

ZEENATUL ISLAM MASJID

1919



In 1899 the first group of Kanamia “Passenger Indians” arrived in the Cape Colony. Before them, in 1897 and 1899, the Bengals, Kokanis, Randerians, Afghans, Pathans, and Hindus arrived. During the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1901) several “Passenger” Indians slipped into the Colony illegally. At the time the Immigration Office was not fully functional because of the war situation. In 1902, after the battle the British took over the Immigration Office and matters became very uncomfortable for the illegal immigrants.

Immigration age limits for Indians at first was fixed at twenty and later changed to sixteen years. Many young boys arrive here unaccompanied or in the company of “fake fathers” or “fake uncles”. To aggravate matters even further they travelled on the names of their “guardians.” The Kanamias were all Muslims and were members of the *Hanafi Madhab*.

In 1905 Adam Ebrahim, a staunch Muslim and “Founding Father” sent for a fellow Tankarian, Ebrahim Hafferjee to lead take charge of the religious affairs of his countrymen. Hence, No.3 Muir Street became the first salah Khana, fifteen years before the first Masjid opened its doors. Ebrahim Hafferjee lived at No.3 Muir Street and so did Essa Allie, Cape Fruit, and many others.

I’ve named in chapters below, the founding fathers who took the leading role in the establishment of the first Masjid, but there were others as well in their group

who all agreed to build a Masjid. Out of this group members were delegated to embark on fundraising missions.

Mohamed Omar and Ismail Vallie left by train in April 1919 to collect funds in Durban and Transvaal. Adam Ebrahim left on the 2nd of May 1919 for the Transvaal where he collected funds. The rest of their group did the home run and collected, under the leadership of Ahmed Ismail £700.0.0. In all, they collected the princely sum of £1200.0.0. These funds were banked in the name of the Kanamia Moslem Trust. In June 1919 at a meeting held in the Empire Bioscope, to which all Kanamias and friends were invited, Ahmed Ismail announced that the Kanamia Moslem Community Society had collected the sum mentioned and that they were going to build a Masjid and a school.

At this meeting, the unforeseen and unthinkable happened. Regardless of the multiple challenges which they had to face, they persevered regardless and bought the property which they converted into a Masjid.

The interior walls of the two houses in Chapel Street were demolished into a flat-roofed open-plan hall. The administrators applied to the Council to erect a free-standing Minaret on the corner of Muir and Chapel streets.

BOARDING ROOMS

Houses such as numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, and 13 Muir Street; numbers 7, 9, and 15 Sydney Street and numbers 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 Selkirk Street functioned as refugee havens for the new arrivals. These addresses appear as contactable reference addresses on numerous Immigration Permit applications. There were several other houses and tenement buildings close to the market where the Kanamia immigrants found boarding and lodging.

At numbers 3 and 5 Muir Street, in particular, practically every new arrival from Broach, some penniless, were fed, clothed, and accommodated by the "landlord" of the house. At 3 Muir Street, the first *Salah Khana* was established in 1906 at the insistence of Adam Ebrahim.

Initially, white homeowners who lived close to the market rented their homes to the Indian tenants at high rentals and they, in turn, relocated to Woodstock and Salt River. The tenant sub-let rooms to new arrivals at a fee. It was perfectly normal for the new arrivals to sleep 10 to a room. All these houses had one toilet and perhaps a bathroom. The rooms were not big and all had plank flooring boards. Each house had a small kitchen and a small yard, part of which served as a storeroom.

Here the new arrivals got a jump-start in life. They were assisted to find employment as stevedores at Cape Town Docks, as rail-coach cleaners and bedding boys; sweepers at the Post Office and window washers in the Cape Town Business District. Most of them took to the Sir Lowry Road Early Morning Market where they worked for established traders as hawkers and labourers. Others hired two-wheel hawker carts and started their own transport business. It was hard work. They took any manual job to earn a living. Several were employed as bus painters, cleaners, and mechanic assistants at the City Tramways in Sir Lowry Road. The abattoirs that were situated close to where Buchanan stands today employed several as slaughterers and skinners.

