

The Story of “Khalfan Soap”

From interviews with Mohammed A. Khalfan, Dar-es-Salam

Khalfan was a young man when his family got him married. As things were difficult in India at the time due to drought, soon after his marriage in 1835 he set sail in a dhow for the East African coast to Lamu. Unfortunately on arrival in Lamu, the sea was extremely rough and the dhow that was carrying Khalfan to the shore capsized and Khalfan drowned. By the time news of Khalfan’s death reached Bhavnagar, six months had passed and Khalfan’s wife was pregnant. The child born was called Mohamed Khalfan. Around 1855 Mohammed Khalfan came by dhow to Zanzibar.

In 1860 Mohammed Khalfan had a son, Ali who was the first local birth in Zanzibar. When Ali grew up he was appointed Custom’s agent to the Sultan. Later he was given the management of the coconut and clove plantations of the Sultan’s sister. He had two sons, Abdulrasul who was born in 1887 and Abdalla born in 1889. In 1910, Ali Mohamed Khalfan decided to send his young sons Abdulrasul and Abdalla to Mombasa. There Abdulrasul quickly got a job as broker with Smith Mackenzie & Co, due to his fluent command of English, Kutchi, Gujarati and Kiswahili. Abdalla on the other hand went into manufacturing after he met an Ethiopian named Abdelrehaman, who told him he knew how to make soap.

Soon Abdalla had opened a small shed in Mombasa and had started manufacturing soap. Business was brisk and within a short time, ‘Khalfan Soap’, had become famous. The purchase of caustic soda from Smith Mackenzie reached such high levels that Abdalla decided it was time to build a full-scale factory. Abdalla had by then become a personal friend of Smith Mackenzie and it was this close friendship which allowed him to ask Smith Mackenzie to accept the resignation of his brother, Abdulrasul and along with him, Smith Mackenzie’s chief accountant L.F.De Mello. Land on which to build the factory was provided, by the mercantile prince and Mombasa magnate Jaffer Dewji, who was the father-in-law of both the brothers.

When the factory was built around 1920, it was the first time that a two-story factory could be seen in Mombasa. Modern machinery was imported from Krupp the giant German weapons manufacturing company during the first and second world wars. The factory had a rest room and a prayers room. A chef was imported from Bombay to do the cooking. Once the Company’s Registration Ordinance came out, Khalfan Oil Mills and Soap Factory was one of the first Ithnasheri establishments to become a Limited company. Smith Mackenzie took over the sole agency for the marketing of the soap. The factory had become so prosperous that in 1930, when the Maharao of Kutch Shree Khengarji visited Mombasa, a party was held in his honour at the factory and various dignitaries of Mombasa were in attendance.



Mombasa – 1930. The King of Kutch, Maharao Shree Kehngarji, accompanied by Prince Madansinhji visiting the Khalfan Oil Mills and Soap Factory. Sitting r-l: Late Haji Rashid Moldeina, Fazleabbas Esmailjee Jeevanjee, Late Abdulrasul Ali Mohamed Khalfan, Prince Madansinhji, Maharao Shree Khengarji, Late Haji Jaffer Dewji, Late Bandali Esmail Kalyan, Yusufali Esmailjee Jeevanjee, De Mello; standing r-l: Mohamedhusein Abdulrasul Khalfan, Late Shariff Khalfan, Late Haji Mohamed Jaffer S. Dewji (from Muhammed A. Khalfan)

The Rao of Kutch's Visit to Mombasa
From interviews with Hassan A.M.Jaffer

I remember late Kassamali Jivraj Meghji telling me that when the Rao of Kutch visited Mombasa in 1930 the elders of the Asian community wanted to hold a celebration of some sort in his honour. They approached Jaffer Dewji to host a tea party at his house. In those days Jaffer Dewji was one of the senior most Asian businessmen in Mombasa. Jaffer Dewji suggested that it would not be appropriate to only invite the Rao of Kutch for tea; after all he was the King of Kutch and had to be treated with respect in keeping with his status. He suggested that he would get the official boat of the Liwali Sir Ali bin Salim.

Jaffer Dewji asked the Liwali for his boat with the request that there should be two flags on the boat, the Union Jack and the red flag of the Sultan of Zanzibar. A number of prominent Ithna-asheris and non-Ithna-asheris were invited to accompany the Rao of Kutch and his chief minister as they were taken round the island on the boat and then to Jaffer Dewji's house for tea.

