

NAJEETH RAJPAUL

REG. NO. 14727

THE EVOLUTION AND IMMIGRATION OF INDENTURED
INDIANS INTO NATAL

SUBMITTED AS A REQUIREMENT TO:

THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE

DATE SUBMITTED: 23 MAY 1983

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
 - 1.1 THE SUGAR INDUSTRY
 - 1.2 THE INDENTURED INDIAN
 - 1.3 THE PASSENGER INDIAN
2. SUBJECT OF RESEARCH
3. PLACE OF ORIGIN
4. SOCIAL BACKGROUND
5. FIRST OCCUPATION
6. SUBSEQUENT ENTERPRISES
7. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES
8. MARRIAGE AND BIRTH OF CHILDREN
9. DIFFICULTIES AND MODUS OPERANDI
10. SOURCE LIST

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

My sincere thanks to Mr G. Rampersad, third son of Jaikharie Rampersad, my research subject, and Mr P. Ramchurran, without whose assistance this project would not have been possible.

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

THE NATAL SUGAR INDUSTRY

"The wide coastal belt of Natal, with its subtropical climate, constant humidity and rich soil proved ideal for the cultivation of sugar cane, exotic fruit and other crops!" 1

In 1851 Edmund Morewood set up the first sugar mill on the Natal North Coast. Natal decided to go into the sugar industry. However, there was need for labour which was not available locally. Natal was populated by the Zulus but "these proud military people were not prepared to sell their labour for long stretches of time to white men whose economy and whose values were alien to their own." 2 When they were eventually persuaded to come nearer the sea, "they proved unsuited as always, to occupations other than cattle raising." 3

The sugar industry considered alternative sources of labour. It was suggested that they should use convict labour. This did not seem a feasible proposition. It was further suggested that the immigration of young labourers from Britain be encouraged. Chinese and Malay labour from Java was tried out by the Umzinto Sugar Company. They were dissatisfied with the conditions and wages.

FOOTNOTES:

1. H. Kuper : Indian People in Natal, p.2
2. H. Kuper : Indian People in Natal, p.2
3. R.L. Gayet: A History of South Africa, p.277

THE INDENTURED INDIANS

Large groups of Indentured Indians were sent to sugar producing colonies of Mauritius, British Guiana and the West Indies where the "coolies" were very successful. Impressed by their performance and success, the European sugar planters decided that they too would use Indian labourers. The European sugar farmers of Natal pressed their claims for labourers. The British Government (in England and India) after lengthy negotiations with the Natal authorities, assented in 1859 to their request.

The first batch of Indians arrived on the Truro on 16 November 1860 mostly from the Madras region (83 per cent Buddhists, 12 per cent Muslims and 5 per cent Christians).⁴ When this experiment proved highly successful the arrivals of Indians multiplied, reaching thirty thousand by the end of the century. The Indians came from two main places.

They were put into ships from Calcutta and Madras. They came from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal and South India. Their arrival paved the way for the "Passenger Indian!"

The Indentured Indians arrived on contracts of service for a period of three (later five) years⁵, after which they became automatically "free". As "free Indians" they could remain in Natal or receive a free return to India; or they might indenture for a further period of five years service, after which they had the option of a free passage to India or a piece of Crown land in lieu of the fare. "Thus the Indians first came to Natal as a result of persistent demands for cheap and reliable labour by a group of Europeans!"⁶ Indentured Indians were also employed in other fields of activity - railways, dockyards, coal mines, municipal services and domestic employment.

FOOTNOTES:

4. R.L. Gayet : A History of South Africa , p.281
5. H. Kuper : Indian People in Natal, p.3
6. H. Kuper : Indian People in Natal, p.3

THE PASSENGER INDIAN

Apart from the Indentured Indians, a second smaller stream of immigrants, generally described as "passenger Indians", entered the country (South Africa) under ordinary immigration laws, and at their own expense. The majority came specifically to trade or serve in commerce, and they opened up shops in backward rural towns, coal mine towns, African tribal areas and a few developed European centres in Natal. They supplied goods desired not only by the Indians but also by Africans and Europeans. The passenger Indians came from different areas, from different religious and language sects. They were mainly Gujarati-speaking Moslems and Hindus from Kathiawar, Surat and Porbander. There were also a few Urdu-speaking Moslems and Marathis from the northern provinces. A considerable number came from the upper middle class of Indian Society. Some were landowners in India. Some had occupied positions in the local Government. Many came from ordinary peasant families who did horticulture. Mainly merchants had come. The passenger Indian did not want to be grouped with the Indentured Indians. All the passenger Indians embarked at Bombay. "A much smaller trickle of passengers both Moslem and Hindu entered from Madras and Calcutta. Most of these were men who had returned to India at the expiry of their contracts, and then for various reasons had come back at their ^{own} expense and with the new improved status of passenger."⁷

