

THE
KHOJAS

A People's History
through the
Journey of Faith

A Story of a Journey of Faith

- ◆ From a Hindu heritage, the Khoja Community embraced an integrated faith called Satpanth which combined Sufi ideas with traces of Hindu belief
- ◆ Subsequently Ismaili Dais & Pirs were able to bring the Khoas to the Nizari Ismaili path and eventually they found their way to fully practice the Ja'fari madhhab .

Khoja from Lohana Caste

- ◆ Hindu Social Order:
- ◆ a) Brahmins- (Priest class)
- ◆ b) Kshatriya - (Soldiers/Ruling class)
- ◆ c) Vaishya* - (Commoners)
- ◆ d) Sudra - (Menial workers)
- ◆ Khojas are from the Loahana caste
- ◆ *Lohana are the considered the Vaishya

The Origin of the Word Khoja

- ◆ The title Khoja (for Persian: Khwajeh) meaning honorable convert was received from Pir Sadr al Din upon their conversion to Sat Panth
- ◆ Term is a translation of the title 'Thakkar' or by which Lohana are addressed.

KHOJA: A Caste - Not faith

- ◆ Phonetic Corruption of Word Khwaja
 - ◆ 'Khoja' label has no connection in Islam.
 - ◆ A Khoja is a Khoja by birth.
 - ◆ Remains one even when he adopts a new faith

How To Be a Khoja!

- ◆ A Khoja is born as a Khoja.
 - ◆ It is not a religion or sect to which one could be inducted.
- ◆ Born as Hindu.
 - ◆ Converted into loose form of Islam, Sufism, with remnants of Hinduism.
- ◆ Into Nizari Ismaili
- ◆ Into Sunni.
- ◆ Into Ithna-Asheri
- ◆ Into any other religion- still remains as Khoja.

Conversion: 9 - 11 CENTURY

- ◆ Pirs Converted many Hindus to Islam
 - ◆ Pir Satgur Nur d 1094 -in Gujarat
 - ◆ Pir Shams d 1356 in Punjab
 - ◆ Pir Sadr Din - Circa 1276
 - ◆ Arrived in Sindh
 - ◆ Responsible for the conversion of the Lohanas to Sat Panth

The Beginning

- ◆ Some 600 years ago a missionary by the name of Pir Sadruddin arrived in Sind
- ◆ Number of myths about his origins.
 - ◆ The most common consensus among historians is that he was Dai (emissary) of the Nizari branch of the Ismaili sect
 - ◆ That he was a sufi teacher from Iran.

Das Avtar

- ◆ Pir Sadr-din lived amongst the rich Hindu landowners called Thakkers
 - ◆ Thakkers believed that the god Vishnu had lived through nine incarnations on this earth. They were waiting for the tenth.
 - ◆ Pir Sadr-din managed to convince them that Hazrat Ali (A.S.) was the Dasmo Awtar of Vishnu (The Tenth Incarnation).
 - ◆ He converted quite a number of the Thakkers into a faith called Satpanth (True Path) - a peculiar admixture of Sufic/Hindu ideas.
 - ◆ The ancient text called Das Awtar was considered a primary source for the followers of the Aga Khan until very recently.

Mode of Conversion

- ◆ From Hindus to:
 - ◆ Sat Panthi – 11 – 17 Century
 - ◆ Ismaili 17 – 18 Century
 - ◆ Ithna-Asheri – 19th Century
- ◆ Three divisions of Khojas
 - ◆ Sunni Khojas
 - ◆ Ismailiya Khojas
 - ◆ Ithnaasheri Khojas

Sadr Din to Aga Khan ?

1276 – 1840 CE

- ◆ Connection between Nizari Imams and the Aga Khan is shrouded in mystery
 - ◆ Death of 44th Ismaili Imam Abul Hasan – passed to his son Khalilullah
 - ◆ 1817 Khalilullah killed in Yezd by a mulla jealous of his popularity
 - ◆ Shah of Iran Fateh Ali Shah awards Khalilulla's son Hasan Ali Shah with governorship of Kerman
 - ◆ Fateh Ali Shah dies 1834 Hasan Ali Shah flees to Afghanistan and then to India in 1840

