



MOSES SOMAKE

THE MAN WHO BUILT KARACHI



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Moses Somake married Mary Wyse, daughter of Simon Wyse, in 1900 in Karachi. They had five children, Joe, Ellis, Kathleen (Kitty), Victoria (Vicki) and Annabelle (Anna). The couple was usually invited to the Viceroy's garden parties. They were also of the few who were introduced to the Prince of Wales when he visited India.



Moses Somake, was born in a Jewish family on June 6, 1875 in Lahore. His family was from Spain and had also lived in Iraq for some time. He passed away on April 6, 1947 in London, by a heart-stroke. Some sources also describe him as an Iraqi Jew but differ as to whether he was born in Iraq or was of Iraqi heritage but born in India. He spent most of his life in Karachi before migrating to England in the mid-1940s.

Moses Somake's granddaughter narrates, "I pulled out the old letter and documents of my grandfather (which are in a briefcase inscribed M.J.H. SOMAKE, M.S.A., ARCHITECT AND C.E.) I also have some correspondence: reference letters from 1893 to 1895 describing M.J.H. Somake, first as an assistant draughtsman, then as draughtsman who can make finished drawings from rough sketches and estimate quantities. It almost looks as if this was all the formal training he had. Unfortunately, none of us knows where he studied architecture."

Papa was a kind and caring person and loved to play games with his grandchildren. His house in London was bombed during the World War II. Luckily, he was safe because he had already moved away during the Blitz. Most of his belongings (including many of his papers and designs) were destroyed or badly damaged. He stayed with us in Norwich (where we had evacuated during the war) for some time. After the war, he moved back to London and lived in a hotel. When we returned to London, he came to live with us. He died peacefully on April 6, 1947 in London, from a stroke at our home, says Doreen.



Moses gave up his practice of architecture after leaving Karachi, even though he was very young to retire. "He was always designing things and kept his notes and drawings on the shelves of his big roll-top desk." Says Doreen Curran and Mary Keizer. The Somake family left Karachi for London in Sept 1922, for higher education of their children. Ellis became an architect and Joe pursued law.



Back row left to right: Ellis Edward, Moses Somake, Mary Wyse, Joseph (Joe) Front row left to right: Victoria (Vicki), Annabelle (Anna), Kathleen (Kitty)



Edward House was named after Somake's son Ellis Edward, who later became an architect himself. Ellis studied from London School of Economics (LSE) and University College, London. He was a gifted interior designer.

No one knows precisely where he learnt his art but it is a known fact that he was a member of the Society of Architects in the first decade of the 20th century.

His portfolio embarks the religious diversity that existed in Karachi in the early 20th century including designing a mosque, a Christian club and a school for Zoroastrians. He always placed his signature at a reserved spot on all his buildings. Many of the buildings still remain: some, including the Karachi Goan Association Hall and the BVS Parsi School, still fulfill their original purpose, while others are neglected or have fallen into disuse.





The BVS Parsi School is an imposing building with nicely carved features, making it one of the finest works of Moses Somake.



BVS PARSI SCHOOL

Bai Virbalji Soparivala (BVS) Parsi High School was built in 1905 as a school for the Zoroastrian community. The school has nicely carved features in its pilasters and a pediment which further enhance the entrance design. Architectural features such as the arched doorway, Corinthian capitals and tall pilasters of the building make the stonemasonry

appear like a colossal work of art. In 1923 a floor was added to the old building using the same Girzi stone. "After partition, Quaid-e-Azam requested my father to open the doors of BVS Parsi High School to other communities as well. Five years later, the school had over 600 students and was converted into a public school," said Deena Mistry.



In 1923, an extra storey was built and added using the same Girzi stones to match the stonemasonry of the building.



