

Katana, Shadrach Baya (1922–2006)

SAMWEL MWERI BAYA

Samwel Mweri Baya is the fifth son of Shadrach Baya Katana.

Shadrach Baya Katana was an Adventist teacher and school planter in the Kenya Coast Field.

Background

Shadrach Baya Katana was born in 1922 to non-believing Mijikenda parents, Katan Hudhumu and Sidi Thoya, in Sokoke, Kilifi County, on Kenya's coast.

Shadrach Katana was born with a club foot on his right leg. In Mijikenda culture, the deformity meant that he had to be killed in order to avoid a curse or misfortune befalling the family. Being the eldest son of the newly married couple, Katana was seen as a harbinger of bad fortune for his family.

One day his father announced loudly while drunk that he was done with the child, and he would soon kill him at a sacred tree to appease the spirits and prevent another such child being born to the family. His mother-in-law, who was visiting the new born child, overheard these unfortunate words. Seeing the innocence of the child in her arms and the serenity of his face in his sleep, she was filled with sympathy and quickly thought of a plan to escape with the child that same evening before Hudhumu could sacrifice the child.

Quietly waiting for darkness to fall and using the moonless night to advantage, she crept slowly behind the house heading to her home. To prevent the child from crying, she shoved her milkless breast into his mouth and briskly set out for the 10-mile (16 kilometers) night journey. She had not gone far when she heard Hudhumu's heavy footsteps as he chased after her. Noticing freshly dug holes where a farmer had prepared that day to plant his coconuts, she dove into one of them. The steps soon passed her, and a few minutes later she could hear her enraged son-in-law cursing as he returned home. Knowing the danger was behind her, she climbed out of the hole and continued with the rest of the journey.

Katana's grandmother raised him as her own. He grew up believing that his grandmother was actually his mother. The truth was finally revealed to him by one of his uncles, who also informed him that he belonged to



Elder Shadrach Baya Katana

another clan.

As a boy, Katana was responsible for the care of his grandfather's goats, although he really wanted to attend school. In 1939, the Thandia school was established in his area by Adventist missionaries. That same year, a great famine fell on the land, and when relief food was supplied at the school, Katana finally enrolled in the school. Four years later, he passed the exams, and progressed to Changamwe Adventist Intermediate School, where he met other young men who would later become pastors and teachers in the denomination. Upon completion of his intermediate classes, Katana successfully trained as a primary teacher level 4, the lowest grade, at the Kamagambo school in Kisii, Western Kenya, which a teachers' training college.

Employment

Katana was posted to Mere Adventist Intermediate School in Malindi in 1948, where he taught for over ten years. Many pupils who passed through his tutelage were full of praises for his way of teaching and their parents appreciated how quickly their children learned to read and write.

In 1958, Katana moved to Singwaya Missionary School, a school in which he had played a role in its establishment. In 1960, he returned to Mere, though he did not stay long before he left for personal reasons to become a trader.

Katana began trading in dried fish using his bicycle. He moved daily from Ngomeni to Malindi, a distance of twenty-eight kilometers. Then one day, word reached a Roman Catholic priest, Father O'Connor from Ireland now living in Malindi, that the Adventists had laid off one of their teachers. He decided to offer Katana an appointment as a teacher in his own newly established Catholic school in Matsangoni, which Katana accepted. Starting work at Matsangoni in 1962, the school prospered under his tenure and the enrollment increased. O'Connor recognized Katana's talent for teaching and rapport with parents that helped him convince them education was important. Wherever O'Connor wanted to establish a new school, he had Katana talk to the parents and recruit students. Along with O'Connor, Katana established many Catholic-sponsored schools within the parish's jurisdiction. Among them were Mkaomoto, Kijiwetanga, Kwa Upanga, Langobaya, Majenjeni, Magarini, and Nyari Primary in his home area of birth.¹

Return to Church Employment

After working with O'Connor for about four years, Katana accepted the call to return to teaching in the Adventist schools. He was posted to Changamwe Seventh-day Adventist Primary school in Mombasa in 1967²

Changamwe School was the oldest Adventist school in the region.³ It drew pupils from a wide variety of tribal backgrounds, a challenge that sharpened his teaching. He rose to become the head teacher in 1972, holding the position for two years. He was then reassigned to teach the lower classes (standards one to three), a job he did

diligently. It was during his time in Changamwe that the enrollment rose to over 450, the highest in the school's forty-year history. He taught at this school until 1989, when he retired on medical grounds. After a few years, enrollment at Changamwe School dropped to less than 100 pupils, forcing the board of management to close the primary school. It was replaced by a secondary school.

Katana did not leave his close family members behind in his evangelism work. His two sons also became Adventists. He preached to his sister, who had married young, but was now a widow with three sons and two daughters. She was addicted to snuff (tobacco) and had sworn never to leave it. But gradually she came to accept Jesus Christ as her Savior, overcame her addiction to snuff, and was baptized. Her children did not accept Christ until after her death when the church came to bury their mother. The eldest son accepted Christ afterwards and became an elder in the church in Kibarani near Kilifi. The rest of his siblings, except one, also became Adventists. Katana also invited the children of his distant cousins into his home, so that they could get education at the school in which he was teaching. All these embraced the faith after leaving school and became members of the church in their home communities. Two of the employees who worked for him on his farm also converted through his effort.⁴

Retirement

After leaving his teaching career in 1989, Katana retired to his home in Matsangoni. While in retirement, he privately tutored children for a small fee although many parents did not pay it. The children would improve their grades while in school and also learn about Jesus Christ and the Sabbath truth from him, which gave him great joy. Upon seeing his effort to tutor the young ones, some illiterate neighbors also approached him about conducting adult literacy classes for them, which he agreed to do. Interaction with them led some of them to follow Christ. Katana donated a plot of land from his farm for the construction of a church after several families were baptized into the faith through his preaching and praying for the sick. Starting as a Sabbath School with few families as members, this group grew into a fully-fledged church with over twenty-five adult members and more than thirty children and unbaptized members.

An old lady, who had joined the adult literacy classes, surprised her sons on her deathbed by declaring that she was an Adventist and gave instructions that when she died, the Adventists should be called to bury her. The sons respected her wish. Her unbaptized profession of faith was honored, and she was given an Adventist burial.⁵

Katana's jovial and friendly demeanor helped him attract passers-by who happened to pass through his unfenced compound. He would invite them to stop and talk, and pray for them and their problems. A woman, who had come to seek work on his farm, was invited for lunch, but she refused saying a witchdoctor had told her not to eat the kind of food which was being served to her. She was warned that if she did not adhere to this restriction, she would die. Katana told her that she would not die once he prayed for her in Jesus' name, and she

should eat in faith. She agreed to be prayed for and ate the prohibited food. She waited for the hiccups to start as had been the case whenever she flouted the witch doctor's rules. They never came. The woman accepted the Lord Jesus as her personal Savior from that day.

Shadrach Katana passed away on March 29, 2006, and was laid to rest at his Matsangoni home. He was survived by his wife, Hajiri.

NOTES

1. Hajiri Baya Katana, interview by author, February 26, 2020.
2. Ibid.
3. Founded in 1934 by pioneer missionary William C. S. Raitt (founder of the Kenya Coast Mission where he served between 1934 and 1944).
4. Hajiri Baya Katana, interview by author, February 26, 2020
5. Josiah Mwaringa, retired pastor, interview by author, February 26, 2020.

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