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H I S T O R Y     111

T O P I C

"T R A C I N G       T H E

R O O T S       O F

A N     I N D I A N

I M M I G R A N T"

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1983
GOUNDEN S.A
15568

P R E F A C E

The immigration of Indians tends to have been the highlight of the 1860s. This project gives one a clear indication of the many reasons the Indians left their country, the condition when leaving and their arrival in South Africa. From interviewing one surviving immigrant of this era and his off-springs, the following information was obtained. However I must warn you that the validity of this information is highly questionable. My subject is approximately 91 years old and during this age memory retention and recall seems to be impaired. However I was fortunate to complete my interviews with the co-operation of my subjects son, who had the opportunity to speak to me about his father's old days. His identity document seems to have been mutilated so the only valid document is the B.M.25. from the Department of Internal Affairs.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Stories of the first ancestors in South Africa are often told by informants and form part of the current mythology of South African Indian life. Though each case is in some way unique, and the final factor remains the secret of each particular personality, emphasis is given in nearly every instance to one of three general reasons, economic opportunity, family dissension, the desire for adventure. Promise of wealth, the currency easily forged by recruiting officers, was the most obvious inducement to indenture.

Natal was regarded as 'beautiful luxuriant waste' hardly yielding a product which could be turned into commercial profit in 1843 when British were in control. By 1850 it was abundantly clear that the prosperity of Natal lay, not in cotton, but in sugar. During that era there was a very large indigenous population of Zulus and the hope was entertained that this reservoir could supply the needs. However this scheme did not prove successful. 'Local Zulus who constituted an inefficient labour force' and by no means disinclined to labour, or unwillingly to render it to the planters, but upon their tribal terms and their own times, were accustomed to live by their tribal customs and cared not to be a long duration in employment.

It is clearly indicated in the 120th Anniversary of the Annual Indian Settlers issue, when a public resolution was passed in Durban on October 10, 1851 :- " That it is impossible to rely upon the 'Kaffir' population of this colony for permanent effective supply of labour and that successfully to raise tropical productions it is absolutely necessary to introduce foreign free coloured labour."¹ As the/.....

1. Annual Settlers Issue, P.11

As the Natal planters begin to despair of obtaining their labour locally, some of them turned to the idea of importing it. The first evidence of the existence of such an idea came from the year 1850, when Rev.W.Holden, a Wesleyan Missionary, published a polemical pamphlet against the Govt. Policy in which he referred to the suggestion " that 'coolis' should be imported "from India or China, a suggestion which immediately would be deplored"². Petition drawn to the Governor contrasting the potentiality of Natal "one of the most fertile countries in the Globe, capable of yeilding almost all European as well as tropical production, with its state of lethargy and natural despondency, obstructed the difference to lack of labour consequent on a ill-considered Native Policy and suggested a remedy. In 1857 a flood of refugees came into Natal because of civil disturbances in Zululand. But this was not reliable labour due to the fact that natives were fickle and uncertain in their opinion and feelings. 'You cannot take a man from the bush and make him a steady labourer.' As the fifties progressed, the sugar coastal enterprises began to face disaster. It was a matter of absolute certainty that if an immediate supply of labour is not secured, a very large amount of capital now embarked in the sugar enterprises of the coastal-land will be wasted. There was however some consolation when Indians immigrated to Mauritius. This too was curbed. When the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir George Grey arrived in the territory, the poeple approached him with their grievances. They said that experimental cultivation has abundantly demonstrated that the crisis depend solely on a constant supply of labour. After negotiating with the Indian Government, the governor agreed on allowing indentured Indian labourers into South Africa providing certain conditions were carried out.

