The Making of a Diasporic Muslim Family in East Africa

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CHAPTER SIX

The Making of a Diasporic Muslim Family in East Africa

SALIM LAKHA

Gujaratis are renowned for their mercantile skills and mobility. It is therefore not surprising that they enjoy a ubiquitous presence in the global Indian diaspora. My extended family, the Kassim Lakha clan, for example, now spans five continents with some members exclaiming they even have one of their clansmen living 'down under' in Australia! Considering the family is scattered all over the world, it is difficult to keep track of where certain members reside at any point in time. For example, when I was about to depart on my sabbatical leave to Palo Alto, California in 2004, I was most surprised to learn that two of my long-lost cousins, Jenny and Azim,[1] lived close by in

[1] Azim is my first cousin, the son of my father's younger brother Tajjdin. Jenny (who passed away in September 2012) was my second cousin. She

Menlo Park. My curiosity was aroused as I had not had any contact with them since my childhood in East Africa. Within 48 hours of my arrival in Palo Alto, Jenny's husband Amir collected me and my wife from our motel to meet Jenny and their daughter, my cousin Azim, and Rafiq, an acquaintance originally from South Africa who also lived in Palo Alto. Soon we all settled down with ease in Jenny and Amir's pleasant courtyard to sample samosas, sip drinks, and share our life stories over the course of a balmy evening. What was striking about this reunion of the three cousins was that despite our lengthy separation and diverse life journeys, kinship bonds and a common heritage still bound us together. We represent the third generation of the Kassim Lakha family born in East Africa, and brought up as Khoja Ismailis, a Muslim community with a very distinct identity and followers of the Aga Khan. To appreciate the significance of this heritage it is necessary to understand its historical and cultural context.

This chapter examines how trade, community, and British rule forged the fortunes of the Kassim Lakha family, who migrated to eastern Africa from Kathiawad, Gujarat in western India. Based partly upon biographical and autobiographical accounts, this case study of the Kassim Lakha family illuminates the significant role of the Khojas in trade in eastern Africa and their cultural adaptation. The Khoja Muslims are renowned for having readily embraced many aspects of modernization during British rule, and for being at the forefront of Westernization among the wider Indian community in East Africa.[2] The experience of the Kassim Lakha family illustrates this process, underlines their engagement with modernity, and highlights the significance of community in the shaping of diasporic lives in East Africa.

There is quite an extensive scholarly literature on South Asians in East Africa, and a growing number of academic publications on the Khoja Ismailis, but substantial biographies of individual Khoja businessmen and public figures are not common or readily available. There is a part-fictional biography of the famous Ismaili merchant Allidina

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was the daughter of my father's first cousin Daulat who was the daughter of Hassan Kassim Lakha, a prominent figure in the Khoja Ismaili community in East Africa.

[2] J.S. Mangat. 1969. *A History of the Asians in East Africa c. 1886 to 1945*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 175.

Visram,[3] and a volume titled *101 Ismaili Heroes* (2003) by Pakistani writer Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali,[4] which provides some interesting details on the lives of prominent business and community leaders, but represents a hagiographic study. A personal account by Keshavjee[5] sheds some light on her grandfather and his family in Kenya. Further, an academic study of a Kenyan businessman Kassam Kanji, by his granddaughter Aneesa, offers some illuminating insights, particularly into the political and personal encounters of her grandfather and, to some extent, the Ismailis in Kenya.[6] Beyond these few accounts there is not much biographical literature that offers insights into the lives of individual Ismailis or Ismaili families. Consequently, the discussion of the Kassim Lakha family in this chapter is based on scattered information derived from various scholarly and non-scholarly sources, including autobiographical input and several short articles contributed by my father's elder brother, Abdulrasul Kassim-Lakha.[7]

The chapter begins with the arrival of the Khojas in Zanzibar and a brief explanation of the community's identity. It then focuses on the early settlement of the Kassim Lakha family in Zanzibar and its shift to the mainland of East Africa. The third part explores the family's business expansion, and the final section examines the family's involvement in Ismaili community institutions.

KHOJA ISMAILIS AND THEIR ARRIVAL IN ZANZIBAR

The substantial migration and settlement of Indians, predominantly Gujaratis, on the east African mainland, and on the islands

[3] Dana April Seidenberg. 1996. *Mercantile Adventurers*: *The World of East African Asians 1750-1985*. New Delhi: New Age International, p. 65.

[4] Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali. 2003. *101 Ismaili Heroes*, vol. 1, *Late 19th Century to Present Age*. Karachi: Islamic Book Publishers. Available online at http://ismaili.net/heritage/node/20664 (accessed on 12 December 2012).

[5] Shariffa Keshavjee. 2005. *Bwana Mzuri: Memories of Hasham Jamal, A Pioneer in Kisumu*. Nairobi: Executive Printers.

[6] Aneesa Kassam. 2009. 'In Search of the Good Life: Life-History of a Kenyan Indian Settler. A Sartrean Approach to Biography and History', *History and Anthropology*, 20(4): 435–57.

[7] Cynthia Salvadori (compiler). 2000. *We Came in Dhows*, 3 vols. Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited.

of Zanzibar and Lamu corresponded with the convergence of various events during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly the establishment of British and German control in eastern Africa from about 1895. Those migrating to eastern Africa from Gujarat included Muslims belonging to different religious sects such as the Bohras, Memons, and Khojas, as well as Hindus from various caste groups, prominently Bhatias, Lohanas, Patels, and Jains.[8]

The Khojas were early settlers in Zanzibar since they already had a well-established presence in 1820, marked by the existence of an 'organized … Jamat', that is, a gathering of the followers of the faith.[9] They originated from Kutch, Kathiawad, and parts of Gujarat which had been brought under British administration during the early nineteenth century, and were converts from the Hindu Lohana caste, whose traditional occupation was trade.[10]

They were bestowed with the honorific title of Khwaja (in Persian 'lord'/'master') by the Persian Ismaili missionary Pir Sadr al-Din (around the fifteenth century) who converted them to the Ismaili faith.[11] Asani claims that the Khojas were 'strongly influenced by their Indian cultural ancestry'[12] which was evident in their traditional literature and rituals,[13] while at the same time they shared a 'religious vocabulary' which reflected links with Sufism.[14] A distinctive feature of the Ismaili faith is the emphasis placed upon maintaining a balance between '*din*' (religion) and '*duniya*' (world) where the two are not

[8] Makrand Mehta. 2001. 'Gujarati Business Communities in East African Diaspora: Major Historical Trends', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(20): 1738–47.

