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ASIAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN RHODESIA FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR TO 1972¹

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THIS STUDY IS intended as a preliminary statement. Material used in this study is drawn mainly from interviews² with various people, mainly Asians,³ and from primary source materials — the documents of some of the Asian organizations and in the possession of some Asians in Rhodesia.

The first basic premise is that the Asian community's perception of its priorities stems from the fact that the amelioration of any disabilities suffered by it or the redressing of injured rights as perceived by it has had first priority, with the proviso that more often than not Asian organizations have cast their requirements in national terms, i.e. in terms of rights for all citizens rather than any special safeguards for it as a community.

The second basic premise in this brief study is that a clear unanimity of views and tactics on specific issues within the Asian community cannot be expected — nor has been historically evident.

The general pattern outlined here is the examination of Asian-African, Asian-European and Asian-Coloured relations against the background of Asian perception of its priorities in terms of its minority position in Rhodesia. This study also deals with some of the intra-Asian relations as these affected the development of various Asian organizations and movements especially in the period after the Second World War.

A chronological unfolding of events is not attempted here. Rather facts, emphasis and interpretation are presented here in terms of styles of politics.

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¹ I am grateful to the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Makerere University, Uganda, the Department of Political Science, University of Rhodesia, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, USA for providing partial financial support for this study. An earlier version was originally submitted to the East African Universities Social Science Council Conference at Makerere University, Kampala, 14-17 December 1971.

² I am very grateful to various people, mainly Asians, too numerous to mention here, who consented to be interviewed for this study. Most of the interviews were conducted in 1971 but some were conducted in 1968 and 1970 during brief visits to Rhodesia. Comments and criticisms from Diana Seager, Victor Anant and staff and students of SARP, Yale University are gratefully acknowledged.

³ In the only general study available (F. and L. O. Dotson, *The Indian Minority of Zambia, Rhodesia and Malawi* (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1968)) the term 'Indian' is used; but the term 'Asian' (or in earlier times 'Asiatic') has had wide currency in Rhodesia.

These are (a) Politics of Internal Organization and Unification, (b) Politics of Persuasion, (c) Politics of Demonstration, (d) Politics of Litigation and (e) Politics of Alliance. Of course there is some overlap in this scheme but it is hoped that such an ordering of material will adequately bring out the essential styles in which Asian political activity has unfolded in the post-war period.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ASIAN COMMUNITY

The Asian presence in Rhodesia in the last century started when the country was 'opened up' with the arrival of the European settlers. About 500 Asians were imported into Rhodesia to work on the railway from Beira to Rhodesia but hardly any survived the toll taken by heat, wild animals and insects;⁴ a scheme to obtain Indian labour for the mines of Rhodesia and to operate sugar plantations in the Zambezi Valley during the early part of this century did not materialize because of 'a combination of strong anti-Indian sentiment among the settlers and lack of co-operation from the Indian government'.⁵

Asians in Rhodesia have a broad homogeneity in that most of them came from the western part of India (with the major exception of South Indians who came to Rhodesia from South Africa), are Gujarati-speaking people primarily engaged in commerce and industry (though over the years there has been quite a remarkable degree of professionalization) and are 'passenger' Asians who constitute the second phase of the world-wide movement of Asians from India.⁶

Kuper's⁷ comprehensive idea of caste is, according to some observers, not very important in Overseas Indian communities; the verdict is 'that castes do not form important units, nor are intercaste relations significant in the community structure of overseas Indians'.⁸ More particularly for Central Africa: 'Society and culture, sufficiently intermeshed in India to provide a fairly smoothly working system of social relations, are in Africa sundered apart. The former caste culture applies only to restricted facets of the Indian's social experience, and even where it does apply, the fit between norm and behaviour is apt to be grindingly discordant'.⁹

⁴ Y. Ghai and D. Ghai, *The Asian Minorities of East and Central Africa* (London, Minority Rights Group, Report No. 4, 1971), 6.

⁵ Dotson and Dotson, *The Indian Minority*, 30.

⁶ H. Kuper, *Indian People in Natal* (Durban, Natal Univ. Press, 1960), 3. Kuper draws a distinction between 'indentured' and 'passenger' Indians roughly corresponding to the two waves and types of Indian immigration into the African continent. The latter group of Indians 'entered the country under ordinary immigration laws and at their own expense'; see also H. Kuper, 'Strangers in plural societies; Asians in South Africa and Uganda', in L. Kuper and M. G. Smith (eds), *Pluralism in Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Univ. of California Press, 1969), 247-82; Dotson and Dotson, *The Indian Minority*, 33.

⁷ Kuper, *Indian People*, 18.

⁸ A. C. Mayer, 'Introduction', in B. Schwartz (ed.), *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities* (San Francisco, Chandler, 1967), 2.

⁹ Dotson and Dotson, *The Indian Minority*, 125.

However, in spite of the fact that the centrality of caste as noticeable in Village India is not evident among Asians in Rhodesia, caste in Rhodesia has not been irrelevant.¹⁰ Caste has been of some importance in some friendship groups, some castes have had ongoing caste societies, caste has figured in some disputes within the community, some caste members have dropped their surnames indicating traditional occupations and have instead adopted middle names as surnames (in a process somewhat opposite to the process of Sanskritization seen in India),¹¹ and caste is still especially important in marriages.

