

SHAMIN SOOKHAY
16098

HISTORY III

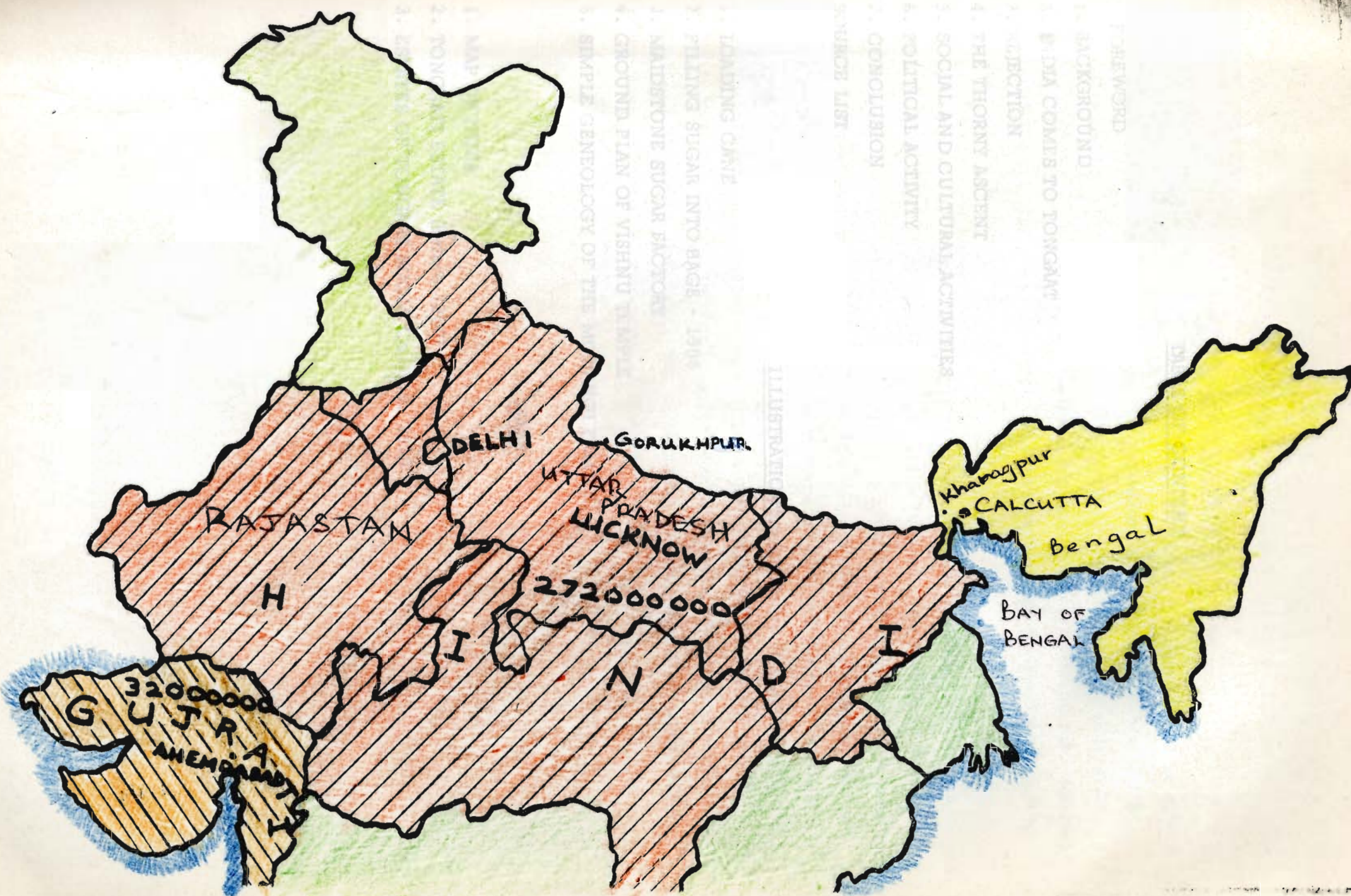


TABLE OF CONTENT

FOREWORD

1. BACKGROUND
2. INDIA COMES TO TONGAAT
3. REJECTION
4. THE THORNY ASCENT
5. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES
6. POLITICAL ACTIVITY
7. CONCLUSION

SOURCE LIST

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. LOADING CANE
2. FILLING SUGAR INTO BAGS - 1905
3. MAIDSTONE SUGAR FACTORY
4. GROUND PLAN OF VISHNU TEMPLE
6. SIMPLE GENEALOGY OF THE MOHANGI FAMILY

MAPS

1. MAP OF INDIA
2. TONGAATI ESTATE (Before 1900)
3. ESTATES OF TONGAAT SUGAR Co. Ltd. 1960

FOREWORD

THE MONEY LENDER

I have titled the essay "The Money Lender" for in various interviews with relatives of the late Mr. Mohangi no one had failed to mention that he was popularly known as the "Money Lender". The title is still pretentious for a content that only skims the surface of the suggested subject matter. But one has to understand that Mohangi was a man of great strength who managed to rise above his misfortunes and achieve the status of the "Money Lender".

