

BIOGRAPHY OF MY GRANDFATHER



1983

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C O N T E N T S

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

I would like to thank all individuals, and Departments for their co-operation in furnishing photographs and informations in response to my requests. Special thanks goes to my Grandfather who made himself readily available at all times. I am also grateful to his brother Mr Fazel Ebrahim Khan for supplying me with the necessary information about the background of his parents. My sincere gratitude also goes to my brother Mr Ashraff Khan who willingly provided me with transport. Above all I would like to thank my mother for introducing the topic to my Grandfather and for accompanying me to his house when ever I went. I also express my gratitude to the History Department and the Department of Indian Affairs for their kind help. Lastly I would like to thank my sister for typing the script.

Information obtained from the various sources often differed from one another and I tried my best to arrive at the approximate truth. Efforts were also made by me to place each fact in its proper historical context; in some instances I was successful while in others this was impossible to accomplish. I have eliminated the lengthy facts from the biography and included it in the appendix.

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

Biographies have been written of many great personalities. History in fact is made up of the actions of men either set on changing the existing circumstances, or to fulfill their own ambitions. I have chosen my Grandfather Mr Mohammad Fazel Khan as the subject of a biography not because he occupied an important place in History or because he was the only member in the family who came from India, but because of the keen interest he displayed when I told him of my research and his willingness to be of assistance to me. On reading his biography one will find that he has crowded a good amount of experiences into his life.

PLACE OF ORIGIN IN INDIA

Grandfather was born on the eve of the First World War on 14 August 1914, in the Rander district of Surat in Bombay. My attempts to locate Rander on any map of India or to find information on its socio-economic background was unsuccessful. My next move was to read some general history of Bombay, from which I learnt that it was the largest and most important port of India. "From 1860 onwards Bombay grew dramatically in every way: population, physical extent, employment, wealth, sophistication. By 1896 it had more than 800 000 inhabitants, and despite a serious setback of bubonic plague in that year the population resumed its growth passing 900 000 in 1911."¹

Surat lies 150 miles North of Bombay and is the chief port of Gujerat; it seemed to have gained in economic importance right from the 1660's when the Dutch East India Company first built its trading stations there and established its headquarters.²

1. D. Moraes: The Great Cities - Bombay, p. 54.

2. D. Moraes: The Great Cities - Bombay, pp. 42-44.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Grandfather states that they were a mixed community but since he left India at the early age of ten he does not know the different race groups. He also says "our family mingled with all the people."³ According to Taya Zinkin most Indians lived in villages and "Indians run the whole gamut from mongloid to semitic, from negroid to negrito races."⁴ Most of Bombay and Gujerat was predominantly inhabited by Muslims and Hindus. He states that the mixed community comprised mostly of agriculturalists and labourers. This evidence is supported by Jean Filliozat who states that "there is a general division of society into agricultural and industrial workers."⁵ She further states that in small townships or rural districts the carpenter, blacksmith, potter and policemen keep their distinct and necessary function and means of livelihood of their particular group because they are trained for no other. Relationships between different groups are restricted to the interchange essential to

3. Interview with my Grandfather: 2 April 1983.
(Henceforth referred to as First Interviews).

4. T. Zinkin: India, p.8.

5. J.Filliozat: India - The Country And Its People, p.61.

daily life, but apart from the occasional rivalry and dispute they consider each other as necessary and complimentary.

As regards their working conditions there is a basic feature common to all: although land is divided up into a large number of small independent farms the villages appear to live on a broad communal basis and not only do small scale farmers help each other in turn in tasks such as ploughing, sowing, irrigation and harvesting and have their flocks and herds tendered all together, each village also has its group of traders and professional men who serve the whole community and receive payment not in money but in kind.⁶

Grandfathers family belonged to the wealthy landowning class and their main occupation was agricultural farming.⁷ From my conversation with my Grandfathers⁵ brother Mr Ebrahim Fazel Khan I learnt that my great great-Grandfather Hoosen Khan was employed by the British Government as a general. When he retired he was given the choice either to take pension in cash or land. Hoosen Khan chose the land. As a result my great Grandfather Mr Fazel Khan Hoosen Khan and the family inherited land and established themselves as agriculturalists.⁸

6. J. Filliozat: India - The Country And Its People, p.87.

7. First Interview.

8. Second Interview with my Grandfathers brother: Mr Fazel Khan
30 April 1983. (Henceforth referred to Second Interview).

