



ONCE UPON A TIME . . .

A HUMBLE, MEMORABLE BEGINNING

INTRODUCTION

Movement from one place to another can lead to progress. Man is forced to use all his powers and talents in a new environment and to make it worthwhile and successful. "No matter how timid a man is, he is capable of the loftiest heroism when he is put to the test." The beginning, however, is always humble and difficult, challenging and even frustrating, but the end product is thrilling an often permanent

ARRIVAL AND PROGRESS

The Gujrati-speaking community followed the indentured labourer. The adventurous, pioneering struggling spirit of Surat and Kathiawad districts culminated also in the Pretoria region. These early immigrants saw no need to organise. Their families were still in India. After 1927, wives and children followed for domicile. Need for Gujrati education arose. The need for retaining language, religion and culture of the mother country was a necessity.

ESTABLISHMENT

Social contact between the Pretoria Gujratis remained active. In 1931 Mahatma Gandhi fasted in jail in India during the Independence Struggle against the British. This passive resister had spent some years in South Africa and actually lived in the Asiatic Bazaar, Pretoria. In sympathy, the community held daily prayers as long as the fast lasted for the national leader. Here the idea of forming an organisation appears to have germinated. An organisation in Johannesburg was named the Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj. This prompted the name PRETORIA HINDU SEVA SAMAJ, established in 1932 - the name adopted by the Gujrati-speaking community of Pretoria. Incidentally, the first meeting of the Samaj was held at the Royal Cinema in Grand Street, Asiatic Bazaar.

PIONEERS

The founder members that are mentioned in the records among others are:

Nathalal G. Kala	Jivan Gordhan	Pranlal M. Joshi
Rama Naran	Rama Jeram	Danjee Chiba
Ranchhod Bhoola	Bhima Vala	Valjee Madhavjee
Chiba Kara	Chhagan Bhana	Govind Bhana
Pama Lala	Bhoola Naran	Ramlal Mooloo
Nana Sita	Pema Panchia	Narsai Pema
Gosai H. Mistry	Chaganbhai S. Jivan	Jamnadas Ranchhod
Parbhoobhai Nana	Morarbhai S. Mistry	Jamnadas R. Govind
Jivan Patel	Narsaibhai M. Patel	Parbhoobhai Manga

INITIAL ACTIVITIES AND NOTES

The venue and headquarters of the Samaj remained the corner of Tenth and Mogul Streets - a property purchased by the Community. This building was also used as the Vernacular School. The Seva Samaj also owned the vacant plot on Ninth Street. The properties served as a source of income for the Community. These also served initially as residence for teachers from India.

Besides the normal discussions regarding progress and problems; farewell receptions for members visiting the Mother Country; arrival of celebrities from India; general correspondence and end-shanti-paath, formed the contents of the Samaj meetings. It is noteworthy that by 1945 the Samaj opened its meetings with Guyatri Mantra and terminated with Gita Vanchan and shanti-paath: a forward step in the blessed beginning. The meeting even resolved to terminate by 10.30 p.m.



Noteworthy are the following from the Samaj minutes:

1. Regular consultations with various Hindu bodies related to Divali and New Year Festivals: also with the Bharat Samaj of Lourenco Marques (Maputo).
2. Contributions for 1942 quit India struggle.
3. For Bengal-Relief fund in 1943
4. Relief to victims of a tornado in Mauritius in 1945.
5. Visit of Dr Mirzah (1944), a Parsee at the Orient Hall who lectured on East-West culture – sponsored by both the Samaj and the Muslim Council.
6. Pundit Ravishankar Vidyalkaakar (1945) – from Lourenco Marques.
7. Pundit Rishiram (1945) for religious lectures.
8. Kumar Palana (1946) for gymnastic demonstrations: balancing act on highest building in Pretoria.
9. Swami Gajananda (1947) for religious discourse and stories.
10. Pundi Kunjroo (1947), (1950) for political and cultural lecturers.

