

TITLE PAGE

THE HISTORY OF AN

INDENTURED INDIANS

PIONEER

1983

S. CHERRY

16305

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S. Chetty.

PREFACE

This project traces the origin and experiences of my grandfather, Patchai Mannaroo Chetty, who came to South Africa as an indentured labourer. It covers the period from 1883 (birth date) to 1964 (year of his death).

It also reveals his family life and background. This information pertains, also to most of the other indentured Indians.

I have not been able to supplement my information with many documents. These have, apparently been destroyed during the 1949 riots. I have relied more on books (source list page) and interviews. However, of the latter, I am sure we are all aware of its unreliability as a source of research technique.

The documents I started with to gain information was Virasami "Pass to India" and was thus able to get information from the Department of Indian Affairs.

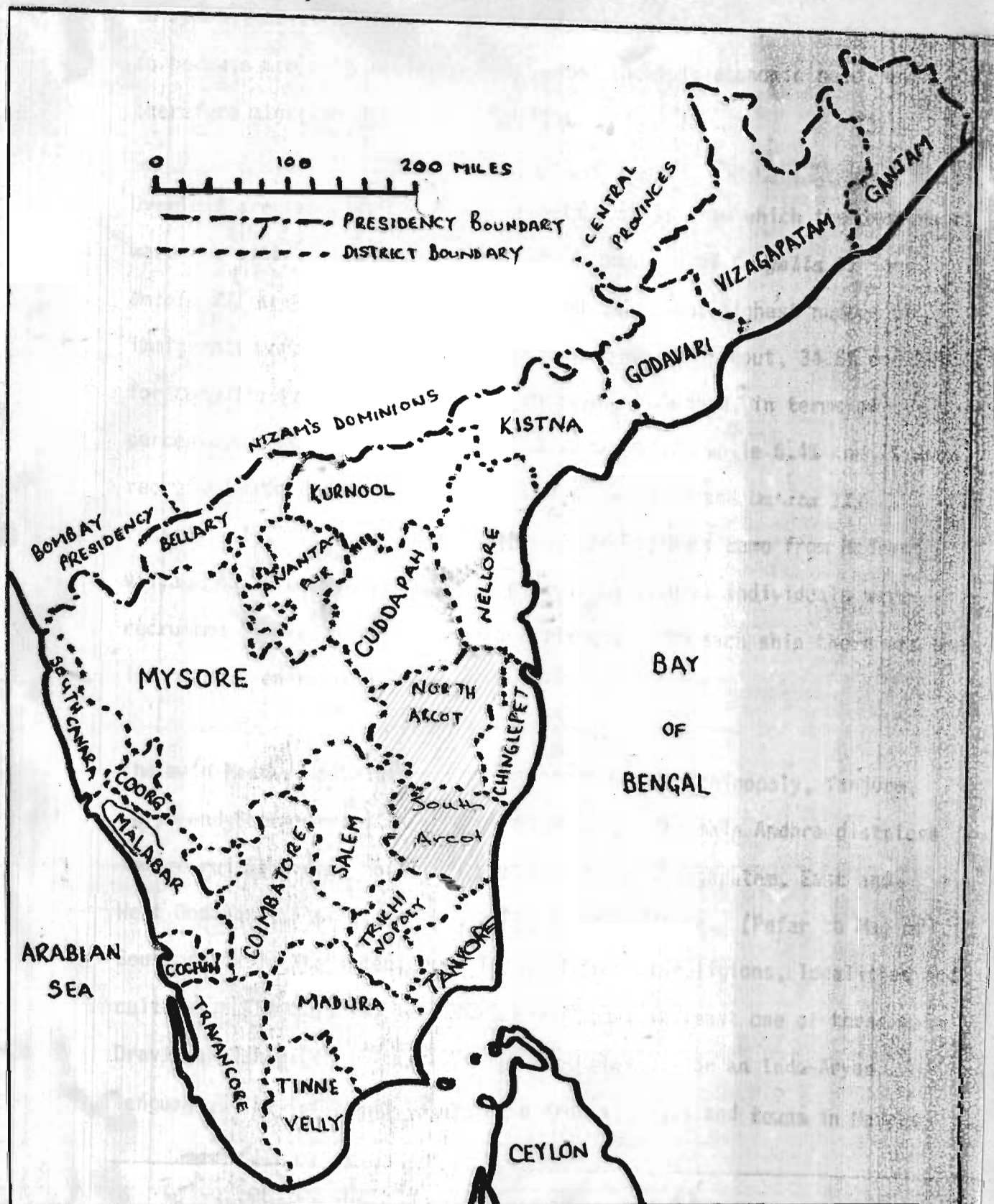
S. Chetty

INTRODUCTION

The subject under present study is Patchai Mannaroo Chetty who came to South Africa in 1891, at the age of eight. He arrived on the ship, the "S.S. Congella x". He was born in the district of North Arcot in India in 1883. Although hardened at the delicate and impressionable age of eight, in the cane fields, he has been described as being a kind, friendly, ambitious, determined, humble, yet strict, quiet, loving father and gentleman. His turban formed a link to Indian Tradition and the place of his birth.

North Arcot is part of a city of British India and is within the presidency of Madras and under the jurisdiction of the governor of that province. As we see from the map of Madras Presidency (Page 2) it is bound by the districts of Cuddapah and Nellore in the North; by Chinglepet in the East; South Arcot and Salem in the South, and by Mysore in the West. According to the annals of the Indian administration for 1871-72, the population was 2007667 and the area of North Arcot was 15146 square miles. Though it is mountainous and scenic, little vegetation was carried because of the granite and sienite present. But it is abundant in minerals- copper and iron ores. However, the narrow valleys are fertile, ^{have} rich soil and abundant water supply even in the driest seasons. Grain, cotton, sugar cane and indigo are grown here. Part of indigo is sent to the Madras market. Cotton cloth is manufactured and oil is used locally and for example export.