The greatest disappointment and setback experienced in compiling this research project was the sparsity of documentary evidence for that early period. I have tried to be scrupulous in my research and the major information had been gained in conversation with the Mohangi grandsons and only surviving son. However, fortunately I am not totally without evidence for the existence of Mohangi as I had managed to obtain a newspaper cutting published after his death. Furthermore there is a brief synopsis of his life featured in the Who's Who. In the assessment of this essay I would maintain that the object of this work has been only partially attained since history is based on legality of documents and without this one can only make speculations which does not fall into the context of history.

The following sent floral tributes: S. Moonsamy and sons, Newlands; K. Maduramuthu, Bracken; John Moonsamy and family, Wychbank; T. Rajoo Bros., Mayville; T. Kunnu and family, Richmond Farm; Thandya Gopaul, Mayville; Tommy and family, Sydenham; Hoosen James, Mayville; Moonglum Moonsamy, Cato Manor; P. O. Pillay and family, Pietermaritzburg; K. S. Pillay and family, C.

Gopaul Singh and family, R. Sitaram and family, P. Seebrun and sons. Tongaat and districts: Messrs. N. J. Maharaj and family, C. Subramoni and family, Hurbans and family, S. Bala and family, L. D. Naidoo and family, B. Mathabadul and family, Principal and staff, Isuembe Indian School, M. V. Naidoo and family,

officials and members, Shri Hariroop Vishnu Temple, officials and members, Isuembe Indian School Committee, Bragwandass and family, Mr. and Mrs. C. P. Naidoo, officials and members, Tongaat Indian Mill Group, Vallabhjee and sons, Natal Indian Cane Growers' Association, Tom Murugan and sons.

MR. MAHANGEE

The death occurred on September 15, 1952, of Mr. Mahangee, at his residence, Isuembe, Tongaat, at the age of 71 years. The late Mr. Mahangee was born in Gorukpur, India, and came to this country when he was 14 years old. By dint of hard work, he became a leading personality in the district and a prosperous farmer and businessman. He visited India in 1950.

Among other official positions, he was the foundation member of the Natal Indian Cane Growers' Association, vice chairman of the Shree Sanatham Dharam Sabha (Natal), chairman and trustee of the Isuembe Indian School, trustee of the Shri Vishnu Temple and an executive member of the Tongaat Indian Mill Group.

He was always kindly disposed and gave generously to all charitable and educational causes, and only a few weeks before his death, he donated £625 to the Benevolent Home in Tongaat.

His wife predeceased him in 1950. He leaves behind five sons, four daughters and a host of grand- and great-grandchildren to mourn their loss.

His remains were cremated at the family crematorium on September 16, 1952, in the presence of a large and representative gathering. The following paid tributes: Messrs. P. B. Singh, Durban; Sudama Singh, Chaka's Kraal; B. R. Singh, Durban; S. T. Naidoo, G. Hurbans and O. P. Naidoo of Tongaat.

Floral and other tributes were received from the following: Durban and Districts, Messrs. Findlay and Sullivan, Billy Bechoo and family, Ramnath Mahabeer and sons, City Motor Repairs, A. R. Varma, R. Ramcharran, L. Munshi, Sookdeo, B. Sowki and family, S. Sewpersadh, L. Sewcharran (Paul), Jhabee, Romkissoren and sons, B. Purmasir and sons, S. Deval and family, A. R. Maharaj, B. Seebrun, L. Gokool (John), Harripersadh and family, C. Sewduth and family, Sanathan Dharam Sabha, H. Gokool (bookkeepers), J. Maganlal and Co., E. G. N. Dore, R. Renaud,

MRS. BUTCHIE MAHANGEE

The death occurred of Mrs. Butchie Mahangee, mother of Mahangee brothers, at her residence, Isuembe, on July 15, 1950.

She leaves behind a very large family, friends and relatives to mourn their loss.

Her remains were cremated on July 16, 1950, at the family Crematorium, Isuembe, where a large gathering of friends and relatives were present to pay their last tribute.

Mohangi Sewthal originated from a farming community. Born in 1883, he was the second son of Sewthal from Dhavupurd, District Garukhpw, in the Uttar Pradesh in India. Up to 1869 Indian indentured labourers had migrated to Natal from the South and the East coast of India, from Madras and Culcutta. One of these labourers from Uttar Pradesh was to be instrumental in paving the way for the entry of Mohangi into Natal. He was Beharie who resided in the same district as the Sewthal family. The reason for Beharie signing on as an indentured labourer is not clearly understood. However since Gorukhpw was primarily a farming community at that stage, he may have sustained great losses because of the Monsoon^F floods or through the existence of the exorbitant land tax. Drought also seems to be a possible setback experienced by the farmer.

