



**SHREE VISA OSHWAL COMMUNITY
THIKA**



Mr. Bimal Sobhagchand Shah

Chairman

72nd Board Adhiveshan

24th / 25th 26th May 2013

Chairman of the OERB, Trustees, members of the Managing Committee and Advisory Board, Chairmen of all Visa Oshwal Community centres, Delegates, Distinguished Guests, my fellow Trustees and Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Jai Jinendra. On behalf of Thika Oshwals, I extend to you all a very warm welcome to Thika. This is the 8th Adhivesan to be held in Thika and we are very honoured to host it after a spell of 17 years. I still remember that during the Adhivesan in 1996, my Late father Mr Sobhagchand together with the Late R.N. Shah, Late Chunibhai and Mr Mohanbhai – amongst other leaders – spearheaded the funds drive for the construction of our community centre in Moshi. In 2 days they managed to raise a lot of funds. Such enormous decisions and tasks are carried out in these forums, and it is only fair that we give credence to these Adhivesans.

This is my second term in office, and this year is very special in our calendar. In February we celebrated 15 years of Pratistha Mohatsav of our Jinalaya. We were honoured with the divine presence of Param Pujya Jinchandraji Maharaj. During his short stay we travelled with him to Mombasa, Kisumu, Kitale, Eldoret, Nakuru and Nairobi where lectures were held. Now we are hosting this 72nd Adhivesan and, as part of the national celebrations, we will be celebrating the Jubilee this year.

VOC Thika was initiated in 1934 and it is now more than a century since the first Oshwals settled in Thika. My own family celebrated our century in Thika last year. Thika has been the birth place or place of early childhood of our pioneers, leaders and visionaries. Our first Oshwal industry was established in Thika. The Thika Oshwals' support for the activities of OERB from its inception in 1941 has been very strong. We have been in the forefront of supporting any fundraising activity of OERB, and have taken our rightful place in OERB's history. In fact, Thika Oshwals have in many cases been the first to start the kitty, such as the Millenium Education Fund. In its history spanning 72 years, our own Mohanbhai has been Chairman and now is a Trustee. We are proud of his contributions both to our community and the entire Oshwal institutions, both here and abroad.

VOC Thika has progressed tremendously in the last 80 years. Our facilities are one of the best, together with our Jinalaya. During our 75 years celebrations in 2009, we gave out bursaries of KSH 1.5 million to 75 students to pursue 4 years of higher education. We also planted 7500 seedlings at Kamae forest on the outskirts of Thika and also recognised all our past leaders. Thika Oshwals have been the pioneers in hosting the Shah Free Eye and ENT camps. This year we organised the 34th camp with a lot of success and I take this opportunity to congratulate the Chairman, Mr Shanket, together with his Committee and Doctors and Volunteers, for their dedication to this project. Every year our community supports needy wananchi students with scholarship worth KSH 1.5 million towards education. We also cater for the needs of our own community members, either for medical, education or shelter. Although our community now consists of only 200 from a maximum of 900 in the early 1960's, our unity and respect of our elders has made it possible for all of us to work together and progress.

The four pillars of OERB – entrepreneurship, religion, education and medical – have been embedded very firmly. Today, the GDP of our community could be one of the highest in the world. Today, our community is involved in running a high percentage of industries in the country. We also have interest in finance, insurance, real estate, floriculture, pharmaceuticals, amongst others. We, the leaders should support Jain religion learning and activities and also promote inter-town religious activities and events. I was quite shocked that in many centres, there were separate committees managing the affairs of the community and Jain religion, with both pulling in different directions. A substantial budget for religious activities should be included in every centre.

Schools and colleges managed by us offer the highest standards of education, not only for Oshwal children but children from all communities. Our higher education loans and bursary scheme has supported many of our students to fulfil their dreams. This will further be enhanced with the opening of our first Oshwal University, which we hope will be in Thika. At present, Thika is home to a number of universities and colleges and the demand is growing. Today, each and every Oshwal family has a graduate who either manages family businesses or is in employment in large organisations. Our graduates have now started returning home, and should take advantage of the immense opportunities available both here and in our continent. Unfortunately, we have lagged behind in having our own hospital; although our community's contributions to the MP Shah Hospital has been significant since its start-up, and is still continuing with the support of the Jain Social Group, who have managed to raise significant funds for the institution.

Having accomplished so much in one century, we – the leaders – both old and young, now need to go and chart our future and our vision for the next century. The following are areas that we need to ponder upon:

- A) Make our Jain religion relevant to our children. There are millions of Jains on this continent and we should be able to interact and learn from each other. It is with pride to note that our Oshwal centres in Nakuru and Eldoret are planning to build Jinalayas. We need to support them fully.
- B) Oshwal Economic Council to look into creating Oshwal industrial and economic zones. Great opportunities are available in the fields of telecommunication, infrastructure development and transport. These are fields we have not actively participated in, owing to the enormous resources required. We need to create an Oshwal investment fund in order to raise large funds and be able to participate in these areas of investment.
- C) Our youth and older generation must be looked after. Exposure to hard drugs, alcoholism and other vices are a threat to our future. Old peoples' homes are a priority, with many female widows living a life of misery. Now with our modern way of living, this does put a strain on the older generation. It is our duty to ensure our elders and widows can live their own independent lives in secure surroundings. As a policy, we should – on such forums – honour our pioneers and leaders who have contributed an enormous amount of their time and effort to our community, instead of waiting to praise them in their obituary!
- D) Although we have not actively participated in political activity, we now need to groom and support our youth to take leadership positions in the governance of our country. We should not fear to fight for our rights.
- E) Leadership – our leadership should be based on uniting and not aimed at the personal destruction of individuals. Remember, those who work for the community are bound to make some mistakes, but we should all be able to discuss our shortcomings amicably. Equal opportunity should be available to Oshwals from all the centres and should not be the right or privilege of delegates or members from Nairobi only.

Finally, with these remarks I wish you all success and Lord Mahavir's guidance in your deliberations. Our volunteers are here to take care of your needs, and if there are any shortcomings please accept our sincere apologies. May this 72nd Adhivesan be a memorable one and we hope that this honour is bestowed upon us again to host such forums.

Jai Oshwals.



SHREE VISA OSHWAL COMMUNITY

(Est. 1934)

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