Map of The Madras Presidency



MADRAS PRESIDENCY - LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Copy from :-

Sookdeo, Anil's survey on : Intervued Indian Immigration
in Madal with Specific emphasis on the 1890's & the Caste-Structure amongst Indians ; No

CASTE

Although it is started in the copy of ship's list of Indian Immigrant that he belongs to the "Ceddu" caste, a counter-check in the history Department of ^{the} University of Durban-Westville, ~~reveals~~ reveals that his brother and sister belonged to the Odda caste. This is an agricultural caste. Those that do belong here are "an aboriginal race that serve as agricultural labourers and navvies". In fact (odda) is a migratory caste of earthworkers. The Odda caste is also referred to as the waddava class. Patchai has the surname of Chetty which is a caste of "bankers, shopkeepers, money lenders, etc. They correspond with the Bhaniyas of Northern India. This caste enjoys a position of cultural respects and civic power in modern India. This is the high caste. The doubt as to which caste he belonged to and the contradiction in both these castes, could imply that he came down as one of the odda caste and later assumed the surname Chetty. This was a common practice. Unless the Chetty caste could have formed part of the Ceddu caste (Documents I page)

The indentured Indians were Hindus of different religions, localities and cultures. "Majority of the Hindus spoke Tamil, Telegu and Malayalam or Indo-aryan language".² Patchai was Telegu speaking. Occupations decided ^{the} emphasis on certain castes and the deliberate exclusion of others. Those who were excluded were the "poojaries" (temple Priests)

1. Sookdeo; A; Indentured Indian - - - -

Pg. 39

2. Kuper; H; Indian People in Natal

Pg. 5

shopkeepers, beggars, policemen and palaquin bearers. Thus this explains the move to assume new names and castes.

Patchai arrived at a time when South Africa was experiencing more overtly hostile attitudes and many legislations were passed with regard to the Indians. "The latter was ostensibly due to the fact that in 1893 the colony of Natal was granted Responsible Government and to parallel this, Gandhi, soon to be champion of Indians rights, arrived in S.A."