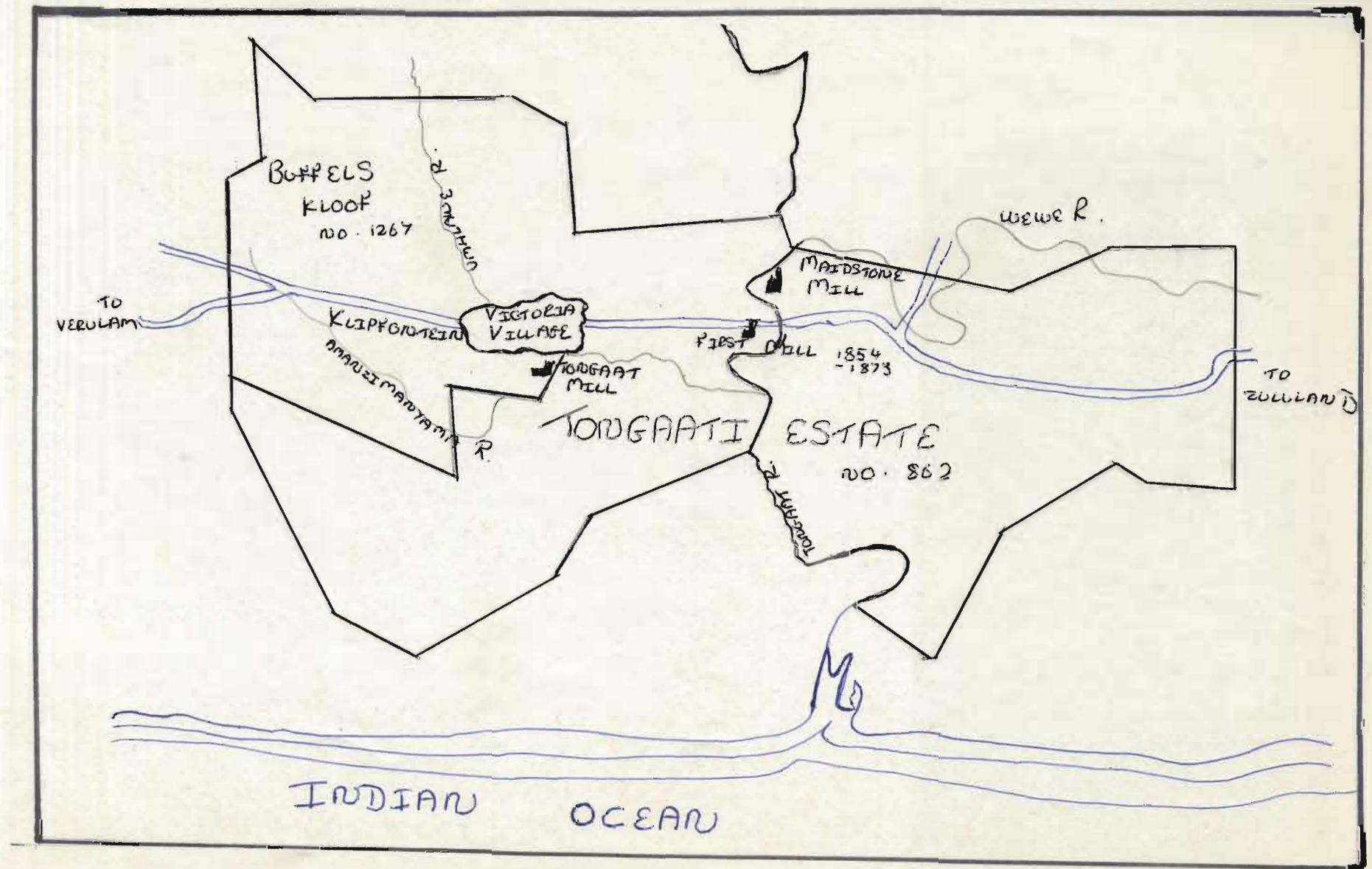
After his contract had expired Beharie returned to India. In continuation of the traditional pattern, Mohangi at the age of ten was proposed to a daughter of Beharie. Among Hindustanis it is usual for the girl's people to start marriage negotiations. There is an attempt to restrict the marriage to persons whose forebears were members of a common village in India, in addition to members of a common caste. In this respect a matrimony between Mohangi and Soogarie was desirable by Mr. Beharie. However before the matrimonial arrangements could be finalized the young bridegroom at the age of eleven years was abducted by Beharie and married secretly to his daughter, Soogarie. Thereafter the family was to leave India and return to South African soil.