More recently the following personalities visited Pretoria for religious, political and cultural discourses:

Shakuntala-devi (1968–69) – mathematics genius; Krishnanand Saraswati (1974) from Mauritius; Swami Narayan sect (1974), (1977); Pundit Shiv Ram Maharaj (1975–5); Abram Bhagat (1975); Acharya Vaidyanath Shastri & Acharya Krishnaji (1975); Narhari Bhagat (1975); Yogiraj Jayantkumar Yagnik (1976) (1977); Pradyumna Shatri (1976); Swami Chidananda: ceremony for foundation of Hall; Ram Bhagat (1978); Mahant Ram Swarup Dasji (1978); Swami Premanand – attached to Avoca, Natal. Ooma Bharti (1979); Swami Deekshanandji (1979) who conducted Sanskrit classes for over two months.

PERMANENT SITE?

A site in Jerusalem Street was acquired for a Temple, School and Hall. even a proper plan was drawn up and a Committee was elected to raise funds. However, a large site was promised, and only by 1946 a site of Ten stands was expected near the old football ground area, but "the request of stands to build a school, temple, hostel and gymnasium could not be granted because the City Council was considering laying out a residential area for the benefit of the Indian Community" (Pretoria News 11/2/46). Finally, the ten promised stands in the Asiatic Bazaar football-ground were given to the Community on a twenty year lease, but the Community had to wait until 1964.

GUJRATI SCHOOL

By 1933 the Gujrati School was established as confirmed by the minutes of the meeting of 26 April 1942. The school was run by persons who had studied in India. They formed the teachers. By 1939 it was decided to obtain qualified teachers from India. On 7/12/41 a deputation approached the Commissioner for immigration and High Commissioner of India on 5/1/42. But only in 1944 saw the arrival of two teachers Mr Nichhabhai S. Patel and Chhotubhai Mehta from India, Mrs Ambaben Cyclewala from India was expected to be helpful in teaching girls, but later left for Durban. The need for a well-educated, well-qualified teacher and guide remained unsatisfied. Finally, the Immigration authorities after numerous requests allowed Mr Babubhai D. Patel to come to South Africa on a five-year teaching contract. Once again the language was injected with the professional touch.

CREMATORIUM

The Crematorium site was acquired in 1935. A fence was soon constructed around the area. The election of 1943 marked a height of activity for the building of the Crematorium, open to all Hindus. The Pretoria News of 28/3/46 quoted the official opening: "The Crematorium was erected by the Pretoria Hindu Social Service League at a cost of £ 3500 of which £ 500 and the ground were granted by the council. The need of the Indian Community for land for recreational facilities was emphasised as well.

LIBRARY

On 26/4/42 a library was formed. A youth organisation, Arya Yivak Mandal was given permission to run the library. Books and cupboards were donated. Constant use brought about an enthusiasm for literature and culture. A revival in 1960 led to a classroom being allocated. Tables and chairs followed for the readers and new shelves helped to maintain a Gujrati-conscious reading population. As a result of population movement to Laudium the books were finally donated to the State Library, Pretoria. These books are now housed in a classroom in the present Gujrati School.





REVIVAL

The girl guides from Arya Kanya Maha Vidyalyaya from Baroda visited Pretoria in 1936 and gave it a boost to the formation of Vidyamshala concentrating on the physical aspects of the youth. The Bhartiya Koshori Mandal concentrated on the cultural and craft activities of the youth. The Navyuga Mandal assisted by serving during weddings and even undertook to repair and paint the Samaj building and later the Crematorium.

There was a religious, educational and cultural revival. There was re-organisation of the school Committee and its valuable role in the Community and school was defined. The Community took special pride in activities of Krishna-Jayanti, Raksha-Bandhan, festivities of Diwali and Navratri. A bus was purchased by the Samaj to allow pupils living in the Prinloo Street area to attend the school in the Asiatic Bazaar. The Gujrati school was truly a model in South Africa at the time. The Divine Life Society's request to use a classroom for Hindu classes was a further boost to the progress of the Gujrati Community.

