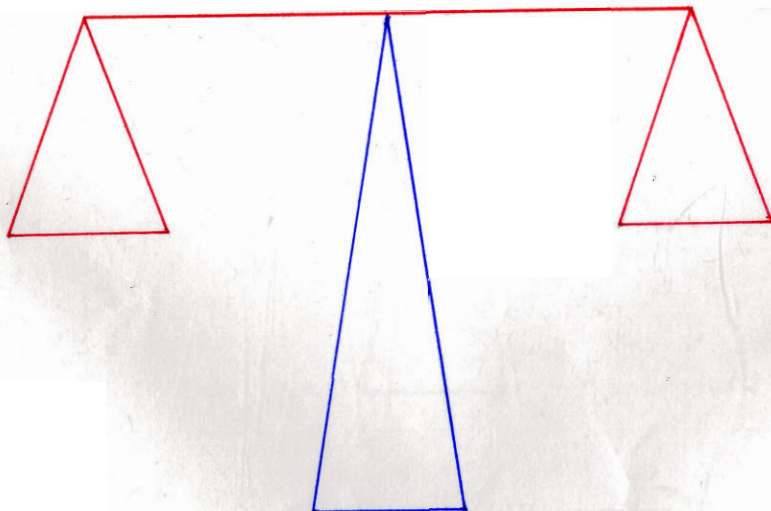


M S SHAIKH

REG No 16036

T H E Y O W E T H E

I N D I A N S



I do not want my house to be walled in all sides and
my windows to be stuffed

... I want the culture of all lands to be blown about
my house as freely as possible

... But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them

Mine is not a religion of the prison house

It has room for the least of God's Creations, but it is
proof against insolent pride of race, religion or colour.

Mahatma Gandhi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am indebted to many people for their help they offered in making my project possible. I express my sincere appreciation to Muniamal and her grandson, Louis, for their enthusiasm to help me, the library Staff of the University of Durban Westville for their assistance and a very special "Thank You" to my personal friend Vijay for typing and proof reading this project for me.

PREFACE

In attempting to study the role of my subject in the Indian "Question" I am faced with the difficulty that the greater proportion of the material on Indians was written by Europeans and reflects a European point of view. It is thus virtually impossible to present accurately an assessment of the Indians views, using such books. To state an example, historians write that the strikers who had marched into the Transvaal with Gandhi were sent back to Natal after the strike on passenger trains. Firsthand information given by my informant reveals that these strikers were sent back to Natal on open goods trains

Violet Wetherell states that "Conditions must have been fairly intolerable for the coolie class if Natal, with the consent of India was able to recruit these labourers on a voluntary basis over a long period of years. Further, when their indentures were up, the labourers were entitled to a free passage back to India, but many preferred to remain". He goes on to say that these Indians were far better off than the masses in India but yet they still had grievances against the government.'

Wetherell does not realise that the Indians had every right to rise against the inequalities of the state. The Indians had worked towards the economic upliftment of Natal and why should they not have a share in it.

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The achievements of the Indian people of South Africa and their impact on their fellow citizens have been remarkable. Many of them pioneered in the field of trade opening up areas where no other trader was prepared to go. In farming and in industry as entrepreneurs and as workers their contribution to the prosperity of South Africa, and particularly of Natal has been immense.

Among the thousands of Immigrant Indians who had helped to make this possible there are many that history has little records about. One of them is Muniamal Munian who had to leave India with her parents when she was just eight years old. They had left the "fruitless" motherland in the hope of a better life.

Muniamal was born in 1898 in the village of Periaagram in the district of North Arcot. Her parents worked in the rice fields of North Arcot. They were econounically well off at first but the coming of droughts and famine in the second half of the nineteenth century had the effect of leaving them poverty stricken. They had no desire to leave India and emigrate to South Africa, but now they were left choiceless.

CONDITIONS IN INDIA

Indian immigration to South Africa was a selective process in certain individuals and categories of people reacting to specific pressures in their homeland. Indians did not emigrate to South Africa to escape any specific brand of persecution, political or religious, nor did they come in organised bands interested in creating any particular type of society. They were driven to leave India by a variety of incentives. ²

In the nineteenth century village life in many parts of India was harsh and hard. The country was underdeveloped, stricken periodically by famine and ravaged by disease.

