

TITLE PAGE

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B. Paed. Arts III

Research Project

CONTENTS

PAGE

Maps and Documents

Introduction 1 - 3

Chapter 1 2 - 5

Chapter 2 6 - 10

Chapter 3 10 - 13

Chapter 4 13 - 20

Chapter 5 21

Chapter 6 22 - 23

Chapter 7 24 - 25

Chapter 8 26 - 27

Conclusion

PREFACE

This project is almost entirely based on an interview with my grandmother Mrs. S. Foolchand, daughter of my subject, Mr. Harri Gobind, my great grandfather. This interview held on a period of two days yielded much information but few documents to verify the story since all the documents were burned during the 1949 riots. The only surviving document in her possession was a recent duplicate copy of her birth certificate which can be found inside.

The document fortunately has her parents colonial number which with the reluctant help of the people at Internal Affairs department made available to me a copy of a ship list which was very useful.

Unfortunately I was not so lucky with the who's who as my subject was not listed. To verify the story given by my granny further interviews were held with various other members of the family. Probably the greatest problem that I experienced with the interviews was the language barrier and an interpreter was invaluable to me. At points I have directly transcribed the tape recordings and presented some information in the form of a dialogue. This is not my own doing since my granny presented her story to me in a very dramatic manner using direct speech dialogues and it would have lost its effect if I had reported her direct speech sections in reported speech. Finally I am indebted to all those who generously gave me advice and help and special thanks to the Department for giving me the opportunity to get to know my great grand parent better.

Identity No. 800/244879A.

4/53/1708.

Revenue/Inkomste 196.

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C.P.I. 0942855/1.

FEE PAID.
BEDRAG BETAAL.



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA.

A COPY FROM REGISTER OF BIRTHS OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE
PROVINCE OF NATAL—SCHEDULE F. LAW No. 25 OF 1891.

(This certificate is in the form of the entry as finally amended.)

REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA.

'N AFSCRIF UIT REGISTER VAN GEBOORTES VAN INDIËRIMMIGRANTE IN
DIE PROVINSIE NATAL—SKEDULE F. WET No. 25 VAN 1891.

(Hierdie sertifikaat is volgens die inskrywing soos finaal gewysig.)

1 No. Nr.	2 When Born and Where. Wanneer en waar gebore.	3 Name. Naam.	4 Sex. Geslag.	5 Parents' Names. Name van ouers.	6 Parents' Official Numbers. Offisiële nommers van ouers.	7 Indentured or Free. Ingeboek of vry.	8 Father's Occupation. Beroep van vader.	9 Parents' Residence. Woonplek van ouers.	10 When Regis- tered. Wan- neer geregi- streer.	11 Remarks, Signature of Registrar, etc. Opmerkings, handtekening van Registrateur, ens.
4591 1921	JANUARY, 1905. ISEZELA.	SOORJEE.	F.	GOBIND BHAGANDI.	62408. 52306	FREE	FARMER	UMZINTO.	21. 10. 21.	(Sub) EA ROYEPPEN.

Certified a true copy.
Gesertifiseer as 'n ware afskrif.

R. Rautan
Factor of Indian Immigrants.—Beskermer van Indiërimmigrante.

Durban

Parents' Population Reg. No.
Ouers se Persoonsnommer

Father
Vader

Mother
Moeder



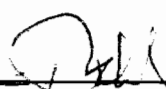
PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION

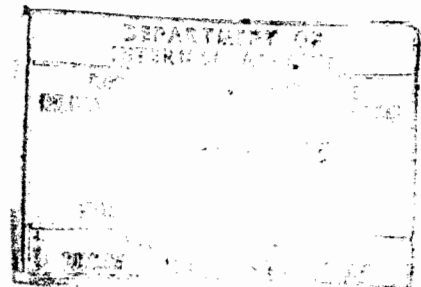
WHICH YIELDED HARRI GOBINDS COLONIAL
NUMBER WHICH HELPED IN ACQUIRING
A SHIP LIST.

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRSCOPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	193
Colonial Number	:	62408
Date of Arrival	:	22/5/1896
Name of Ship	:	S.S. PONGOLA
Place of Registration	:	FYZABAD [REFER TO MAP]
Date of Registration	:	18-3-1896
Number in Register	:	119
Name	:	GOBIND
Father's Name	:	RAMMA
Age	:	18 YRS
Sex	:	MALE
Caste	:	FRAHAR
District	:	HAMDAL
Thanna/Taluq	:	BAMGUNGA.
Village	:	BOROWLI [REFER TO MAP]
Height	:	—
Bodily Marks	:	SCAR ET. SHIN.
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	—
Relations Accompanied	:	—
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	VACCINATED.
Remarks	:	—

Certified a true copy.


REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE



INDIA

(POLITICAL AND RAILWAY)

IN 1865



INTRODUCTION

No newspaper story is thought to be properly slanted unless it deals with personalities. The most complex themes are started in terms of particular people. Television reinforces the process by appearing to lining every kind of person, famous or unknown, right into the heart of the home.

At the same time so much happens in the 20th century that even famous people get forgotten. A new generation does not even know what they looked like. Very often it has little incentive to know what they did. Any people near home are as important as Faraday, Edison and Rutherford. Our own great grandparents who braved the odds to come to South Africa influence our lives at least as much as these three "great men". Famous people may be quickly forgotten, but people who worked away from the limelight may become far more significant to other people after they are dead. The Indian indentured labourers that came to South Africa are one such people who strove in darkness away from limelight yet are remembered in the parts of thousands up to this present day.

The story of the Indians and their place in the hearts and minds of many begins with the cane farming schemes of Edward Morewood who in 1851 established the first sugar mill on the noted North Coast.

Not long afterwards numerous other mills were to appear on the Natal coast line. To prosper the mills needed a steady supply of reliable labour which they found hard to come by. African labour was found to be unreliable and they were generally regarded as lazy. At one crucial point three hundred thousand labourers were needed, however, only six thousand labourers were available to the mills. Hence a desperate need arose for alternative sources of labour.