INDEPENDENCE

15 August 1947 marked not only independence for India from British Rule, but also freedom for Indians all over the world. Pretoria Gujratis with the Tamil League decorated their shops and houses with flags and bunting. Businesses were closed and a celebration holiday was declared. Even the City Council co-operated by charging a nominal rate for light decorations. A large procession led by the Hindu Brigade marched from Town to Asiatic Bazaar assisted by the Police and the Traffic Department. A huge marquee was put up on the old Pretoria sports grounds. A variety concert, speech by Pandit Kunjroo from India marked the highlights of the celebration.

PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY

The National Party came to power in 1948. The political climate changed dramatically. The Indian community felt insecure and saw a dim, bleak future. Consequently, the building projects — Hall and the Mandir — were shelved. This uncertainty seems to have permeated the lack in constructive activity. Personality clashes, private schools, resignations of teachers, enquiries and distrust were a further hindrance in this decade, leaving a bad taste for all. But there were sparks of improvement and a thought towards communal feeling. Elections after 1956 started with best of luck and good wishes. A period of fruitfulness was expected. This tied in with the political plant of the Group Areas.

POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1964 the Community Development Board took over the Asiatic Bazaar from the City Council. The Seva Samaj was accordingly given notice to hand over the Ten stands. By now LAUDIUM, the Indian residential area was established with its religious sites. However, the Pretoria Hindu Seva Samaj was not allocated a site to develop its religious, educational, cultural and social structure. Alas! Logical explanation of recovery of grounds returned, good intentions, persistent approach finally won the day when erven 250—251 was sold to the Community at the cost of R6 000,00. This flat site was rezoned for a temple, school and hall development.

CONCERTED COMMUNITY EFFORT

"The salvation of the people depend upon themselves, upon their capacity for suffering and sacrifice".

The Samaj hardly had funds. The public had to sacrifice. What should come first? Discussions and criticisms followed. "The school was the basic requirement, then the temple" it was thought.

In memory of his parents, Dr B. Jogee of East London donated R8 000,000, laying a firm Mandir foundation. R80000 came from the coffers of the public-spirited, generous and charitable people of Pretoria. The religious, Satsang Mahila Mandal and the cultural Kishori Mandal contributed R5 000 Rand each. The front wing of the school wall reflects plaques with their generous donation. In spite of difficulties, the project was finally completed. An official opening of the Mandir and the induction of the Idols, specially imported from India were done on 14 May 1972. Invitations were sent out to all Hindu organisations throughout South Africa. Each Hindu family of Pretoria was invited for lunch provided by the Mahila Mandal. A truly historical and religious Day began with thanksgiving, procession of religious floats while the Ramakrishna Band highlighted this memorable activity with pomp and rejoicing. This was the Day of climax that gave the Gujrati inhabitant of Pretoria a source of pride and satisfaction . . . nearly forty years of yearning and achievement . . . "our very own Mandir and Gujrati Shala" thought each relevant individual of the Seva Samaj.

HALL PROJECT

A Hall project would complete the square. But this was not easy due to varied thoughts and plans. Meanwhile, the Gandhi Centenary Celebrations followed. Annual speech contests and festive celebrations continued.

Pretoria hosted the Transvaal speech competition providing lunch for the audience and participants. A properly established and acceptable constitution allowing for the intended purpose and modernisation, a co-operative spirit, many devoted hours and charity tours can be said to have led to a successful conclusion of a monumental task — the completion of a Hall that the Community of Laudium can be proud of.

CONCLUSION

The Gujrati Community of Pretoria, it can be safely said, has progressed culturally and also economically in these past forty-eight years. Since the acceptance of the Indian people as permanent part of South African population in 1961, roots have become firmer; houses and living conditions have improved; adaptation and diversity have increased. The Community can feel proud and be thankful that they have managed to remain in the changing times and values of the ever flowing river of progress and look forward to an optimistic future.