Now it so happened that an Ithna-asheri had been killed by an Ismaili in Kutch in the Rao's life time. Abadalla Kanji who was fearless

decided to ask him what happened to the case. The Rao, realizing he was surrounded by leaders of different communities shrewdly said “You come to Kutch and I will answer you.” Somebody on the boat asked Abdalla Kanji if he would go to Kutch, to which Abdalla Kanji replied in Kutchi, “Buddho mukeh rosivindo!” (If I go the old man will kill me).

Date.	Name.	Address.	Remarks.
5/11/29	Mr. M. S. Sanyal	Shankar Bhai, Ahmednagar	H. J.
7/14/29	Carl Kuller	Lamburg 29	
17-11-29 and 19-3-30.	Maharashtra of Kutch.		
"	Madamsid Kutch.		
"	Yusufali Esmailji Jivranji		
23-11-29	Mr. Humphrey		
25-11-29	Mr. M. Humphrey		
" " "	K. K. Koster		

Jaffer Dewji's Visitor's Book (from Hassan A.M. Jaffer)

Bwana Judge

From an interview with Aunali G. Kanji



*Abdalla Kanji
(from Aunali G. Kanji)*

Abdalla Kanji was born in Bhuj, Kutch in 1881. His father Kanji Dhalani was trading in Bagamoyo and died there. After his death Abdalla Kanji came to Mombasa in 1902 with his brother Bandali Kanji. He began work in the firm of Jivraj Meghji & Co and then established Abdalla Kanji & Sons in 1904. As the family grew Abdalla Kanji decided to expand his import export business into land and estate as well. Most of his savings were invested in the purchase of land and property. Tewa road off Moi Avenue where he built houses including his own used to be known as Abdalla Kanji St.

He was a great philanthropist and friend of the needy. Although he never took any official position in the community, leaders and elders always sought his advice. He was a champion in

resolving disputes and was nick-named 'Bwana Judge' because people respected and honoured his judgment. When he passed away in 1944, on the way to the kabrastan his coffin was stopped three times by other communities so that they could place "shaals" on it as a mark of respect.

Molubhai Rhemtulla

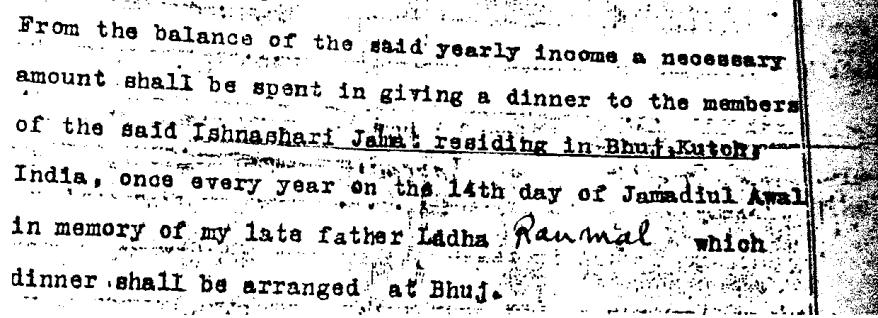
From an interview with Mulla Hassanali G. Khaki

Opposite Mackinnon Market there used to be a shamba and a small shop belonging to Molubhai Rhemtulla. When Molubhai became old he went to the jamat elders and told them that he wanted to donate his shamba and shop to the jamat. The jamat elders refused and advised him to keep it for his only daughter. Unfortunately Molubhai's daughter passed away soon after. Molubhai once again went to the elders and told them since he had no heirs he would give the shamba and shop as a gift to the jamat.

The jamat asked Molubhai what he would like the income to be used for and Molubhai told them to use it for Thursday majlis and niyyaz. No, it was not written down; no will was made at the time it was only spoken. Suddenly in that same year in 1926 Molubhai passed away. In those days the jamat used to collect a rent of five rupees from the shop. Later a building was constructed on the land, and a portion was leased out to the adjacent petrol station. Today the rent accrued is worth thousands of shillings.

A Dinner in Bhuj-Kutch

Valimohamed Ladha came to Mombasa in the 1890's from Zanzibar. He belonged to an old Zanzibar Khoja family and had four brothers Shermohamed, Mohamed, Dostmohammed and Rustamali. In his



will he left his land and property (opposite the Saifee bakery) to the jamat. In writing how he wished income from his property to be spent, Valimohamed added the remarkable stipulation that every year on the 14th of Jamadil Awwal, his trustees had to arrange a dinner in memory of his late father Ladha Ranmal in Bhuj-Kutch!

From the balance of the said yearly income a necessary amount shall be spent in giving a dinner to the members of the said Ishnashari Jama'at residing in Bhuj, Kutch India, once every year on the 14th day of Jamadil Awwal in memory of my late father Ladha *Ranmal* which dinner shall be arranged at Bhuj.