In the year 1894 Mohangi and the Beharie family embarked in Natal as so called passengerIndians. The social and economic backgrounds of the passenger Indians varied widely. There were among them those who had held important posts in local government, as mayors and magistrates, or whose ancestors had received valuable jagirs (land gifts) from the Moghuls. The vast majority, however were impoverished peasant proprietors whose traditional economy had been shattered by the exorbitant land tax. The immigrants began their business in Durban or travelled into the interior where there were large communities of Indian labourers. They soon discovered the lucrative African market and began to establish country stores in remote areas of Natal. It was against this background that Mr. Beharie was to travel to Tongaat to set up a small farm and store.

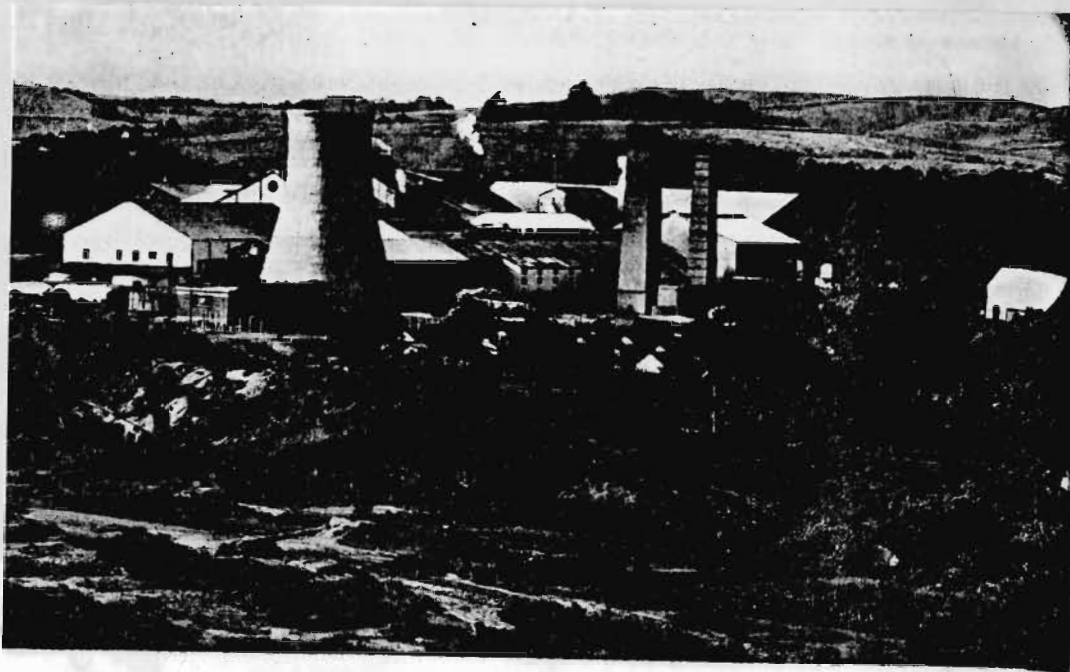
Considered as a place on the map of Natal, Tongaat is one of a score of sugar villages which punctuate the dusty coast road at intervals from Umzimkulu to Umfolozi. For forty-six years the little Tongaat Sugar Estate under the management of James Renault Saunders had been the principal undertaking in the district. Yet in all these years the Estate had never become more than a pioneer settled - farmer enterprise in which sugar was no more than one of several more or less precarious props of a subsistence economy. At the turn of the century, James son, Edward Saunders floated the Estate as a limited company, with a new and much larger mill, and the undertaking embarked on the role of the pioneer industrialist. That limited part was to last nearly another few decades, because it was not until a year or so before the outbreak of World War II that the Company shed its industrial swaddling clothes and achieved something approaching "big business status." In common with the rest of the young industry development on the Tongaati during the first five years was slow as to be imperceptible. The total quantity of sugar recorded as having been made in Natal by the seventeen mills that were in operation in 1859 was 1 300 tons.⁽¹⁾ Nevertheless, the Estate was already recognized as one of the leading establishments on the coast. The solution of the labour problem was soon to be provided. In the 1859 Council elections Dr. Charles Johnstone, the leader of the "Anti-Coolie Committee" was defeated and it was requested that the Lieutenant Governor introduce legislation to facilitate the introduction of coolies. This resulted in the promulgation of Law 14 of 1859 which gave power to the Government of Natal to introduce labourers from India. Thus there was the entry of immigrant Indian labour to Natal.

Watson in his book TONGAATI states that the stagnation of Tongaat as a European settlement was one of the causes of it becoming a popular locality amongst Indian immigrants. It was surrounded on all sides by extensive unfarmed areas owned by absentee landlords. This made it easy for India settlers to obtain available land on leasehold, with the chance later of gaining freehold title, when enough money had been saved to meet the purchase price. Thus the population of Tongaat became increasingly complicated as new ingredients of race, religion, language and tradition were stirred into the mixture.

(1) J.F. Ingram: THE COLONY OF NATAL, Page 38.



