

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks go to the following people in preparation of this essay:-

Interviews

1. Mrs Omrawo (21A Nehru Road, Glencoe).
2. Mrs D Sheobalak (24 Burnside Road, Glencoe).
3. Mr B B Singh (Waschbank Road, Glencoe).
4. Mr M Gokul (66 Victoria Street, Dundee).
5. Mr R Sheobalak (18 Nehru Road, Glencoe).

Typing

Mrs P Lutchminarain (17 Catherine Crescent, Tongaat)

1983

R. RAMADEEN

9842 E

1 "Although Indians originally came to South Africa to work on the sugar cane plantations, they were gradually introduced into the tea estates and other industries like the railways, coal-mining and, as they were seen to be 'reliable', they began to be employed as domestic servants in European households. But a substantial number of Indians did not reindenture on the tea and sugar estates because of the low wages which were paid here - 16 to 30 shillings per month. Instead, they went to work in the coal mines where they received between 40 and 45 shillings per month".

Yet at the time of his death in 1951, he was earning measly £12 and 10 shillings per month after having served the coal mines in Natal for 40 years (released 1 June 1911 and died July 1951).

Gokul Rattan known in those days to his associates as Muna arrived in Durban harbour on the 27 March 1902. The ship that he came in was "S S Umkuzi".

1 He resided in Basti Jhila. One day he was out in search of work. On his way he met "Bharthiwalas" (immigrant agents) who lured him away to Calcutta. From here he brought away to South Africa without his people's knowledge. When he arrived at Port Natal he was 22 years old. From Port Natal he was sent to a coal mine near Hattingspruit. This mine was called no. 1 coal mine. After serving for a while at this mine he was transferred to a near by coal mine called St. George's Colliery. The attached transliteration will provide the detail concerning his experiences of the above two mines that he had worked.

Life at his first Occupation

When he landed at a mine called No. 1 near Hattingspruit he was employed as a "Schoff" (ie. his job was to take the food and tea in time for a particular White man who worked in the mine. If he was delayed while taking the food or tea, he would either get a scolding or a clout. In the time between meals he was used as a handy boy around the White mans house. He worked from dawn to dusk. He was given "left-overs" to eat. Later when he was old enough he was given a job in the mine.

When he was employed as a scoff boy, his mother and father worked in the mine. Women who had children, were also employed. A female was in charge to take care of the children. When baby were hungry, they had to wait for lunch break when their mothers were free to breast feed them.

1 J P Naidoo and R Chetty: Indian Annual Settlers issue (120th Anniversary p 189)

The Home they lived in

There were several rows of barracks (barkis). Each row of barracks had 6 - 8 rooms. (Mr M Sheobalak lived in this type of home. Interview.) Mr Sheobalak confirms that the size of each room was about 14 feet by 14 feet. Each room housed about 10 men (unmarried). All these people were expected to prepare their own meals on the common fire place (choola). This invariably led to problems. There was a small rectangular common place (sunken) to bathe or wash - no privacy. They slept on hessian or grass mattresses, without pillows.

Unmarried women were housed similarly in other rooms.

Two married couples with children were given one room. This room was divided in two by a curtain.

There were no taps in the houses (rooms). There was one communal tap that served each barracks.

Toilet

There was one communal toilet. This was divided in the centre by a wall - one for males and one for females. Each section of the toilet catered for about 10 people at a time where conversations etc. were heard clearly on both ends.

Working Conditions

Every morning at 5.00 a.m. a hooter went off to indicate that it was time to get up. A policeman (a "sardar" an Indian) was there to see if the workers got up in time. The workers were treated like animals (refer annexure 1). They were whipped and sworn at during the course of the day. This type of treatment was so unbearable that some even resorted to suicide (refer annexure 1)

It was during one of these intolerable times that Gokul's father retaliated against his white superiors. He was of course dismissed summarily.

He subsequently took up a job at the Burnside Coal Mine run by the Dundee Coal Company.

Life at Burnside Colliery

Here the living conditions were better than at St. George's Colliery in that lesser number of people were housed in one room.

Here the treatment was also not so severe as at St. George's Colliery. Married women were given the option not to work.

The Indian Community at Burnside consisted of about 100 families (confirmed by 5 people who actually lived in this area).

The community was very closely knit. This was a case of "one for all and all for one" eg. if there was a girl/boy to be married, members of the whole community contributed towards the wedding.

A very interesting feature of this community was that, if any family had any domestic problem, this matter was resolved before a group of five elders of the community, (punch) in the presence of the whole community.

There were no wedding cards in those days. Announcements for special occasions like weddings, funerals, katha etc. , was announced by selected members of the community. This person or persons had to beat a drum, standing in front of each row of barracks. The rhythm of the drum indicated to the people the type of announcement to be made. When people heard the beat they came out onto the doorways. These announcers were retributed by "daan" (presence of grocery).

This brings us to the point of rations. One day in the week was allocated for wives to collect from a common place, the weekly ration. This consisted of rice, dhal, a bottle of cooking oil, salt and vegetable in season.

This traditional way of life only came to an end fairly recently (1955 when the mines closed down).

As school was provided by the mines (this was only a big room in the barracks) a few of the Principals who served here were Mr Vinden, Mr P G Moodley and Mr Natasen. Mr S L Pillay, a retired Principal and training college lecturer also had his early beginnings at Burnside School.

During the Sathvagara when Ghandi was at Newcastle², the Indian workers at the Mines gave their very full support to the cause.

AN INTERVIEW: MRS OMRAW, 21A NEHRU ROAD, GLENCOE

A translation of the original interview which was conducted in Hindi.

