



Maldives

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HERITAGE NEWSLETTER JULY 2012



ASIAN
AFRICAN
HERITAGE
TRUST

Chairperson's Welcome

The Asian African Heritage Exhibition ran at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) Nairobi Museum from 2000 to 2005. This was at the invitation of the then Director-General of the NMK, Dr. Isahakia, now Permanent Secretary, Prime Minister's Office. He pointed out that "the preservation and presentation of Asian history in Kenya must be a critical concern to the Asian community itself."



All over the world this responsibility has devolved from the central government and the central museum networks to the respective communities themselves in a shared enterprise and effort. To do that, the community has to gather and examine its heritage.

The task as we move into a new Kenya is to define ourselves and our social identity within our primary political identity as Kenyans. Our Kenyan heritage then helps us to keep constantly a national outlook, as opposed to a communal outlook.

Thus, the Trust moved away from the colonial, racial and sectional labels of the past. Three years of long debate and careful scrutiny followed Dr. Isahakia's invitation : after more than 200 years of settlement and many generations in the country, we had become African, and though we had ever increasingly fewer ties with India or Pakistan, we had also retained much from that sub-continent. We had become Asian Africans.

This was what the exhibition celebrated. We have continued to work closely with the NMK since, and have always received support and encouragement from the Museum's Board of Trustees and Issa El-Timamy, its Chairperson, as well as the Director-General, Dr. Idle Farah and all his staff. Very generous funding from the Chandaria Foundation and the Desai Memorial Foundation has now enabled us to reinstall the previous Exhibition in improved fashion. This is the work in progress. Further generous funding from the Ford Foundation enables this Newsletter and other activities to advance the aims of the Trust. The Trust is very grateful to each of these supporters.

This and succeeding Newsletters will enable us to be together in these exciting journeys.

Pheroze Nowrojee
Chair - Asian African Heritage Trust

Message from the NMK

The National Museums of Kenya (NMK) is pleased with its fruitful co-operation with the Asian African Heritage Trust. The first Asian African Exhibition generated an overwhelming response, attracting many visitors from the public, national and international media and academics. It led us into a discourse about who we are, and the key role each segment of our society has played towards the making of the Kenyan nation.



The exhibition, though temporary, opened a discussion of the possibility of developing a more permanent exhibition, now in its initial stages of planning. The Asian African Community in Kenya has a rich history dating back to the 1900's, which needs documentation so future generations appreciate the role played by this community in the making of the Kenyan nation, and the larger East African community. We hope this exhibition will demystify the tags which others have given this community.

As an institution of international repute, the NMK is obligated by Kenyan law to showcase and promote the cultures of the peoples of Kenya. We strive to be a centre of excellence in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and to be a place of dialogue and understanding between the cultures and peoples of a nation. The NMK is dedicated to meeting the recognized and perceived recreation, information and educational needs of Kenyans by providing access to heritage resources in the country.

On behalf of the Board and the staff on NMK, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Asian African Trust for supporting the NMK in the establishment of its Endowment Fund. Through the support of the AAHT, and its Chair Mr. Pheroze Nowrojee and Treasurer Mr. Nazim Mitha, the Endowment Fund received a total of 35 million from the Desai Memorial Foundation and the Chandaria Foundation. The Endowment Fund will help to build, over the years to come, an institution worthy of bearing this great name, and hope it will continue to be a source of pride for Kenya and the world.

We invite readers to visit our other exciting exhibitions, both temporary and permanent, as we await the new Asian African Exhibition.

Dr Idle Omar Farah
Director-General - National Museums of Kenya

Flashback – The Asian African Heritage Exhibition (2000-2005)

The original Asian African Heritage Gallery was designed as a temporary exhibition, but ran for five years

In 2000 the Asian African Heritage Trust created a temporary museum exhibition titled Asian African Heritage: Identity and History. This was hosted by the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) at their Nairobi museum complex,

The landmark exhibit covered the migration history of the Asian community to East Africa, which has existed with Indian Ocean trade routes into pre-history, but grew enormously after the 1880s. The exhibit then explored the community's labour heritage, social heritage and intellectual heritage in East Africa, and began a discussion on Asian African Identity.

The exhibition was a huge success. This was partly because it was developed by the community itself, with the involvement of over 100 volunteers. Over 30 articles were written about it, including by the BBC and The Washington Post. Although only intended as a six month temporary exhibition, it ran for five years because of its popularity, until substantial renovations began at the Museum.



*top right : overview of the first exhibition, filled with visiting schoolchildren
above : Asian African mosaic of photographs; right : handicrafts*

The Trust is now creating an updated permanent exhibition, building on the strengths and content of the original, for installation at the National Museum.