The Indians were ^{now} posing now, a greater threat in commercial field ever. In the time of this arrival there were 598. Indians shopkeepers in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Inanda and Ladysmith. There was also another successful group of traders in Newcastle, Pietermaritzburg and Durban. This is indeed a far cry from the figures for the periods 1870 - 1885 which shows that there was a total of 48 retail stores in Durban alone. (table I). Thus we see by the beginning of 1890 and - the late seventeenth century, the Indians were looking further than the fields of sugar cane, they were striving for more than the pittance earned. Not many chose, any more to re-indenture. "Evidence is found in the Protector's report that of the 4548 Indians in receipt of their discharge certificates, none re-indentured as labourers." 2. Following this we notice that there was yet another demand for labourers, thereby leading to other ship loads of Indians, Patchai belonged to one of these.

Looking at the conditions in India in the 1880's and being an adventurous, yet gullible boy at the young age of 8, leave us in no doubt, as to the reasons for his coming to South Africa. According to Mrs. K. Chetty, Patchai's daughter, he together with his brother, Chengal Royen, (5 years)

1. Bookdeo, A.: Indentured Indian - - -

2. " " " " "

and his I-year-old sister, Ammoo ranaway from India. It is no wonder, - stories of the land "'where fowls laid diamonds,' 'money was easy', 'gold could be picked up in the streets', 'chilli trees bore gold', 'food was plentiful and where 'fruit hung in uneaten from the tree'" would certainly sound like a dreamland to any poverty - stricken, adventurous and ambitious young boy. Many in his position did the same, ^{and} who came to South Africa to escape the rigid caste system, the harsh, and hard lands of India who was undeveloped, stricken periodically by famine and ravaged by diseases. This was the picture of India in the nineteenth century. Her home industries went on the decline because of the importation of British goods and she did not have enough land to offer her people. Many did come to make money and then return, others to make money and stay, though, it should be emphasised that they did not intend to start a settlement in South Africa.

We are all aware of the main reason for indentured Indians labourers:- to work in the cane fields following the disastrous abolition of slavery in 1834. Looking for a new source of labour, South Africa became aware of the flourishing sugar plantations in Mauritius through the use of indentured Indian labour, and thus it appeared that the "(the future prosperity of Natal seemed to depend on the adoption of similar labour policy)" ¹

Indentured labourers continued, to come at irregular intervals even after, 1886, when the world depression had affected Natal Government decided to act against Indian immigration, financial aid was stopped and imposition of £3 tax was implemented to persuade indentured Indians whose indentured

1. Kuiper, H.; Indian People in Natal

2. Boyce, A.N.; A History for South African Schools

6.
had expired to return to India or force them to re-indenture. But immigration of the free Indians continued. These entered South Africa at their own expenses. In 1897, contempt for the Indians rose so high, that the government was forced to pass a law to prohibit the further entry of Indians. However importation continued until 1911 when the Indian government terminated the system of sending indentured Indians to Natal.

Although the natives outnumbered the white population, they were not employed because they did not provide a satisfactory and reliable labour force. However they did provide workers of a kind. "They were still in a stage of subsistence economy." They could own land and grow all they needed. However the hard work of the kraal were traditionally done by women and the men looked after the cattle, fought and hunted, built huts and did other tasks. They were unaccustomed to regular work and did not understand the term,

"Contract of labour." Furthermore if there were any tribal functions they would leave their work without grant of leave and without notifying the employer when they will return - Consequently leaving the employer in the lurch.

Work

Patchai was employed at the Natal Central Sugar Company Limited. In 1876 Captain Smerdon's Mt. Edgecombe Estate was sold to a Mauritian, Mr. Langlois who at once built a huge mill there which was the ^{Usine Centrale. Two years later, a company} entirely of Natal men purchased it and then, the first truly central mill to operate in the colony was the Natal Sugar Company Ltd.