[9] Hatim M. Amiji. 1971. 'Some Notes on Religious Dissent in Nineteenth-Century East Africa', *African Historical Studies*, 4(3): 603–16, p. 605.

[10] Ali S. Asani. 2001. 'The Khojahs of South Asia: Defining a Space of Their Own', *Cultural Dynamics*, 13(2): 155–68, p. 155; Azim Nanji. 1999. *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*. Delmar: Caravan Books, p. 74.

[11] Nanji, *Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, p. 74.

[12] Asani, 'Khojahs of South Asia', p. 156.

[13] Nanji, *Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 7–21.

[14] Asani, 'Khojahs of South Asia', p. 156.

mutually exclusive spheres of life but 'intersect and interact', guided by an Islamic ethical context.[15]

The heterodox and syncretic character of the Khojas was evident in their early trade practices that included banking from which the more orthodox Muslims refrained since it involved usury.[16] While the Khojas were involved in diverse occupations in Gujarat, including cultivation, the Bombay Gazeteer for Ahmedabad district reported that they were engaged in wholesale and retail trades and appeared 'shrewd, hardworking and thrifty'; they were also classified as 'well-to-do'.[17] Not all Khojas who migrated to Zanzibar came from a prosperous trading background, but as a community, trade was one of their important occupations.

By 1887 the population of the Khojas in the town of Zanzibar stood at 1,900, well ahead of the other Asian communities which totalled 3,086 persons; only the Hindus with 610 persons and the Bohras with 362 were the other significant groups besides the Khojas.[18] The Khojas dominated numerically even when the Indian population of Zanzibar was combined with that of other areas, including the mainland, which were under the rule of the Sultan of Zanzibar. In 1877 the Khojas numbered 3,398 (or over 53 per cent) out of a total Indian population of 6,344.[19] The period from 1870 to the beginning of the 1900s witnessed a substantial growth of South Asian traders in Zanzibar, expanding from 2,500 to 6,000, with a majority being Muslims while only a small

[15] Malise Ruthven. 2011. 'The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions', in Farhad Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, pp. 189–220. London: I. B. Tauris and Co., p. 191.

[16] M.N. Pearson. 1976. *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 27.

[17] Bombay Government. 1879. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. 4, Ahmedabad. Bombay: Bombay Government, p. 41.

[18] Robert G. Gregory. 1971. *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within the British Empire 1890-1939*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 37; Carmen Voigt-Graf. 1998. *Asian Communities in Tanzania: A Journey through Past and Present Times*. Hamburg: Institute of African Affairs, p. 32.

[19] Gregory, *India and East Africa*, p. 37.

segment was Hindu.[20] Though a detailed time-wise breakdown of the Indian population along lines of religious affiliation is not available in the literature, it is clear from the above statistics that during the latter part of the nineteenth century the Gujarati Muslims, especially the Khojas, were the dominant group of Indian settlers.[21] The Muslim dominance in terms of settlement during the early years may partly be explained by the ritual restriction against 'overseas travel' among Hindus,[22] the influence of which declined with modernization, greater integration into the East African economy, and the passage of time. Further, in the case of Muslims geographical and historical factors also played their part since Gujarati Muslim communities from Kutch and Kathiawad, with their proximity to seaports, were exposed to Indian Ocean trade and cultural influences over many centuries. Traders from these communities in Gujarat had actively participated in the trade with Africa, the Persian Gulf, and other parts of the Middle East.[23] However, during the course of the twentieth century the Gujarati Hindu population in East Africa surpassed that of the Muslims, and by the 1960s the former represented an overwhelming majority, that is, around 70 per cent of the overall Asian population.[24] According to Ghai, the Asian population in East Africa in 1970 was between 350,000 and 370,000 persons, which was only under 1.2 per cent of the entire population.[25] Their economic influence however far exceeded their population size.

[20] Gijsbert Oonk. 2005. 'Gujarati Business Communities in East Africa: Success and Failure Stories', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(20): 2077–81, p. 2078.

[21] Mehta, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 1742.

[22] Gijsbert Oonk. 2006. 'East Africa', in Brij V. Lal (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian Diaspora*, pp. 254–61. Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Paris: Editions Didier Millet.

[23] Kenneth McPherson. 1993. *The Indian Ocean: A History of the People and the Sea*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 78, 190.

[24] Agehananda Bharati. 1970. 'A Social Survey', in Dharam P. Ghai and Yash P. Ghai (eds), *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, pp. 15–67.

[25] Dharam P. Ghai. 1970. 'An Economic Survey', in Dharam P. Ghai and Yash P. Ghai (eds), *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, pp. 98–127.

In contrast to the Hindus who did not initially bring family members to Zanzibar, the Muslims from the Khoja and the Ithnasheri (a Muslim Shia sect) communities brought their families from the early period of settlement, which may partly explain the demographic predominance of the Khojas.[26] Initially, Hindus were restricted in travelling overseas because of the belief that it constituted ritual pollution, and those from the upper castes regarded Africa 'impure', especially where women were concerned.[27] The growth in the Khoja population from the mid-nineteenth century onwards is also attributed to several other factors related to conditions in India. Among the important push factors accounting for migration to Zanzibar were the repeated droughts and famines in Kutch and Kathiawad, combined with the fall of employment in local handicraft industries[28] in the face of competition from imported goods, and later, mechanized Indian production. These famines, which occurred during 1896–7 and 1899–1900 in Gujarat, resulted in widespread shortage of food and claimed many lives.[29] By the end of the nineteenth century starvation, combined with diseases like dysentery and cholera, resulted, according to Boyd, in 'utter destitution', and the administration of the Bombay Presidency was unable to deal with the situation in a satisfactory manner.[30] Consequently, many from Gujarat were forced to search for better prospects across the Indian Ocean.