From the wakf deed of Valimohamed Ladha

how he wished

Two German Spies

From Interviews with Mulla Anverali Vallimohamed Walji

I heard about this from our elders when I was very young. During the First World War there were two Ithna-asheris here who were German spies. They were caught and sentenced to death. Before they were hanged they were allowed to pray in Kuwwatul Islam mosque. I used to know their names but I can't remember them anymore.

Contributors to the Old Bustani

Based on the Bostani wakf deed and the "Ithnasheri trade directory"

In 1899 when leaders of the community decided to build a mosque and imambara, they organised a "harambee" to collect money. The list of contributors has been preserved in the wakf deed. Some of the names are quite surprising. Rattansi Virji who donated 251 rupees was none other than the first "kamadia" of the Kuze Jamatkhana built in 1888. Mohammed Dhanji another Ismaili contributor was a wealthy glass and lamp merchant of Mombasa who once famously owned "10,000 acres within a 10 mile radius of Mombasa". Other contributors included Jamaldin Pasandali, a Baloch shopkeeper, who donated 615 rupees and was one of the original six "mutawallis" of the Bustani (the other five were: Nazerali Dewji, Jaffer Dewji, Mohammed Lakha, Allarakhia Valli and Mohamed Jetha).

Mohammed Baqir who donated 4,000 rupees was a Persian living in Mombasa. In the 1900's he left Mombasa and went to Mbale in Uganda. According to late Ladhahbai Rawji of Mbale, Mohammed Baqir was a good hunter and used to trade in ivory and other produce. He was very religious and had an annexe of two rooms in his house where majlises were recited regularly. He was also a great social worker. In 1919 when an epidemic of influenza struck at Mbale people were very scared but Mohammed Baqir continued to serve bravely and distributed free medicines to all. He died in 1922.

Issa Thaver's Lane

Who is Issa Thaver? No one knows. Was he a Khoja, a Memon, a Bohra? I remember seeing a sign which said "Issa Thaver Lane" on the road just after the central police station leading down into Kibokoni. Today the road is renamed "Bawazir Rd". According to late Sadak Jivraj Meghji in the "Ithna-Asheri Trade Directory" Issa Thaver was a prominent Ithna-asheri merchant of Mombasa. The head of his firm was Abdalla Dato, it had a branch in Lamu, and its biggest buyer was A.M. Jeevanjee. When Molubhai Jivraj Meghji arrived in Mombasa he stayed with Issa Thaver. In 1899 Issa Thaver donated the sum of 1001 rupees for the construction of the Bustani.

The Ithna-Asheri Musafarkhana in Mombasa

The first Ithna-Asheri Musafarkhana or traveller's guesthouse in Mombasa was built in 1908. 2,500 rupees were raised by the jamat and a small musafarkhana was built behind the Kuwwatul Islam imambara. In the 1920's Abdalla Kanji and Fazal Ladak Shivji bought land and built a new musafarkhana. The Kanjibhai and Ladakbhai Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Musafarkhana officially opened to travellers amid great fanfare at 9 am on 25th September 1926. Its first trustees were: Abdalla Kanji, Fazal Ladak Shivji, Walji Bhanji, Kassamali Jivraj Meghji and Gulamhussein Abdalla Datoo. Travellers were welcome to stay for up to one month after which they had to submit a special application to extend their stay.

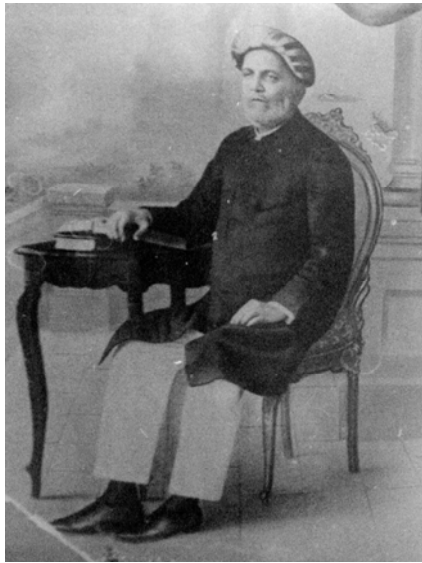


Mombasa, 1926 - Opening ceremony Ithna-asheri Musafarkhana (from Jivraj collecion)

From L-R: T.M. Jeevanjee, British Colonial Official, Sir Ali bin Salim, Abdalla Kanji (l behind Sir Ali), Kassamali Jivraj Meghj, Gulamhussein Abdalla Datoo, [?], Religious Alim, Fazal Ladak Shivji (above Alim), Rashid Moledina and Sir Mbarak Hinawy

Contributors to “Kuwwatul Islam”

From an interview with Mohamed Jaffer Mulla Hassanali Khaki



*Jivraj Meghji
(from S.Sadak)*

I have here an exact translation from Gujarati of notes made by my late father Mulla Hassanali G. Khaki based on details of the history of Kuwwatul Islam mosque and imambara given to him by late Mohamed Sadak Jivraj Meghji.

