

Autobiography of Shree Keshavbhai J Patel – Philanthropist and Community Leader Bodali and UK - My Life's achievements and my Aspirations. February 2021

My name is Keshavlal Jerambhai Patel. I was born in Bodali in the Kantha Vibhag part what is now known as Navsari District in southern Gujarat, India, way back in the later half of 1930's. Like almost all of us I had a normal childhood in the loving but simple family environment that prevailed then except that I suffered a major operation in my ear at the age of seven. Attended primary school in Matvad then Bodali and in Navsari.

Again like most of us I left India in 1948 to go to Nairobi, Kenya to join my father who like the majority youths of 1933 - 1940 from our area migrated to overseas country in search of a better life. (I have written a short booklet describing the Story of India's Historic People - The Kolis. This is to be found at www.mandhatglobal.com - our community's website.) In Nairobi I studied to Senior Cambridge level and started work. I spent three months in a Government Department and then joined Maritime Insurance Company. After three years there I joined East African Railways in the stores department until I left for UK. Nothing remarkable. I did what most of us youngsters did in Nairobi. Go to work, play a little sports, see Indian and cowboy films, visit friends and relations, the usual things.

I did read a lot of Gujarati literature, English novels and listened to Indian and Nairobi radio etc.,. The vast majority of us had no TV or phones. Mobile had not been discovered.

These were however Kenya Independence struggle times. Last five or six years before the independence of the East Africa countries we were all concerned about our future. Africanisation Policy was discussed. Almost all of us had British passports but the thought of factory labour work in UK worried us.

I worked in an office where we were a mixed crowd of gujaratis, sikhs, goans etc, and we discussed how we can prepare for life in UK. With a Sikh friend I started studying for a Junior Accountancy Institute. Completed but we were not satisfied as it only assured a booking job. A few more friends joined and we started studying for the UK Chartered Accountancy examinations. We studied in the evenings at the Gandhi Memorial Library at the University of Nairobi after work. A number of other friend from other organisations joined us. We set for the exams every six months. I set for my finals in June 1971 after five years of hard study.

Unlike a lot of our people who left Kenya in 1969 exodus cause by the proposed restricted voucher system on entering UK, I waited to finish my finals. Just three days after the exams I with my wife and two kids we boarded the plane to London. It took us a while to get used to life in UK with the rather small low level ceilings rooms and midsummer sun setting at about nine o'clock in the evening.

Initially like everyone our concern was accommodation and a job. I decided to settle in London in spite of all my relations were in the Midland. My first job was with London Transport as a budgets officer. Changed a couple of departments and then left in about two and a half years to

Join National Health Service as an assistant treasurer. 12 years with NHS I changed to go to a private social research organisation as an Accountant. I retired at the very end of 1999.

I was always interested in community work. In Nairobi I had served a few years as committee member of our Mandhata Mandal Nairobi but had to give up after few years to concentrate on studies. Coming to London we all missed a place where the community could meet. I played an active part in starting Mandhata Mandal in Wembley. Started Youth Club and Gujarati School for our young children. I held all the office bearer positions in the Mandal. Changed its name as Mandhata Youth and Community Association and registered it as a Charity.

I also help revitalise Bodali Seva Mandal by registering it as a charity and serving in various capacity. I took active part in our umbrella organisation called Association of Mandhata Samaj UK and registered it a registered Charity and served for a number of years as a leader of its Gammonatti and Publication Sub-Committee. I edited Mandhati Pragati and Mandhata Navsarjan for a number of years. In conjunction with AMSUK I took active part in the Transvaal Koli Hitwarthak Mandal in Navsari through Gammonitti Committee.