Typically, the Asian in Rhodesia is a member of a minority group: We may define a minority as a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. The existence of a minority in a society implies the existence of a corresponding dominant group enjoying higher social status and greater privileges. Minority status carries with it the exclusion from full participation in the life of the society.¹²

The group may or may not be an alien group; as far as the Asians in Rhodesia are concerned, most are citizens of the country, but they are certainly 'visible' and historically are a 'transplanted' group. The critical point is that the term 'minority' does not necessarily mean numerical minority; rather it indicates a disadvantage in power terms.¹³

Numerically, the Asian community in Rhodesia is quite small in relation to the total population. According to the 1969 Census, out of a total population of 5 099 344, Asians numbered a mere 8 965 (although some Asian informants adamantly stated that the real figure was around 12 000).¹⁴

Largely because of restricted immigration policy Asian immigration has been a trickle; over the years the population increase has been quite gradual, mostly through natural increase. In 1911 there were 900 Asians and this figure had increased approximately tenfold by 1969. The Asians are predominantly an urban group (8 641 out of a total of 8 965 in 1969)¹⁵ with the majority concentrated in the two main urban areas of Bulawayo and Salisbury having a population of 2 410 and 4 055 respectively.¹⁶ About half of the

¹⁰ Ibid., ch.5.

¹¹ M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Univ. of California Press, 1967), 1-45.

¹² L. Wirth, 'The problem of minority groups', in M. L. Barron (ed.), *American Minorities: A Textbook of Readings in Inter-Group Relations* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 6.

¹³ J. Roucek, 'The eternal problem of minorities', *United Asia* (1964), XVI, 239.

¹⁴ Rhodesia, *1969 Population Census (Interim Report), Volume I: The European, Asian and Coloured Population* (Salisbury, Govt Printer, 1971), 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., Table 5, 8.

¹⁶ Ibid., Table 6, 9 and 11.

population is under the age of 20 (4 437 out of a total of 8 965).¹⁷ The Hindus and Muslims are approximately equal in number (3 582 and 3 348 respectively).¹⁸ The majority are Rhodesian born (5 999)¹⁹ and the majority are Rhodesian citizens (8 180).²⁰ The total economically active population is 2 864 out of which as many as 1 354 are in retail trade.²¹

Asians have not been particularly welcome in Rhodesia. This has been, and is, evident in the application of immigration policy, e.g. the 1903 Immigration Ordinance which did not specifically mention Asians was used to control Asian immigration. Nonetheless Asians continued to be allowed in some degree until Rhodesia achieved self-governing status in 1923. From this time onwards Asian immigration, with the exception of wives, some dependants and certain categories of teachers and priests, virtually came to a close.²² The major contemporary exception, during the Federation period, was the immigration of some Asians from Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia.

Reception of Asians by the Europeans has not been particularly friendly especially in the matter of trade licences. In this regard Asians were regarded as keen competitors; 'There is little doubt, however, that the threat posed by Indian competition was felt keenly and resisted vigorously'.²³ At times Asians were the recipients of European violence against them because of this felt competition²⁴ and one of the more famous early Asian traders, B. R. Niak, was forced to petition Queen Victoria for protection which was granted. Even as late as 1971 an attempt was made to nullify such Asian trade competition in Shamva, where the local authority unsuccessfully tried to block an Asian application for a trade licence!

Historically, Asians in Rhodesia have been on the receiving end of racial discrimination in various respects, such as hospitals, fire-arms, liquor, education, civil service, defence service, public places, and residence;²⁵ and the eradication of these difficulties experienced by them as a group has been their first priority. Usually they have argued in terms of common citizenship (earlier in terms of Empire citizenship and later in terms of Rhodesian citizenship) and loyalty to Rhodesia rather than in terms of special rights for them as a distinct group.

¹⁷ Ibid., Table 7, 13.

¹⁸ Ibid., Table 16, 22.

¹⁹ Ibid., Table 10, 17.

²⁰ Ibid., Table 11, 18.

²¹ Ibid., Table 17, 24.

²² Dotson and Dotson, *The Indian Minority*, 40-2.

²³ Ibid., 37.

²⁴ Ibid., 39.

²⁵ D. M. Desai, *The Indian Community in Southern Rhodesia* (Salisbury, privately, 1948), especially 10-18.

POLITICS OF INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND UNIFICATION

Generally speaking Asian organizations in Rhodesia arose to protect Asian interests or to redress any hardships suffered by the community. They usually have had small membership with infrequent meetings, especially general meetings, and have often exhibited 'intermittent life'. Often new organizations or *ad hoc* committees have been formed which gather momentum for the specific issue at hand and more often than not enthusiasm dies away as the issue is settled or takes a longer time to settle than anticipated. True there have been ongoing fissures, e.g. between young and old, between religious communities, between personalities, between radicals who wanted to align more with African nationalist aspirations and moderates who felt that being a small community without power the best that could be done was to advance Asian causes. However, serving organizations do enjoy some legitimacy within the community. Such legitimacy should not be underestimated; this will become clear in this study.

The explanation for this 'intermittent life' lies in several factors: the nature of the slow immigration and increase of the population; Asians came to make a better future for themselves rather than become politicians in Rhodesia; the generally low level of education of most of the Asians who came; initially very few brought their wives with them and as such felt less settled; until a little before the Second World War most Asians felt that this was a temporary home; most were rural in their origin, and for most Asians little had changed in Village India for as long as they could remember or recollect of their ancestors' life styles. Had it not been for 'disabilities' suffered by the community as a whole one wonders when the Asian organizations would have started in Rhodesia. More than anything else, it was their 'second-class' status with all the disadvantages which went with this status which prompted Asians to form organizations to look after their interests. As one informant put it, 'Politics as a science of government never came naturally to us; for Asians necessity drove us into the political arena because essentially we are business people because not many other fields are open to us.'