The Kuwwatul Islam mosque and imambara were built in 1904 at the cost of 13,500 rupees. This was a large sum in those days. For the construction of the mosque, Hasham Ghulamhussein Bhujwalla’s sister paid 5,000 rupees in 1903. In the same year Jivraj Meghji and Ismail Kalyan went to Bombay to raise funds for the construction of the imambara and contributions were also received from Zanzibar. After the

mosque and imambara were built extensions were made to the complex paid by Rajabali Bhaloo.

In 1906 a shop was built outside the imambara by Jivraj Khatau in memory of late Dharamsi Khatau. Above this shop the first madrasa was built by Nasser Virji of Bagamoyo in memory of his late mother (dedicated to the community on 13th July 1907). Next to the shop built by Jivraj Khatau, a second one was built in 1907 by Jivraj Meghji to cover the running expenses of the mosque. (This shop was later occupied by Messrs. Dawood Haji Nasser and Co). Funds were also raised by the jamat to buy the shop next door occupied by the Ismaili firm of Suleman Virjee for 5,900 rupees. In the same year (1907) Jivraj Khatau passed away inside the mosque.



*Nasser Virji
(from Jaffery Sports Club)*

Abdalla Dattoo's Bohra Banker

Based on the Memoirs of Akberali G.A.Dattoo published in the "Ithna-Asheri Trade Directory"

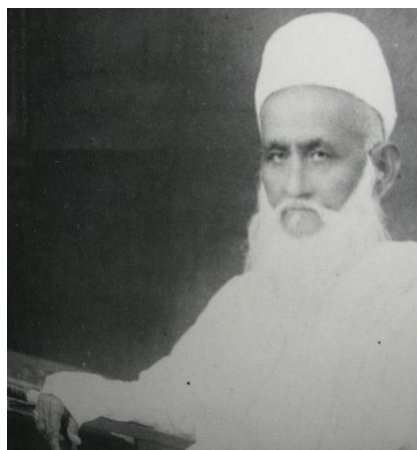


*Abdalla Dattoo
(from C. Salvadori)*

Abdalla Dattoo came to Zanzibar from Mandvi in Kutch in 1870. He began work in the firm of Tharia Topan. In those days Tharia was a very powerful and influential man in Zanzibar. He was both the "mukhi" of the Jamatkhana and also Sultan Baragash's Chief of Customs. His company had thirty shops reaching all the way to Mozambique with its head office in Zanzibar. Abdalla Dattoo was Tharia's chief accountant and he used to travel by donkey through jungle from shop to shop to check the accounts. His travels took him towards Mombasa, Mikindani and Lindi. After working in Tharia's company for around ten years in 1882 Abdalla Dattoo came to Mombasa to settle down. In Mombasa he worked as the manager of the prominent firm of Issa Thaver.

Abdalla Dattoo had become an Ithna-Asheri by then and he was a very pious and religious man. Each month he would take fifteen rupees from his salary and give it to his banker, the Bohra high priest Sheikh Esajee Mulla Bhaijee, to keep so that he could go for pilgrimage and ziyarat.

Unfortunately just when he had collected enough money, the First World War broke out and before it ended Abdalla Dattoo passed away. After his death Sheikh Esajee went to see Abdalla Dattoo's wife Sakinabai. He gave her five sacks containing one thousand rupees each and said, "Abdallabhai saved this money to go for pilgrimage and ziyarat but I am the only man who knew about it." Even today old Bohras in Mombasa remember Sheikh Esajee's honesty and trustworthiness. He never lost a single rupee.