The Aga Khans

- ◆ Aga 1 - Hasan Ali Shah - 1817 - 1881
- ◆ Aga 2 - Aga Ali Shah 1881 - 1885
- ◆ Aga 3 - Sultan Mohamed Shah - 1885 - 1957
- ◆ Aga 4 - Karim Al Husaini - 1957 to Present

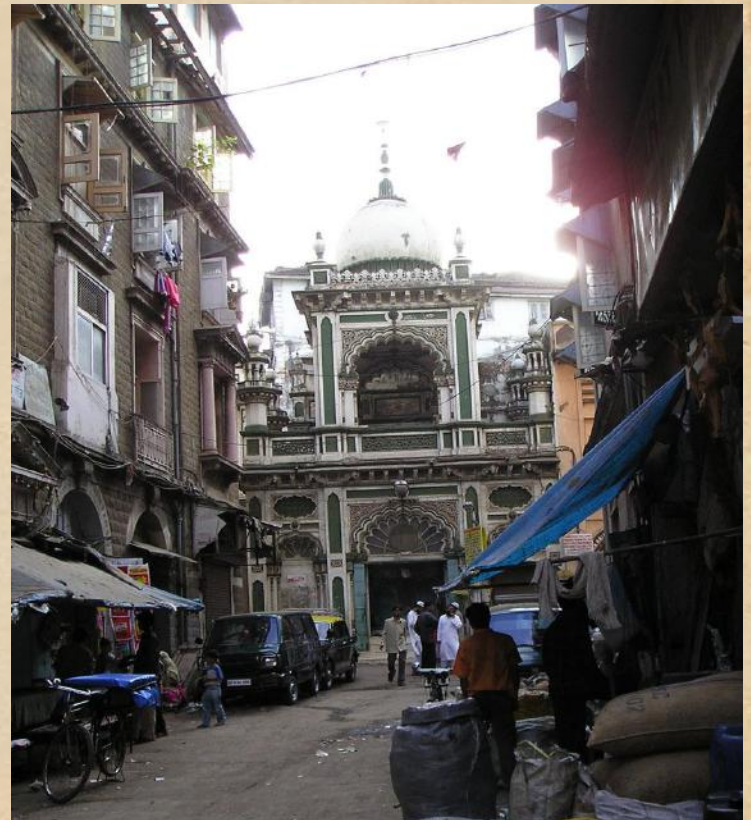
Khoja Split Begins

- ◆ 18/19 Century sliding more towards Nizari Ismaili
- ◆ 1842 Aga Khan I – Arrives from Iran.
- ◆ Changes Sunni practices
- ◆ Expulsion of some Khoja – 1848
 - ◆ 1848 – formed separate congregation on Sunni Tariqa
 - ◆ 1850 – Four Sunni Khoja killed – 3 injured.
 - ◆ 1851 – Court case – Seceders re admitted.
 - ◆ 1861 – Oath of allegiance
 - ◆ 1862 – Bar Bhaiyya expelled again.
 - ◆ 1862 – Khoja Sunni Jamat formed

The First Crack

- ◆ 1829 Habib Ibrahim + 50 Families
 - ◆ Refused to pay Dasondh – All ousted
- ◆ 1845 to 1860 turmoil in the Community
- ◆ 1861 declaration that Sunni Mullas will not conduct nikah and burial rites
- ◆ Aga Khan asks his followers to put their signatures declaring their Shia Affiliation

Sunni - (Bar Bhaiya) Jamat Imambargah



1866 A.D. – Khoja case

- In 1866 complaint against Aga Khan in the High Court of Bombay - known as the “Khoja Case.”
 - Judgement records: “The plaintiffs contend that Pir Sadr-ud-din, was a Suni; that the Khoja community has ever since its first conversion been and now is, Sunni; and that no persons calling themselves Khojas who are not Sunis, are entitled to be considered members of the Khoja community, or to have any share or interest in the public property of the Khoja community or any voice in the management thereof.”
 - The plaintiffs lost the court battle.
- In 1905 suit brought against Aga Khan III by Haji Bibi daughter of Jungi Shah, an uncle of Aga Khan III where High Courts Justice Russell Stated:
 - “The mother of defendant 1 [Aga Khan III] and some of his relatives are (sic) ‘Asnasharis.’”