Asian organizational activity seems to have been established at the beginning of this century; the British Indian Association in Salisbury petitioned against the 1908 Asiatic Immigration Ordinance passed by the Legislative Council — the Government of India objected to the Ordinance and eventually it was disallowed by the High Commissioner.²⁶ In the second decade of this century there is reference to a British Indian Association of Southern Rhodesia, for in 1916 it passed a resolution affirming its loyalty to H.M. the

²⁶ National Archives of Rhodesia, RC/3 [Office of the Resident Commissioner: Correspondence], 3/18 (Administrator, Salisbury, Main Series: 1908), Adm. 86; see also RC/3/7/16 [High Commissioner for South Africa, Main Series: 1909], H.C.101; C. Palley, *The Constitutional History and Law of Southern Rhodesia* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), 167-8.

King.²⁷ Later, British Indian Associations were formed in a few other centres in Rhodesia. Asian organizations were generally concerned with Asian immigration difficulties, problems over trade licences, general discrimination and the welfare of the community. The British Indian Association in Salisbury was to become dormant in the late 1930s whilst the British Indian Association in Bulawayo and a few other centres in Rhodesia were to continue their life well into the late 1950s.

The pattern of organizational activity in Salisbury after the effective demise of the British Indian Association in Salisbury was that the Hindoo Society and the Islamic Society (both formed in the mid to late 1920s) not only were the spokesmen for their respective communities but also acted separately and jointly on behalf of their communities in matters which needed contact with the Government. Whilst both religious communities had their own internal problems, the Hindu community in Salisbury was to be divided organizationally when some dissidents formed the Hindu Association in 1942. The immediate cause of this seems to have been a scuffle between members at one of the earlier meetings of the Hindoo Society. This conflict was to last for some years.

An attempt was made in the late 1940s to form a joint Asian organization in Salisbury. The meeting was called by the Hindu Association and the Islamic Society. Because it was a general meeting members belonging to the Hindoo Society also attended. The result was the formation of the British Indian Association — Salisbury (to be seen partly as a revival of the earlier organization but with different groups competing for its control) which, largely because of personality disputes, adjourned its meeting after election of officials — it still remains adjourned!

A later attempt to form a comprehensive organization in Salisbury started in 1952; Shri Apa Pant, the Indian High Commissioner for East and Central Africa based in Nairobi, was very important in this development. Conflict arose between various leaders concerning the word 'Indian'; some wanted to retain this word because nearly all of the Asians had come from India, whereas some wanted the word 'Asian'. In part this was the effect of the partition in India in 1947. Agreement was reached in 1953 between the Hindu Association, the Hindoo Society and the Islamic Society, all of which gave mandates to a new organization called the Asian Association in Salisbury which was henceforth to act on behalf of the Salisbury Asian community in its relations with, and representations to, the Government and non-Asian communities generally.

The Indian High Commissioner had played a leading role in this development but added impetus came from the issue of the impending formation of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the possible allocation of land

²⁷ National Archives of Rhodesia, RC/3/1/5 (General, 1916), 1030.

for the community for an 'Asian' residential area in Salisbury, and the need to get a better Asian primary school than the prefabricated one which Asian children had attended. The school, named the Louis Mountbatten School, was to be re-housed in the 'Asian' residential area of Ridgeview under somewhat better conditions.

In 1952 the British Indian Association in Bulawayo proposed to convene a conference of Asians in Southern Rhodesia to guard against Federation, which was feared by the Asian community as a Central African attempt at a replication of the South African situation. The Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference was inaugurated in July 1952; it was to be the overall spokesman for the Asian community in matters concerning the Federation and disabilities suffered by it. It was to last a few years and then wither away as Federation became an accomplished fact and Asians began adjusting to the Federation whilst at the same time doing all they could for bettering their position. During its lifetime the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference was to reflect, in a variety of activities, Asian fears concerning the Federation.

The general Asian fear of the Federation was that the immigration laws of Southern Rhodesia under which Asians were at a disadvantage would become part of the Federal Law, that Rhodesia-type discrimination would affect Asians in the two Northern Territories, that freedom of movement of Asians across territories would be restricted and in general that the Federation would go the way of South Africa.²⁸

These fears were presented by the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference, soon after its formation in July 1952, to C.R. Attlee in August 1952. Besides containing the Asian position on the Federation, the memorandum to Attlee outlined various discriminatory practices against Asians.²⁹

In 1953 the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference submitted a memorandum to Sir Godfrey Huggins, the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, in which it outlined Asian fears of the Federation and petitioned against discrimination in matters such as immigration, hospital services, military conscription and training, fire-arms, liquor, servitude clauses in title deeds, hotels, restaurants, cinemas, buses, municipal swimming pools, Bulawayo City Hall, Salisbury Lottery Hall, sports grounds, public conveniences, Bulawayo Public Library, the civil service, educational facilities, railways, trade unions, angling societies, and the Automobile Association.³⁰ At a central committee meeting in Salisbury held on 3 April 1953, the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference resolved to reject the Federation and urged Asians to vote against the Federation in the referendum.³¹

²⁸ *The Indian* (May 1953), IV, v, 3.

²⁹ Papers of the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference, Memorandum to Mr. C. R. Attlee, Aug. 1952.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Central Committee, Memorandum to the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Godfrey Huggins 1953.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Minutes of Central Committee Meeting, 3 Apr. 1953.

Concurrent with the formation of the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference, lengthy discussions took place between Asian organizations in Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland in order to co-ordinate Asian efforts in the three territories in a joint policy towards the Federation. Accordingly, the first meeting of the Central African Asian Conference took place in Limbe, Nyasaland, in July 1952. But here again, as in the case of the efforts of the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference *vis-à-vis* the Federation, the Central African Asian Conference could not halt the Federation.