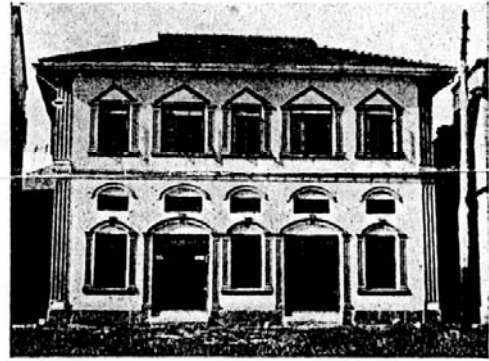
*Sheikh Esajee Mulla Bhaijee
(from Yusuf Saeed)*

**G. A. DATOO and CO., Auctioneers, Valuers, Land and Estate Agents, etc.,
P.O. Box 334, Roge Road.**

An auction sale-room, like that of Messrs. G. A. Dattoo and Co., is one of the most interesting places that can be visited by the individual with a mind that sees beyond the ordinary and the obvious and endeavours to visualise the sequence of circumstances that led to the presence there of the multifarious articles for disposal to the highest bidder. Blighted domestic or business hopes, lost wealth, transference of owners to other scenes of activity, the fluctuations of demand and supply, and the changes of fashion and fancy—these and many more causes contribute to the extraordinary medley of goods sold by Messrs. G. A. Dattoo and Co. every Wednesday morning and Saturday afternoon. Of course, anyone with very limited intelligence may observe there very desirable things that are eventually knocked down to discerning purchasers for ridiculously small amounts, and frequently prove very valuable acquisitions indeed. An auction sale-room reflects very much the activities and conditions of the city in which it is situated; and in that respect Messrs. G. A. Dattoo and Co.'s is exceptionally attractive to all classes of people on the look-out for bargains because of the great variety of articles disposed of there—furniture, antiques, curios, pianos, wines and spirits, silver and electro-plate, jewellery, Persian and other carpets, and many fine specimens of native craftsmanship of past and present days.

Messrs. G. A. Dattoo and Co. are the leading auctioneers at Mombasa, and hold themselves in readiness at all times to dispose of by auction or private treaty property of every description—land, houses and their contents, etc. They are

auctioneers to Lloyds' agents, and are approved Government valuers for probate, fire, insurance, etc. Their business was founded in 1882, by the late Mr. A. Dattoo, and carried on by him until his death in 1917, when it was taken over by his son, the present proprietor, Mr. G. A. Dattoo,



PREMISES OF G. A. DATOO and CO.

who had excellent training for it, including six years in the Customs Department and six years as a court interpreter, for Mr. G. A. Dattoo speaks no fewer than seven languages—a very valuable acquisition in his many affairs.

The firm's telegraphic address is "Dattoo," Mombasa, and they use the 5th edition of the A B C code. Their London agents are Messrs. A. W. Johnson and Co., Ltd., 9, Denman Street, London Bridge, S.E.1.

Kwakizi or Kwakiziwi (Place of the Deaf Man)

From John H.A. Jewel, *Mombasa the Friendly Town*

Used to be forest land and was once owned by an Asian who was very deaf. When people began to build houses in the location it came to be called Kwa Kiziwi. He was the grandfather of the Dattoo family, Abdulla Dattoo, and his house is still there.

The First Allidinian

From *Fifty Years: A History of Allidina Visram High School, 1923-1972*

Allidina Visram High School admitted its first pupil on 2nd January 1923. He was Mohamedali Dhalla, one of the senior pupils in the former school and looked upon by both staff and pupils as a perfect leader. He still recalls the day vividly as with a large crowd of other pupils he turned up at the new building. "We had been looking forward eagerly to the day when we would move to the beautiful new school," he recalls "although the opening was held without ceremony, it was an occasion in itself for us."

Sheriff Jaffer & Co

From Cynthia Salvadori's *We Came in Dhows* based on interviews with late Hussein Abdalla Jaffer

In 1903 shortly before his death (he died in Bombay in 1905), Dewji Jamal asked his two sons, Sheriff and my grandfather Jaffer, the only two sons remaining in East Africa to close his business (Dewji Jamal & Co) and to form their own company. Thus 'Sheriff Jaffer & Co' came into being. All the 'Dewji Jamal' properties were valued and sold to 'Sheriff Jaffer & Co' and Dewji Jamal gave each of his two sons a gift of Rs 80,000, a large sum at that time, for their dedicated services. Sheriff looked after the Zanzibar branch and my grandfather Jaffer managed the company in Mombasa and also looked after the Lamu branch, helped by his nephew Mohamedali.

'Sheriff Jaffer & Co' was one of the three major firms in Mombasa, together with that of Allidina Visram and his son Abdulrasul and that of A.M.Jeevanje. These big merchants loaned money back and forth, with no bills or anything written; their word was enough. As Mombasa grew, streets were named after prominent Indian merchants, usually the streets where they had their business premises. Jeevanjee St linked For Jesus Rd and Makadara St. Three of the Dewji brothers had streets named after them – Sherrifbhai St, Jafferbhai St, and Nazeralibhai St all strips of land given by the estate free to the government to make the roads.

