

A Short History  
of  
Faatemi Duaat  
Part II

Ahmed Luqmani B.A., D.PED., F.C.A.

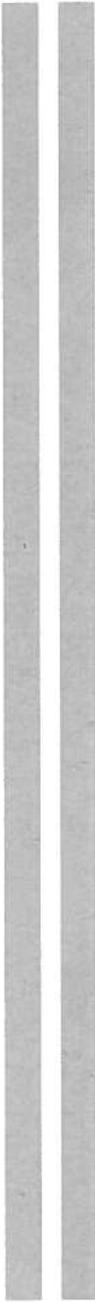


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## INTRODUCTION

**Praise be to Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful and salawaat upon Prophet Muhammad and his progeny.**

Some parts of India like Gujarat, Kathiawad, Malwa, Rajasthan and Deccan have produced scholars of a high calibre and a number of saints whose main aim in life was to spread education, give guidance and render service to fellow human beings.

They were pious and sincere and never indulged in luxuries but led a very simple unostentatious life. They exhorted people to piety and virtue and always came to their rescue in time of need.

They always kept in mind some of the traditions of the Holy Prophet as narrated by Imam Jaafar-us-Sadiq and Jaabir bin Abdullah al-Ansari. According to Imam Jaafar once the Prophet said to Hazrat Ali,

*“I strongly advise you to develop the following traits in you.*

*Always be truthful and never tell lies.*

*Be content and do not be dishonest.*

*Do not be carried away by the glitter of this world.*

*Let all your deeds be pleasing to Allah feeling as if He is present in your midst and watching you.*

*Fear Allah and shed tears remembering His might and awe. This will soften your heart and bring you nearer to paradise.*

*Be prepared to spend your wealth in the cause of Allah and be ready to offer your life if needed.*

*Do not neglect Zawaal prayers at midday nor Tahajjud prayers at night.*

*Make it a habit to give in charity so generously that people might say he is so extravagant.*

*Do not ever be slack in reciting the Quran.*

*Clean your teeth whenever you perform Vudhoo.*

*Observe good manners and keep away from the company of the evil.”*

Jaabir al-Ansari narrated thus.

*A man asked the Messenger of Allah, 'Do you think that if I perform the obligatory prayers, fast in the month of Ramadhan, treat as lawful that which is permitted and treat as forbidden that which is prohibited and do nothing further I shall be admitted into paradise?'*

*He said 'Yes'.*

The selfless service of these saints is not forgotten even to this day. People visit their tombs in large numbers paying homage and offering faateha. Standing at their graves people pray to Allah to grant all their wishes. It is believed that Allah listens to such prayers and is inclined to grant them for the sake of these saints with whom Allah is pleased.

Before we continue with the history of the Dais it would not be out of place to make a mention of some of the saints for the information of pilgrims intending to visit their shrines.

In Burhanpur lies Maulai Abdul Qadir Hakimuddin whose imposing shrine attracts visitors every year by thousands. Maulai Hakimuddin was an eminent scholar and was so capable that Syedna Ismail Badruddin (38 th Dai) had declared 'Nas' on him. But unfortunately death overtook him in 1142 Hijri depriving him of this honour. However, his son, Ibrahim Vajihuddin became the next Dai after Syedna Ismail Badruddin in Ujjain.

In Galiakot the shrine of Maulai Fakhruddin is the centre of attraction not only for the Muslims but also for the non-Muslims. He was a martyr and is popularly known as 'Babji Fakhruddin. His 'Urs' (death anniversary) is observed on 27 Moharram.

In Ujjain the shrine of Syedi Qamruddin bin Syedna Hebatullah Al-Moayyad is a place visited by many people all the year round. He was an admirer and lover of Hazrat Ali to such an extent that he used to repeat the name 'Ya Ali' even in his sleep. He used to recite aloud prayers from 'Saheefah Sajjadiah' and at the time of death he was heard reciting these prayers. He died on 24 Rajab 1221 Hijri.

In Rampura we find the tomb of Syedi Bawa Mulla Khan ibne Habibullah. He was a business man of high repute. He traded strictly in accordance with Shariah and never indulged in profiteering. He

observed strict punctuality in prayers so much so that he would even sacrifice his best deals if they interfered with his prayers. His hospitality and the care he took of the poor is well known. He died on 29 Shawwaal 1113 Hijri.

Sheikh Ibrahim the martyr lies buried in Chechat. Every year besides the faithful even non-Muslims participate in his death anniversary. He died on 17 Safar 1259 Hijri.

Within the precincts of the mosque in Jaora stands the tomb of Sheikh Abdulali bin Syedi Abdul Qadir who is regarded as a saint of high order. He died on 27 Shawwaal 1274 Hijri. So are Syedi Khanji Peer in Udaipur (died on 2 Moharram 1118 Hijri), Syedi Qazi Khan ibne Ali in Sidhpur (died 3 Jamadil Awwal 1148 Hijri) and Mulla Wahidbhai ibne Mulla Ibrahimji in Surat and Chandabhai ibne Karimbhai in Mumbai (died 21 Jamadil Awwal 1232 Hijri).

In Baroda we have Syedi Musanji Taj who it is believed was burnt alive (28 Moharram 986 Hijri). His resting place is worth visiting.

In Aurangabad there are the tombs of Maulai Noor Muhammad (died 11 Jamaadil Awwal 562 Hijri) and Mulla Valibhai ibne Sheikh Jeewanji the martyr (20 Zil Qaad 1200 Hijri).

It is said that the first missionary who spread Islam in Sind was Syedna Haisham, the nephew of Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Khalee. There have been a number of missionaries after him and they all lie buried in Nagar Thatta in Sind.

About 30 Miles from Sidhpur lies a place called Denmal which is the resting place of Maulai Hasan Peer the martyr (23 Moharram 795 Hijri). He was a great scholar and his shrine is visited by people of all faiths who go there with hopes and aspirations to be fulfilled.

In Parda, Malwa the shrine of Syedi Valibhai ibne Sheikh Habibullah is a favourite place of visit by people specially at the time of his 'Urs' in Ramadhan. He was very pious and caring and a highly learned person. He was one of the four scholars who, after the sudden death of Syedna Muhammad Badruddin (46 th Dai), had jointly agreed to appoint Najmuddin Sahib in the capacity of Nazim or caretaker. He died on 2 Ramadhan 1262 Hijri.

## **47. Syedna Abdul Qadir Najmuddin bin S. Tayeb Zainuddin**

When he was born his father Syedna Tayeb Zainuddin took him to the then Dai Syedna Abdeali Saifuddin to be blessed. When asked as to what name the child was given the Dai was told that he was named Yousuf. However Syedna Saifuddin changed it to Abdul Qadir and that was the name with which he came to be addressed since that day.

It is reported that on the last day of Jamaadil Aakhar 1256 Hijri the 46 th Dai, Syedna Muhammad Badruddin had expressed his intention to discuss the important question of 'Nas' (appointment of a successor) in an open meeting to be held the following day which was Friday the first of Rajab. But unfortunately he passed away suddenly during the night and did not see the day. His death was surrounded with mysterious circumstances and according to the author of Mausame Bahaar poison was administered to him along with his medicine for piles from which he was suffering.

It was the practice for the Faatemi Dais to appoint a successor through the instrument of 'Nas' before their death and it was the firm belief of the faithful that a Dai never dies before declaring 'Nas'. Hence it was a crucial moment for the Ulamaa (Scholars) who had to find quickly some satisfactory solution in order to avoid consternation and a sense of helplessness among the faithful. Four of the top grade scholars Sheikh Abdulali Vali and his brother Sheikh Abdullah Vali, Sheikh Valibhai ibne Sheikh Habibullah and the most senior among them Sheikh Abdeali met together and discussed the situation. They decided unanimously that the true position should on no account be revealed to the people. They kept it as a highly guarded secret and they did this in good faith to maintain unity.

Sheikh Abdeali said, "If the members of the community came to know that 'Nas' has not been declared on anyone it is bound to create chaos among them. Besides we cannot delay performing the funeral rites of the deceased Syedna. I therefore suggest that as a temporary measure we nominate someone to act as Nazim (caretaker) who would serve as a guide to the community and no one would ever know the truth." He then suggested the name of Najmuddin Sahib. The remaining three scholars were reluctant but finally agreed on certain conditions that Najmuddin Sahib gave a covenant to the effect that he would not claim to be a Dai by

right; that at the time of Fajr prayers his name would not be announced as was the practice in case of rightful Dais; that soon after making suitable arrangements at home he would proceed to Makkah, pray in Kaabah and return only when he sees a sign or receives guidance from the Imam in seclusion.

During the consultation the four scholars had to consider the following issues.

1. Syedi Hebatullah Jamaluddin who was Mazoon (the first assistant to the Dai) should have been apprised of the situation. But then he was in Jamnagar and the death of the Dai had occurred in Surat. The distance between the two places and the difficulties of communication would have prevented establishing immediate contact with the Maazoon.
2. Najmuddin Sahib was the Mukaasir (the second assistant to the Dai) and was the man on the spot.
3. It was believed that Syedna Muhammad Badruddin had often spoken well of Najmuddin Sahib in his majlises.
4. There was no other claimant worthy of the post of Dai.

Hence, after obtaining an undertaking from Najmuddin Sahib that he would never claim the daiship as a matter of right the scholars declared him to be the successor Dai.

On this occasion Najmuddin Sahib gave the following statement to the scholars,

*“Maulana (Badruddin) had intended that according to the age old custom of the Dais he would discuss the matter of ‘Nas’ on 1st Rajab but fate decided otherwise and he died before that day. His death came down as a calamity upon us and we did not know what to do. But the scholars particularly Sheikh Abdeali, the most senior among them, gave the verdict that Maulana’s earlier intention should be considered as if it was ‘Nas’, although this intention was never expressed in private or in public. Besides, there is no other claimant on whom ‘Nas’ might have been pronounced nor even hinted at.”*

Sheikh Abdeali also wrote a very thrilling and touching account of the death of Syedna Muhammad Badruddin in a journal called “Al-Batshatul Kubra” meaning “The Great Catastrophe”. Lamenting the death of

Syedna Muhammad Badruddin he wrote,

*“Alas alas where have you disappeared? Whatever has happened to you? The doors of our hopes are now closed and we are left extremely worried and sad as if a mountain of sorrow has fallen upon us. No doubt a great calamity has overtaken us. Why don’t the stars fall from the sky? Why does the sun not disappear under an eclipse? Why does the earth not quake with grief? It seems the doomsday has arrived, the moon appears to have been shattered to pieces and we are facing a dangerous situation. The trumpet of doomsday is sounded and the dead seem to have risen from their graves. O what has happened? The shining light of guidance has disappeared and the ocean of generosity has dried up. Your death is the death of the nation. By God this calamity is so great that no amount of grief can be a compensation for this loss. This calamity has so baffled us and rendered us so senseless that we do not even know which part of the earth we are in. We strongly feel that your death is like a dark night in which we have lost our bearing. Our ship has foundered on the rocks and shall never be put together again. Your death has inflicted upon us such a deep wound as will never heal.”*

The author of Mausame Bahaar painting a picture of despair and hopelessness says, “The evil forces of Satan have engulfed us from all directions. Although chairs (ranks) are available in true Daawat suitable persons fit to grace them are nowhere to be found.”

On having assumed the Dai’s post Najmuddin Sahib observed 40 days mourning for Syedna Muhammad Badruddin. During this period Quranic sessions were held.

For a while Najmuddin Sahib complied with the terms of the covenant but soon he succeeded in winning the full support for all his actions from his teacher and benefactor, Sheikh Abdeali who proved to be a man of the world less spiritually inclined. With his help Najmuddin Sahib succeeded in having his name being publicly announced before the Fajr prayers. He tightened his hold on the community and started introducing innovations (bidaat) in religion. The other scholars realised the danger but were powerless to be able to do anything. He awarded titles and ranks to the children of Najmi and Husami families high above others disregarding the criteria of merit based on knowledge, experience and piety.

Syedi Hebatullah Jamaluddin was not even informed of the death of Syedna Muhammad Badruddin for a number of years and he was under

the impression that everything in Surat was normal. He continued as Mazoon unaware of the changed circumstances.

Sheikh Abdeali was appointed to act as Mukaasir and was awarded the enviable title of Imaduddin (the Pillar of Faith).

A gradation was decided upon and accordingly his relatives, the scholars and other influential and wealthy persons were allotted seats in every majlis indicating the superiority of one over the other.

This arrangement resembled more or less a royal Durbar with the Dai as the Rajah or the Nawab and the relatives and the scholars surrounding him as his counsellors with the rest of the public in the background. This was the beginning of an era when religious leadership no longer remained the guidance and service of the community. Instead the foundation was laid of an autocratic rule over the people. The glamour of this new set up dazzled most of the people who had no choice but to accept it. Najmuddin Sahib tried to create friction and division among the learned men with a view to stifle all opposition. Many of the discontented scholars stopped attending majlises or going to the mosque. They only participated in funerals.

Sheikh Valibhai persuaded Najmuddin Sahib in 1260 Hijri (1844 AD) to proceed for Haj according to the term of his covenant. He complied with it but very soon came back to Surat without accomplishing anything. After the death of Sheikh Valibhai in 1262 Hijri the two Vali brothers tried to improve the situation but failed since Sheikh Abdeali, by using his diplomatic and cunning ways was backing up every move of Najmuddin Sahib.

He married Sakinabai (1241 Hijri) whom he loved very much and was never separated from her. He did not take another wife during her life time. Sakinabai's mother was Chamanai, daughter of Sheikh Abdul Qadir and the sister of the Vali brothers. She was a lady of stern character and exercised great influence over people. No decision could be taken in any matter without her consent.

Sakinabai gave birth to three daughters Amtullah, Zainab and Faatema and one son named Muhammad and she died in 1258 Hijri.

After her death Najmuddin Sahib married Ratan-ai and Khadija-ai, the two widows of Syedna Muhammad Badruddin. From Ratan-ai he had two sons named Tayeb and Tahir and a daughter Zainab and from

Khadija-ai one daughter Maryam and two sons Husain and Ibrahim.

He then married Maryambai, a divorcee from whom he had two daughters Khadija and Sakina and a son named Hasan. Next he married Zainabbai, a widow, from whom he was blessed with a son named Abdullah Hakimuddin. Then he married another lady named Zainabbai followed by Asmabai and Hayatibai Dholkawalla. All his wives died except the last two who survived him and died long after him.

He had a lustful and luxurious life. He made invocations (sadhna) to the Hindu deity Hanuman in the house of Chibawalla in Surat for the prolongation of his lustful life. He was attracted by the charms of Zainab, wife of Sheikh Salhuji Sironji. She was beautiful and shrewd. Upon the death of her husband Najmuddin Sahib married her. Whenever he was away from home he would write such indecent letters to her that no husband would dare write to his wife. Most of these letters were extremely vulgar. It is believed that there was an affair between Zainab and Husamuddin Sahib, the brother of Najmuddin Sahib. This fact was known to Najmuddin Sahib and he referred to it in one of his letters saying, "Darling whatever is in your mind do write to me clearly without hesitation, fear or shame. When I am in your presence you address me as 'My dear beloved, my comfort I belong to you only' but in your heart you profess love to Husain."