2. L.M.THOMPSON , ' Indian Immigration Into Natal,)gen. ed(
)Book(Achives Year For S.A History, P. 10

CONDITIONS IN INDIA

In the(19th Century village life in parts of India was harsh and hard;the country was underdeveloped, stricken periodically by famine,ravaged by disease. Home industries had decayed with the importation of British goods and cloth, peasants were in need of land, a few wealthy land owners battled on the misery of many tenants. Several informants described this in simple language " We left at a time of drought and sickness"; ' Our villages changed'. We had nothing to eat', 'We had no land , nothing';

In India about twenty percent of the Hindu population belong to the depressed caste, and this submerged and poeple suffered bitterly in their struggle to make a living in the poverty stricken countryside, and the slums of the city. There was also the economic motive alone however is seldom sufficient. It was generally related to other experiences, more especially the native and strength of family ties which explain why from among several brothers, only one would immigrate or why a small community in an entire family broke away, and why , having immigrated , some remained and others returned. Some recruiters told villages of a country where " chilli trees bore gold, ' money was easy', ' food was plentiful", " fowls laid diamonds', " gold was picked up in the streets "; " and fruit hung uneaten from the trees". One old man was led to beleive that he would see the land of the Gods.³

3. H.Kuper..... Indian Poeple in Natal, P. 10

This was the extent to which the Indians were canvassed into immigrating into Natal.

INDIA

COMES

TO

NATAL

Having been fully convinced that the prospect of enjoying a 'wealthy' existence in Natal the ship, The Belvedere left Calcutta on October 14, 1860 about nine days before the Truro because of the 1200 miles additional sailing distance it had to travel. The memorable day in Indian History was when the Truro dropped anchor on Friday 16 Nov 1860. The Natal Mercury dated 23 Nov 1860 dispoled on the 1860 Truro Settlers, " A newspaper at that time refers to them as "Master COOLIE seemed to make himself perfectly at home and did not appear in the least bit disconcerted by the novelty of the situation".⁴ Considerable apprehension was at once experienced into the sanitary condition of the vessel. The whites were led to beleive that the immigrants were connected with Cholera and other epidemic evils. However this was mere false rumour for the Truro was healthy in every respect.

Thus the Indians first ~~came~~ to Natal in result of persistent demand for cheap and reliable labour by a group of Europeans who had preceeded them by less than 40 years. However one must be aware that while the recruitment was initially for the sugar plantations, it was seen to be sufficiently profitable to be extended to railways, dockyards, coal mines , municipal service and domestic employment. So great was the early desire of white employees for a steady flow of indentured Indians labour force that for close on 25 years (1874-1897) the Natal Govt.contributed 10,000 per annum from public funds towards the cost of importing its human"consignment". The first batch/.....

4. Natal Mercury.....23 November 1860

The first batch of Indentured Indians arrived in 1860 contracts of service for a period of three(later five years) after which they became automatically Free Indians. As 'Free' Indians, they could remain in Natal or they must return to India or they might indenture for a further period of five years service, after which they had the option of a free passage to India or a piece of Crown Land .

T H E

INDENTURED

O N E

(Reasons for leaving

After the Truro, Belvedere and a few other Ships anchored in Durban, the Ship, the S.S.UMKUZI arrived carrying the indentured labourers. Among the crew was the subject that I will focus attention on:-

His name is J O G A N N A T H A N M O T T A I T H A L A Y A N

Owing to the mutilation of his identity document his date of birth could not be easily detected. A close approximation is the year 1892. He received no education in English and due to the depressive state of the country he had a very unhappy existence.

He was born in the village of Kelur. He farmed in Village near Tiruvannamalai. Throughout his childhood he engagedⁱⁿ this field of work.

He was also one of the victims who were canvassed into believing that the streets of Natal were paved with gold. He had five brothers and one sister. Their names however could not be obtained due to the subjects poor memory. Each of the brothers ventured out of their birth places. One went to Rangoon, another to Birma, one to the Gold fields in India, another to Delhi and JOGANNATHAN emigrated to South Africa.

Indians did not~~emigrate~~ to South Africa to escape any specific hand of persecution, political or religious, nor did they come in any organised band interested in creating any particular type of society or any new Utopia. The indentured came as individuals, occasionally with kinsmen or a friend, frequently with complete strangers. They were driven to leave India by a variety of Incentives---poverty, ambition, domestic tensions, restlessness of spirit, the urge to escape an epidemic or other mis fortunes. Some hoped to return after acquiring a certain amount of wealth, others realised that they would never return. Indentured Hindus/.....

