



**HINDU SOCIETY**  
HARARE

## **Shree Omkar Mandir – Origins of the Omkar Temple, Cameron Street**

(As recalled by Jacksonbhai Magan)

The beginnings of the Hindoo Society can be traced back to 1926 when a group of Hindoo pioneers felt the need for an organization to serve the interests of the Hindoo Community which had settled in what was then known as Salisbury. Their aspirations were to establish a Society which would keep alive the Hindoo Dharma and Gujarati cultural traditions. There were about 25 families at the time.

The main initiators for the establishment of a Hindoo Society were Chhotubhai Haribhai Desai and Laljibhai Datalji Vashee. The Society was formally inaugurated in 1926 and its first task was to obtain land on which a Hindoo School and Temple could be built. During this period there was also an urgent need for a primary school for the Community because the only school open to them was the coloured primary school.

After a long battle with the colonial administrators, the Society managed to obtain three stands on Cameron Street. Fundraising began in earnest by way of membership fees. The fee charged was determined in proportion to sales made by individuals (one penny per every pound of sales).

The foundation stone for the Hindoo Gujarati School buildings was laid in 1928 and on Vasant Panchmi day in 1929 the foundation stone for the Temple was laid by Shree Laljibhai Dayalji Vashee. Both buildings were completed before the end of that year. While the Temple was being built there was a considerable debate amongst the community elders about which deity or Gods dedicate the Temple to and whether to proceed with Murti Sthapana (Pran Pratishtha).

Haribhai N Patel (Professor Hasubhai's late father) put forward the idea of dedicating it to Aumkar. He felt that Aumkar being the imperishable symbol of the Supreme God, was Universal and beyond the worship of individual personal Gods and their manifestations. Furthermore an Aumkar Temple would always be a source of unity and harmony amongst the small Gujarati Hindoo Community comprising of families from different castes and backgrounds.

Although there was no known precedent anywhere in India (or indeed in the rest of the World) of the existence of an Aumkar Temple, the Community elders agreed that it was the most appropriate way of providing a universal place of worship for all Hindoos, irrespective of their personal religious beliefs and practices.

Over the course of the last eighty years, this central theme of unity and togetherness in worship to the Supreme Paramatma: symbolized by Aumkar, has been the bedrock of our stability. The Hindoo Community's close "family" bonds and its acceptance of the diversity of religious beliefs and practices amongst its peoples, is truly something to be proud of.

A few details and anecdotes about the Cameron St. Aumkar Temple:

- The Kalash on the top of the Dome was donated by Motiram Khushal Family. It was placed into position by Haribhai N Patel.
- The Aum centre piece was fabricated in Gujarat and was shipped to Harare.
- The first priest was Shree Umedram Maharaj from Kadod, Gujarat. He performed religious duties and taught at the Gujarati School. He also prepared food for the Hostel pupils.
- The Temple and school took six months to construct. The contractor was a Mr Stroebel.
- Some of the pioneering families from that period were:

Chhotubhai H. Desai, Lalji Dayalji Vashee, Bhimji R. Naik, Motiram Khushal (Gokal), Haribhai N Patel, Maganbhai Bhana Tailor, Morarbhai Bhana, Nagarbhai Hari, Mawjeebhai Ranchod, Narsinghbhai Parboo, Paragbhai and Kalanbhai Keshav, Morarjibhai Patel, Bhikubhai Kanjee