In 1951 convict labour was tried. In addition to this in 1952 the immigration of young men from Great Britain was encouraged. In 1958 an attempt was made to try out an Amatanga labour force from Portuguese East Africa. In addition the Umzinto Sugar Company tried out Chinese and Malay labour however the Chinese were dissatisfied with the low wages. During this labour shortage in Natal, Mauritius was quite content with the labour she was receiving from India. Sugar farmers soon heard of this and desired the same system of indentured labour for Natal.

In 1959, the British Government passed Law 14 which provided that indentured labour could be recruited from India. The first batch of Indians arrived in Natal on the 16 November 1860 and between this date and 1911 when the Government of India terminated this system. one hundred and fifty two thousand, are hundred and eighty four workers came to South Africa. The majority worked in the cane fields while the rest worked on wattle plantations, coal fields and as domestic servants.

This system of labour led to exploitation and received heavy criticism. Many commented that it was meant to replace slavery which was abolished in 1807 in the British Empire. According to the contract the labourer had to work for five years for a minimum wage of ten shillings with an increase of one shilling for each year; accommodation and medical service was to be free; and he had to work a fifty four hour week. Although conditions as stipulated by the contract were satisfactory, in reality they were not.

It is against this background of a labour arises that the ignorant Indians came to South Africa with the hope of getting rich quickly. However most were met by the harsh reality of the situation - there was no gold for the picking as the white man had said in India.. The only gold was to come from the hours of back breaking hardships under the hot sun.

CHAPTER 1

The Lure of Gold

It was the spring of 1896 in Assam, India, Harri Gobind, a tall North Indian came out of his modest cottage which he shared with his elder brother, Rambharose, now deceased for six months and his childless widow, Swarup, as well as five other brothers. Two of these brothers were married and had three and four children each.

The house, though large in comparison with the others in the neighbourhood was getting cramped for space, because of the increasing family. After every two year or sooner, there would come a new arrival, screaming lustily, but received with the usual jollification and acclaim. The popular belief was that these were God's gifts and as such to be received with open arms and gladdened hearts.

The house was becoming too small to hold all its occupants. Harri Gobind showed some concern about this, though his family held twenty acres in freehold and were regarded as prosperous tea planters. He came outdoors and looked at the tea bushes on the rolling hills of his land. These unimpressive bushes yielded the tender leaves which brought in the cash when sold to the whiteman's factory.

Twenty acres of farm land would remain the same for ever, but the number of mouths to be fed would increase inexorably. The money coming from the tea bushes provided a modest standard of living, much higher than that of the local population, many of whom were in grinding poverty. Harri Gobind was addressed by the district people as "sirdar". (landlord).

Harri Gobind looked at the green expanse of his land as he stood in the hot Indian sun beating down upon him. The heat was stifling but these people were accustomed to the burning on their skin, and Harri Gobind's complexion had already reached a deep brownish tan. He was thoughtful of the future because he was a man with ambitions and initiative. He was conscious of the white factory owner's great self-possession and aplomb which money and the good life brought. He also resented his leisure and great prosperity which came about without apparent effort and little manual work. How nice it was to be called "sahib" (boss) and afford the luxuries of life - to dress immaculately, to change clothes everyday as if from an inexhaustible wardrobe. Mr. Martin Armstrong, the factory owner, had come from England only three year ago, and yet within that short space of time, he had a vast rambling bungalow erected, with spacious cool verandahs and interior furnishings the like of which Harri Gobind had never seen.

There was also some disturbing news from Calcutta which fired his imagination. A villager, Ramdass, had made the long journey of a hundred and sixty miles by bullock cart to purchase clothes and jewellery for his eldest daughter's wedding. Their agents were working vigorously to recruit labourers for South Africa.

This was a little known country at the southern tip of Africa, but news had spread world-wide about the great workings in the gold and diamond fields. It would appear that the Creator had endowed this country with numerous Eldorados and the whiteman was tunnelling into the bowels of the earth and bringing to the surface great deposits of gold and diamonds. There was money for the taking and great fortunes were being made by enterprising people. Money was in abundance - gold was the common currency and there was so much of it that some towns paved their streets with gold. No doubt there was some exaggeration, but which man with red blood in his veins would resist the lure of the pale metal?

Ramdass heard these agents address large crowds in the streets, all agog with the wonders of South Africa. The man with an empty stomach, coming from a dilapidated mud house resembling an ugly pimple on the face of the earth, or like a magnified mole hill, had his imagination wildly fired and was ready to go. Had it not been for his family responsibilities, the parental family life, surely would Ramdass have boarded the waiting ships for the unknown but inviting shores of the Eldorado.

Harri Gobind walked reminating towards the cart track, a mile away from his house and there he met Ramdass, urging his tired bullocks over the last two miles of his journey.

"Namsthee, Shri Harri Gobind Bhai" (Greetings respected Harri Gobind, my brother) said Ramdass, with the candour and intimacy common among North Indians.

"Namasthee, Shri Ramdass Chai How was your journey to Calcutta? Did you have a fine trip and did you strike some good bargains in the great city?"

"Yes, yes, Brother. there is everything there that money can buy.

"What is the news from Calcutta, Brother? How is the great City?"

"Getting bigger by the day Brother".

"But there is great news in Calcutta, brother. Large numbers of our people are taking ship to South Africa, where gold can be picked up in the streets. They have call for thousands of people to work on the cane-fields, and gold is earned brother, GOLD. It is a new country, peopled with savages who scorn to work. Honest work, brother? Look at my hands, that have toiled now for fifty years, and what have they earned here? Not enough to furnish few modest needs for my Banu's wedding, yet there ... Ah, there, there is gold for the taking." Ramdass's face glowed, and he visualised the intense excitement of holding the lovable metal tight in his hardened, calloused hands - the hand of the true son of the earth.

Harri Gobind went through the same phase of excited phantasmagoria, and he too visualised a palm full of beautiful gold pieces.

"But are these stories true, brother? Are they not the fabrications of deceits and humbugs, who want to lure people away and make slaves of them in a far - away land, away from the protection of their government and even their household gods?"