Combined with the push factors there were other major influences during the second half of nineteenth century that drew the Khojas and other Indians to East Africa. The rise of Zanzibar as a trading centre by the middle of nineteenth century, together with the a growing British influence over Zanzibar and the Indian Ocean created propitious conditions for Indian traders who had already obtained a foothold in the region.[31] The British encouraged Indian traders to

[26] Oonk, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 2078.

[27] Oonk, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 2078.

[28] Amiji, 'Some Notes', p. 606.

[29] Kassam, 'In Search', p. 443.

[30] Cited in John Mattausch. 1998. 'From Subjects to Citizens: British 'East African Asians'', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 24(1): 121–41, p. 121–41.

[31] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, pp. 3–5.

participate in commercial activities in the region and once the British established their consulate in Zanzibar in 1841 this support was further strengthened.[32] Further, the introduction of steam shipping between India and Zanzibar in 1873 on a monthly basis provided an additional spurt to migration.[33] According to Amiji, a large expansion in the Khoja population in Zanzibar occurred from the late 1850s to 1870s, which coincided with the commercial growth of Zanzibar.[34] While this initial rise in Khoja population preceded the famines mentioned above, their population expanded substantially both through migration and natural increase following the famines and from the beginning of the twentieth century. Importantly for the Khojas, their Imam Sultan Mohamed Shah (Aga Khan III) also advised them to 'seek economic opportunities in East Africa'.[35]

The prominent role of the Khojas in trade in Zanzibar and on the mainland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued despite serious dissension and splits within the community in Bombay in 1866 and 1908, and in Zanzibar in 1899.[36] The source of these splits was mainly over the role and authority of the Aga Khan. According to Mehta, the Ismailis commanded both numbers and 'great prestige in the business world of East Africa' at the time.[37] Pioneers such as Sir Tharia Topan, Sewa Haji Paroo, Allidina Visram, my great grandfather Kassim Lakha, and a few others who were from Kutch and Kathiawad were linked to each other through business ties, with some enjoying close relations with the Arab rulers of Zanzibar.[38]

Amongst these men, Sir Tharia Topan and Allidina Visram gained considerable fame, fortune, and prestige through their trading activities and close connections as advisers to the rulers of Zanzibar. Sir Tharia Topan (1823–1891), who was regarded as 'The King of the Ivory Trade' in Zanzibar, had an illustrious lineage since

[32] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 3.

[33] Amiji, 'Some Notes', p. 606.

[34] Amiji, 'Some Notes', p. 606.

[35] Kassam, 'In Search', p. 443.

[36] Asani, 'Khojahs of South Asia', pp. 159–60; Amiji, 'Some Notes', pp. 609, 612.

[37] Mehta, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 1742.

[38] Mehta, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 1742.

he claimed descent from Seth Topan, a close associate of Maharao Khengar (1510–1585), the ruler of Kutch.[39] Seth Topan was a convert to the Ismaili faith from the Hindu Bhatia caste whose members were traders.[40] His descendant, Tharia Topan, however, was raised in humble circumstances in Kutch since the fortunes of his ancestors had declined considerably over generations. After arriving in Zanzibar in 1835 as a stowaway, and working as a 'scribe' in the firm of the prominent Hindu businessman Jairam Shivji, he experienced a considerable rise in his fortunes when he became the island's customs collector during 1875–80.[41] Sir Topan was highly respected by British officials and explorers, whose expeditions he financed and provisioned, as did other leading Indian merchants.[42] For his assistance to the British in ending slavery he was awarded a knighthood in 1890.[43] His special status within Zanzibar's ruling elite, combined with his leadership of the Khojas, greatly aided the commercial efforts of the community.[44]

Another renowned Khoja businessman noted for his considerable commercial acumen was Allidina Visram (1863–1916) who also originated from Kutch, arriving in Zanzibar as a young boy in 1877[45] where he initially worked for a prominent Khoja Kutchi businessman, Sewa Haji Paroo.[46] Later, Visram set up stores of his own far into the mainland and financed the infamous slave trade in East Africa, as did some of his other Indian counterparts.[47] Described as the 'leading merchant in East Africa', his entry further inland to Uganda even

[39] Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali. 2003. 'Tharia Topan', *101 Ismaili Heroes*, available online at http://www.ismaili.net/heritage/node/20763 (accessed on 8 March 2011).

[40] Ali, 'Tharia Topan'.

[41] Ali, 'Tharia Topan'; Gregory, *India and East Africa*, p. 39.

[42] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 20.

[43] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, pp. 20–1.

[44] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 20.

[45] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 51.

[46] Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali. 2003. 'Alidina Visram', *101 Ismaili Heroes*, available online at http://www.ismaili.net/heritage/node/20666 (accessed on 8 September 2011).

[47] Oonk, 'East Africa', p. 254.

preceded the railways.[48] By the first two decades of the twentieth century his diverse commercial networks stretched all the way from Bombay to encompass many parts of East Africa, as well as the Congo and Ethiopia.[49] For his entrepreneurship he gained widespread respect from the Indian community, and even the African elite in Uganda.[50] His legacy included also the promotion of education since he established the Allidina Visram High School in Mombasa, Kenya.

The considerable contributions of Sir Tharia Topan and Allidina Visram to the Khoja community received recognition from the Imams of the time, Imam Hasan Ali Shah and Imam Sultan Mohamed Shah (Aga Khan III) respectively, who awarded them the honorific title of Varas.[51] Sir Tharia Topan, apart from his other services, had served as the *mukhi* or head of the *jamat* in Zanzibar for a year. Similarly, Visram had made a generous contribution to the building of a *jamatkhana* in Kisumu (a port on Lake Victoria in Kenya), as well as followed the advice of Aga Khan III to aid poorer Khojas from Kathiawad to settle in Zanzibar.[52] Their contributions to the welfare of the community were in keeping with the tradition of voluntary service to the Imam and the *jamat*.