"if we are to make progress, we must not repeat history, but make new history. We must add to the inheritance left by our ancestors."

JOINT SECRETARIES.
TAPIDAS C. BHANA
MAGAN PARBHOO



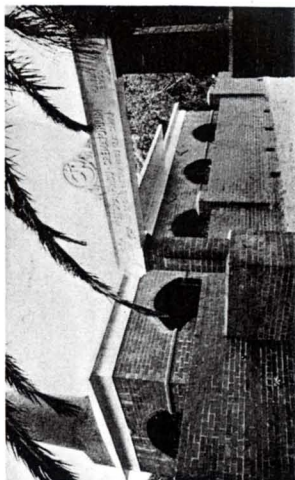
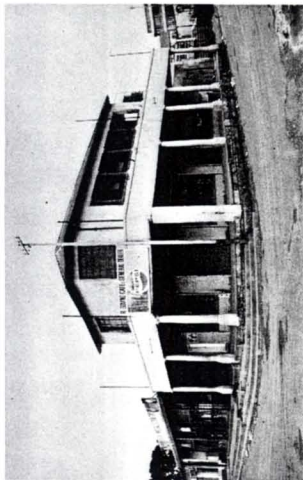
OFFICIALS OF SAMAJ



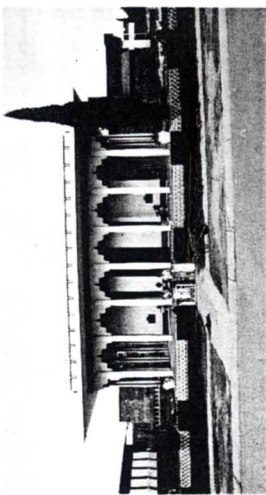
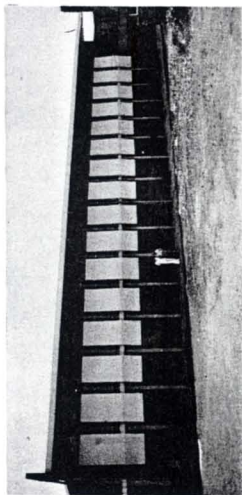
SITTING L TO R: V. MADHAVJEE (TRUSTEE), N.M. PATEL (VICE CHAIRMAN), J. KALYAN (CHAIRMAN & TRUSTEE), K.VALLA (VICE CHAIRMAN), B.J.GORDHAN (PATRON), K. BHIMA (PATRON) N. BHANA (TRUSTEE), T.C. BHANA (SECRETARY), M. PARBHOO (SECRETARY), C.C. GANDHI (TREASURER & TRUSTEE), M.P. LALA (TRUSTEE)

ABSENT

J.S. MISTRY (TREASURER), P.M. JOSHI (TRUSTEE), LATE D.G. KALA (PATRON), LATE A. DESAI (TRUSTEE)