My grandfather Jaffer Dewji lived very well. He even had a horse [there were hardly any horses in Mombasa], such a good horse that some military person, a colonel, wanted to buy it. My grandfather refused to sell it – and the horse died three days later. Jaffer Dewji associated with the leading people, of all communities. He was a friend of Abdulrasul Visram – Abdulrasul was a very kind-hearted man, and anyone who came to him for help always received it. He was a wonderful person. Sadly Abdul Rasul suffered from TB, which is why he died so young.

My grandfather was also very friendly with Mackinnon, as well as his Persian headman Mulla Shambe. But he didn't kowtow to anyone. One time the PC came to visit him at his house and was ushered into the sitting room where Jaffer was sitting. Jaffer, being rather elderly, did not stand up



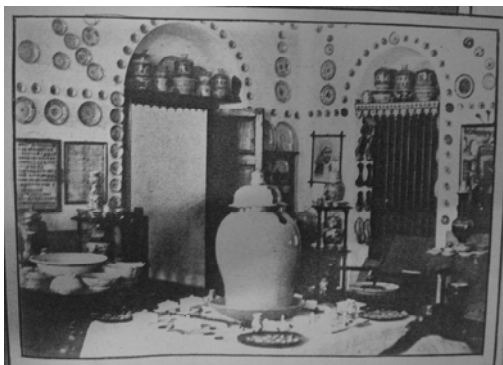
*Premises of Shariff Jaffer & Co,
Mombasa opposite the Bohra Mosque
in Old Town (from Playne & Gale)*

but welcomed the PC and invited him to take a seat. The PC stayed standing and seemed rather angry. Again, my grandfather asked him sit down. The PC took offense and said, 'why haven't you stood up to welcome me?' My grandfather said, 'This is my house and in it I do not have to stand up for anyone. If you don't like it you can leave.' The PC left. Another European official who heard of the incident took the matter up with the Governor – and the PC was transferred.



Mombasa 1900's. Sitting L-R: Count Abdulrasul Allidina Visram, T.M.Jeevanjee, the Maharaja of Gaekwad, Jaffer Dewji, Jadewji Dewji. Standing R-L: Dr.Gama the Portugese consul (from H.A.Jaffer)

*Jaffer Dewji's Museum at the Old Port
From 'SHELLBACK' in the Mombasa Times*



(From Playne & Gale)

Hanging on the wall in front of the table I am writing at in a house up-country is an entertaining rug which once belonged to that coast collector of Persian and other treasures, the late Mr.Jaffer Dewji of Mombasa. Older residents on the island will remember that big crowded room at the top of a high building down near the Old Harbour and reached by a wide rather gloomy staircase

set about with huge grain jars which could well have hidden Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. One panted up several flights, and then, through an entirely unpretentious door, there suddenly was this unique private collection of beautiful china and pottery massed so thickly on the high walls that one could barely find space for an outspread hand between the rows and rows of curious dishes, glazed tiled bowls and a hundred different things spread before one.

It was a fascinating conglomeration. I remember glorious Persian China of deep blue on white with the full blown Persian rose twined in and out of the delicate fluting, in fact this typical rose was everywhere in the decorations. Other bowls and plates, of a greenish-grey glaze had sacred writings from the Koran, and the devout would use there for their medicines or even plain draughts of water – so certain were they that the holy words would still their fevers.

There were any amount of the so called Lamu China dishes – now identified



Jaffer Dewji's Museum c.1908 (from Playne & Gale)

as of Chinese origin and some of the specimens were huge and very rare and ancient. There were covered Chinese soup and rice bowls with their little stubby china spoons, or rather scoops; tear bottles galore, tall slender-necked rosewater bottles and sprinklers of exquisite turquoise blues and greens, some encrusted with jewels. These bottles are often highly prized heirlooms and rich Persians and Arabs bestow them upon the brides of their eldest sons: I have one such lovely rosewater bottle given to me by a charming Washihiri lady whom I once helped, and it has an honoured place in my glass cabinet...

But I started off this article with a rug – alas not mine! Old Mr. Jaffer Dewji had many such unusual rugs; not for the floor but to be hung as tapestries are in Europe. He was persuaded to part with this one, but I do not

think anyone was ever successful in getting him to sell others. He died some years ago and since then we have not had the pleasure of being able to look at his lovely and interesting things. The Dewji family has a long and honourable association with East Africa: is it too much to hope that some day perhaps that fascinating top room may be thrown open again and people interested in old and valuable and lovely china, porcelain, pottery and silver and other objects may be privileged to enjoy once more the rare treat of browsing round a magnificent private collection.

