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⁵⁴⁰The immigration of Pettigrew Betty to
South Africa

1983

[R. NAIDOO] ⁵⁴⁰₇₀₁

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Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge my appreciation To The Department of Indian Affairs, ~~The Dept~~ their assistance in trying to make my research fruitful. I also wish to thank the Department of History at The University of Durban Westville, especially Professor Bbana and Mrs. Mesthane for their assistance that they always made available to me. I wish also to thank my mother-in-law, Mrs. P. Chetty (my interviewee) who spent father's hours with me relating what she knew about my subject. I am sad only because I was unable to continue my research into the roots of my own ancestors, because of the death of my grand father - Mr. K. R. Nair a month ago. He tried his best to tell me his about his past, but his unfortunate death deprived me of the opportunity of researching the roots of my family.

I must also acknowledge the immense benefit and pleasure that I experienced in the process of my research.

I also have to admit that the authenticity of my ~~as~~ research depends largely on the authenticity of the information I gathered from my interview. This type of research has its limitations because of the lack of first hand information, but nevertheless it was an immeasurable exciting one.

Jan

SOUTH AFRICA	
DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS	
REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE	
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STREEKSVERTEENWOORDIGER	
REFERENCE NUMBER	DEPARTEMENT VAN INDIËRSAKE

C E R T I F I C A T E .

COPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT.

Serial Number:	113.
Colonial Number:	36721.
Date of Arrival:	3rd OCTOBER, 1888.
Name of Ship:	"BARQUE UMVOTO"
Name:	CHENGI.
Father's Name:	Pettigan.
Age:	6 years.
Sex:	Girl.
Caste:	Vodda.
Height:	-----
Next-of-Kin:	-----
If married, to whom:	-----
District:	N. Arcot.
Taluk:	Arnee.
Village:	Karigalputhu.
Bedily Marks:	-----
Smallpox or Vaccinated:	Vaccinated.
Remarks:	Nil.

A CERTIFIED TRUE COPY:-

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
5 -4-1965
DURBAN
STREEKSVERTEENWOORDIGER
DEPARTEMENT VAN INDIËRSAKE

Make
for REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE,
DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS.

aptly

The quotation ~~may~~ stated ~~stated~~ by Dr Mabel Palmer sums up to very succinctly the reason for the coming of the first INDIANS in Natal in 1860. The coming of the Indians to Natal was no spontaneous uncontrolled movement of adventurous individuals seeking a better livelihood than their ~~own~~ country gave them. It was part of an elaborate system organized and controlled by the Government of Great Britain. But after my interview into a person who ~~who~~ enlightened me on ^{her} personal reason for her family coming to Natal, I have my ~~revo~~^{reservations} about in stating that the immigration to Natal from India did not have in their ~~mind~~ idea of a better life.

The infant colony of Natal had great mineral and agricultural possibilities. There was coal in the Northern districts. In the uplands maize showed promise of developing into an important crop. Arrow, root, indigo, cotton, and sugar ~~lead~~cane were promising crops on the coast, but sugar finally led the way to a bright future, when Edward Morewood planted the first cane in the Umlali about 35 Miles north of Durban, he initiated a period of prosperity for Natal in the sugar industry. Eight years later it is reported that Natal was producing 500 tons of sugar.

~~So all~~ the ~~no~~ ingredients for a successful industry ~~was~~ present, but one - land for sugar ~~planted~~ was sufficient, experience and money was also available. Even the first bank was opened in 1854. This is an indication of the great potential that the sugar industry offered but to be exploited to the fullest, the question of labour potential was also present in abundance. In 1850 the white population was in Natal 5000 and the zulu population was between 90 000 to 100 000. Zulus were found to be unstable and not possessed by the necessary agricultural skills.

The restoration of tribal authority by the method of segregation ~~and~~ and retrobalzation, allowed for the africans to maintain their tradihonal, subsistence economy. This policy resulted in the fact that 300 000 labourers in the colony in 1857 only 6000 africans were available. This was the psychological attitude by the whites that manual below was to be done by the non whites that created the problem of the shortage of labour.

The experience of the sugar, producinces territones indicated that the Indian labour was for superior.

This situation resulted in lengthy negotiations and petitions from the colonists to the court of directors of the British court & the British India company, the secretary of the Statute for the colonies and the government of India. Eventually in 1859 Natal was able to pass legislation for the importation of labourers from India. William Collins, postmaster general of the colony, made a study of labour conditions in Mauritius two ships, the *Kelvedere* at Calcutta and the *Truro* at Madras were chartered. The *Truro* dropped anchor at Durban on Friday, 16 November 1860 and it landed 340 Indians. This crew consisted of 197 men, 89 women and 54 children. Among these passengers were 101 Creoles, 78 Malabars, 10 Christians, 10 Muslim, 1 Rajput and 1 Marathi. Ten days later the *Belvedere* landed 318 persons, composed by 68 gardeners, 61 Brahmins, 25 warriors, 18 dairymen, 16 pig-rearers, 14 fruit-growers, 14 clerks, 8 herdsmen, 7 boatman, 6 leather workers, 5 police-man, 5 laundryman, 6 oilpressers, 4 iron-masters, 1 traders, 3 undertakers, 2 barbers, 2 hunters, 2 jewellers, 1 confectioner, 1 weaver and 5 messengers.