This, later called the Natal Estates Limited, was the foundling to the present concern at Mt. Edgecombe.

"This was the first successful application to the sugar production Natal over the next few years." The Indians were employed to work in the mill-yard, to carry bundles of cane from the railway siding and laying them on a long tray feeder. They only possessed five yards of 3 penny calico which was divided equally between loins and cranium.

This company practised the strict^{ed} economical programme, as will ^{is} be seen as in the following extract from "Valiant Harvest." 2.

Salaries and Wages	for	1880 - 1881	-	£31.486	150
Salaries and Wages	for	1881 - 1882		8082	136
Rations	for	1880 - 1881		5615	137
Rations	for	1881 - 1882		3136	166
Interests	for	1880 - 1881		1032	178
Interests	for	1881 - 1882		856	105

However these differences do not imply that the mill's efficiency in as much as the mill earned was effected:-

Season 1880 - 1881 £24 000

Season 1881 - 1882 £26 000

From 1890 to 1908 we see that production rate of sugar is from 750 tons to 2 000 tons (Appendix I). During this period the majority employed, in the cane ^{fields}, were Indians.

Gradually after 1910, the employers began to see the advantages of using African Labour ^{as opposed} to that of Indian Labour. (Appendix II).

1. Osborn, R.E.; Valiant Harvest

2. " " " "

Pg. 75

Pg. 147.

In the period 1964 - 1965 we see that a very small percentage of Indians were employed. The case of Indian employment also declined because efforts to mechanize.

8.

CONDITIONS OF WORK AND Life Thereafter

It was not an uncommon practise for the Sugar Industry to employ boys without any age restrictions. Patchai himself was indentured at the age of 8. Unlike the coal mines which only employed boys over sixteen years of age. These two sites of employment also differed on the conditions of work. Conditions on the Sugar Estates were most horrifying. The labourers were overworked malnourished and lived in degrading and squaling conditions. The coal mines tried to offer better conditions. There were hwo however in both situations, high incidents of occupational and enviromentally related diseases. Women were also employed on the sugar planations thus degrading their position and status, and causing them to neglect their homes and children.

Patchai was under contract, firstly for three years and thereafter for another two. Later he indentured for another five years thus making himself entitled to a free passage back to India or to Crown Land to the value of the passage money. He chose the latter. Thus at the age of eighteen he was given lease of a piece of land in Clairwood. (Appendix III). A few years later he bought land in Cato Manor where he and his family lived until the 1949 riots. On this land, he cultivated vegetables and fruit with which he supplied the Durban Market.

The

The 1949 riots began on the 11 January 1949. The Africans began rioting, destroying the lands and homes of the Indians. Patchai's house was also burnt down ^{together with} ~~and~~ his source

18.
of income - his cultivations, and his documents. However none of his family had been injured and or killed.

"Even before 1948 there were clear signs of a growing dissatisfaction among some of the non-whites in connection with the political impotence and economic backwardness." ^{1.}
Their dissatisfaction grew steadily and finally broke free in January 1949. On the first of May 1951, all blacks were called to stay away from work. At the beginning of 1953, the Government passed laws to deal with the resistance and riots, - the criminal law amendment act and Public safety act. However, these acts did not stop the riots. In 1956, delegates of the different race groups held a meeting - 156 people were arrested, among them many of the leaders. The Riots began again in 1959. This was stopped in 1960 when the police were called in.

According to Mr. Patchai Kistam Chetty the rioting had started the men folk of Patchai's household had been at work and on returning, discovered that the women and children were in a panic state. Later they were taken by car to a friend's house Mr. L. Naidoo. The others had to hide in the bushes till they were fetched by the police. For the following three years the family lived at a friend's house in Westville. During this period the members of the Chetty family were able to save enough money to buy a house in 45th Avenue, Mayville. From here each of the thirteen children got married moved to areas ^{which} and these include: Chatsworth, Park Rynie, Silverglen, Merebank, Reservoir Hills and Sea Cow Lake.