Federation was established and now the organizations turned their attention to acting within the framework of the Federation and doing the best they could on behalf of the community. At the August 1953 conference of the Central African Asian Conference held in Bulawayo, at which Shri Apa Pant was a distinguished guest, it became clear that now they had to work within the Federal framework: 'The Federation of the three territories, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, is now an accomplished fact. We have to think of the part we are going to play in the progress and development of these territories, and at the same time we have to consider, frankly and seriously, the difficulties that lie ahead of us.'³²

Another meeting of the Central African Asian Conference was held in Lusaka in 1954 but, like the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference, it was to disappear from the scene. Efforts at unification of Asians in the three territories petered away as Asian organizations in the three territories became immersed in problems peculiar to their own situations. The three territories were to move in separate directions and, with Federation a fact, the enthusiasm for joint action died away.

The last attempt at internal unification of Asian organizations in Rhodesia took place in 1957 with the formation of the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization. But, again in line with the historical pattern the organization had few paid-up members in local Asian organizations affiliated with it. Subscription fees from the affiliated organizations were often late in coming, the meetings were held at irregular intervals and it only came to life at critical times as perceived by the organization or by the community members. Its headquarters shifted every few years from centre to centre and the more active organizations were, as usual, the affiliated organizations from Salisbury and Bulawayo. However, it did have an ongoing legitimacy even though there was often criticism from members and non-members alike.

In the development of organizations within the Asian community a movement of great significance took place in Bulawayo and Salisbury between 1950 and 1959. This had the ingredients of a cleavage between the

³² Papers of the Central African Asian Conference, Minutes of Proceedings, 26 Aug. 1953.

older generation and the younger generation but it also had within it an ideological dispute, concerning the relationship between Asian priorities concerning its own welfare and the merging of this with the aspirations of the African nationalist organizations. It also was to take a more radical position, in demonstrations against discrimination suffered by the Asian community for example, and an active and overt participation in the African nationalist movement in Rhodesia.

In Bulawayo an informal study group was formed in 1950; the object was to gain self-awareness concerning Rhodesia and India. Thus the attempt was to fashion a proper identity as far as the Asian in Rhodesia was concerned. There was also an attempt to publish a periodical called *The Ladder* but efforts in this regard came to naught. This study group was later to be replaced by what may be called the 'Lotus Study Group' which was formed in 1953. It was composed of Asian youth, most of whom had studied together in Bulawayo, and was added to by some who had studied overseas. Its purpose was to study 'Indianness' especially through Gandhian literature, to increase self-awareness concerning Rhodesia, to awaken Asian political consciousness and to link it more directly than ever before with the aspirations of the African nationalist movement, and to publish a periodical for the transmission of these viewpoints.

As a result a periodical called *Lotus* came into existence in 1955. This periodical came to an end in 1962 because of a combination of factors: some of the keener organizers and 'prime movers' had left for study overseas, the African parties had been banned, and as a result many Asian advertisers, supporters and subscribers were shying away, with the result that the magazine was experiencing financial and readership difficulties. It ought to be mentioned here that the periodical did have support from many Jewish, as well as Asian advertisers. In its time *Lotus* had a wide-ranging circulation, became an object of criticism in Parliament, aroused much debate, was welcomed by African nationalists, and generally played a most important role in the political consciousness of the community. In Salisbury, the Asian Association in 1961 published a periodical called *Crossroads* but after the first issue nothing more came of this publishing attempt.

Besides this, organizationally, the Bulawayo Asian Youth Organization was formed from a nucleus of 'old boys' of the Government Indian School in Bulawayo, primarily for social get-togethers. But the nucleus later formed the Bulawayo Asian Association in 1954 and was seen by its members as a necessary attempt because the existing British Indian Association in Bulawayo had not called a meeting for years and because it was associated with the older generation which was probably tired of strenuous activity and which was not as keen as the younger generation to be more directly and openly in line with African nationalist aspirations. Thus it is to be seen as a rival body to the British Indian Association in Bulawayo; and it later affiliated with the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization.

In Salisbury, the Salisbury Asian Youth Organization was formed in

1959, again with much the same sentiment as the 'Lotus Study Group', and the Bulawayo Asian Youth Organization, except that the organization in Salisbury did not venture into any publication. Its membership included 'old boys' together with some who had recently arrived from study overseas. For some time there was talk of going all the way as a rival body to the existing Asian Association in Salisbury which was viewed in much the same terms as the British Indian Association in Bulawayo. However, this was abandoned in an attempt to 'penetrate' the existing Asian Association in Salisbury and work within it in order to change it more radically, carrying the older generation along. In this they succeeded; this is illustrated by the fact that at the 1960 Lancaster House (Constitutional) Conference in London the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization had been an explicit supporter of majority rule.

Mention must also be made of a primarily Asian organization in London called the Rhonya Group which existed to awaken political consciousness of Asians studying in the United Kingdom. It sent a paper to the Asian Association in Salisbury asking it not to submit evidence to the Monckton Commission, which in 1960 had come to review the Federation, as it felt that the Monckton Commission was engaged in a 'whitewash' of the Federation.

The nationalist activities of the Rhonya Group, the 'Lotus Study Group', the Bulawayo Asian Youth Organization and the Salisbury Asian Youth Organization were welcomed by African nationalist leaders.

In 1958 the Bulawayo Asian Civil Rights League was formed to fight racial discrimination against Asians in Bulawayo with more than resolutions and petitions — i.e. by active demonstration. It succeeded in eliminating some of the discrimination in Bulawayo; the areas of success are mentioned later in this paper.

