



Hull & East Riding  
Hindu Cultural Association

May 2013

## ***Cultural Committee Report***

### ***Background***

In the October meeting of the EC in 2011, concerns were raised by a few members of the EC on behalf of some members of the association, with regards to the issue of serving of non-vegetarian meal and alcohol in the premises of the Cultural Centre. The Chairman recognised the concerns and promised to look into the way these concerns can be best addressed in order to clarify the issues for smooth running of the association in the future.

### ***Process***

Following discussions at the EC, looking at different options to deal with the issue such as electronic balloting, extra ordinary AGM etc., the matter was referred to the Board of Trustees for guidance. After lengthy discussion at the Trustees meeting, rather than having large open meeting with a serious risk of disruption and splitting the association into groups with strong views one way or the other, the recommendation was to set up a small committee – ‘Cultural Committee’ to look into the matter and report back to the Trustees for further recommendations. The aim was to look at and examine all related issues in more calm and collected way and recommend the way in which most members feel included.

The Committee had to represent the views of all sections of the community. This was accepted by the EC. The committee was then formed with a Chair and 8 other members equally split in terms of their preferred personal views. 2 to represent the Trustees, 2 from the EC, 4 from the General membership. It was easier to recruit members from the Trustees and the EC but was somewhat difficult and time consuming to get volunteers from the General membership. The process was democratic by open invitation by the Chair through general e-mail at least on 2 occasions. After a few weeks delay the following members agreed to be part of the committee which was announced at the AGM in 2012.

Tapan Mahapatra - Chair

Amulya Chaturvedi - Trustee

Rajeev Chitnis - Trustee

Hiten Thaker - EC

Uma Rajesh - EC

Suresh Nayar - General member

Ganesh Gopalakrishna - General member

Sunil Upadhyay - General member

Rajaraman - General member

The committee met at on 4 occasions over several months and following some strong debate and intense discussions examining all aspects and all options, agreed to a set of recommendations.

## **1st Meeting – 26 June 2012**

In the very first meeting - Terms of Reference (TOR) was discussed and agreed. (Copy attached)

### ***Terms of Reference***

#### ***Members***

The members of this committee are all volunteers who have agreed to be part of this committee. The volunteers represent The following groups and represent diverse views within these groups:

- Chair - Dr Tapan Mahapatra
- Trustees - Dr Amulya Chaturvedi and Dr Rajeev Chitnis
- Executive Committee - Dr Hiten Thaker, Dr Uma Rajesh
- Members - Dr Raja Raman, Dr Ganesh Gopalakrisna, Dr Sunil Upadhyay & Dr Suresh Nayar (Secretary)

#### ***Quorum***

The committee should have at least two-thirds of its members present to be quorate.

#### ***Objectives***

To discuss and recommend to the Trustees and Executive Committee of the Hull and East Riding Hindu Cultural Association, keeping in mind the sensitivities of all concerned:

1. To define the name of the building and the room where prayer is conducted.
2. To define what activity is permissible in the room where prayer is conducted and what is permissible in the rest of the building
3. To discuss the short and long term vision and impact of the recommendations made by this committee.

#### ***Time frame to report***

The committee took a view to aim to submit its report to the Trustees before the next AGM scheduled in 2013.

#### ***Core facts***

- Unity and inclusivity
- Room where prayer is conducted is sacred.

#### ***History***

The meeting was mostly devoted to discussion around the history of the association and establishment of the Cultural Centre in particular. The Chair and all the members who have been involved with the association for a considerable length of

time gave their experience and knowledge of the developments over the years mainly for the benefit of the newer members to make them aware of the facts.

The association was established in 1993 with a small group of individuals and was given the name as it stands based on the majority views then. It held various events and meetings over the years by hiring venues. In 2005 there was an opportunity to apply for charity status. After an initial deferment, and subsequent amendment of constitution, we were finally registered as a charity organisation. This meant we had to follow all the rules and regulations laid down by the Charity Commission, submit reports and annual accounts. We also needed to be inclusive (constitution amended accordingly) and welcome all. The status gave us not only the recognition but a number of financial benefits that we as an organisation have been enjoying to date.