The three brothers Najmuddin Sahib, Husamuddin Sahib and Ismailji were fooled by two beautiful sisters Dayam and Mana. They were mad after the two sisters who pretended to know the art of making gold. Later Mana claimed to be Imam's daughter and married Husamuddin Sahib in secrecy. But the marriage lasted only for a day and she disappeared. Husamuddin who thought she was dead wrote letters addressed to the hidden Imam imploring him to make her alive again. Ismailji married Dayam secretly giving her an undertaking in writing that he would renounce his present wife, Umme Zainab, the daughter of Sheikh Abdeali.

At the circumcision ceremony of his children in 1257 Hijri Najmuddin Sahib issued an open invitation to all Muslims to have the circumcision of their children performed without any cost. As a result nearly 700 parents and guardians took advantage of this offer and had their children circumcised. They were each given a dress for the child and Rs 10 to cover expenses. A procession was taken out wherein apart from the

Muslims even the English regiment participated with its military band. Nineteen guns were fired by way of salute in honour of the occasion.

The decoration of arches and temporary gateways, the buntings and the lighting all created an atmosphere of unparalleled joy and merriment such as could only be seen at a royal wedding. It is said that never before had Surat witnessed such a spectacular celebration.

✓ The great scholar Sheikh Abdeali Imaduddin has left us three books:

- (1) Lubbul Lubaab
- (2) Deewaan and
- (3) Tohfatul Ikhwaan.

Among other scholars at the time were Sheikh Ahmedali Hamiduddin who wrote:

- (1) Lome-aat
- (2) Commentary of Lome-aat, and
- (3) Daameghul Ifke wal Bohtaan.

Sheikh Valibhai wrote An Najmus Saaqib and Sheikh Sharafali of Sidhpur wrote:

- (1) Riyazul Jinaan which was published in litho in 1260 Hijri and
- (2) Uyoonul Maarif which was published but proscribed for some reason.

Upon the death of Sheikh Abdeali Imaduddin on 7 Safar 1271 Hijri Najmuddin Sahib appointed his youngest brother Ismailji as Mukaasir and after the death of Syedi Hebatullah Jamaluddin on 16 Ramadhan 1275 Hijri he gave the post of Maazoon to his second brother Husamuddin. The three brothers now jointly ran the affairs of the community.

At this time new developments had taken place in India under the rule of Queen Victoria. Telegraphic communication was introduced, rail links were established and the use of machines in many industries became common. This heralded an age of industrialisation which boosted the economy of the country.

The English had firmly established their rule in India by now and were introducing many reforms for the benefit of the people. Looking back in history we notice that it was in 1600 AD during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I that some adventurous persons first came to India on a commercial basis and landed at the port of Surat. They obtained trade concessions from the then Emperor Akbar. Some went to Chennai (Madras) and were well treated by the Nawab and given a piece of land to

build a fort. They also spread eastward into Bengal and obtained land at Calcutta.

They developed cordial relations with the Sultans and Amirs at all these places and gained such confidence that the authorities began consulting them in important matters of state.

When Queen Elizabeth died James I ascended the throne. He was followed by Charles I who was beheaded and after him his son Charles II wore the crown. When Charles married king of Portugal's daughter the city of Mumbai, which was gifted to the king of Portugal by the Mughal Emperor, passed to the English crown as dowry.

When Charles II died in 1685 AD, James II came to the throne but as he was a follower of the Roman Catholic faith he was deposed in 1688 AD and instead William III was appointed king. After him his sister in law, Ann became the Queen in 1702 AD. As she had no issue, after her death in 1714 AD, the Parliament invited a nobleman from Germany and offered him the crown with the title George I. Then came successively George II, George III and George IV from 1727 AD to 1830 AD. Next William IV became the king. When he died in 1837 AD his brother's daughter, Victoria ascended the throne as queen and was also declared the Empress of India.

In 1264 Hijri (1848 AD) Najmuddin Sahib received five threatening letters believed to be from the Imam in seclusion. Their tone was undoubtedly authoritative. In the first four letters he was addressed as Yousuf which was his birth name and in the fifth and last letter he was referred to as Abdul Qadir Najmuddin, the Mukaasir.

The following is an extract from the first letter.

*"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and Ali is the saint of Allah. This letter is from Abdullah al-Moatasim.*

*O Yousuf what is the matter with you. Why have you ignored the issue of 'Nas' which has broken into pieces and you know it. You have claimed to be Dai whereas you are neither Dai nor even an ordinary guide. The Maazoon is still living. You are warned O Yousuf, submit to the Maazoon. Go without delay to Khambat, wait there for 10 days and see what transpires. Then travel to Broach and back to Surat. Send for the Maazoon to Surat and obey him. If you fail to do as you are told Allah will punish you very severely."*

In the subsequent letters he is forbidden to collect Zakaat and other dues from the faithful and is disqualified from taking their Meesaaq.

The author of Mausame Bahaar comments on this event thus,

*“During the officiating period of Maulana Najmuddin, may Allah maintain his power, letters arrived from the Imam. Upon reading these letters the heart of every man of clear understanding was full of praises for the Lord but nothing useful was achieved on account of sins. For long there was a search for the Goal but it was nowhere to be found.”*

Najmuddin Sahib was highly perturbed and worried on receipt of these letters. He tried to get in touch with Sheikh Abdulali Vali but he was at the time in Makkah. He then consulted Sheikh Abdeali Imaduddin who advised him to ignore the letters. Nonetheless a feeling of guilt overpowered him and he passed many a sleepless nights. However in the end he survived this wave of shock and fear and was able to continue as before.

After the death of Sheikh Abdeali Imaduddin in 1271 Hijri, Sheikh Abdulali Vali seized the opportunity to exercise some control over Najmuddin Sahib. Before proceeding to Haj in 1272 Hijri (1855 AD) Sheikh Abdulali managed to visit Syedi Hebatullah Jamaluddin in Jamnagar and related to him in detail the tragic event of 1256 Hijri and the developments since then. He added,

*“You are the master. I shall persuade Najmuddin Sahib to submit to you. Many years have gone by and Najmuddin Sahib has exercised authority without any right. Please forgive him for his past errors and let him continue but with your permission. Otherwise there will be great confusion in the community. You will of course remain in the background and watch him.”*

Syedi Jamaluddin had no choice but to accept the suggestion and Sheikh Abdulali returned to Surat. He said to Najmuddin Sahib, “How long will you persist in deceiving people and conceal the truth? You say that you saw your father in your dream rebuking you and the Imami letters warned you, yet you did not submit to the Maazoon. Think there is still time to make amends.” Najmuddin Sahib replied that it was no use since Syedi Jamaluddin was totally unaware of the happenings. Thereupon Sheikh Abdulali informed him of his visit to Jamnagar and the terms agreed with Syedi Jamaluddin. He then asked him to invite the

Maazoon to Surat, seek his forgiveness and act according to his written instructions a draft of which Sheikh Abdulali promised to send from Mumbai on his way to Makkah for Haj. Soon Syedi Jamaluddin arrived in Surat and Najmuddin Sahib bowed before him with a salaam of Rs 51 and sought his forgiveness. On receipt of the draft as promised the instruction letter was prepared and signed by Syedi Jamaluddin. Najmuddin Sahib wrote to Sheikh Abdulali in Makkah that he had done the needful. This incident was described by Ibrahim Safiyuddin, son of Sheikh Imaduddin, in one of his poems (Nasihah) wherein he says,

*“If he had been rightly appointed by ‘Nas’ why did he have to bow down to Maula Jamaluddin and present him a salaam of Rs 51?”*

The new arrangement had hardly worked for a few months when Najmuddin Sahib began flouting the authority of Syedi Jamaluddin who, having been fed up with the awkward situation left for Jamnagar where he died shortly after. Sheikh Abdulali also died soon after his return from Haj and his brother Sheikh Abdullah Vali died a few days later.

Now that the top scholars were gone Najmuddin Sahib became free to do whatever he liked without any interference. As for the rest of the scholars some knew the truth but kept quiet while others were unaware of the situation.

In 1283 Hijri (1866 AD) the Governor of Mumbai awarded the title of Sardar of the First Class to Najmuddin Sahib which he gladly accepted. It will be remembered that some years ago this very title was offered to his uncle, Syedna Muhammad Izzuddin and to his father, Syedna Tayeb Zainuddin (44th and 45th Dais) but they had both declined the offer on the ground that they did not crave for any rank or position of honour in this world. However they would like to see that the members of their community were treated justly and well.

In 1293 Hijri (1875 AD) a deputation set out to Saudi Arabia in search of the Imam (in seclusion). It consisted of five persons (1) Syedi Muhammadali Hamdani. He wrote an account of the departure in his journal called ‘Risaalatul Hijrah’ (2) Syedi Yousuf Valiyullah (3) Sheikh Muhammad Aarif Fawzi who worked as ‘Aamil’ of Aden till his death (4) Mulla Sultanali Mutawwif and (5) Mulla Moosaji Nagarwalla. They chose Makkah as their base for this purpose. While they were departing from Jeddah they were arrested by the officials of the then Turkish Government on a charge of spying. The matter was referred to the

authorities in India and the English Collector of Surat issued a clearance letter on receipt of which the prisoners were released by the Turkish Government. Nothing substantial was achieved by the deputation.

In 1296 Hijri (1878 AD) Syedi Yousuf Valiyullah wrote an epistle wherein lamenting deeply he prayed and implored the Imam to come out of seclusion and said,

*“People have adopted evil ways and virtue seems to be non existent. They are treating as lawful whatever is forbidden (haraam ), their deeds are against the Shariah and they ignore all canons of justice and prudence.”*

Najmuddin Sahib had grown old and felt that the time of his departure was near. So he declared his intention to appoint his son, Husain Izzuddin as his successor. He maintained that this decision was based on a dream which he described in a booklet called “Ar Risaalatul Vaziyah fee Eezaahin Nasse wal Wasiyah”. He wrote that some unknown voice, probably that of the Imam woke him up twice during the night and commanded him to appoint his son Husain to succeed him. Hence he was just obeying the command and nothing more. One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that there was no devoted or pious person at the time other than Husain Izzuddin who was capable of undertaking the responsibility of leadership of the community.

In 1297 (1879 AD) an Association called Hilful Fazaail came into existence in Surat. Its main aim was to ensure that the Daawat (community) affairs were managed on parliamentary basis. Najmuddin Sahib would have no power to take any decision or pass judgement over community matters without obtaining the consent of the Anjuman. The leading members of the Anjuman were his sons and sons in law and his brother Husamuddin Sahib who was very annoyed at Najmuddin Sahib when he had declared ‘Nas’ on his son, Husain Izzuddin. There was much discontent and bickering over the whole affair. No doubt Najmuddin Sahib was put in a very difficult situation with no one to turn to for advice. The author of Mausame Bahaar describes this as follows.

*“Najmuddin Sahib is all alone. The good people who are in minority are in no way happy. The evil and ignorant are the ones who enjoy all the good in life. Learning (Daras) is being neglected and people are running after the riches of this world. They are spending their entire energy in the accumulation of wealth. The books are left on the shelves to rot and the light of knowledge is extinguished. Everyone is engrossed in eating and drinking.”*

*Such are the persons who are awarded titles of honour which they do not deserve. Remember Syedna Tayeb Zainuddin had expressly forbidden the giving of titles and positions of honour to the undeserving."*

Najmuddin Sahib had to make tremendous efforts to win over the prominent members of the Anjuman by offering them money, titles and other benefits. This diplomatic step worked and ultimately the Anjuman was dissolved.

During this period Ibrahim Abdul Qayyum constructed 'Dawoodi Baagh' in Mumbai and created a waqf donating it to the community. Bhaji Tamboowalla constructed a mosque in Bhindi Bazaar and Abdul Tayeb bin Ibrahim Nooruddin built a large mosque in the market area both of which were made into a waqf.

One of the greatest philanthropists of the time was Sir Adamji Peerbhoy who had become famous for his welfare and charitable work. He served Najmuddin Sahib so well that he was always addressed as "My virtuous son Adamji". He was ever at his beck and call. At the end of 1297 Hijri Najmuddin Sahib was afflicted with chicken pox and despite treatment there was no sign of recovery. So he called for help his spiritual son, Adamji who immediately moved Najmuddin Sahib to his own bungalow in Valkeshwar. There he was given the best and most expensive treatment and was looked after so well that he recovered completely and was able to return home.

There was a severe famine in many parts of India and people were dying of hunger and starvation specially in Gujarat and Kathiawad. Again Najmuddin Sahib called his "Virtuous son Adamji" for help. He responded immediately and by supplying grains and cash alleviated the sufferings of thousands of people without discrimination of caste or creed.

In Surat the faithful used to have common meals sitting down on the road as there was no provision of a covered building that could be used on such occasions. Najmuddin Sahib had a community hall (jamaat khana) built for this purpose. His example was followed by well to do persons in other towns and cities and jamaat khana sprang up everywhere.

It is said that he was so generous that he never refused monetary help to anyone who approached him. Once Sheikh Abdeali Imaduddin asked him "What does a sum of one lakh rupees look like?". In response

Najmuddin Sahib ordered Rs one lakh to be delivered to him just to satisfy his curiosity. Expenditure was incurred lavishly at the marriage of his children and on many other similar occasions.

Besides, Najmuddin Sahib had divided the Daawat territories amongst his seven sons with full authority to collect and utilise for their own personal use the income derived from these territories by way of Zakaat, Khumus, Sadaqah, Salaam etc. The effect of this arrangement was that the income available to Najmuddin Sahib was reduced considerably. Like father the sons were also in the habit of spending money extravagantly and Najmuddin Sahib could not turn to any of them for help. Consequently Daawat funds were depleted and Najmuddin Sahib was compelled to borrow huge sums of money on interest. At the same time he was obliged to apply cuts to all his expenses. The biggest target of this reduction was Saifee Daras. As a result many pupils who were now asked to pay for their training had no alternative but to leave without completing their studies and many of them were forced to seek employment in order to earn a modest living.

The author of Mausame Bahaar describes the situation thus,

*“Like mosques the Madrasahs (schools) are deserted. Where will the seekers of knowledge now go? Our condition is like that of people who are groping in the dark night and cannot find the way out. Most of them have given up attending mosques as they have no interest left in spiritual upliftment. Instead the call of the flesh draws them to the bazaars where they can satisfy their carnal desires. In addition they have adopted arrogant manners.”*

In Rajab 1302 Hijri Najmuddin Sahib was in Ujjain where he fell victim to cholera. Although he had pronounced ‘Nas’ on his son Husain Izzuddin he did not get an opportunity to revive it. So he appointed his brother Husamuddin Sahib as his successor thus winning his goodwill, specially for the disbanding of the Anjuman Hilful Fazaail.

He was afraid to face death and craved for a long life. During his illness in Ujjain he learnt that a procession of Ganpati (a Hindu God) was passing by. Immediately he sent one of his servants with oil to offer on Ganpati in the hope that this dedication would prolong his life but all his efforts were in vain. He died on 26 Rajab 1302 Hijri (1884 AD). He was buried in Ujjain and the period of his office as Nazim Dai was 46 years and 26 days.