"People are rushing brother, to board these ships - besides, what have we here? Out children and our poverty. A piece of bread is hard to come by, let alone gold pieces. All the agents say the same things, and the whiteman's ships are waiting at anchor, ready to depart. In any case, a new land can offer much more than our poor, overworked land, where the crops are becoming smaller and smaller, and the mounths to be fed more and more, "said Ramdass, with the vision of Eldorado unmistakeably lightning up his face, his sunburnt, weather beaten face, with the flush of a boy given a new toy.

"Let us gather more news, brother, and then we can discuss matters," rejoined Harri Gobind, but imbued with the urge for adventure and a new life.

CHAPTER 2

The Decision

At the end of the day, with the last of the blazing sun dipping mercifully over the western hills, Harri Gobind returned home in a thoughtful mood.

The family gathered for supper, sitting on low stools, the children who had already supped were preparing for bed. Swarup, the widow, being the senior memner of the family, presided at supper. The food was appetising and threw the company into a jocular mood, but Harri Gobind had a weight upon his mind.

Unmarried, he could sever his family relationship at any time, but his whole being was rooted to tradition. This was the very soil on which he was born and nurtured and the Indian's traditional roots went deep into the soil of his country. It was not easy to force up those roots of culture and tradition and leave for foreign shores. Even at that time, numerous Indian scholars and tourists, entranced by the greatness of the West, had gone to savour of the whiteman's learning and culture. This practice was frowned upon, for the transfromation was grotesque, as these sojourners had returned with queer graces in eating, clothing and conducting themselves.

Too often they had returned with European wives, who were too independant in outlook, unlike their meek, obsequious Eastern counterparts in marriage, and it was not long before they got the better of their Eastern husbands who rapidly lost their mascilinity in the marriage relationship.

Swarup, for some time now, with the memory of Rambharose fading away after an eventful marriage, expected Harri Gobind to make overtures to take her as an unwedded wife, as was the Hindu custom. There was much in this custom, because in the absence of any sort of pension, scheme or monetary settlement on her by herlate husband, the widow was dependant upon the rest of the household for her keep. It was a wise early ligislator that had made provision for a younger brother to take into custody the widow of an elder brother.

Satyanand and Harrinand, the younger brothers of Harri Gobind, had also heard of the return of Ramdass from Calcutta and, gossip spreading fast along the grapevine, were aware of the news about South Africa. If everything, the news was getting more and more sensational as it passed from mouth to mouth and got a particular flavour according to the temperament and character of the narrator.

Satyanand opened the topic on South Africa

"Burra chai (big brother), what is this that Ramdass says about South Africa? Is there gold for the picking? How I would love to stuff my pockets with gold!"

Harri Gobind, who had relapsed after supper into his ruminations on the favoured land, was slightly taken aback at his thoughts being accurately read by his brother.

"God knows what is the truth. Yet it must be remembered that a new land has great wealth, just like our land many thousands of year ago. Look at the temples with gold-plated domes and figures in gold studded with diamonds. Did not the British steal shiploads of jewels and minerals from our land? South Africa may be such, for it is said the natural inhabitants care not for gold and minerals, but clothe themselves sparsely in skins and love nothing better than to fight and hunt. They are simple people who have not yet learnt to read and write. Yes, brother, we have used our precious metals for thousands of years, and there are too many of us to share what remains."

At the mention of gold and diamonds, Swarup's face lightened, for, poor woman, life had nothing for her now, save to work for this household to earn her keep. The gods were hard with her, widowed, left alone in the world, without issue on who she could have devoted her life.

Being a female, she did not directly butt into the conversation, but she was an interested participant.

"How far away is South Africa?" she asked unobtrusively

"Three thousand miles by the whiteman's ship," said Harri Gobind.

Instinctively, these landbound people, who had never seen the sea, were afraid. Indians offered elaborate rites to propitiate Sunder Mai (Sea mother), the goddess of the sea.

Harrinand, much younger than Harri Gobind, was attracted by the thought of riches and said,

"How nice it is to be rich and powerful like Martin Armstrong!

One is respected and has the good things in life. Why should we toil from morning to nightfall merely to satisfy the cravings of the stomach, when men like the factory boss can sit at books in a cool office and smoke one long cigar after another."

Harrinand was merely speaking out of curiosity and, being a family man, had no intention of cutting himself adrift from his native soil

Satyanand was in the same position, for nothing would make him drift from the intimacy of his immediate family circle, which experienced the simple joys of birth, the pangs of death, the concern and anxiety of sickness.

A day passed and Harri Gobind, with a mind which was normally agile, was more and more convinced that his destiny lay in South Africa. On the same day he found Swarup in the courtyard, crushing wheat in a mortar for the evening bread. She was anticipated a turn in Harri Gobind's mind, and was not unprepared for the conversation that followed. She was a Brahmin stock, the highest in the social order, a woman with neatly chiselled features, quite pretty and with a stately carriage, the birthright of the upper classes.

"Bahin" Sister, a common address for women of the speaker's age expressing a great measure of respect, "you have by now, I know, since the women have been busily talking about it, learnt much of the news about South Africa. My ancestors were born and died on this soil, but I have a great yearning to depart for that wonderful South Africa. Perhaps the fates have willed that I become a pardesi (a person who crosses the seas) and build a home in a foreign land. We cannot go against the fates. You are alone in this land, your people have all departed ... will you come with me to share a new life?"

Feminine modesty could not easily be discarded, but Swarup, who had expected Harri Gobind at some time much earlier, to have arranged for her custody, was flattered, but at the same time, frightened at the prospect of leaving her land of birth.

"Brother, you have made up your mind very suddenly. Is it so easily that you can leave that bosom of this large family which has begun to look upon you as the leader and provider? This is our land that has nourished us for centuries. Can we discard our home, our people, and our dependants so easily?"

"Satyanand and Harrinand, our brothers, are quite capable businessmen and this good land will provide them with a good living, if their numbers do not increase too fast. That is the problem, there are always too many mouths to feed. That is the trouble with our land, but our going away will mean more bread for the children."