Mulla Qader Husain

- ◆ 1862: Mulla Qader Husain from Madras opens a Madrasa in Mumbai
- ◆ 1870 Mullah Qader Husain returns to Karbala
- ◆ 1872 Dewji Jamal visits Karbala
- ◆ Ayatullah Mazandarani in Iraq sends Mulla Qader Husain to Bombay.
- ◆ His efforts resulted in more and more Khoja families leaving the Ismaili sect and accepting the Shia Ithna-Asheri faith.

Mulla Qader Husein



Born - 1842
Arrived Mumbai - 1862
Returned to Madras - 1868
To Kerbala early 1870/71
Returned to Mumbai - 1873
Autobiography - 1900
To Kerbala - 1901
Buried Kerbala 1902
Property acquired and bequeathed as Waqf in 1893 -
by "Khoja Ibrahim Hasambhai"

"Madressa of Mulla
Qader Husein"

Dewji Jamal

1872 Dewji Jamal visiting
Karbala requests
Ayatullah Zainul Abedin
Mazandarani (RA) to
send Mulla Qader Husain
to Mumbai to guide
Khojas towards Jafari
Madhab



1820 / 1905

Years of tribulations ~ 1873 ...

- ◆ Mulla Qader now in Mumbai opens a Madressa
 - ◆ Elders join in ~ Salat, Majlis, Masael
- ◆ Pressure to boycott Mulla
 - ◆ Khoja converts forced to meet secretly
- ◆ Pressure on Mulla to stop his mission
 - ◆ Bribes ~ Threats ~ Assassinations Attempts
- ◆ Community succumbs to pressure
 - ◆ Major Concerns ~ Marriage ~ Burial

Types of Pressures on Khoja

- ◆ Social Boycott
- ◆ Economic Boycott
- ◆ Excommunication from Khoja Jamaat
- ◆ Refusal to bury in Khoja Qabrastan
- ◆ Physical threats – Murders
- ◆ Opposition to building Mosque
 - ◆ Results in Assassinations of prominent KSI

Assassinations

- ◆ 1876 - Karachi - Lalan Alidina killed.
- ◆ 1878 - Mumbai - Killu Khatau hanged.
- ◆ 1901 - Mumbai Assassinations
 - ◆ Hirji Alarakhia - Killed
 - ◆ Lalji Sajan - Killed
 - ◆ Abdulla Lalji - Injured
 - ◆ Alibhai Nanji Miani - Injured.

Shahid Lalan Alidina



- ◆ On 2nd march, 1876, Lalan Alidinia was the first Khoja martyr to be killed in Karachi
 - ◆ Photograph of Lalan Alidina is not available, reproduced here is a picture of his son Nur Mohamed Lalan who had a close likeness with his father.

Lonely Grave of Killu Khatu ~ Hanged 1878



Mulla's favorite student,
Killu Kahtaw was
taunted and in anger he
stabbed Mukhi who died.
Killu admitted to the
killing and was sentenced
to death by hanging.