## 48. Syedna Abdul Husain Husamuddin bin S. Tayeb Zainuddin

After the death of Najmuddin Sahib in 1302 Hijri Husamuddin Sahib took over the reins of Daawat. He lost no time in convening a majlis wherein he promoted his brother Ismailji Badruddin to the post of Maazoon and appointed Muhammad Burhanuddin, the eldest son of Najmuddin Sahib as the Mukaasir. He awarded shawls to all the bereaving sons of Najmuddin Sahib in order to gain their cooperation.

Even though he was hot tempered he would cool down quickly. It is reported that he was careless in observing the canons of cleanliness (Tahaarat) and often led Fajr prayers in an unclean state (Janaabat).

Since the Daawat was heavily in debt Husamuddin Sahib had to curtail his expenditure and unlike his brother had to adopt simplicity on all occasions.

When he was holding the post of Maazoon during the time of his brother he happened to visit Kathiawad, where people offered him such hospitality that he prolonged his stay there for several months. At Rajkot alone he was hosted by Khanbhai Ismailji for a period of three months. After assuming the office of Dai he visited Kathiawad once again and was welcomed by the faithful everywhere in his new capacity. He ordered well to do persons to erect tombs over the derelict graves of saints in their areas ; to arrange for accommodation for those pilgrims visiting the saints from far off places and provide them with free meals for at least a day or two. Consequently rest houses were built near most of these sanctuaries. It is said that he took great care of the poor, the orphans and the widows and made provision for them from the Daawat funds.

During his term of office many of the faithful lived in fear of ghosts and spirits and in order to escape from their evil influence they often resorted to magic and 'mantras'. Husamuddin Sahib used to comfort them and impress upon them that these were mere superstitions and that they should give up such false beliefs.

He used to issue instructions to the 'Aamil' (deputy) of whichever town he would visit to treat the poor, the orphans and the widows fairly and justly.

He had four sons (1) Abdeali Mohiyuddin (2) Abdullah Badruddin (3) Sheikhadam Ziauddin and (4) Hebatullah Jamaluddin.

Abdeali Mohiyuddin knew the fact that there was no 'Nas' on Najmuddin Sahib, hence the 'Nas' on Husamuddin Sahib was invalid. He never prayed under the leadership (Imaat) of Husamuddin Sahib nor did he accept any post of Maazoon or Mukaasir offered to him.

Abdullah Badruddin was very pious and kept himself occupied in reading, learning and correcting hand written books.

The remaining two brothers had a bad reputation and were notorious in fornication.

In 1303 Hijri Husamuddin Sahib visited Mumbai which was under the control of Muhammad Burhanuddin according to the division which was made by his father. Husamuddin Sahib requested Burhanuddin to help him pay off the Daawat debts but he refused. Husamuddin Sahib returned to Surat highly disappointed and disillusioned.

In 1304 Hijri at the invitation of Sir Adamji Peerbhoy, Husamuddin Sahib became a guest at his sanitorium in Mumbai. He stayed there for several months and enjoyed Sir Adamji's hospitality. Pleased with Sir Adamji's service he used to pray for him and often used to repeat, "Adamji, may Allah increase your wealth". He would even supervise the Madrasah run by Sir Adamji, test the pupils and award the successful ones the title of Mulla. Sir Adamji's Madrasah has produced many a genuine and learned Mullas.

After his long stay in Mumbai he went on a tour to Ujjain and other places. On the way the people of Malegaon invited him and he accepted. They wished to take him to the city in a procession and invited brother Muslims to join but they refused to participate. However, when they learnt that this was Sir Adamji's Mulla they came willingly and took an active part in the procession. Such was the reputation of Sir Adamji. When Husamuddin Sahib returned to Mumbai he called Sir Adamji in his presence. He praised him and said, "May you achieve success in all your undertakings and may Allah blacken the faces of your enemies"

He prayed for Sir Adamji and asked him to continue his good work.

In 1305 Hijri he made a trip to Chennai (Madras) and Madhya Pradesh and in 1306 Hijri he again travelled to Kathiawad. This time he was the guest of the Jodiyawalla family.

On 23 Zil Haj 1307 Hijri the great scholar of the time, Syedi Yousuf died in Mumbai and was buried in the cemetery at Charni Road.

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Husamuddin Sahib spent the latter part of 1307 Hijri in travelling to Mumbai and scores of other towns and villages ultimately arriving at Ahmedabad on 14 Zil Haj 1308 Hijri (1890 AD). During his last trip he used to tell people, "This is my last visit to you. After this you will see me no more."

On 16 Zil Haj he had an attack of polio. Complications arose and there was no likelihood of recovery. Hence he called his sons and brother before him and appointed Muhammad Burhanuddin as his successor. He died on 27 Zil Haj 1308 Hijri and was buried in Ahmedabad. The period of his office was 6 years 5 months and 1 day.

#### **49. Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin ibne S. Abdul Qadir Najmuddin**

He was appointed by his uncle Husamuddin Sahib on his death bed in 1308 Hijri (1890 AD). Upon taking over the reins of Daawat in his hands he wished his younger brother, Abdullah Hakimuddin to assist him in Daawat matters just as he had helped Najmuddin Sahib in the past. Abdullah Hakimuddin was the son in law of Syedi Muhammadali Hamdani and also his cousin. He was learned like his father in law and was exceptionally bright. Collection of rare books and documents was one of his hobbies. He was soft hearted yet very strict in his dealings. He had no hesitation in reprimanding even the highest authority if he saw something wrong. Burhanuddin Sahib's love for his younger brother was so profound that he would not let him be out of sight and made sure that he was never displeased. He was offered the post of Vazir but he refused. After continued efforts and persuasion he consented to assist Burhanuddin Sahib in his day to day affairs.

Once he was highly displeased over a matter of principle. Burhanuddin Sahib tried his best to convince him but all in vain. It was only after Burhanuddin Sahib gave him the following pledge that he calmed down.

*"This is a pledge from Muhammad Burhanuddin to his honourable brother Abdullah Hakimuddin.*

*May Allah guide me to virtue and help me in fulfilling this pledge.*

*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.*

*Praise be to Allah to Whom gratitude is expressed for all His blessings and salawaat on His messenger Muhammad and his progeny. I, Muhammad Burhanuddin, son of Dai Maulana Najmuddin, the insignificant servant of Allah hereby state that the concept with which I occupied the seat of Dai is the same as that of the previous Ulamaa (scholars).*

*They believed that after the death of Syedna Muhammad Badruddin whoever was appointed to take charge of Daawat did so only to keep the community together and to manage its affairs and not to claim for himself the post of Dai ul Mutlaq or any other rank lower than that. Even my father had the same concept. I consented to be the successor of Husamuddin Sahib not because I desired the post but because it has become the habit of the masses to obey none other than the person who is nominated by the previous incumbent. Truly speaking the main motive in my agreeing to the nomination was to protect the honour and name of our family and maintain our prestige. Otherwise I would never have consented to take his place because of his doubtful character which I knew very well.*

*Now Allah be Witness, this is my pledge to my worthy brother Abdullah Hakimuddin that I shall obey him in every matter. Without his permission I shall not make any move whatsoever whether hastening matters or delaying; whether it pertains to worldly matter or to religion; whether it affects me personally or the people in general; whether to promote or demote someone; whether to depute anyone or remove him; whether to befriend someone or to shun him. In fact in every matter which I have mentioed and that which I have forgotten to mention I shall not take a final decision without my brother's approval. I shall refrain from doing anything which does not please him.*

*If unintentionally I decide to take steps, verbal or in writing, which are against his wishes it shall be my duty to refer to him and never to go against him.*

*I shall never consider myself superior to my brother. On the other hand it is because of him that I have been able to secure this honour. Before writing this letter I have convinced myself that my statements are based on truth and I am sure my brother will be satisfied with my confessions and will have no doubt about my sincerity in fulfilling the pledge. How I have longed to win his true love and kindness. I do hope to get his help all the time in private or in public.*

*I swear by all the names of Allah, His throne and His chair, His angels, His prophets and the books, the deputies and the Imams that I shall honour my*

*pledge which I have given to my brother in writing. If I fail to do so then I may be rejected by Allah, His apostle and the Imams. I may become one of those who have been ungrateful to Allah's blessings and to whom Allah's beneficence is denied. I may be deprived of the love of Ameerul Mumeneen without which one's birth is not right and I may suffer Allah's severe punishment for breaking the pledge.*

*(I pray) May Allah include me on the Day of Judgement among those who are blessed for honouring their pledges and not among those who are defaulters.*

*I, Muhammad Burhanuddin bin Dai Najmuddin, an obedient servant of Allah, being of sound mind have written this letter of my free will and without any pressure on Friday 8 Safar 1309 Hijri."*

Burhanuddin Sahib had four sons Tayeb, Tahir, Saleh and Ibrahim. As Burhanuddin Sahib was not learned, complications and problems arising in religious matters, particularly nikaah and talaaq, were not at all dealt with satisfactorily. As a result the lives of many couples were ruined by his incorrect rulings. One such example is that of Abdul Husain Aita Rangwalla of Ahmedabad who married a divorced lady from Surat. A dispute arose regarding the validity of the lady's divorce. When the matter was referred to Burhanuddin Sahib he was not able to solve the problem and the couple had to separate and were compelled to live apart for the rest of their lives.

Daawat funds were spent lavishly with the result that Burhanuddin Sahib became heavily indebted. Recovery suits were filed against him by a number of creditors including Sheikh Abdul Tayeb Goribadam. The latter had applied to the court for a decree of Rs 52,000 with a jail sentence and wanted some of the properties of Burhanuddin Sahib to be attached. But Burhanuddin sahib stated in the court that all these properties belonged to the community and that he did not own any of them. In spite of the fact that Burhanuddin Sahib was dragged into the court and suffered a great deal of humiliation he did not punish the Sheikh nor did he take revenge from his family members for this outrage. Even the vazeebah (pension) which the Sheikh was drawing from the Daawat funds was allowed to continue. Being soft hearted and simple he used to treat everyone equally and used to say, "My position among you is no more than that of a Mulla or even lower than that."

The critical situation thus created compelled Burhanuddin Sahib to start leading a simple life. He could no longer afford to maintain a carriage of his own and had to rely on public conveyance in case of need.

He tried to improve the social condition of the people and several funds were started in order to achieve this aim. A Qutubi company was organised in Ahmedabad to look after the welfare of visitors to the shrine of Syedna Qutbuddin Shaheed including the provision of meals for them.

Due to the recent famine most of the faithful in Kathiawad had suffered and were rendered extremely poor. On top of this their social customs demanded large sums of money on every occasion, which people could not afford and this aggravated the situation. Realising the gravity of the matter Sir Adamji suggested a new code of practice for the people to follow and which would eradicate most of the sufferings of people, mental as well as physical. He sought Burhanuddin Sahib's permission to introduce these reforms. Burhanuddin Sahib gladly gave his consent and sent Abdullah Badruddin to help him in this noble work.

On 26 Shawwaal 1316 Hijri (1898 AD) Sir Adamji organised a conference in Dhoraji, his native place in Kathiawad. All the rich persons of Kathiawad and all the Aamils of towns and villages in Kathiawad were invited to attend. Some dignitaries from Surat like Abdullah Hakimuddin, Abdeali Mohiyuddin, Karimbhoy Adamji Peerbhoy and Muhammadali Sheikh Alibhai Vanak also participated.

Serious discussion took place about the prevailing social customs most of which involved exorbitant sums of money which the poor could ill afford. It was decided unanimously that all such customs should be totally abolished. A new charter called 'Dastoorul Aamal' (Working constitution) was drawn up in which simple rules involving minimum monetary obligations were laid down as regards engagement, the exchange of clothes and ornaments, nikaah, meher, breaking of engagement, circumcision, faateha of the dead and so on. This document was signed by Sir Adamji, Abdullah Hakimuddin, Abdeali Mohiyuddin and many other distinguished persons and also by the delegates from Jamnagar, Kalawad, Rajkot, Dhari, Junagadh, Vanthali, Mahuwa, Porbandar, Jasdan, Sardhar, Gondal, Amreli, Rajpara, Bhayavadar, Upleta, Khokhri, Morbi, Aatkot, Ranpur, Kutiyana, Palitana, Jetpur etc.

The document was printed and copies were widely circulated.

Burhanuddin Sahib also sent a memo on 2 Zil Qaad to the faithful directing them to follow the constitution which was approved unanimously in the conference in the presence of both Abdullah Hakimuddin and Abdeali Mohiyuddin.

For a while people followed the constitution religiously but in course of time opinions changed and with some excuses or the other they began violating the rules. Ultimately the constitution was given up.

In 1320 Hijri Kathiawad and some parts of India were once again afflicted with famine. Burhanuddin Sahib was very worried and sought the aid of Sir Adamji who had already started helping people anonymously. He went to Dhoraji and personally supervised the distribution of grains and clothes to the sufferers. Daily meals were provided to those who had no means left to cook them.

Burhanuddin Sahib was highly delighted with this excellent work of Sir Adamji. In recognition of his services which he had been rendering from the days of his predecessors he awarded him the enviable title of "Rafiuddin" (the elevated in faith).

Two funds called Faize Husaini and Faize Alavi were started in Karachi for charitable purposes. In 1325 Hijri (1907 AD) Chandabhai Charities Fund was set up in Mumbai to administer the moneys received in the charity box (Gulla) placed at the shrine of Chandabhai and a trust deed was drawn up for its management.

Another trust called the Dawoodi Bohra Trust was formed and an affidavit was signed to the effect that Burhanuddin Sahib or his administration will have no claim over the funds nor will they interfere in the management of the trust. The trustees will be able to act independently and take decisions without any interference.

Burhanuddin Sahib visited Rajkot where he performed the opening ceremony of the magnificent Noor Mosque built by Noorbhai Jeewaji. A marble plaque was placed with the name of the donor inscribed on it. That plaque has since been removed. The people of Rajkot served Burhanuddin Sahib with unforgettable devotion and sincerity.

A boarding school was opened by Sir Adamji in his sanitorium at Charni Road, Mumbai, where pupils from Yemen, Kathiawad, Gujarat and other places sought admission in large numbers. They were given intensive training and all those who achieved proficiency were made Mulla.

During his period of office one Abdul Husain, resident of Kapadvanj and living in Mumbai initially claimed that he was in direct touch with the Imam but when he moved to Nagpur he further claimed to be the Imam's Hujjat ranking higher than a Dai. He was an intelligent young man with polite manners and a sweet tongue. His arguments were such as would impress anyone who listened to him. Hence he succeeded in attracting a considerable following which included many well to do persons and even some of the learned Sheikhs. He laid the foundation of a sect called Mehdibaag. But soon it was discovered that Abdul Husain was an imposter, was not as learned as he was believed to be and that his main aim was to acquire wealth. More than 70 persons who had been lured by this new sect repented and rejoined the mainstream due to the efforts of Syedi Ahmedali Hamiduddin. After the death of Abdul Husain the leadership of Mehdibaag passed to Ghulam Husain Khan Bahadur H H Malak with about 100 followers at the time.