*“Thank you for revealing
our identity,
I am proud to be
an Asian African”*

*Dr Jaimin R. Bhatt
exhibition guest book*

Tribute to Cynthia Salvadori

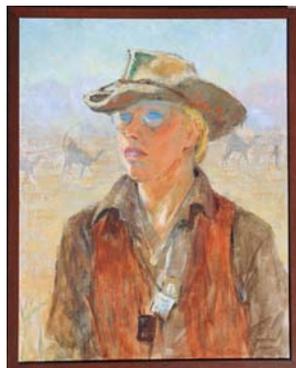
Widely known as the historian of East African Asians, Cynthia died in Lamu in June 2011

Cynthia Salvadori was a child of several heritages. These marked her life and work.

Max Salvadori, Cynthia's father, was an Italian political thinker who opposed the tyranny of Fascism in Italy. He was imprisoned by Mussolini before going into exile in Kenya to farm - where Cynthia was born. Cynthia's mother, Joyce Woodford Pawle, was an artist whose family had been in Kenya and East Africa for over 150 years. From this heritage stems both her deep commitment to Kenya, and to the dignity of the marginalised in society.

Cynthia became an established and highly respected author of numerous books and articles on the peoples and cultures of Kenya and Ethiopia, including the Maasai, Turkana and Borana. Her standing as a serious social scientist and her approach, often working with her partner Andrew Fedders, was vindicated by the reprinting of many of her prolific publications over the years.

Cynthia's work for a substantial period centred on the Asian African community in Kenya. Several books then followed: *Through Open Doors*, *They Came In Dhows*, *Two Indian Travellers* and *Settling In A Strange Land* (see review on page 7).



She was a hunter-gatherer of memories. What would have been lost was saved. What would have been forgotten was recorded. What would have been considered unworthy was recalled. This in itself retrieved self-worth and dignity. All this was achieved due to her patient efforts over many decades.

Cynthia was a lexicographer, historian, collector and also an accomplished photographer and artist. Many of her own photographs and drawings are to be found in her books and numerous articles.



She was a Renaissance person, fittingly for a child of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Her tools were her pen, and her sympathy and learning. A passion to understand the society around her, and a desire to confront and correct injustice, manifest in all her books.

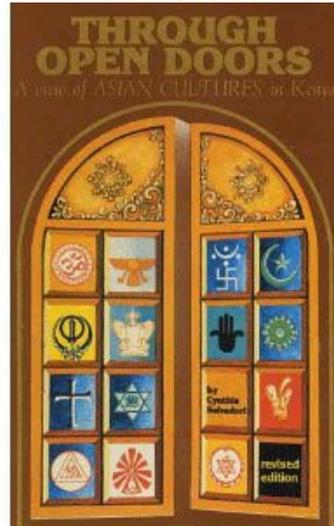
It was therefore fitting that in 2000, the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) commissioned her to report on the human rights situation in Marsabit and Moyale Districts, published as *The Forgotten People Revisited*.

Cynthia Salvadori wore her vast learning lightly and with great modesty. Her work was always meticulously researched, and she was a part of every step to each publication.

Her work as social archaeologist and archivist was always in the service of the marginalised in society. For this, African Asians, who have been the largest beneficiaries of her commitment and talents, remain immeasurably in her debt.

Pheroze Nowrojee

*painting of Cynthia Salvadori by her mother, Joyce Woodford Pawle
photograph of Cynthia Salvadori by David Fisher - Lamu, December 2010*



Memory and Identity of Asian Africans from the Lamu Archipelago

A new exhibition and meeting traced the history of Asian Muslims in Lamu

The Asian African Heritage Trust (AAHT) and National Museums of Kenya (NMK) sponsored a new exhibition and accompanying meeting at the Lamu Fort. The meeting was held on the 21st-23rd November 2011, at the beginning of the Lamu Cultural Festival.

Asian Muslims in Lamu have been trading since 1700 or earlier, coming in dhows from the north west coast of the Indian subcontinent to the east coast of Africa, extending from Kismayu (in modern Somalia) to Kilwa (off the southern coast of modern Tanzania).

Muslim families began to settle in the 1800s, when the Omani Sultan made Lamu his main port, and encouraged settlement there and in Zanzibar. They constructed the stone houses and shops along the sea front on Lamu Island, and numbers increased up to the 1930s. The Muslim communities included Bohoras, Ithnashris and Ismailis. Meanwhile single men settled in Faza, Siyu and Pate Islands, where they married Arab, Bajuni or Swahili women.

The exhibition details each community, and prominent families, as well as their lifestyles, homes, trade, cemeteries and mosques. Many families left in the last few decades, so it was important to preserve records and history of this community. Community records had been extensively researched and assembled, and the creation of the exhibition prompted several old families from the region to provide previously unseen original photographs and information. More information is still sought, notably about the lesser-known Goan and Parsee communities in Lamu.