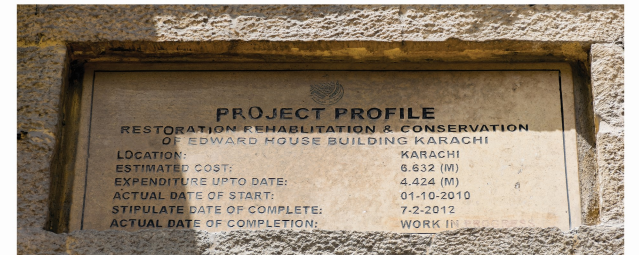
The building has semi-circular openings at the ground floor and segmented ones on the first floor.



The two-storey structure has a tall central tower and balcony-like projections which further makes this century-old facade more artistic.

EDWARD HOUSE

Edward House was built in 1910 and is based on Moses Somake's signature architectural design; amalgamation of simplicity with grandeur. It is a double-storey structure which is constructed using strong detailing and rusticated masonry. Edward House was one of the popular spots of the metropolitan back in early decades of the 19th century. The Cafe Grand, that was located on the ground floor of the building, was run by confectioner Herbert Cumper and served delectable menu in a ritzy, jazzy venue. The Cafe Grand was visited by Karachi's most famous artists and writers. These days the building houses 'Stars Club' on the ground floor, an architect's office, a photocopier shop, and few residential blocks.



Edward House design is of hybrid nature and has strong stone detailing and rusticated masonry.

FLAGSTAFF HOUSE

Flagstaff House, also known as the Quaid-e-Azam House Museum, is one of Somake's first known building. Built in the 1890's, this historic building consists of arched openings, carved pillars, semicircular balconies and six spacious rooms. It was rented by the British Indian Army and served as a residence to senior officers including General Douglas David Gracy, who later became the second commander in chief of the Pakistan Army. Initially the Flagstaff House was owned by a Parsi magnate, Sorab Kavajji and his family but was later purchased by Muhammad Ali Jinnah in March 1944. After the partition of the Subcontinent in 1947, Jinnah's belongings were shifted here from Delhi and Bombay. In 1948, after the death of Quaid-e-Azam, Fatima Jinnah moved into the house and lived here until 1964.



The bungalow also includes servant quarters and a horse barn which is now converted into a hall for guests.



The front facade of the house is chiseled and finely carved whereas the rest of the building is in hammer-dressed stonemasonry.



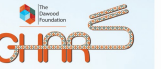
Cincinnatus Fabian D'Abreo was the President of KGA Hall from 1901 to 1909, and again from 1911 to 1926.



During World War II, the KGA Hall was used as the Senior Officers Club for a short period but was restored back to its former use.

KARACHI GOAN ASSOCIATION HALL

The Karachi Goan Association Hall is a classic example of stonemasonry. In 1886, the Goan Portuguese Association (later renamed the Karachi Goan Association) commissioned little-known architect named Moses Somake to design this leisure club. It quickly became the center of social life for the Goan community (composed of Catholics of Portuguese-Hindu descent) in Karachi. The Karachi Goan Association (KGA) Hall was the first work of construction that catapulted Somake to fame, earning him more projects. Made in the English Renaissance style, it has pediment, pilasters, hipped roofs dormers, and semicircular window openings.



The KGA Hall is an imposing structural design, a European classic – tribute to its architect Moses Somake.

MULES MANSION

Mules Mansion was built in 1917. It blends Renaissance and Anglo-Oriental methods of architecture in a distinctive style. Mules Mansion had once been the grandest and most recognizable buildings in Karachi. It was built to serve the porters of Karachi Port Trust. The structure is ornate with prominent features like pilasters and vaultings on the roof. Virtually empty except for a few small shops, the building now houses some offices and residencies. Over the time, the exterior of Mules Mansion has been eaten away by pollution and dust.



Mules Mansion has an orderly arrangement of columns and the prominent Anglican features that can be readily noticed.



After the partition of India, Mules Mansion served as Pakistan's naval headquarters, and then was converted to a residential building.