This tradition of volunteering continues with enthusiasm and considerable vigour in contemporary times among the Khojas on the subcontinent and in East Africa as well as amongst those from the community who have migrated to Western countries. The following account of the Kassim Lakha family illustrates service to the community combined with the pursuit of material progress which is characteristic of many Khoja Ismailis.

BEGINNINGS: FROM ZANZIBAR TO THE MAINLAND

The migration of my great grandfather Kassim (1853–1910) to Zanzibar in 1871 had many parallels with the experiences of other Khojas like Tharia Topan and Allidina Visram. In Zanzibar he followed in the

[48] Oonk, 'East Africa', p. 255.

[49] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, pp. 76–81.

[50] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 81.

[51] Ali, 'Tharia Topan'; Ali, 'Alidina Visram'.

[52] Ali, 'Alidina Visram'.

footsteps of Visram in his quest to establish a new home across the ocean from where he was born. According to Seidenberg, the 'rags-to-riches' transformation of the Kassim Lakha family was 'archetypal' of others in East Africa.[53] My great grandfather's father, Lakha, originated from a village close to Jamnagar in Kathiawad where he was a small cultivator.[54] Though my great grandfather originally migrated from the Gujarati-speaking region of Kathiawad, in East Africa the family spoke the Kutchi language, thus sharing the heritage of Kutch with many of the Khojas from Zanzibar. In his biographical account, Ali claims that Kassim's family was severely affected by the famine,[55] so to escape these poverty-stricken conditions he migrated with other Ismailis to Zanzibar.[56] Like other Khoja men, he was soon joined by his female relatives, namely, his wife Ratanbai, and his mother.[57]

My great grandfather was initially employed by Sultan Syed Barghash to organize food and tents for expeditions departing for the mainland.[58] Following this assignment he moved to the island of Lamu around 1883, while still working for the Sultan. Sometime during his stay in Lamu he started his own business by opening a small general store.[59] By then his family had expanded to include several children, both boys and girls.[60]

His secular, unorthodox view of learning was demonstrated in his choice of education for his boys in Lamu. He recruited a Hindu Brahmin teacher by the name of Raval from Zanzibar to teach them

[53] Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.

[54] Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.

[55] In the biographical account of her grandfather, Kassam also claims that the drought of 1899–1900 (and consequent deprivation) was a major consideration in prompting her grandfather and other Indians to migrate to East Africa. Kassam, 'In Search', p. 443.

[56] Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali. 2003. 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count', *101 Ismaili Heroes*, available online at http://www.ismaili.net/Source/mumtaz/Heroes1/hero042.html (accessed on 29 August 2011).

[57] Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.

[58] Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.

[59] Abdulrasul A. Kassim-Lakha. 2000. 'The Sultan's Aide-de-Camp', in Cynthia Salvadori (compiler), *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 1. Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited, pp. 26–7.

[60] Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.

to read and write, but they were also sent to a madrasa to learn the Quran. Additionally, they attended the Khoja community's religious school to acquire a knowledge of the *ginan*s,[61] which are a central component of the community's 'literary heritage', and normally 'recited' or 'sung'[62] to a particular raga in *jamatkhana*s every day wherever in the world the Khojas reside. Although the secular education imparted to my grandfather and his brothers did not extend beyond the early primary level,[63] among the third generation of the family in East Africa, to which I belong, the pursuit of higher university level education became a prime objective.

In Lamu, my great grandfather gained in social stature since he was appointed *mukhi* of the small *jamat* there.[64] As *mukhi* he was considered the leader of the Khoja community in Lamu and recognized as such by the British district commissioner.

Some years later, in 1898, he shifted to Mombasa, Kenya, where he worked as a manager in an import–export firm owned by Allidina Visram which was engaged in trade with India.[65] Not content with staying in Mombasa, he moved inland to Kisumu where he continued in the employment of Visram, and supervised 'all of Allidina Visram's shops in Kenya and Uganda'[66] until he died in 1910. Further, he had set up two shops for himself in Mombasa and Kisumu that were operated by his four sons, Mohamed, Hassan, Rahemtulla, and Alibhai, my grandfather.[67] The eldest, Mohamed, was also employed by Visram's business for sometime in Kisumu. My great grandfather's career was therefore closely tied to Visram's businesses and patronage, underlining the importance of community networks in the business history of the Khojas in East Africa.[68]

During his time in Kisumu my great grandfather (Kassim) gained significant recognition for his public service, especially his

[61] Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.

[62] Nanji, *Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 6–9.

[63] Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.

[64] Kassim-Lakha, 'The Sultan's Aide-de-Camp', p. 27.

[65] Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.

[66] Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.

[67] Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.

[68] Kassam, 'In Search', p. 445.

contribution in helping to eradicate a plague epidemic that afflicted the town in 1905. His presence in the town, where two of his sons Mohamed and Rahemtulla had settled, was commemorated by his four sons, who had a clock tower built in his memory. The clock tower, now 'a landmark', occupying a central location in the town, had its plaque 'unveiled' by Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, the colony's governor, in 1938.[69] The event was reported in the *Standard* newspaper (26 August 1938), which stated that the governor's 'short speech' acknowledged Kassim Lakha's 'notable enterprise and ability'.[70] Further, the paper commended Kassim Lakha's 'assistance in stamping out' the plague 'regardless' of the risk it posed to his own health.

The clock tower in Kisumu was not the only monument displaying the family's links with the British administration. At the time of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953, the Kassim Lakha family donated a clock tower to the city of Kampala, Uganda, in recognition of the occasion. Despite the expulsion of Asians in 1972 from Uganda and the ravages of Idi Amin's regime, the clock tower still stands in one of the city's major landmarks.