"That is true, brother, and since I am all alone, I thank you for considering my welfare," Swarup said simply.

A load was lifted off Harri Gobind's mind, and the same evening the news was broken at the family circle. The whole family was aghast at the rapid turn of events, because the Indian family is a closely knit one and a separation is extremely rare.

"Satyanand, and Harrinand, you are capable people and you will, I am sure, fend well in the interests of the whole family. This land will easily satisfy your needs, and you will carry out responsibilities to your families," said Harri Gobind, in an attempt to assure their grief.

"But brother," said Satyanand, close to tears, "we shall always be fearful for your safety and welfare in a foreign land, so far away - you will be lost to us".

"We shall always write to one another. Look at the whitemen who have departed from their lands and are living happily here. We can do the same without fear."

The decision, once made, was confirmed. The day of departure was set two days away. Everything of the best was provided for the emigrants and long family councils were held.

The day of departure arrived. It was a very tearful parting, being a wrench of the heart to leave the ancestral home and ancestral land. The departees mounted the bullock cart and waved farewells to the whole family weeping unashamedly.

CHAPTER 3

On Board

It was a tiresome journey of a hundred and sixty miles and slow. At last Harri Gobind and Swarup arrived on the outskirts of the great city. It was three p.m. and the heat was stifling. There were thousands of people hustling and bustling in the streets, great throngs of them. Great buildings rose from the streets and the city seemed unending, vastly different from the peaceful countryside, which was clean and neat. Here there was the odour of the vast humanity and the stink of refuse collecting in the streets.

They passed through the thronging streets and came to the harbour entrances. Here were vast shack settlements, constructed rudely of jute sacking and pieces of iron. These tenements were like burrows, and the inhabitants like demoralised rats eking out a precarious existence. Coming from the comparative prosperity of the countryside, Harri Gobind had never seen such stark poverty before. Swarup, coming into a large city for the first time in her life, as Indian women are often confined to their homes and hearths, was amazed at the vastness of life here, and struck with commiseration at the sordidity of human life.

"What poor people; they are like rats!" said Swarup.

"It is better that we have made the decision to see a new, clean land with a lot of promise. It were better to be dead than to live in such misery," rejoined Harri Gobind.

They came to the docks in the evening and arrived at the agency offices. There was a mighty bustle and they were immediately ushered to the recruiting officer's desk. (at Fyzabad as the ship list meneals)

With practised eloquence there was a man extolling the virtues of the new land and painting glowing pictures of the wonderful climate, the sparse population, and the great riches to be found there. Gold and diamonds were to be picked up from the river beds and food was plentiful.

The recruiting officer noted their names, dates of birth, place of origin and the formality was completed in a few minutes. (This day when they registered had to be 18/3/1996 as the ship list reveals) They were ushered into a vast compound, choc-a-block with emigrants, resting on crude bedding comprising sacking and a few blankets. There was animated conversation and an easy cordiality flowed amongst these people bend upon a common adventure.

There were all shades of people. Many were drawn from the lower classes, escaping a life of drudgery in an overpopulated land, with life becoming more and more difficult. There were also some people of the higher castes, like Harri Gobind, drawn by a spirit of adventure.

An uneasy night followed, understandably, because all of them had wrenched themselves from a life which they had followed for countless generations. Separation from homes and families. in certain cases dependant upon them, was not easy. In the morning, three hundred souls boarded the stern wheel steamer which, with startling speed, weighed anchor - and the voyage beagn on the 19/3/1896 since they left 1 day after registering. The ship was the S.S. Pongola as the ship list indicates.

It was a small ship crowded with its human cargo, with no pretence at comfort. The accommodation was poor, the food tolerable, but since they were travelling at the expense of the South African government, with nothing to pay, the complaints that would have been vociferous were toned down, and people accepted what came with resignation. In any case, complaints were futile with the while officers who exceeded their authority in no uncertain manner, and looked at their human cargo with scant respect. Being traditionally law - abiding people, with high respect for law and order, discipline was easy.

Land was sighted and there was a great commotion as all the people bent eager heads to catch sight of the promised land. The ship came towards a mighty headland, the Bluff, looking impressive, covered with dense green vegetation. It was a mighty ridge topped with a great lighthouses. All around stretch some of the finest beaches, covered with golden sands, a sight that would impress any tourist. The surrounding land was thickly forested with sub-tropical vegetation - richness of soil and climate being evident everywhere.

The ship rode the bar and entered one of the most beautiful harbour on earth, Durban Harbour, a vast inland sea, stretching as far as the eye could see, ending in lush, tangled mangrove swamps. The ship rode easily on the almost still waters of the bay, bright bluish in the brilliant sunshine. No doubt, Nature was bountiful in this country. It still seemed to be virgin land.

The ship dropped anchor at a wooden jetty. The officers announce briskly that the voyage was over, and excited cries of thanksgiving were rendered to the for the merciful and uneventful voyage. (According to the ship list the voyage ended on 22/5/1895). With their meagre belongings, some change of clothes, effigies of their household gods and some articles of food, the emigrants were ushered to the Immigration Office presided by the Protector of Indian Immigrants.

Their registration was completed and were accepted as immigrants to a new country.

Without delay, these immigrants were assigned to various sugar farms. Harri Gobind, his wife Swarup, and thirty others were allocated to a sugar farm in Umzinto. They were taken into custody by a burly white farmer, dressed in white with a white pith helmet. His complexion was red with the heat of the sun and he lost no time in conducting his charges to three wagons drawn by eighteen oxen apiece. All eyes were agog at the novelty of the place. There were five Zulus in charge of the wagons and oxen. The Indians saw the natives for the first time. They were dusky in colour, with shiny skins, their naked torsos covered only with the loin cloth of animal skins. There was a strong odour about them as they moved with wonderful agility in spite of their great size standing about six feet in height. There was a strong odour about them as they moved with wonderful agility in spite of their great size, standing

Their bodies were muscular, with great bulging muscles of arm and leg, the sinews standing out prominently. They spoke a peculiar language with deep voices issuing from barrel - like chests, a language with sharp clicks and guttural noises. The hair was unique, the like never seen before, kinky and matted, growing in tuft and woolly in texture. They were a simple people and spoke with flashing white teeth.