Patchai Mannaroo Chatty married at the age 15 to Kaly in 1908. In 1909 their eldest child, Mannar was born. The other 12 children are Coopsamy, Manikum, Kistan Nagamah, Sandlar, Naraisamy, Govidamma, Balamma, Virasami, Kanagarathnum, Sigamoni and lastly Thevanna.

It was in this house in Mayville that Patchai passed away due to old age. He died peacefully at the age of 81 in the year 1964. His wife Kaly who entered Natal as a Free Indian died at the age of 86 in 1976, at her son's home in Silverglens. They are survived by their 13 children and many grand and great grandchildren.

This project has looked behind the system of indentured Indian labour system - the reasons & scheme. It has helped to understand the conditions of work under this system; the conditions left behind & the conditions present, when it started. It is important to us (the present Indian society) to understand these facts about these pioneers who have, although, unintentionally, have started a settlement in South Africa, thus helping many escape the conditions in India which are similar to those of the seventeenth century.

South Africa exploited the system to her own needs. Once her labour had been restored & production rapidly progressing, she tried to dispose of it, seeing it as a threat to her white population. On the other side of this unjust scale, the Indians were experiencing ~~de~~^{de}gratory conditions - poor diets; inadequate housing facilities, etc.

But, ^{against} throughout these hardships & pain, many won the battle. One such was my subject, Patchai Mannaroo Chetty who came down as an ignorant child, swallowing the stories like ^{glut}, but who has made his mark, however small in history. He established himself as a market gardener, thus building the foundations for his family members, many who have branched out into the field of teaching & tailoring. His daughters have all become housewives - few of them are also working mothers.

Thus we come to open a door into the past to understand the present & possibly the future, thanks to these pioneers, our ancestors.

Table I

Population of Natal				Retail stores in Durban Borough kept by Passenger Indians
Year	White	Indians	Free Indians	
1870	14445	6000	2	0
1875	16261	9914	10	1
1880	25271	20536	30	7
1885	36701	30159	26	40

Adapted from:-

B.B. Pachai's; 'The International Aspects of the South
African Indian Question - 1860-1871.'

B.M.25

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

COPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	<u>251</u>
Colonial Number	:	<u>47569</u>
Date of Arrival	:	<u>19-12-1891</u>
Name of Ship	:	<u>S.S. CONGELLA X</u>
Place of Registration	:	<u>-</u>
Date of Registration	:	<u>-</u>
Number in Register	:	<u>-</u>
Name	:	<u>PATCHAI</u>
Father's Name	:	<u>MANNAROO</u>
Age	:	<u>87RS</u>
Sex	:	<u>MALE</u>
Caste	:	<u>CEDDU</u>
District	:	<u>N-ARCOT</u>
Thanna/Taluq	:	<u>NAGIRI</u>
Village	:	<u>CAMARUANJALAM</u>
Height	:	<u>-</u>
Bodily Marks	:	<u>-</u>
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	<u>-</u>
Relations Accompanied	:	<u>-</u>
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	<u>VACCINATED</u>
Remarks	:	<u>-</u>

Certified a true copy.


REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE



Document II

G.P.S. 639970-1959-60-100-50.

68/3/667

5855/77

Revenue/Inkomste 200.

DUPLICATE.—DUPLIKAAT.

3742

1925

Date of Original Pass
Datum van oorspronklike pas

13. 3. 48

Birth Registration No.
Geboorte-registrasieno.

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.—UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA.



PASS TO INDIANS.—PAS VIR INDIËRS.

Born in the Province of Natal,
In die Provinsie Natal gebore.

(SEC. 97, LAW No. 25 OF 1891.)
(ARTIKEL 97, WET No. 25 VAN 1891.)

A 33404

This is to Certify that
Hierby word gesertifiseer dat dit

Colonial Born, is at liberty to dispose of
in die Kolonie gebore, vrystaan om

1/5

Services
te verhuur

Father's Name
Naam van Vader

PATCHAI

No.