TONGAATI ESTATE (BEFORE 1900)



Maidstone Sugar Factory from the south-west, with the canefields of Frasers in the distance

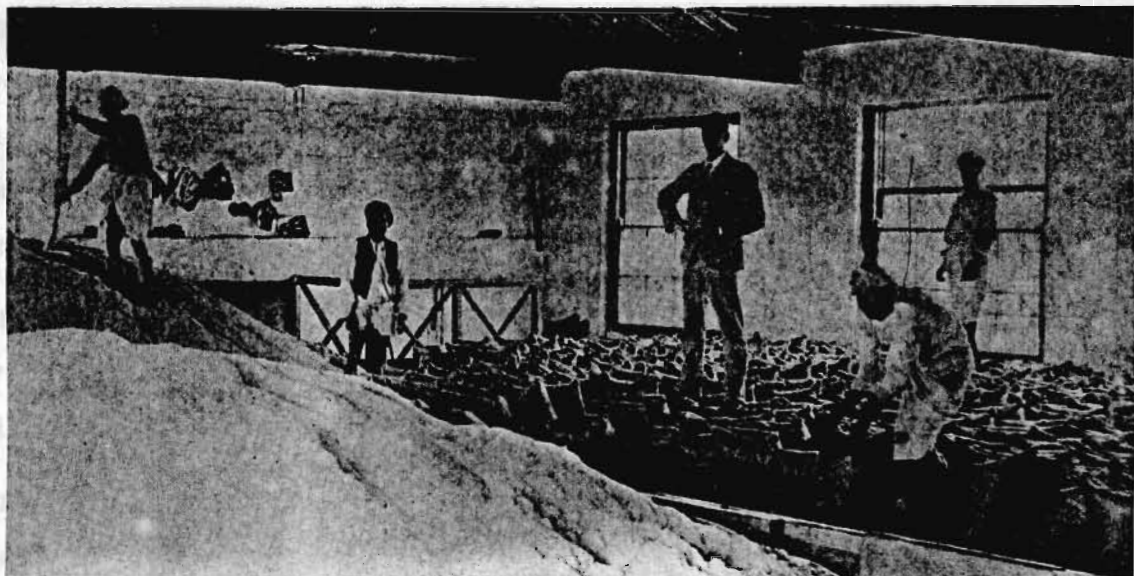


Filling sugar cane bags - 1905



Loading cane.

THE THORNY ASCENT



Filling sugar into bags — 1905

For t
eviden
part of
him for

3.

Moh
was an
Moh

favour among his relatives who accused him of desertion. Thus he was
to South Africa in 1898. The article in The Leader publishing his death mentions
Mohangi as arriving in South Africa at the age of fourteen. This is not accurate
since 1897 was his second arrival to South Africa. The date in the 'Whos Who
article is of fair accuracy.

4.

On his return to Tongaat Mohangi was to face the wrath of his father-in-law. As
a result of ill-treatment he escaped to Verulam. Verulam at this stage possessed
a milieu of farms and settlers less promising than those of the Tongaat, but it had
the advantage

district was
from Umtata
urban popula
worked in Va

During the
The five boys
The four girls

The Mohangi
Tongaat sug
settlement

Udaibhan and Chitrakha. Finally they were to come to Isenembe spelt at that stage
as Sinembe. Sinembe (see map) in this period was as Rajaram the sole surviving
son called it, a "bush country". It was only in 1925 that the Sinembe Sugar
Planting Co. Ltd. was to start operations.

2.

INDIA COMES TO TONGAAT (Continued)

For the next two years Mohangi was to work on the sugar cane fields. It is evident in the book by Watson, TONGAATI that Saunders at this stage did compose part of his labour force of free men and free sons born in the Colony, who came to him for employment from amongst the local Indian community.

3.

REJECTION

Mohangi was to return to India after two years. On his arrival to Garukhpw he was enlightened of the death of his mother. She had drowned while searching for Mohangi during the Monsoon floods. Mohangi was thereby met with strong disfavour among his relatives who accused him of desertion. Thus he was to return to South Africa in 1898. The article in The Leader publishing his death mentions Mohangi as arriving in South Africa at the age of fourteen. This is not accurate since 1897 was his second arrival to South Africa. The date in the Whos Who article is of fair accuracy.

4.

THE THORNY ASCENT

On his return to Tongaat Mohangi was to face the wrath of his father-in-law. As a result of ill-treatment he escaped to Verulam. Verulam at this stage possessed a milieu of farms and settlers less promising than those of the Tongaat, but it had the advantage of official momentum. It was the seat of the magistrate and the district surgeon. It was also the terminus of the Natal Government Railway line from Umgeni. Each of these functions attracted satellites, augmenting the permanent urban population and giving an impetus trade. It is not clear how long Mohangi worked in Verulam but he was soon brought back to work for his father-in-law.

During their stay in Tongaat nine children were born to Mohangi and Soogarie. The five boys were Ramnarain, Luxenenarain, Ramsaraj, Jungebhadar and Rajaram. The four girls born were Majedie, Mohader, Basmat and Rewa.

