

## **Developing Koli Patel Samaj Properties in Navsari**

Koli Patel Samaj in Navsari has four properties in Navsari. These properties are in the name of three separate Trusts.

One of the Trust the Transvaal Koli Hitwarthak Mandal in South Africa (TKHM) owns one property in its name. The Management Committee of SA delegates the management of their property in Navasari to a locally appointed Committee of Trustees. The 3.81 acres property is lumbered with several litigations and the building on the property is in highly dilapidated condition.

The third generation committee members who now runs the SA Mandal is too remote from Navsari both emotionally and in proximity. It appears that they would rather be rid of the headache.

Their first attempt to sell and take the proceeds to SA a few years ago was foiled by worldwide opposition. Recently on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2012 at a general meeting in SA a resolution was passed to sell more than three quarters of this property to a developer at just about half the price that the property could command in the open market. They hope to try and develop the remaining obscure corner for community use! Sale proceedings are said to be in progress. It is understood that the developer will pay them in SA.

This action by SA raises some fundamental questions for the Koli Patel Samaj in Navsari and for our worldwide community.

(Let us consider the background to these properties first)

The present day Navsari District was a part of Valsad District, and before then both of them were part of Surat District.

The city of Navsari is the commercial hub of the District serving hundreds of surrounding villages. A large majority of our Koli Patel Samaj people live in the villages and look to the city for employment, shopping, medical services, higher education for their children and various other needs.

Some of the primary services are now available in almost all the villages but in the olden days one was fully dependent on the city, as they still have to do for any specialist services required.

Well over a hundred years ago our Koli people's main occupation was agriculture and animal husbandry, hence Koli Patel. These occupations were very limited so our youths of the time, even though uneducated started going far a field looking for employment. When South Africa was opened up for immigration a number of our people went there and in due course settled there. Here we are talking about the year 1883 onwards.

Although these early immigrants were mainly uneducated they were not ignorant. They soon realized that education was holding our people back. So having set up Transvaal Koli Hitwarthak Mandal in South Africa, these visionaries started thinking about ways to help their brethren in the villages of Navsari.

The first property they bought, housed village students who were then able to study in Navsari. Later they bought three other properties.

Koli Patels of Navsari District as a community owns 4 properties in Navsari. All these properties were purchased by our forefathers who migrated to South Africa in the later part of 19th century and in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quarters of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their intention was to help the Koli Patel community of Navsari District (Surat District at the time,) to develop these properties for educational and cultural purposes so that the community may raise its living standard and its social status.

#### **The 4 Properties are:**

Koli Patel Ashram Site 4 on map	Nutan Society Land Site 3 on map	Chhapra Road Land Site 2 on map	TKHM(SA)Navsari Site 1 on map
Purchased: 1926	Purchased: 1947	Purchased: 1947	Purchased: 1962
Rebuilt: 1973 mainly with UK/Overseas donations	44084 sq. ft flat land. Undeveloped	2.20 acres of Mango plantation Undeveloped	3.81 Acres Undeveloped. Bungalow delapidated
<b>MANAGEMENT:</b>			
Trusts Involved: (a) N.V.K.T.	(a) N.V.K.T.	Trust Involved: (b) D.G.K.K.M.	Trust Involved; (c) TKHM (SA)
Mohanbhai Vakil	Mohanbhai Vakil  Navsari Nagarpalika has put this site on their 10 year development plan	Disputed by Amrutbhai Koli, Claiming it for DGKKM with N.V.K.T.	Thakorebhai Vallabhbhai Patel
<b>TITLE DEEDS:</b>			
N.V.K.T.	N.V.K.T.	Kuverji Gopalji	TKHM (SA)

N.V.K.T. – Navsari Vibhag Keravani Trust

D.G.K.K.M. – Daxin Gujarat Koli Keravani Mandal

T.K.H.M. (S.A.) – Transvaal Koli Hitwarthak Mandal (South Africa).

This is a second attempt by South Africa to try and sell and develop the site. The local people in Navsari have not been told what development they have in mind. If arrangement with a property developer to build a commercial hub and pay the proceeds to TKHM South Africa in South Africa then I consider that unethical both commercially and socially.

Commercially, the sale price agreed is well below the market value of the property. Repatriating sale price to South Africa is injustice to the local people as the original donations given by the forefathers of the present day third generation TKHM South Africa Management Committee members. Nowhere in the world are donations once made can ever be reclaimed. Let alone be reclaimed by their grand sons and grand daughters.

Let us now look at what the people for whose benefit the donations were made and the investments bought with those donations were used for.

