

Historical Background

The early history of the Cape cannot be neglected for it is here that local Muslims have their roots.

Historical research shows that what transpired during the 17th century at the Cape involved not only the Malays, but also large numbers of Indians, Javanese, Bengalese, and even Arabians. In fact, there were more Indians brought to the Cape than any other nationality. Therefore, be we Malays or Indians, our history originated here and cannot be ignored.

Firstly, we must look at events in the East which led to Muslims being brought to the Cape. There was a power struggle between the Dutch and the Portuguese for supremacy of the seas. These two powers were competing to plunder and loot as much as possible. In order to do so, they built up a large naval capacity in the Asiatic sea. The target centres were places like Bombay, Goa, Cochin, the Coramandel Coast and Bengal in India, Columbo and Galle in Ceylon, Medan and Padang in Sumatra, Patani in Malasca, Batavia and Bali in Java, as well as smaller islands like Macassar, Rotti, Timor, Ternate, Tidore and others.

Very soon, the inhabitants began to resist and united to form defences against the imperialist tyranny. The men to lead the people were of a high calibre; men of great spiritual intellect who commanded a great deal of respect from the communities. They were however cunningly captured, and together with their followers, banished to the Cape.

In the meantime, Jan van Riebeeck, had his own peculiar problem in the Cape. His plan was to establish a Dutch garrison here to defend the sea route to the East, but all was not going well. He had hoped that the capture of the local Hottentot population would adequately serve his labour force requirements. This proved difficult as the Hottentots soon fled to the interior. Those captured were too lazy to work. Van Riebeeck wrote to the Dutch Council in the East (VGC) to plead for slaves. The slaves would be used for the hard labour, in addition to which they could be made to carry stones, build the Fort, make bricks, dig, plough, sow, plant and construct homes. They would also be used to work the salt mines and club seals.

This marked the beginning of the Muslim community in the Cape. The Dutch arrived as conquerors and slave-masters, and the Muslims arrived as conquered slaves. Some historians have a different view:

"The slaves" arrived here with chains around their necks, leg-irons and hand-cuffs on their wrists, but their minds could not be chained. These very 'slaves' were the leaders of resistance against the Dutch colonialists and exploiters in the Far East. These 'slaves' did not have experiences in battles, but they brought with them a supra-national ideology of liberation... the ideology of ISLAM.

It is said that 250 years ago a prophecy was made that there would be a "circle of Islam" around the Cape. According to local beliefs the circle is complete, comprising the tombs of Saints and *Auliyah* (friends of Allah) who were brought as slaves to the Cape. It starts at the old cemetery on the slopes of Signal Hill, just above the quarry in Strand Street, where two saintly men lie buried, the circle continues to two graves on the top of Signal Hill. The circle then continues at a grave much revered, situated above Gude Kraal

beyond Camps Bay, and sweeps around the mountain to a Kramat at Constantia, on the Tokai Road.

The circle proceeds to the most important and widely known of all tombs, the Kramat of Sheikh Yusuf at Faure, on the farm Zandvliet. The circle is completed by an old tomb on Robben Island. Modern pilgrims can visit all, except the Island Tomb, in a single day.

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