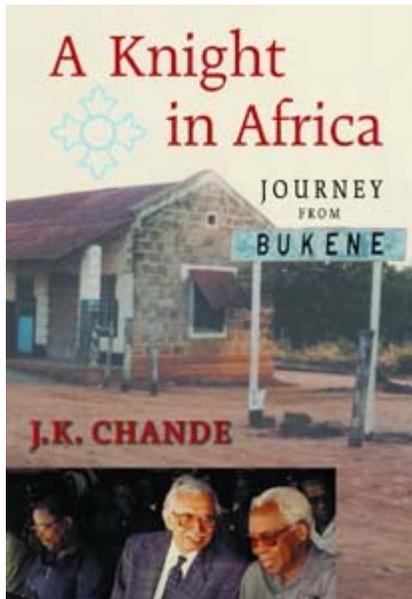


Review of "A Knight in Africa"



A KNIGHT IN AFRICA

Journey from Bukene

Chande, Jayantilal Keshavi

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Reviewed by Alain Berranger

This piece of twentieth century history of East Africa, as seen from the eyes of a famous descendant of British Indian immigrants, tells a story different than the one usually told by British historians...

Sir Andy Chande looks back on his business life and draws insightful lessons about the generation of wealth and the building of relationships and the universal business practices that African entrepreneurs, indeed entrepreneurs everywhere, need to follow: hard work, market knowledge and tight supply chain relationships. Sir Chande learns early on that he has a talent for building relationships with people from different backgrounds and interests, in a spirit of partnership and equality. He takes it as a given that business, like marriage, is family driven. His engagement and marriage is the "union between two prominent business dynasties", "the union of two of the foremost Indian families in East Africa".

He remembers his father as one to pay his workforce fairly and treat his employees with respect, with a willingness to work in genuine partnership with newly established black businesses. In 1959, when anti-Asian sentiments were strengthening, his father's funeral was a spontaneous demonstration of the "tribal, racial, and religious tolerance that has always been the bedrock of Tanganyikan society".

He describes how the British colonial system replicated domestic bureaucratic structures in what was then Tanganyika without ever asking the obvious questions: why? How does it upset the "uneasy local harmony between the races?"

Sir Andy Chande is a man of firsts: the first non-white Round Tabler in the whole world (and subsequently the first non-white World President of the Round Table movement), the first non-white president of the Dar es Salaam Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, the first Tanzanian to be Knighted, the first government board member of Tanesco, the national power utility, the first

Chairman of Air Tanzania, and the list goes on. He was also a volunteer, fundraiser and philanthropist decades before philanthropy and corporate social responsibility became norms for business leaders. In 1998, President Benjamin Mkapa refers to Sir Chande as the man that “always found time to provide relief to the needy and reducing the pains, want and suffering in our society”.

Sir Chande was also a keen observer of Mwalimu Nyerere, Tanzania’s first president, whom he calls “a humanist without a racist bone in his body” and “the visionary leader par excellence”. A fascinating feature of this book is that Sir Chande witnesses the birth of two nations on two continents: India and Tanganyika. He draws parallels between Mahatma Gandhi and Mwalimu Nyerere as men of principle and moderation. He describes Nyerere as “a man of unbending principle and a moderate, a man who would tirelessly seek to bring an end to colonialism across Africa [...], but whenever possible without recourse to violence”.

Not shy however about the failure of Ujamaa (Kiswahili coined word for Nyerere’s brand of socialism based on the concept of “togetherness”), Sir Chande also takes shots at the British colonialists “enlightened despotism” and treating Tanzania as second fiddle to Kenya and Rhodesia. Sir Chande is also critical of donor money turning Tanzanians into mendicants and at the partiality of international response (stark differences between Bosnia and Rwanda!) which “prizes European lives way above those of Africans”.

There are lighter parts to read as well. For example, the story of the Dodoma vineyards where the local commissioner of prisons ran a winery, producing an appropriately named Chateau Choky which was later dubbed Chateau Migraine! As a good Tanzanian friend of mine just returned to Canada with a recent vintage bottle gift for me, the story has somewhat encouraged me to keep the bottle in my cellar, not for aging purposes but because I’m now truly afraid to taste it!

The reader will also find gold nuggets of modern thinking such as Sir Chande’s excellent definition of sustainability: “the art of existing today in a way that safeguards tomorrow”. He is at ease with the idea of linking sustainability with poverty alleviation and convinced that “environmental protection and poverty alleviation are two sides of the very same coin”. He proposes that “economic growth is a much more reliable means of avoiding conflict than any force or sanctions that the UN might or might not deploy” or “the global market is not something you can opt into or out of. It is a phenomenon that has to be dealt with and prepared for”.

From a man in his late 70s, Sir Chande looks back to his numerous and outstanding contributions to Tanzania and is still full of a young man’s energy: “However old I was or felt, I still had an important role to play in the economic life of the country”.

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