The scholars Syedi Muhammadali Hamdani and Syedi Ibrahim Safiyuddin who wrote 'Nasihat' died in 1315 Hijri, Syedi Muhammad Valiyullah in 1321 Hijri and Syedi Jaafarbhai in 1323 Hijri thus creating a vacuum in the field of learning.

With the help that Burhanuddin Sahib received from Karachi he was able to pay back most of the debts including the one incurred in Jamnagar. He then decided to go for Haj accompanied by some of the learned men. So he appointed Ismailji Badruddin to look after the Daawat affairs in his absence giving the impression that he would be the successor after him.

But when he returned after performing Haj he expressed his intention to nominate Abdeali Mohiyuddin for the post of Dai and prepared a 'Nasnamah' (document of 'Nas'). Suddenly he became ill and lost all hopes of recovery. So he sent his son, Tahir Saifuddin to Abdeali Mohiyuddin with the message,

*"I had declared 'Nas' on Ismailji which I now revoke and instead declare 'Nas' on you."*

Upon hearing this Abdeali Mohiyuddin immediately came to Burhanuddin Sahib and said,

*"Please forgive me. I shall not be able to bear this burden. Try my brother Abdullah Badruddin. Perhaps he will accept."*

Burhanuddin Sahib was very annoyed and nominated on 11 Zil Haj 1323 Hijri (1905 AD) Abdullah Badruddin to be his successor which was willingly accepted.

Burhanuddin Sahib died in Surat on 27 Zil Haj 1323 Hijri , exactly the same day and the month as his predecessor, Husamuddin Sahib. His term of office was 15 years.

## **50. Syedna Abdullah Badruddin bin S. Abdul Husain Husamuddin**

He assumed the reins of Daawat in 1323 Hijri after the death of Burhanuddin Sahib. He was born on 18 Rajab 1266 Hijri and his mother was the daughter of Allama Syedi Valibhai and sister of Syedi Ahmedali Hamiduddin. His brother Syedi Abdeali Mohiyuddin was six months older than him and was born of a lady from Sidhpur.

From childhood he preferred to be alone and was well known for his excellent behaviour. He was a disciple of Syedi Ahmedali Hamiduddin, his maternal uncle, Sheikh Luqmanji the poet and Husamuddin Sahib. His main occupation was reading books or correcting hand written copies of religious books. Nothing was dearer to him than these books and he used to spend a lot of money in acquiring them. He used to assist his father Husamuddin Sahib in his work and he also rendered substantial help to Burhanuddin Sahib in the management of Daawat affairs. It is said that it was through his efforts that Burhanuddin Sahib was able to repay his debts in 1905 AD.

Before accepting the post of Dai he led a very pious life like his brother Abdeali Mohiyuddin. He did not like to use allopathic medicine as he suspected it contained alcohol. He expressed feelings of contempt even at the mention of the word 'interest'.

However, after taking charge he completely changed and the signs of piety began to disappear. It became lawful for him to use allopathic medicine prescribed by his physician, Dr Tayebbhai. After recovery from a serious illness he gave financial help to many of his relations from public funds and lent Rs 50,000 to Isabhai Motabhai at compound interest.

He celebrated his accession with some pomp on 19 Safar 1324 Hijri. It seems that the concept of establishing a financial empire had gradually

taken root. He paid visits to different towns and cities and wherever he found disputes arising between two factions, he would mediate and using his good offices settle the disputes amicably to the satisfaction of all.

At his orders the much needed repairs to the Saifee Daras and the shrines in Surat were carried out. It is said that he contributed a huge sum of Rs 60,000 for the Saifee Daras from his private resources.

He took a personal interest in looking after the affairs of the community and used to work hard at it. Every morning he would read the letters received from various towns and dictate their replies. A couple of hours in the morning he would spend in teaching Tayeb Zainuddin , Tahir Saifuddin and his own son Fazal Qutbuddin. At night after Isha he would engage himself for an hour reading books.

During his ministry it was noticed that many of the deputies (Aamils) had adopted corrupt practices and used to make unreasonable and tortuous demands from the faithful instead of giving them service and advice. On receipt of complaints against an Aamil Badruddin Sahib would investigate and if found to be guilty would either rebuke the Aamil or remove him. He issued general instructions to all the Aamils to be lenient in their dealings with the faithful and to help them solve their problems with sound advice. They were directed to pay particular attention to the poor, the needy and the pupils. The serious disputes between the Aamils of Zanzibar, and Pemba and their residents were settled through the unceasing efforts of Badruddin Sahib, which was a great achievement for him.

It is reported that according to Ismaaili Faatemi tradition for the purpose of guidance, education and training of the faithful land was divided into 12 Jazeerahs (regions) each under the supervision of a Dai to be appointed under the authority of the Imam. One such Jazeerah was Hind, Sind and Yemen and all the Faatemi Dais mentioned in Part I were considered as Dais of Hind, Sind and Yemen with no jurisdiction beyond these limits. Hence, the appointment of Aamils in Zanzibar, Pemba or other places and the settlement of the disputes between the Aamils, although highly commendable, seem to have contravened this tradition.

Among the reforms that he introduced was one relating to the manner in which the titles of Mulla and Sheikh were awarded. During the past 40 years such titles could easily be obtained by any ignorant or poorly educated person if he paid a substantial sum of money or was

recommended by some dignitary. Consequently the community was flooded with uneducated and untrained Mullas or Sheikhs some of whom did not possess even the basic knowledge of leading prayers.

During Burhanuddin Sahib's term of office of 15 years many unworthy persons succeeded in gaining the title of Sheikh. Although Badruddin Sahib did not approve this action he kept quiet out of respect for Burhanuddin's authority. However, Badruddin Sahib was now careful in awarding titles only to those persons who had achieved a certain degree of proficiency in their learning and training. No recommendations or bribes would deter him from exercising his judgement.

Between 1906 and 1908 AD he undertook a tour of Mumbai and Kapadvanj and also visited Umreth, Dhrangdhara, Halvad, Kutch Mandvi, Jamnagar, Rajkot, Morbi, Ahmedabad, Wadhwan, Dhoraji and Bhavnagar. The intention of the visit was to learn about the hardships of the faithful and to help them as far as possible.

The Nawab of Surat arranged a delightful party in honour of Badruddin Sahib on his return from the tour. This was an indication of the popularity which he had gained from the rest of the Muslim community.

In 1326 Hijri (1 September 1908 AD) he laid the foundation of Maskati Dispensary in Surat.

In 1328 Hijri (1910 AD) he was afflicted with typhoid and became so frail that he lost all hopes of surviving. But soon he recovered and was able to perform marriages in the family in Shaabaan.

His assistant was Sheikh Ali Ahmed who was a very kind hearted person. All the petitioners used to come through him and they were pleased with him as he would always give them sound advice. Although Badruddin Sahib was old and physically weak yet he had the experience to manage the affairs of the community with great confidence so that all trouble was avoided. His elder brother Abdeali Mohiyuddin who had a very pleasant temperament was always ready and willing to help. It was only after his brother's death that he faced serious dissensions in the family. However, expediency and a show of tolerance on his part saved him from awkward situations. He championed the cause of education by encouraging the opening of additional Madrasahs for pupils. Their finances and management were left in the hands of local committees of

every town or village with little or no interference from any priestly authority. Only nominal supervision was exercised through the respective Aamils. Consequently a number of new Madrasahs sprang up and flourished well. A Primary school named Hakimia school was established in 1902 AD in Burhanpur. In 1911 AD it became a high school with the name changed to Hakimia Coronation High School. It was run by a committee of competent persons. It is said that Badruddin Sahib persuaded Mr Muchhala of Surat to donate a sum of Rs 51,000 towards the school funds.

In 1909 AD he went to Deolali and Nasik to settle the serious dispute that had arisen between two well known families and he succeeded.

In 1910 AD he was invited by Khan Sahib Nazarali Qamruddin of Ujjain on the occasion of marriages in his family. Khan Sahib was a philanthropist and provided employment to a number of poor persons in the community. In December of the same year he became a guest of Sir Adamji Peerbhoy who showed him his new Railway line to Matheran and there put him up in his bungalow.

A monthly paper in Gujarati called 'Gulzare Hakimi' was started by Hasanali Abdulali Gulzar, who was a well known businessman of Khamgaon. He realised that the believers everywhere had become too materialistic and devoted no attention towards spiritual upliftment and the priest class had become corrupt inspite of the so called supervision of Badruddin Sahib. In the first issue which came out in December 1910 (1327 Hijri) he published a few articles on religious subjects and also news of the atrocities committed by the Aamils on innocent believers. Badruddin Sahib did not like this criticism of his administration. So he issued letters to every town ordering the believers not to buy or read this paper. In spite of this prohibition the believers used to read it secretly with interest and the paper gained popularity.

In 1911 AD Badruddin Sahib went on a tour of Karachi, Rawalpindi, Shahjahanpur, Delhi, Jaipur and Kotah and ultimately to Navsari (Mai Sahiba) returning to Mumbai in 1912 AD. On 15 February 1913 AD he performed the opening ceremony of Badri Mahal which was built by M M Isabhai and M/S Yousufali Muhammadali Badukwalla at a cost of Rs 5 lakhs.

By the end of 1913 AD he went to Ahmedabad where he opened the new guest house, the old one having been demolished. Then he proceeded to Kapadvanj in 1914 AD. Here the golden turban (pheta)

had become a major issue and there was unrest and resentment in the community. A suit was also filed in the court against the Aamil in connection with the golden turban. But through Badruddin Sahib's efforts the dispute was brought to an end. He was awarded the title 'Sardar of the first class' by the English Government and he was exempted from attending the court in criminal proceedings.

The faithful of Yemen had come into serious trouble on account of famine coupled with oppression by the Zaidi Imam. They were supplied with grains and all other necessary help was given.

Some trouble arose in Mumbai during Muharram over 'Tazias' but through the intervention of Sir Adamji all conflict was averted. When Sir Adamji Peerbhoy 'Rafiuddin' died on 10 Ramadhan 1331 Hijri (1913 AD) Badruddin Sahib was afflicted with shock and grief. He went to Adamji's bungalow and personally supervised his funeral rites. He even joined the funeral procession of thousands of mourners. Sir Adamji was buried in the court yard of the mosque at the sanitorium. Badruddin Sahib stood at Sir Adamji's grave, offered faateha for the deceased and laid his scarf (dupatta) on the grave as a mark of his deep affection for him. Badruddin Sahib did not go out of Mumbai for 40 days in honour of the deceased and asked his sons to erect a tomb over Sir Adamji's grave.

Badruddin Sahib had become very weak by this time and he nominated Tayebbhai, the elder son of Burhanuddin Sahib as his successor. It appears that Tahir Saifuddin did not like this as he was not on good terms with his brother.

At the behest of Badruddin Sahib, during the Muharram of that year in Surat Tayebbhai delivered sermons which were very much liked by the listeners. He gained some popularity and Badruddin Sahib was very pleased with his performance. This increased the jealousy between the two brothers. When Sheikh Abdul Qadir ibne Isabhai Motabhai died Tayebbhai volunteered to conduct the funeral prayers in Navapura mosque. Before setting out from home he had nothing to eat or drink except a glass of milk. No sooner had he finished the funeral prayers than he vomitted near the pond in the mosque. On being brought home he vomitted once again and before the arrival of the physician, Dr Tayebbhai he passed away.

When Badruddin Sahib was informed of the sudden death of Tayebbhai he jumped up from his sick bed and said, "O God there is

definitely some foul play in this". A report was lodged with the police since there was suspicion of murder by poisoning but no action was taken by the police. Evidently they must have been bribed by the perpetrator of this heinous crime. At the time of this sad incident Tahir Saifuddin was having a picnic with his friends in his bungalow in Dumas. Perhaps he might have arranged this picnic in order to avoid any blame of his involvement in the poisoning. When he returned from Dumas he pretended to be deeply shocked and hurt and shouted loudly, "O my brother, O my brother". But after that he remained completely silent throughout the funeral ceremony. It was 10 Safar 1333 Hijri (1915 AD) that this tragic and untoward incident occurred. The sudden death of Tayebbhai was more than a mystery and Badruddin Sahib was so heartbroken that he never smiled after that and lost all interest in life.

During this period some trouble was brewing in Bhopal between Shias and Sunnis regarding a mosque, and legal proceedings were also instituted in the court. However there was a sudden flare up resulting in riots in which many members of the Dawoodi community were victimised and suffered heavy losses. Upon hearing about the trouble the Begum of Bhopal quickly returned from Mumbai and tried to pacify both the parties. Badruddin Sahib also went to Bhopal and attempted to calm down the faithful. But they were not prepared to bear any more hardship or oppression on behalf of Bhopal state officials on mere suspicion. So they decided to leave Bhopal and were determined to stay away until complete peace and security was established and due compensation was paid for the losses they suffered. The sons of Sir Adamji Peerbhoy came to the rescue and intervened. They fought the case and succeeded in obtaining due compensation for the victims. Some ill intentioned persons in the community felt jealous and could not bear to see credit being given to Sir Adamji's family. So they started an adverse propaganda against Sir Adamji's family and tried to create misunderstanding and succeeded to a certain extent.

Badruddin Sahib had by now become very weak and had not changed the 'Nas' document. The passing of his brother Abdeali Mohiyuddin and the tragic death of Tayebbhai coupled with the Bhopal incident all had contributed to the deterioration of his health and he died in Surat on 10 Rabiul Awwal 1333 Hijri (1915 AD). His term of office was 10 years.

## 51. Syedna Tahir Saifuddin ibne S. Muhammad Burhanuddin

When Badruddin Sahib died in 1333 Hijri (1915 AD) Tahir Saifuddin Sahib declared himself as Dai. While his step mother was welcoming and congratulating him the rosary that was in her hand broke and the beads were scattered all over the floor. The people who witnessed this considered it as an evil omen and one of them said,

*“Allah forbid, this is a sign of disintegration of the community.”*

Saifuddin Sahib was very shrewd, haughty, ruthless and arrogant in his manners. He could not tolerate opposition of any kind whatsoever yet he had the knack of making people submit to him.

His intimate friends were Akbar ibne Husainbhai and Abdul Husain. The latter was so dear to him that the two were often seen together for as long as 20 hours and there were ugly rumours about it. Abdul Husain, the intimate friend of Saifuddin Sahib was reported to have illicit relations with Vazirabai, wife of Tayebbhai, the elder brother of Saifuddin Sahib and this had caused a rift between the two brothers.

On 4 Jamaadil Awwal 1333 Hijri Saifuddin Sahib held a grand celebration of his initiation as Dai. The participants were welcomed with dry fruit and betel leaves (pan) and they were given perfume quite generously. To add to the festivities on this occasion arrangement was made for a musical band to play. Among the hundreds of persons attending were several poets – Samandar, Sikandar, Jawhar and Ghazanfar who read in loud voices their poems eulogising him. The pupils of Saifee Daras and other schools had also prepared poems in Arabic praising Saifuddin Sahib and praying for his long life. A grand feast was also given to all relations, dignitaries and pupils at his bungalow in Dumas, a delightful resort on the Tapti river. The festivities lasted for four days and suitable conveyance was provided for everyone attending.