47529

Mother's Name
Naam van Moeder

KALY

No.

65748

Sex
Geslag

MALE

Age
Ouderdom

34 yrs (31. 7. 59)

Height
Lengte

5' 4 1/2"

Marks
Merke

MOLE ON FACE

Office Date Stamp.—Kantoordatumstempel.

Protector of Indian Immigrants.
Beskermer van Indiese immigrante.

This document, "Pass to Indians" of my uncle, Virasami was used to assist me in providing the reference number of Patchai to obtain a 'Copy of Ship's List of Indian Immigration' from the ^{Department of} Indian Affairs.

My mother's birth certificate was also used but this document is torn & impossible to photograph.

16.

NATAL 7. 17801

Certificate of Industrial Service,

UNDER LAW 2 OF 1870, SEC. 53.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that Muniamma
 Official No. 30655, Father's Name Vardyanaswami
 Indian Immigrant, having completed her indenture, is hereby released from
 further Industrial Service.

DESCRIPTION:—

Age 9 years
 Height 30 inches
 Bodily Marks nil
 Date of Arrival in Colony April 23rd 1884
 Ship Andotis XII
 Last Employer R. A. Smith

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION,
 DURBAN, NATAL.

May 2nd 1889 L. Murray
 Protector of Immigrants.

This is a facsimile of the Certificate issued to Indians upon completion of 5 years of industrial labour. This document was referred to as "Certificate of Freedom" and failure to produce it rendered ex-indentured labourers to immediate arrest and imprisonment as vagrants. The passes and the certificates of Industrial Service were the two most important documents in possession of Indians in the early days.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Kaly, wife of Patchai; at the age of 79.