The Mohangi family was thereafter to move to Eglomy (See map of Estates of Tongaat Sugar Co. Ltd.) where another son was born, Jumna. Their next place of settlement was in Shakaskraal which saw the arrival of two additions to the family, Udaibhan and Chitrekhia. Finally they were to come to Isnembe spelt at that stage as Sinembe. Sinembe (see map) in this period was as Rajaram the sole surviving son called it, a "bush country". It was only in 1925 that the Sinembe Sugar Planting Co. Ltd. was to start operations.

Rajaram: "We were the first people to settle in Isnembe. When we first came here it was a bush country. There were no houses. My father was a determined man. He wanted land and he got it."

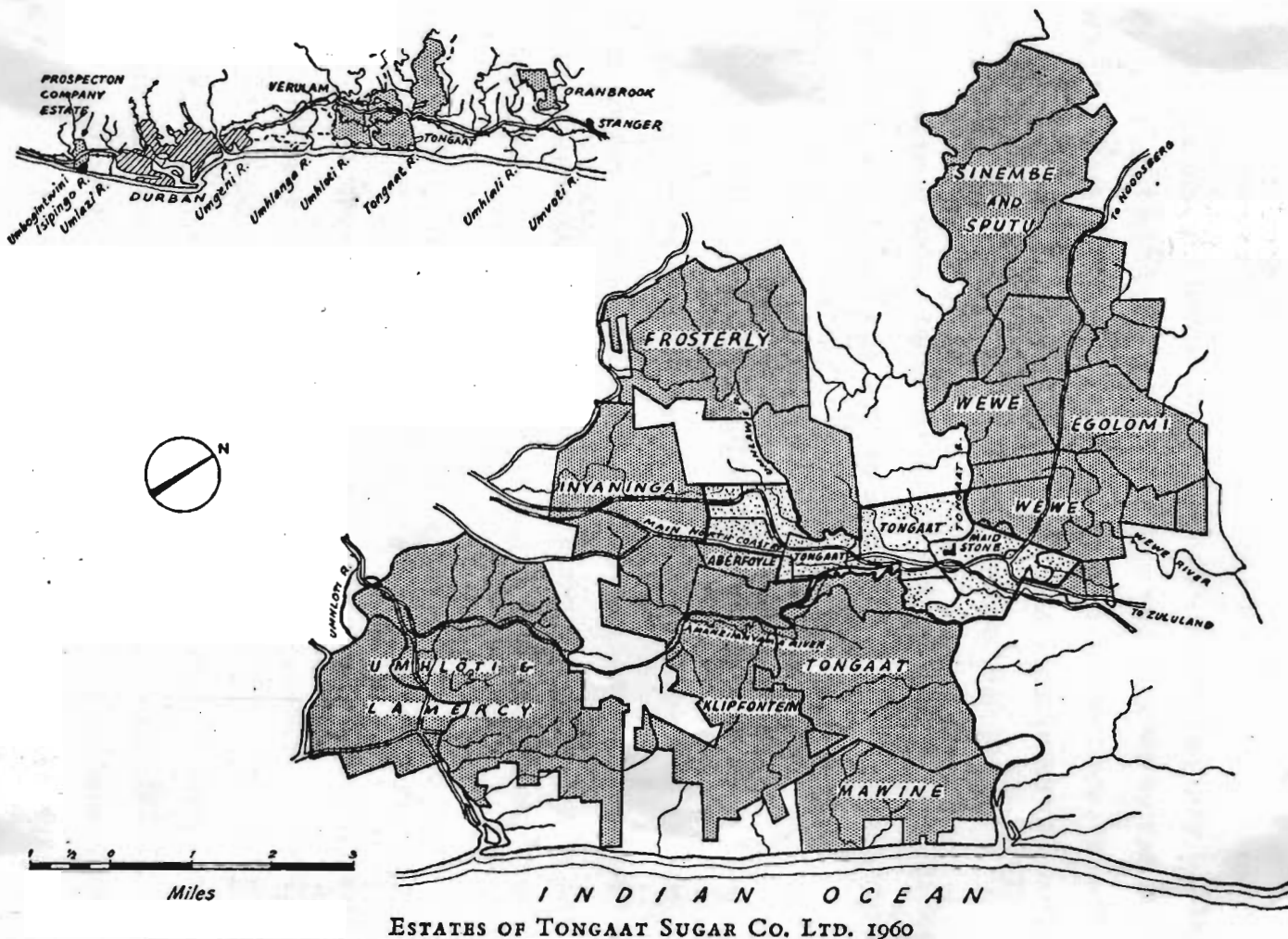
Rajaram at present at the age of seventy still resides in Isnembe being a retired school teacher while his three sons supervise the farm and the numerous businesses that they hold. His memory has faded increasingly and as a result of this information gained by Rajaram had to be substantiated by his intellectual nephew Shan Mohangi who is at present compiling a manuscript on his grandfather. This work however is still in its initial stages.