The Indians boarded the wagons and the procession entered the little town of Durban. It was nothing with Calcutta, that vast sprawling metropolis. They entered the main street, West Street, which was a dusty street with a few shops on either side. The largest were those of Greenacres, Payne Bros. and John Orrs. By the standards of Calcutta, Durban was merely a village.

At the end of half-a-mile, the end of the town was reached. At the head of the three wagons rode the planter boss, Clark Morrison, in a sophisticated buggy drawn by two beautiful, spirited horses.

It took the better part of a day to reach Umzinto, the plantation of Clark Morrison. This was wild country, with the plantation the only mark of civilization encroaching upon untouched nature. It was man's attempt at curbing nature, and these Indians had to come from six thousand miles away to help in winning this fight against nature.

CHAPTER 4

A New Home

Harri Gobind and Swarup were in a kind of dream about the new surroundings. They were on virgin land, much of it still bush-covered and wild, habited sparsely, and different from the land of his forbears, which was thickly populated. There were people everywhere there; groups of them in every village and gathering place, and vast masses in the cities. Yet, strangely, here was a land faced with expanses of nothingness, unbelievably bare of people. He could not fathom such a state of barrenness or reasons for such a sparsity of population. Man did not seem to thrive in these lands.

They had now become the labourers of the white man, a come down for Harri Gobind who had been a planter in his own rights, and had been called "sidar" (boss) by his villagers. Now he was no more than a menial. Where were the gold and diamonds too? Durban was a dusty little town and unimpressive by the standards of his Indian cities. Disillusioned and sad at the gross exaggeration of the touters who had deceived him and thousands of his compatriots he became resigned to his fate.

They were allocated little rooms in a vast brick and concrete compound. There were metal framed beds, coir mattresses and coarse blankets. He would not complain much about the quarters because he had known all his life the restriction of living space even in his own home.

The workers came into contact for the first time with a well-organised and rigid regimen. Time in India was of little consequence and watches being rare, no emphasis was placed on time.

It was not uncommon for time to be disregarded as not being something that should place strictures upon a person's schedule or organisation. Time was meaningless in the vast expanse of India and nobody lost his choler over lateness. In fact, people would intentionally make an allowance of half-an-hour in predicting the starting time for an event. Lateness was proverbially an eventuality in Indian life.

Under the whiteman's organisation, things were different. Time was a monster, to be listened to, heeded and obeyed. There was a great bell, a brass founded affair with a mighty ring, that sent echoes over the whole plantation. It was rung at precise times by a young African boy, who also worked in the kitchen of the whiteman doing the chores normally reserved for women. The booms sounded at five in the morning, heralding the start of the working day; then at one o'clock to signify the taking of the midday meal. Then at two o'clock to start work again and finally at five o'clock to signify that the day's work was done and rest declared for man and beast, between both of whom there was little difference. The bell was followed with religious zeal and woe betide any laggard or late comer. The wrath of the white man was terrible to bear, and besides, the offender had his wage reduced by a few shillings. This hurt because the monthly wage was ten shillings (one rand) - not by any means a high wage.

In addition to ten shillings, each worker was given rations comprising of ten pounds of rice, the staple food of the Indian; five pounds of dhal (crushed lentils); two bars of blue soap; one gallon of cooking oil; and allowances of sundry items in small measure, required in the Indian diet. With careful husabndry, to which the Indians were accustomed, a quality that aroused the contempt of the whites who were not aware that food was a commodity highly prized in a densely populated country, and therefore something to be stored and sparingly used, such rations often carried a couple with ease for a month. Very little had to be supplemented, especially with a kitchen garden allocated to each family. Through devoted gardening in which the Indian had an acknowledged skill, each family produced an abundance of vegerables. The seeds for Indian vegetables and fruits were available in the little bazaars set up by the Indian traders on the outskirts of Durban. A few hundred of these traders had come as passenger Indians, not indentured workers like the others, and had built up flourinshing places of business. Their shops, small and poky, tended by the meek and humble traders, were nevertheless sources of a tidy income. Everything required by the Indian was available

Wages were paid in gold; the salary of both Harri Gobind and Swarup amounting to one gold sovereign. Their store of money carefully hoarded began to grow and slowly it dawned upon Harri Gobind that this could be the gold that was previously shouted and advertised as the gold being picked upon the land. Sweat was shed from the brow of a working man and woman, but the gold was well-worth working for, becoming more enchanting as the heap grew bigger by one piece at a time.

With financial stability, Swarup became placid and composed with life. One year later, she presented Harri Gobind with a boy named, Hardayal. Her happiness at successful motherhood was immense and continued to grow, as after another two years, Gasetan, another boy presented himself. In 1905 a girl, Surajranee was born (see birth certificate).

There was no happier motherhood. Even in those crude surroundings, Swarup, a member of the Brahmin caste, and intensely religious, offered thanksgiving to her numerous gods, by varied rituals accompanied by offerings of fruit and sweetmeats.

Love and care of children somewhat dispelled the rigours of physical toil for Harri Gobind and he worked with zeal to increase the measure of his security, represented by the beautiful gold pieces.

Nevertheless, having been a person of some material standing, and distinct social stature, he was unused to the ignominy to which he was subjected, firstly by the overbearing lordship of his boss and also the lower domination, but more caustic of the Madressi overseer appointed by Clark Morrison. The latter being more unbearable than the whiteman was good - naturedly tolerated a periodic slackness amongst the workers, but not so the Indian who, perhaps, considering the advantage of his status, wanted to impress his boss more and more of his ability, by driving his workers harshly to greater norms of production. The irked Harri Gobind and several other Indians who had known a higher status in their own land, with a solution that was swift and macabre. One dark night, Moonsamy the overseer, returning from rendering an account of the day's progress to the boss, as he did everyday, passed a thick growth of ornamental trees fifty yards from the boss's mansion, forming but a small part of other masses of decorative trees and shrubs, prized by white people who devoted great care to them, when he was fatally assaulted. There were no clues to the murder, which has remained an unsolved mystery, and with no names mentioned, it was regarded by the Indian workers merely as just retribution.