Unless a settler was recommended or referred to for a job, it was near impossible for any of them to secure jobs on their own because they had few skills and could not communicate in any of the local languages. In any case, their main aim was to find a job and earn money to sustain themselves and to send money to India for the family.

In the beginning, the young men worked hard and struggled to make ends meet. Yet they went on to become prominent leaders, successful businesspersons, property owners, and financiers.

The few businessmen who had the financial means rented rooms in tenement buildings from Jewish and English landlords in District 6. Buildings such as the Fountain Lodge corner Sir Lowry Road and van de Leur Street, Burmeister Chambers in Sir Lowry Road (later J and A Buchanan), Transvaal Hotel, corner Rutger Street and Sir Lowry Road, Market Chambers (Market Building) Sir Lowry Road, Sidney Chambers, Sidney Street and Singh's building in Reform Street, were always fully booked. Many of those who became the Who's Who of the Kanamias, at some time in their lives, lived in one of these buildings.

It was essential for them to acquire accommodation within walking distance to the main business areas such as Greenmarket Square, Riebeeck Square, the City Centre (Adderley Street, St. George's Street, Darling Street, and the Grand Parade) where they traded fruit and vegetables from hand baskets and pushcarts in the open air and the market.

They dreaded the bitterly cold and rainy Cape winter weather. If they were caught up in a downpour it meant they had to hang out their clothes to dry in front of the fire or coal stove that night to be dry and ready to wear the next morning. Few could afford a second change of clothing. If they fell ill, it meant a loss of earnings and that someone else would trade on their spot or round and even cause them to lose their business.

Some opened corner shops in District 6, Woodstock, Salt River, and the Southern and Northern Suburbs where they traded as General Dealers.

The spice shop owners imported products such as dhol, ghee, rice, millet, and condiments from Durban, Beira, and India because of the local demand for such goods and products.

In 1906, Parsie Mancherjee was one of the biggest spice dealers in Cape Town. He had his shop on the corner of Selkirk and Reform streets. This shop stood opposite Singh's Building. He was a direct importer and a booking/travel/cargo agent for the German East India Line that sailed between South Africa and India. The company later stood accused of an alleged immigration scandal that implicated one of the biggest and most accomplished "Agents" in the Colony. This will be related in the following chapter.

Mancherjee lived in a mansion in Mount Street and went on to become a respected member of the Indian community. His manager was Moosajee Vallie who lived opposite the road in Singh's Building at 24 Selkirk Street.

Two Police Stations serviced the entire area. One was located at 40 Sir Lowry Road between Van de Leur and Oak streets opposite the market, and the other was on the corner of 170 Hanover and Richmond streets. This Hanover Street Police Station was the nightmare of all immigration offenders because, if apprehended and charged, the accused were kept incarcerated for as long as it took to process and investigate charges or alleged transgressions.

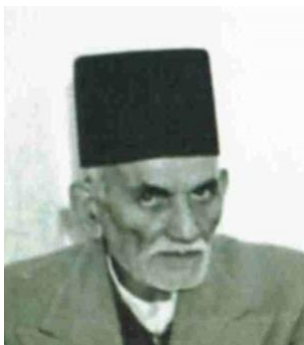
Several respected Kanamia businesspersons were arrested in pre-dawn raids and held at this police station in Hanover Street. Some were snatched upon and arrested as illegal immigrants. Others were the victims of "Agents" whom they refused to pay bribes and/or protection money.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS: WHERE THEY RESIDED – TOWNS AND SUBURBS 1920

In 1920, when push came to shove, when the entire Kanamia Sect was as loggerheads and at each other's throats, these men whose names appear below were bold enough to put up their hands and identified themselves to be counted as those who were prepared to fight for their rights. This was also the time when many of the founding fathers appended their real names (for the first time) to the list instead of the "fake" names by which they were admitted into the Colony and with which some had lived with since 1900 to 1920.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF THE FIRST MASJID

ADAM EBRAHIM



Adam Ebrahim, the son of Ebrahim Bagus and Mulik, was born in 1881 in Tankaria Broach, Gujarat. He arrived in Cape Town in 1902. He was already an adult, a senior when he initially disembarked at The Point in Durban and travelled by train to Cape Town.