Home industries had decayed with the importation of British goods and cloth, peasants were in need of land and the wealthy landowners batten on the misery of many tenants. 3

Muniamal described this in simple language, "We left at a time of drought and sickness". We had nothing to eat as there was no employment. In India about one fifth of the hindu population belonged to the depressed castes and this submerged fifth suffered most bitterly in the struggle to make a living in the poverty ridden countryside, and slums of the cities.

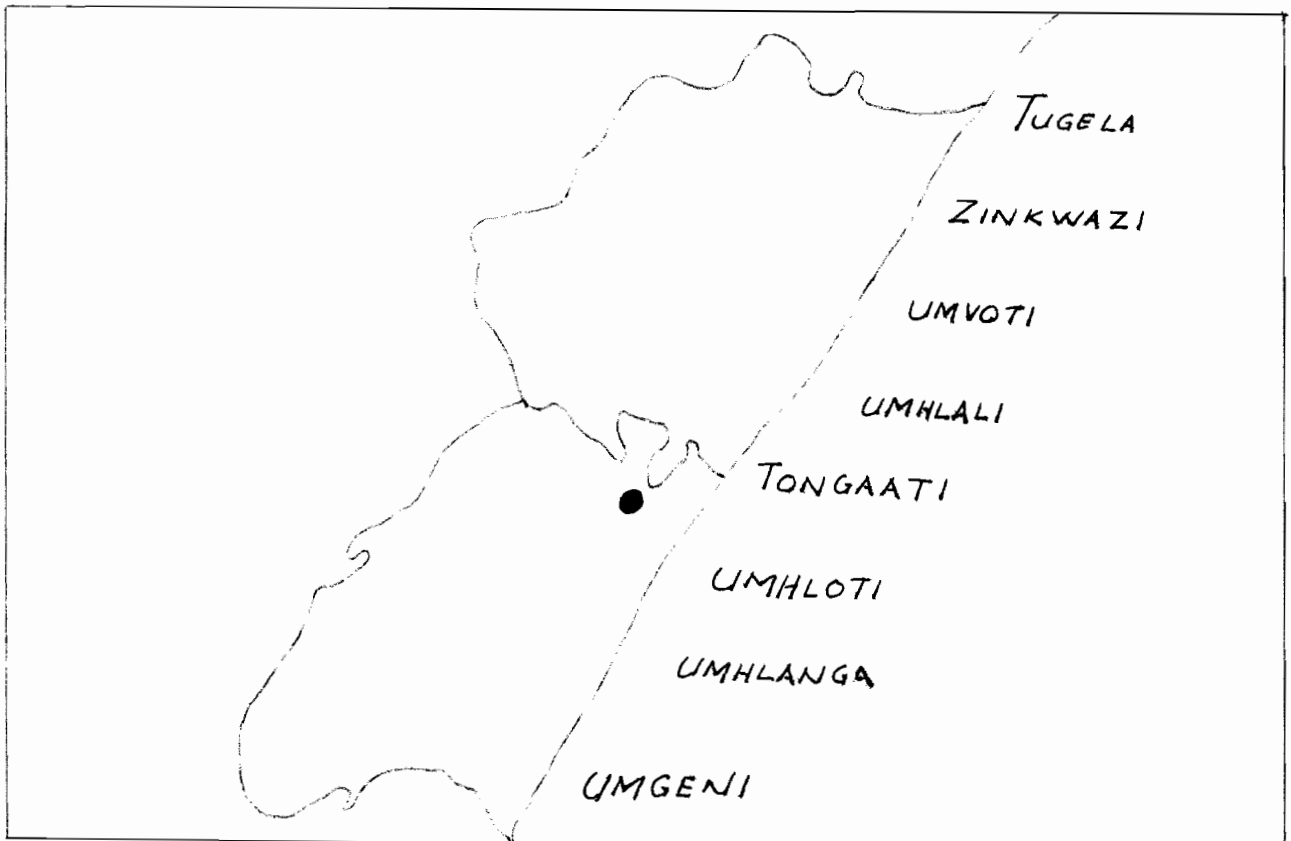
There were other incentives as well, which cannot be ignored. At the time, in India, recruiting was in the hands of government appointed agents who received a capitation fee of about three pounds and later six pounds for each individual recruit. Muniamal stated that some recruiters spoke of a country where "chilli trees bore gold and that gold was picked up in the streets". They are also reported to have stated that "money was easy", "food was plentiful" and "fruit hung uneaten from trees". As a result the promise of wealth became the most obvious inducement to indenture. 4

Muniamal and her parents packed the bare necessities leaving the rest behind for the neighbours to have. They signed in as indentured labourers and boarded the ship S.S. Umfuli Madras. The journey from India to South Africa lasted appropriately six months. Muniamal stated that, while approaching Durban they were excited and looked forward to stepping on the promised land but just then heavy winds developed and the ship was pushed further into the sea . It was only four days later that they set foot on Durban soil. The journey was tiresome and boring.

