

A V R I L D E L A I N E L A U T O N

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HISTORY III

RESEARCH PROJECT

SHOWING ANCIENT PLACE NAMES AND HISTORICAL SITES



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FOREWORD

The information contained in this project relies heavily on secondary material to substantiate my primary information because all Mr. Mackchedie's documentary evidence has been destroyed according to both Mr. D. Mackchedie and Indian Affairs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Mr. Durgaparasad Mackchedie for assisting me with my project. Although he is not my grandfather, he willingly gave of his time and his knowledge about his father, Mr. Mackchedie, and I would therefore like to thank him. I would also like to thank Mr. Mark Howard for his transport to Pietermaritzburg which enabled me to interview Mr. D. Mackchedie.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking to Mr. Durgaparasad Mackchedie about his father, Mr. Mackchedie, who immigrated to Natal in the late 1860's, has been one of the most enriching and educating experiences of my life. Because Mr. Mackchedie has been such a valuable source of information to me, I will not fail to include him in part of my discussion. The facts to follow are therefore an account, based on what Mr. D. Mackchedie had to tell me, about the circumstances surrounding the arrival of the Mackchedie family to Natal with particular attention paid to his account of his pioneering father who was born in India, travelled to Mauritius and finally settled in Natal as a part-time trader's labourer and thereafter concluding in the year 1954 when Mr. Mackchedie dies.

PLACE OF ORIGIN

Mr. Mackchedie was born in the year 1848, in a little hut situated in the remote village of Ajodhia in North India.

REASONS FOR IMMIGRATION FROM INDIA TO MAURITIUS

According to F. Ginwala "the majority of the passenger Indians were from peasant families who were unable to maintain their traditional place in the Indian economy".¹ Ginwala then further explains that because the Indian peasantry had been impoverished by heavy taxation and had lost access to land through debt and growing fragmentation, they were therefore forced to look for new opportunities and enterprises elsewhere.

¹F. Ginwala: 'Class Consciousness and Control - Indian South Africans 1860 - 1946', p. 35.

The Mackchedie family was no exception to this prevailing poverty and in 1855, the eldest Mackchedie brother, named Logan, decided to emigrate to Mauritius along with his brother, Mr. Mackchedie himself. Now according to R. Nowbath "the passing of ordinance Number twelve of 1855 had resulted in an enormous increase in the numbers of Indian immigrants introduced into Mauritius to work on the sugar plantations".² Included among these immigrants was the two Mackchedie brothers who set out to Mauritius to cultivate the sugar plantations there.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

"The first traders were comparatively poor men."³ Mr. Mackchedie arrived in Natal as a very poor child financially but by the age of eleven he had a very vast knowledge about the cultivation of sugar because that was his only task in Mauritius from the time he arrived there till the day he left.

REASONS FOR LEAVING MAURITIUS

Unfortunately for his father, said Mr. D. Mackchedie, there was an agricultural crisis on the island in 1865. "The depressed state of the colony was intensified by the increased numbers of immigrant labourers who came from Madras and Bengal where hurricanes and floods had worsened the positions of the peasants. As a result of this, a large number of proprietors were ruined and the year 1866 was one of general distress in the colony. Owing to the great drought, several flourishing estates were thrown out of cultivation. This was conducive to a large number being unemployed. To complete the picture of desolation, a hurricane of extraordinary violence swept over the island in March 1868".²

²R.S. Nowbath: 'Treatment of Coolies In Mauritius', in The Graphic, 10, July, p. 4.

³Centenary Of Indians 1860 - 1960, p. 62.

This then was the state of the colony in the 1860's, and according to Mr. D. Mackchedie, because of the reasons given above, his father's brother, Logan was therefore literally forced to send his father, at the age of ^{twenty-one} ~~eleven~~, to join his brother, Rachai Mackchedie who had, by this time, already settled in South Africa. D. Mackchedie also mentioned his father telling him that he had arrived in Natal before the Boer war and was already well established by the time the Boer war broke out.