Harri Gobind too, being of an aggressive turn of mind and conscious of his own social standing, did not brook the censure and insults of the white man. It happened one day when Clark Morrison censured a meek, little Indian for some minor neglect and cut across his thin shoulders with his sjambok (a piece of heavy leather used as a whip). This form of discipline and punishment was standard practice amongst the white planters who had no qualms about whipping their labourers. Many of them, small in build, meek and docile by nature, and socially disregarded, took their punishment without demur. Not all rough; some were fine specimens of manhood, standing over six feet, who resented such an indignity to their persons. Harri Gobind seized the whip just as it was descending again upon the helpless back, twisted it easily from the whiteman's grasp and flung it into the bushes.

"How dare you rise against me coolie. What is your name?" spluttered the irate man, his complexion having turned into deep pink and white splotches and he stamped his foot upon the ground and could not restrain the anger churning within him. Had Harri Gobind been a lesser man, he should have been assaulted and taught a lesson for such gross impudence, unheard of by the white man.

However, his composure and stateliness of carriage tempered the white man who, although he had gnashed his teeth several times, contained his fiery anger.

"I am Harri Gobind, Sahib (boss - term of respect). We sweat for you, working from morning to nightfall though you give us the means of sustenance, yet you do not own our bodies and souls. That belongs to God to whom we humbly tender ourselves, and to no man. We are not animals and you use the whip upon us; we have feelings and emotions, aches and pains, joys and sorrows, even like you, therefore why should you beat a poor man for a simple error, even as one beats an animal. Such treatment is too hard even for an animal and I have observed how much tender care and love you bestow upon your dogs, something strange to us, who cannot dream of wasting so much good food, care and time, let alone wealth of feelings upon dogs. Yet, I cannot understand how you could be so brutal to a human", said Harri Gobind stoutly, without the trace of an emotion on his composed face.

Perhaps, the composure of the man, his size and physical well-being that removed his chances of winning in a personal fight, or the humiliation of engaging in a scuffle with a labourer so much below his social class, or the repercussions of bad treatment being reported to the Protector of Indian Immigrants, in which case he would lose the right of getting indentured labourers, whatever it was, whether one or all these factors, Clark Morrison swallowed his pride, disregarded Harri Gobind and marched off to his house.

The victim Rajha, was profuse in his thanks to Harri Gobind and hailed him as his lord and protectors, a habit of praising common to Indians. Clark Morrison had remembered, perhaps, in good time all these Indians were not cringing and servile beings whose sensibilities could be

ridden roughshod and whose personal dignity could be disregarded. Perhaps too, he recalled the swift removal of Moonsamy.

The following day, Harri Gobind and Rajhua requested leave of Clark Morrison, on the pretext of urgent family business, and their names were duly entered in the register for the striking - off of a single day's pay from the salary of ten shillings a month. There was a twinge of guilt, because these men were never absent from the fields, except on very urgent business, nothing short of a personal catastrophe.

There was an urgency in their movements and an overpowering sense of satisfaction. Each had a bag of gold pieces, which was carefully secreted about their persons. The hoard represented their savings, the result of their sweat and tears in South Africa. They arrived at the land agents' offices in Umzinto and, one being told the nature of their business they were treated with great respect. Such is the lure of money, that the white man was prepared to unbend and treat as his equals those who were in a position to increase his commission. On such occasions, a transformation comes into the faces of the superior race, who would wreath their faces into artificial smiles and conjure up a honeyed voice in place of the abrupt, harsh accents with which they addressed blacks.

"You wish to buy my land, my good friends? Come in, come in. Sit down my good men and I shall show what you can buy," said the smiling Ezra Goldstein, a Jewish land agent. It was atrange but true that a great deal of the business enterprise was in the hand of Jews, who by dint of great energy and sharp brains, were amassing great, private fortunes, The Afrikaners, the descendents of the Trekkers from the Cape, seemed to regard business with aversion, and remained religiously on the soil, enjoying the easycarefree life that the great farms offered them. They loved to be close to nature, partly as a result of their earlier upbringing in wide open spaces, close to the dangers and turmoils of a rough country. Continual warfare and confrontations with the naturally aggressive natives had developed a great spirit of independance in these people. The English were concentrated in the towns, and confined themselves to organised banking and trading leaving the field of business in the isolated dorps and villages of

the countryside to the Jews.

Ezra literally beamed:

"What are your names, my friends?"

"My name is Harri Gobind and this is my brother Rajhua - not my brother by birth, but my friendship," said Harri Gobind with a quiet dignity.

"Oh yes! brother - good, good. We are all brothers here," said Ezra genially, "There are many good pieces of land here, we shall see them in a few minutes. Land is good investment my friends - all of you should buy some land, especially since your great leader, Ghandi, had forced the government to sell land in freehold to your people. Yes my friends, now is the time to set yourselves up and leave the slavery of the fields. Who is your boss?"

"Clark Morrison," said Harri Gobind, and his tone spoke volumes to the wily Ezra.

"Ah yes! my friends," he said, "not a good man. I have heard of him - he is a big bully and he demands his work. I have heard that he is not light with the whip either - I have seen your poor friends come to town after being lashed. Better to be on your own, your own boss ... get up when you like, work when you like and sleep when you like. Yes, a great life, that of a gardener. Do you know gardening? Oh, but that's a silly question to ask; you are expert gardeners, all of you. I have seen the beautiful kitchen gardens on Clark Morrison's estates - what beautiful vegetables!" said Ezra, firing the imaginations of the Indians. Little did he know that there was no need for sales talk when Indians desired to buy land.

There was good humour all around, as Ezra invited his clients into his little horse - drawn buggy and they drove out of the town. They skirted the great estates of well-ordered farm land and moved ten miles away. Land was held by the Natal Land Colonization Company, and was being sub-divided into blocks and offered to Indians.

In expansive mood, Harri Gobind addressed Rajhua.

