

F A M I L Y R O O T S

via

THE COMING OF INDIANS

to

SOUTH AFRICA

by SELVAKANTHY THULKANAM

(8682E)

C O N T E N T S

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On the 14th of December 1895, the S.S. Umzinto docked at Port Natal, a harbour on the coast of Natal. This was the sixteenth voyage from India and on board were indentured Indian labourers. Courageously a widow, Mrs Lutchmi Gounden, gathered together her children and shepherded them to shore. With mixed feelings they gazed at the local inhabitants and thus began their future on foreign soil.

The first Indians came to Natal on the 16th of November 1860 aboard the Truro. "Their arrival brought almost the whole of Durban including the sugar planters and some Zulus to The Point." Their dress and mannerisms were in total contrast to those around them. They were not all farm labourers and came from many different walks of life.

These Indians were brought to Natal by courtesy of the Natal Government who needed them on the sugar-cane plantations. In 1847, Edmund Morewood, a sugar planter, planted some sugar-cane on his farm at Compensation on the Natal North Coast. By 1851 South-Africa had produced its first sugar.

1 The Natal Mercury : Extract from Paper by S.S. Singh

The biggest problem facing the sugar planters was labour. European labour was not a viable proposition and the Zulus scorned agricultural labour as it was only for women. Since indentured Indian labour was proving a great success in Mauritius, sugar farmers were now looking at this avenue of labour. In 1859 "Sugar" Kennedy, a sugar farmer from the Sea Cow Lake district wrote² the editor "bemoaning the labour position, and crying for coolies." 2

Finally the Indian Government was approached. "Permission was refused initially but agricultural workers from Madras and South India were sent as an experiment." 3

These Indians were contracted for five years as indentured labourers. (See document on condition of service). At the end of this period they could go back to India or receive their freedom. After another five years they could claim a free passage or a piece of Crown land. However only fifty Indians received land and this was very far from the markets and towns. Much to the chagrin of the White settlers many of the Indian labourers opted to stay.

2 Extract from : The Valiant Harvest, p. 10.

3 A.M. BOYCE : Europe and South Africa, p. 721.

Through their frugal ways and industrious habits these Indians advanced tremendously. "They owned or leased on short term land on the coast belt which no one else would touch and made it fit for sugar planting." 4

It was thus under such circumstances that my subject for study, the late Mr Arunachelam Gounden, came; first as an indentured labourer (a boy of nine years) and later as a passenger Indian (a young man of eighteen years.)

1. Place of Origin in India

The subject came from Madras, South India. About eighty miles from Madras is a village called Appanthangal. The postal address is:

Appanthangal - Village

Velleri Post

Arni - Taluk

N. A.

Tamilnadu

South India

for verification please check letter from the subject's relatives i.e. his brother's children

4 E.A. Walker : A History of Southern Africa, p. 522.

2. Socio-Economic Background

The subject's father was a sort of detective in the Police Force. His early death left the family destitute. The subject on his return to India was employed as a butler cum waiter at one of the Country Houses in India.

3. Reasons for Leaving Original Country

When subject left India the first time he came as an indentured labourer. He was then nine years old. He came with his widowed mother, three brothers and two sisters. Extreme poverty forced them to seek their fortune in a new country. At that time India, under the British, was experiencing a depression and there was poor work opportunities for the masses because of the industrial revolution.

When the subject came the second time, it was as a passenger Indian, under the ordinary immigration laws of the country. The first impression of South Africa had left its mark on the subject and he was ^{determined to return. Many opportunities were} available ⁱⁿ so the subject came to start his own little trade. At this time he was uncertain as to the nature of his trade.

4)a Dates of Departure to South Africa

The first and second dates of departure are uncertain.

4)b Dates of Arrival to South Africa

1st arrival : 14:12:1895

2nd arrival : sometime in 1904

5. Name of Ship and Port of Entry

1st arrival : S.S. Umzinto - Durban

2nd arrival : no information- Durban

6. First Place of Settlement : *Duff Road Area on N. Coast*
and then
Both times in Pietermaritzburg.

7. First Occupation

1st arrival : indentured labourer

2nd arrival : steward

8)a Subsequent Places of Settlement

After second visit moved from Pietermaritzburg to greater Durban. Thereafter moved to Mansfield Road, Durban. Final place of settlement was at 209 Warwick Avenue, Durban. Today it is a timber yard next to Scala Cinema, the property having being sold in 1962.

8)b Subsequent Occupations

While employed as a waiter at the Savoy Hotel, the subject together with his wife ran a small laundry business.

In 1916 the subject and his family moved to larger premises at 209 Warwick Avenue. Hygienic Laundry Services came into being and became a thriving business. The subject's abode was the first brick and tile building in Warwick Avenue and was built by the Late Mr Makan.

The living quarters was at the front of his large semi-detached cottage and the laundry was at the back. The entire family plus some outside help (other family members) was involved in the business.