Photo: Courtesy "Boytjie Cape Fruit"

He was a total stranger to the City. Upon arrival, there was not a single soul to meet or welcome him. He spent several hours wandering about on the Cape Town Railway Station platform until a commuter who spoke Gujarati directed him how to get to Muir Street.

OMARJEE EBRAHIM



Omarjee Ebrahim, the younger brother of Adam Ebrahim, arrived in South Africa via Lourenco Marques in 1902 from Tankaria Broach, Gujarat India.

After working and trading in the Transvaal, he left Johannesburg for Cape Town in 1907.

He boarded at 13 Muir Street, a house that was rented by Adam Mohamed. He lived at this house until 1908 when he returned to India.

Photo: Courtesy "Boytjie Cape Fruit"

ISMAIL VALLIE



Ismail Vallie was a "founding father" and foundation member of the Kanamia Moslem Community Society who planted the first seeds to build the Kanamia Masjid in Cape Town. This vision he shared with fellow countrymen who worked extremely hard to realise it.

Born in 1887 in Manober, Broach India. He was the son of Valli Dasoo and Fatima Valli. In 1902, 15-year-old Ismail arrived in the Cape Colony, South Africa via Delagoa Bay Portuguese East Africa where the boat landed and where passengers had to disembark. A few months later, he left Delagoa Bay and travelled overland to Cape Town where he boarded with several other Kanamias settlers at 5 Muir Street.

ADAM ISMAIL, ALIAS MOHAMED OMAR



Adam Ismail was born in 1889 in Dyadra Taluka Broach, India, the son of Essop and Amina of Dyadra. He was only 13 when he arrived in South Africa via Portuguese East Africa in 1902 on the SS AKBAR.

He arrived in South Africa with his "father" and his "uncle". They were fake relatives but served the purpose to get him into South Africa.

He disembarked at Durban where he worked as a child labourer and later as a cook in a food cafe.

AHMED ISMAIL



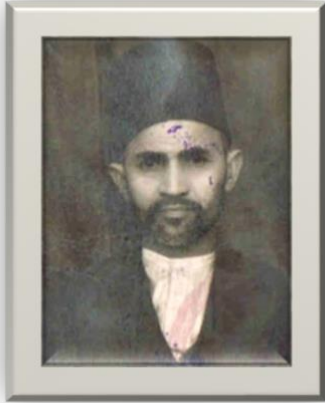
Council

THE IMMIGRANT

Ahmed Ismail was born in Tankaria; District Broach Gujarat, India on 17 February 1892. He arrived in the Cape Town Docks in 1904 as an unaccompanied 12-year-old.

Through sheer hard work and determination, he became a successful merchant, a director of companies, a member of the Cape Town City

WALLIE ADAM (VALLIE ADAM MALJEE)



The above spelling of his name appears on his Immigration documents. Vallie was born in 1887 in the village Dyadra Broach. He was the son of Adam Maljee and Muluk (Bhai Moola).

He arrived in Cape Town in 1902 and boarded for four years with several Kanamias at 20 Reform Street, Cape Town. This small double-storey building had a café (food) and a kitchen at the rear of the premises on the ground floor, as well as three bedrooms on the first floor.

ISMAIL MOOSA (Maitland)

Ismail Moosa was born in 1889 in Valan-Karpan Taluka: Baroda. Region: Broach, Gujrat. He was the son of Mussa and Fatima.