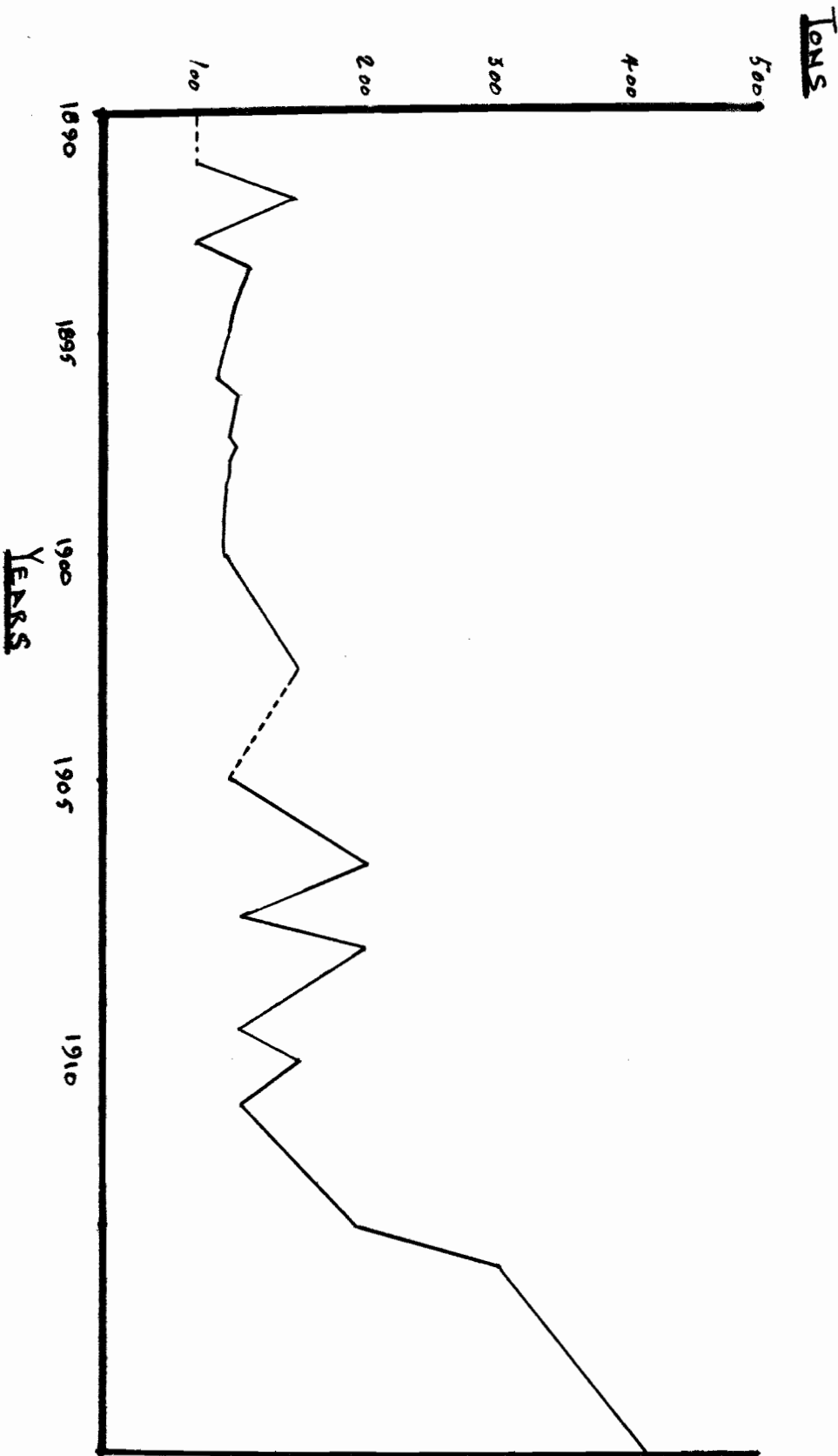


Kristan; fourth son of Patchai:-

Assisted by giving information through
an interview and supplying photographs.