In the Sinembe district Mohangi purchased land in partnership with Mr. Sewlal and Mr. Gobind. The land consisted of 100 acres of which fifty acres was owned by Mohangi. Originating from a farming community, Mohangi was soon to be a great success in his field. He initially kept pack animals like oxen to transport goods to places. Although being a fastidious vegetarian, he kept chickens for their eggs which was sold at the market. Tramps instead of oxen were subsequently used to transport goods. Progress continued when Mohangi came to be proprietor of special trucks to transport goods.

Shan Mohangi: "My grand-father at one stage was the largest market gardener in this district. He had farmed more than 1 000 acres of land before his death-----"

In addition Mohangi was the sole owner of 540 acres of land in Hillcrest. Weekends were spent in his palatial double storey house in Hillcrest. Cattle ranching activities were displayed on this farm and there was also the cultivation of citrus fruits. Unfortunately these activities had to end in the 1949 riots when the house and farm was destroyed by fire.

The rumpus between the Natives and Indians was sparked off with a simple incident whereby a Native boy in Grey Street was slapped by an Indian shop assistant for cheeking him. Natives from municipal compounds and urban locations assembled in force and marched on Durban. The central city area was the scene of vicious fighting. Indiscriminate attacks were made on Indians wherever they were found. There were also sympathetic outbreaks in smaller townships and in Maritzburg.



The official finding of the Commission of Enquiry which filed its report on April 7, 1949 was that 1 European, 50 Indians, 87 Natives and 4 persons whose race was undetermined had been killed in the riots. The buildings destroyed numbered 1 factory, 58 stores, 247 dwellings and 2 factories, 652 stores and 1 285 dwellings were damaged. ⁽²⁾

The shock of the 1949 riots brought home forcibly the realization that they (Indians) as the smallest of the oppressed minorities cannot hope to attain rights by themselves, and that their strength lies in co-operating with other political minorities. Indo-African co-operation between the Indian and African Congresses, and faith in African leaders, had created new expectations among Indians during the decade 1950 to 1960. ⁽³⁾

Despite the existing insurance policy taken on his farm Mohangi was not entitled to claim anything. The land was later to be sold to a European due to the entrenchment of a certain Group Area Act.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Mr. Mohangi had apparently been a much respected and admired citizen of the Tongaat and Isnembe districts. In discussing the character of the late Mr. Mohangi many relatives claim that he was known throughout the district as "The Money Lender". This is significantly displayed in his generous contribution to the welfare of his community.

Interested in every activity of Indian interest, he was a past president and Committee Member of the Shri Harriroop Vishnu Temple and was a principle donor of the site to the Temple Committee on which the present building stands. Evidence of this fact is present in the book entitled Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa by P. Mikula, B. Kearney and R. Harber. A photocopy of the relevant page appear in the appendix. The original temple was erected by a Mr. Maharaj in 1924. Later a new site was purchased by Mohangi in order to establish a more permanent public temple. Mohangi's youngest daughter-in-law, wife of the late Udaibhan Mohangi claims that the marble "moorthis" were brought from Jaipur all at Mohangi's expense. She also declares that Mohangi was solely responsible for the importation of the unusual conical dome. Rajaram Mohangi quotes the price as being 650 pounds.

(2) R.G.T. Watson: TONGAATI AN AFRICAN EXPERIMENT, Page 191.

(3) F. Meer: PORTRAIT OF INDIAN SOUTH AFRICANS, Page 42.

Rajaram: "My father hired a chamar (low caste) builder but the pundits did not agree to this---There was abig dispute before the temple was finally built."