9)a Marriage

The contract having expired after five years, Mrs Lutchmi Gounden decided to return to India. She first married off her two daughters in Pietermaritzburg. One of the reasons for her leaving South Africa was to get her sons married. "At this time males outnumbered females - which indeed was an odd phenomena." ⁵

Another reason could have been the introduction of the £3 tax brought about by Act 17 of 1895. This act was designed to force Indians to return to India or to re-indenture. Those who remained were obliged to pay

⁵ ~~The Indian South African, 14th October 1966, p. 15.~~

this tax which included women and children. For some it meant a meagre wage after deduction of the tax. Since women and children earned only half of a male's salary, this must have been a severe blow to Mrs Lutchmi Gounden. So in 1900 she left South Africa with her four sons and returned to India.

⁵ The Indian South African, 14th October 1966, p. 15

In India Arunachelam married Baguim, a South Indian girl. But embedded in this youth's heart was the desire to return to South Africa. Four years after he left South Africa, he arrived again with his young bride and his mother, Mrs Lutchmi Gounden. This time he came as a "free passenger Indian." In 1908 Baguim died and in 1909, the subject married Kamatchi, a local girl from Newlands, Durban.

9)b Birth of Children

Baguim, the first wife had one son in 1908, Muthusamy. Kamatchi had seven children, four daughters and three sons. My father, Ganas is the eldest son.

9)c Death of Arunachelam Gounden

In 1931, Arunachelam Gounden also known as *Govender* died tragically at the age of forty-five years. He was at this stage a very successful businessman. His previous association with the hotel industry, secured for him a large portion of trade with them. He was responsible for the laundry in many of the local hotels in and around Durban. The running of the business fell into the hands of Kamatchi and their eldest son, Ganas (a lad of thirteen).

9)d Return of Muthusamy back to India

In 1913 Muthusamy went to India with his grandmother. He was five years old and he remained in India for fourteen years. In 1927 he came back to South Africa where he is presently residing. He is one of the few members of the family who takes an interest in his relatives in India (see letters) He writes regularly and has already visited them in India three times.

10. Social, Religious and Political Activity

Social activities were limited within the close family circle. These were in the form of special functions, example weddings and religious functions.

Mr Arunachelam was a staunch Hindu of Tamil speaking origin. He was not actively engaged in politics.

In doing this research I have tried to be as accurate as possible. My key witness is Mr Muthusamy Govender (note the change from Gounden to Govender). He is a retired businessman aged seventy-five who lives in Silverglen. He had a laundry business for over fifty years under the name "Blue Bird Laundry", this name is still used today. Furthermore I experienced some difficulty in obtaining the second ship's list from the Department of Indian Affairs. I thus have no written proof of my subject's arrival the second time to South Africa.

This search into my roots has brought to light the plight of those relatives who remained in India. Discussions are underway to start a family trust fund to help them.

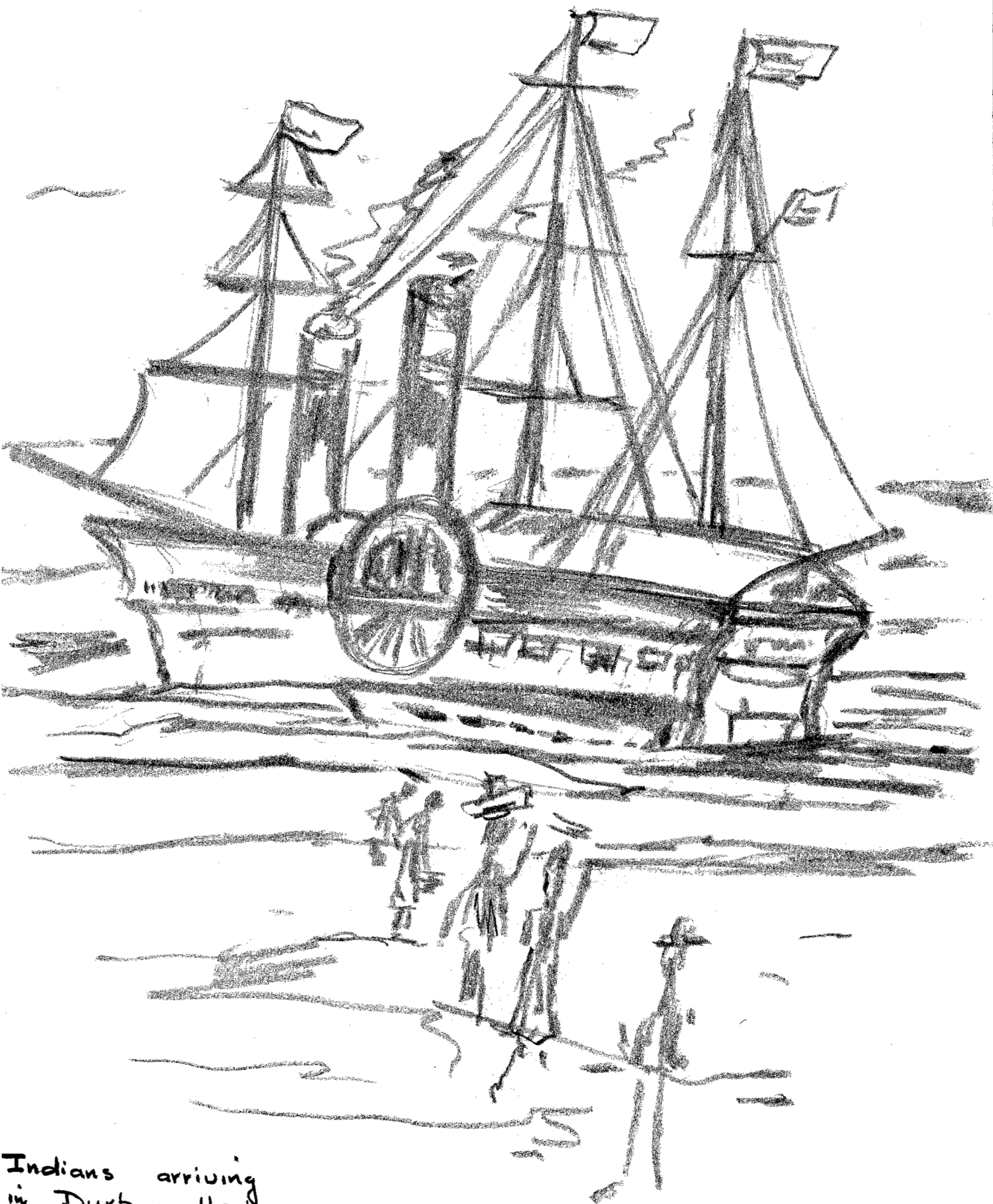
Indians in South Africa have advanced so much and under such adverse conditions that to-day they take their place proudly in the South African regime.