"Rajhua bhai, this is a great day for us - we are no longer worms and yes men.

We are persons in our own right, landlords, even though small ones. Morrison Sahib cannot boss us anymore, and we are as one man to another. Our wives will look up to us today, because we have done a great thing."

The following day, both Harri Gobind and Rajhua terminated their indentures with Martin Armstrong, and decided to set up on their own. The boss, in a mement of expansiveness, offered men and transport to his former employees to help them in their new venture. There was intense excitement and expectation at this new turn in life.

Chapter 5

Golden Trails

With ten years having passed, bringing in ten years of hard work and hard savings. Harri Gobind and Swarup had now begun to see a meaning in life. Their children were growing, with the youngest, Surajranee, turning six.

The men conversed on topic in general and then began to discuss plans about the future. At this time, land was being offered to Indians for the first time in freehold, and Harri Gobind was thinking about buying a small farm.

"Rajhau bhai, I am deciding to leave this labouring and set up on my own. I am not one who can go on indefinitely working for the whiteman. I have been used to being my own boss and looking after my own affairs, because in my own district, I have been a sidar (landlord). The whiteman takes it for granted that we are his inferiors and must listen to his swear words and commands.

Though I have not been bossed around by Morrison sahib (boss), yet it pains me when I see my fellow workers quake and shiver in his presence. He listen too much to his sidar (foreman), a wily spineless slip of a man, who has worked into the favour of the whiteman, by carrying tales that a self respecting man on honour would think can only come from women. I have a little store of gold and I shall till the soil myself.

CHAPTER 6

Ownership Proclaimed

In the early hours of the morning, while there was a hint of darkness, Swarup was bestirring, while the children lay peacefully, deep in sleep. It was a momentous day, as the links of a partial slavery were broken at last, and she would again be a person in her own right, an owner of her own, beloved tract of land, even if it was only a pocket.

She got resdy for a puja (prayer ceremony) to propitiate the household gods and ask for their blessing. She had a thari (brass plate), two pieces of camphor, some cloves, and dhar (an assortment of incense). With a goblet of water she proceeded to the sacred place about twenty yards from her front door. She placed the thari on the ground, daubed with cow dung considered sacred to Hindus. The dhar was mixed in the goblet of water; the pieces of camphor lit on the ground, and Swarup fell into a deep meditation.

Harri Gobind had bestirred himself shortly after his wife; had completed his oblations hurriedly and joined his wife. He knelt at the simple shrine and Swarup daubed some of the sacred ash from the burning camphor onto his forehead. They returned to the house and daubed the foreheads of his children in a similar manner. The children aroused themselves noisily and felt a trifle guilty because they were caught asleep on this great day.

"Swarup, indeed the gods are kind to us, for to-day I set aside my "girmit" (indenture) and I am a free man. I cannot describe to you how I feel, but you will understand because we have not been trifling people in our land. I feel a sense of greatness, I am once again a man in my own right. Many are the times, that I have been on the point of striking the whitemen for bringing on an indignity on a man of my 'izzat' (dignity). I am not a cowering, cringing coolie (labourer), being for my lifetime before I came here, a landlord and a respected member of my village council. Yet, I came as an adevnturer and my heart remained strong, especially with the new-found strength that your love and loyalty have given me. Together, we shall till the soil and reap the benefits that the gods will be please to shower upon us," he said, feelingly.

It was rare for an Indian husband to praise his wife and this must have been a momentous occasion for him.

The wagons were loaded with the household goods and building materials for the new home. Rajhua's convoy had also come up, and the little man at the head of the procession showed as much jubilation as Harri Gobind. After an hour's drive they came up to their lands and set about establishing their new homes.

A site was levelled; props of wattle wood daubed with tar to make them waterproof, were planted into the soil. Lengths of timber were nailed to the props as a base. Uprights were nailed on in quick time. The framework of the roof followed shortly and soon the entire skeleton of the house was ready. Sheets of galvanized iron were nailed to the framework. There were three little rooms and a small kitchen, completing the little domicile, which established Harri Gobind's independence. Rajhua's house was also built in about the same time. These homes were actually little hovels with a measure of dignity. To people who earned such a small salary, money had taken on a meaning and the investment on a house was made with a degree of trepidation. Credit was unheard of for labourers and everything has to be paid for in hard cash; the simple fact of a big payment bringing a jolt to the heart of the purchaser. The building of a mansion like that of the whiteman was something that only came out of story books for people in their position.

It was well watered land; about fifty yards away a little spring gushed forth sparkling water. A little basin being excavated, a little well was made to supply the household with water. Swarup, ever conscious of ritual, took a goblet, filled it with water and made the first offering to the gods. Thereafter, a goblet was filled and handed to Harri Gobind who drank of the water and pronounced it, good. This custom was no doubt a carry-over from India, where water meant life.

A home was established; the household goods, meagre as they were, were carefully stored. Swarup set about preparing the first meal of the new house. It was a great day - a day of thanksgiving.

CHAPTER 7

Free Farmer

From six o'clock to six in the evening, Harri Gobind and Swarup toiled in the fields. In the evening they returned home with their hoes slung over their shoulders. They felt the tang of the salt seal breeze on their faces in the early morning as they swished through the grass to their cultivated plot. It was backbreaking work, to wrest the land from the thick matted jungle; but the toil went on, from day to day. Even the children were drawn into the thick of the struggle and worked with a will. Swarup often did a man's job on the fields, and her delicate figure belied the determination and hard work which she brought to bear.

Harri Gobind felt sorry for her, and from time to time, overcome by the steady but frail figure working at his side, ordered her to rest under a shady tree. After three months they engaged the services of a robust young African. Although at this time, Africans were loath to labour on the fields, considering it the work of women, (hence the introduction of Indian workers), the youth was no lazy boulder but worked with a will. He was encouraged by large helping of the traditional Indian food for which some Africans had developed a palate. He was happy enough to work on the fields for the sake of food alone.