During the Muharram of the following year Saifuddin Sahib deputised Sheikh Ali Muhammad, his assistant (Deewaan) to Rampura for delivering sermons. The Sheikh invited his father in law, Sheikh Haiderali to give him company during the auspicious days of Muharram. Sheikh Haiderali accompanied by Sheikh Abdul Karim and a few others arrived in Rampura on 8<sup>th</sup> of Muharram. They were given a warm reception at Lal Baagh with the accompaniment of musical band, fire

works and illumination. Sheikh Abdul Karim who did not like it protested to this show of merriment and said, "How can you do such things in the holy days of Muharram?". But his protest proved to be a cry in the wilderness. On reaching their destination a majlis was convened in their honour and betel leaves and sherbat were served as is the custom on happy occasions. They then visited Sheikh Muhammad Vazir, the Aamil of Rampura who offered them nothing but the dust of Karbala and said, 'This being a mourning period I cannot offer you any sweets,' News of what had happened in Rampura quickly reached Surat. Sheikh Ismailbhai ibne Sheikh Luqmanji, the brother in law of Saifuddin Sahib, wrote a strongly worded letter demanding an explanation of the Rampura incident and the reasons why he had not taken any action to punish the Sheikh when he knew that the Sheikh had wilfully violated the sanctity of the holy month of Muharram.

But Saifuddin Sahib ignored the letter and did not reply. Instead he advised the Sheikh to deny the incident altogether. Sheikh Ismailbhai then prepared posters in Gujarati and distributed them widely adding therein, "Your Deewaans (assistants) are worse than prostitutes who at least preserve the sanctity of Muharram by closing their business and observing mourning." The posters created a great uproar in the public. This incident and many others show how Saifuddin Sahib nurtured evil persons. Not only did he defend their misdeeds but also rewarded them with money and titles for their acts of threat and violence duly sanctioned by him upon those who had the courage to protest against his unbecoming behaviour or the evil practices of his deputies.

The monthly paper 'Gulzare Hakimi' in which all the mal-practices under the administration of Saifuddin Sahib were reported, was widely read by the faithful. Immediately after taking charge as a Dai Saifuddin Sahib put a strict ban on the reading of this paper and excommunicated Hasanali in Ramadhan 1333 Hijri (July 1915 AD). However the paper continued to be published regularly. Hasanali migrated to Burhanpur in 1925 AD and continued publication of the paper from Hakimia. Its circulation increased and it was financially stable thanks to the help given by Kinkhabwalla family of Surat and the sons of Sir Adamji Peerbhoy and others.

Saifuddin Sahib's desire for wealth knew no bounds. All the Aamils of towns and villages were instructed to remit direct to Saifuddin Sahib the

money collected from the faithful after deducting a certain percentage towards their commission. The cash that was collected in the charity boxes (Gullas) placed at the numerous shrines up and down the country was also required to be sent to Saifuddin Sahib, who claimed that he alone had the authority to appropriate the funds as he wished. Even public properties including trusts (waqf) were forcibly converted into personal properties in his own name or in the names of family members.

One such example is that of Moriswalla guest house, a four storeyed building in Mumbai which was erected in 1924 AD by Karimji Jeewanji Moriswalla at a cost of Rs 2 lakhs for the convenience of visitors to Mumbai. This was in the early years of Saifuddin Sahib's ministry. In due course of time he succeeded in getting many other public properties transferred to himself or to members of his family.

While returning from one of his visits to Sri Lanka in 1957 AD he attempted to smuggle diamonds through his brother, who hid them in his turban. But unfortunately this was discovered by the airport authorities in Colombo. The diamonds were confiscated and a fine of Rs 75,000 was imposed. However due to the intervention of some influential persons of Sri Lanka no arrests were made. This incident caused a great deal of humiliation and brought disgrace not only to Saifuddin Sahib but also to the entire Dawoodi Community.

He had a large family consisting of 4 wives and 23 children. They were provided all the comforts of hearth and home, food from a common kitchen, motor cars for use on pleasure trips and money out of the community funds which should have been spent on the poor, the needy, the orphans and the widows. His sons and daughters were addressed as princes and princesses. They behaved as such and expected everyone irrespective of age to pay them respect and salaam in cash. Like father, the children did not receive secular education in any public school or college as Saifuddin Sahib was against secular education, particularly English education. Although with the passage of time he realised the error of his judgement yet he did not allow all his children to receive education outside the Saifee Daras with the exception of Yousuf Najmuddin who became a barrister and Hatim Hameeduddin who took up research work in Oxford University. He was acclaimed as professor by the innocent members of the community and he never revealed his true position of being a research student. None of them practiced any

profession and preferred to lead life as a Mulla because it was more lucrative and no work was involved.

When the sons of Sir Adamji Peerbhoy demanded an account of the money collected from the charity box (Gulla) kept at the shrine of Chandabhai from Yousufali Bandukwalla, a trustee of the Gulla evasive replies were received. Saifuddin Sahib declared himself to be the owner of the Gulla and accountable only to the Imam in seclusion. Hence no one had the right to demand an account from him.

However a suit was filed in the high court of Mumbai for failure to render account of the Gulla. This was the famous Chandabhai Gulla case (No 941 of 1917). The plaintiffs were Karimbhoy, son of Sir Adamji, Sharafali Mamooji and Jeewanali Rajabali of Udaipur. The defendants were Yousufali Ibrahimji Bandukwalla, Shamsuddin Muhammadali, a partner in Yousufali's firm looking after the Gulla and Saifuddin Sahib. The case was heard by Justice Martin.

The advocate general opened the case on behalf of the plaintiffs and asked Saifuddin Sahib if Chandabhai was a 'Vali' (saint) and that he was a trustee of the Gulla placed at the shrine. He denied it with disdain. He also denied that Fakhruddin Shaheed in Galiakot and Syedi Hakimuddin in Burhanpur were saints, because according to him a Dai-ul Mutlaq alone could be a Vali. He maintained that he was the owner of the property and souls of all the Dawoodis and that he could not be treated as a trustee accountable to them. Later under cross examination he admitted that Syedi Hakimuddin, Fakhruddin Shaheed and Chandabhai were all Valis (saints). On the question of interest he confessed that his father (Burhanuddin Sahib) and grandfather (Najmuddin Sahib) borrowed money on interest and that his predecessor (Abdullah Badruddin Sahib) lent Rs 50,000 to Isabhai Motabhai on compound interest. Thus according to him payment and receipt of interest was perfectly legitimate under certain circumstances and he believed that it was sanctioned in "Da-aaemul Islam".

At one stage of the proceedings he even claimed to be God on earth. It is said that such a fantastic claim created a stir in the Muslim world and he had to withdraw his statement.

During the hearing some papers were produced showing that there had been a dispute between Sir Adamji Peerbhoy and Burhanuddin Sahib. Saifuddin Sahib confirmed this and commented, "Later on Adamji

approached my father and sought his forgiveness in my presence. I was then 13 years old." The hearing was adjourned at this stage. Meanwhile the advocate general arranged to obtain copy of Saifuddin Sahib's birth certificate from the Municipal records in Surat. When the hearing was resumed the advocate general wanted verification of Saifuddin Sahib's last statement. An Urdu speaking interpreter asked him, "When you were a loanda (boy) were you like other loandas (boys) or were you different." The Urdu words seemed to be undignified for his position so he did not answer even though the question was repeated thrice. The judge was curious and wanted to know why the witness was not answering. He was informed that probably the witness did not understand the interpreter. Immediately he was replaced by a Parsi who asked the same question in Gujarati. Saifuddin Sahib now replied that he was like other boys. Then showing him the birth certificate the Parsi interpreter asked him, "Look at this certificate and tell the court how old you were at the time of the dispute referred to in the previous hearing." Now Saifuddin Sahib had to admit that he was 3 years old at the time. This was a very humiliating situation for him. The judge told the advocate general, "How long will you keep flogging a dead horse?"

The witnesses on behalf of the defendants included Sheikh Tayeb Kokab as an expert and Sheikh Abdul Qadir Tapyia as chief accountant. In case of Kokab the judge remarked, "This witness swears not to tell the truth before he sets out from home." As regards Tapyia it was recorded, "This witness is quite dangerous because he tries to mislead the court". The rest of the witnesses gave stereotyped and parrot fashion statements.

The advocate general's questions baffled Saifuddin Sahib so much that he contradicted himself several times. One cannot imagine the extent of shame and humiliation that he must have suffered throughout the proceedings.

The advocate general summed up by saying, "Whether Mullaji Sahib is Dai-ul Mutlaq, Imam, Prophet or God, it has no relevance to the case. I only want to establish that he is a trustee and as such he is bound to render account."

Finally the case was decided in favour of the plaintiffs. Saifuddin Sahib was declared a trustee fully accountable for the money collected in the Chandabhai Gulla and the plaintiffs were awarded three fourths of the cost which was borne by Saifuddin Sahib.

This was a great defeat for Saifuddin Sahib but he declared to his followers that he had achieved a great victory ('Fathe Mubeen') over the enemies. He ordered the followers everywhere to celebrate this victory with illumination, buntings and a show of merriment.

One of his many claims was that he possessed knowledge of the unknown and he called himself 'Aalemul Ghaib'.

However this claim was falsified by the following incident and many others. Saifuddin Sahib fell in love with Faatemabai Hamdani who had lost her husband in 1336 Hijri (1918 AD). In 1338 he made up his mind to marry her. Accordingly preparations were made to solemnise the marriage and a majlis was convened. In the nick of time Rabab-ai Sahiba, the widow of Abdullah Badruddin Sahib, sent a message through her step son, Fazalbhair, "Faatemabai has 'mehram' with my sister, Husaina-ai, your wife. Hence this marriage would be illegal and against the command of the Quran which prohibits marriage between two sisters at the same time." The ceremony was therefore postponed. But for the timely intervention Saifuddin Sahib would have committed a grave sin. He should have known it had he the knowledge of the unknown.

After this Husaina-ai did not live long and within two months of her death which remained a mystery, Saifuddin Sahib married Faatemabai.

He also claimed to be infallible (maasoom). Once after Zohor prayers in the Bhindi Bazaar mosque he gave a sermon in which he mentioned that he could not make mistakes. However, on the same day when he led Asr prayers there was an error on his part and he had to perform the compulsory additional sajdahs for mistake (sehwa) at the end.

During his visit to Karachi he predicted that the Imam would come out of seclusion during his life time and that he would have the honour of presenting him to the faithful. But this prophecy never came true.

An educational conference was held in Hakimia Coronation High School in 1340 Hijri (December 1921 AD). People from various towns and places attended. When they intended to visit the shrine of Syedi Hakimuddin they were obstructed and prevented by the management from entering the premises. Consequently a meeting was held whereat it was resolved to file a suit in the court to establish and secure their rights of access to that public property. Hence a suit was filed in 1343 Hijri (26 October 1925 AD) known as Burhanpur Dargah case. During the same

year the opening ceremony of a science wing in the Hakimia High School donated by Adamji's sons was performed by the Governor of Central Provinces and an Arabic School (Daras) was also started which remained under the guidance and supervision of Sheikh Ismailbhai Luqmani.

Initially the Dargah case was heard once a week. At this rate it could have taken several years to finalise it. Hence representations were made to the higher authorities in Nagpur and as a result an additional judge, B G Kher was appointed who heard the case more frequently. Besides books, hundreds of letters and documents were produced in the court by both the plaintiffs and defendants. The judge studied the translations of relevant passages from Arabic books, letters and documents so thoroughly that he became more familiar with the issues involved than any learned Mulla or Sheikh.

The chief witness for the defendants was Maulvi Sheikh Dawood, whose statements actually helped the plaintiffs to win the case.

As usual Saifuddin Sahib made a public announcement that he was victorious although he had lost the case. He then lodged an appeal in the Nagpur high court against the judgement of the lower court in Burhanpur. In Nagpur Justice Staples, a Roman Catholic, was influenced by a lady barrister Dilruba who worked with the well known lawyer Bhulabhai Desai. Hence a biased judgement was pronounced in favour of Saifuddin Sahib whose right of excommunication of dissidents was upheld. In the judgement Justice Staples commented that the existence of the Imam is a figment of imagination. Saifuddin Sahib did not even bother at the remarks of the judge in denying the existence of the Imam who in fact was the source of Saifuddin Sahib's own authority. The plaintiffs in the Dargah case were now left with no option but to lodge an appeal in the Privy Council against the judgement of the Nagpur High court. The cost was exorbitant but some well wishers provided the funds and Hatimali Alavi through his painstaking efforts obtained the necessary permission to refer the case to the Privy Council. Finally the appeal was lodged in 1349 Hijri (1930 AD).

The Dargah case when filed in Burhanpur was treated as a representative suit and the names of the plaintiffs originally given were those of Muhammad, son of Khan Bahadur Fakhruddin and Tayebali Muhammadali Bhamgadhwalla. Shortly after Muhammad expired and

due to some disagreement Tayebali's name was deleted. Two new names were substituted, those of Hasanali Chakera, the headmaster of Hakimia Coronation High school and Tahirali Kinkhabwalla, a prominent businessman of Surat.

Due to these changes the Privy Council did not accept the suit as representative and delivered the judgement in favour of Hasanali and Tahirali in December 1947. The decision of the Nagpur High court was reversed and the judgement of the lower court in Burhanpur was upheld.

In the Privy Council judgement it was stated,

*“Abdul Qadir Najmuddin was nominated by four learned men in 1256 Hijri and they accepted him as Dai-ul Mutlaq by virtue of that nomination. The court therefore hopes that the plaintiffs would also accept the Mullaaji as Dai-ul Mutlaq as did their predecessors. Although Mullaaji has the power of excommunication, which has to be exercised with justice, equity and good conscience, he cannot exercise this right arbitrarily. His action in excommunicating the plaintiffs in arbitrary manner is considered invalid.”*

The defendants were required to pay Rs 50,000 to the plaintiffs towards the cost of the appeal.

Again Saifuddin Sahib announced victory and held celebrations on a wide scale. However after a close scrutiny of the judgement he must have been disappointed. His son, Yousuf Najmuddin advised him that fresh notices should be issued to all those who were previously declared excommunicated and they should be asked to appear before a meeting of the community members to be convened in Badri Mahal. It will then be easy to pronounce the decree of excommunication upon them and this would become perfectly legal. Hence show cause notices enumerating the charges against them were issued in all such cases and replies were called for. A public meeting of the community members was then convened at Badri Mahal. The charges on each individual were read out clearly in loud voice so that the members present could hear and understand while their replies were read out hurriedly and in such an inaudible voice which no one could comprehend. When this was done Saifuddin Sahib from his so called 'gadi' (throne) would announce, "I excommunicate so and so". This show went on for a couple of individuals when the group from Malegaon protested and said, "You are reading the charge sheet so clearly but when it comes to the replies you are trying to make them ambiguous. If you can't do it properly give us the letters and we shall

read them.” This resulted in serious and heated arguments and soon a riotous situation developed. So Saifuddin Sahib considered it wise to disperse the meeting. Nothing was accomplished and the whole exercise ended in a failure for Saifuddin Sahib.