In late 2009, after years of searching for a place of our own, we were presented with the golden opportunity to acquire the current building which then was in the hands of the Masonic Group. Some of us saw the potential, moved fast and with the support of the members grabbed the opportunity. We felt that the building was fit for our purpose, affordable within our reach and in due course prove to be a perfect place that we were all looking for a while.

After our initial meetings with the owners where 4 of us met them and had gentleman's agreement on a price, we held an extra- ordinary AGM on 29 Nov 2009 in the building itself whilst still as Masonic Lodge with the permission of the owners for everyone to see the facilities before agreeing and pledging donations to purchase the building. The excitement was there to be experienced. Looking at the facilities available we discussed, voted and agreed to go ahead with the purchase on the building on the basis of being the place to be a community Centre with a place for worship downstairs and the hall, kitchen and bar facilities upstairs for a multipurpose use.

It was extremely encouraging to see at the meeting and the prior EC meeting, members coming up with pledges amounting to thousands of pounds. After a 6 week campaign in which some of us were involved, we raised enough funds to purchase the building outright rather than going for a loan.

Finally, on 12 Feb 2010 we became the legal owner of the building after completion and signing of the contract by 4 of us (holding trustees).

Prior to the actual purchase we had to have a planning permission from the Council for particular use of the building, without which we could not proceed. After discussions amongst ourselves and taking professional legal advice, we put in an application under the category of 'D2' which is for the purpose of 'Community and Leisure'. We did put in it the facilities to include 'a place for worship' in addition to all other activities that had to be taken permission for such as, singing, dancing, music, film shows, community events, private events including bar facilities with timing specified as per rules. After a period of few weeks of anxious wait when we were granted permission it was the most joyous moment for us all as we had the legal permission to go ahead on that basis.

Then came the hard task of refurbishment and developments in the building to make it fit for our use which spanned over several months.

As part of the development after discussion at various meetings in the EC and Trustees, Licensing application for running the bar was made through the specific solicitors at a significant cost. A set of regulations had to be adhered to initially as an addendum to the Constitution and later incorporated as part of the constitution by a subsequent constitution review panel and ratified by the AGM.

The amended constitution has been in place for some time now.

In July 2010 to clarify the position Trustees had sent a general guidance to all members clarifying the position (a copy attached).

Bearing in mind the sensitivities of some members following measures were put in place.

1. There will be no cooking of non-veg meals in the kitchen at any time.

However, in certain events where there is no activity in the temple downstairs non-veg meal may be allowed to be brought from outside caterers. Private functions may also avail the opportunity under those circumstances.

2. Similarly bar facilities will also be available in those circumstances if agreed by the EC and requested by private hirers.

3. Bar shutters and lockable doors were put in as one of the measures again with some expense. It will only be unlocked under certain conditions.

4. A ceiling was proposed which then put in place on top of the deities as was suggested by some to act as a barrier between the temple downstairs and function hall upstairs.

With these measures in place and following Trustees guidelines, all events have run quite smoothly over the years. Members respected the views of other fellow members and acted accordingly.

## **2nd meeting – 25 September 2012**

The members concentrated on the issue of naming and defining of different areas of the building and the building as a whole.

1stly it was argued whether the entire building should be called a Temple. This was discussed originally soon after, at the time of acquiring the building. Various names were proposed. In the end after short listing we finally agreed on the name of Hindu Cultural Centre rather than Temple for 2 purposes in mind. Firstly, it would have been against the council planning permission for the use of the building for the purpose of Community and Leisure as mentioned earlier.

Secondly naming of the whole building as a Temple would have had much more stringent requirements to get the permission as a religious institution and would have potentially attracted a lot of objections from neighbours and a consequent refusal.

However, having had the permission for a place to worship which is what it is in the official document within the building calling that area as the Temple area did not have the same implications with authorities. It is a matter of fact the Masons also called the area as The Temple. We therefore continued to call that as our Temple and not the building as a whole.

However, we recognised the fact that when many new members joined the organisation they were not clear of the distinctions and have for one reason or the other have called the building as the temple.

In the committee, it was clearly felt that calling the building as a Temple was not sustainable in the long run for the reasons mentioned above. We therefore needed to define and demarcate the areas in the building where the religious activities take place and where so many other activities are allowed. It was agreed that anything beyond the main white double doors in the foyer should be regarded as the area where all the religious activities are to be performed and named accordingly.