Little patches of vegetables and fruits were grown so that they would be ready at different times to ensure a steady supply. In the mild temperature climate, with no distinction in the seasons, practically the same crops could be grown throughout the year. There were crops of beans, peas, cabbage, chillies and madumbies (much prized by Africans, a root) and vegetables for the Europeans. Harri Gobind had bought five cows to form the nucleus of a herd for milk which would be distributed to the near - by compounds of Indians and Africans. The little boys, though thirteen and eleven, were quite competent at milking cows. It was an intricate process; the cows were haltered in turn, the udder bathed and the teats were expertly squeezed to make the milk squirt in a thin sharp stream noisily into a white enamelled milk pail. The squirting, prodding and squeezing

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The daughter had finally convinced her father of her desire to stay behind which left Harri Gobind with no alternative but to make preparations for the morning to Phagus since he intended to leave shortly.

Though the wedding was rushed, it was a colourful affair. The active family of Phagun's travelled to Durban to see the family off. They came to the jetty with three hours to spare before the passengers were allowed to board during which time the marriage was registered.

After two months, a letter arrived to tell the safe arrival of the family. Harri Gobind's mother had waited for him and on seeing her son, got into a fit of ecstasy which very nearly killed her. However she died three days later.

Harri Gobind found the farm flourishing and was reinstated over his holdings by his brothers who told him that there was no need for him to go back to South Africa. They enjoyed a measure of affluence and here was the respect of a landholder. To this, life in South Africa was somewhat barbarous. Unfortunately after a few years all contact was lost with Indian and there is no evidence to predict what happened to Harri Gobind and his family.

The Indians were a god-send to the cane fields, different from Zulus who were still hunters, gatherers, warriors and people who believed that it was a womans task to work. The Indians on the other hand had earned a reputation as good labourers because of their meek ways and hard work. They eliminated the labour problem on the cane fields but their uncanny progressive ideas in spite of a host of retributions and

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went on until the stream became lazy denoting that only a little milk remained in the udder, which should be left for the calf. Each cow would yield about a gallon of milk. With the milk in bottles, stacked in a little cart, the boys would trundle along to the customers, walking for miles around without fatigue. At five pence a bottle, the income from milk was not negligible, because the animals did not require feed but helped themselves on the lush farm land.

Harri Gobind was a skilled husbandman and money began to trickle in, much than the wages of farm labourers. Blessed with a good climate and fertile soil, the farm always had plenty and the father saved the golden sovereigns as partimony for his children.

Five years passed with steady labour on the fields, with undisturbed sweat, and aching backs but also with the commensurate trickle of gold coins banked in the house. The bank was a "kaffir-pot" (round pot of cast iron much used by Africans), which was buried in a corner of the prayer room. (a nook set aside for prayers and declared sacred). The gold coins were put into the pot and placed in a cavity in the floor, which was then filled with soil. No foreign eyes could detect this bank and the money was declared secure.

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The daughter had finally convinced her father of her desire to stay behind which left Harri Gobind with no alternative but to make preparations for the morning to Phagus since he intended to leave shortly.

Though the wedding was rushed, it was a colourful affair. The active family of Phagun's travelled to Durban to see the family off. They came to the jetty with three hours to spare before the passengers were allowed to board during which time the marriage was registered.

After two months, a letter arrived to tell the safe arrival of the family. Harri Gobind's mother had waited for him and on seeing her son, got into a fit of ecstasy which very nearly killed her. However she died three days later.

Harri Gobind found the farm flourishing and was reinstated over his holdings by his brothers who told him that there was no need for him to go back to South Africa. They enjoyed a measure of affluence and here was the respect of a landholder. To this, life in South Africa was somewhat barbarous. Unfortunately after a few years all contact was lost with Indian and there is no evidence to predict what happened to Harri Gobind and his family.

The Indians were a god-send to the cane fields, different from Zulus who were still hunters, gatherers, warriors and people who believed that it was a womans task to work. The Indians on the other hand had earned a reputation as good labourers because of their meek ways and hard work. They eliminated the labour problem on the cane fields but their uncanny progressive ideas in spite of a host of retributions and

CHAPTER 8

Crisis

A week after the bethrothal of Surajranee disturbing news came to Harri Gobind, that was to alter the entire course of his life and that of his daughter. A letter arrived from India, from his brother, Satyanand. It was a poignant letter informing him that their mother, now ninety was on her deathbed. He described her lingering illness which had gone on for three years. He had not wanted to burden him with the news of her illness all this time, realising full well of the problems of his brother in making a new life in a far-away country. Now he had to break the news at the express wish of their mother. Her life wavered over the last six months and she felt that she would not find peace until she had seen Harri Gobind. Filial duty was uppermost in a good sone and Harri Gobind was in a dilemma.

"What shall I do Swarup?" he said in puzzlement, "our mother's spirit is disturbed and she cannot close her eyes in eternal sleep until she has seen me. What shall we do? We are settled in this land of our adoption and our daughter is now virtually married."

"The call of a mother in distress, Harri Gobind, must be answered. There is only one course of duty and that is that your mother must be obeyed. Your duty is clear - go, you must; yet we cannot go back and forth; our resources are too small."

"My brother says that the tea plantations have prospered and they have extended the land by another ten acres. Good brother, that he is, he has offered me a part of the land for our livelihood. He says that we must leave this strange land for a few people and return to the land of our forbears."

Harri Gobind was visibly disturbed he saw the present world collapsing about his ears. He saw too the end to the challenge; the expectation of the rewards that were to come and the prospects of a bright, new life.

We shall have to sell our land, stock and goods to pay for the passage money. My mother's spirit calls me and therefore I believe that I must go. But what about Surajranee she has to go with us although we have given our word of betrothal."

"I shall remain here with Phagun," (Surajranee) declared firmly, my mind is made." If he should trouble me, I shall throw myself upon the mercy of the Protector of Indian Immigrants. "So naive was the girl, and so implicit was the faith of the Indian immigrant on the good offices of the magistrate in Durban.

CONCLUSION

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and harrassment on land ownership and crippling taxation, were not favourably regarded by their overloads, the whites. Their is the classic case of coming, seeing and conquering.