Indentured Hindus from Orthodox, caste conscious families, knew that the work for which they were indentured , and the life they would of necessity lead during indenture, were prohibiting or should I say prohibited by their caste status and by breaking through prohibition they would become outcasts among their own kin.

Having embarked in Natal the Indians were visited by the Emmigration Agent. His purpose was to allocate the Indians to the various planters and householders who had applied for them. Advertisements appeared in the columns of the 'Natal Mercury ', " All persons desirous of possessing a "Coolie" servants are requested to apply to the Emmigration Agent in Durban".⁵

Mr. Jogannathan went through the similar channels. He was picked up by his employer and taken to a place called 'DALTON'. (

5. Indian Annual Settlers Issue, P.19

¹ Daltan Area approximately 32 miles out of PMB.
Johann

TREATMENT OF THE INDENTURED

Throughout the journey from India to Natal efforts were made in selecting any special cook, to avoid offending caste scruples. In Natal the indentured labourers were housed in barracks 10'x12' in size, with no special accommodation for unmarried woman, no privacy for the married and no consideration for caste. The local basis of caste, the traditional division of villages according to caste was irrelevant. The absence of woman of the right caste, and the scarcity of woman of any caste, made it frequently impossible in practise.

The indentured labourer were an invaluable acquisition and gave general satisfaction. In spite of their expense, they are accepted to be more reliable than the African Labourer. Each indentured labourer had a white overseer that watched him while he worked. According to Mr. Jogannathan the hours of duty were from sunrise to sunset. There was a roll call at five O' clock in the morning. Punishment for absconders were excessive. When an Indian absented himself from work without lawful cause for a day, the employer was entitled to withhold two days wages provided that he justified the fine of the Indian complained to the residents Magistrate. If in the event of an Indian who wants to leave the estate when he was assigned, the Indian had to obtain a pass from his employer, the very person who was interested in the refund of such a grant. Countless Indians therefore went to the Magistrates on errands of complaints without passes to be summarily convicted and imprisoned, or returned to their employer, their complaint

'Unheard or Ignored' (Apart from a period of 8yrs (1866-1874)), ^{indenturing} ~~indicating~~ continued to 1911, when the British Indian Govt. stopped further indenture owing to a divergence in viewpoint with the S.A. Colonial Govt. This concerned the right of the Free Indians.

Mr. Jogannathan however did not experience much problem for his main purpose was to save money. If this is true , it is sheer speculation.

J O G A N N A T H A N , THE FREE INDIAN

The indentured felt only bound then for 5 years. When the Industrial service was completed they were free to move about and seek employment as they liked, with the restriction that if they left the colony, then they forfeited their right to a free return passage to India at the end of ten years after their arrival in Natal. Having served his indentured contract , Mr.Jogannathan decided to start his own business in the Dalton Area. He now became a Free Trader. He traded livestock . Due to the inavailability of transport his partners and himself had to walk the distance to trade along the way. It was a very prospective business. However this advantageous relationship did not last long. Due to man's personal greed the partnership broke up due to squandering of the profits. Mr. Jogannathan then went back to the Mills. He worked in the Bark Mill in New Hanover. He ^{skinned} ~~peeled~~ the trees of all their bark by his bear hand and fitted them in bags for ~~export trade~~ *use in the Bark Mills.*

SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Mr. Jogannathan married in New Hanover. This relationship continued until he took another bride. This was mainly due to the fact that his former wife could not bear any children. He remarried and thus he chose a bride from Dalton. His residence now incidently was in Ravensworth, about fifteen miles out of Dalton.