EXPANSION OF THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Following the death of my great grandfather, Kassim, in 1910, his four sons, including my grandfather Alibhai, extended their father's business interests across East Africa, particularly in Kenya and Uganda. The eldest, Mohamed, left his employment with Allidina Visram's firm and set out independently with his brothers to start a business that involved the purchase of various agricultural products and hides and skins to be sold initially to European businesses in Kisumu for export.[71] The brothers set up stores all around Lake Victoria in Kenya and Tanganyika (now Tanzania), for the purchase of various commodities, and employed Khoja families to run them.[72] Significantly, over time

[69] Keshavjee, *Bwana Mzuri*, p. 41.

[70] Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 3, p. 162.

[71] Abdulrasul A. Kassim-Lakha. 2000. 'Cotton in Kavirondo', in Cynthia Salvadori (compiler), *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 2. Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited, pp. 152–3.

[72] Kassim-Lakha, 'Cotton in Kavirondo', pp. 152–3.

the family business made a transition from trade to industrial processing, with investments in cotton ginning and a coffee-curing factory outside Kampala which was the 'largest' factory in Uganda.[73] In 1915, Hassan, the youngest of the brothers, who was working for a British firm, Bousted & Clark, left the company to enter the cotton business.[74] Within three years the family had set up several ginneries in Uganda. Then in 1919 Mohamed set up a ginnery in Samia in western Kenya, in partnership with a Captain Gordon Small. The ginnery operated under the name Small & Company, retaining that name even after Gordon sold his share of the business to the Kassim Lakha family.

A striking feature of the Kassim Lakha investments in cotton ginneries was their remote locations, underlining the extraction of commodities by Indian commercial enterprises deep in the hinterland of East Africa. These ginneries purchased cotton from small-scale African producers and processed it in the ginneries. The cotton was brought by foot or on bicycles to the ginneries or to one of the many small depots spread throughout the interior. One of the ginneries that I visited on a few occasions with my parents and uncle Abdulrasul and his family was the one located in Samia (western Kenya). It was extremely isolated, and the closest settlement to which it was connected by an unsealed road was Sio-Port, a small place that was a relatively short drive from the ginnery. The ginnery was set in a compound surrounded by bush, with the accommodation lacking electric lighting, relying mainly on kerosene lamps. Needless to say, working there for up to six months during the cotton season was regarded by various family members as a hardship assignment, especially with mosquitoes presenting a major health hazard in the isolated settlement. I remember my father, Sadrudin, suffering a serious bout of malaria as a consequence. The ginnery's isolation and threat of malaria, however, did not daunt my uncle Abdulrasul, who reminded us that his forebears had travelled all over the interior riding a bicycle.

As the business enterprises of the Kassim Lakha family and other Indians demonstrate, the economic role of Indians in East Africa was not confined, as is commonly imagined, to running retail shops,

[73] Robert G. Gregory. 1993. *South Asians in East Africa: An Economic and Social History 1890-1980*. Boulder: Westview Press, p. 282.

[74] Kassim-Lakha, 'Cotton in Kavirondo', p. 153.

though that sector was dominated by them during the colonial period. Their foray into industrial production was a significant feature of the colonial economy. For example, the statistics for Uganda show that by 1938 the number of ginneries owned by Indian firms far surpassed those owned by British or European owners.[75]

By the late 1950s and early 1960s the family had considerably diversified its business interests and established 'approximately fifty businesses' that were located mainly in East Africa, but they also invested in jute mills in Bangladesh, and made some investments in Canada and the United Kingdom.[76] This extensive family business network in East Africa comprised cotton ginneries, coffee processing, luxury hotels in Kampala and Mombasa, a bakery in Nairobi, and a farm outside Mombasa amongst other enterprises. Since the enterprises were run mainly by the extended family members there was no shortage of manpower. However, some of the enterprises such as the jute mill in Bangladesh had other shareholders besides the Kassim Lakha family. The second generation of the family, including my father, his brothers, and their cousins were all recruited to manage and operate the various enterprises.

The prominent status of the Kassim Lakha family in the business sector was reflected in its participation in politics and in business associations representing Indian commercial interests. Notable among them was Mohamed Kassim Lakha, one of the leaders of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Eastern Africa set up in 1932 to oppose the discriminatory marketing legislation proposed by the colonial administration for Uganda and Tanzania.[77] He also founded the Indian Merchants' Chamber and the Indian Association of Kisumu, which together with other Indian associations represented the 'grievances' of Indians to both the colonial government in India and the British government.[78] When

[75] R.R. Ramchandani. 1976. *Uganda Asians: The End of an Enterprise*. Bombay: United Asia Publications, pp. 132–5.

[76] Robert G. Gregory. 1992. *The Rise and Fall of Philanthropy in East Africa*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, p. 78.

[77] Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 156; Gregory, *India and East Africa*, p. 453.

[78] Abdulrasul A. Kassim-Lakha. 2000. 'Plague & Politics in Kisumu', in Cynthia Salvadori (compiler), *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 3. Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited, pp. 162–3.

Sarojini Naidu was invited in 1923 to the East African Indian National Congress meeting in Mombasa to address Indian concerns in East Africa, Mohamed, who was one of the delegates at the meeting, was asked to translate her speech that was delivered in English.[79] Notably, Mohamed was nominated a member of the Legislative Council in Kenya in 1923, and his brother Rahemtulla also gained a seat in the Legislative Council.[80]

The next generation of the Kassim Lakha family continued this tradition of commercial and political participation. Mohamed Kassim Lakha's nephews, my uncles Abdulrasul and Gulamhussein (sons of Alibhai Kassim Lakha), were both actively engaged in public life. My uncle Abdulrasul occupied various positions on commercial boards, including as chairman of the Kenya Cotton Association (1963–76), and vice-chairman of the Kenya Sisal Board from 1974 to 1978.[81] His brother Gulamhussein was appointed by the governor of Kenya as a member of the Cotton Lint and Seed Marketing Board for a period of three years from 1 July 1961 to represent ginners in the Nyanza Province.[82] He was also a member of parliament in Uganda for 11 years from 1960 onwards until Idi Amin deposed President Milton Obote in a coup in January 1971 and amended the constitution. Since my uncle belonged to the Uganda People's Congress which was the party of the country's then president Milton Obote, my uncle's life was under constant danger during the three months over which Asians were expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin in August 1972.[83] By the

[79] Kassim-Lakha, 'Plague & Politics in Kisumu', p. 163.