Another important case during this period was that known as ‘Abde Faatema’ case of 1937. Abdeali, son of Amiruddin Salehbhai Tayebji, senior partner of the famous firm of shipchandlers in Mumbai, was engaged to be married in March 1936 to Faatema, daughter of Abdulali Rajabali Chibawalla. Amiruddin was an active member of the group of reformists who were demanding from the Government that the stipulations of the Musalman Waqf Act should now apply to the Dawoodi community which had obtained exemption from the Act for three years and which period was now over. Thereupon an enquiry commission was set up by the Mumbai Government for this purpose and Amiruddin was the chief witness in that enquiry. Meanwhile another enquiry was instituted by Amiruddin to find out how and where the sum of Rs 2 lakhs donated by his mother for charitable purposes was spent by Saifuddin Sahib .

When Saifuddin Sahib was requested by both the families to solemnise the marriage of Abdeali and Faatema he refused saying, “Withdraw the enquiry regarding the sum of Rs 2 lakhs.” This money transaction and the involvement of Amiruddin in the Waqf Act enquiry were the main reasons why the request was refused. But apparently the excuse given out was that Abdeali was not growing a beard. Abdeali tried in vain to argue that many marriages were performed where the grooms had no beards. At last he decided to have his marriage solemnised by a Sunni Qazi. In order to avoid any confrontation with Saifuddin Sahib, the bride’s father transferred his ‘Vakalat’ to Sir Karimbhoy Ibrahim, the well known Baronet of Khoja community witnessed by Sardar Sir Sulaiman Kasam Mitha and his son Usmaan. The witnesses who asked the bride her consent to the marriage were Abdul Husain Poonawalla and Abdul Rahim Khandwalla. Hatimali Alavi, the ex Mayor of Karachi was also present on the occasion. Upon a meher of Rs 51 the marriage was duly solemnised by Maulvi Haji Abdul Haleem on 25 February 1937.

However, in April 1937 both the bride and groom received letters from the Aamil of Mumbai stating that the marriage was illegal and that the couple were living in sin. Saifuddin Sahib approved the action of the

Aamil and in August of the same year sent letters of the same tune to Amiruddin and Abdulali. Now the groom had no alternative but to file a suit in the High court of Mumbai against Saifuddin Sahib and his deputy, the Aamil in Mumbai, for maligning the character of the couple and demanded from them damages of Rs 50,000 each by way of compensation.

Top lawyers were engaged by both the parties. The plaintiffs were represented by advocate general M C Setalvad, Coltman, P B Vachcha and Hindade whereas on behalf of the defendants Sir Jamshedji Kanga and B P Taraporewalla gave appearance. The case proceeded and some of the pleas put forward by the defendants were that (a) according to the traditions of the Dawoodi community marriage cannot be solemnised without the prior consent (raza) of the head of the community or his deputy (b) Saifuddin Sahib has the right to refuse to solemnise the marriage if the groom does not keep a beard. However, if the groom undertakes to grow a beard and deposits a substantial sum of money by way of security Saifuddin Sahib might show some leniency and allow the marriage to be performed (c) since the marriage was not performed according to the established tradition of the Dawoodi community and against the wishes of Saifuddin Sahib the marriage was invalid and the couple were living in sin. Hence all relations with them were cut off and they were excommunicated.

The statements of the couple were then recorded and all those who were participants in the marriage ceremony appeared as witnesses and were cross examined by the defendant's barrister, Sir Jamshedji Kanga. Saifuddin Sahib managed to postpone the hearing on some pretext or the other for nearly three years. Ultimately Saifuddin Sahib had to give in and he proposed a settlement on 5 March 1940.

He accepted the 'nikaah' performed by the Qazi as legal and valid (by virtue of his special powers which he claimed he possessed) and agreed to withdraw the letters issued in April and August 1937 regarding the invalidity of the 'nikaah' and the blame on the couple that they were living in sin. Perhaps he was reminded of the fact that Amtullahbai, the mother of Saleh Safiyuddin and Ibrahim Zainuddin, his step brothers, was the daughter of a Sunni muslim lady who was married to Haider Mota in Singapore and the 'nikaah' was performed by a Sunni muslim Qazi. The court pronounced the following judgement.

*“This court states ‘In Invitum’ that the Qazi ‘nikaah’ of plaintiff Abdeali to Faatema, daughter of Abdulali Chibawalla which took place on 25 February 1937 is considered legal according to the laws applicable to the Dawoodi Bohra community and is valid from the date it took place.”*

Saifuddin Sahib paid Rs 35,000 by way of damages but this was not recorded.

During the period of the ministry of Saifuddin Sahib numerous ugly incidents occurred involving threats, abuses, assaults and even death. None of them were investigated into by Saifuddin Sahib nor any action taken against the culprits. A few of them are cited below.

In 1918 Mulla Ghazanfarali was beaten up in Saifee Daras, Surat.

Sheikh Ishaqali was battered and thrown into the gutter.

Tayebbhahi Thanawalla who had been a witness in the Chandabhahi Gulla case was assaulted and his ears were cut off. The culprit in this case was caught and was sentenced to three years imprisonment.

In 1920 the homes of Sheikh Faizullahbhahi Hamdani and Sheikh Ismailbhahi Luqmani were invaded by a mob. They pelted stones and threatened to set fire simply because they had performed the ‘nikaah’ of Hatimbhahi, son of Sheikh Faizullahbhahi, with the daughter of Sheikh Ismailbhahi without the consent of Saifuddin Sahib. In fact he had withheld his consent because both of these dignitaries had given witness against him in the Chandabhahi Gulla case.

Stones and mud were thrown at the coffin of Sharafali Mamooji. It was he who, in conjunction with Karimbhoy Sir Adamji, had demanded the account of the Gulla placed at the Chandabhahi shrine.

Ibrahim Sir Adamji was brutally assaulted by hired goondas but luckily he survived. The goondas were Muhammadali Hakimji, Roshanali Muhammadali Rangwalla and Ismail Tayebali. They were apprehended and each of them was sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour and a fine of Rs 1,000.

The servant of Fazalbhahi Hakimuddin named Jaafar was murdered because he was an eye witness to certain criminal incidents.

Abdul Qadir, son in law of Saifuddin Sahib was a persona non grata and met with his death under suspicious circumstances. Saifuddin Sahib chose another son in law who was already married and who loved his wife

dearly. Subsequently he was forced to divorce his first wife from whom he had a young son who used to visit his father frequently. One day the young boy was missing and after a search his body was recovered from the water reservoir inside the house. A charge of murder against the step mother of the son in law was registered in the magistrate's court in Surat but no conviction was made. No one knows why.

The grave of Alibhai Sir Adamji's wife in Charni Road cemetery was dug up and the freshly buried body of the deceased lady was removed and thrown on the public road in the early hours of the morning. It appears the case was suppressed with the aid of very large bribes. This heinous crime was perpetrated by four persons one of whom was Roshanali Muhammadali. After a number of years he felt remorse and he visited Ibrahim Sir Adamji whom he had assaulted previously and sought his forgiveness for the crimes he had committed. He used to say to him, "I worshipped Syedna as God and it was he who prompted us to commit this sacrilege of exhuming the body of the deceased. We had such blind faith in him that we would have done anything for him." Roshanali was very good at reciting 'marsiyas' and he used to attend Muharram majlises organised at the residence of Adamji Sons.

In Mumbai during the year 1945 acid was thrown on the face of Mulla Abbas Aurangabadi who was running a paper called 'Munsif' in which he used to expose the evil deeds committed by the priest class as a whole. As a result he lost one of his eyes and had to make frequent visits to the hospital for skin grafting on the face.

Saifuddin Sahib tightened the hold on the members of the community by invading their homes- by interfering in their domestic and social life. He forbade eating on dining tables using forks and knives. But a few years later he himself ate from dining tables and used forks and knives when attending parties with Government officials or political leaders.

He discouraged the women of the community from visiting cinema houses and employed goondas to follow them and stop them at the cinema house. However the women of his own household were frequent visitors to the cinemas and theatres and they used to watch the shows from behind curtains specially provided for them.

Parents were required to obtain names for their newly born children from Saifuddin Sahib. They could not choose the names themselves and if they did so they were compelled to change the names according to his

whim. This often created funny situations where the same name like 'Nafisa' was given to a number of girls at the same time.

Starting a new business, entering into a partnership, taking up membership of a club, organisation or political party, casting votes in the elections of local or national bodies, forming trusts for charitable purposes all required prior permission of Saifuddin Sahib.

This clearly amounted to the infringement of the Charter of Human Rights since the community members were not allowed to think for themselves nor to express an opinion nor protest. They were virtually turned into slaves. Remember our Prophet Muhammad (SA) not only condemned slavery but abolished it whenever and in whatever form he found it.

If anyone would like to invite Saifuddin Sahib to his house he was required to pay a substantial sum for the visit. Rarely would Saifuddin Sahib accept the sum offered with thanks. Instead he would put up his own demand and the faithful would be left with no choice but to obey.

He expected everyone of the followers visiting him to perform 'sajdah' (prostration) before approaching him and to kiss his knees and feet when doing 'salaam' which was not acceptable without the offering of hard cash. In case the least hesitation was noticed from any visitor the sinister looking mullas or sheikhs standing around would force him to the floor before the very eyes of Saifuddin Sahib and compel him to perform 'sajdah'.

On the occasion of the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Saifuddin Sahib in Karachi Syed Sarwar Shah Jilani of Khilafat Movement in Pakistan happened to participate among others. His observations and comments are worth noting,

*"I have very good relations with the members of the Dawoodi community who are well known for their love of religion and the language of the Quran, their Islamic way of life, their keeping of beards, and their charitable work. On the evening of the Golden Jubilee, however, I saw that their Mullaji and his son were sitting on a well decorated and illuminated throne. Soon my wonder knew no bounds when I saw some participants approaching the throne and perform 'sajdah' before the Mullaji, remaining in that position for quite some time. I intended to object against this improper behaviour by making an announcement on the loud speaker but*

*the management did not allow me to do so. We are muslims and as such we are not supposed to prostrate before idols whether of stone or flesh and blood but before Allah only. After all what is the difference between idol worshippers and muslims.”*

In 1955 while he was in Karachi, Saifuddin Sahib said to the youngsters, “You may not know the names of Prophets, Imams and Duaat. Do not worry, just remember one name, that of Tahir Saifuddin and that is enough for you.” His son Yousuf Najmuddin gave a statement in the paper ‘Dawn’, Karachi that the 46 th Dai, Syedna Muhammad Badruddin was poisoned and died suddenly. Unknowingly he proved that there was no ‘nas’ after Syedna Muhammad Badruddin. Hence his father’s claim to the post of Dai would be invalid thus jeopardising the position of his father. As soon as he realised his mistake he made frantic efforts to withdraw the paper from circulation and bought all the remaining copies from the press.

The famous scholar, Muhammad Kamil Husain in the introduction of the book ‘Kitaabul Himmah’ has referred to Yousuf Najmuddin as a raw and untrained pupil.

In 1963/1964 AD Saifuddin Sahib visited Kampala, East Africa where he was the chief guest of the millionaire Amarbhai Muhammadali of Kamapala, Uganda. In anticipation of Saifuddin Sahib’s arrival Amarbhai spent thousands of shillings in constructing a tarmac passage for the car from the public road right upto the door of his bungalow for the convenience of Saifuddin Sahib. One by one the Ugandan families invited him to ‘Ziaafat’ (feast with ‘salaam’). Saifuddin Sahib then asked Amarbhai, “When are you giving us Ziaafat?” to which he replied, “Maula you are staying in my house as my most honoured guest. Is that not Ziaafat every day?”

But Saifuddin Sahib was not convinced and insisted upon a special Ziaafat to be given to him. He made Amarbhai agree even the figure of ‘salaam’ in advance. However, on the day of Ziaafat, when all other guests had arrived, the food was ready to be served, and Amarbhai offered the envelope for the amount of ‘salaam’ as agreed Saifuddin Sahib demanded more cash. Amarbhai was very upset and offered a cheque but it was not accepted and cash was demanded. Since this was the period of Xmas holidays it was not possible for Amarbhai to provide the required amount in cash. Realising the precarious situation in which Amarbhai was

placed some Jamaat committee members offered a guarantee that they would pay if Amarbhai failed to do so as soon as the banks opened after the holidays. But inspite of all the assurances given Saifuddin Sahib rejecting the food started to walk out of the house. Amarbhai's wife holding Saifuddin Sahib's legs vainly begged him to stay and was virtually dragged to the door but Saifuddin Sahib did not stop. Both Amarbhai and his wife were stunned. The former had such a severe shock that he did not survive long and his wife suffered from acute depression after this incident.

One of the greatest innovations (bidaat) introduced by Saifuddin Sahib was to compel everyone of his followers to keep his photograph and that of his eldest son, Muhammad Burhanuddin in his house, shop or any communal place. They were even encouraged to keep the photographs in the holy Quran which is nothing but sacrilege. Some of the enthusiastic followers hung life size photographs of father and son on the walls towards the Qiblah and they offered prayers in front of them totally disregarding the Islamic Shariah which expressly prohibits prayers being offered before statues, mirrors, pictures or photographs since this amounts to idolatry.

It is reported that for quite some time Saifuddin Sahib had discolouration of his skin and large white spots were visible on his hands and face, specially lips. He was constantly using very costly lotions to cover up these spots. Since a person with such a handicap could not lead prayers according to our Shariah this must surely be very disturbing for him and a source of worry as to how he could maintain his position as Dai.

The white spots on his body must have become more prominent , hence he was moved to Matheran, away from the public eye, for treatment and recuperation. After a few days he died in Matheran on 19 Rajab 1385 Hijri (1965 AD). His body was brought to Mumbai in contravention of our Shariah which requires the body to be buried in the town where death has occurred. He was buried in Bhindi Bazaar, a very crowded locality resided mostly by the faithful. It is usual to keep the face of the deceased open in the coffin before burial to allow people to have a last look at the deceased. However in case of Saifuddin Sahib the face was kept concealed all the time and no one was allowed to see it. Even Ali Ahmed Fakhruddin, the then President of India, who came to participate

in the funeral, was not shown the face of the deceased. What was wrong with the face?

While digging the grave it was noticed that water was seeping through the underground sewage pipe which must have been damaged in the process. Immediately the pipe was repaired but it left a nasty smell all round. The affected soil was removed and additional soil was brought from elsewhere in order to fill the grave and to cover up the smell. However it is unusual to fill the grave with soil other than that which came out from digging. When Muhammad Burhanuddin went down into the grave helping in laying the body to rest he felt dizzy and almost swooned. Later on he said, "I felt dizzy when I saw father in gardens of heaven".

Saifuddin Sahib's sons decided to erect a monument in memory of their father. So they collected funds from the faithful and started the construction of a mausoleum which, as they said, would match with the Taj Mahal by using white and black marble in the walls and on the floor with Quranic inscriptions on the inner walls of the burial chamber studded with gold and gems. The architect of this mausoleum was Yahya Merchant who was also the architect of the mausoleum of Qauide Aazam Muhammadali Jinnah in Karachi. It must have cost crores of rupees of public money which could have been spent in ameliorating the condition of thousands of community members who are in distress and living below the poverty line. Some of them can be seen begging at the very doorsteps of the Badri Mahal, the headquarter of Saifuddin Sahib.