DATES OF DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL TO SOUTHERN AFRICA

According to Mr. D. Mackchedie, his father arrived in 1869 at Port Natal in Durban having left Mauritius in the same year. In the 1890's he said Rachai Mackchedie ^{went} to India to bring the rest of his family to Natal. Having travelled in the ship called the Karanja, they too arrived at Port Natal. The above dates, however, could not be verified anywhere, including Indian Affairs who informed me that all Mr. Mackchedie's documents had been destroyed. However, the fact that Rachai Mackchedie came without his family can be verified. "Traders like the Indian labourers, came without their wives and families. But with their settlement and their obvious ability to make a livelihood in Natal, came their natural desire to bring their families from Mauritius and India".³ Thus, Rachai's desire to return to India and bring his family to Natal. According to Durgaparasad Mackchedie his father was overjoyed at being reunited with part of his family once again but by this time his father had died.

FIRST AND SUBSEQUENT PLACE OF SETTLEMENT

Not far away from Pietermaritzburg lies the village of Sutherlands where Mr. Mackchedie settled with his brother on his arrival to Natal and remained there ever since. "In the former days, when agriculture was the normal means of livelihood, homes consisted of simple wood and iron structures for market gardeners and small farmers."⁴

³Centenary of Indians 1860 - 1960, P. 63.

⁴R. Burrows: Indian Life And Labour In Natal, p. 13.

"Many Indians had rented plots which they declared for cultivation on the outer fringes of the towns. A decent home on a plot of ground of one's own was a driving aspiration, a symbol of family security"⁵ says H. Kuper. This too was true of Mr. Mackchedie. After a number of years of helping his brother in the field of hawking as well as working for an institution, he secured enough money which enabled him to rent a piece of land on which stood a large wood and iron house but unfortunately had no electricity. It was only after many years said Durgaparasad Mackchedie that my father was able to buy a piece of land of his very own. During this period, he also added, water was communal and my father often told us of the long distances that he would have to walk to obtain water for his family. This statement is substantiated by E.A. Woods who states "Water is often communal, with one tap to many residents and in some cases at a considerable distance from their homes".⁶

FIRST AND SUBSEQUENT OCCUPATION

"Many of the immigrants did not come in as self-employed traders and those without capital usually had contacts through family and village networks and frequently had assured jobs."¹ Mr. Mackchedie too had arrived in Natal with the assurance that he would secure employment with Rachai Mackchedie, his eldest brother. When he arrived in South Africa, Mr. Mackchedie therefore immediately assumed the task of helping his brother hawk. "Much of the early trading activity was done by Indian hawkers and pedlars "¹ just like the Mackchedie brothers were doing.

"Because population was spread over wide areas, and transport and communication was poor, hawkers were welcome on White farms"¹

¹F. Ginwala: 'Class Consciousness And Control - Indian South Africans 1860 - 1946', p. 37.

¹F. Ginwala: 'Class Consciousness And Control - Indian South Africans 1860 - 1946', p. 40

⁵H. Kuper: The South African Indian Family, p. 29.

⁶C.A. Woods: 'Their Economic Position', in The Indian Community Of Natal, p. 13.

"From an early hour in the morning Indian hawkers, male and female, adults and children go busily with heavy baskets on their heads from house to house and the citizens can, daily at their doors, and at low rates, purchase wholesome vegetables and fruit which, not many years ago, they could not, with certainty, procure even in public markets."⁴ Included among these hawkers was Mr. Mackchedie who used to get up at early hours of the morning, pack his baskets with fruit, vegetables, fowls and eggs, place it on his head or over his shoulders and then walk the long distance from house to house selling his produce. Sometimes, he would sell his produce to the local market. Their only mode of transport was ox-wagon but this was a luxury for them and was therefore seldom used.

Besides hawking, Mr. Mackchedie was also employed with the Natal Provincial Administration, Roads Department where he filled the post of a driver. According to Mr. D. Mackchedie, his father worked as a labourer for the N.P.A. because of the seasonal nature of the produce he had to hawk and also because they needed all possible financial help as they were poor. To quote H. Kuper "..... apart from teaching - the Natal Provincial Administration has little to offer the Indians as an avenue of employment"⁵, and R. Burrows "numerous Indians are employed in transport and communications at various centres of the Republic".⁴

INCOME

According to D. Mackchedie his father earned £3 per ^{month} ~~week~~ but that was plenty, he says. The going was rough but the life was good, he added. Their staple diet was rice, dholi and vegetables and they rarely ate meat. Kuper says "The Indians were nearly all desperately poor, but all, including the children, had been conditioned to work from sunrise to sunset."⁵ This was true, agreed D. Mackchedie, and they would all help their father hawking to bring in extra income at home.

⁴R. Burrows: Indian Life And Labour In Natal, p. 24.

⁴R. Burrows: Indian Life And Labour In Natal, p. 26.

⁵H. Kuper: The South African Indian Family, p. 13.

⁵H. Kuper: The South African Indian Family, p. 50.

MARRIAGE

In 1880, at the age of 32, Mr. Mackchedie married Jugiah Sabur who was 15 years old at the time. They had five sons and 6 daughters. According to D. Mackchedie, his father was very strict and insisted that they follow their Hindu customs rigidly. All his sons and daughters married at an early age and Mr. Mackchedie, with the help of his wife, Jugiah, arranged all his children's marriages. This statement is justified by H. Kuper who says that in most families marriages are still arranged by the parents who do their best to "match" the qualities of the young couple. However, according to D. Mackchedie, because his parents had their own ritual for marriage, their marriages were never considered as legal until they had registered it at the office of the Protector of Indian Immigration. To quote N. Vedalanka, "On account of this legal requirement, a number of women have had to undergo great hardships. Many an uncultured young man, without realising his responsibility, takes shelter under this law and rejects the woman to whom he has been religiously and socially married. Such women have no legal grounds to bring their husbands to break a claim against them."⁷ D. Mackchedie agreed that such conditions did exist but his family was fortunate in escaping such a hardship.

Mr. D. Mackchedie said that while his father gardened in his old age, his children helped him but also entered into factories as labourers. Mr. D. Mackchedie was employed by Sutherlands Tannery on 14 August 1926 as an errand boy. His employment is verified by the following quote: "At Pietermaritzburg there is a leather and shoe industry where numerous Indians are employed in the leather and footwear industry"⁸ The Mackchedie marriage was a happy one and love prevailed in their home.

THE WIFE ROLE

According to Mr. D. Mackchedie, his mother remained a housewife all her life and never once went out to sell her labour on the market. This was so because of the traditional attitude of his father who believed that his wife should remain at home.

⁷ N. Vedalamkar: Religious Awakening In South Africa, p. 32.

⁸ Indian South Africans 1965, 9. 9.

To quote A.D. Lazarus, "The men asserted themselves as the wage earners and the women were confined to domestic duties and not allowed to sell their labour on the open market."⁹ This was true of Mrs. J. Mackchedie as we have seen above.

POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Mr. D. Mackchedie said that his father did have many political grievances against the state but because the Indians did not have anybody to represent them, he kept quiet about his problems. He also mentioned that his father was very passive as concerns politics and he did not allow the political situation to worry him. Mr. Tayal has this to say as regards the above statement, "Contrary to the rhetoric of elite politics and indeed, the impression produced by the existing literature the grievances of Indian urban and rural wage labourers, and petty cultivators and hawkers, were largely ignored by the elites, unless representing these needs could be seen to serve elite interests in some way that was cohesive formal political protest generated by the mass of the people themselves."¹⁰

According to D. Mackchedie, the political situation was very difficult and he had to carry a pass wherever he went. This, he said, could be obtained through the courts and fortunately for him, because he knew one of the officers in court, his permit to travel around the country was quite easily obtained, otherwise it was rather difficult to obtain permits to travel, he mentioned. He then related an incident to me which pointed out the inconveniences the permit system had caused him which I shall relate below.

He and his friends decided to go to Cape Town for a holiday. Along the way they had to produce their permits at every central point. He did not approve of the permit system, he said, but because of his great desire to travel, he was forced to obey this system. On arrival at Bloemfontein, he said they went straight to the officials in charge to produce their permits. To their surprise, the officials there did not know what they were talking about and asked them where they were heading and received the reply, Cape Town. The officials in charge then said to them that they had twelve hours to get out of this territory, irrespective of any transport problems they might have had, or else they would all be arrested.

⁹A.D. Lazarus: 'Indians have had hard struggle to get their children educated', in Natal Daily News, 16 Nov. 1960.

¹⁰M. Tayal: Gandhi : The South African Experience, p. 45.

Obeying instructions, they then crossed the Vaal River and continued their journey to Cape Town via Kimberley. We were all young and happy, he said, and we were not going to let such measures get in our way although this system did not have our approval. In connection with the above detail, L. Kuper points out "The passive resistance leaders demanded the abolition of the Pass Laws....." He further adds "The resistance acts take form of deliberate breach of selected pass laws and apartheid regulations...",¹¹ so that one can conclude that the pass laws had an effect on the entire community and while some like Mr. D. Mackchedie obeyed the system, there were other Indians in the community who refused to obey it.

RELIGION

Mr. Mackchedie followed the teachings of the Hindu religion staunchly and his son, Durgaparasad Mackchedie remembers clearly how his father would light the lamp and pray daily at home.

"The absence of any Hindu institution in the district of Plessislaer was a matter of great concern to Mr. F. Satjapal so he summoned a mass meeting of the Hindu residents there on 30 June 1924 when a society named "Nagri Hithsishi Sabha" was formed. This was subsequently changed to Anya Samaj Plessislaer, on the advice of Dr. Bhagatram Sahagal in 1929. The Samaj sees to the needs of the destitute and the poor in the community. The fund of the Samaj were used to purchase a property. The question of erecting a suitable hall on the property proved a difficult one. The mission authorities withdrew their permission once granted to the Samaj to conduct its Hindu school on its premises. This made the Samaj members to concentrate on the erection of a building more resolutely. They staged plays, went from place to place collecting, held bazaars and in fact, devised all sorts of ways and means to raise funds. On 18 September 1949, the foundation stone of their proposed building was laid by Mr. F. Satyapal, its founder, before a large gathering of people."⁷ Being one of the men who supported the erection of the hall, Mr. D. Mackchedie was proud to tell me the story of the Samaj exactly as it is related above by N. Vedalanka. Mr. D. Mackchedie's name can be found listed in N. Vedalanka's book as one of the supporters who helped in raising funds for the erection of the hall.

⁷ N. Vedalanka: Religious Awakening In South Africa, p. 33.

¹¹ L. Kuper: Passive Resistance In South Africa, pp. 42-43.

CASTE SYSTEM

Mr. Mackchedie was very much aware of the caste system when he arrived in Natal and he was regarded as belonging to the low class because of the menial work he performed as a labourer. Today, however, the caste system is dead, says Mr. D. Mackchedie. N. Vedalankar verifies this by pointing out, "At first the caste system herein in South Africa was as rigidly observed as in India, but due to different environmental factors, it is slowly crumbling down."⁷ According to D. Mackchedie, when he was a young man, there were no distinctions made as concerns class and brotherly love prevailed. N. Vedalankar justifies this by stating "the feeling of high and low is on the waning side. A number of inter-caste marriages have also taken place and this system is rapidly becoming a thing of the past to many Indian families."⁷ In accordance with D. Mackchedie, H. Kuper says, "In South Africa, colour, not caste, is the basis for exclusion from the acquisition of privileges and for legal prohibition on inter-marriage."⁵

EDUCATION

Mr. Mackchedie was illiterate and received no formal education during his life because he had been initiated into the world of work from a very early age. According to him, there were many adults in South Africa like himself and despite this fact, the education of Indian children in South Africa was neglected and many children grew up illiterate. Reporting on the situation in 1877 the Protector of Indian Immigrants said, "No systematic effort has yet been made for the education of the children of the Indian Immigrants of the colony."¹² Today, however, education for Indian children has come a long way from the religiously orientated vernacular schools of the Indians in which D. Mackchedie received his education.

⁵H. Kuper: The South African Indian Family, p. 47.

⁷N. Vedalankar: Religious Awakening In South Africa, p. 30.

⁷N. Vedalankar: Religious Awakening IN South Africa, p. 30.

¹²A.D. Lazarus: 'Indians have hard struggle to get their children educated' in Natal Daily News, 16 Nov. 1960.

To quote A.N. Boyce, "There has been a marked improvement in Indian education in recent years largely due to the interest taken by the Natal Education Department. The number of Indian children attending school increased from 9 766 in 1927 to 66 587 in 1953. At first the Province was slow in erecting schools and the Indian community had to bear the greater part of the expense involved in the erection of the buildings. The Indians have shown initiative and made many sacrifices to promote education: their teachers have raised money in different ways and have even taxed themselves to provide funds. An example of the difficulties under which teachers laboured at one time was the adoption of the system whereby schools are used twice daily for different groups of children. Since 1965, Indian education has been placed under the direct control of the Department of Indian Affairs."¹³

Mr. D. Mackchedie also said that according to his father, girls did go to school but left at an early age as his sisters did. To quote an example, "In the early days, boys enjoyed precedence over the girls in going to school but nowadays, girls are also sent to school to obtain academic qualifications."⁸

LANGUAGE

"The Indians who came into South Africa spoke different provincial languages viz. Tamil, Hindi, Gujerati and Telegu. In the early days, most of the Indians were illiterate in their mother tongue and hardly knew any English. They were not able to understand the language of those who came from a different province. With the advance of English education amongst the colonial born Indians, Hindi as well as the other vernaculars has begun to be relegated to the back. English has gained prominence."⁷ According to D. Mackchedie, his father had great difficulties in communication as he too was illiterate. His language barrier was a disadvantage to him especially in his field of work as a hawker and driver.

⁷ N. Vedalanka: Religious Awakening In South Africa, p. 79.

⁸ Indian South Africans 1965, p. 15.

¹³ A.N. Boyce: Europe And South Africa, p. 727.

PENSION

"Till recently, Indians were excluded from the benefits of the old age Pensions Act of 1928. In 1944, these Acts were made applicable to Indians also. But Europeans are provided higher benefits than Indians under these Acts."³ According to D. Mackchedie, his father only received pension at the late age of 80.

LAST YEARS

Hawking was Mr. Mackchedie's whole life but because of old age, he had to unwillingly give it up and retire. On the 26 October 1954 at the age of 106 years, Mr. Mackchedie died.