In Salisbury, Asians were to play a leading part, with the other racial groups, in the Citizens Against the Colour-Bar Association which included Asians, Coloureds, some staff and students of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, African nationalist leaders, and others. In 1961 it engaged in peaceful demonstrations against discrimination in hotels, restaurants, cafes, cinemas, and swimming pools. The purely Asian organization, the Salisbury Asian Youth Organization, had also earlier conducted its own demonstrations against some public places in Salisbury to remove discrimination. The Salisbury Asian Youth Organization was to publicly repudiate the proposed new Constitution in 1960 and directly align itself with the African nationalist boycott of the 1961 Referendum held for the proposed new constitution. Asians were to play an active part in the African nationalist parties, especially the National Democratic Party (which was later banned in 1961) having earlier established contact with African nationalist leadership, especially in Bulawayo and Salisbury. After the formation of the African National Council in December 1971, Asians individually and organizationally, through local Indian Associations and the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization, established contact and tried to co-ordinate activities with the new 'public' and 'umbrella' African nationalist organization in Rhodesia.

Besides this radical political activity, there were Asians who were to play a part in the then governing party, the United Federal Party, especially both in Bulawayo and Salisbury where local branches, predominantly Asian, were established in the hope that such multiracialism was the best course for Asians and non-Asians alike. Later some Asians were to become members of the Centre Party.

Asians were also to engage in active co-operation with the Coloured community through joint organizations such as the Bulawayo Asian and Coloured Association and the Rhodesian Action Association. There was also joint *ad hoc* and organizational co-operation with the Coloureds, in, for example, the successful election of G. Ishmail (Asian) to the Salisbury City Council in 1971, the unsuccessful Parliamentary election attempt of G. T. Thornicroft (Coloured) in 1970 and the unsuccessful attempt in 1971 by P. Vagmaria (Asian) to gain a seat on the Bulawayo City Council.

POLITICS OF PERSUASION

Here are included various attempts by the Asian community to persuade whoever was felt to be the right person or group to approach in the general interests of the community. Such activities included interviews, memoranda and correspondence with Government officials, including Prime Ministers, visiting dignitaries and commissions, and meetings between the organizations and individual non-Asians who had criticized Asians or who were thought to be sympathetic to Asians. The list is too long to mention here. A few examples of this style of politics should suffice to make the point.

One of the earlier attempts was that by B. R. Naik who had petitioned Queen Victoria for protection in his trading activities in Umtali. A second early colourful attempt was in 1924 when the Revd C. F. Andrews, who was working on behalf of the Indians in South Africa, was invited to Rhodesia by the British Indian Association in Bulawayo in order to help the community in matters of immigration and trade licences. In 1949 the British Indian Association in Bulawayo carried on a lengthy correspondence with, and submitted a memorandum to, the Ministry of Internal Affairs on immigration difficulties, shortage of teachers and education generally, and building permits.³³

The Town Management Boards' Conference in Gwelo held on 21 April 1951 passed the following resolution: 'This conference urges the Municipal Association to pursue its efforts with the Government on Asiatic infiltration in matters of licence, land ownership and limited liability company shareholding.'³⁴ In response to this resolution the British Indian Association in

³³ Papers of the Bulawayo British Indian Association, Department of Internal Affairs to Chairman, Bulawayo British Indian Association, 18 Aug. 1949; and Bulawayo British Indian Association to Minister of Internal Affairs, 10 Nov. 1949.

³⁴ Papers of the Bulawayo Indian Association, Bulawayo Indian Association to the Minister of Internal Affairs, 15 June 1951.

Bulawayo submitted a memorandum to the Minister of Internal Affairs urging him not to take heed of this resolution.³⁵

In 1953, the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Sir Godfrey Huggins, in which it voiced Asian fears concerning the Federation, outlined various discriminatory practices against the community and asked the Prime Minister to do something about them.³⁶

In a memorandum to the Monckton Commission in 1960, the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization outlined various discriminatory practices directed against the community:

We hope that the Monckton Commission will note the indignities and humiliation suffered by the Asians in Southern Rhodesia and the Federation, and recommend to the Authorities concerned the need to do away with the colour-bar and racial discrimination and to embody the Fundamental Rights in the Constitution before the conference for the review of the Constitution takes place.³⁷

In a memorandum to the Select Committee on Disabilities of Eurafricans, Asians and Coloureds in Southern Rhodesia, the Bulawayo Asian Civil Rights League, an organization of young men primarily concerned with the removal of the colour-bar, gave detailed case-by-case examples of the disabilities suffered by Asians and asked the commission to see that a just and fair treatment was given to all the communities in Rhodesia.³⁸

The Constitutional Commission (under the Chairmanship of Senator Sam Whaley) set up in 1967 was not regarded as legal by the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization and the Asian Association in Salisbury; but, after a letter from the Commission to the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization asking for the views of the Asian community, a memorandum was submitted by the Asian Association in Salisbury. This memorandum made clear that submission of views did not mean recognition of the legality of the Commission. The memorandum asked, amongst other things, for fundamental rights for all Rhodesians in a constitution which would be protected by an independent judiciary.³⁹

The Rhodesian Action Association, a joint body of Asians and Coloureds, was formed in 1967 specifically to fight the proposed 'Property Owners (Residential) Protection Bill' (the intention to put forward the Bill was declared

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Papers of the Southern Rhodesia Indian Conference, Central Committee, Memorandum to the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Godfrey Huggins, 1953.

³⁷ Papers of the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organisation, Memorandum to the Monckton Commission, Jan. 1960.

³⁸ Papers of the Bulawayo Asian Civil Rights League, Memorandum to the Select Committee on Disabilities, 18 Apr. 1959.