FOOTNOTES:

7. H. Kuper : Indian People in Natal., p.8

SUBJECT OF RESEARCH : JAIKHARIE RAMPERSAD

One such person who established himself as a merchant much later than his arrival was Jackaree Ramersad (Who's Who), also known as Jaikharie Rampersad (Passenger File- Department of Internal Affairs, Durban), for whom research was conducted.

PLACE OF ORIGIN

According to "Who's Who", Jaikharie Rampersad was born in Basti in the United Province of India in 1883. Basti is in Uttar Pradesh. (See Appendix 3) In his passenger file, number 1409, page 527, it is stated that he was born in Banthara, District of Basti, Uttar Pradesh, India.

His third son, Mr G. Rampersad, a teacher at Westcliff Indian High School, Chatsworth, has made a significant revelation. Jaikharie Rampersad had come to South Africa as a stowaway in a cargo ship in 1897 at the age of 14 since his father was in South Africa under the Indenture Scheme. Fortunately for him the ship was bound for Durban. Another brother, under the misconception that all ships were bound for South Africa, boarded a ship as a stowaway. Unfortunately for him the cargo ship ended in Trinidad and nothing was heard of him since. Jaikharie Rampersad was declared a "passenger Indian"- thanks to the financial influence of his father.

SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Jaikharie Rampersad was the oldest son of Rampersad Choudary, formerly a merchant of Durban. Rampersad Choudary had come to Natal as an Indentured labourer to work in the sugar cane fields under contract. He was paid in gold sovereigns. At the end of the contract the people were given the following choices:

1. A sum of money and a free passage to India.
2. A sum of money and continue working for the same farmer.
3. A freehold piece of ground equivalent to the amount given in cash.

Rampersad Choudary chose the money and remained in South Africa.

He settled in Durban. With the money he set up a small retail business at a place called Bamboo Square in Durban, which is now referred to the Point Road Area. He had leased the property from the Durban Corporation and erected a wood and iron shop on it.

FIRST OCCUPATION

Rampersad Choudary was later joined by his son Jaikharie Rampersad. He ran the business under the strict supervision of his father. He owned a spring cart which was used for the express purpose of transporting goods to his shop. He traded mostly with the Bantus and had built up a cordial relationship with them. Later he established a retail business in present day Gale Street - again trading mostly with Bantus.

SUBSEQUENT ENTERPRISES

Jaikharie Rampersad was educated in Durban. On leaving school, he joined his father as a general merchant. He opened his own business at Cato Manor in 1913 and which closed down in 1937. He then opened a store in Reunion, Natal. During this time he also ventured out into the property market. He was a land and estate owner in both the Union of South Africa and in India. He normally purchased a number of plots at an auction sale. With the help of his builder, the late A.V. Pillay, he erected houses on these plots. Once these houses were ready for occupation, he sold them to various people on an easy term basis - a small deposit and the rest in instalments. He charged about 3 per cent interest on the balance. At a later date he erected a building in Gale street called Basti Court which still stands today: (277a Gale Street, Durban). This building now belongs to the Nathoo Brothers of Durban. He also had a farm of 126 acres at a place what we now call Burlington Heights, in Shallcross, Chatsworth. He also had several properties in Stella Hill and Escombe.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Rampersad, senior, built a huge temple in Basti, Uttar Pradesh, at his own cost. This temple stands even up to the present day.

Jaikharie Rampersad took a keen interest in all Indian public affairs. He had built a school in Basti entirely at ^{his} own cost but the Government of India paid the salary of the teachers. The school, which is still in operation today, catered for pupils up to the standard six level in Hindi. He built a "Musaphir Khana" (a public house) which consisted of ten bedrooms. Each room had a simple bed and a chest of drawers. A traveller passing through the area and whom could not reach his home in time, normally spent a night or two at this place free of charge. Jaikharie Rampersad organised a bazaar at the temple site. On a certain date farmers with different produce assembled here and people from the different villages came and made their purchases.