It can be deduced from the polygot assortment of skills, that the Indians who come to Natal were not specialists in the growing of sugar. My subject her family also left India to plant sugar which she was not trained to do. These people were absorbed by other European businesses in different parts of the colony. These labours came under contract.

Accordingly laws 13, 14, 15, were passed authorizing both Natal Government and private persons to indent labour from India. Law 13 dealt with the introduction of immigrants from territories east of the Cape of Good Hope but not from India. Law 14 dealt with the introduction

by the government to Natal of immigrants from territories east of the Cape of Good Hope but not from India. Law is enabled persons to introduce at their own expense, immigrants from India. Of these laws, law 14, the Government of Natal advanced all initial monies required of to start the importation but the employees of labour were required to repay 3/5 of the whole cost involved during the time of the first assignment which was valid of three years and a further fifth per year for 2 years on re-assignment. In section 9 of the law, every Indian immigrant labourer was at liberty to hire or dispose of his services or to change his residence after the 5 years of indenture. He was then deemed to be as free as and unfettered as any unindentured labourer in the colony. Section 24 provided for the right of return of passage. Free after ten years residence in the colony. Section 28 stated that if 24 was not wanted help the person would be entitled to grant land equal in value to the cost of the return passage. The immigrants signed no contract, but put their marks under a written statement. This tells us why and how the first Indians arrived in the colony of Natal in 1860.

(3)

I had the task of interviewing my mother-in-law, Mrs P. Chetty who told me the story of her mother-in-law who had come to Natal to work on the sugar plantations. There werelimitations in my ~~relative~~ process of collecting information as my relative was enable to furnish me with vivid details. Her husband, son my subject was a reporter for the leader and the Daily News. Mr P.M. Chetty earned great repete and also was very unbrested in the roots of his ancetors.

My subject CHENGY came to Natal with her father and brother. Her brother Moonsamy and father Pettigan left India because they were lured by the exuting prospects that the Natal Government offered.

My information gathered from Mrs P. Chetty was verifird by the certificate- a copy of the ships list of Indian Immigrants. The senal number allotted to my subject was 113 and her col= onial number was 36721. Chengi was one from a family of 4. Her father, mother, and brother Moonsamy. They in the district of N. Arcot. In Arcot her trade earned out by my subject and her family was pottery. From the account that I received, the bussiness making, clay pots was very interesting yet demanding. This family found that at the beginning bussiness was flourishing. The father owned two machines which enabled him to make the pots. Unfortunately this bussiness did not last long because Pettigan, father and Chengi found that he had to contend sith too much of competition. A neighbour of his also decided to join the trade of pottery consequently my subjects family were at a disadvantage.

This family, consisting of Pettigan the father, Moonsamy the elder brother and Chengi the only daughter, decided that the current recrutary of immigrants to South Africa was an ideal prospect to win back some of their confidence and popularity. They initially came with the idea that they could continue the trade of pottery in S.A., but on arriving realized that the demands in South Africa was for labourers in the sugar industry. The mother, who came could not pet, decided against coming to South Africa. She preferred to fight for her survival in India where she felt her life belonged to coming to a strange and evil land. This resulted in the 6 year old Chengi and Pettigan and M Moonsamy arriving in Natal on the 3 October 1888. This was 18 years after the first batch of Indians came to South Africa on the ship called " BARCUE UMVOTO".

My subjects father Mr Pettigan signed the contract according to the law 14 as an indentured labourer. It was reported to me that he did not go through any elaborate system of signing the forms of a contract. He had the simple task of placing his finger print on a particular space on the contract.

In my report, I was given to understand that the conditions on Umvolo were not pleasant... Chengo had her ordeal of being separated from her father, and brother. She had to remain mainly with the girls of her age. This she detested because being a shy girl she was bullied into doing a lot of chores on board the ship.