³⁹ Papers of the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organisation, Letter to Area Chairman of Affiliated Bodies, 8 June 1967; and Papers of the Salisbury Asian Association, Memorandum to the Constitutional Commission, Aug. 1967.

in Parliament by the then Minister of Local Government in June 1967). The Rhodesia Action Association submitted a memorandum to G. Thomson, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, who had come to Rhodesia in November 1967 to try to resolve the Anglo-Rhodesian 'constitutional dispute'. In the submission criticism of many aspects of Rhodesian life was made, the proposed 'Property Bill' was attacked, and the Government was criticized for not being truly representative.⁴⁰ A draft of the Residential Property Owners (Protection Bill) 1971 was published in November 1970; the Rhodesian Action Association, joint delegations of the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization and the National Association of Coloured Peoples, and other non-Asian groups led the fight against the draft Bill.⁴¹

B. Govan, an Asian M.P., went to London in October-November 1967 to make representations to the Commonwealth Office on general conditions of life in Rhodesia and to obtain assurances that the British Government would do something about these conditions. In this trip he was joined by H. Thompson, a leader of the Coloured community, in October-November 1968. B. Govan was to undertake a similar trip to London. This time he was accompanied not only by H. Thompson but also by P. Mkudu, the then Leader of the Opposition in the Rhodesia Parliament.

In 1971 Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the British Foreign Secretary, had talks with the Rhodesian Government on the possibilities of a settlement. In a submission in November 1971, the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization argued that if a nation was ever to be built in Rhodesia it had to be on a basis of equality for all; that any settlement had to ensure that Africans had been a party to it; that without this there would be no peace in Rhodesia; that any settlement constitution must include a Declaration of Rights protected by an independent judiciary in the form of a Supreme Court; and that the ideal democratic system was one based on universal adult suffrage.⁴²

POLITICS OF DEMONSTRATION

As mentioned earlier, the Bulawayo Asian Civil Rights League was formed in 1958 to fight non-violently against racial discrimination. In a series of demonstrations in Bulawayo it was to be successful in integrating the Bulawayo City Hall, the Bulawayo Public Library and the Bulawayo Theatre. In cinemas it was unsuccessful but its most colourful triumph was in its successful boycott of the Boswell Circus. It followed the Circus wherever it went and in Gwelo the boycott was successful. In the end the Circus Manager is reported to have given £10 to the organization as a donation! These activities were conducted through joint action between Asians and Coloureds.

⁴⁰ Papers of the Rhodesian Action Association, Memorandum to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Nov. 1967.

⁴¹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 27 Nov. 1970.

⁴² Papers of the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organisation, Memorandum to Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Nov. 1971.

In Salisbury, the Salisbury Asian Youth Organization was to conduct, in 1959, a shortlived peaceful campaign to break the colour-bar in public places. This was generally unsuccessful. The Citizens Against The Colour-Bar Association, in which Asians had a leading role, was to have more success in its demonstrations but more of this in a later section.

Generally speaking, demonstrations and boycotts have been the activity of the younger generation with tacit support from some members of the older generation.

POLITICS OF LITIGATION

This style of politics has been an important one in some critical issues but, because of the high legal costs involved, has been an infrequent activity. In the period between the Second World War and 1972, the three most important cases of organizational litigation on behalf of the community were the 'Princess Margaret Hospital Case' in 1951, the 'Swimming Pool Case', in 1961, and the 'Matopos Dam Hotel Case' in 1971.

In 1950, plans were mooted by the Salisbury City Council to shift the then existing small hospital for Asians and Coloureds situated in the central area of Salisbury to a site far out of town and for the new hospital to be part of the African facilities at Harare Hospital. The Asians and Coloureds objected to this shifting but the Municipality wanted to hold a referendum on the issue. The Government was not in agreement with the Municipality and wanted the new Asian and Coloured Hospital to be rebuilt on the existing site. A joint organization called the Asian, Coloured and Eurafrican Hospital Committee was formed to fight the Municipality on this issue. In this fight some members of the Chinese and Goan communities were also associated. An interdict was lodged against the Municipality. Ultimately the case went to the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and action was won against the Municipality. The new hospital, on the original site, was opened in 1952.⁴³

The non-violent demonstrations carried out by the Citizens Against the Colour-Bar Association had resulted in 1961 in the non-racial admission to cinemas and the Ambassador Hotel, one of the leading hotels in Salisbury. A gala dinner-dance was celebrated in the hotel by the multiracial group! But after the Citizens Against the Colour-Bar Association suffered at the hands of the counter protesters in a scuffle at the Salisbury Municipal Swimming Pool, the issue was taken up, by an arrangement between the Asian Association in Salisbury and the Citizens Against the Colour-Bar Association, by the Asian Association in Salisbury; the Municipality was taken to court on the grounds that it could not use ratepayers' money to build a public facility and deny entry to any ratepayers. It seems that the Municipality

⁴³ *Thornicroft v. Salisbury City Council*, 1951(1) S.A. 99.

misjudged the mood then and did not think that the Asian Association in Salisbury would ever take the matter to court even though the Asian Association had given notice of such a possibility. Eventually it was taken to court under the name of S. N. Mehta, Secretary of the Asian Association in Salisbury, who won the case in the High Court of Rhodesia; on appeal from the Municipality the case was eventually won in 1962 in the Federal Supreme Court, and the Municipal Swimming Pool was opened for non-racial admission in 1962.⁴⁴

The third most important case was resolved in the 1971 decision on the Matopos Dam Hotel near Bulawayo. The litigation concerned the refusal by a country hotel to serve liquor to Asians and Coloureds. The action against the renewal of the hotel liquor licence by the Liquor Licensing Board was taken up by the Bulawayo Asian and Coloured Association on the grounds that such refusal constituted a violation of Rhodes's Will; but the Appellate Division, sitting under Justice Beadle, was to widen the case to the advantage of the appellant, by arguing that Rhodes's Will or his personal views were not of great significance to the case. Rather, the proper consideration was whether the 'public interest' was served by the hotel refusing service to Asians and Coloureds. He concluded that under the 1969 Land Tenure Act Asians and Coloureds together with Whites were Europeans and thus were part of the relevant 'public' in the case before the Court. And especially as there was no alternative service available in the area for Asians and Coloureds, they were entitled to be given service because the licensee did not have 'the right arbitrarily to discriminate between different sections of the public on the grounds of race or colour.' The valid discrimination was one of reasonable restrictions, but:

In the instant case, by arbitrary and capricious action, the licensee had deprived on purely racial grounds the right of the Asian and Coloured people to obtain liquor on his premises. This is racial discrimination of the worst type and the Board, in the circumstances of this case, should have set its face against it.⁴⁵

The Liquor Licensing Board was accordingly directed to attach conditions to any renewal of licence to the defendant, because in law there was no explicit or implied authority for the Liquor Licensing Board to sanction or acquiesce in the kind of discrimination brought to the attention of the court.