At Durban, families had to remain together and they were not to drift away from the canvas camps provided. A few days/.....

days later they had to board a train at Durban which left them at the Tongaat Station, in Maidstone. This was Edward Saunders labour consignment.

NATAL : PLANTING AREAS.
MAJOR AREAS WHERE THE SUGAR INDUSTRIES
HAD FLOURISHED ON ACCOUNT OF THE INDIANS.



EMPLOYER

In 1856 W.P. Nosworthy jointly with Messrs Landsberg and Hoffman and Company of Cape Town bought much of the Shares of the Tongaat Sugar Company. In 1856 James Renault Saunders was appointed manager of the Company's Affairs with a share in all its operations

By 1860 the Tongaat Sugar Company had become somewhat entangled. So to bring order to the general position all partners agreed to a division of the lands they held. Already domiciled and fully employed at Tongaat, Saunders acquired that portion of the Company's holdings.

In due course Edward James Saunders, youngest son of Renault James Saunders, succeeded to the estate after having proved himself worthy. Edward Saunders lost no time in applying the practical intelligence fostered by his father. However, Edward Saunders needed finance. By June 1896 an agreement was signed between Saunders and William Mirrlees of the Glasgow firm whereby Mirrlees agreed to see to the financial needs of the firm. He supplied capital to the tune of 15 000 pounds. The firm was registered in 1895 as the Tongaat Sugar Company Limited.

Much progress was taking place in the Colony. Together the partners moved. By June 1895 they had concluded an arrangement with the Natal Central Sugar Company, the latter lending them 61 000 pounds to build an adequate mill and for the purpose of employing more Indian Indentured labour.

EMPLOYMENT

Edward Saunders labour consignment an arriving were settled at "Ramsamy Cotrie" which is presently Tongaat Section. Each family was given a small piece of land on which they had to build their houses. Mud houses were built after which their indenture started immediately.

Muniamal worked for twelve years at the Tongaat Sugar Company. She started her indenture with a salary of ten shillings a month and later received a raise earning twelve shillings a month.

Muniamal worked for the Tongaat Sugar Company until 1922 as she was to be married. She lived at Ramsamy Cotrie until 1975 when the Sugar Company instructed them to leave as the land was required for other purposes.

Muniamal states that the Tongaat Sugar Company had looked after them well. Their was no severe grievances against the Company except that of low wages and unsatisfactory rations was solved immediatily as it was found that the Indians in charge of the rations were not working honestly.

Muniamal has reported that she was lucky to be working for Saunders as much illtreatment was received by indians working for other companies who had to for 11 hours rather than the stipulated 9 hours. Inspite of their values Indians were misused by their employers who were determined to obtain the maximum measure of service possible in return for their outlay.

Indians under indenture voiced their grievances through government appointed inspectors who visited their places of employment once or twice a year and on rare occasion penalised the overharsh employer by removing his labourers complete their terms of indenture elsewhere.

A possible reason for Indians receiving such treatment could be attributed to the expiry of their indenture. At the/.....

the time most of those whose indenture had expired left the sugar industry for other occupations. Meanwhile the demand for labour in the Sugar Companies were increasing. The owners, as a result, got rid of their frustrations by meting them out on those indians whose indenture had not expired.

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE

This is a facsimile of the Certificate issued to Indians upon completion of five years industrial labour. The document was referred to as "Certificate of Freedom" and failure to produce it rendered ex-indentured labourers to immediate, arrest and imprisonment as vagrants. The passes and certificates of Industrial Service were the two most important documents in possession of indians in early days.

