

NAME : MISS .P .CHETTY

REG NO : 170688

TOPIC ; SEARCHING FOR

THE ROOTS OF AN

INDENTURED LABOURER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My principal thanks must be to my family who offered me most valuable assistance, unlimited use of my family albums and treasured tokens of those loved ones who have toiled the tough soil of South Africa and have long perished away.

In particular I would also express my deep gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Leo. Nasaree who offered me invaluable advice, criticism and assistance.

In addition to these private individuals I would also like to thank the following persons and organizations:

The Staff of the History Department of the University of Durban-Westville,

The Staff of the Pietermaritzburg archives and the long list of helpful friends who have rendered special services to me that I must content myself with a general thanks.

P R E F A C E

In tracing the roots of my great grandfather Mr. VENKET RAMUDU, who arrived on the S.S UMLAZI on 9th of APRIL 1902 I drew upon the recorded experiences of an indentured labourer who had lived and worked in South Africa.¹ For this project I have tried to develop my own impressions of that era in visual terms going back further in time so as to include the earlier origins of his life in India prior to emigration in South Africa as an indentured Indian Labourer.

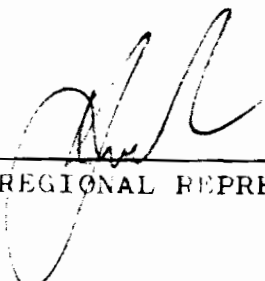
I have chosen the bulk of my material from private resources given special reference to amateurs rather than professional illustrations. Where there have been gaps I have tried to fill these with reference to universal interpretations of history which proved to be very difficult and challenging, and which most often did not correspond with my information previously obtained regarding the personal details of my great grandfather.

I have decided to paraphrase my interview to avoid repetition of facts obtained and verified.

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRSCOPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	<u>338</u>
Colonial Number	:	<u>92794</u>
Date of Arrival	:	<u>9-4-1902</u>
Name of Ship	:	<u>S.S. UMLAZI</u>
Place of Registration	:	<u>—</u>
Date of Registration	:	<u>—</u>
Number in Register	:	<u>—</u>
Name	:	<u>VENKET RAMUDU</u>
Father's Name	:	<u>CHENGUDU</u>
Age	:	<u>32 YRS.</u>
Sex	:	<u>MALE</u>
Caste	:	<u>GOVA</u>
District	:	<u>N. ARIOT</u>
Thanna/Taluq	:	<u>TURUPATHY</u>
Village	:	<u>GATULAMANNIYAM</u>
Height	:	<u>5'6"</u>
Bodily Marks	:	<u>MOLE IN RIGHT PALM.</u>
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	<u> </u>
Relations Accompanied	:	<u> </u>
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	<u>VACCINATED.</u>
Remarks	:	<u> </u>

Certified a true copy.

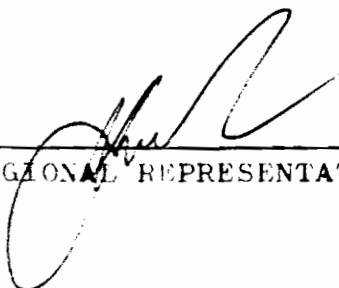

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE


INDEX

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRSCOPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	<u>339</u>
Colonial Number	:	<u>92795</u>
Date of Arrival	:	<u>9-4-1902</u>
Name of Ship	:	<u>S S UMLAZI</u>
Place of Registration	:	<u>—</u>
Date of Registration	:	<u>—</u>
Number in Register	:	<u>—</u>
Name	:	<u>NAGAMMA</u>
Father's Name	:	<u>RENGIAH</u>
Age	:	<u>23 YEARS</u>
Sex	:	<u>FEMALE</u>
Caste	:	<u>GOVA</u>
District	:	<u>N. ARCOT.</u>
Thanna/Taluq	:	<u>TURUPATHY</u>
Village	:	<u>GATULAMANNIYAIN.</u>
Height	:	<u>4'11"</u>
Bodily Marks	:	<u>HOLE ON EACH SHOULDER BLADE</u>
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	<u>—</u>
Relations Accompanied	:	<u>—</u>
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	<u>VACCINATED.</u>
Remarks	:	<u>—</u>

Certified a true copy.


REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

NORTH ARCOT

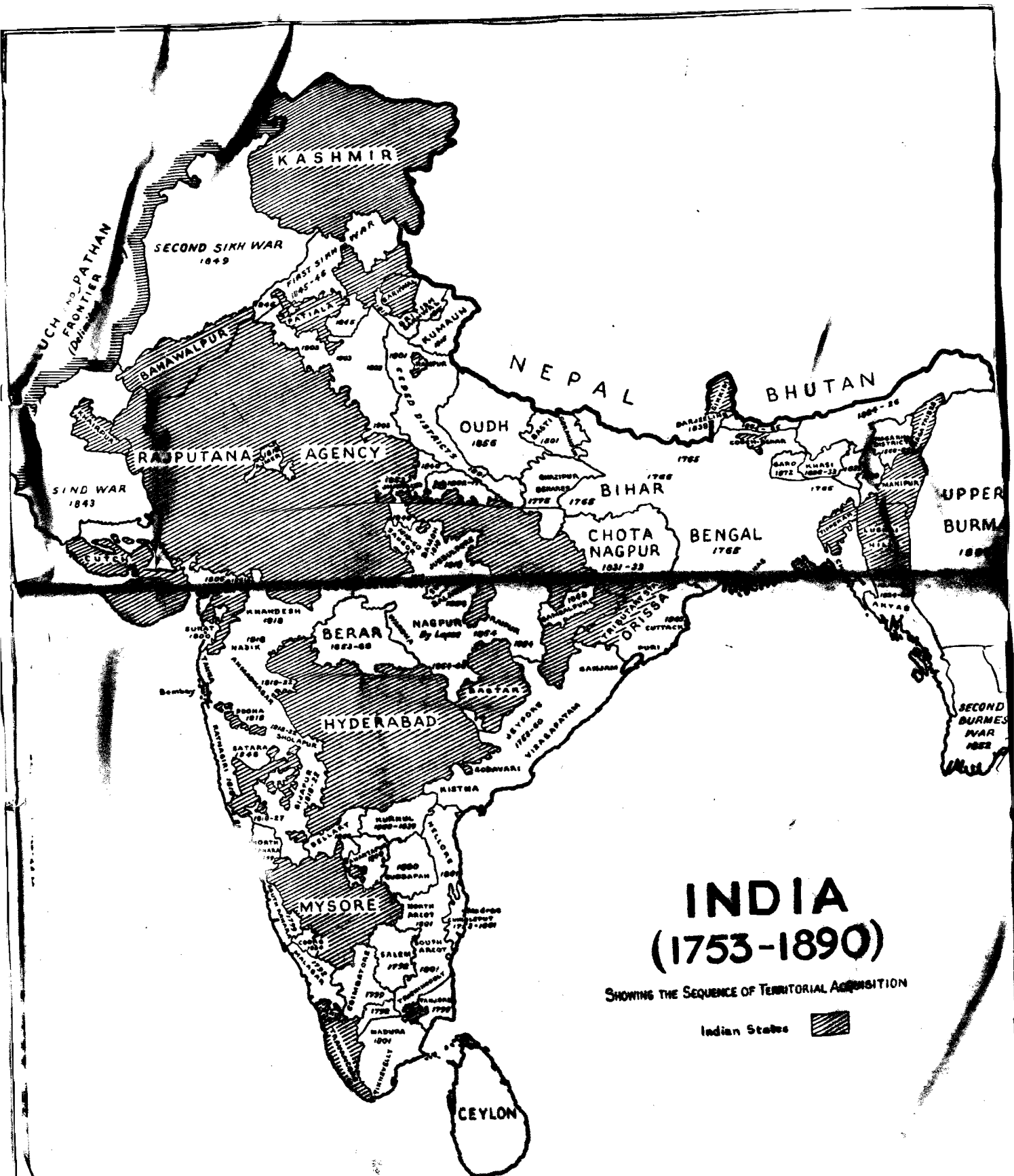


TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

i

PREFACE

ii

SHIPS LIST

iii

LIST OF MAPS.

v

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

1

2.0 PLACE OF ORIGIN IN INDIA

2

3.0 \$SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND IN NORTH ARCOT

2

4.0 REASONS FOR LEAVING INDIA

3

5.0 LABOUR FOR NATAL

4

6.0 DATE OF ARRIVAL IN SOUTH AFRICA

5

7.0 FIRST PLACE OF SETTLEMENT

6

8.0 FIRST OCCUPATION

7

9.0 SUBSEQUENT OCCUPATIONS

8

10.0 CASTE

9

11.0 SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS, ACTIVITIES

10

12.0 NATAL'S PROSPERITY

11

13.0 CONCLUSION

12

14.0 SOURCE LIST

18

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

By 1860 the cultivation of sugar was well established in Natal but the settlers found that they could not obtain sufficient Bantu Labour to work on the SUGAR plantations, and the few who did come proved unsuitable.

However on the Island of Mauritius, Sugar planting flourished, due to the competence of the Indian Indentured Labours. With this in view the SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT embarked on a scheme which altered the shape of SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY. In this respect, I chose to highlight (in my opinion) the life in SOUTH AFRICA of one of the pioneers of the sugar industry my grandfather MR VENKET. RAMUDU. This man provided us with an identity one would be too pleased to remember.



MR. VENKETSAMY RAMUDU

PLACE OF ORIGIN IN INDIA

My great grandfather Mr VENKET RAMUDU ^{was born} originated in a little village known as GAJULAMANNIYAM in the year 1870. This village is situated on the out-skirts of a district known as NORTH ARCOT. These facts are in keeping with those obtained from my interview but emphasis was placed on TURUPATHY which encompasses both GAJULAMANNIYAM and NORTH ARCOT. The emphasis on TURUPATHY was largely due to the fact that my great grandfather was a TELEGU speaking individual. 'TURUPATHY is the main district which houses Telegu speaking individuals!'