KSI Excommunicated

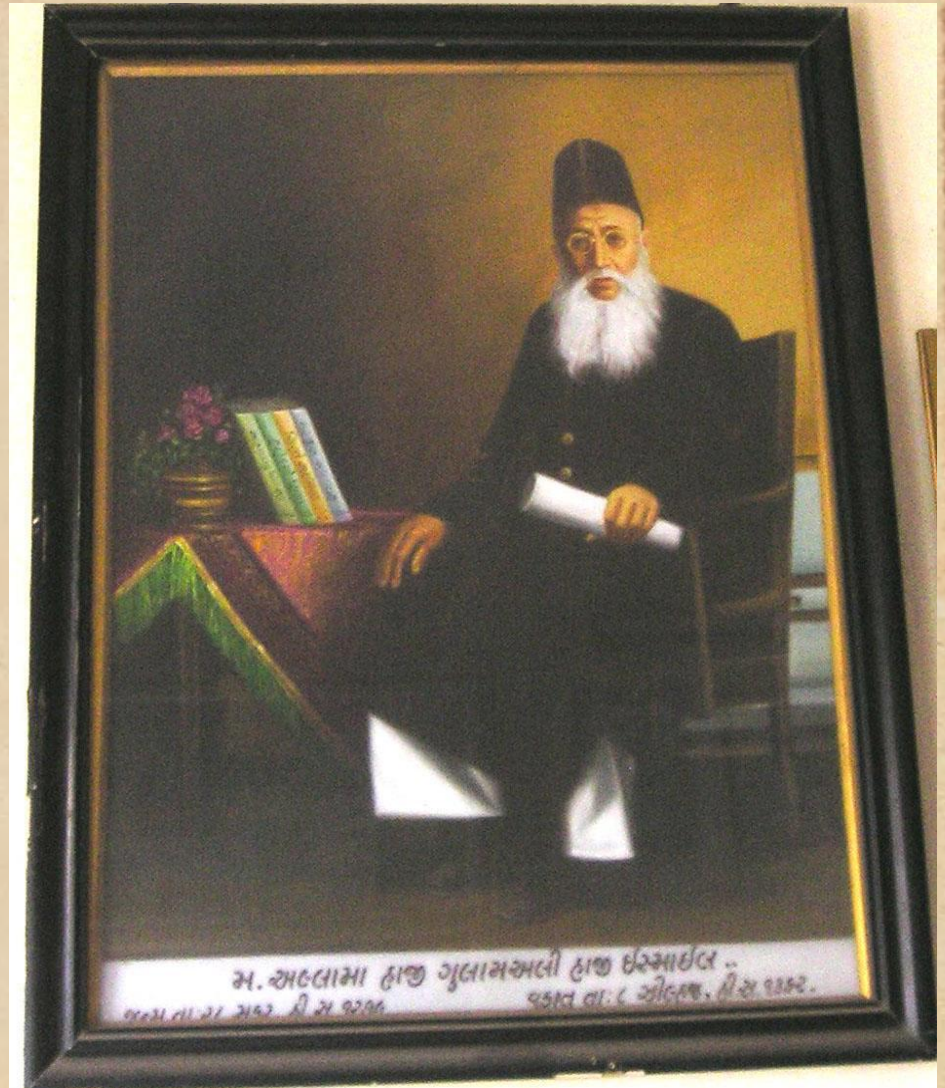
- ◆ 1876 - Khalfan Rattansi excommunicated
 - ◆ Daughter denied burial
 - ◆ Buried in Irani Cemetery and then eventually to Kerbala.
- ◆ 1877: Dewji Jamal & Alarakhia Valli excommunicated
 - ◆ Migrated to Zanzibar

Gulam Ali Haji Ismail (Haji Naji)

- ◆ Prominent student of Mulla Qader Husain
 - ◆ Gulam Ali Haji Ismail began to preach the Ithna-Ashari faith
 - ◆ Launched his monthly journal 'Rahe Najat' (path of Salvation)
 - ◆ First published in Zilqad of 1310 A.H. (1892)
 - ◆ Now one of the oldest Shi'ite religious monthly in Gujarati language
- ◆ Services rendered by Haji Naji were at the most critical time in the History of the Khoja Shia Ithnaashari Community

Haji Naji

Haji Gulamali
Haji Ismail -
1864/1943



Mulla Mohamed Jaffer Sharif Dewji Grandson of Dewji Jamal



- ◆ Born in 1889 in Zanzibar and died in 1960.
- ◆ Traveled throughout East Africa and visited Madagascar reciting Majalis in Gujarati
- ◆ Wrote 26 books in Gujarati including 'Sham-e-Hidayat' and 'Diniyat parts 1, 2 and 3' - which by 1976 were in use in almost all the Gujarati Madrassahs

The First Mosques

- ◆ The first Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Mosque and Imambara built in Zanzibar in 1881
- ◆ Karachi mosque built in 1892.
- ◆ Bagamoyo mosque also built in 1892.
- ◆ Because of litigations the Mosque in Bombay not built until 1901.

Zanzibar Kuwwat Mosque - 1881



Zanzibar Hujjat Mosque - 1884



First Resident Alim - Zanzibar



Madagascar Mosques

- ◆ First Khoja Mosque was built in Nossibe in 1865*
- ◆ Second Mosque was built in Maruwai in 1896
- ◆ Third Mosque in Majunga in 1906.
 - ◆ *It is possible that it was initially built as a Jamaat Khana as was not until late 1870's that Khoja practicing Ithna-Asheri faith had openly come out to register their own community to be known as Shia Ithna-Asheri Khoja.