[80] Keshavjee, *Bwana Mzuri*, p. 41.

[81] Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali. 2003. 'Abdulrasul Kassim-Lakha, Wazir', *101 Ismaili Heroes*, available online at http://www.ismaili.net/heritage/node/20665 (accessed 27 June 2011).

[82] See the Kenya Gazette dated 10 October 1961, available online at http://books.google.com.au/books?id=ln6uHWQFJGYC&pg=PA1206&dq=gulamhussein+kassim-lakha&hl=en&sa=X&ei=nDY9UrHYM8Tdigfb0ICoCw&ved=0CFMQ6AEwBzgK#v=onepage&q=gulamhussein%20kassim-lakha&f=false (accessed on 28 July 2011).

[83] Email communication dated 16–17 October 2011 with my cousin Zul Kassim-Lakha (son of Gulamhussein Kassim-Lakha) who now resides in Belgium. On the expulsion of Ugandan Asians, refer to Mohamed M. Keshavjee. 2012. 'The Ugandan Asian Expulsion and Its Place in the Evolution

mid-1970s, the family experienced a waning of its business fortunes following the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, the conflict between East and West Pakistan, and also serious dissension within the Kassim Lakha family itself, which witnessed the children of the four brothers, Mohamed, Rahemtullah, Alibhai, and Hassan go their own ways. Significant changes in direction of the Kassim Lakha family can be seen in the third generation to which I belong, who were not drawn into the family business network, but instead moved out into professional occupations or entered business with others outside the family. The increasing political instability in East Africa combined with new professional opportunities abroad witnessed the emigration of many family members to Europe, mainly France, Belgium, Canada, and the United States.

A distinct feature of the third generation of the family was the pursuit of university educational qualifications and professional careers. My grandfather, Alibhai Kassim Lakha was an ardent believer in the value of education. On holiday visits to his residence in Mombasa I was usually ushered in front of him for a lengthy discourse on the importance of education for material success. The emphasis upon higher education was in keeping with the broader trend within the Khoja Ismaili community. It was encouraged particularly under the guidance of the current Imam, Aga Khan IV, who is a graduate of Harvard University. However, the Aga Khan III also vigorously promoted education among his followers, including for women, who were encouraged to adopt Western dress and pursue learning.[84] The emphasis on learning was evident in the network of Aga Khan primary and secondary schools that were set up in urban centres in East Africa where I acquired my school education.[85] The provision of

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of the Gujarati Diaspora', in Sharmina Mawani and Anjoom Mukadam (eds), *Gujarati Communities across the Globe: Memory, Identity and Continuity*, pp. 13–26. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

[84] Bharati, 'Social Survey', pp. 30–1; Gregory, *South Asians*, p. 29.

[85] P.M. Rattansi and M. Abdulla. 1970. 'An Educational Survey', in Dharam P. Ghai and Yash P. Ghai (eds), *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa*, p. 132; Azim Nanji. 1974. 'Modernization and Change in the Nizari Ismaili Community in East Africa: A Perspective', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 6(fasc. 2): 123–39, p. 129.

modern education through these schools, together with other initiatives in health, housing, and credit facilities were major features of modernization of the community in East Africa.[86] The use of English as a medium of instruction at the Aga Khan schools I attended in Nairobi (Kenya) was vigorously pursued, with some emphasis on French as a second language. At secondary school most of my teachers were either Christian Goans or British, reflecting the multicultural background of the teaching staff. The school curriculum was in keeping with the requirements of the Cambridge School Certificate exams at secondary school level, followed by the Higher School Certificate for entry to university. This meant considerable emphasis was placed upon the effective delivery of secular education.

However, not all my young relatives attended the Aga Khan schools, with some attending secular Indian schools in Nairobi, and others acquiring their schooling at British public schools. Most male cousins, and some female ones, went on to universities in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States where they obtained undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. Thus, my cousin Azim trained as a dental surgeon in the United States, and my cousin Jenny attended the American University in Beirut. Similarly, I acquired my undergraduate and postgraduate education in the United Kingdom, and Australia where I obtained my doctoral qualification. However, the first person in the family to acquire a postgraduate qualification was my first cousin Shamsh, uncle Abdulrasul's son, who graduated with a master's in business administration from the University of Minnesota.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Following graduation, Shamsh managed a jute mill in Khulna, East Pakistan, until the conflict between East and West Pakistan, and later went on to have a distinguished career as the founding president of the Aga Khan University and Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan. His competent role in setting up the university, which involved a very close working relationship with the Aga Khan, gained him and the Kassim Lakha family considerable prestige, especially within the Ismaili

[86] Farhad Daftary. 1990. *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 526–7.

community. Importantly, his contribution to the field of education also received international recognition when he was awarded an honorary doctorate from McMaster University in Canada in 1984, and granted the award of Officer in the French National Order of Merit from President Chirac in 2001.[87]

The role of Shamsh in the establishment of the Aga Khan University was part of a continuing tradition within the Kassim Lakha family of involvement in community institutions. However, in contrast to the paid professional position held by Shamsh, many members of the family had previously contributed their services on a voluntary basis across a range of institutions that were integral to the functioning of the community, and in implementing the directives of the Aga Khan. Some notable examples in the family, beginning with my great grandfather Kassim Lakha, who was the *mukhi* of Lamu *jamat*, confirm a long-standing and continuous engagement in community affairs in East Africa. This was underlined by the attendance at the milestone Evian conference in France in 1952 by three members of the family, namely, uncle Abdulrasul, my grandfather Alibhai, and his brother Hassan. An outcome of the conference convened by Aga Khan III, which included Ismaili leaders from Africa, was the introduction of a new constitution in 1954 that restructured various Ismaili institutions with the aim of modernizing the community's social and cultural outlook.[88]