The period of Saifuddin Sahib's ministry was 50 years.

## **52. Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin ibne S. Tahir Saifuddin**

Upon the death of Saifuddin Sahib in 1385 Hijri (1965 AD) Burhanuddin Sahib took over the reins of Daawat.

After Najmuddin Sahib this succession had become hereditary in the Najmi (47th Dai) and Husami (48th Dai) families and was no longer based on knowledge, piety, ability or sincerity.

During the last 50 years the community members, specially those seeking reforms in the society were branded as unbelievers and were harassed and tormented. They became victims of social ostracism because they revolted against the inhuman treatment by the Daawat administration and as they demanded a true and honest rendering of account of the huge collection of public money.

Since Burhanuddin Sahib during the life time of his father seemed to be rather liberal minded, kind and meek it was hoped that upon his succession the tyranny to which the community members were so long subjected would stop and an era of peace and security will follow. But alas, this was not to be. Burhanuddin Sahib proved to be more hard hearted than his father. Besides, he appears to be under the influence of his brothers whom he dare not displease. He is neither shrewd nor awe inspiring but like his father is extremely greedy and ruthless in his dealings. From the day he took over there has been greater trouble in the community. People are suffering even more than before and the unrest is increasing day by day. Societies have come into existence in most of the major cities to express resentment against the treatment by the priest class of the community members who are seeking redress for their grievances but most important of all for demanding from Burhanuddin Sahib and his associates an account of how and where the wealth of the community is being spent. Some of the prominent societies are the Dawoodi Bohra Jamaat, Mumbai, the Dawoodi Bohra Roshan Khayal Jamaat, Malegaon, the Dawoodi Bohra Jamaat, Udaipur and the Bohra Youth, Udaipur, the Dawoodi Bohra Welfare Society in Great Britain, London, the Association of Progressive Dawoodi Bohras of Ontario, Canada and Nairobi Group Charitable Society, Nairobi, East Africa.

Four of the top grade ulamaa (scholars) of the Saifee Daras in Surat (which was renamed Jaamia Saifiyah) were insulted and harassed a

number of times through their own pupils at the instance of Yousuf Najmuddin, the brother of Burhanuddin Sahib because they knew that no 'nas' was declared by the 46 th Dai, although so far they had not disclosed it in public. They were Sheikh Sajjad Husain, his brother Sheikh Hasanali, Sheikh Ali Ahmed and Sheikh Ahmedali.

The pupils were told by Yousuf Najmuddin that these four ulamaa did not believe in Hazrat Ali, they ridiculed the Ahle Bait, Islam, Faatemi Daawat and Imam Husain's maatam and they had led astray a number of families. In 1393 Hijri he even accused the ulamaa of insulting his late father Saifuddin Sahib by saying , "We (the sons) have buried our father in the gutter." By making this accusation Yousuf Najmuddin himself revealed this fact to the people who were altogether unaware of it.

The ulamaa were dragged out of their homes, spat upon and severely beaten. Sheikh Sajjad Husain, the most senior among them received such fatal wounds that he did not survive long. Their homes were wrecked by the mob, all the furniture was destroyed, all the books were looted and the wives and children were molested.

On learning that Burhanuddin Sahib would be present in Galiakot (in Jamaadil Awwal of 1393 Hijri -1973 AD) a group of the faithful from Udaipur, majority of whom were women, travelled to Galiakot with the dual purpose of visiting the Fakhri shrine and paying respects to Burhanuddin Sahib. But as Burhanuddin Sahib was displeased with the people of Udaipur this group was not allowed access to the shrine. On the other hand goondas were set upon them and they beat the women and began molesting them, shamelessly pulling and tearing their clothes. They appealed to Burhanuddin Sahib who was watching the outrage from the upper balcony, by shouting "Maula save us , Maula save us" but to no avail. Most of the women were compelled to run into the jungle around the shrine to save themselves and their honour and with great difficulty managed to return to Udaipur. In 1402 Hijri (1<sup>st</sup> March 1982 AD) it was decided to observe the day as ' black day' to remind the sufferers of the atrocities committed upon them. This was in fact a turning point in the history of Udaipur which was named "My Madinah" by the late Saifuddin Sahib. The belief of the majority of people was shattered and they no longer showed the reverence to Burhanuddin Sahib as before nor accepted him as their religious pontiff.

This was followed by several incidents involving violence which further

shook the belief of the people of Udaipur. On 6 Muharram 1395 Hijri a brutal attack was launched in Moayyadpura mosque with lathis and knives by Shababis as they were called upon innocent men, women and children who had gathered there for the majlis of Imam Husain (AS). Blood was shed in the mosque, many were injured and one person was killed. It resulted in a series of court cases and Burhanuddin Sahib and his men fought hard for the re-possession of the Moayyadpura and other mosques which were now under the control of the reformist group including the shrines in Udaipur. After much bickering it was decided by the court that Mullaji will be allowed to share only the Moayyadpura mosque with the reformist group.

There were nearly 100 couples in Udaipur who were anxiously awaiting the blessings of Burhanuddin Sahib for the performance of their 'nikaah' but he had withheld permission as they had leanings towards the reformists. After waiting for some time they unanimously decided to go ahead and perform the marriage ceremony without 'raza', and by the Qazis of their choice. All the marriages were performed on 5 Rabiul Awwal 1395 Hijri without any hitch and strictly in accordance with the Shariah. It was a grand ceremony and will be remembered in Udaipur for years to come. This event emboldened people of Udaipur to carry out all their other religious duties and obligations without the need to obtain 'raza' from anyone.

The editor of 'Naseeme Sahar', Sheikh Kalimuddin reported a speech given by Burhanuddin Sahib in which he said, "The position of Saifuddin Sahib is the same as that of Ahmed. In fact he is Ahmed, he is light and he has merged with light. This is the interpretation of the Quranic verse 'Qaaba gausain'". According to the editor "The Quran describes the attributes of Prophet Muhammad and Aale Muhammad and their Dais specially the 51<sup>st</sup> Dai. His glory can be felt in the shrine 'Rawdhate Taahira'. The 52<sup>nd</sup> Dai built this shrine, the like of which was never built before. For 1400 years the Quran was waiting to be inscribed on stone in golden letters and this is the same Quran which Hazrat Ali had written in his house."

In April 1977 a body called 'Nathwani Commission' was appointed at the instance of Citizens for Democracy to investigate into the alleged atrocities committed by the Dawoodi Bohra administration (Kothar) upon the reformists and their families and the imposition of social

boycott (baraat) which was worse than excommunication. There was no intention at all to interfere in religion or to challenge any of the Dawoodi Bohra tenets.

The members of this commission were Narendra Nathwani and V M Tarkunde both judges of Mumbai high court, Professor Aloo Dastoor, Dr Moin Shakir, Aalam Khundmiri, Professor of Usmania University and Chandrakant Daru.

The first sitting of the commission was held on 28 Jamaadil Awwal 1398 Hijri (30 April 1978 AD) in Justice Nathwani's bungalow in Malabar Hill, Mumbai. The complainants were required to answer in writing or in person 24 questions on citizens rights and human rights, 13 questions on social boycott (baraat), 18 questions on salaam, gifts etc and some miscellaneous questions. None of them related to religious beliefs of the persons. Despite the attempts of Kothar to stop the hearing it went on smoothly. It was due to the unceasing efforts of Nomanbhai Contractor and Dr Asgharali Engineer that the commission was able to complete its work successfully. Similar sittings were also held in other major cities and a report of over 200 pages was published by the commission in April 1979 AD (1399 Hijri).

A summary of the recommendations proposed by the commission in their own words is as follows:

“Our enquiry has shown that there is large-scale infringement of civil liberties and human rights of reformist Bohras at the hands of the priestly class and that those who fail to obey the orders of the Syedna and his Aamils, even in purely secular matters, are subjected to Baraat resulting in complete social boycott, mental torture and frequent physical assaults. The Meesaaq (the oath of unquestioning obedience to the Head Priest) which every Bohra is required to give before he or she attains the age of majority, is used as the main instrument for keeping the entire community under the subjugation of the Syedna and his nominees. On the threat of Baraat (social boycott) and the resulting grave disabilities, Bohras are prevented from reading periodicals which are censored by the Syedna (such as the Bombay Samachar, the Blitz and the Bohra Bulletin); from establishing charitable institutions like orphanages, dispensaries, libraries etc without the prior permission of the Syedna except by submitting to such conditions as he may impose; from contesting elections to

municipal and legislative bodies without securing beforehand the blessings of the Syedna; and above all, from having any social contact with a person subjected to Baraat, even if the person is one's husband, wife, mother, sister, father or son. The weapon of Baraat has been used to compel a husband to divorce his wife, a son to disown his father, a mother to refuse to see her son, and a brother or sister to desist from attending the marriage of his or her sister or brother. An ex-communicated member becomes virtually an untouchable in the community, and besides being isolated from his friends and nearest relatives, is unable to attend and offer prayers at the Bohra mosque. Even death does not release him from the taboo, for the dead body is not allowed to be buried at the community's common burial ground. Bohra Jamaats in India and abroad are not allowed to frame their own rules and regulations, but are subjected to authoritarian constitutions granting absolute power to the Syedna and his nominees. Millions of rupees are collected every year from Bohras in India and abroad as customary taxes and Nazranas by the Syedna and his nominees, but the Syedna is not accountable for them to any one. The Syedna also claims to be the owner of all the Bohra mosques and the sole trustee of all Bohra trusts, and where the accounts of any of these trusts are audited, the work is done by a firm composed of some members of the Bohra community who are also bound by the Meesaaq given by them to the Syedna. For obvious reasons, it is almost impossible to improve this situation by organising a reform movement from within the Bohra community. Any person who fails to obey implicitly the orders of the Syedna and his Aaamils commits a breach of his Meesaaq and is liable to be subjected to Baraat or social boycott. The consequence is that although a large number of Bohras resent the disabilities imposed upon them by the priestly class, they are unwilling to give any public expression to their resentment. We thus found that although a systematic public campaign was organised in the Bohra community to condemn our Commission and to put a stop to its enquiry, quite a few of the campaigners wanted us to carry on the work.

While the majority of dissenters are thus unwilling to express their opposition to priestly domination, those who have the courage to do so are unable to carry on a reform movement from within the community. Although they are willing to accept the religious, as distinguished from the secular authority of the Syedna as an essential

part of their faith, Baraat is proclaimed against them, and being thus deprived of social contact with other Bohra brothers and sisters, their movement has only a peripheral impact on the community.

The situation therefore calls for the authority of the State to be invoked for passing suitable legislation to relieve the hardships of the community, without encroaching on the fundamental rights which it enjoys as a religious denomination. Under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution, members of the community have the right to freely protest, practice and propagate their religion, to establish and maintain institutions for religious purposes, and to manage their own affairs in matters of religion. These rights, however, do not prevent the state from making any law (a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or secular activity, which may be associated with religious practice, or (b) providing for social welfare and reform.

We will indicate in this chapter the types of enactment which are required for regulating the economic and secular activities of the Bohra priesthood and for providing social reform in the community. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to emphasise that such legislation is not likely to be passed and implemented unless it receives the active support of all progressive sections of the Indian people, including those belonging to the minority communities. We appeal in particular to Indian Muslims to peruse this report, see the ghastly picture of persecution which it presents, and decide whether legislation is not necessary to regulate the secular activities of the Bohra priesthood and to introduce social reform in the Bohra community.

We recommend the following types of legislation in order to mitigate the evils described in the earlier chapters.

1. Baraat or social boycott should be made illegal and penalised as an offence.
2. We have seriously considered the question whether the abolition of Meesaaq should be recommended as a measure of necessary social reform. We recommend that the Syedna should in the first place be requested to limit the Meesaaq to obedience of his directions in religious matters.

3. It is essential that all the trusts where the Syedna claims to be the sole trustee, and the receipt and expenditure of all the customary taxes and Nazranas, should be regulated by suitable legislation.
4. We have referred to in this report to the ways in which the Syedna or his nominees influence the elections to municipal and legislative bodies. It is not only a corrupt practice but also an offence under section 171 C of the Indian Penal Code. We hope that such electoral influence by religious heads will discontinue. The present law is sufficient to meet the situation and additional legislation is not called for.
5. We have seen in an earlier chapter how Bohra Jamaats in India and abroad are compelled to accept authoritarian constitutions under which autocratic powers are granted to the Syedna and his nominees. Pressure for the acceptance of such constitutions could be exercised because of the force of Meesaaq and the fear of Baraat. If Baraat is made illegal and if the Meesaaq is either improved or prohibited, the aggrieved Jamaats will be free to make such alterations in their constitutions as they may desire. No additional legislation appears to be necessary for this purpose."

After a few years another body was set up known as Tevatia Commission whose work was more or less similar to the Nathwani Commission. Its report together with the report of the earlier Commission were submitted to the Provincial and Central Government authorities for consideration and some suitable action.

It is said that Burhanuddin Sahib loves travelling, specially to foreign countries. In 1967 he went on a tour of East Africa. When he visited Tanzania he was well received by the faithful there but unfortunately for him the Tanzanian Government issued expulsion orders in August 1968 because it was alleged that he had made an illegal transfer of 65,000 shillings from the country. This was reported in the 'Nationalist' on 15 August 1968 and also in 'East African Standard' on 16 August 1968. There was a considerable agitation but nothing could be done and Burhanuddin Sahib had to leave Tanzania. In 1977 his brother, Yousuf Najmuddin was also expelled by the Kenya Government on a similar allegation.

He made a trip to Egypt where he was said to have spent foreign exchange worth several crores in Indian rupees on repair work of an old

mosque in Cairo known as Jaame Anwar. He also presented for the tomb of Hazrat Zainab a silver Zarih the cost of which was met out of public donations. But he earned the title 'Vishahun Neel' (the sash or band of the Nile) from President Sadat for these donations.

Several lakhs of rupees were collected from the community for building a Zarih for Hazrat Abbas. When Burhanuddin Sahib went to Karbala and wished to place the Zarih in position it was discovered that the Zarih was too small and would not fit over the grave. He therefore suggested that the covering over the grave should be trimmed to accommodate the Zarih.

The chief caretaker was persuaded to call several engineers to do the job but they all refused saying that they could not and would not do such alteration. One of the most famous engineers from Iran was then called for. But he also refused as he considered it a sacrilege. In the end the Iraqi authorities decided to reject the Zarih offered by Burhanuddin Sahib and installed one of their own.

In 1979 Burhanuddin Sahib travelled with a retinue of about 21 persons in the famous ship Elizabeth II spending approximately 53,000 rupees per head. The voyage covered places like Colombo, Singapore and Hong Kong where huge collections were made by way of 'salaam' from the faithful. It is common knowledge that on a ship of this kind entertainment and facilities which are considered 'haraam' in our Shariah are available.