The family could not supply any documentary evidence about my great great Grandfathers date of birth and death except that he was originally from Afghanistan, settled in India and died there. The only information I could gather from text book is that the British ruled India during the years 1842 - 1947.

In November 1918 my great Grandfather sailed from Bombay to Durban leaving behind my great grandmother Amina Bebe Khan and the rest of the family.⁹ He arrived in early 1919. Amina Bebe apparently was a Burmese, born in Rangoon. How she came to be in India is unknown.¹⁰ My great Grandfather came as a passenger Indian at the age of 32. One of my Grandfathers uncle was a manager of the ship which came to Durban harbour; he noted the situation in South Africa and when the ship returned to India he gave a very encouraging report of the progress made by Indians in South Africa.¹¹ This enticed my Grandfather to come to South Africa. His experience of agricultural farming in India made him pursue it in South Africa as well and he also set up a small poultry business.¹²

9. Great Grandfathers actual dates of departure and arrival could not be traced.

10. Second Interview.

11. Second Interview.

12. First Interview.

He befriended a Mr Motala who soon recommended him to the owner of a General Dealer Mr Mullah who needed a Manager for his shop.¹³ He accepted this position though he continued with farming as well.

13. First Interview.

REASONS FOR LEAVING ORIGINAL COUNTRY

"My father saw better prospects for the children," Grandfather stated "he therefore sent my fee for me to come."¹⁴ In order to justify this we have to look into India's condition from 1918 onwards. The situation was changing rapidly after the First World War. People were trying to bring about constitutional changes. "British policy of reform was primarily designed to safeguard the interest of the new elite in the villages, without disturbing the precapitalist mode of production. Social tension gathered momentum as the landlord stubbornly clung to power."¹⁵

Rent paying tenants rose in struggle against landlords. Various agrarian movements were organised. As these movements gained momentum they caused social disorder and the positions of great landlords became insecure. As my great Grandfather left India during this period of chaos and had found a more quieter existence in South Africa he strived towards bringing his entire family over.

I have briefly discussed the various movements and in doing so I have largely referred to Sunil Sen's "Agrarian Relationship In India." The earliest form of peasant association was the "ryot sabhas." From 1917 onwards there was a marked increase in peasant unrest. In this year Gandhi launched the Champaran struggle.

14. First Interview.

15. S. Sen: Agrarian Relations In India, p.177.

The major portion of this district was held by the Bettiah, Ramnagar and Madhuban estates; the landlords leased out their land to the planters. The ryots discontent became intense as the planters enhanced rent under the tinkathia system. They also revolted as they were forced to pay more rent against the freedom from growing indigo crop which was rapidly declining in the twentieth century. Then another movement, also launched by Gandhi in 1918, the Satyagraha of Patidar ryots of Kaira (Kheda) in Gujarat. Here the ryots paid revenue to the government. In 1917 there was a failure of kharif crops due to heavy rains, and the ryots demanded suspension of land revenue. But the government rejected their demand, and the movement was in full swing from March to June. Thus in 1919 during the Rowlett Satyagraha the Kaira district was in the vortex of disturbances.

From the 1920 onwards continued tenant struggle flared up. After the rent Act of 1886 was passed, the landlords often evicted the tenants in order to get Nazarana from new tenants. During 1919-1920 notices of eviction rose to 2 593. As a result the tenant struggled spread to other districts from Uttar Pradesh where it started.¹⁶

16. S. Sen: Agrarian Relations In India, po. 179-183

In South Africa, after the First World War which lasted from 1914-1918 there was a cessation of Indentured Immigrants. "Trade was good at the time as a result of the War, and the transition from indentured labour to free labour was accomplished without too many difficulties."¹⁷ In Natal there were no restrictions on Indians owning land. Indians were acquiring land in an even larger scale in the Coastal Areas. During the years 1920-1921 no restrictions had been placed in Natal on land holdings by Indians, and Durban still possessed a considerable amount of land not yet dispossessed of to private owners. Periodic auction sale was held and Indians were accustomed to bid for and buy this land. But in 1922 there was a strong protest from the European public and the auction was abandoned.