However, whether this decision applied to urban hotels and especially hotels in areas where alternative service was available to Asians and Coloureds remained open to question. In any case Africans, who for the purpose

⁴⁴ *Mehta v. City of Salisbury*, 1962(1) S.A. 67.

⁴⁵ *The Bulawayo Asian and Coloured Association v. The Liquor Licensing Board and Armine Le Strange Furlong*, 1971(2) R.L.R. 124.

of Justice Beadle's judgement did not constitute the relevant 'public' because the affected hotel was in a European Area, could find no relief in the decision of the High Court.

POLITICS OF ALLIANCE

The term alliance is used quite loosely here to indicate Asian activities in which they were to participate in political action with non-Asians. These activities include Asians addressing meetings, particularly African nationalist movement meetings, taking out membership in African nationalist organizations in Rhodesia, joining multiracial organizations for contact and exchange of views, forming *ad hoc* committees and organizations, with the Coloureds, for example, joining 'European' political parties such as the United Federal Party and the Centre Party and organizing local branches and working within the party framework, and in general participating in multiracial organizations to fight discrimination.

Much has already been written about Asian joint action with the Coloureds in earlier sections of this article. Asians addressed rallies of African nationalist movements. A small number of Asians in the late 1950s and early 1960s took out membership cards in the African nationalist parties. Asians contributed both organizationally and financially to African nationalist causes and contributed finance, time and labour on various occasions to African charities and educational needs.⁴⁶ An African Scholarship was established at the University of Rhodesia from the African Scholarship Fund of the Hindoo Society, Salisbury; in late 1971 a sizeable sum was contributed by some Asians for scholarships to University of Rhodesia students, mainly Africans, whose Government bursaries were terminated because of their participation in a demonstration connected with the Goodman Mission to Salisbury. Earlier, Asian contribution to Nyatsime College (for Africans) had been quite substantial.

In much of the charitable and educational activities, the older generations of Asians have not been lagging — in fact they started the process. However, in terms of aligning Asian political thought and action much more directly and overtly than ever before, the work is owed to the efforts of a dedicated band from the younger generation. This process could be seen quite visibly by the late 1950s.⁴⁷ Asian direct and overt financial and organizational support for the African nationalist movement continued up to the 'silencing' of 'constitutional' African nationalist parties in the early 1960s. Thereafter until December 1971 Asian support for African nationalism became more indirect and covert. But after the formation of the 'umbrella'

⁴⁶ P. Stigger, 'Asians in Rhodesia and Kenya: A comparative political history', *Rhodesian History* (1970), I, 1-8.

⁴⁷ H. H. Patel, 'Changing Asian politics', *The Central African Examiner*, 27 Aug. 1960, 14-15; and *Crossroads*, 20 July 1960, 1.

African National Council in December 1971 Asian support for African nationalism once again became direct and overt.

In 1953, with Federation a reality, Asians were to join multiracial organizations to try to work out agreements on how best to give effect to the officially-stated policy of 'partnership'. In this effort they joined, with Europeans, Africans and Coloureds, organizations such as the Interracial Association and Capricorn Africa Society, both having similar aims.⁴⁸

Another multiracial organization in which Asians played a leading role was the Citizens Against the Colour-Bar Association, whose secretary was an Asian (H. H. Patel). This organization has already been referred to in earlier sections of this paper. Its high point was the eventual non-racial admission to the Ambassador Hotel, one of the leading hotels in Salisbury, and some cinemas in Salisbury. As a result of difficulties in entry to the Salisbury Municipal Swimming Pool, the Asian Association in Salisbury was to take the case to court and found redress in the matter.

An area of activity in which trans-racial co-operation was very necessary was in the attempts by Asians and Coloureds to gain Parliamentary and Municipal seats in Rhodesia. An Asian, B. Kiddia, held a local-government seat in Gatooma for some time. In 1965 M. Adam unsuccessfully fought for a seat on the Salisbury Municipal Council. G. Ishmail, then President of the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization, also unsuccessfully fought for a seat on the Salisbury Municipal Council in the elections in 1967; in 1971, however, he was the first Asian to gain a seat on the Salisbury Municipal Council. The *ad hoc* organization created to help him win this election was largely composed of Asians and Coloureds. But there is no doubt that he received, besides the Asian and Coloured votes, a substantial and necessary number of votes from Europeans, mainly businessmen who had known him for many years. Besides this, what had helped was an unofficial alliance made between two European candidates and the Asian candidate in the constituency.

B. Govan, an ex-President of the Southern Rhodesia Asian Organization, resigned his position in this organization in order to compete for a Parliamentary seat in 1965. According to him, some Africans had come to ask him to stand and he had accepted the 'call'. His constituency stretched from Sinoia up to the Rhodesia-Zambian border and was basically a rural constituency with some small urban centres. Most of his voters were Africans. There were not many voters in the constituency and B. Govan had won by a margin of 2 votes having polled 42 votes.

From the point of view of general public interest, the most interesting election was that fought by G. T. Thornicroft, a leader of the Coloured

⁴⁸ H. Holderness, 'The case of African X', *The Central African Examiner* [Special Report entitled *Crisis in Rhodesia*], 30 July 1960.