The first property bought over 80 years ago served well as student accommodation. This property was rebuilt in 1973 with Samaj donations and for a few years students lived and studied in Navsari. Times were changing and students acquired easy methods of transport and so fewer and fewer students became resident. The 2nd floor has 12 rooms allocated to student accommodation have been sparsely used for the last 50 years. The 12 rooms on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor allocated for foreign /local Guests have rarely ever seen a guest (except for some rare soul) who ever came and lived there ever since 1973. The Community Hall on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor again rarely see a wedding or a regular program.

It is fortunate that the ground floor is occupied by a bank and a couple of small shops. This produces some income as rent.

All requests to convert the above mentioned 24 rooms for Office use (to generate revenue for Samaj use) has fallen on deaf ears.

The other 3 properties were acquired over 50 years ago.

TKHM Navsari property in a prime location and which housed a grand bungalow, has deteriorated year after year and is now the subject of sale.

The other 2 properties have remained as they were acquired on the day.

Considered as a whole the four properties are worth some 30 crores and possibly more in the market. Yet we earn a miserly 3 lakh from them over a year. It should be a matter of great shame for the local leaders of the Samaj.

How did this state of affairs come about? And why did it last so long?

I put this to lack of leadership, lack of knowledge, lack of strategy, lack of unity and failure to understand the changing needs of the Samaj and inadequate organizational structure and outdated constitution of the responsible authority.

## **The Way Forward**

It is time for all concerned (in fact our whole of the local and overseas Samaj) to agree on a strategy and a programme of Projects to develop these most desirable property investments that our forefathers from South Africa in their most visionary compassion endowed to the present generation. Overseas Samaj will have to realize and accept that they can only play a helping hand role. Local Samaj will have to realize that it is fully their responsibility to make full use of the legacy that they have been endowed with for the sole benefit of the local Samaj.

I make a few suggestion that I hope may help in an organized way forward towards a better future for the Local Samaj and all concerned. I would like other to add to this so that a quick start can be made. Failing that it seems to me that we shall not have the leisure of wasting another sixty years.

1. Register a constitution fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, ideally for a merged Samaj Organisation. If this is proving difficult initially then for each one of them, with special emphasis on the maximum term for an office bearer including the Managing Trustee. (no more than 3 years and no older than 60 years). Let anyone over 60 who wish to serve the Samaj to act as an advisor without a vote.
2. Decide on a strategy where the welfare of the Samaj comes first. This should be looked at from the point of view of educational needs, social, cultural and religious needs. (Meaningful scholarships for the students and one good standard Hall to serve the other needs of the Samaj.
3. Aim to work under one organization for the benefit of the Samaj. (Daxin Gujarat Koli Keravani Mandal has no standing in the Navsari Koli Patel Samaj. To claim that people of Bhavnagar or Surat have donated to buy the property is completely baseless. Our forefathers when they set out to collect donations would not have solicited from communities of those areas as it is not in our nature to ask other community to contribute. We do not ask one who is not of Navsari Koli Patel Samaj villages of Navsari even for our present needs. Refuse to accept such baseless claims).
4. Appreciate that any development necessary for our present day needs will cost crores of rupees. Such a project cannot be undertaken on the basis of donations.
5. The Samaj in Navsari does not need all four properties. It must consider (if it wants to develop) to generate money required for development via the sale of one or two of the properties. Holding on the dead capital has cost the Samaj its present backwardness. (Imagine what educational benefit would done to the Samaj over the years if 10 crores were put aside for this purpose from the sale of one of the properties.)

6. If a decision to develop is taken than it must be appreciated that the work cannot be left to voluntary effort but professional people will have to be brought in and paid for. Even the later management cannot be left to volunteers.

7. From the present group of Trustees I personally do not see anyone able to drive the project forward. I would prefer a new qualified and committed team of our Samaj Leaders to drive the change and let the present trustees act as advisors.

8. Failing that I would sell at least 2 of the properties and put the proceeds in a fairly long term deposit account earning interest and beyond the reach of the Trustees. Let the bank be advised to transfer an agreed sum of money to a current account, once a year, from which meaningful scholarships are given to deserving students who have admission in a recognized school, college or university.

**As far as I am concerned the only reason we want to develop these properties is to help our people in Navsari villages, to fast tract them into higher education and technical skill to get them ready for better paid jobs, etc.**

There are many other reasons and needs but this to me is crucial as standing on their own two feet is of first importance to give the local people the confidence they need to undertake the development of the Samaj locally themselves.

Finally, let everyone keep this in mind that, other interested parties and property developers and even Navsari Palika, have an eye on our highly desirable properties. If we are not careful and leave them in the care of the present Trustees we shall be done for.

**Keshavlal J Patel.** *(These are my personal well considered views)*

**I hope others will express their views also without any fear.**