Although land was provided the arrangements for Indian housing at this time was most unsatisfactory. "The great mass of the Indians were very poor and they frequently occupied land on the out skirts of the town which meant that every approach to Durban was littered by untidy Sanitary Indian Shacks... The shacks were badly built, which very soon fell into a state of disrepair. Each room was occupied by a separate family and cooking was done outside in a communal shelter erected at the back. Sanitary conditions were inadequate or non existent."¹⁸ Grandfather states that although these conditions were deplorable they were much better than the conditions that existed in India.

17. M. Palmer: History of the Indians in Natal, p.93.

18. M. Palmer: History of the Indians in Natal, p.76.

DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL

He boarded the S.S. Karagola in May 1924 and arrived in South Africa in June of the same year. According to him there were four ships operating from Bombay to South Africa. While one was in Bombay one arrived in South Africa while the two others were in mid-sea. As a result every fortnight a ship arrived at Durban harbour.

FIRST PLACE OF SETTLEMENT

His father had arranged for him to stay in South Coast Junction (Present day Rossburgh). The absence of any educational institute in the Marianhill area largely accounted for this. He lived with his uncle Rasool Mia Sadek who owned a butcher. He took his education in the Clairwood Government Aided Indian School.

FIRST OCCUPATION

As he was only ten years old when he arrived in South Africa he took some time to adapt to his new environment. After school hours he used to assist his uncle in the butcher, as a result of which he learnt the art of business. After completing his standard three at the age of fifteen he left school and went out working. In the beginning he worked at Paddock on the South Coast.

SUBSEQUENT OCCUPATION

In 1934 he returned to Clairwood but left again. This time to Van Reenen which was at that time the border of Natal and the Orange Free State. During this year my great granny and the rest of the family arrived in South Africa. The reason for their coming was that the law of 1933 stated that children above the age of 17 would not be allowed to enter South Africa. My great Grandfather applied for their passports and they arrived in South Africa on 4 February 1934.

While my Grandfather was living in Van Reenen he married a woman named Halima, the daughter of a businessman Mr Peerbhai. From this marriage he had two children, a daughter named Zubeida born in December 1938 and a son named Ismail born in February 1941. During this year he moved to Ladysmith in Northern Natal. While he was here he worked as a salesman and also as a commercial traveller. This was his main occupation until the Second World War broke out in 1942. During the war he was employed in the ammunition factory in Ladysmith known as the South African Mint. There they used to manufacture cannon shots known as twenty-five pounders which had a destroying range of twenty-five miles.¹⁹ After the war the South African Mint was taken over by the Consolidated Textile Mills for processing raw cotton.

19. See Appendices.

Grandfather states that: "should the war break out again I will be called upon to serve because from the moment I started I knew my job, and still know the secret of manufacturing it."²⁰ He was also employed as a supervisor of two departments, the cordite cutting and bag stamping. He worked in shifts.

After the war Grandfather purchased two businesses, one an eating house in Colenso and the other Athlone Cafe adjoining the Athlone cinema in Ladysmith. Until 1951 he lived in Colenso. But two years later he returned to Ladysmith, decided to go into partnership with one of his friends who disappointed him so he decided to close both the business. During the years 1952-1960 he lived both in Ladysmith and in Glenco. He returned to commercial travelling and at the same time worked as a clerk for Moshell Gevisers branch in Ladysmith. In the year 1960 he returned to Durban where he worked as a salesman in a clothing shop; and a furniture shop respectively. At present he is working in Hammarsdale and is residing in Unit 11 in Chatsworth.

He remembers the 1949 riots and took an active part in protecting his family.²¹

He proudly claims to be the holder of a medal and a diploma from Charles Atlas of America on body building. He obtained this because he could lift up 50 pounds with one finger above his head. He further says that at the age of sixty two he got his insurance policy at which the doctors themselves were surprised. He was also an active sportsman, played tennis in Ladysmith and won the double Championship.

20. First Interview.

21. See Appendices.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

At the moment he is a member of the Crossmoor Civic Association. This Association holds a meeting every Sunday. Through this association the various problems of the inhabitants such as trouble of the railways, corporation, parking problems etc., are solved. He is also the founder and active member of the Crossmoor Islamic Society which also attends to the problems of the Muslim community. While he was living in Ladysmith he was elected as a council member for the Natal Indian Congress Branch of Ladysmith. He was proved to be a very dedicated member.