His wife, Thayamah lived with him. Amakanoo, his new bride at that time bore five children. This consisted of 2 boys and three girls, one of them went to India and to this day is residing in Madras. A unique thing happened when Thyamah, his first wife gave birth to a boy. To further complicate the matter, she bore six children after that. Altogether Thyamah had two girls and five boys. Taking an overall look Mr. Jogannathan fathered twelve children.

There were several factors affecting free and indentured Indians alike which hindered the developement of the small Indian Society here in Natal. Education facilities for Indian children was deplorable.

There were very few schools receiving Govt. Aids--a fee of 68 pounds a year and the teachers were not fit enough. More serious was the Social situation. Only about 36 Woman (many of whom were recruited from the streets) had been imported with every hundred men. They had been distributed in about that proportion among the estates, where they were entitled to half the rations if they did not work and also full ration otherwise and small wages." With this gross disproportion between the numbers of the sexes there was an inevitable tendency towards social instability"⁶ Sexual crimes were frequent. This is why it was impossible to prove the validity of marriages. If the woman was seduced by another the Magistrate could not take recognition of the case. They also had/.....

6. L.M.THOMPSON: 'Indian Immigration into Natal(Gen. ed)

They also had the language problem to contend with. None of the Magistrates spoke the Indian Language and scarcely an immigrant spoke anything but his native tongue.

Mr. Jogannathan did not participate in any of the strikes but he said" I was aware of them but remained ^{neutral} ~~neutral~~ for fear of my life".

With regard to politics the immigrant lacked the protection of a strong Government.

Mr. Jogannathan was well versed in Indian literature. He taught Tamil. He was a very staunch believer in the Lord Shiva, the Hindu deity. Due to his knowledge in Tamil he officiated weddings. He could easily carry out the duties of a Brahmin. The indentured were of different religions, localities and cultures. The majority were Hindus who spoke at least one of three Devine languages--Tamil, Telegu and Malayalam or an indo-Aryan Language. The Tamil and Telegu were from villages and towns around Madras in India.

C O N C L U S I O N

This gives one a clear indication and a beautiful picture of the plight of the South African Indian who is just a mere small proportion of the immigrant population. Mr. Jogannathan and his companion who anchored in Durban helped the Natal farmers in a time when they were in deep waters. The indentured were excellent agricultural labourers for they came from the great river plains of India. They had behind them centuries of labour and struggle against the elements, and he did not have to be trained to do the work. However the immigrants experienced gross domestic problems. The grovert one , of which was the caste issue. Most of them turned out to be outcasts. They had beside this many other grieviences, language, validity of marriage and political representation. Mr. Jogannathan however could not depart with much and his children who I interviewed could not tell me much about his difficulties. Mr. Jogannathan is still living , but is bedridden. He says he has had a successful life. His new home is presently in Dalton. Both his wives are still Living.

R E F E R E N C E S

INTERVIEWS:

MR. JOGANNATHAN.....23 ERICA DRIVE,DALTON
MRS.P. JOGANNATHAN.....51 COSMOS CRESCENT,DALTON
MR.S.PILLAY.....82 VICTORIA STREET, DURBAN

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Cape Town,Cape Times LTD,1961
2. KUPER,H. _____ INDIAN PEOPLE IN NATAL
Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood
Publishers, 1960
3. SUGDEN,M. _____ THE POTENTIAL INDIAN LABOUR FORCE
Vol.37 Part1 1978 U.D.W.
4. THOMPSON.B.M. _____ ARCHIVES YEAR BOOK FOR S.A.HISTORY
Cape Town,Cape Times LTD Parow C.P.
Vol 2

NEWSLETTERS:

5. INDIAN ANNUAL SETTLERS ISSUE _____ 1980
6. NATAL MERCURY (Articles) _____ 23 Nov 1980

DOCUMENTS ①

1. CONTRACT OF SERVICE WITHIN INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

INDIA COMES TO NATAL

(MAN'S)
CONTRACT OF SERVICE WITH INDIAN
IMMIGRANTS.