SAMAJ BUILDINGS



SHREE PRETORIA HUNDU SEVA SAMAJ

LIST OF OFFICE BEARERS

	<u>CHAIRMAN</u>	<u>SECRETARIES</u>	<u>TREASURERS</u>
5-12-37	Late Mr Nathalal G. Kala	Mr G.H. Mistry	Mr Ramabhai Jairambhai
5-12-37	Late Mr Jivandas Gordhandas	Late Mr Chhaganbhai S. Modi	
7-12-41	Late Mr Nathalal G. Kala	Late Mr Chhaganbhai S. Modi	Late Mr Jamnadasbhai Ranchhod
11- 4-43	Mr Bachooabhai Joshi	Late Mr Jamnadasbhai Ranchhod	Mr Morabhai S. Mistry
		Late Mr Liladher Gopalidas	
12-11-44	Mr Bachooabhai Joshi	Mr Liladher Gopalidas	Mr Hiralal Rambhai
		Mr D.D. Patel (resigned 12.4.45)	
		Late Mr Chhaganbhai S. Modi	
22-12-46	Late Mr Liladhar G. Kala	Mr Parbhoobhai Nana	Mr Dhirajlal Mohanlal Joshi
		Late Mr Jivanbhai Bhoolabhai Patel	
18- 1-48	Late Mr Jamnadas R. Gound	Mr D.D. Patel	Mr Dhirajlal Mohanlal Joshi
		Mr Narsaibhai Mangabhai Patel	
27- 2-49	Late Mr Jamnadas R. Gound	Mr Narsaibhai Mangabhai Patel	Mr Dhirajlal Mohanlal Joshi
		Late Mr Jivanbhai Bhoolabhai Patel	
25- 4-54	Late Mr Liladhar G. Kala	Mr Morabhai S. Mistry	Dr Bhagoobhai V. Mistry
		Mr D.D. Patel	
23- 1.55	Late Mr Jamnadas R. Govind	Mr D.D. Patel	Mr Mohanbhai P. Lala
		Mr Narsaibhai M. Patel	
13- 5-56	Mr Dalooabhai R. Patel	Mr Bhanoobhai Lala	Mr Naranbhai Bhana
		Mr Dajeebhai Pemabhai	
7- 4-57	Mr Dalooabhai R. Patel	Mr Bhanoobhai Lala (Resigned 10-5-57)	Mr Naranbhai Bhana
		Mr Dajeetbhai Pema	
		Mr Maganlal Dhirajbhai	
19- 6-60	Mr Narsaibhai Mangabhai Patel	Mr Bhanoobhai Lala	Mr Choonilal C. Gandhi
		Mr Thakorabhai Nathoo (21-8-60)	
26- 8-62	Mr Narsaibhai Mangabhai Patel	Mr Naranbhai Bhana	Mr Choonilal C. Gandhi
		Mr Jivanlal Kalianjeebhai	
20- 3-66	Mr Narsaibhai Mangabhai Patel	Mr Jivanlal Kalianjeebhai	Mr Choonilal C. Gandhi
		Late Mr Savjeebhai Bhima	
3- 8-69	Mr Narsaibhai Mangabhai Patel	Mr Jivanlal Kalianjeebhai	Mr Choonilal C. Gandhi
		Mr Ashwinbhai P. Joshi	
2- 8-70	Mr Narsaibhai Mangabhai Patel	Mr Mohanbhai P. Lala	Mr Jhinabhai S. Mistry
		Mr Hasumukhbhai S. Gordhan	
21- 4-74	Late Mr Chhaganbhai Sita	Mr Mahendrabhai Sita	Mr Jhinbhai S. Mistry
		Mr Tapidas Chhaganbhai Bhana	Mr Dhiroobhai Kalan Vala
11- 4-76	Mr Jivanlal Kalianjeebhai	Mr Tapidas Chhaganbhai Bhana	Mr Jhinabhai S. Mistry
		Mr Maganbhai Parbhoo	Mr Baboobhai Gokal
9- 4-78	Mr Jivanlal Kalianjeebhai	Mr Tapidas Chhaganbhai Bhana	Mr Jhinabhai S. Mistry
		Mr Maganbhai Parbhoo	Mr Choonilal C. Gandhi

CONGRATULATIONS ON THIS GLORIOUS OCCASION
OF YOUR OFFICIAL OPENING



Welfit Tailors & Outfitters

503 Boom Street, Asiatic Bazaar, Pretoria
American Centre Phone: 33347



Tip Top Tailors

490, 9th Street, (Cnr. Boom Street)
Asiatic Bazaar, Pretoria. Phone: 33347



Ocean Tailors

423 Boom Street, Asiatic Bazaar
Pretoria. Phone: 35877