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

No. 2865

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE

OFFICE OF THE
PROTECTOR OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS
DURBAN, NATAL

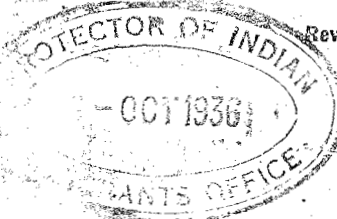
1ST OCTOBER 1936

I hereby certify that MUNIAMMAL
Indian Immigrant No. 119204 duty
completed HER term of indenture on the
12TH APRIL 1913 in terms of Indian
Immigration ACT 17 1895 and
is released from HER Obligation to perform
further service in this province under indenture.

DESCRIPTION

Father's Name; MUNIANI
Age; 38 YEARS

G.P. 8431-16/1/35-10.250



Revenue 195 (D.I. 187)

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE.

No. 2865

OF THE

PROTECTOR

NATAL

1ST OCTOBER

1936

I HEREBY CERTIFY that MUNIAMMAL

Indian Immigrant No. 119204 duly completed her EP term of

indenture on the 12TH April 1936 in terms of

Indian Immigration Act 17 of 1935

and is released from her obligation to perform further service in this Province under indenture.

DESCRIPTION

Name Muni

Age 35

Pass Issued		
Prachap, C. M.	27 Feb 1917	13.17
Coopers, J. M.	21 Dec 1920	20.1.21
Winn, J. M.	2 Oct 1925	3.11.25
X. International	28 Sept 1930	30.9.30
Moonsa, J. M.	11 Feb 1934	
Coopers, J. M.		

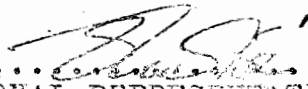


REFERENCE NUMBER. 20/2/2/4.

COPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT.

Serial Number: 300
Colonial Number: 119204.
Date of Arrival: 6th March, 1906.
Name of Ship: s.s. "UMFULI".
Name: MUNIAMMAL.
Father's Name: Munian.
Age: 8 years.
Sex: Girl.
Caste: Vannia.
Height: *****
Next-of-kin: *****
If married, to whom: *****
District: (North Arcot).
Taluk: Polur.
Village: Periaagram.
Bodily Marks: *****
Smallpox or Vaccinated: Vaccinated.
Remarks: *****

CERTIFIED A TRUE COPY:-


.....
REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE,
DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS.

/NEW.

CONCLUSION

Despite their setbacks in working conditions and with the South African Government as a whole, the Indian indentured labourers did more than their share in making the sugar industry a success in South Africa.

A late nineteenth century newspaper "The Natal Mercury" states that "Coolie Immigration after several years experience of its kind is deemed more essential to our prosperity than ever. It is the vitalising principle It may be tested by its results. Had it not been for Coolie labour we should certainly not have had it to say that our sugar export increased from 26 000 pounds in 1863 to 100 000 pounds in 1864 and has prospects of a greater increase before it. Had it not been for Coolie labour we should not hear of coffee plantation springing up on all lands of the prosperity of older ones being sustained ..."

INTERVIEW

1. Why did you leave India ?

Conditions were bad in India and we left with the promise of a better life. We were promised abundant food and a free life. These things we needed most during the harsh conditions in India. I was only 8 years old at that time and came to South Africa with my parents.

2. What were the problems in India at that time ?

There was a shortage of money and the climate was terrible and droughts occurred quite often. The Sarkar (land owners) over-exploited them. Poverty became common all over.

3. What picture were you given of South Africa ?

We were told by the white people that gold grew on chillie trees and also that pavements were made of gold.

4. How was the journey from India to South Africa ?

The journey was tiresome and boring. On reaching Durban harbour we were all excited and looked at the promised land but just then heavy winds developed and the ship was pushed further into the sea. It was only four days later that we set foot on Durban soil.

5. What procedures did you all have to follow on reaching land ?

Families had to remain together and they were not to drift away from the canvas camps provided.

6. How did you come to be employed ?

On arrival we were given small pieces of land to build our houses on (to farm on as well) and had to start our indenture immediately.

7. Was there any dissatisfaction with the employer ?

Yes, Wages was too little for our big families.

8. Who was your employer ?

Edward Saunders.

FOOTNOTES

1. V WHETHERELL : The Indian Question in South Africa, p.7
2. H. KUPER : Indian People in Natal, p.9
3. Ibid : p. 10
4. Ibid : p.11

SOURCE LIST

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