



The Hindu Impact

Since the advent of the historical ‘*Lunatic Express*’ in the aftermath of the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway, the Hindus - and Asians in general - have been very much a part of us. From the dawn of the humble *dukawalls*, over the years they have been the trendsetters in business, entrepreneurship, commerce, industry and trade; and have been an integral fulcrum upon which a significant portion of our economy has been anchored on in terms of tax generation, job and wealth creation. Equally, they have made other momentous contributions to the growths we have witnessed in the local fields of medicine, education and health, among other vital sectors. But their impact in their adopted country Kenya could never have been that remarkable largely in part if not for their unity of purpose, synergy and togetherness under the ambit of the **Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK)**. To deliberate on the role of the HCK and assess on the impacts the Hindu community has had in various facets of life, *Nyanza Magazine* talked to **DAMJIBHAI MANDAVIA**, a long-serving member of the HCK-Kisumu Chapter.]

Nyanza Magazine (NM): Briefly introduce to our readers the Hindu Council of Kenya.

MANDAVIA: The **Hindu Council of Kenya** is a non-commercial organization aimed at serving members of the Hindu communities living in Kenya. This is not a competition-driven body as we basically aim at playing a complimentary role to unify all the members of our Asian communities from varied prism of life for cultural, business and professional cohesiveness. The Council is a medium of communication between the Hindu communities and the government.

The Council has its genesis in the realisation a long time ago that the diversity of cultural heritages and religious beliefs among a fragmented members of our communities who had settled in the country in the aftermath of the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway line was not in our interests as we could not even easily draw the ears of the government to our needs. With these realisations, our people started seeing the need for coming together. To paraphrase the late Pandit Nehru, our people had realised that amidst our economic and cultural diversity, we were a bundle held together by strong invisible threads. But it was in the advent of the mass expulsion of members of our community from Uganda in 1972 at the height of Idi Amin's dictatorship that our need to coalesce into an umbrella organization to articulate our voices and secure our interests became more profound. That was when an interim body was set up to strategize on the modalities to achieve Hindu unity. This was soon followed by the first election of HCK.

Over the years, the Hindu Council of Kenya has continued to attract quality leaders of high caliber and integrity to effectively run its affairs. Currently, HCK has more than 125 affiliate institutions spread in across the major towns in the country such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru and Kisumu. Taking Kisumu for instance some of the institutions affiliated to HCK include Shree Lohana Mahajan, Shree Visa Oshwal Vanik Community, Patel Samaj, Shree Sanatan Hindu Union, Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Lohana Youth League, Arya Samaj, Bhartiya Swayon, Sevak Singh, Brahma Samaj, Shree Nyanza, Nyanza Community Temple, Bhagini Samaj and Savadera Mandir.

NM: Under what tenets does the Hindu Council operates in?

MANDAVIA: The Hindu Council of Kenya is an umbrella body of all Hindu institutions. It is the most powerful organization of Hindus in Kenya. It upholds the highest ethical standards and displays best

conduct at all times. It aims at promoting exemplary leadership qualities in the public and equally seeks to promote the spirit of true Hinduism and enhance one family spirit. Lastly, at all times it strives to project its best image.

NM: So what kind of activities does the Hindu Council gets involved in?

MANDAVIA: The Council has a broad range of activities and programs. These are in addition to providing essential informative and educative services to members of the Hindu community thus helping to knit the community together into a colourful fabric. The Council's myriad programs facilitate social, cultural, business and environmental initiatives for the benefit of the members. The Council has coordinated various cultural, business and exchange programs. Our activities range from social, cultural, religious, education, famine relief and disaster management.

On the cultural front, we have facilitated great Indian classical musicians and cultural troupes to perform in Kenya. We have the women's wing taking the sterling lead to oversee the implementation of different cultural activities. The Youth's Wing coordinates the youth's activities which include sporting and cultural activities. We are also immensely involved in matters to do with education. We are the people who petitioned the Kenyan government to adopt the teaching of Hindu Religious Education (H.R.E) when the 8-4-4 system of education was introduced in 1984. It is the Council which in collaboration with the now defunct Kenya Institute of Education (*this has recently been restructured and is now the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development*) formulated a single comprehensive Hindu religious syllabus for the primary level right up to the tertiary level for the teaching of Hinduism encompassing all different paths – *Sanatan, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Swaminarayan, and Shakoti*, among others.

And still HCK has other things it is actively involved in. For instance, the Council recognizes the importance of business people and other professionals among its ranks and has activities geared towards them. The Council is also involved in the provision of advisory services to the members and offers them assistance on matters to do with immigration. Then there is the Citizens' Crime Prevention Committees known as 'Suraksha' which HCK formed to work with the police to control

crime within the neighbourhoods inhabited by members of the Asian communities. In articulating and propagating our activities and the programs we are involved in, the Council publishes a newsletter for its members.

Presently, among other things, we have embarked on service activities in most counties to uplift the lifestyles of the under-privileged members of the society.

NM: There is a common feel among many locals that members of the Asian community seemingly tend not to fully integrate with the locals. And there is also this other uneasy feel among some of the locals that a section of you people get undue advantages over the locals in the business arena. What's your take on these charges?

MANDAVIA: It is not in doubt that the Asian communities rank way high up as the most successful business community not only in Kenya but across East Africa. However, it is wrong for anyone to insinuate that we have received favours along the way. Nothing could be further from the truth. Just like most locals, we were never born with silver spoons in our mouths. We have reached where we have and done what we have on the entrepreneurship scenes because of our strong affinity to the culture of sacrifice, hard work and commitment as ingrained in us from long ago.

From of old, most Asians living in Kenya have considered this to be their home and have immensely contributed to its socio-economic growth and development. It needs no emphasis that Asian communities in Kenya have done a lot in the construction and sponsorship of hospitals, schools, dispensaries, provision of relief food and bursaries, and the hosting of free medical camps. Through these, we have had a chance to interact and intermingle with the locals. Bear in mind also that we have employed the locals in our homes, industries and businesses, so we do get a chance to intermingle with them. It is thus wrong for anyone to insinuate that we are 'aloof' race.

Let's also not forget it that in Kenya's struggle for independence, we had a number of exemplary members of our community who fought alongside Kenyans for the liberation of this country. The readers must have heard names such as A.R. Kapila, Pio Gama Pinto, Makhan Singh, Jitz De Souza,

A.M. Jeevanje and Vidyarthi. These are among the unsung Kenyan Asian freedom heroes. In sum, our members are very much a part of Kenya because we consider this to be our home.

ENDS

MR OBAT:

➤ **I need a sidebar listing the names of the past chairpersons of the Hindu Council of Kenya – Kisumu Chapter.**

➤ **I will also need a list of the names of the current office bearers of the Hindu Council of Kenya –Kisumu Chapter.** If we can get their mug-shot photos to go with that will be fine, but if we can't get their passport photos, we can just list their names and positions.

➤ **It would also help if Mr Mandavia will give some specific examples to depict the involvement of the Hindu Council-Kisumu in the community. What are some of the projects and activities they are involved in around Nyanza?**

➤ Try ask him for relevant HCK photos if any. We will also need one of him. A better one this time.

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-SUCHIA