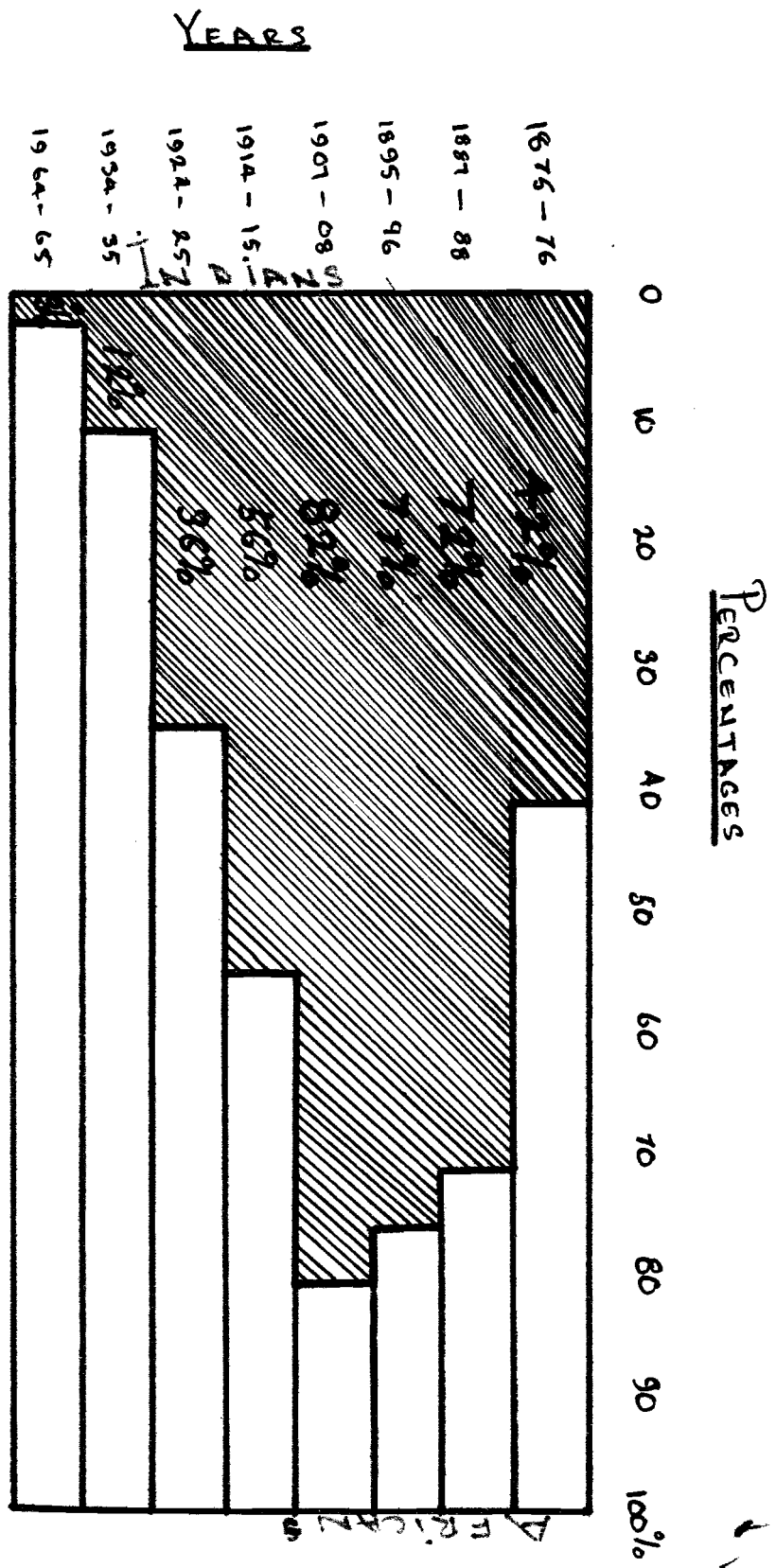
APPENDIX I

SUGAR PRODUCTION IN TONS FROM 1890 TO 1910



APPENDIX II

INDIAN AND AFRICAN LABOUR IN THE
CANE FIELDS FROM 1876 TO 1965.



APPENDIX III

INTERVIEW

SUBJECTS: Patchai's ~~Feart~~Förth Son

Mr. Kistan Chetty; Taylor, 68 years old.

QUESTION: How many years was he indentured for?

ANSWER: At first, three years and later another 2; thereafter he had gained some land in Clairwood. A few years later he bought land in Cato Manor where we stayed till everything had been destroyed in the 1949 riots.

QUESTION: Can you describe the Riots?

ANSWER: It began on 11 January 1949,, It was sudden, people were turning and Africans were burning crops and houses. We (men) were at work that day; when we came home, everything was at a stand still and the women and children were in a state of panic. We used the car to take them to a neighbour's house (Mr. L. Naidoo), the rest hid in the bushes until the police had arrived.

QUESTION: How many children did he have and can you name them.

ANSWER: 13 - 7 boys and 6 girls.

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Mannar (74 yrs) | 8. Govindamma |
| 2. Coopasamy | 9. Virasani (58 yrs) 11 |
| 3. Mankium | 10. Balamma |
| 4. Kistan (68 yrs) | 11. Kanagarathum |
| 5. Nagamma | 12. Sigmony |
| 6. Soundala | 13. Thevanna |
| 7. Nairainsamy | |

QUESTION:

What kind of person was he?

ANSWER: Kind, strict, gentleman, humble, pleasant, ambitious, determine.

QUESTION:

After the riot what had did your family do?

ANSWER: The house being burnt down with all our possessions, could offer nothing. For 3 years we stayed in Westville at a friend's house and managed to save enough to buy a house in 45th avenue in Mayville.

21.
QUESTION: What did he die of and which year?

ANSWER: He died of old age, I think he died in 1963 or 1964. I am not sure.

QUESTION: How old was your mother when she died?

ANSWER: She was about 86 years.

THANK YOU

SOURCE LIST

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