Burhanuddin Sahib is said to be very fond of being photographed specially with dignitaries. His photos appear in newspapers and magazines and even on calendars. Once the Urdu paper 'Blitz' published his photograph where he is seen standing in a queue behind Rafique Zakaria waiting to shake hands with Queen Elizabeth of England. The magazine 'Naseeme Sahar' published a photo showing Burhanuddin Sahib sitting in front of the Queen with folded hands. The desire for pictures is so great that Burhanuddin Sahib has exceeded even his father in expecting every household to keep his picture and that of his father without fail. By some their pictures are kept even in the Quran in the chapter Ya seen.

It would not be inappropriate at this point to mention an episode from the life of Prophet Muhammad (SA). Once the angels came to the house of the Prophet and found that there was a curtain hanging on the

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door. The angels hesitated and did not enter the house. The reason for this hesitation was that there were pictures on the curtain. Immediately the Prophet removed the curtain and the angels entered.

A number of projects and schemes were announced by Burhanuddin Sahib some of which were never completed, some never even started, but he never failed to collect funds from the faithful. Some of them are listed below:

1. "In order to give better training to pupils in Jaamia Saifiyah teachers will be invited from Egypt." This did not materialise.
2. "Magazines will be issued regularly." Four or five issues came out and then it stopped altogether.
3. "Special attention will be paid to the education of girls." This came into force after a period of 10 years and then not more than 10 girls were able to derive benefit.
4. "A 14 storey building will be constructed next to Jaamia Saifiyah for the pupils." The foundation stone was laid but the building never came up.
5. "A 30 lakh rupees worth of technical college and a 21 lakh rupees worth of Arabic Islamic Academy in Mumbai and 2 lakh rupees worth of high school in Surat will be established." People are waiting to see them.
6. "There will be a provident fund for teachers." So far this has not been provided.
7. "Nahjul Balaagha will be translated into Gujarati and will be published together with a number of other religious books." This has not been done.
8. "To send first class pupils to Jaame Azhar in Cairo or to Muslim Aligarh University." As far as known no pupil has been given this opportunity.

In 1979 Burhanuddin Sahib announced the opening of a bank in Mumbai where all transactions would be without interest. All the faithful were told to withdraw their deposits from the Mercantile Cooperative Bank, Mumbai which was the only bank started by the community members, specially Zainul Aabedin Rangoonwalla who was one of the pioneers in establishing this bank and raising it to a high standard in the

banking world. Its Dawoodi Bohra employees were coerced to resign from their jobs in the bank as it was dealing in interest. In May 1982 goondas were posted around the bank picketing and coaxing the faithful not to have any transactions with the bank. Nothing however became of the interest free bank promised by Burhanuddin Sahib.

It is believed that apart from collecting funds under some pretext or the other Burhanuddin Sahib derives from the community as 'waajebaat' an income of about 12 crore rupees every year. The question is how and where this amount is spent.

Many industrial and commercial organisations in India are owned or controlled by Burhanuddin Sahib and his brothers. Some of them worth mentioning are Sultan Brothers and His Holiness Dr Syedna Tahir Saifuddin Memorial Foundation. Burhanuddin Sahib's brothers Yousuf Najmuddin, Shabbir Nuruddin and Qasim Hakimuddin were among the directors of these companies. Sultan Brothers built the 5 star hotel in Mumbai named Ambassador Hotel. For years the family of Saifuddin Sahib enjoyed the income from that hotel where drinking of alcohol was a common sight and all kinds of things prohibited by Shariah were happening in it.

This hotel was ultimately sold reputedly for rupees 65 lakhs to Rama Narang, a smuggler, who paid rupees 30 lakhs in black money thus evading the stamp duty to the Government on transfer, according to a report published in the paper 'Blitz'.

In order to divert the attention of the faithful from the success of the 1982 International Dawoodi Bohra Conference in Mumbai it was widely publicised that water had appeared in the 'Rawdhate Taahirah' and that this was one of the many miracles of late Saifuddin Sahib. There is nothing unusual in this because leakage of water can sometimes occur from the cooling system.

During the Ramadhan of 1978 some of the Dawoodi members in Mombasa, East Africa were prevented from entering the local mosque simply because they had criticised some of the mal-practices of the Mullaji Burhanuddin Sahib and his deputies and therefore were considered as his enemies. As soon as news of this incident reached London some of the reformists approached Mufti Abdul Baqui for a ruling ('fatwa'). The Mufti gave the following 'fatwa' on 21 August 1978

(17 Ramadhan 1398 Hijri):

*'Unlike other buildings or properties a mosque stands out as a unique structure because of its special significance and use as a place of worship. It belongs to Allah and cannot be owned by an individual or group of individuals. The use of the mosque is governed by the laws of Allah, that is the laws of Shariah and no other law can prevail in the mosque. It can neither be sold nor purchased by an individual or an institution for its own purposes. It is unlawful to carry on any business within its precincts. Those who prevent people from entering the mosque for prayers are the greatest tyrants ('zaalim'). The doors of mosques should not be kept closed unless there is danger of theft.'*

Another 'fatwa' was obtained on 14 July 1979 (19 Shaabaan 1399 Hijri) by Sheikh Salehbhai Moosaji of Colombo from the Board of Fatwas of Jaame Azhar, Cairo. It is reproduced below:

- Q.1. Does Islam permit a man or woman to worship by prostration anyone whatever his dignity and to kiss his feet?
- A. Islam does not allow any muslim to perform 'sajdah' (prostration) before anyone other than Allah or to kiss anybody's feet.
- Q.2. Does Islam permit 'baraat' or social ostracism on any muslim?
- A. Islam does not allow any muslim whatever his social or religious status may be to order any other muslim to obey his commands blindly. This is in contravention of the commands of Allah. The Prophet said,
- "No obedience to the created if it means disobedience to Allah."*
- If anyone boycotts a muslim and calls upon other muslims to do so, that is to refrain from dealing with him or prevent him from entering a mosque, he commits a great sin.
- Q.3. Does Islam permit the high priest to take 'meesaaq' or oath of allegiance from believers in his own name?
- A. No human being has the right to take such an undertaking from anyone.
- Q.4. Does Islam allow Sheikhs and leaders to own mosques and waqf properties and thereby hold the power to prevent a muslim from entering a mosque?

- A. Mosques and waqf properties cannot be owned by an individual or institution and no one has a right to prevent anyone from entering them. These are the properties of Allah and can be used by any muslim without any distinction.
- Q.5. Can a sum of money big or small be charged to a man (rich or poor) to ensure his and his relatives' entry into paradise?
- A. This is a despicable act of monks and priests who sell a place in paradise to those who can afford to pay a sum of money. These people will receive severe punishment on the day of judgement. Allah will reward everyone according to his deeds and not according to how much money he pays to purchase a share in paradise.
- Q.6. Can a muslim dignitary order another muslim to divorce his wife and boycott his parents and on refusal be prevented from entering paradise?
- A. The Prophet said that among all permitted things the most hateful to Allah is 'divorce'. Allah commands the muslims to protect and show kindness to wives and parents. If anyone goes against this he disobeys Allah.

Yet another 'fatwa' was obtained by Fidahusein Adamali of Nairobi, East Africa from the Ministry of Justice, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1977 (27 Jamaadil Awwal 1399 Hijri).

The following are the summarised questions and answers:

- Q.1. The Bohra Mullaji insists upon his followers to perform 'sajdah' for him every time they visit him. Was there such practice in the days of the Prophet or the guided caliphs?
- A. The 'sajdah' is a form of worship commanded by Allah for Him only and should therefore be offered to none other than Allah. The followers of Mullaji are worshipping him and ascribing a partner to Allah and having their own God above Allah. His ordering the followers to do this or his tacit agreement to it makes him a tyrant (taaghoot).
- Q.2. Is it permitted in Islam for women to kiss the hands and feet of Mullaji and other male members of his family?
- A. In Islam this is not allowed. No such practice existed in the time

of the Prophet or the guided caliphs. When the believing women would come to the Prophet to give the pledge of faith and loyalty, he would take the pledge verbally and never touch or shake hands with them. The kissing of hands and feet of Mullaji and others by the women amounts to 'shirk' and is an unpardonable sin.

- Q.3. The Mullaji claims that he is the master of the souls of all the followers. Can such a claim be justified?
- A. This is false and absurd. It is Allah alone Who is the owner of all the souls because it is He Who has created them.
- Q.4. The Mullaji claims that he is the owner of all properties of religious trusts and that he does not have to render account because he is God on earth. Can he make such a claim?
- A. The properties of religious trusts cannot be owned. What is owned is the benefit of their yield. The Mullaji does not own any trust property nor is he entitled to any yield except what has been earmarked for him, if he deserves it. Every person must render account of how he uses the trust property according to the Holy Book, the tradition of the Prophet and the general agreement of the muslim ummah. The Mullaji's claim that he is God on earth is a flagrant infidelity and he will be treated as 'taahoot'.
- Q.5. The Mullaji claims that he has the right to declare the cancellation of people's sins and to apply social boycott against those who oppose any of his actions. Can we accept this claim?
- A. The Mullaji is indirectly claiming divinity for himself which is no more than infidelity. In fact he should accept the advice of people if it is for improvement and for the benefit of all instead of applying social boycott against them.
- Q.6. Does Islam permit religious persecution? The Bohras are muslims believing in the glorious Quran and the teachings of Islam. Can persecution be justified against them?
- A. Islam does not sanction the persecution of muslims with sincere belief in the Quran and the tradition of the Holy Prophet. The Mullaji's agreement to persecution amounts to infidelity.

According to a report appearing in the newspaper 'Vancouver Sun' of 11 January 1993, at the instance of Burhanuddin Sahib a Toronto law firm

approached Senator Norman Atkins of Canada in 1993 to represent the 1000 strong Canadian Dawoodi Bohras by sponsoring a bill in the Canadian Parliament, better known as Bill S-13, to incorporate the Bohra Dai-ul Mutlaq as a Corporation Sole in Canada. It stated that:

*“the Dai-ul Mutlaq is the supreme head of the Bohra community and that in his sole discretion controls and guides the administration and management of all assets, funds, properties, investments and other affairs of Daawate Hadiyah and other organisations of the Dawoodi Bohra community or held for the advantage or benefit of any or all of them ; and that for the continuing and better control and guidance of the administration and managemnet of those assets, funds, properties, investments and other affairs in Canada, it is desirable that the Dai-ul Mutlaq be incorporated as a Corporation Sole.”*

The bill would give him the status of a diplomatic person with total exemption from all taxation and, as owner of the body and soul of all Dawoodi Bohras, bestow on him the power to dispose of their properties in whatever way he would like.

As soon as this information reached the reformist group they left no stone unturned in educating the unaware senators concerned by supplying them all the documents, letters, newspapers and photographs showing how the said Dai was exploiting to his personal advantage community members specially the reformist section in India and other places. Why should he seek recognition from the Canadian Parliament when he is an Indian subject? Perhaps his plan was that once the Canadian Government accepted him as Corporation Sole the British Government and others might follow suit. The bill did not go through.

During one of his sermons in the Bhindi Bazaar mosque on a Friday he openly pronounced curse (laanat) on the first three Caliphs. Since the loud speaker was switched on, this curse was heard by the Sunni brothers in the neighbouring mosque. It resulted in a Sunni-Bohra riot in which innocent Bohras had to suffer a great loss on account of Burhanuddin Sahib's folly. However he saved his life by secretly escaping from the scene leaving the followers at the mercy of the Sunni mob. Later Burhanuddin Sahib apologised to the muslims and his apology was broadcast on the Indian television.

In order to cover up the shame and humiliation suffered by Burhanuddin Sahib on various occasions he made efforts to prove that he

was a good muslim by ordering his followers to cut their hair, keep beards, wear caps and put on national dress (qaumi libaas). The women were instructed to put on a cloak (rida) covering the whole body whenever they went out. Upon his instructions his deputies approached all those on whom 'baraat' had been declared to persuade them to come back to the fold without the need to make any financial commitment or to observe formalities except the giving of meesaaq. They promised relaxation of many of the restrictions imposed such as breaking all relations or communication with close relatives and friends and debarring them from the use of communal facilities. Very few families responded in India and overseas. However the Kothar publicised that all have come back to the fold and there is no such thing as 'baraat'.

Burhanuddin Sahib married Amtullahbai whom he loved so dearly that he did not take another wife even though several offers of marriage were made to him. From Amtullahbai he has 10 children. She was not keeping well and it is believed that she had cancer. She was brought to London in 1995 for treatment but she died and was buried in the Dawoodi Bohra Centre and complex in London. Upon the death in 1970 of Sheikh Ismailbhai Luqmani, the maternal uncle of Burhanuddin Sahib, he remarked in one of his sermons, "Since he did not believe in the Dai he lies here in London, the land of the kaafirs (infidels)." But now his wife also lies buried in the same land of the kaafirs. Moreover he is soliciting the faithful to pray that he may also die in London and be buried next to his wife. The gulla (box) placed at the grave of Amtullahbai is a permanent source of income.

More than 100 years ago the members of the Dawoodi community had a reputation for their religious fervour, their knowledge of Quran and Arabic language, their honesty, kindness and charitable work. However, during the past 25 years of the ministry of Burhanuddin Sahib and the 50 years of his father the good name of the community has been tarnished. Religion has assumed a secondary importance. The use of translations of the Quran is forbidden as it is considered likely to expose his false claims to holiness and his perpetration of deeds expressly prohibited by the Quran and this could prove to be detrimental to his interest. Majority of the community members are unfamiliar with the Arabic language and are purposely kept ignorant of even the true Islamic history, which is being replaced systematically by legendary and mythical accounts of the miracles of father and son. Learning is confined to the

elementary teaching of how to lead prayers and the observance of certain rituals. The Saifee Daras (now Jaamia Saifiyah) produces mullas and sheikhs who like robots are programmed to repeat the so called marvellous deeds and miracles performed by Burhanuddin Sahib and his late father. Both father and son have built up a commercial empire in the name of religion.

The reformists do not wish to introduce any changes in the tenets of religion. All they are demanding is justice and fair play for all the community members. They want that extortion of the members through 'raza', meesaaq, waajebaat and baraat should stop forthwith and all moneys collected from them should be spent for the benefit of community projects and should be fully accounted for.

The reformists want that the community affairs should be run on democratic principles rather than be subjected to dictatorial edits..

The former glory of the community would be difficult to restore but at least some respect can be gained if the Mullaji stops claiming divinity and starts treating all members of the community with dignity and respect like fellow human beings.

**The quotations and the material presented in this booklet have been based on the following.**

1. Mausame Bahaar by Mian Sahib Muhammadali ibne Mulla Jeewaji
2. Akhbarud-Duaatil Akrameen by Ismailji Hasanali
3. My Experiences and My Will by Syedi Ismailbhai Luqmani
4. Sansani Khaiz Haqaaiq by Sheikh Ahmedali Mulla Qurban Husain
5. Hairat Angaiz Inkishaafaat by Sheikh Ahmedali Mulla Qurban Husain
6. Report of the Nathwani Commission
7. Extracts from Chandabhai Gulla case, Abde-Faatema case and Burhanpur Durgah case and various newspapers.

**Wa aakhero daawaa-na anil hamdo lillaahe Rabbil Aalameen.**

*1422 Hijri - 2001 AD*