There was further intense discussion in the committee about what should be the name of this area. The choices boiled down to two. It should either be called 'Temple' or 'Prayer Hall'. After discussing pros and cons of two different names, the committee was split on the choice of names. However finally it was decided and accepted by all that the name should remain as it is now i.e. Temple. However, it needs to be made clear to all members that which part of the building the name applies to and the building should be called as either Hindu Cultural Centre or simply be referred to as Centre rather than the temple.

### **3rd meeting – 30 October 2012**

Members decided the agenda for this meeting would be to discuss the second point on the objective list – i.e. – to define the activity that is permissible in the room where prayer is conducted (Temple) and what is permissible in the rest of the building.

Initially there was a lengthy discussion on temples in general, types of temple, activities and rituals that are allowed or not in different temples and traditions etc. It was recognised that there are numerous types of temples with varying traditions and rituals some with very strict regimes to more liberal including serving of alcohol and non-veg food as prasads in specific temples.

After discussions, following were the conclusions of the meeting:

Activities that is permissible in the Temple (downstairs) are:

1. Singing – Prayers, Bhajans
2. Dancing – is allowed for practice session, but only at the discretion of the Chairman/EC. The decorum of the temple should be maintained at all times and activity should be in keeping with a religious/cultural theme.
3. Eating food – Only Prasad given in the temple after puja. No outside food or drinks to be brought in or consumed in the temple. Infant food and drinks will be allowed to be brought in and used. It has been suggested that the Prasad may be distributed in the ante room outside the temple along with the Aarti.

4. It is not possible to monitor what anyone eats or drinks prior to entering the temple. That should be left to individual decisions.
5. Similarly, it is individual choice for ladies to come to pray irrespective of time of the month.
6. Silence to be maintained in the temple during and after prayers for benefit of people who would like to pray/ meditate quietly.
7. No foot wear to be worn
8. Devotional audio-visual presentations, lectures and talks are allowed. Audio-visual recording of the puja and other events in the temple will be allowed.
9. All people of other faiths are allowed. People of other faith can sing their devotional songs after a request to the Chairman/Exec Committee. No fundamentalist teaching/preaching of any kind would be allowed within our temple

## **4th and final meeting - 5 December 2012**

Was to discuss what was acceptable or not in the remaining part of the Cultural Centre i.e. The function hall, kitchen, committee room upstairs.

It was made clear that this part of the building is not exactly the religious part of the building and therefore the committee needs to look at all the non-religious activities that can be permitted.

The Chair gave **3 main options** to consider with a possible 4th.

1. Any licensed activities allowed at any time at member's request including non-veg meal and alcohol
2. Complete ban on the use of non-veg meal or alcohol on any occasion irrespective of whether religious or non-religious including private events.
3. A compromised, strictly managed option of complete ban at the time of religious events but on non-religious event to be allowed as and when required with appropriate permission.
4. A 4th option is open to discussion in relation to possible purchase of a separate property adjacent to the centre which could potentially resolve the issue for good.

In the current situation the first 3 options were the realistic options which needed to be discussed in detail in terms of viability, implications legally, financially, culturally and socially.

### ***Option 1***

This option was only briefly discussed and rejected unanimously by all members present at the meeting. It was felt by all that the views of the members particularly at the time of religious events must be respected.

## ***Option 2***

Complete ban of serving of alcohol and non-veg meals at any time in any event was given the most thought and a serious consideration

### ***Pros***

It will satisfy a group of members who still feel such activities contravenes the religious norms even if it is not within the temple but adjacent in the same building

### ***Cons***

#### ***Legal***

Firstly, as discussed before, the building as a whole has been licensed for use under category 'D2' for 'Community and Leisure'. To make it purely a religious centre application has to be made to the Council for its change of use. Such use will have very strict conditions attached to it and subject to objections by neighbours with no guarantee of being given permission. Therefore as it stands now we cannot completely ban the activities which have been allowed on the planning permission on a strictly religious basis. Any member not agreeing to it and being excluded will be free to bring to the attention of the Council authorities and will have a strong case for challenge legally.