C O N C L U S I O N

It would be noteworthy to add to his long list of experiences, his second marriage to Ayesha Bebe. My late grandmother passed away when my mother was seventeen years old. My Grandfather remarried six years later in 1963. He has no children from the second marriage. On his next birthday he will be 70 years old. He looks much younger than his age and is still very active and in good health.

A P P E N D I C E S

19 - These were the shells with which the British troops in South Africa blasted German Tiger tanks. Only then did Romel, the commander of the German army retreat. When Japan entered the War a second shell was made known as the 3.7 harwitzer. When these were used Japan was ~~free~~^{forced} to retreat. Grandfather said that according to the foreman in order to keep one soldier going in the front-line they needed about ten people to supply ammunition, clothing etc. The War ended in 1945 with the blasting of the Atomic Bomb in Japan. Victory went to Britian and its allies, U.S.A., Russia and France. At that time the twenty five pounder~~k~~ was manufactured in Pretoria as well as in Kimber~~ely~~.

21 - My Grandfather was paying a visit to his parents, who at that time was residing at the farm Damatt near Marianhill. One Saturday evening while he was taking a walk in the garden he was attacked by Africans. He ran indoors and warned his families. Thereafter he fired a few shots at the Africans. But because his father was well known to the Africans they did not attack but warned that when the bullets would be finished they would attack. By midnight they had already looted the shop and was directing their attack at the family. My Grandfather hid his parents in a banana pit and with his younger brother climbed a tree to watch the movement of the Africans. He remembers seing more and more Africans being brought in a van which he says looked likad one of the Natal Durban Corporation (NDC) vans. He also witnessed with horror how the neighbouring houses were being burnt down and people were being killed or injured. Fortunately their house was not burnt. When the Africans had cleared away he brought

A P P E N D I C E S

his family into the house which was completely ransacked. He says that "we had lost everything but were lucky to be alive."

Grandfather says that the riot was caused by a dispute over a loaf of bread in Durban. An African boy was assaulted by an Indian and the Africans attacked the Indians. Indians living in the Cato Manor area were most severely hit. Many shops and houses were burnt down. Indians were burnt and killed. The riot came to an end only when the army and the navy came to the rescue of the Indians.

PASSPORT.

(2)

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

Fajalkhan Husenkhan

to pass freely, without let or hindrance, and to afford ^{him} every assistance and protection of which ^{he} may stand in need.

Given at *Bombay* the *14th* day of *Novr* 1918

By order of the Viceroy and Governor-General.

[Signature]

Deputy Secretary to the Government of Bombay.
Political Department.

This Passport is valid for 2 years only from the date of its issue. It may be renewed for 4 further periods

DESCRIPTION OF BEARER.

Age *32 yrs* Profession *Fruit Dealer*

Place & date of birth *Bombay Dec 1886*

Maiden name if widow or married

PHOTOGRAPH OF BEARER.



SIGNATURE OF BEARER.

PASSPORT OF MY GREAT GRANDFATHER.

A P P E N D I X B

APPENDIX C

PASSPORT OF MY GREAT GRANDFATHER IN JUNE 1946 - LEAVING SOUTH AFRICA
TO VISIT PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA.

DESCRIPTION.—BESKRYWING.—SIGNALEMENT.

Wife.—Vrou.—Femina.

Profession Beroep Professione	Scholar	
Place and date of Birth Plek en datum van geboorte Lieu et date de naissance	Natal 1907	
Domestic woonplek Domicile	Johannesburg	
Height Lengte Taille	5 ft. 4 1/2 in.	
Colour of eyes Kleur van oë Couleur des yeux	Brown	
Colour of hair Kleur van hare Couleur des cheveux	Grey	
Visible physical peculiarities Merkbare liggaamlike oanmerkingswaardighe Eienskeits particulariers	/	

CHILDREN.—KINDERS.—ENFANTS.

Name.
Naam.
Nom.Age.
Ouderdom.
Age.Sex.
Geslacht.
Sexe.PHOTOGRAPH OF BEARER.
PORTRAIT VAN HOUDER.