In India he had 500 acres of land. Because only 150 acres were under sugar cane, the government under a certain proclamation took over the 350 acres that were not in use. The amount for the 350 acres would be paid in 30 years time. In the meantime the 350 acres were subdivided into plots of 10 acres each and handed over to poor people free of charge to start off a farm on a small scale.

From 1938 to 1963 (25 years) Jaikharie Rampersad had made monetary donations to four schools in the Durban area; S.R.S. Hindu-Tamil, Gandhi School and Sastri College. The money was used for the purchase of book prizes.

MARRIAGE AND BIRTH OF CHILDREN

Jaikharie Rampersad had married in India. There were two children - a boy and a girl - from this marriage. The son is still living in the village in the district of Basti in Uttar Pradesh. The village, which was an inheritance from his father, is still in existence. After the demise of his wife, he married in South Africa to a girl from Escombe. There were no children. When she died he married Kailaas, a girl from Rannion. At this stage he was 48 years old and she was 28. He married Kailaas on 20 May 1931 but was registered only on 5 March 1937. (See Appendix)1

They lived at 277a Gale Street, Durban. Thereafter they lived at 2 Mitchell Road, Greyville. They left this address in 1956. Between 1956 and 1967 they lived at 270 Bellair Road, Mayville.

They have three sons and four daughters. Anirudh, Ramchander, Ganesh, Sursuthie, Radhika, Parbathie and Premilla.

Anirudh Rampersad was born on 3 August 1934. He is married. They have three sons and a daughter. They live in Effingham. He is a bus-driver.

Ramchander Rampersad was born on 8 June 1938. He is married and has three daughters. He is a truck-driver. He lives in Mobeni Heights.

Ganesh Rampersad was born on 24 June 1940. He is married and has two sons. He lives in Silverglen, in Chatsworth. He is a teacher.

Sursuthie Rampersad was born on 2 December 1932. She was married to R. Sewpersad, but now she is a widow and has four sons, two of whom are married. She lives in Reservoir Hills.

Radhika Rampersad was born on 3 May 1936. She is married but has no children. She is a dressmaker in Durban. She lives in Victoria Street.

Parbathie Rampersad was born on 1 September 1943. She has decided to remain a spinster and lives with Ramchander Rampersad in Mobeni Heights.

Premilla was born on 22 October 1950. She is married to a teacher. They live in Verulam. They have a daughter and a pair of twin boys.

All the children received their education at schools in central Durban.

Jaikharie Rampersad had received regular correspondence from India. After his arrival into South Africa, he made seven trips to India and two with his children. Letters were exchanged between him and a cousin whose reply to a letter is attached. (See Appendix) 6.

Jaikharie Rampersad died on 7 April 1963 at the age of 80. His wife died on 14 September 1971. They are survived by their seven children and fifteen grandchildren.

DIFFICULTIES AND MODUS OPERANDI:

This project was hampered by the lack of adequate information, documents, records and proofs of dates of departure from India and arrival into South Africa.

Important documents were destroyed by fire while Ganesh Rampersad was living in Shallcross, Chatsworth. All the information supplied were verbal and as such its authenticity is questionable.

I received assistance from Ganesh Rampersad whom I interviewed. He is the third son of Jaikharie Rampersad. He stated that his father had related to his children about his life, both in India and in South Africa. In view of this, the information supplied could not be cross checked with documents. Ganesh Rampersad lives at 28 Playglen Road, Silverglen, Chatsworth.

Further information was supplied by R. Ramchurran, who is employed at the Department of Internal Affairs, Stanger Street, Durban. He, a neighbour, lives in Verulam. He informed me that public scrutiny of the records housed in Stanger Street by any member of the public was not permissible under any circumstances. Photocopy of the records or documents was forbidden. However, I supplied him with a passport number of one of the daughters. The information that he supplied was terribly scanty and lacked detail. Some information was obtained from "Who's Who."

SOURCE LIST :

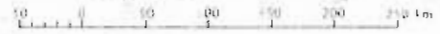
1. Gayet, R.L. : A History of South Africa - New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1977.
2. Kuper, H. : Indian People in Natal- Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1960.
3. Muller, C.F.J.: Five Hundred Years; A History of South Africa
4. Palmer, M. : The History of Indians in Natal, In Natal Regional Survey, X. Cape Town, London, New York, Oxford University Press, 1957.