Other difficulties that they experience / on the ship was that they were huddled together in the ship as there was insufficient space. My interview recalls one death that was related to her by her mother - in - law. It was the death of a young girl as there not more than 4 years old who was infested with sores. At first people brushed it aside with the idea that it was measles, but later this sore became infested and the child sat in the corner of the deck scratching and moaning with pain as the infection spread. The doctor on board could not provide relief for the little girl who died a few days before the ship reached the port Natal. I was forced to believe as being the truth from my reading / on on the subject I found that disease was rampant and death frequent. Ships records show 180 deaths on board during 1860 - 1866 and 67 between 1881 - 1882. Also on the voyage, within the Indians was the constant fear of sexual assault from the fellow immigrants as well as the ship crew.

The UMVOTO arrived at the Natal port on the 3rd October 1888 Chengi Pethgan came from the caste the Vedda.

This caste system was a result of the complexity of the Indian economic and social system. Various groups of people were grouped according to locality, race, profession, or religion. The caste or Jati did not develop directly out of the four Aryan castes, or varna and the 2 system are not completely harmonious. Under the Jati system in each village there are a dozen or more castes. Each caste consists of one or more families. Each caste had a headmen or a council which makes many basic decisions regarding the behaviour of the families which belonged to it. Caste council had power to punish members of the caste or for the rules. Outcasting is the most severe punishment. Caste rules cover social behaviour, social contact marriage occupation and ritual practices. Each caste tends to follow a common occupation, such as weaving or carpentry. My subject therefore belonged to the caste which consisted of potters. Everyone in the village is well aware of the expected behaviour for each caste group and public opinion enforces the rules.

The caste divides the village into compartments. The village is also a significant unit of the country. The individual apart from belonging to a caste belongs also to a village. My subject and her family came from the village of KARIGAL-PUTHU. Village loyalty is a marked feature of Hindu life. From my interviews I gathered that the typical village is compact with dwellings huddled together to be economically self-sufficient. It was also reported that the village provides the larger framework for the individuals social horizons. My subject and family have reported to me

interview~~ee~~ that they felt very secure^⑤ and needed in their own village. The village provided for their Basic needs. It was also stated that like the caste, the village also held the loyalty of the Indian. I also learned that each village had a headman or a council to administer the traditional folk law. They saw to that customs were followed that inter-caste quarrels were settled and that the unity the village was preserved. This was the explanation that I received on asking about the type or caste and village that my subject came from. I am forced to add that today however the ease of transportation and the spread of Western Ideas have exposed the village to new ways of doing things there has been a marked growth of individualism and opportunity for the individual to make his decisions.

My interviewee also talked on the importance of agriculture in India. The major manifestations of Indian social life, are based upon religion and are structured into the pattern of agrarian life. Holidays and religious performances it was said fall into a rhythm which is seasonal.

There is an intimate connection between beliefs and the rituals which are designed to enrich agriculture. The role of the supernatural, I was given to believe, in Indian life is strengthened by the importance of the supernatural to harvests. The subject was as concerned with her relationship to nature to the God as she was with her relationship to men.

From the above information that I gathered about the village and caste that my subject and her family belonged to I can now imagine the type of change and metamorphosis that they must have undergone when they came to South Africa in 1888. When the families came to Natal, with the strong qualities of belonging and unity they expected to be kept intact as a family. This was also one of the stimulants in indentured labour. My subject when she arrived with her brother Monsamy and father Iethgan she was alarmed at the difference in values and ideology. The Natal did not try to keep the families intact, but rather separated, as it suited their convenience. My subjects and her family reported that they had asked for a small sum of money to be advanced to him to meet their immediate demands. This money was deducted from their wages. This resulted in their earning hardly any money for the first few months of service.

After my subject and her father and brother were assigned to a farm in the Mount Edgecumbe Area. This was close to the Phoenix area, where they worked on the sugar plantations. When I enquired after how these indentured labourers got to their places of employment I gathered that they had to walk the long distance to get there with the things they earned also their small belongings which meant so much to them.

I was not able to ascertain the name of my subject's employer but I gathered that when they got to their places of employment they got to face the task of building huts. Which was made from grass and wattle. The conditions of these huts were very poor especially during the rainy season. I also have reported that the family of my subjects hated these homes because they were so uncomfortable and cold.

My subjects and her brother and father all worked on the (5) fields. They were used to working in ganda. The father worked on the fields with the brother. Change my subjects at the beginning stayed at home and although she uses only 6 years old she had to work at home. The usually cooked mealie which (b) was about the best meal that they could afford. The family enjoyed the new prospect of fish. They favoured the ordinary tamatoe chutnies rice and mealie meal with dried fish or shrimp. When her brother and came back home they were exhausted. Seldomly they even noticed the meal that she prepared. A sirdar the person who was in charge the labourers on the field very rudely rang a bell to get the employees up. The employer was called a sahif and he made great demands on the times of his employees. If the employers were not working on the plantations then they had to help the sahif at his house. My subjects from her reports to my interview reported howray helped the sahif in the kitchen to wash dishes and clear onto the diningroom.