Bagamoyo & Lamu



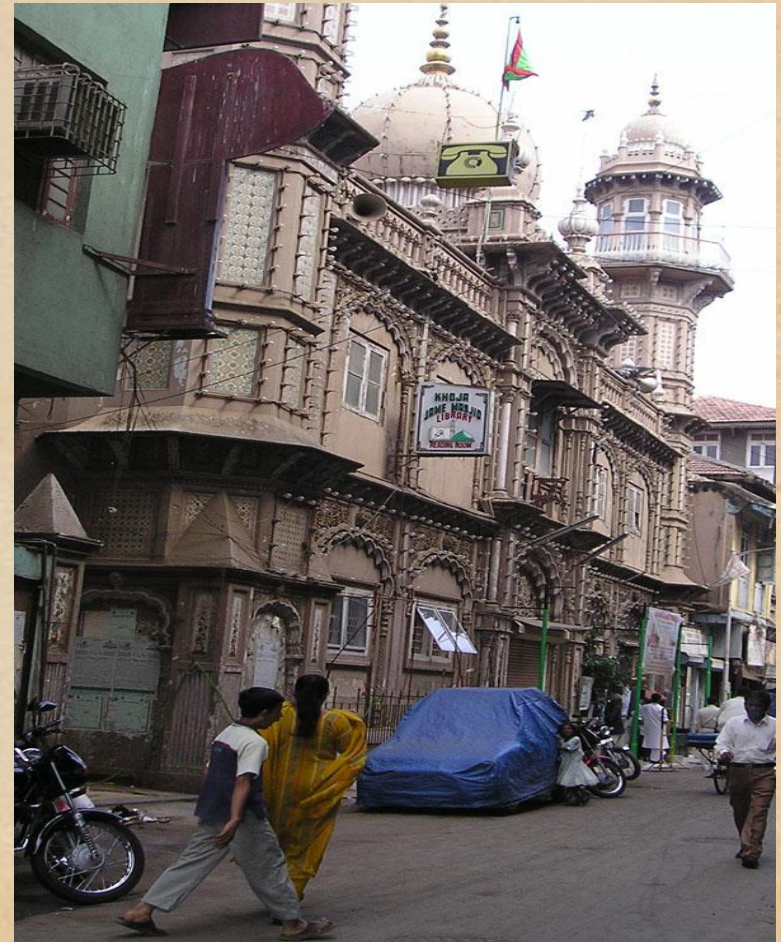
KSI Mosque Bagamoyo.
Built in 1889



The KSI mosque at Lamu
seafront.

Establishment of Jamat in Mumbai

- ◆ In 1901, the splinter group made an announcement in the newspapers and established a Khoja Ithnaashari Jamat in Mumbai.



The First Resident Alim - Mumbai



Left Sheikh
Abdulqasim Najafi the
first resident Aalim of
the Mumbai Jamaat

Right Shiekh
Mohamed Hassan
Najafi A.H., the
resident Aalim of the
Mumbai Jamaat.

Karachi Jamaat

- ◆ 1876 land located at the current site of the Khoja Mosque and Imambara in Kharadar area was purchased to build the first Imambara in Karachi.
- ◆ Karachi Jamaat, known as The Khoja (Pirhai) Shia Ithna-Asheri Jamaat was formally registered in 1892.
- ◆ A masjid was built on the present site in 1910.

The famous 'Pirh' in Karachi



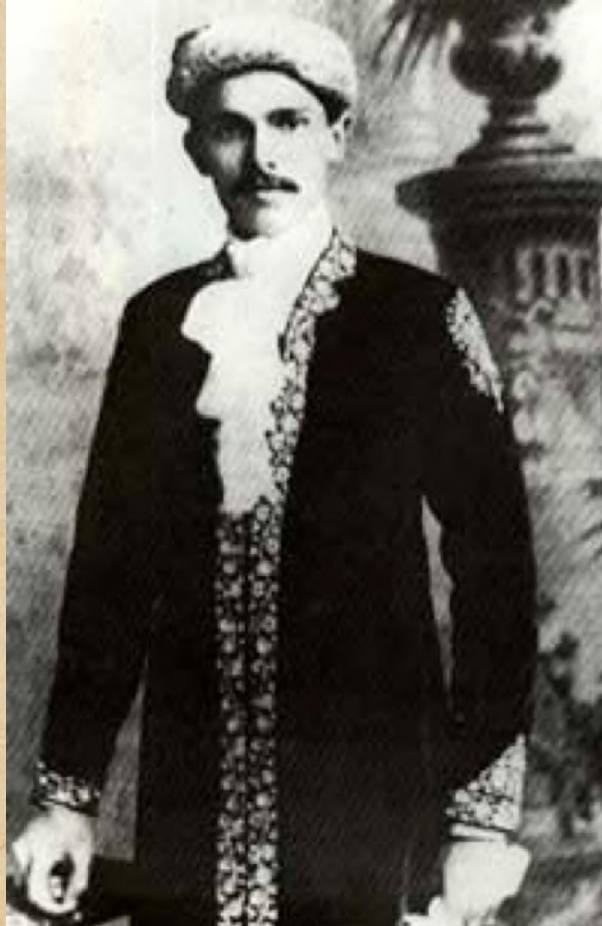
“Pirh” in Kharadar, Karachi, where beautifully carved wooden Tazia and Alam are kept and taken out in procession during Muharram. The name “Pirhai” for the Karachi Jamaat is derived from this place.