Mr & Mrs JAIKHARIE RAMPERSAD





1:20 000 000



JAMMU AND KASHMIR

On same scale as Main Map

CHINESE REPUBLIC

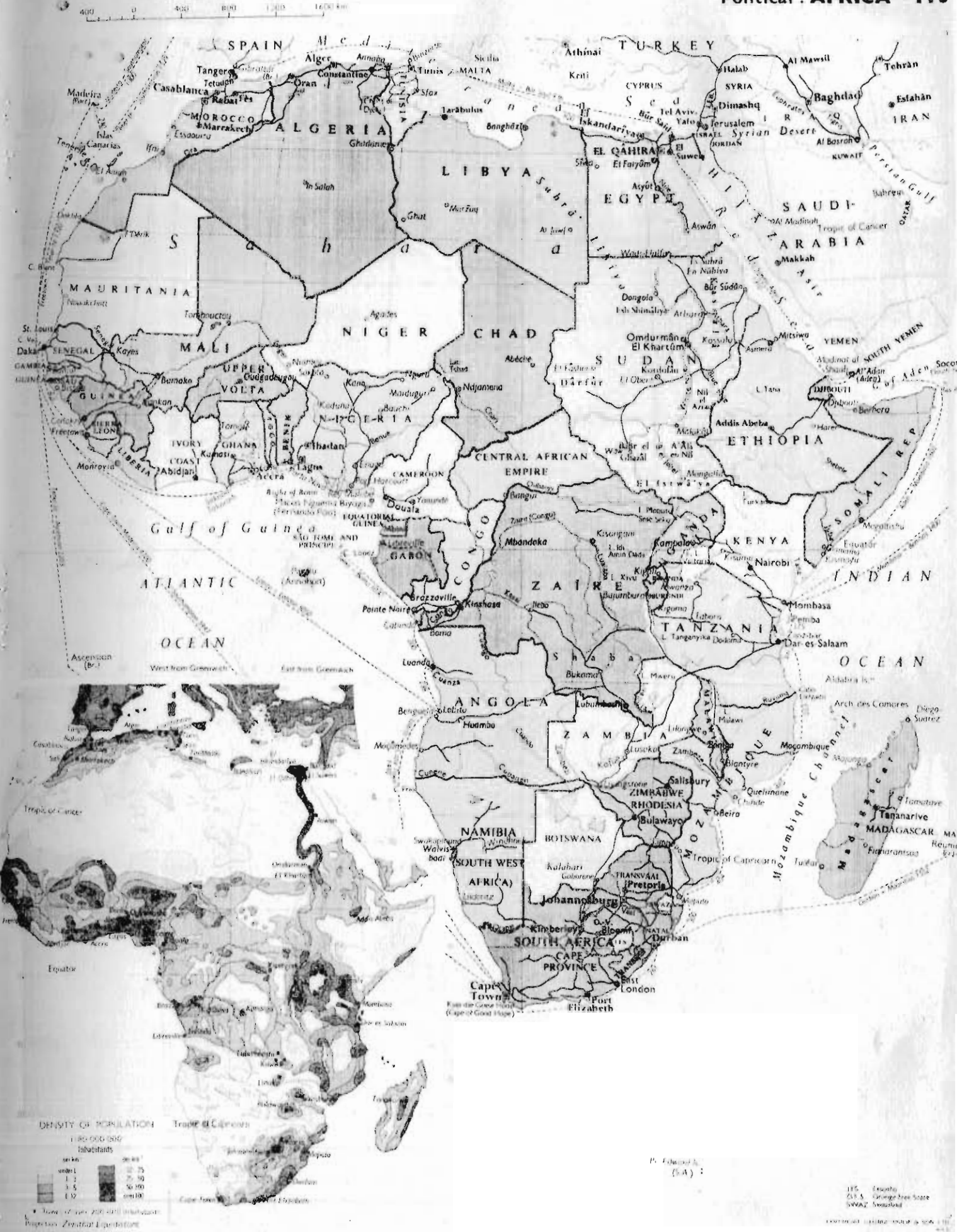
BANGLADESH

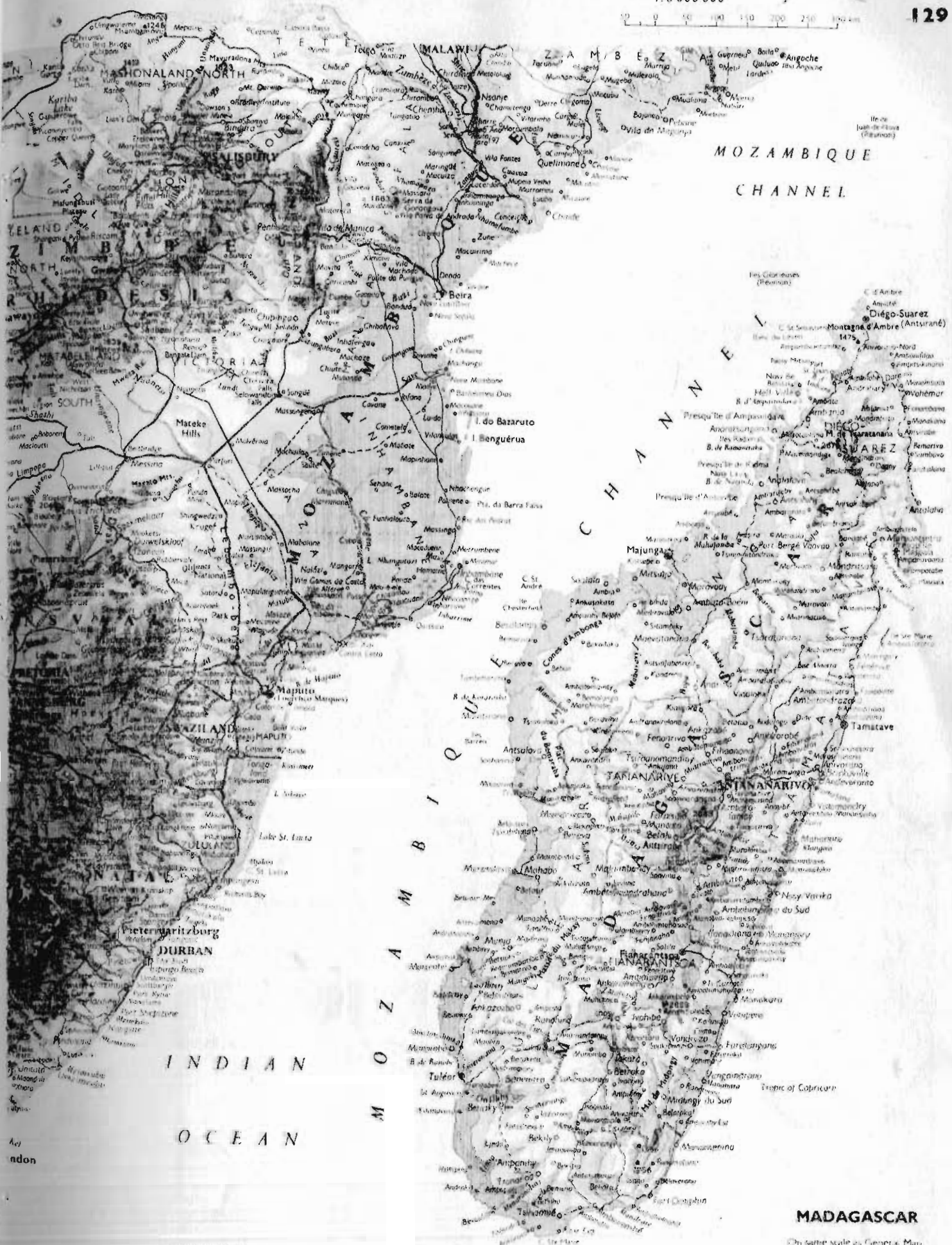
The Sandheads

From General

Copyright 1964 by the S. N. S. LTD.

1:40 000 000





Scale from Cape Town

MADAGASCAR

On same scale as General Map

Copyright 1988 by the Government of South Africa

old china Baran Street, 1,
Calcutta - India.

Calcutta,
May 19th 1941

My dear brother,

Your letter ~~reached~~ me about three weeks ago. I am
~~in~~ replying to it. You ~~may~~ excuse me for it.

The joy which I felt on having received a letter
from you is indescribable. How much I wished, while going through
it, that we were to sit together for hours + hours + talk to our hearts
content. Your letter was a link that joined two loving hearts who
may well claim to be nearest to each other in the sense
that there was no hope of our coming in contact with one
another. To be frank, I was ever doubtful, since I wrote
to you, about a reply from you, not because I thought that
you would not reply but because the letter would
not reach you. The address which I put on the
envelope was three years old + it was not known for
certain whether you live at the same place. And suppose
you had changed your abode! Was it possible for my
letter to have reached you. It was on this account that
I was not sure of a reply from you. But you got it
+ were kind enough to reply + that was the greatest
pleasure to me. The two papers sent by you have also
reached me + I very much thank you for the trouble you
took in sending them.