The conference was an outstanding success, well attended and received locally, as well as by national media. It generated scholarly investigation and debate on the community in the Lamu archipelago, within the context of a Kenyan identity. It was supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

The concept for the meeting and exhibition was conceived in early 2010 by one of the organisers, Prof. Jameela Hassanali, while tracing her family history with her maternal grandfather. At the same time, Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai from Mauritius was tracing his family roots from Mandvi in India, via Lamu. Zahir Bhaloo also contributed his personal research and time to organise the event.

The conference had distinguished speakers including Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai (former Vice-Chancellor, University of Mauritius), Dr. Idle Farah (Director General, NMK), Mr. Salim Bunu (Director, Lamu Museum), Ustad Mau, Maalim Husein Soud and Dr. Omar Bwana (former Director, NMK).

Mr. Ronald Minor, a close friend of Cynthia Salvadori, spoke of her life and work. The first keynote address was given by AAHT Chair Pheroze Nowrojee.

The exhibition will now be displayed at the Mombasa Fort.



Abdulhusein Ebrahimjee with a photograph of his father (left), and Prof. Jameela Hassanali speaks at the meeting, in front of an exhibition panel (right)

Film Review – “Muigwithania”

“Mr Patel” and the Mau Mau Struggle

The recently released film *Muigwithania* (‘Reconciliation’), written and directed by Amit Tyagji, is set at the height of the Mau Mau war in 1954.

Two freedom fighters, General Rashid and one of his soldiers, Mbogua, are on the run from a unit of the British Army in a forest in Central Province. The General is injured and they decide to hide in a nearby village.

Realising that his need for medical attention will drive him there, the British Major orders the chief to search all the houses. The Chief complies, but does not think it necessary to search the premises of the local shopkeeper, ‘Mr Patel’. However his home is exactly where the fighters are hiding – and holding the family hostage.

The village herbalist, Nganga, is the only person who can treat the injured General. An unsuccessful attempt to reach him finally reveals their presence to the British. They call for reinforcements, planning to attack the house the following morning.

Now both the fighters and the shopkeeper’s family are trapped together in the house overnight. The safety of each can only be secured by the help of the other. This compels them to re-examine their attitudes to one another, and their vision of the Kenya they want to live in, if they come through the night alive.

Despite the inevitable simplification needed to encompass the complexities of a national struggle in a two hour film, the characters are credible, and the actors provide fine performances. These are difficult characters to play, as they change with the events they experience.

Tonny Njuguna gives an intense portrayal of the General, while Mehul Savani, as Mr Patel, carries the brunt of the film.

In a complex and realistic depiction of a stereotypical role, the character of Mr Patel begins defining his part in the future the General is envisaging. His discovery of himself as Kenyan, amid the conflicting tugs of the immediate situation, and old attitudes, is simply and credibly expressed by the talented Mehul Savani.

Bharati and Prachi Sevani, Mehul’s wife and daughter in real life, play his on-screen family, Mrs Patel and daughter, Rajni. The daughter is the catalyst for many developments in the story, while the mother is another complex and manifestly real character. Tom Alter brings authority to his role as the British Major.

The title of the film draws upon our past. *Muigwithania* (Reconciliation) was the name of the newspaper published from 1928 by the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), and first edited by Jomo Kenyatta.

The choices that Asian Africans like ‘Mr Patel’ and ‘Mrs Patel’ made in 1954 are the choices that all Kenyans will have to make in 2012, at election time, when the politics of ethnicity are unleashed again.

We too will have to choose – communal chauvinism or national muigwithania.

Muigwithania is now available on DVD.



Book Review – “Settling in a Strange Land” by Cynthia Salvadori

A new book chronicles early stories of Punjabi Muslim pioneers in Kenya

Settling In a Strange Land consists of narratives from Punjabi Muslim families who trace their roots back to the pioneers who came in those early days without sophisticated machines, when pure muscle power literally moved mountains.

This book by the late historian Cynthia Salvadori, published by the Park Road Mosque Trust, was conceived in December 2004 when then Pakistani High Commissioner to Kenya H. E. Syed Zahid Hussain approached Basheer Mauladad to suggest a book on the Punjabi Muslims in Kenya.

At the same time Masud Quraishy, a professional photographer, was spurred by the need for Punjabi Muslim photographs for the African-Asian Heritage Exhibition at the National Museum in Nairobi. He started seriously collecting old photographs.

In 2007, an ad hoc group was formed under the umbrella of the Park Road Mosque Trust, made up of Basheer Mauladad, Masud Quraishy, Anwar Sheikh, Salim Lone and Shaila Mauladad Fisher.

Cynthia Salvadori was invited to author the book, and the group started collecting interviews, articles, stories, photographs, maps, and all sorts of records in earnest. Once all the diverse material was collected, compiled and edited, designer Sufyan Slatch made it presentable in book form.