DEWJI CURIOS STILL EXIST

KENYA DAILY MAIL

OBITUARY.

DEATH OF SHETH JAFFER DEWJEE.
ONE OF THE OLDEST
PIONEERS OF MOMBASA.

It is with deepest regret that *Kenya Daily Mail* announces the death of Sheth Jaffer Dewji, one of the pioneers of Mombasa and one of its most respected citizens, in Bombay on Saturday last at the age of 75.

Sheth Jaffer Dewji left Mombasa about four months ago for pilgrimage to Iraq and other holy places. On his way he was unfortunately taken ill and had to return to Bombay for treatment.

Sheth Jaffer Dewjee was well-known not only amongst the Indians but also among the European and Arab communities of the Island. In Mombasa he owned most of the land round the Central Station and the Shariff bhai Street besides many other properties in the Old Town. The land on which the Central Station stands today was purchased by the Government from Sheth Jaffer Dewjee and his brothers.

In the old days he had been taking a keen interest in the public life of the community and besides other activities he was one of the founder of the Mombasa public Library and Reading Room some 33 years ago.

Sheth Jaffer Dewjee's show room of oldest Persian and Arabic curios contain articles of rare values and has been visited by almost all distinguished visitors to the Island and the Country, including high Government officials and Governors.

He had a winning and an amiable personality which had earned for him respect and confidence of many people of this Island. He leaves behind a large family both in India and East Africa.

He belonged to Khoja-Ithna Ashri community members of which had closed their shops on Saturday afternoon as a mark of respect and honour for the old and highly respected leader. The Ithna-Ashri Sports Club also remained closed on Saturday.

The Indian Community of Mombasa has certainly lost in Sheth Jaffer Dewjee one of its pioneers and respected member and his death breaks one more link with the past. The *Kenya Daily Mail* takes this opportunity of expressing its heartfelt sympathy for the family of the deceased.

RARE COLLECTION INCLUDES 900-YEAR-OLD PERSIAN CHINA, CARPETS AND LAMU GOLD

From a Staff Reporter: MOMBASA, Friday

A COLLECTION of curios, described some 60 years ago as being one of the finest of its kind in the East, is still in existence in Mombasa.

The collection — which includes Persian china and brass plates over 900 years old, gold inlaid ornaments from Lamu and amongst other things a fine collection of coins — was the life work of Jaffer Dewji of Dewji Jamal and Co., who died in 1934.

Famous house

But despite rumours that the collection had been sold, much of it remains in the hands of Dewji's son, Abdul Jaffer, who still lives in the famous old house in Government Square, near Mombasa's Old Port.

It was in this very house that Smith Mackenzie and the National Bank of India first set up office.

VIPs, including Sir Winston Churchill, Lord Kitchener, Sir Joseph Byrne, British Residents and Governors in East Africa, Maharajahs of Gaekwad, Cutch and Bhavnagar, and Nawabs from India — to mention only a few — have all visited the house.

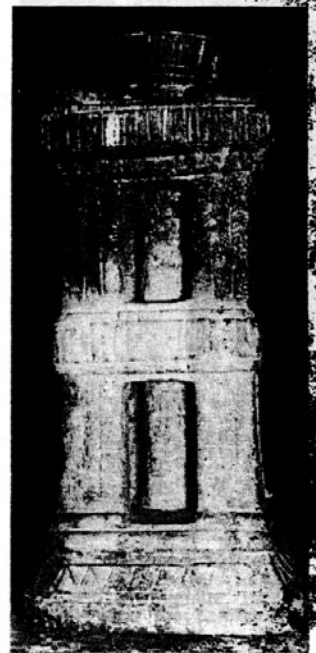
Many broken

Right up to 1941 the curios remained displayed in a large first-floor front room. Then came the Second World War and rumours that the Italians were bombing Malindi.

The Kenya Government urged people to leave Mombasa, and the Dewji family started the gigantic task of taking down and packing up hundreds of rare collectors' pieces which have never been catalogued.

But the family did not move. The curios, however, were packed and locked away, many unfortunately being broken in their removal to a store-room. The collection is now estimated at some 1,000 pieces.

However, beautiful Persian carpets still adorn the walls of the house, whilst valuable Persian and Chinese vases decorate shelves and odd corners.



● One of the Dewji curios is a 2,000-year-old urn, said to have been used in religious rites at a temple near the Zambezi. It is carved from stone.

over 60 years, and are claimed to be about a century old.