He arrived in Cape Town via Portuguese East Africa in 1902 without an Immigration Permit. He was 15 years old when he travelled with his “fake” uncle Vallie Essop from India to the Colony.

By 1919 the community expanded and there was a need for a Masjid. South Africa and the world just exited from the Great War. The South African gold and diamond rush, attracted immigrants from all over the world. On the 2nd of January 1919, seven senior sincere religious, members of our community got together. They were: Adam Ebrahim; Omarjee Ebrahim – the father of Ahmed and the grandfather of Yunus Ebrahim; Muhammad Omar – the father of Ebrahim Omar; Ismail Vallie – also called six wheels; Ahmad Ismail (Piccadilly); Ismail Moosa (Maitland) – the grandfather of Yunis, the current chairperson of the Masjid and Vallie Adam – the grandfather of our current Trustee Jameel Adam; and community member Mehboob Adam, decided to build a Masjid. The very next day at a meeting they informed the community of their Niyah to build the Masjid. There was some opposition to their proposal but they gained the support of the community to pursue their goal. In May 1919, they obtained travel permits. In those days one could not travel from one part of South Africa to another if you were a non- European. You had to apply for a permit. Two teams travelled north and east, one team was led by Muhamed Omar and Ismail Vallie, and other team was led by Adam Ebrahim. In all they, together with local collections, they collected £1,200.00

THE NEW MASJID

1936-2003



Fifteen years later, in 1935, the Kanamia Moslem League initiated the idea to demolish the first Masjid and to replace it with a new Masjid. In 1936, the Kanamia Moslem League, under the chair of Ahmad Ismail (Piccadilly) launched an ambitious fundraising campaign

THE FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

Mr. Ahmed Ismail Piccadilly, Essop Moosa Jhb, Omarjee Moosa Mohamed Beaufort West, Hadji Vallie Essop, B. Allie, and other members were elected to serve on the fundraising committee. Omarjee Moosa Mohamed served as the interim treasurer of the fundraising committee. They embarked on this long journey by car, from Cape Town to Transvaal, Natal, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, Delagoa Bay, Nyasaland, and beyond into Central Africa to raise funds.



**FRIDAY 15TH APRIL 1938. THE INAUGURATION JUMU'AH.
SHAYK ABDUR RAHIM AI Iraqi WITH THE NEW MACE.**

THE ZEENATUL ISLAM MASJID TODAY

1983-2010

Apartheid legislation forced the D6 inhabitants to vacate the area in steady streams. Those who refused to budge were forcibly evicted, lock stock and barrel, loaded onto a government truck, and transported to their allocated housing estate on the desolate, wind-swept plains of the Cape Flats. By 1980, bush and weeds sprung up where a few months earlier, houses of a vibrant Muslim community stood. The Masjid stood in silence, surrounded by a desolate area that was marked by bare patches of clay, rubble, weeds, and refuse. Like its drab surroundings, the Masjid too was in dire need of a new coat of paint and a general spruce up. The forced removals robbed the Masjid of its daily musallies, whose numbers dwindled drastically. Only on a Friday for Jumu'ah the Masjid would be well-attended.



Shaykh Muhammad Moerat, Shaykh Ismail Keraan, and Shaykh Ebrahim Gabriels (MJC Chair) leading the invocation prayers at the site on the corner of Muir and Chapel streets. In September of 1919 and the spring of 1936 similar services were conducted by Shaykh Abdur Rahim Al Iraqi.

In 2010, Zeenatul Islam Masjid had undergone several renovations, as well as upgraded facilities to cater for a growing community. These facilities included; a modern wudu facility, toilets, showers, modern Salaah facilities for ladies, classrooms for madrassa, facilities for the Tabligh Jamaat, Imaam's office, caretaker area, and a Janaaza room. It is through the continued generosity of the local and national Muslim community that the Masjid grows and becomes the prominent pillar it is today.