The book begins with a map of pre-Partition Punjab, the land of the five rivers (*punj*: five, *ab*: river),

and is divided into four main parts:

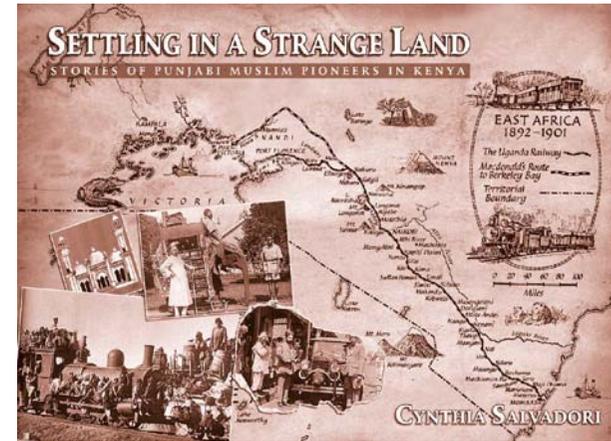
‘Building the Railway, Manning the Administration’ covers the railway workers, from soldiers to teachers.

‘Communal Institutions’ describes mosques, madrassas, Muslim associations, schools, social and cultural associations and sports.

‘Punjabi Panorama’ covers the entrepreneurs and professionals who literally broke new ground connecting the interior of the country.

‘JNI – the Ties that Bind’ explores Janaza (funeral), Nikah (marriage) and Idd (religious celebration), the three events that bind all Muslims. This also recognizes and gives credit to the many mixed marriages that took place in that time, and the descendents thereof.

Finding a specific story amongst the detailed 228 pages is facilitated by a comprehensive index, compiled by Salvadori’s assistant, Shaila Mauladad Fisher. The appendices include a 2.7 metre long Shajraa (family tree) of Mahmood Qureshi, spanning 42 generations, as well as a section of stories and anecdotes that are *‘Best left Anonymous’*.



This book will be an interesting source for both Punjabis and non-Punjabis, and those who know living descendants of these extraordinary pioneers.

Salvadori’s introduction states “It is not to denigrate the contributions of the many people of the many other Asian communities [...] which have been better organized [...] the hopelessly disorganized, highly individualistic Punjabi Muslims have never [...] published anything. So now, before memories fade and the last of the people who remember the old days pass away, we have compiled this book so that the stories of the Punjabi Muslims in Kenya will not be entirely forgotten”.

from a Special Report by Anjum Asodia (Coastweek)

Pio Gama Pinto Commemorated

The life and assassination and freedom fighter and patriot is commemorated in Westlands, Nairobi

Pio Gama Pinto was born in Nairobi on 31st March 1927. He was sent to India for his secondary school studies. After that he studied journalism. On his return home to Kenya in 1949 he immediately joined the anti-colonial struggle for the freedom of Kenya from British rule.

Working as a journalist, trade unionist and political worker, by 1952 he was the Editor of the Daily Chronicle, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Kenya Indian Congress, and a founder member of the Kenya African Study Union, a think-tank for the Kenya African Union (K.A.U.). Pio worked with K.A.U., and also very closely with the Mau Mau Central Committee, particularly with Bildad Kaggia and Senior Chief Koinange.

Upon the declaration of the Emergency on 20th October 1952, numerous leaders including Bildad Kaggia, Jomo Kenyatta, and other KAU national officials were arrested. Pinto intensified his work for the Mau Mau, until he too was arrested in Operation Anvil on 19th June 1954.



Pinto was sent to detention at Takwa Camp on Manda Island, Lamu, a maximum security camp for hardcore Mau Mau, and where he spent three and a half years in detention. He was then moved in February 1958 to restriction at Kabarnet, where he was later joined by the ailing Senior Chief Koinange.

Pinto was finally released in December 1959. He returned to immerse himself in the final push for Uhuru, the electoral triumph of KANU (May 1963), and in ensuring that the Government provided for the welfare of the returned freedom fighters, ex-detainees, and the families of those who had died in the struggle.

In 1963 Pinto was elected a Member of the East African Community Central Legislative Assembly, and in July 1964, he was elected a Member of Parliament.

On 24th February 1965, the Hon. Pio Gama Pinto M.P. was assassinated, the first of the political assassinations that have troubled this country.



The new Pio Gama Pinto Road runs alongside the Sarit Centre in Westlands

It is next to the site of the house he lived in, and was assassinated in, since demolished and now part of Sarit Centre's car park.

A road in Westlands has been named after Pio Gama Pinto, by an application by the Asian African Heritage Trust, with the support of Councillor Jaffer Kassam.

His grave is in the City Park Cemetery, and can be accessed via City Park Road, opposite Aga Khan Hospital, Nairobi.

Pheroze Nowrojee

Credits

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