My grandfather's brother Hassan Kassim Lakha (1892–1982) who attended the Evian conference played an extensive and prominent role in the community's affairs in East Africa, and to some extent, beyond Africa. His contribution was 'diverse and distinguished' since he was involved in many different roles in the economic institutions of the community, as honorary secretary and president of the Ismaili council in Uganda, and as a trustee of the East African Muslim Welfare Society, of which Aga Khan III was a founding member.[89] In recognition of his

[87] Higher Education Commission, Pakistan. 2011. 'Governance and Coordination: Dr Shamsh Kassim-Lakha', available online at http://www.hec.gov.pk/InsideHEC/CommissionMembers/Pages/shams_lakha.aspx (accessed on 24 August 2011).

[88] Nanji, 'Modernization and Change', p. 129; Daftary, *The Ismailis*, p. 525.

[89] Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.

business expertise he was appointed director of the Jubilee Insurance Company Ltd and Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust Ltd[90] which extended credit at low interest rates for business and housing to Ismailis in East Africa.[91] As a long-time businessman with interests and knowledge of the cotton industry, he was also sent by Aga Khan III to Syria in 1955 to assist the Ismaili community there in 'improving' cotton cultivation and establishing better marketing facilities.[92]

Both Hassan Kassim Lakha and my grandfather, Alibhai, were awarded the high-ranking title of 'Count' by Aga Khan III in recognition of their services to the community. For his philanthropy and voluntary services, Hassan Kassim Lakha was honoured several times by the Imams of the time.[93] This included a private visit by Aga Khan IV in 1962 to Hassan Kassim Lakha's plush residence located in the salubrious suburb of Kalolo, Kampala (Uganda). I was present at the time, together with a small gathering of relatives, where the Aga Khan granted a fairly long audience to those gathered and spoke individually to a few of the family members there. It was indeed a rare event!

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What is distinctive in the migratory experience of the Kassim Lakha family is its continuing diasporic narrative. It is a narrative marked by a double displacement: first from the Indian subcontinent and then East Africa. The encounter with my two cousins in California represents one strand in that narrative. It was a revelatory encounter because it brought into sharp relief the common heritage that united us. There are several strands running through this heritage. A defining feature of the family's identity is the status it has gained over several generations through its service and involvement in the institutions of the Khoja Ismaili community. Another is through the joint family businesses, which were for long the bedrock of the family's social and economic status, and a significant source of shared memories and experiences.

[90] Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.

[91] Daftary, *The Ismailis*, p. 526.

[92] Marc van Grondelle. 2009. *The Ismailis in the Colonial Era: Modernity, Empire, and Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 88–9.

[93] Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.

Thus, during a casual conversation with my cousin Azim in California, he suddenly enquired whether I recalled the remoteness and complete isolation of our cotton ginneries which he had also visited in his childhood. I was surprised it had such an enduring impact on his recollection of the past, as it had on mine. Similarly, on my regular visits to Vancouver to see my mother and various other members of the extended family who now reside in Canada, it is not uncommon to reminisce fondly about the holidays we spent at our Oceanic Hotel in Mombasa on the coast of Kenya. A shared history has proven a powerful source in uniting relatives scattered across different continents.

While memory, kinship bonds, and a shared history of life in East Africa exerts a strong influence in binding various members of the Kassim Lakha family, the same could not be claimed where ties to Gujarat or India are concerned. When references to 'back home' are made in casual conversation with other people, these normally refer to East Africa. There is a relationship with Gujarat and India that is affective but it is more distant and complex. Very few Khojas from East Africa that I knew had property or family members in India. Those who did, or still do, may occasionally visit them but 'home' now is wherever they currently reside, be it Canada, United Kingdom, East Africa, or elsewhere. This does not completely exclude ties with India. Two of my first cousins from the Kassim Lakha family have married women from India. My cousin Shamsh married a Parsi lady from Mumbai and Zul, who now resides in Belgium, was married to a Khoja Ismaili lady also from Mumbai. Neither of the two cousins settled in India nor have their children who are spread across Canada, the United States, and Europe. While Shamsh lived with his family for many years in Pakistan, he now moves between there and Canada, while Zul lives in Belgium. I would argue it is their business interests and professional careers that have defined their residence rather than marriage or family origins.

If being diasporic means having a 'collective memory' of an 'original homeland' or considering 'their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home' and 'as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return',[94] then the Kassim Lakha family or

[94] William Safran. 1991. 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1(1): 83–99.

many of the Khojas from East Africa elude that definition. Similarly, Twamley's Gujarati informants in the United Kingdom whose parents were from East Africa claimed that the identification of their parents with India was much weaker compared to East Africa. Revealingly, one informant stated that when holidaying in India the family was uninterested 'in visiting Gujarat' as they had no familial links or any memories of the region, but like all tourists they made a trip to the Taj Mahal.[95] As in the case of other Indian diasporic communities such as the Indo-Fijians,[96] there is no clear recollection and perpetuation of the history of migration from India among the East African Khojas or that of their family histories in Gujarat. However, a longing to return to 'ancestral homeland' or to one's roots may severely constrict what constitutes a diaspora, and instead, other considerations like 'boundary-maintenance' in order to preserve 'a distinctive identity' in relation to 'a host society' may be more applicable to certain communities.[97] Here endogamy is the most pertinent feature of boundary-maintenance.[98] In that respect both the Khojas and other Indian communities in East Africa strictly practised endogamy and restricted social interaction with the host community, that is, the native Africans.[99] While endogamy may not be practised as strictly by the descendants of those who subsequently migrated to the West, it is still a preference among many first-generation Khoja migrants in the West. However, my observations of the younger people in the community in Canada, where many East African Khojas migrated to from 1970s onwards, reveal that cross-cultural marriages are not uncommon regardless of

[95] Katherine Twamley. 2010. 'A Suitable Match: Love and Marriage amongst Middle Class Gujaratis in India and the UK'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, City University London. Available online at http:/openaccess.city.ac.uk//1182/1/Twamley_Katherine.pdf (accessed on 27 December 2012).