WIFE.—VROU.—FEMME.

(Photo.)
(Portrait.)

Specimen signature of applicant, which will be affixed to the passport when issued.

SIGNATURE OF WIFE.
HANDTEKENING VAN VROU.
ET DE SA FEMME.

APPENDIX D

MAP OF INDIA SHOWING POSITION OF BOMBAY AND SURAT.



APPENDIX E

PASSPORT OF MY GRANDFATHER.

2				3	
DESCRIPTION SIGNALEMENT				PHOTOGRAPH OF BEARER	
Profession					
Place and date of birth	Randa.		Dol. Sunat		
Lien et date de naissance	18914.				
Domicle					
Domicle					
Height	4	ft.	1	in.	
Taille					
Colour of eyes	Brown				
Conteur des yeux	Black				
Colour of hair					
Conteur des cheveux					
Visible distinguishing marks.	Small scar marks on the face.				
Signes particuliers					
CHILDREN - ENFANTS					
Name		Age		Sex	
Nom		Age		Sex	
				(Photo)	
				WIFE FEMME	
					
				SIGNATURE OF WIFE ET DE SA FEMME <i>* n g n e i t i</i> <i>* Mohamed Khan</i>	

Mr. Khan's mother, Mrs. Anna Khan, was born in Rangoon and remained in India with her children while her husband established himself in South Africa. Her family remains that she is well over 100 years old.

APPENDIX F

MY GRANDFATHER'S MOTHER AND BROTHER.



Mr Khan's mother, Mrs Amine Bebe, was born in Rangoon and remained in India with her children while her husband established himself in South Africa . . . Her family maintain that she is well over 100 years old.



STORE keeper Mr Fazel Khan was born in Bombay. At present a mosque is being built along side his store while about 12 other families occupy houses on his land

THE TEMPLE OF HEALTH

CHARLES ATLAS PHYSICAL CULTURE SCHOOL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Greeting

Be it known that Mr. Khan has honorably completed the prescribed course of the Charles Atlas System of Health, Strength and Personality Building. We are satisfied that he has successfully mastered this course, therefore we duly award and grant this

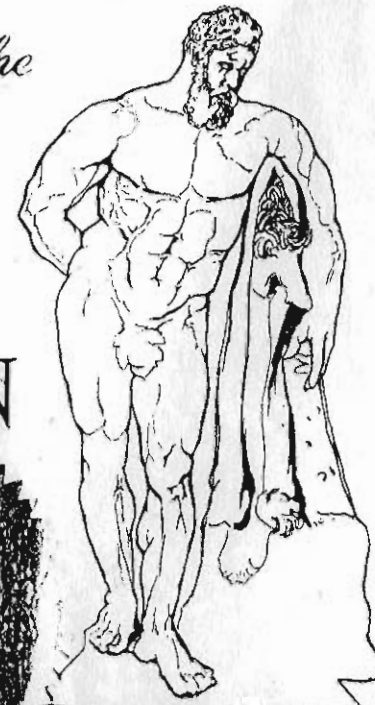
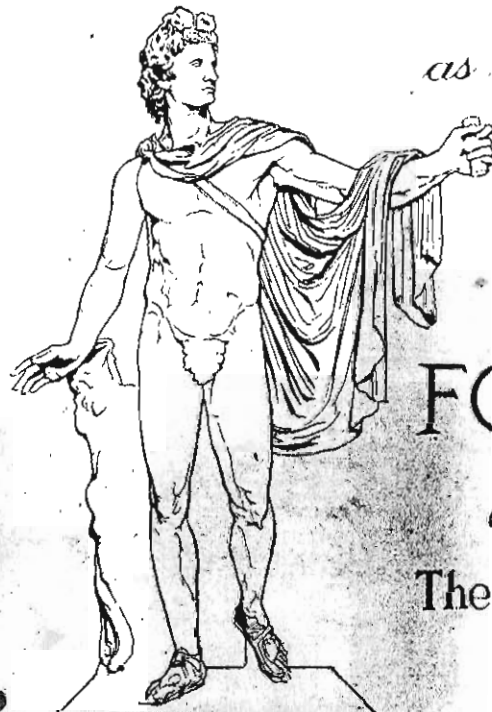
DIPLOMA

as an evidence that he has complied with all the requirements to enable him to graduate from this Institution. In testimony whereof we have hereunto affixed our hands and seal this 7 day of Dec 1933