You have done a great kindness in
telling me know all about your family. Do you not think

others with you there I am a stranger. ^{was} (long after your dear
ther left the Indian shores that I was born. So even he
has not known me, were he present today. But
I will introduce you with my family through this letter.

My father ~~was~~ three brothers. I put them
order — Bhagwati Prasad, Gajadhar Prasad + Sita Ram
Lal. Gajadhar Prasad ~~the name of my father~~ Bhagwati
Prasad + Gajadhar Prasad expired at some time in 1922.
Sitaram Lal is still alive. He was the intimate class
class-fellow of your father when he was here. Bhagwati
Prasad had so many sons + daughters but after his
death only three sons were alive + they are as now safe +
sound. They are Kali, Prasad, Santkatha Prasad +
Jagdamba Prasad. Kali Prasad is about 45 +
has three daughters. Laska, Sharda + one more not named
yet + two sons Anand Prakash + Om Prakash. Then
comes Santkatha Prasad. He is 40. He has one son
Baidi Prasad + one daughter. Jagdamba Prasad is
33, has no issue. Bhagwati Prasad's wife is alive.
Then comes my uncle. I am the only son to me
father. I am at present a little above 25, my date
of birth being October 30, 1915. I have a sister —
Kusum Kanti — who is some four years younger to me.
She has just been married, say on the 20th of February
last. I was some thing about seven when my father
passed away. My mother is alive. I am still

unmarried as I deferred my marriage to a later date. I am not as yet certain if I shall be able to give my consent for marriage. Sita Ram Pataiages 60, has two daughters — Chandra Devi & Sarawati Devi, both having sons and daughters. So thus ends the chronology of my family.

Now I shall let you know what needs. Ram Bhai lives at home. He has the management & control of Zemindari etc. Kali Prasad is reader to Civil Judge at Ghazipur. Jagdamba Prasad is a Military Inspector. Saukatha Prasad works in Cotton Mills as Asst. Hearing Master. At present he is out of employment. He is with me at Calcutta. He was greatly delighted when I told him about you. I was serving here, a year as a school teacher in a Matriculation school. I served school for more than three years but due to some difference of opinion with the school authorities I resigned my job and came home. It was in May last year. Up to December I remained at home. But my friends pressed me & after some thing was to be done, so I again came to Calcutta on December 22, 1940. After a fortnight I got employment in a printing press as you already know. The nature of the work does not suit me. Long since I began service in the school I was thinking of working, as a part time job in some newspaper. Journalism to my mind is the best & the noblest career. But I got no opportunity for it then. After my return from home I got two

must work in some newspaper. It was difficult in ^{any} ~~any~~
in some English newspaper. Three ^{Hindi} dailies are published from
Allahabad. I tried but there could be no arrangement. At last
accepted the job of a translator in this press. The proprietors are
willing to publish the Hindi ^{translations} of some religious books written
by Swami Vivekananda — a great ^{man} ~~man~~ in English. I was ^{appointed}
to effect their translation in Hindi. So far four books have
been done & they are selling in the market. With regard to
my salary I must tell you that we get ^{at a} sufficient
rate here in Hindi. You will be surprised to learn
that I get only Rs 35/- a month after 8 hours of strenuous
work in the press. It will come to something about 2
rupees ^{or a half} in a month. I think Africa must be too Europe
this respect.

You say I can write in English but rest
assured I know nothing of the language. My knowledge of
English is very poor indeed. Besides I have had no
university education. I passed the Matriculation Exam
in 1933 & appeared at the Intermediate Exam as a private
non-collegiate candidate from the Allahabad Board in
1936. I could study for a month only for the
examination but to my good luck, be it spoken,
I got through.

The letter has become sufficiently lengthy
so much of what I had to tell you I shall

write next time. I am at least satisfied that we have come to ~~learn~~ in every detail about our families & from next time onwards we shall not ~~be~~ either ~~as~~ new to others or shall have to deal with these things so that we shall be able to write much that is in our hearts.

You wrote about 'Orient'. It is published from Calcutta. I know it well. I shall try to send you a few of the Hindu journals & magazines very soon.

There is nothing new. You will remember me to all who know me.

With sincerest regards to your mother & deepest love & affections to you,

I am
Ever yours,

Mahendra

P.S.
In my letter to ~~uncle~~ at home
I shall write about you
Mahendra