If the sahif was good the hours of work would be in accordance with the regulations. The regulations only stated that they could work for hours a day. Their working hours usually ended after 12 hours. In some rare cases the labourers were given time to cultivate the land around their huts. This was used to plant vegetables, lentils and flowers. Sometimes the labourers worked on Sundays which left them little time for family life and personal needs.

The housing conditions were very poor. The employers lived in huts that were collectively called barracks. Sanitary conditions were very poor. The area around the huts was surrounded by rubbish and human excrement. Not only were the houses in poor conditions but also the roads, pavements pathways were in a filthy state. The Indians on the estates were much criticized for their use especially of the latrines. The Whites accused them of being unhygienic and also stated that the Indians were used to squatting in any available space. This I feel was an unfair judgement against the Indians whom I feel had little option but to do what they had to. Housing was very poor and wanting. Proper sanitary system were not provided. The indentured labourers were promised a "rosy" life with the convenience but when they actually boarded on the estates, they realized just how jollible they were. The contract which they signed now being them to a specific period of service. There was little use to complain to the authorities who seldomly heeded their cries.

The sick were not attended to. Even though the contract stipulated free medical service this in effect did not operate. Hospitals were inadequately equipped. Staff was short. The sexes were put together. Infectious diseases were not separated. This system made the hospital up equally unsafe place to visit. Cremation was not all.

Some workers were able to tolerate the conditions of indenture but the weak committed suicide, some absconded while others went on strike. Heavy punishment was inflicted on the rebels. If he wanted to take his complaint to the magistrate it was impractical because they were not allowed to leave their estate without the permission of the master. This therefore did not solve the problems of the family which I dealt with. Persistent.

My subject, Chengi Pethgan married a sirdar first, but this marriage was not legal. She reports to have had a bad experience with the Sirdar and then ran off. She ultimately went and lived with her brother Moonsamy Pethgan in the household, and a divorce this time legally.

(9)

to champion the cause of the Indians in South Africa. Like Gandhi, the other Indians, especially the indentured and "passenger" Indians (free) felt very bitterly towards the legislation in South Africa. My subject and her family felt that they had a "raw deal". They shared the sentiments of their colleagues, who were lured by the enticing contracts to come to South Africa as indentured labourers.

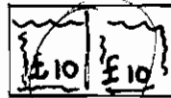
From my researchs into the roots of my family I was able to ascertain that in the Indian population possessed a very high constitution and well poised. Despite the unfair legislation that prevailed during their time and the poor housing and labour conditions they were able to endure the hardships and persevere in their struggle. This credit has to be given to them solely because of their hard and dedicated service to the South African Government in the jobs that they undertook.

Economically South Africa has to be thankful to the perseverance of the Indians who helped an infant industry to flourish to such heights. The sugar industry today in South Africa contributes a substantial amount to the economy of South Africa. The Indians also did not stagnate in one type of activity. They spread out and reached horizons in all fields of life. We must give some credit to our strong willed and determined ancestors for the success of our own lives. This quality of endurance I feel is partially inherited from our ancestors.

Pass under Act 17, 1895

No. 9308

D



PASS THE INDIAN IMMIGRANT

COLONIAL NUMBER

SEX ----- AGE ----- HEIGHT -----

BODILY MARKS -----

HE HAVING PAID THE ANNUAL LICENCE OF (£3)
THREE POUNDS STERLING, AS REQUIRED BY
SECTION 6, LAW 17, 1895.

THIS PASS EXPIRES ON THE -----

ISSUED BY THE

R.M. OFFICE -----

----- 190.

R.M.

my subject Chengi lived in Natal in the period when the Natal Government passed restrictive legislations against Indians because of persistent European agitation over the years. In 1896, the Parliamentary franchise was taken away from the Indians in Natal. This affected Chengi and his family who felt that they now had no backing and support from the Government in Natal South Africa. In fact I have gained in my interview that they felt like outsiders and intruders who left the security of their homes in India to come and be treated so shabbily by the white Government in South Africa. In the Transvaal suffrage was given withheld by law No 3 of 1885. (amended 1887) Indians were also rigidly denied entry into the Orange Free State. Act No 17 of 1895 in Natal imposed a kind of poll tax upon the indentured Indian labourers. Males paid 3 pounds per annum. In 1893 Mahatma Gandhi came to Natal on behalf of some lawsuit for a merchant. He interested himself with the Indian problem and became their champion, trying to redress grievances caused by discriminatory laws. He was distressed about poll tax and restrictions of Indians access further.

In 1907, Transvaal made the registration of all tribes in that colony & their identification by finger-print compulsory. This triggered off Gandhi's passive resistance campaigns within a year Indians were by law another law forbidden entry into T.V.I. Gandhi continued his case

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