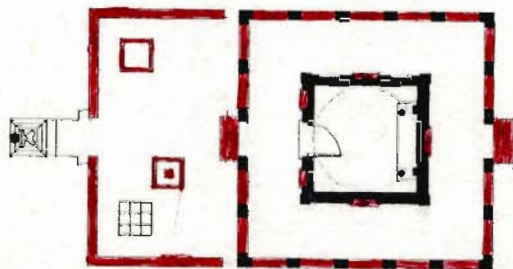
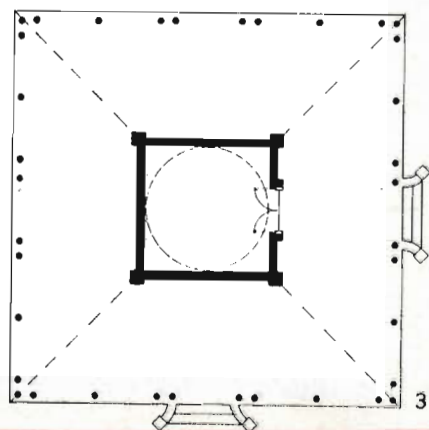
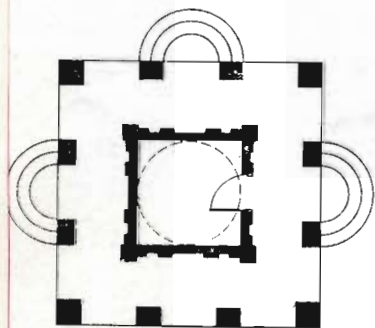
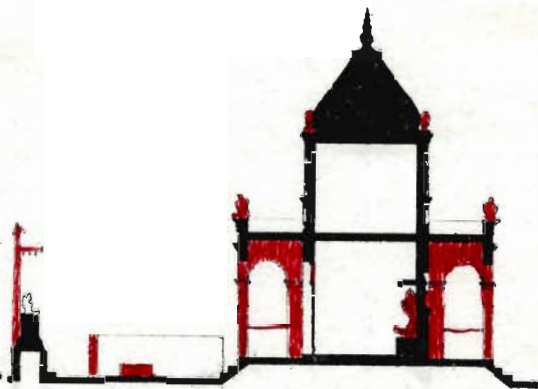
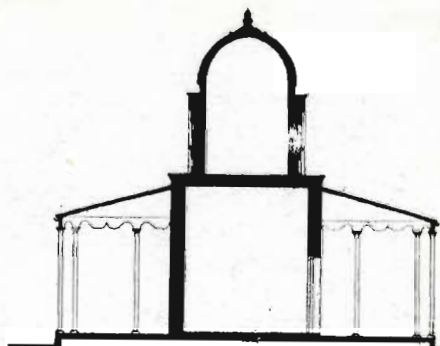
In the field of education Mohangi was the first treasurer of the Isnembe Indian Govt. Aided School. A generous donor to all local and other deserving cause, he was one of those who helped in the erection of the school. Sholly Mohangi, one of the numerous grandsons describes his grandfather as a man of modesty because of his refusal to have the Isnembe School named after him. Indian education at this time was mostly provided through schools established by missionaries or the community as in this case, which on certain conditions received a Government grant- in-aid towards teachers' salaries. These were known as state-aided in contrast to Government schools which were provided directly by the Province. Mabel Palmer states that these schools which were state-aided were in a very unfortunate position with underpaid teachers and ramshackled buildings and there not being enough secondary schools.⁽⁴⁾

It was Mohangi's desire to educate his people. Thus in 1959 two of his sons, Rajaram and the late Udaibhan both being teachers erected a school in honour of their father after his death. The Mohangi name is therefore still rendered alive in the form of the Mohangi School in Isnembe.

Mohangi's charitable nature also led him to donate 625 pounds to the Benevolent Home in Tongaat and was also responsible for building the first pension cottage in Tongaat before his death.

The Whos Who article indicates that Mohangi was the President of the local branch of the Natal Indian Congress. However no-one can verify in which year he held this position. The Natal Indian Congress was founded in 1894 by Gandhi. It was exclusively reserved for the financially well of because the membership fee was three pounds which immediately restricted the possibility of indentured Indians joining. In 1904 the N.I.C. was to split because of Gandhi's failure to include the Gold Law in his Satyagraha campaign and because he included the three pound tax which affected only indentured and free Indians. Later Gandhi was to form the Natal Indian Association.

(4) M. Palmer: THE HISTORY OF THE INDIANS IN NATAL, Page 106.



2

3

4

7.

CONCLUSION

The death of Mr. Mohangi occurred on September 15, 1952, at his residence, Isnembe, Tongaat, at the age of 71 years. His grandsons described him as being in a psychological turmoil before his death. This depression was due to his visit to India in 1950. Mr. Mohangi had never at any stage forgotten that he was indirectly responsible for his mother's death.

SIMPLE GENEOLGY OF THE MOHANGI FAMILY

MOHANGI / SOOGARIE

RAMNARAIN

LUXMENARAIN

RAMSARAJ

JUNGEBHADOR

RAJARAM

MAJEDIE

MOHADER

BASMAT

REWA

JUMNA

UDIABHAN

CHITREKA

SOURCE LIST

1. INGRAM, J.F. : THE COLONY OF NATAL.
(Sir Joseph Causton & Sons, London, 1895.)
2. MEER, F. : PORTRAIT OF INDIAN SOUTH AFRICANS
(Avon House, Durban, 1969)
3. MIKULA, P; KEARNEY, BAND HARBER, R: TRADITIONAL HINDU TEMPLES
IN SOUTH AFRICA.
(Hirt & Carter (Pty.) Ltd., Durban, 1982.
4. PALMER, M. : THE HISTORY OF THE INDIANS IN NATAL.
(Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1957.)
5. WATSON, R.G.T. : TONGAATI AN AFRICAN EXPERIMENT
(Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., London, 1960.)
6. SOUTH AFRICAN INDIANS' WHO'S WHO 1971 - 72 FIRST EDITION
(Universal Printing Works, Clairwood.)