We H Remembered,

That on this 23rd day of April
in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty Nine
and Telucksing of Surab Indian Immigrant
No. Bandur 41698 appeared before me,
Louis. H. Mason Protector of Immigrants,
and in my presence signed (or made his mark) to the following Contract of Service:—

The said Telucksing agrees to
hire the services of the said Indian Immigrant, and the said Indian Immigrant agrees to
render the said
his services in the capacity of General Labourer for Five Years, commencing on the
23rd day of April, in the Year of our Lord
One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty Nine

And it is further agreed between the said Parties, that the said Indian Immigrant shall be employed as above for six days in each week, save as in such Law is mentioned, and that the hours of labour shall not be more than nine hours daily, between sunrise and sunset, with a break of at least an hour for

And it is further agreed between the said Parties, that the said Telucksing shall
pay to the said Indian Immigrant, as such servant as aforesaid, wages at and after the rate
of TEN SHILLINGS for the first year, ELEVEN SHILLINGS for the second year, TWELVE
SHILLINGS for the third year, THIRTEEN SHILLINGS for the fourth year, FOURTEEN
SHILLINGS for the fifth year, for the remuneration of the services of the said Indian Immigrant, and that such wages shall be paid on the first day of each month.

And lastly, the said Telucksing
doth hereby bind and oblige himself to give, grant, and provide, to and for the said Indian Immigrant, and for such family as may be allotted, good and comfortable lodging, wholesome and suitable food, and proper medical attendance and medicines, during the period for which this present contract is made, and otherwise to observe and fulfil all the conditions and obligations of the Coolie Laws of the Colony so far as the same are applicable to this Contract and Agreement.

P.S. ① The following documents were issued to the indentured one during the late 18th.

2. CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE

— INDIA COMES TO NATAL —

Reproduction of a Certificate of Discharge given to one Mr. Roopia.

NATAL

Certificate of Discharge.

SCHEDULE H. SECTION 100.

No. 22

I HEREBY CERTIFY that

Indian Immigrant No. 22, who did complete his term of indenture of 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 indenture.

DESCRIPTION

Father's Name

Age

Height 5 Feet 11 Inches.

Bodily Marks

Date of Arrival in Colony

Ship

Last Employer

OFFICE OF THE PROTECTOR OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS,
DURBAN, NATAL.

For use of Indian Immigrants.

3. PASS UNDER ACT 17, 1895

Pass under Act 17, 1895

No. 9208

D



210

RECEIVED



210

RECEIVED

Pass the Indian Immigrant

James

Colonial Number

20800

Sex

M.

Age

27

Height

4' 9"

Bodily Marks

Scar Right side

... he having paid the Annual License of (£3) Three Pounds
sterling, as required by Section 6, Law 17, 1895.

This Pass expires on the

23rd April 1905

and must then be renewed.

Issued at the

R.M. Office

Beacons

by James

190

W.S.

R.M.

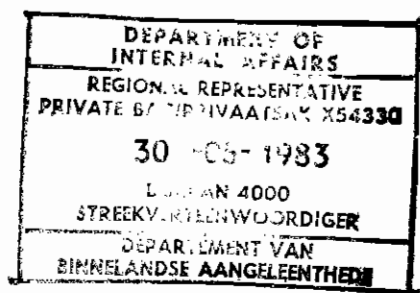
4. INDIAN AFFAIRS

B.M.25

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

COPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	139603 7
Colonial Number	:	139603.
Date of Arrival	:	23.05.1909.
Name of Ship	:	SS "Umkuzi"
Place of Registration	:	—
Date of Registration	:	—
Number in Register	:	7
Name	:	JOGANNATHAN
Father's Name	:	MOTTAITHALAYAN
Age	:	17
Sex	:	MALE
Caste	:	PARIA
District	:	N. ARLOT
Thanna/Taluq	:	POLUR
Village	:	KELUR
Height	:	5'5"
Bodily Marks	:	WOLE ON RIGHT SHOULDER
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	FATHER
Relations Accompanied	:	—
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	VACCINATED
Remarks	:	—



Certified a true copy.


REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE