

TOPIC : A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DHANA KALIDAS

by

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(History III).



TABLE OF CONTENTS.

I.

<u>Preface</u>	Page II.
<u>Acknowledgment</u>	Page III.

Introduction

a. Place of origin in India;	Page 3
b. Socio-economic background;	Page 4
c. Reasons for leaving original country;	Page 6
d. Dates of departure and arrival to South Africa;	Page 7
e. Name of ship and port of arrival;	Page 6
f. First place of settlement;	Page 6
g. First occupation;	Page 6
h. Marriage, birth of children;	Page 6
i. Social, religious activities;	Page 7

Conclusion	Page 11
------------	---------

Illustration	Page 12
--------------	---------

Map	Page 3
-----	--------

Appendices	Page 12, 13, 14.
------------	------------------

Source List	Page 15
-------------	---------

PREFACE

II.

When a study of Mr. D. Kalidas was investigated it was of paramount importance to place Mr. D. Kalidas in proper historical context. After having achieved success on this aspect I did consult secondary material.

I also interviewed individuals, organizations and Government Departments to ensure that the information supplied to me was true and correct.

I would like the reader to view Mr. D. Kalidas not as an individual shoe-repairer, but as being part of the very small percentage of Indian shoe traders who arrived in South Africa.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

III.

My work among the Kalidas family had been an enriching experience and I deeply appreciate the kindness, tolerance and friendship shown to me.

I would like to express my special thanks to the Kalidas family especially to Dhana and Persotam for showing such great co-operation.

INTRODUCTION

The persistent demand for cheap and reliable sources of labour for the sugar industry initiated the arrival of the first Indians to Natal in 1860. The arrival of these labourers triggered off the ultimate arrival of the trading class. These two groups tended to play a significant role in shaping the future of the Indians in the country.

The recruiting of Indian labour was initially confined to the sugar plantations, but it was later seen as profitable to extend Indian labour to railways, dockyards, coal mines, and domestic employment. "The majority of labourers were from peasant families who had been unable to maintain their traditional place in the Indian economy".¹

The Passenger Indians who were mainly the trading class realised the economic potential of a young and developing country. "Families either sent out one of their members to open a branch of an established business or individually came to further their ambition."²

Generally, the pioneer traders did well; they had certain advantages over white traders. "Acclimatized to heat, patient and gentle by nature; they were able to cope better with the region of the rural idiosyncracies of African custom".³

1. F. Meer: Portrait of South African Indian, p 3

2. A. Ratan: Indian Perspective, p 61

3. F. Meer: Portrait of South African Indian, p 25

2.

The Indian trader was able to compete with the white trader in that the expenses of most Indian traders were lower, due to the fact that most of the shop assistants were part of the family. The shop in which they traded also tended to serve as part of their residence.

In Natal the early reaction to Indian settlement was favourable amongst the whites. This favourable attitude can be described mainly to the Indentured Indian who laboured continually on the fields. However this attitude changed when the Passenger Indian who were mainly traders began to compete with whites in the supply of agricultural produce and particularly in trading.

"The first political elite also arose from the Passenger Indians"⁴. The Indentured Indian was desired as labourers and followed into the status pattern ascribed to non-Europeans - "that of menial and inferior with limited opportunity for personal development"⁵. The Passenger Indian on the other hand, by entering into trade challenged white privileges and were the first to be affected by any anti-Indian legislation.

Merchants, who were mainly Muslims took the lead in organizing legal defence against attacks on Indian trading rights. It was also due to a Muslim that we had the arrival of Gandhi in South Africa which tended to be the turning point in his career.

4. H. Kuper: Indian People in Natal, p 45

5. Ibid, p 46

3.

Most of the Passenger Indians brought across their wives and children as soon as they could afford their passage and had found them a home, and if unmarried, they returned to India to look for wives. They did not sever their ties with India, and it became a recognised practice to have their children married in India.

Kara Gosei was born in the year 1863 at Kacchiawadi, district Navsari, Surat, India. The green dot on the map depicts the approximate location of Kacchiawadi. Gosei married Ratan Dunne in 1883 who gave birth to seven children.



The photograph below was taken in 1972 when Dhana Kalidas visited Kacchiawadi.



The village of Kacchiawadi is largely dependent upon agriculture. Most of the families were very poor and lived at a subsistence level. Food was obtained from the crops they grew on the little land they owned. Crops commonly planted were potatoes, sugar cane, oil seeds and grain.

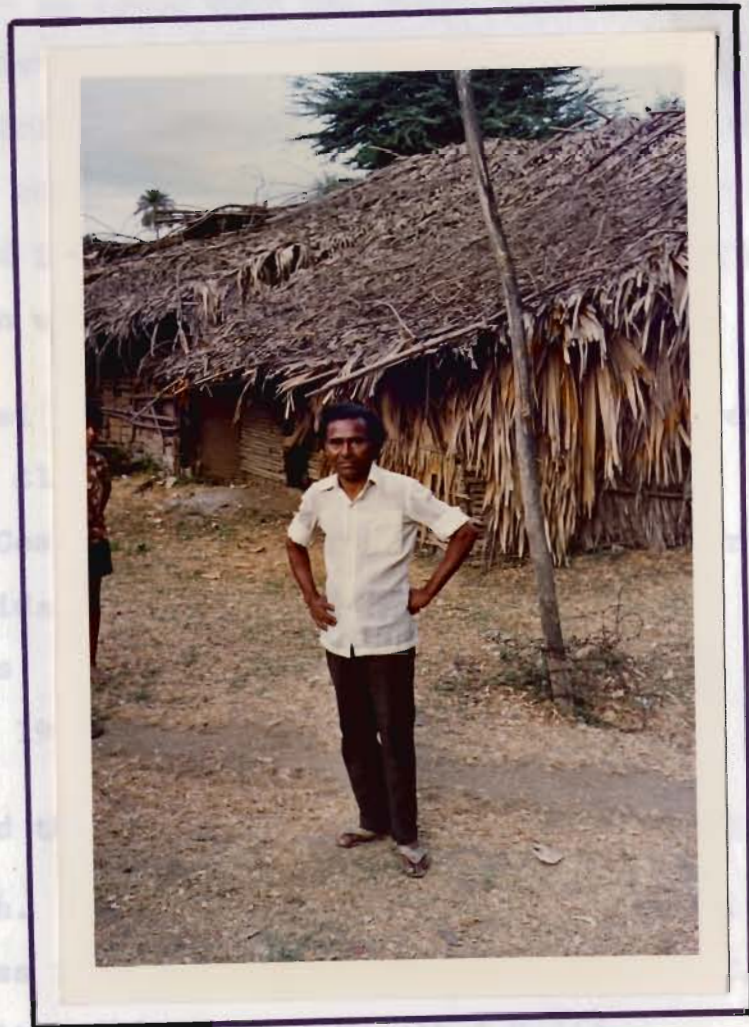
The few wealthy farmers had a large number of labourers on the farm. Being a shoe-repairer Gosei did not have a large farm but did have a few labourers working for him.

6. A.R. Desai: *Rural Sociology in India*, p 212

7. *Ibid.* p 219

5.

The photo below was taken in 1972 which show the son of one of the labourers who worked for Gosei. The background of the photo show the poor socio-economic conditions in which they lived. Most of the houses were made of bamboo. The labourers were totally reliant on the owners of the farms. Both young and old worked on the fields to make ends meet.



"Due to the rural nature of the settlement the infrastructure of the village is generally poor"⁶. "The presence of cattle near the homestead made conditions for health poor"⁷.

6. A.R. Desai: Rural Sociology in India, p 212

7. Ibid, p 219

Insects tend to be a common sight in the hot summer months.

As a shoe-repairer in a small village, Gosei found himself reliant for business on a very small section of the population, which consisted mainly of the rich farmers . Gosei also travelled great distances to serve his customers.

The conditions in India were not very favourable in the business circles which caused him to venture abroad, that is to South Africa. Communication between South Africa and India had been good. Friends like Jeevan Bhana who were stationed in Durban told him that South Africa was a young nation with a bright economic prospects.

In Durban Gosei worked as a shoe-repairer at 176 Grey Street, at a rent of £1 a month in the year 1905.

The first of Gosei's children to arrive in South Africa was Dhana Kalidas who came primarily to satisfy his fathers wishes . Dhana was born at Kacchiawadi on the 1st September 1907 (Refer to appendix 1).

Dhana attended the St. Adains school in Durban and later Mitchells High. Dhana left school at Std. 4 and joined the family business in 1925. He traded as Kalidas and Co. in partnership with elder brother Haribhai Kalidas.

"Parents feel their life task incomplete until all their children have been married"⁸. It is therefore imperative

8. T. Kalanje: South African Indians, p 12

that before Dhana left India in 1918 that Gosei arranged for another shoe-repairers daughter to marry his son at a matured age.

"Marriage among Muslim and Hindu is one where the caste system is rigidly employed"⁹. Forming a framework for caste system are four hierarchical graded varna, caste groups. The varna structure is symbolically represented by the Brahmins, (priest) as the head; the Kshatriya (warriors and rulers) as the arms; the vaishya (traders) as the body; falling outside the varna are the exterior or scheduled caste"¹⁰.

As soon as the business was well established, Dhana's wife Dhani and son Parsotam arrived on 11th June 1930 on the S.S. Karapara (Refer to Appendix 2).

It was not long after the arrival of Dhana's wife, Dhani, that a turning point was to occur in his life. Dhana had an immense desire to preserve the Hindu-Gujarati speaking populations culture and identity. It is therefore imperative that he joined various organisations in trying to promote this ideology.

Associations tend to be more characteristic of urban than rural societies which enable people to come together on a voluntary basis for various purposes.

9. A.D. Srinivas: A Indian Village, p 14

10. H. Kuper: Indian People in Natal, p 19

"In Durban, these associations proliferate not only along the usual environment of interest in specific activities - economics, politics, welfare or recreational - but also along lines of racial, tribal and cultural cleavages"¹¹.

The photograph below depicts the pioneers of the Durban Hittechoo Mandal of 1929.



THE PIONEERS OF OUR DURBAN HITTECHOO MANDAL - 1929

Between ¹⁹³⁰ 1930-34 the chairman of the Mandal was Haribhai Kalidas while Dhana Kalidas served as treasurer. During these years Dhana was continually to play a prominent role in the community. A greater awareness of the needs of the

11. H. Kuper: Indian People in Natal, p 80

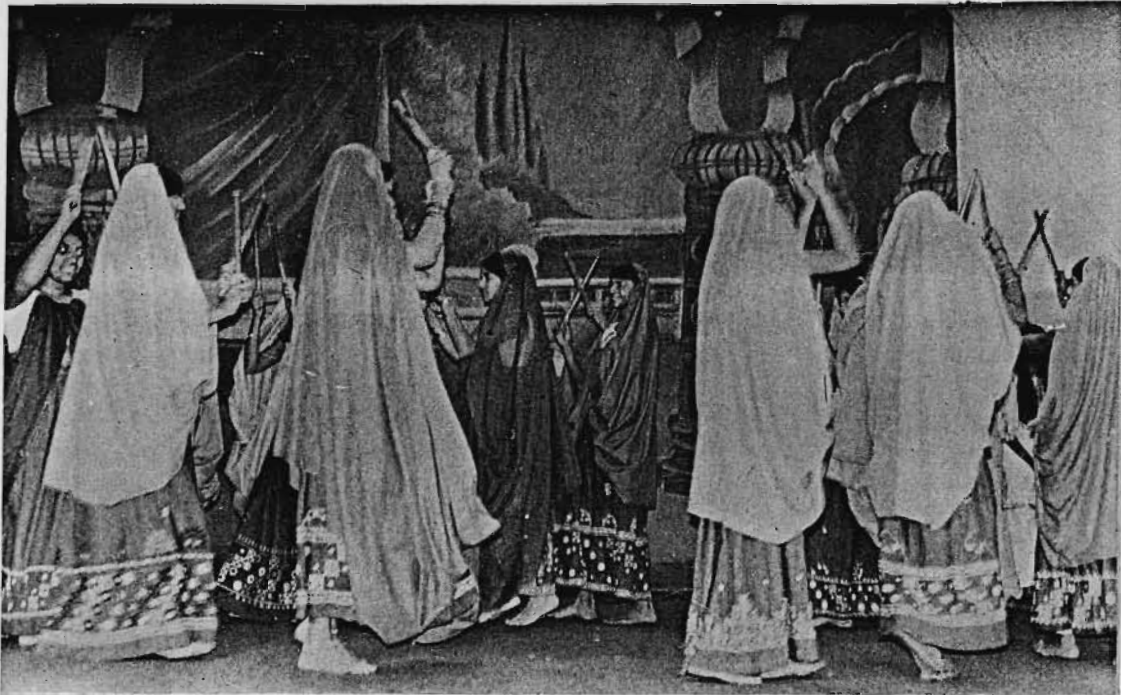
community within the realm of the total Gujarati community was realized for example the need for Gujarati education, the Mandal joined the Surat Hindu educational society to lend support in its work.

At the celebration of the Port Elizabeth Mandals silver jubilee celebrations, the Mandals from the various centres were united and plans discussed for the formation of a nation wide parentbody to co-ordinate activities. Thus the Kshatriya Mahasabha was borne. At this stage Dhana Kalidas was voted as Chairman (1935) but had to turn it down because of family and business commitments.

In the photograph below which was taken in 1969, D. Kalidas is the sixth person from the left.



SHRI DURBAN HITTECHOO MANDAL GROUP 1969



Gujarati girls perform the Ras-Lila and enact the worship of the Lord Krishna by his Sakhis (companions).

The height of the Mandals participation in the social events occur during the Diwali festival. Young girls and boys come together to organise various types of entertainment for the community as a whole.

The Gujarati community should not lose their cultural roots in a heterogeneous population of South Africa and to a large extent he realized this aim.

A concluding remark from Bhana Kalidas "Noteworthy achievements have been made in the fields of commerce, industry, and education. From humble beginnings as shoe-repairers the Mandal raised the majority of our people on a cultural level".

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can see that Kara Gosei who came to South Africa in 1896 to seek his fortune greatly succeeded in his goal.

It was in 1918 that he brought Dhana down at the age of ten. (Refer to appendix 3). Dhana was educated in Durban who later was to play a prominent role in the family as well as in the Gujarati community at large.

At present he is still engaged in shoe repairs, which shows he has followed the tradition of his father. His business has prospered from humble beginnings, to where, at present he is endowed with the proprietorship of three shops.

Although being successful in business did not deter him in playing an active role in cultural activities. The Mandal played a great role in education, religion and for the general awareness of the Hindu Gujarati Community of which he was a prominent member. The main aim of the Mandal was that the Gujarati community should not lose their cultural roots in a heterogeneous population of South Africa and to a large extent he realized this aim.

A concluding remark from Dhana Kalidas "Noteworthy achievements have been made in the fields of commerce, industry, and education. From humble beginnings as shoe-repairers the Mandal united the majority of our people on a cultural level".

Appendix 1.PASSPORT.

These are to request and require, in
name of the Viceroy and Governor-
General of India, all those
whom it may concern to allow

Dhama Kala.

to pass freely, without let or hind-
rance, and to afford him every assist-
ance and protection of which he
may stand in need.

Given at Baroda the 28th
day of November 1917.

By order of the Viceroy and
Governor-General.

Frederick Mead
Resident at Baroda

This Passport is valid for 2 years
from the date of its issue. It
may be renewed for 4 further periods
two years each after which a new
passport will be required.

RENEWALS.

DESCRIPTION OF BEARER.

Profession Student
Date of birth Kachhiwadi,
14 September 1907
name if
married
travelling

3 feet 10 inches

Nose straight Eyes dark
Mouth small

Colour of Hair black

Complexion brown Face round

Special peculiarities Scar on fore-
left eye, mark of branding on
Status a subject of the
Baroda, a Native State
and as such entitled
to the protection

PHOTOGRAPH OF BEARER.

13.

Appendix 2.

Chaque document
de service doit
être ainsi signé

53075

UNIE VAN
SUID-AFRIKA.



UNION OF
SOUTH AFRICA.

Z. 14 B.

KANTOOR VAN DIE—OFFICE OF THE

PRINCIPAL IMMIGRATION OFFICER;
P.O. BOX 28, THE POINT
DURBAN.



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

It is hereby certified from the records of this office that PARSOTAM, the son of DHANA KALA and DHANI was born at Ethan in India on the 6th December 1928, according to a certificate issued by the District Magistrate at Navsari in India on 24th March 1930.

PARSOTAM lawfully entered the Province of Natal on 11th June 1930 ex s.s. KARAPARA.



for
PRINCIPAL IMMIGRATION OFFICER:
(PROVINCE OF NATAL).

Appendix 3.

OBSERVATIONS.

Valid only for the journey
to Durban (Natal).

The bearer states that he is going to Durban to join his father Kala (Kara).

Gosai, who is working there as a shoe-maker

7 ~~Handwritten signature~~

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