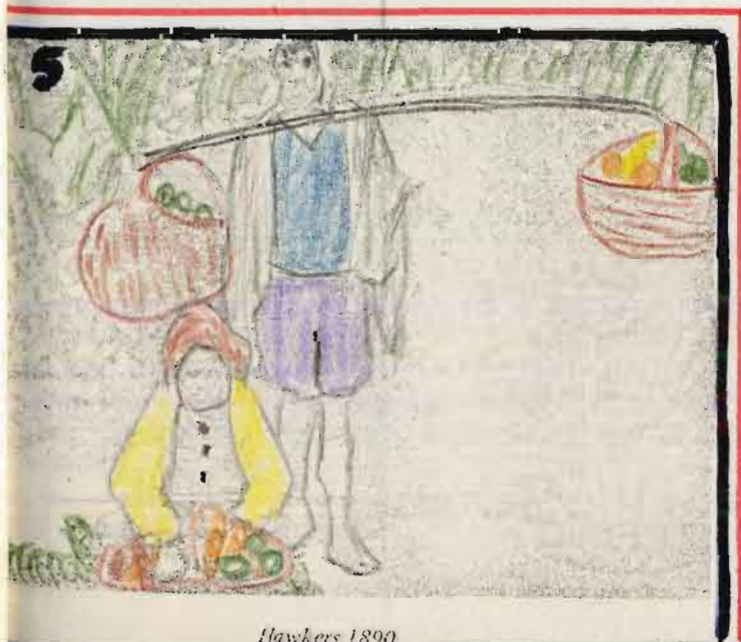
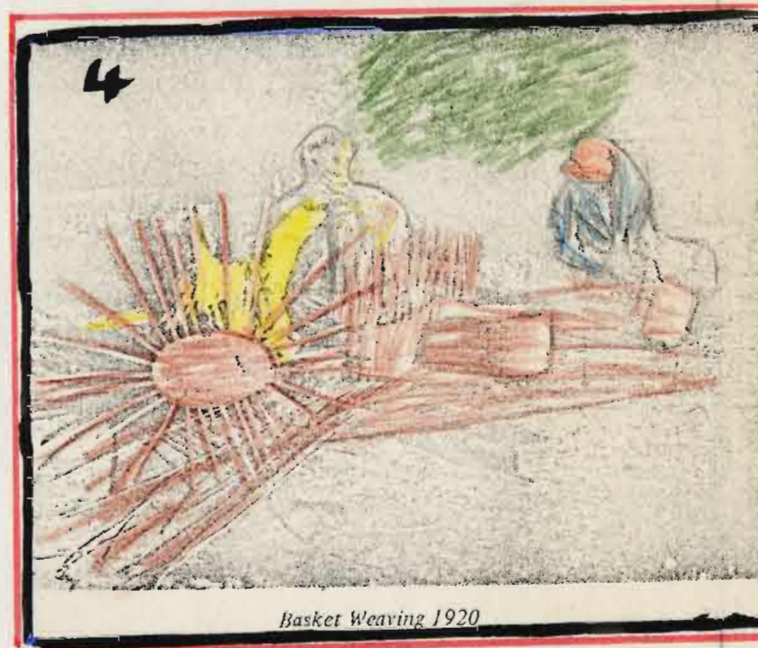
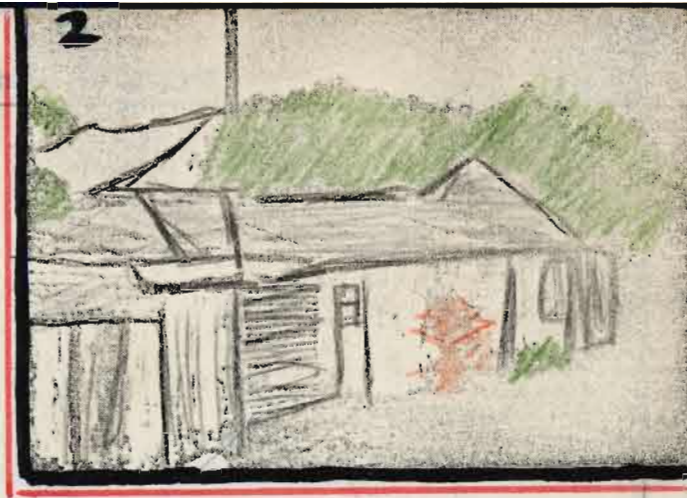
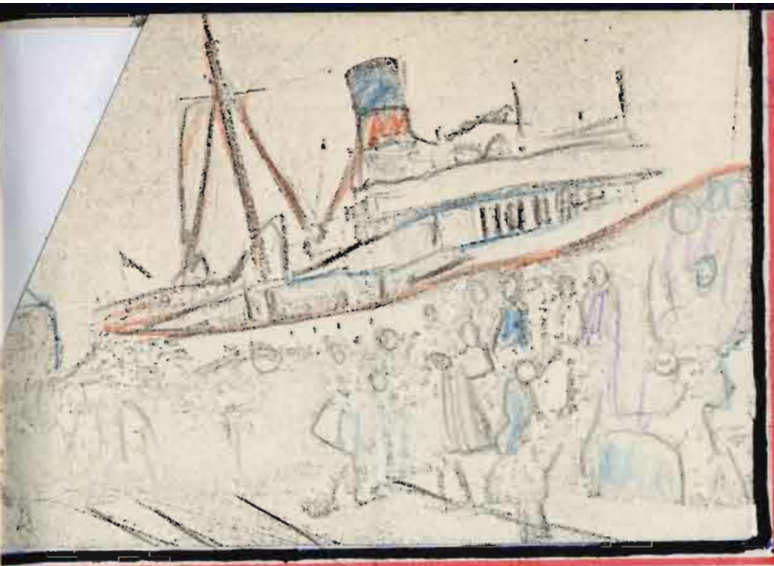
CONCLUSION

In the light of the above discussion, I therefore conclude that Mr. Mackchedie, although not acknowledged in history textbooks, has helped in part, to fill one of the gaps in the history of the Indian pioneers who came to South Africa in the 19th century. Although long since dead, Mr. Mackchedie also became part of history when he undertook the long journey from Mauritius to Natal as a young man of twenty-one years old.

³Centenary of Indians 1860 - 1960, p. 62.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. ARRIVAL OF INDIANS TO SOUTH AFRICA 1890's
2. WOOD AND IRON HOUSE
3. REFUSE REMOVERS
4. BASKET WEAVING 1920
5. HAWKERS 1890
6. HAWKERS 1920
7. THE INDIAN MARKET
8. INDIAN FACTORY WORKERS
9. HINDU TEMPLE 1904





ABOVE:

7
The Indian market stalls laden with fruit and vegetables produced on Indian farms in the Durban area



Hindu Temple 1904

SOURCE LIST

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