FOR PHYSICAL PERFECTION

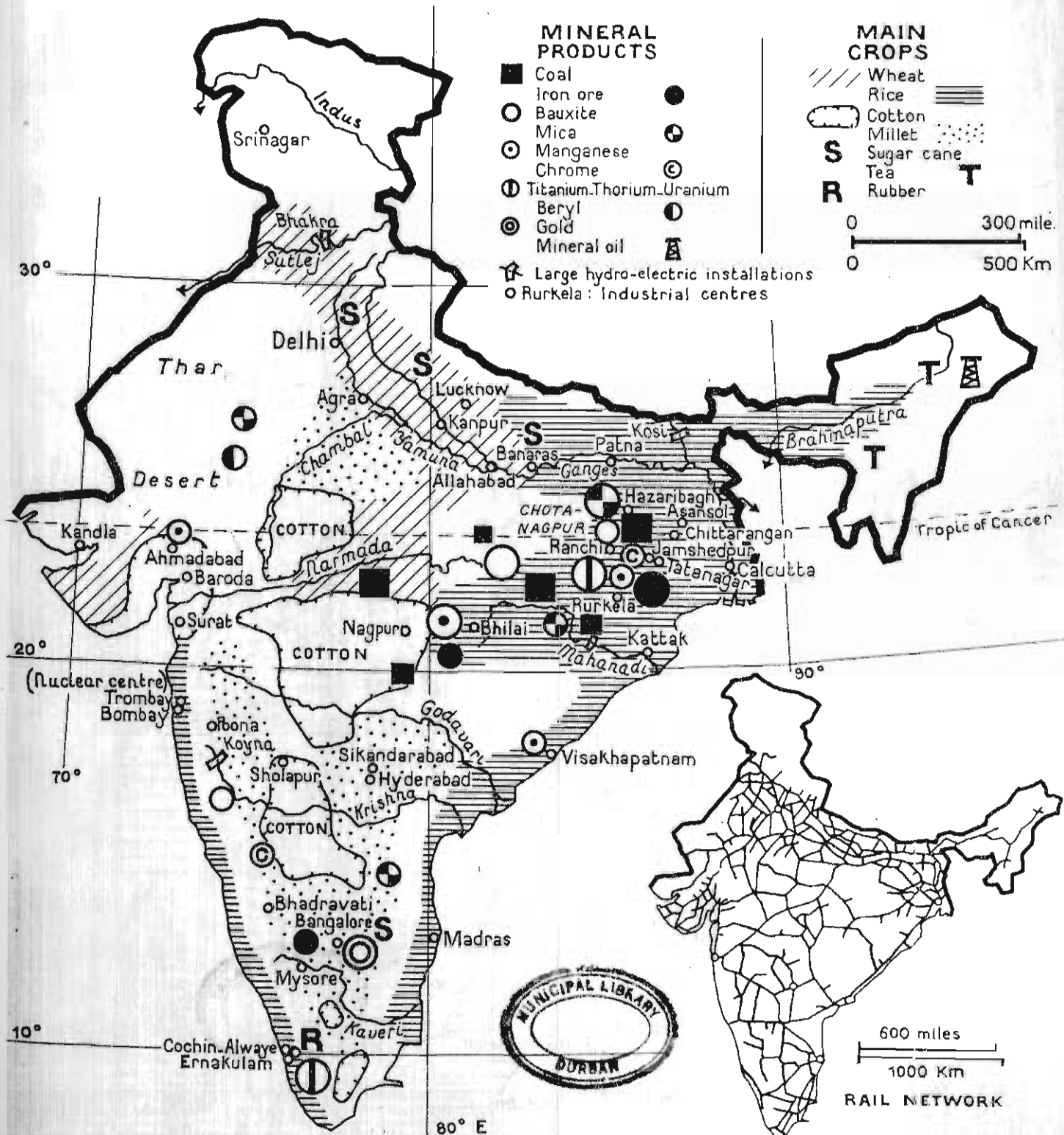
Charles Atlas

The World's Most Perfect Man



APPENDIX H

ECONOMIC MAP OF INDIA.



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