Community since 1931 when he was the founder-Chairman of the Coloured Community Service League. A joint *ad hoc* organization of Asians and Coloureds was set up to nominate and help elect one member of the two communities in the Rhodesian Parliament in the 1970 general election. The election was held in a 'European' constituency in which Asians and Coloureds had the right to vote and stand for election. Here it was believed that the Rhodesian Front, the governing party, was not sure of winning and had put up a 'dummy' candidate. Asians and Coloureds voted solidly for their man but he lost by a bare 40 votes. This defeat can be explained partially by absences, deaths, failure to register on the part of some members of the two communities. But the candidate and organizers were convinced that if the Centre Party had supported G. T. Thornicroft and if J. Lentell, an Independent candidate, had not stood, they could have won the election even though some of the right-wing candidates in the constituency polled votes which were just a little higher than were expected of them. The news media were quite curious and keen in following G. T. Thornicroft's election attempt because there was the definite possibility that out of the 50 'European' seats in the Rhodesian Parliament one could be won by an Asian or a Coloured. As it turned out, the Rhodesian Front was to make a clean sweep on the 'European' seats.

CONCLUSION

As was stated in the beginning of this paper, the first priority for the Asian community has been the amelioration of 'disabilities' suffered by it as a minority community in Rhodesia. This priority is understandable because it is a small community (taking into account the total population of Rhodesia), and because it has been the victim of a variety of discriminatory practices which affect its daily life pattern.

However, Asians have engaged in trans-racial alliances in order to benefit themselves and the communities with which they allied. Usually their demands have not been for special protection or privileges as a group but have been cast in terms of common citizenship, first as Empire citizens and later as Rhodesian citizens.

Individually and through Asian organizations Asians have supported African nationalist aspirations. Some were detained and restricted and some left the country. However, with the passage of time and with what they regarded as racial prejudice against, and persecution of, Asians in some of the independent African countries, the early Asian enthusiasm for African nationalism had become somewhat diluted in the late 1960s. Additionally, during the mid-1960s up to the early 1970s when African nationalist parties were banned, the prevailing political climate was seen by most Asians as not being conducive to direct and overt nationalist activity. Yet the direct and overt support for African nationalism resurfaced after the formation of the African National Council in December 1971.

Generally Asians have historically conducted their political activities in the constitutional vein. In part this emphasis on 'constitutional politics' found expression in the evidence submitted to the Pearce Commission which came to Rhodesia in 1971-2 to conduct 'the test of acceptability' for the 1971 Smith-Home Settlement Proposals. A national conference of Asian organizations was held in Salisbury to decide on the evidence to be submitted but the decision taken was that, at the national level, no opinion would be submitted because of a division of views and the matter would be left to individual organizations and persons. The Pearce Commission received 640 written views from Asians; out of these 624 were in favour of the Settlement proposals, generally with reservations, and 21 were against the settlement proposals. The Commission reported:

Those in favour (the majority) had a number of reservations. Although classed as Europeans for electoral purposes many of them complained that this was as far as it went. Humiliations suffered under racial discrimination was a common theme: 'Being Asian is like being between Kariba and the Deep Blue Sea. Not accepted by either the white or the black.' Most witnesses accepted the Proposals as a compromise, a new chance for stability and for dismantling discrimination, a possibility of progress for all, or at least an improvement on the present impasse. The removal of sanctions weighed heavily with some of the more well-to-do businessmen, who favoured the Proposals for economic reasons. Some feared precipitate majority rule and referred to the position of Asians in East Africa. The few, predominantly the younger members of the Community, who rejected the Proposals were prompted by distrust of the Government, a sense of injustice for the African, the lack of external guarantees, and the absence of any real change of heart amongst the Europeans.⁴⁹

The 1961 Constitution had given all the communities (European, African, Asian and Coloured) of Rhodesia the power to block any changes in the 'especially entrenched' clauses of the constitution. This 'blocking mechanism' could be overcome if the Governor was persuaded to obtain Her Majesty's assent to any changes in the 'specially entrenched' clauses. However, if such a procedure proved fruitless a referendum was to be organized in all the communities and a majority in each of the communities voting separately was required before action could take place.⁵⁰

The 1961 Constitution was later to be replaced by the 1965 Constitution which did away with the 'communal blocking mechanism'. Under the 1969 Constitution the Asian was defined as a 'European', a European being any

⁴⁹ Great Britain, *Report of the Commission on Rhodesian Opinion under the Chairmanship of the Right Honourable the Lord Pearce* [Cmnd 4964] (London, H.M.S.O., 1972), sections 306-7, 79-80.

⁵⁰ Southern Rhodesia, *The Statute Law of Southern Rhodesia* (Salisbury, Govt Printers, 8 vols, revised edit. 1963), 1, The Southern Rhodesia (Constitution) Order in Council, 1961, sections 107-8, 58-9.

Rhodesian who was not an African.⁵¹ This was purely expediential in that the Asian and Coloured communities were so small that it would not make much difference to the political structure of the country. This new definition constitutionally allowed Asians and Coloureds the right to vote and be candidates in the 'European' area and, *theoretically*, allowed Asians and Coloureds to enjoy all the privileges enjoyed by the Europeans. However, by 1972, this 'constitutional equality' of Asians and Coloureds with Europeans had not led to any major changes in the various discriminatory practices and laws which continued to negatively affect the daily lives of Asians and Coloureds in the country.⁵²

⁵¹ Rhodesia, *The Statute Law of Rhodesia 1969*, Act to Provide for a New Constitution . . . , No. 54, section 92.

⁵² 'The twilight citizens', *Illustrated Life Rhodesia*, 18 Oct. 1972, 13-17.



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