"As coolies, they had made the sugar industry possible, and as free men, they had played an important part in the economical development of Natal." ⁶ But then could we not say that Indians are ^{3rd} playing an important part in the economic development of South Africa. The sugar industry gave birth to a new race, namely the South African Indian.

SOURCE LIST

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3. Shields, C. : The Making of A Nation, 2nd ed.
Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter,
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4. Walker, E.A. : A history of Southern Africa, 3rd ed.
London, Longmans, 1957.
5. The Indian South African : papers presented at a
conference in Durban (14-10-1966).
6. Extracts and ^{excerpts} from seminar held by ~~excerpts~~
Mr S.S. Singh, Inspector of History in Durban - 1983.



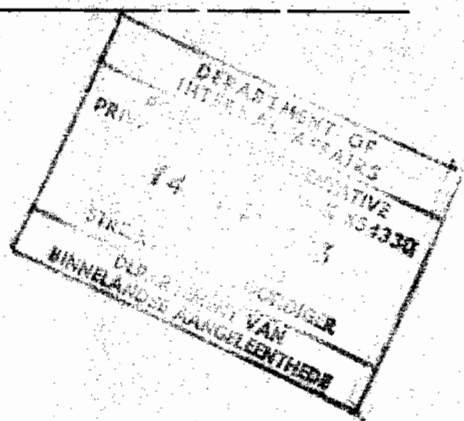
Indians arriving
in Durban Harbour

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

COPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	150.
Colonial Number	:	60088
Date of Arrival	:	14. 12. 1895
Name of Ship	:	S.S. UMZINTO 16TH
Place of Registration	:	—
Date of Registration	:	—
Number in Register	:	—
Name	:	ARUNACHELAM
Father's Name	:	CHINNIA GOUNDEN
Age	:	9 YRS
Sex	:	MALE
Caste	:	GOUNDEN
District	:	N. ARCOT
Thanna/Taluq	:	PALANI
Village	:	VELLARI
Height	:	—
Bodily Marks	:	—
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	—
Relations Accompanied	:	—
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	VACCINATED
Remarks	:	—

Certified a true copy.



[Signature]

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

Dept No.

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE
TOWN OF BOSTON TO THE BOSTON ENGINEERS

FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE BOSTON ENGINEERS

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NATAL.

Duplicate Certificate of Discharge.

SCHEDULE H. (SECTION 106).

6921

19th Oct. 1897.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that Rookia
Immigrant No. 6921 has duly completed his term of indenture
five years in terms of Indian Immigration Law No. 25, 1891, and is
released from his obligation to perform further service in this Colony under

DESCRIPTION:—

Age 51 yrs.
Height 4 Feet 11 Inches.

Scars Scars back of head

Date of Arrival in Colony July 1892

Place of Birth India

Present Employer Government

OFFICE OF THE PROTECTOR OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS,

DURBAN, NATAL.

Protector of Indian Immigrants.

10/6/1942

10/6/1942