[96] Carmen Voigt-Graf. 2009. 'Transnationalism and the Indo-Fijian Diaspora: The Relationship of Indo-Fijians to India and Its People', in William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, and Brij V. Lal (eds), *Transnational Migrations: The Indian Diaspora*. New Delhi: Routledge, p. 116.

[97] Rogers Brubaker. 2005. 'The 'Diaspora' Diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1): 1–19, p. 6.

[98] Brubaker, "Diaspora' Diaspora', p. 6.

[99] Mattausch, 'From Subjects to Citizens', p. 130.

the parents' views or opinions. These involve marriages with partners from other Indian or Asian communities as well as with those from Caucasian backgrounds.

Though a longing to return to ancestral Gujarat was not an important feature of the Khoja diaspora in East Africa, it did not exclude cultural engagement with Gujarat and the Indian subcontinent more generally. This engagement occurred through both religious and other cultural practices. As mentioned above, the singing of *ginan*s in the Gujarati language (and other South Asian languages) in *jamatkhana*s is a key feature of religious practice. Similarly *git*s (songs in appreciation of the Imam) which are recited in Gujarati, Hindi, Sindhi, and Punjabi, combined with traditional Gujarati dances, are a regular feature of religious and social occasions in East Africa and in the West, though over time *git*s have been transformed through the migratory experience.[100] From my observation over many years in Melbourne, Australia, the performance of *dandiya raas* (Gujarati or Indian dances) is common on auspicious occasions after prayers when members of the Khoja community from East Africa and the subcontinent enthusiastically participate in these dances. I remember on one visit to Paris in the late 1960s witnessing the *raas* being performed there by Khoja migrants and students from Madagascar and East Africa to mark an auspicious occasion. Needless to state, serving Indian food is a regular accompaniment to the *git*s and the dances. The perpetuation of these cultural practices by Khojas across continents underlines the strong and enduring cultural identification with Gujarat and India regardless of whether they were born there or have lived there.

Kutchi and Gujarati languages are still spoken in many homes in East Africa as well as in the West where many East African Khojas emigrated. Both my nephews, who were born in Canada and brought up there, can converse in Kutchi. Indian food is equally important and a fairly regular feature of the diet among community members who have migrated from East Africa to Canada and elsewhere. Hindi songs and Bollywood movies have pride of place in popular culture

[100] Sharmina Mawani. 2012. 'Songs of Praise: The *Git* Tradition of the Nizari Ismaili Muslims', in Sharmina Mawani and Anjoom Mukadam (eds), *Gujarati Communities across the Globe: Memory, Identity and Continuity*, pp. 59–78. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

among friends and family members, especially of my generation. On my regular visits to Canada to meet my family, it is common for friends and family to entertain me with Bollywood videos or to be given recordings of old and contemporary Hindi film songs. Even my nephews include contemporary Indian music in their cosmopolitan collection of songs and instrumental tunes. I detect a rising interest in India among some of my friends and family who have settled in Canada and who have visited the country as tourists in recent years. I am also struck by the popularity in Canada of fashionable salwar kameez for social occasions among Khoja women from East Africa, who when living there, expressed little interest in the attire.

At an intellectual level, few of those in the community who have pursued academic studies in humanities and the social sciences have explored aspects of the Khoja Ismaili faith as practised on the subcontinent or investigated development issues connected with India and Pakistan. In my opinion, the engagement of the community with India and more widely with the subcontinent is likely to continue for various reasons, and importantly is reinforced by the extensive activities of the Aga Khan network in the region. The network's involvement in the provision of education, health services, and agricultural development especially in India and Pakistan is well publicized both within and outside the community. At the same time East African Khojas in the West and Australia are increasingly coming into contact with their counterparts from the Indian subcontinent who have migrated there. These contacts may also reinforce and reinvigorate the former's cultural and non-cultural links with the subcontinent.

The third generation of the Kassim Lakha family has transitioned from a regional diaspora to a global diaspora. Their cultural capital[101] manifested through educational attainment facilitated their integration into the economies of the countries they relocated to, especially Canada and the United States as well as France.[102] Though

[101] For a discussion of cultural capital refer to Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

[102] Those who moved to France did so to work in the Aga Khan network at Aiglemont outside Paris.

this transition was disruptive, resulting in a substantial loss of assets (in common with many other Khojas) it was eased by their early engagement with modernity. A notable feature of this engagement for the Khoja community was that it was negotiated without deep anxiety about their identity. Modernization and Westernization did not diminish their institutions, communal bonds, or a sense of pride in their identity. *Jamatkhana*s and national Ismaili councils sprouted wherever they relocated. While individual dissenters express disaffection from time to time, the large body of the community has remained committed to its faith and identity. The leading role of the Imam (Aga Khan IV) in guiding the community[103] and interpreting the faith according to the demands of the time is one explanatory factor for the community's adaptation to changing circumstances. To quote Aga Khan III: 'Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules, even the set of regulations known as Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained.'[104]

Other South Asian communities in East Africa also had to negotiate their engagement with modernity and transition to countries beyond East Africa in their own ways. However, what distinguishes the experience of the Kassim Lakha family and Khoja Ismailis is the flexible outlook articulated above by Aga Khan III, and continued under the present Aga Khan IV since 1957, combined with the dense community networks or social capital that they have reproduced[105] and that shapes their lives in different diasporic contexts.

[103] Bharati, 'Social Survey', p. 30.

[104] Aga Khan.1954. *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*. London: Cassell and Company Limited.

[105] Ruthven, 'Aga Khan Development Network', pp. 189–220.