tanga. Jaffer Dewji established business first at Mombasa and later opened branches at Kampala, Jinja, Mbale and Soroti.

Sheriff Dewji died in 1913 at the age of 73 and is buried at Kadhmain, Iraq. Sheriff Dewji had three sons; Mohamedali, Mohammed Jaffer and Hussein and two daughters Kulsum Gulamhussein Nazerali and Shirin Saleh Somji.

Haji Jaffer Dewji (1860-1934)

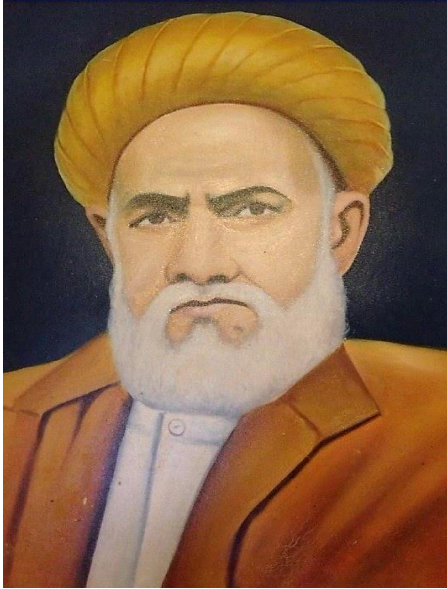


Jaffer Dewji is believed to be the founder of the Mombasa Chamber of Commerce, Indian Association, Indian Congress and The Mombasa Public Library which is now known as Seif Bin Salim Library. In 1923 Abdulla Jaffer was one of the members of the Round Table Conference, under the chairmanship of the then Governor of Kenya.

Jaffer Dewji was a connoisseur of old china, coins, stamps, carpets, old battle arms, and objects of art. His museum in his house is said to have been visited by all the notables, like Sir Winston Churchill, Lord Kitchener, Admirals, Governors of East Africa, English Princes, Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Prof. Kunzru, Indian Princes including the Maharaja of Gaekwad and the Maharaja of Kutch (India).

Jaffer Dewji died in 1934 at the age of 74 and is buried in Mumbai, India. He had 13 children. The children from his first wife Fatma Ratansi Khalfan were Mohamedhussein, Abdulla, Sakina Mohamedali Sheriff, Kulsum Mohamedali Jamal, Khairunnisa Abdulrasul Khalfan, Sughra Mohamedali Nazerali and Rukiya Jaffer Jamal. Children from his second wife Khadijabai were Abdulkarim, Molvi Alimohamed, Ahmed, Zainab Abdulla Khalfan and Fatma Mohamedtaki Abdulhussein. He had one child Aliasgar through his third marriage which was with Maryam Rajabali Bhalloo Walli.

Haji Nazerali Dewji (1842-1930)



Haji Nazerali Dewji Jamal is the founder of NazarAli Imambargah, Kurla in Mumbai. He purchased this land in 1905 in memory of his father who had passed away on 9th January 1905.

The original Imambargah Building (approx. 2000 sq.ft.) was constructed by him and his brother in law Noor Mohammed Hemraj from their personal funds.

They also formed the 'KSI Imambargah and Kabrastan Trust' on 11th August 1921 and handed over the Imambargah Property and building to this Trust for the general benefit of Khoja Shia Ithnaasharis.

Haji Nazerali Dewji Jamal passed away in Mumbai at the age of 88 on 18th October 1930. He is buried in Karbala in Wadi al Qadeem graveyard. He had 7 sons and 3 daughters from three wives. His children were: Gulamhussein, Mohamedali, Ahmed, Mohamedjaffer, Hassanali, Yusufali, Hussein, Fatma Abdulhussein Mauritiuswala, Khairunnisa Nazerali and Zehra Nazerali.

Sources: Prof. Abdul Sheriff, Zanzibar; The Endangered Species (Alhaj Hassan A M Jaffer, Mombasa), Murtaza Jaffer Dewji (Toronto), Mohamed A. Khalfan (Dar es Salaam)

We pray to Allah (SWT) by his grace and mercy to grant Marhum Haji Dewji Jamal, Marhum Haji Sheriff Dewji, Marhum Haji Jaffer Dewji, Marhum Haji Nazerali Dewji and all the Marhumeen maghferat and heavenly abode in the proximity of Ahlulbayt (A.S.), Ameen. Please remember them all with Sura-e-Fateha.

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Secretariat

Archives Section of the Federation of KSI Jamaats of Africa

19th June 2020 (27th Shawwal 1441 AH)