'Barha Imamabarh'



The famous "Barha Imambara", built in 1878, Kharadar, Karachi, from where the 'Shaame Ghariban' Majalis by late Allama Rashid Turabi were relayed by Pak Radio/TV.

Jinnah - A Khoja Shia Ithnaasheri



- ◆ Born in a Khoja Sia family when his parents converted
- ◆ A rare picture of Mohamed Ali Jinnah, dressed in long velvet frock coat with golden braided borders known by Khoja community as “Ves”,
- ◆ There would also be matching golden headgear known as “pugree” or turban. The golden turban was also worn by Ithna-Asheri Khoja elders during marriages and on festive occasions.

Jamaat Fever around the world

- ◆ The success of the Khojas in Zanzibar and Bombay & Karachi to form their own group spread throughout the Khoja world.
- ◆ Everywhere a new Jamaat was formed and the movement of spreading the Ithna-Asheri teachings was symbolized by construction of mosques instead of 'Jamaat Khanas' and the performance of regular salat as practiced by all other Shias.

Dispersal of the KSI

- ◆ Initial stage was the movement from Kutch, Kathiawad and Gujarat to Bombay and Karachi.
- ◆ Phase two was further movement towards the latter half of the last century to East Africa, Burma and Aden.
- ◆ After the second World War, 1939-1945 and the independence of the Indo-Pak sub Continent in 1947 a further wave of migration of Khojas took place from Cutch, Kathiawad, Gujarat and Bombay to Karachi in Pakistan

Diverse Colonial Influences

- ◆ Upon their arrival in Africa the Khojas these Khoja pioneers were subjected to:
 - ◆ German rule in Tanganyika
 - ◆ British rule in other parts of East Africa,
 - ◆ French rule in Madagascar
 - ◆ Italian rule in Somalia
 - ◆ Belgian rule in the Congo
 - ◆ Portuguese rule in Mozambique.

From Africa to the World

- ◆ The upheavals, following the independence movements in East Africa, forced many to look towards the Western world for settlement.
- ◆ The 1972 mass expulsion from Uganda, transplanted a significant portion of the Community in the UK and Europe and far corners of North America for settlement.

Rescue Operation - Somalia

- ◆ The latest exodus took place in 1990, when an entire community of 1,100 living in Somalia was evacuated in a daring seaborne evacuation exercise led by Alhajj Sajjad Rashid organized by the Community members in Kenya, at the risk of their own lives,, while Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia was rocked with civil war and tribal strife.

A Lament by 'AZAD'

- ♦ Ithna-Asheri Society today is overwhelmed by layers of backwardness and retrogression. The ship of our community is drifting aimlessly and helplessly in a vast ocean, and none can predict when it will perish against the rocks. This is not a figment of imagination by a poet, or empty, fictional verbiage by a writer. Those who care to spare a moment or two to make an appraisal, will agree that our words portray an exact and accurate picture of the prevailing situation.”
 - ♦ Abdulhusain Sachedina - Editor of MUNADI Magazine 1932

The Genesis of Federations

- ◆ "Progress without reform and organisation is difficult. We need a strong, fortified set of laws which should bring about order and discipline in all our Jamaats, big and small, and should open up the stifled path of progress and advancement. This has got to be our goal, and the easiest way to achieve this is to form a Central Council of the Shia Ithna-Asheri Community in East Africa".
 - ◆ Solution offered by - Azad

Unique Trait !!