My father came from Basti Jila. Home circumstances were very poor. He set out, one day in search of a job so that he could provide his mother with the necessities of life. On his way, he came across "Bhartiwalas" (immigration agents) who confronted him and offered him a job at a rate five times more than he would get anywhere else. He would also be provided with a house and rations. They did not explain to him where he was being taken to, or how. He just agreed, giving his full particulars. He was not allowed to bid his parents farewell. They told him that he would be allowed to return so there was no need for any formal farewell.

Similarly many others were recruited. My father was ultimately brought to Calcutta. It was only here that it dawned on him that he was about to be taken away to another country. Being in the hands of the law, he had no chance of escaping.

When he arrived in Durban, they were allocated to different areas mainly, sugar plantations, farmers and coal mines.

My father was sent to a coal mine near Hattingspruit called No. 1 mine. Here he learnt that the workers were treated like cows and oxen. They were whipped and sworn at. There was no question of escaping as they had signed a contract only to be released after five years. Police were engaged to ensure that workers didn't escape. This kind of treatment was so unbearable that it could not be tolerated by even the young and the strong.

The police got them up in the mornings and remained with them throughout the day. In the evenings they would return from work and prepare their own meals and then retire for the night.

The treatment was so intolerable that five men had their meals, sang, then committed suicide by lying on the railway track. These were young men who came from well-to-do homes in India and could not face up to the maltreatment and hard labour.

They lived in barracks - one room was allocated to five to ten people.

Two married couples were given one room. A curtain in the room was the only thing that gave privacy to each couple. They cooked, eat and slept in the same

room together with their children (at this stage, for some reason or other the tape did not record anymore).

The rest from here is a very brief account of what happened thereafter. The important and significant parts had been included in the main essay in full detail.

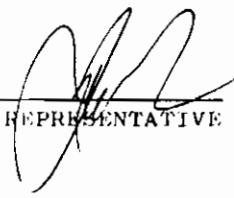
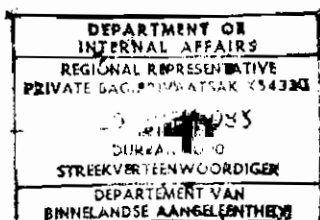
When the No. 1 mine closed down, my father moved to a nearby mine called St. George's Colliery. It was here that he defied his superiors, and was dismissed. Overnight he was asked to vacate his quarters.

Consequently he settled at a coal-mine at Burnside near Glencoe where he spent the rest of his life (details of his life here are discussed in the main essay).

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

Serial Number	:	<u>418</u>
Colonial Number	:	<u>92347</u>
Date of Arrival	:	<u>27 MARCH 1902</u>
Name of Ship	:	<u>SS UMNUGZI</u>
Place of Registration	:	<u>BASTI</u>
Date of Registration	:	<u>17 FEBRUARY 1902</u>
Number in Register	:	<u>115</u>
Name	:	<u>GOKUL</u>
Father's Name	:	<u>RATTAN</u>
Age	:	<u>22 YEARS OLD</u>
Sex	:	<u>MALE</u>
Caste	:	<u>KWIMI</u>
District	:	<u>BASTI</u>
Thanna/Talug	:	<u>BASTI</u>
Village	:	<u>GANESH PUR</u>
Height	:	<u>5'5"</u>
Bodily Marks	:	<u>SCAR ON RIGHT THIGH</u>
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	<u>MATHAVIA - (COUSIN)</u>
Relations Accompanied	:	<u>BROTHER</u>
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	<u>VACCINATED</u>
Remarks	:	<u>1</u>

Certified a true copy.


 REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE




8740

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

9650
15

Certificate of Discharge.

OFFICE OF THE PROTECTOR OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS,

DURBAN, NATAL,

13 March 1915

I hereby Certify that.....

Gokul

Indian Immigrant No. *92347* duly completed h.c. term of indenture
on the *1 June 1911* in terms of Indian Immigration Act, No. 17
of 1895 (Natal), and is released from his obligation to perform further
service in this Province under indenture.

DESCRIPTION :

Rattan

Father's Name.....

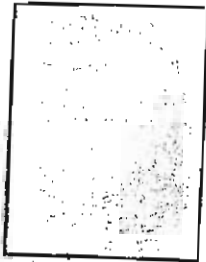
Age..... *34*.....

Height: *5* Feet..... *5* Inches

Bodily Marks..... *Scar right thigh*.....

IMPRESSES :

LEFT THUMB.



RIGHT THUMB



J. Robinson
Asst. Protector of Indian Immigrants, Natal.

DEDICATION PRAYER

Thou art the Supreme Jothi, all pervading Eternal Light!

We have gathered here O Lord! sons and daughters of the soil, on this historic day 16th November 1980, when 120 years to this day our forefathers set foot in this country.

We pray to thee, in silence and humble dedication.

In thy supreme grace came our forebears who set foot on this unknown land. They gave all that they had to give, their sweat and blood. They died for us, so that we may live, and by their sacrifice gave life to the dying sugar industry. To their memory the greencane fields sing to the music of the winds.

Lord! they in passing through the ecstasies of joys and sorrows entered unto the valley of tears. We place before thee their sacred tears "the dew of compassion", on thy holy sanctum, with deep reverence, our palms held together in solemn prayer. We stand before thee! Lord! in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future in thanksgiving and gratitude.

Lord! we hold high and aloft with deep courage and faith the torch of remembrance, for ever and ever in thy glory.

Aum! SHANTHI ! SHANTHI ! SHANTHI !



Offered before the lighting of the "TORCH OF REMEMBRANCE" at the 1860 Indian Settler's Memorial 37 Derby Street, Durban on 16th November 1980 at 3.00pm. by SWAMI SIVANANDA NAVALAR -Spiritual Head of the Saiva Sithantha Sungam

THIS EDITION OF THE INDIAN
ANNUAL IS ALSO HUMBLY
DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
THE 1860 INDIAN SETTLERS