

MR. SHAMS VELLANI - Islamic

"Ismaili Sect"

INTERVIEWED:

March 12, 1975

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Origin of Group

In 1967 about 30 members of the Faith arrived in Vancouver. Met in own homes on rotating basis, on Fridays and Sundays. These two days chosen because Friday was of Special significance and Sunday was a free day for most people, although the group should have met everyday. Group was of East Indian background geographically, and of Islamic religious faith.

1971 Increasing immigration of East Africans settling in Burnaby area. By mid-1974 group had grown to around 4,000 people in Lower Mainland areas.

Since then, the community, in keeping with its past tradition, has adapted the policy of neighbourhood "Jammat Khana" or neighbourhood Mosques, which means that the community does not like to congregate in larger groups than 300 - 400. Also, for convenience, they prefer to meet in the neighbourhood of the majority of the people. The first two prayer halls were in Vancouver, then in North Vancouver, and South Vancouver for residents of Richmond and South Vancouver.

1975 Since March 2, 1975 the group now meets at William Cook School on Friday and Sunday evenings. A rental is paid to the School Board.

Officers

As Ismailis are a sect of Islam, they do not have a professional priest class but they do have two people who officiate at prayer meetings. One is the Muki, at present Mr. Vellani, the other being

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the Kamadia who at present is Mr. Bahadur Kanani, a pharmacist. Their wives officiate at the women's section.

Services

Basic prayers are in Arabic and the rest are in the native language of the congregation.

Background of Congregation

Because of political circumstances, the majority are from East Africa, India and Pakistan - a few from Iran or Syria. The group is not derived from any ethnic background, but from a religious stem.

Tenets of Faith

Islam does not have a priest class, but has Ulemas who are learned ones. There are a few simple tenets such as:

- (1) - Belief in one God, Allah
- (2) - The prophethood of Mohammed, the chosen one, but Islam has accepted that every group which has reached a certain stage of intellect and was able to understand the Word of God was endowed by God and therefore they recognize the Prophets of Israel and other great men like Confucius and Socrates.
- (3) - Revelation and divine guidance comes through the Imam. Spiritual leader at the moment is the Aga Khan IV, the 49th direct descendant of Mohammed.
- (4) - The Day of Judgement
- (5) - Fasting for 30 days at the Month of Ramazan.

Role of Women

Faith does not make any distinction between men and women. A Firman issued from the Aga Khan declares that each is equal, stemming from the days of Mohammed. Ismailis do not hesitate to follow a woman if she has the qualifications. Women can take the prayers.

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Structure of Official Body

Socially - Regional Council of Western Canada looks after social and economic affairs - through committees such as Welfare, Women's Association, Youth Committees & Economic Committees.

Above that, is the Aga Khan National Council for Canada, and the Supreme Council for U.S.A. and Western Europe. Ultimately above that is the Institute of Imamat where the Aga Khan is the Imam as the ultimate source of authority and responsibility. There are women in the Regional & National & Supreme Councils.

Appointments of Mukhi

Regional council selects nominees whose names are submitted through the Councils to the sole discretion of the Iman himself. Appointments are for one year at the neighbourhood mosque level, and two years at the main mosque level.

Duties of Mukhi

Primarily to officiate at meetings, but also ex-officio representative to the Regional Council, looking after their interests. Selected for reasons of educational background and/or success in business world or professional field. This is by origin a position for a man but there exists a certain congregation where the leader is a woman.

Women

Although there is no distinction between the roles, women do have a Women's Association doing social work such as interest and care for the Senior Citizens.

Headquarters

Supreme Council is in Paris because the Aga Khan resides in France and Switzerland.

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World Alliance

Very many in Syria, Iran and Middle East, India, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, South Africa, Russia and China and England and Brussels.

Upkeep

Regional Council through the Aga Khan, provides funds for the upkeep of the mosques. Funds are given voluntarily. There is no obligation of any member to repay these funds.

Plans for Future

Uncertain, at the moment, because of newness of group. If, however, it is felt that they should have a mosque it will be discussed and considered.

M. NOBLE