Secondly, as a registered charity organisation, following the rules and regulations of the Charity Commission as an organisation we cannot be seen to be excluding members based strictly on religious grounds if they wish to avail the available facilities as part of the benefit of membership such as use of function hall for private events. If not allowed under this option, any one has the right to report to the Charity Commission with a serious risk of losing the charity status. This will mean a significant loss of financial benefit that we currently enjoy because of the status e.g. 80% discount on Council rates and 25% additional income under gift aid scheme - a substantial amount amounting to thousands of pounds.

#### ***Constitutional***

The constitution has gone through amendments after properly constituted Review Committee and approval by the AGM to include the rules and regulations under licensing laws for sale of alcohol on the premises. To change this would mean going through the same process lasting over months to revert back and losing the money spent on lawyers etc.

#### ***Financial***

We as an organisation which relies on a significant amount of finance to run our Centre for its upkeep and maintenance - being an old building and for future improvement of facilities and have contingency funds for unexpected events e.g. just for day to day expenditure £20,000 per yr. is what is required for expenses. Therefore we cannot be complacent and rely purely on membership fees which cannot be guaranteed in numbers from one yr. to another for one reason or the other. Or for that

matter on hand-outs and donations from other organisations at all times. We should be self-sufficient. We should therefore have all the options available for income generating activities / events at the Centre on a regular basis to boost the financial position now and in the future.

The income generating activities we have had so far and there are potentially so many more we can explore in the future are:

- Medical Meetings
- Private hire for birthday parties, retirements, anniversaries, Zambian nights, etc.
- Musical evenings
- Gandhi committee lectures
- Hiring of hall by dance classes with regular get-together and parties throughout the year with additional income
- There are plans for more.....

The above activities are only possible with the availability of the option of serving alcohol /non veg meal.

### ***Cultural & Social***

Currently, we are able to provide a plethora of activities and events for the benefit of our members to enjoy. These include religious, cultural and social events throughout the year. Whereas purely religious events have always been free of such use, some of the Cultural events and most Social events, these have been allowed through proper channel to avail the facilities which many members enjoy.

The activities/events that are most certainly will be axed, and moved outside if such a ban is applied are:

1. New yr. parties
2. Holi celebrations
3. Onam Celebrations
4. Musical evenings
5. Social evenings /movie night x 12
6. All private parties where such facilities are requested
7. Potentially many more (income generating)

This will be totally against our efforts to integrate our members and have social and community gatherings by holding such events.

After considering all the above reasons and intensive debate, it was decided by the Committee that although it is desirable by some members, in an attempt to be all inclusive, other options must be considered.

### ***Option 3***

A partial ban respecting the views of most, at the time of religious events and allowance at other times with appropriate consideration and approval was then considered.



The main advantage of this option was thought to be all inclusive, a principle which was set as a core fact in the initial Terms of Reference.

It had the benefit of respecting religious beliefs of most members and not allowing the facilities when not required and at the same time allowing the facilities for those events after appropriate consideration where it was required. This will cater to the varied interest of our members and our visitors and keep us united and open to outside community and organisations in general.

It was also felt that, as a number of events that we allow the facility are very popular and enjoyed by a number of our members, to axe them would be against our interest. The feeling was 'why change something which had been working well' and we have a unique formula.

After a very lengthy, intense and very engaging debates and discussions, an agreement was reached and a consensus statement and recommendations were agreed.

## ***Recommendations***

After careful consideration of all facts as described above, the following points are recommended which we as a Committee would envisage as the working rules for our Cultural Centre and Temple long into the future so long we have only the current facilities available to us. As and when more facilities become available in the future these recommendations could be reviewed.

1. It is important that the general members be clarified on the name of the building as 'Hindu Cultural Centre' and the 'Temple' is the part of the building beyond the area where we have the current sign - in order to avoid confusion in people's mind.
2. It was evident from the discussions that general members including some of the committee members were not fully aware of the steps already taken by the EC on this issue to respect the views of all - so they should be made aware.
3. After careful consideration and in keeping with the objectives and core facts set out at the outset in mind, compromise and inclusivity, the consensus among the members was that in the Cultural Centre upstairs, alcohol and non-veg food will only be allowed occasionally on certain cultural/social events (when the temple downstairs is closed).

### ***Authors:***

Tapan Mahapatra (Chair)

Amulya Chaturvedi

Rajeev Chitnis

Hiten Thaker

Uma Rajesh

Suresh Nayar  
Ganesh Gopalakrishna  
Sunil Upadhyay  
C Rajaraman