'Endangered Species' - by Hassan Jaffer

- ◆ “When there is one Englishman, you have a gentleman. When there are two, you have a Club. When there are three Englishmen, you have an empire;’ somewhat on similar lines, it is said that when you have one Khoja, you have a lonely subdued individual. When there are two Khoja families, you have a Jamat; and when there are three Khoja families, there is a 'Federation' and a merry go round of meetings”

The Africa Federation

- ◆ In 1945, the leaders of the Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Jamaats of East Africa met in Dar-es-Salaam to approve the idea
- ◆ In 1946 Constitutional Conference which was convened to form the organization



The East African Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Preliminary Conference held in Dar es Salaam on 10 November, 1945

Mulla Asghar – Outline History of the Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Community



- ◆ “The ability to create an effective unified organisation of nearly 72 Jamaats, further enabled the Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheris of Africa to grow from a conceptually static and arid society into the one more vigorous and discursive. A new hierarchy placed greater responsibilities upon the leaders, giving them a wider perspective”

The World Federation

- ◆ The World Federation was born by unanimous assent at the 1976 Constitutional Conference in London. Its constitution, previously drafted by a sub-committee, was accepted by majority accord.
- ◆ 'Let me begin at the beginning. The concept of the World Federation dawned upon us by the events in Uganda.'
 - ◆ Mulla Asgharali M.M. Jaffer's inaugural address at the First Constitutional Conference of the World Federation (October 1976).

A Clear Vision

- ◆ The founders of the World Federation had a clear vision that the organization was formed to cater to religious and consequently to the social needs of the community, in order to fulfill our 'collective obligations' (wajibe Kifai).
- ◆ The concepts of 'Simplicity' and 'Sincerity', which were the hallmarks of the legacy of Marhum Mulla continue to remain uppermost as motivating factors.

The Federations

- ◆ Gujarat Federation - Formed in 1984
- ◆ NASIMCO - Formed in 1980
- ◆ COEJ - Formalized in 2005

Perceived Influence Belies Number

- ◆ The Khoja Shia Ithna Asheris spread over five continents number less than 125,000.
- ◆ Despite the miniscule percentage of the 200 million Shia Ithna-Asheris, their perceived influence and fame belies their number.
- ◆ This level of recognition and influence has not been without the attendant challenges of disparagement and denigration, at times even from their own.

Numbers in Perspective

- ◆ World population 5 billion + Muslim 1.3 billion +
- ◆ Shia - 15 to 20% = 210 to 280 million
- ◆ Khoja Ithna-asheri: 120,00
 - ◆ Pakistan: 40,000;
 - ◆ India 30,000
 - ◆ Africa: 20,000
 - ◆ Europe: 10,000
 - ◆ Canada/U.S.A: 10,000
 - ◆ Rest: 10,000

A Critical Time

- ◆ In March 2000, the KSI Community faced a critical challenge. The towering personality, who had been at the helm of the Community for almost 4 decades, was no more.
- ◆ Acknowledged as one of the most charismatic and visionary leaders of the Shia world in the 20th century Mulla Asgharali M. M. Jaffer breathed his last at the offices of the World Federation.

Where do we go from here?

- ◆ The new generation is questioning the modus operandi and the insularity of the community whilst the old guard insists upon retaining what has worked well for the community for almost a century. So, where do we go from here?
- ◆ It is this kind of evaluation that will enable us to deal with contemporary challenges and plan for the future.

How Should we meet the Challenges?

- ◆ “We need to meet the challenges of the day, not with a unquestioning observance to convention nor with the fascination of the novel - but with a spirit of revitalizing pristine Islamic values and traditions. We must seek to enhance this institution through concepts that derive their nourishment from the spirit of Islam which are at the same time fitting to the needs of time.”
 - ◆ Hasnain Walji - President World Federation 2000 - 2003

Sources

- ◆ Khoja Vrattant
 - ◆ Sachedina Nanjiamni – 1892
- ◆ History of the Khojas
 - ◆ Jafferri Rehmtukllah - 1905
- ◆ Khoja Kawm ni Taarikh
 - ◆ Adelji Dhanji Kaaba 1912
- ◆ Mulla Qadra Husain nu Jiwan Charitray
 - ◆ Mulla Qadir Husein