I went to India for the first time in 1976. In 1983 trip I visited The Agricultural University in Navsari and met a Prof. Dr. Ramanbhai Patel with whom I discussed my idea for setting up a trust to plant Fruit trees in our area. Ramanbhai agreed to the project and in 1984 I registered a Kantha Vibhag Friendship Trust with the Charity Commission of England. We started our first programme by planting about 400 fruit trees in 1985. Over the years we branched out in various other activities related to poverty alleviation in our Kantha Vibhag. To day we have several sponsor and we do something like 15 lakh rupees of about 20 projects every year. Our emphasis is now on education. The Lottery Commission in UK was impressed by our work in India and we were awarded a grant of £25000. This is one of my major project and it could not have been as successful as it has been without the enthusiastic commitment of Ramanbhai and the team he built up. Our activities over the years is recorded at www.mandhataglobal.com

My other major project was the setting up of a website for our global community. Again this project could not have been successful without the full dedication of Bharatbhai Vala Patel of Avdafalia/Johannesburg, South Africa/Cincinnati USA. Thanks to Bharatbhai this is one of the most comprehensive resource for our community. Do visit www.mandhataglobal.com

Whatever little I managed to do could not have been possible without the help and cooperation of thousands of our community members over the years. I am grateful to them all.

Although I was involved in other subjects also I feel I could have done much more and of better quality. Now at the age of 84 I am constantly thinking what was it that I or our Samaj could have done to achieve my desired higher standards.

So looking back if I had to live my life again what skills and attributes I consider I should have acquired and developed for a more satisfying life.

Education:

One's permanent habits are formed when one is young. Young minds are influenced more easily. If you have the benefit of many relations (grandfather/grandmother, uncles and aunts, cousins and other youngsters of your age) you have an advantage of being corrected of any unwholesome habits even before you start school. The healthy environment that you grow in is a great advantage. This is not always possible here in England. So the elders in the community has to set up environments and systems to lead the children of the community.

Here in London we set up youth club and Gujarati school and encouraged children to participate. This initiative also acted as a way forward for the communities in other cities.

By the time you enter school you already have good familiarity of your mother tongue.

At school you advance further and faster in mother tongue medium. Once learned it becomes easy to pick up any other language. We must remember that the mother tongue of the children born here to the second generation is not Gujarati.

I feel that the present day emphasis on job related education while necessary is misplaced. In younger formative years if the emphasis is on the training of body, mind, memory, concentration and awareness via the study and practice of yoga techniques on a regular basis it would become much easier later to learn anything quickly.

The whole universe and everything in it are an amalgam of the five elements - Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and Space Our body is everything we eat. This comes out of earth. Our mind is all the impressions we have gathered through our five senses. There is something in everyone of us which keeps this most sophisticated machinery functioning without our intervention. It goes on working automatically day and night. Good food and the care in the choice of good positive friends and other means of communications will train our minds to contribute greatly in the world.

Everything we have gathered, the body, mind etc we leave behind when we die. It is said in our Sanatan teaching that what you have gathered is not you. The thing that kept you breathing to your last is you. That power has been given various names, soul, atma etc. When Atma leaves the body we become a corpse, that is returned to the earth and the elements.

Since Atma or the power continues to function automatically one can live on this Earth without making any effort. You are born, eat, drink, procreate and die.

However we all want to do a bit more. In fact we want more and have a lot more but to get whatever that more is, need effort, education, continuous self education, body and mind training and the development of various skills.

As far as I am concerned the practice and the discipline of Yoga is ideal for training the body and the mind. If your trainer is any one like the Kung Fu master, continuously looking over your practice so much the better. Younger you start the better.

There are various ways one can train the body and the mind. Sticking to just one or two well proven method will give you best results and you will progress faster. I wish I had not jumped from one method to another in search to better myself. I would now say stick to Yoga the most comprehensive discipline for both body and mind training.

Study the highest achievers in any field wherever they are in the world. You will note that they all enjoy good health. Their mind is well concentrated on the subject in hand. They are good listeners, observers and have excellent perception - being aware of the big picture.

Experience is important but life is too short for every practical personal experience so the second best thing is to learn from others through wide reading and visualisation.

We are all aware of and the development of perception via a systematic asking questions via the six popular servants called 'What, Why, Who, When, How and Whom. Ask plenty of questions to others and to self. We have to be our own Kung Fu Master.

With a high level of the above skills you will be able to create yourself the way you want and craft your destiny the way you want as well. Your life would then be a miracle.

K J Patel. February 2021