One tells a story of Shah Abbas Safavi, who ruled Persia some 400 years ago, and another recalls the great feats of Rustam the Strong.

There is also rare pottery with Kufic script.

The majority of pieces collected by Jaffer Dewji of Persian and Chinese origin were obtained at Lamu; others were added during his frequent travels abroad to Persia and India.

No space

As to the future of the collection now in store, Councillor Jaffer shrugged his shoulders and said: "I just don't know. We now have insufficient space in the house to display the curios."

The Dewji family arrived in Zanzibar about 1850, and established themselves in business under the name of Dewji Jamal and Co.

Branches were opened at Mombasa, and in 1903 the name of the business was changed to Shariff Jaffer and Co. The family owned considerable land in Mombasa, Nairobi, Lamu and Malindi.

But fortunes have changed, and today the Dewji family have little left of their great memories.

A Mombasa Pioneer

Passing of Mr. Jaffer Dewji

Many Mombasa residents have learned with deep regret of the loss of one of its best known pioneers and highly respected citizens in the person of Mr. Jaffer Dewji, who died in Bombay on Saturday last at the age of 70. He left Mombasa about four months ago for a pilgrimage to Iraq, where he was taken ill and returned to Bombay.

Mr. Jaffer Dewji was well-known not only among Indians and Europeans, but was familiarly styled "Bwana Jafari" by the Arabs and Natives. His family can claim him as a pioneer and one of the oldest residents of Zanzibar and Mombasa.

He owned most of the land around the Central Station and Sheriffbhai Street, besides owning other landed property in Mombasa. The land on which the Central Station stands today was also purchased by the authorities from Mr. Jaffer Dewji and his brothers.

His famous show-room of old Persian and Arabic curios has been visited by almost all the high officials, and governors and by distinguished visitors.

With his amiable character and smiling personality he had won respect of all the communities in this country.

He leaves behind him a family some of whom are in East Africa and some in India.

The Khoja Shia Ithna-ashri Community closed their business on Saturday afternoon, as a mark of respect towards their veteran and highly respected leader. The Ithna-ashri Sports Club was also closed on Saturday.

The late Mr. Jaffer Dewji had taken a keen interest in Public Life for many years and besides other activities, he was a founder of the Mombasa Public Library and Reading Room.

Mombasa's First Public Library

(From Robert G. Gregory's *The Rise and Fall of Philanthropy in East Africa*)

A striking exception to this pattern of restriction is the Seif bin Salim Public Library of Mombasa. Founded in 1903 as the Mombasa Public Library, it has been described as not only "the oldest library" but also the oldest "inter-racial cultural institution in East Africa."⁴⁰ From the beginning it was open to peoples of all races and creeds. Endowed chiefly by two influential Asians, Jaffer Dewji and Allidina Visram, the library was administered during its first ten years by Cowasjee Manekji Dalal. By 1919 it had ninety-nine members who, during the year, borrowed 4,364 books—significant numbers in view of the fact that Mombasa then had probably little more than one hundred literate adults. During the twenties, when still dependent entirely on private donations, the library suffered from lack of effective leadership and survived only because of the beneficence of a few Asian donors, notably the Alibhai Esmailjee and Suleman Verji families and Allidina Visram's son, Abdul Rasul. Beginning in 1929, when A. B. Patel became its president, the library steadily improved. Patel attracted more support, including an annual municipal grant of £100, and in 1939 moved the library into a more spacious building shared with the Mombasa Indian Association. In that year the Arab Sir Ali bin Salim pledged an annual grant of £100, and the library was renamed in honor of his brother, Seif bin Salim.⁴¹

During the mid-fifties under the presidency of Ramanbhai Be-

(From *Africa Speaks* by Paul Louis Hoefler)

Several days later I met Jaffer Dewjee, called Jaffer the Ancient, and he kindly showed me through his most unique museum. Here I looked upon a marvellous Persian rug over four hundred years old which

(From *Early Days in East Africa* by Frederick John Jackson)

were obtained from 'my banker,' Jaffer Dewjee Jumal, the leading Indian merchant, but no one knew anything about them except Horton; the Gallas preferred them to trade goods. In the meantime, through the good offices

Abandon further speculation about Lt. Reitz for the moment, and note the low building on the left in Ndia Kuu, set back from the road. This was the first public library and reading room in Kenya, started in 1903 and financed by Jaffer Dewji and Allidina Visram. It was run by an Indian Chris-

(From *The Old Town, Mombasa: A Historical Guide* by Jenny Maitland-Jones, Janet McCrae, Judy Aldrick and Rosemary Macdonald)