SSOCIO ECONOMIC BACKGROUND IN NORTH ARCOT

My great grandfather was a landowner, and agriculturalist in North Arcot. Owing to his position he was rather a distinguished individual in that village. The living conditions in NORTH ARCOT was relatively simple, like that of an agrarian society, their diets were frugal and their dress was traditional. He however played a prominent role in social activities in North Arcot taking into account the numerous efforts he made in trying to educate the primitive persons of GAJULAMANNIYAM.

3
He placed emphasis on religious activities, insisting that regular visits were made to the village temples.

Although he was not a very successful person in his activities he was extremely content with living in India because he conceived it to be a place with a relaxed climate, friendly surroundings, ^{and} close to persons of his own origins. This whole situation was to change with the arrival of the British, who, according to my grandmother MRS A. CHETTY, were detested at that time. I was given to believe that my great grandfather hated the British because they robbed him of his personal freedom. This fact was very much associated with his reasons for emigration.

Reasons for leaving India

'The Indian families in North Arcot had very small pieces of land which they regarded as their priceless possession. Soon after British occupation of India heavy land taxes were placed. This collection of taxes left this village destitute and the inhabitants helpless!'²

The land that my great grandfather possessed became the possession of any individual who could pay the highest tax. This actually meant that those who could afford to pay low taxes could no longer own land. Thus the once landowning class became labourers who were slavishly manipulated by other individuals on their own land.

2. Y.S. MEER: DOCUMENTS OF INDENTURED LABOUR NATAL 1851-1917, P. 5.

4

My great grandfather became so bitter and disillusioned with this system. Unfortunately for him he lost interest in his piece of land, neglected his harvests, which were bad as a result famine was experienced. Generally the intolerable conditions ⁱⁿ on the village provided ^{precipitated a} ~~push factors~~. ^{mass exodus}

At this opportune moment the Natal government needed labour for its industries and my great grandfather accepted this offer because of the grand future that its terms had promised.

LABOUR FOR NATAL

The fate of the colony hangs on a thread and that thread is labour. Sir George ^{GREY} Gery, governor of the Cape was petitioned by the burghers of Durban in 1855. He requisitioned India for 300 labourers but the terms of the labour were so broad that the Indian government turned down this request, but, subsequently, agreed to allow Natal Indian labour once Natal had passed ^{certain} subsequent laws stipulating its terms. According ~~to~~ laws B, I4 and I5 of 1859 were passed authorizing both the Natal government and private persons to indent labour from India. Law I4 provided for the appointment of a coolie immigration agent, stipulated a 9 hour working day with a minimum wage rate of 10 shillings per month, medical treatment, food, clothing and lodging at a deduction of 2 shillings per month. It also provided imprisonment or fine for absenteeism from work and leaving the colony without a written pass. Workers were bound for five years but had the option to purchase their freedom at the end on payment of 5 pounds. They were entitled to a free passsge home ten years after their arrival or a piece of crown land of equal value.'

DATE OF ARRIVAL IN SOUTH AFRICA

My great grandfather left his village of GAJULAMANNIYAM on board the S.S. UMLAZI which arrived in Durban on the 9th of April 1902.

On board the ship my great grandfather had been made a number of ~~keen~~ promises. Firstly, he would be given a house to live in, free clothing and rations. Secondly, he was told that he would find money in the streets of South Africa. These prospects attracted many distraught Indians who were only too disillusioned to see through this ^{deception} false effrontery.

Apart from their promises the conditions on board the S.S. UMLAZI were depressing. Each Indian had to be paired before entering the ship. This system caused quite a stir in India as mainly loose women accepted the invitation to South Africa. Various diseases broke out on board ship. A few persons died owing to unhealthy conditions. But yet the enthusiastic spirit of our forefathers saw them through this tedious journey. Furthermore the Indians saw this as their last chance to enjoy a journey among their own kind before facing the rigours and responsibilities of a new land that lay ahead! ³

FIRST PLACE OF SETTLEMENT

'Once the indentured labourers arrived they had no such freedom. Once on shore the indentured labourers were apprehendedⁿ by policemen who proceeded to herd them into the unfinished barracks surrounded by pools of stagnant waters.'⁴

'In their barracks they were expected to improvise their own cooking facilities and to find their own places for sanitation purposes and perform their ablutions in soggy mosquito infested terrains. Thus sores erupted, dysentery, colds, coughs and malaria broke out.'⁵ My great grandfather was first assigned to the sugar field of MR HUELETT. However upon checking and rechecking this statement I seemed to have found no possible certificates to verify this. All I could do was to progress along by hearsay.

4. Y.S. MEER: DOCUMENTS OF INDENTURED LABOUR NATAL 1815-1917, P.5.
5. H. TIWKER: A SYSTEM OF SLAVERY, P.201.

FIRST OCCUPATION

Thus it follows his first occupation was that of an indentured labourer working on the sugar plantations in the Tongaat-Stanger area. I was told that he worked on this Settlement from sunrise to sunset, received very little rations unlike those originally promised on board the ship.

In the fields he prepared the grounds. My great grandmother together with her crew planted the seed cane. Weeding was also done by the women. When the cane season was over my great grandfather tended to repairing, building, cleaning and storing of tools. When harvest time approached the workers were oblivious to everything around them except the sound of cane being cut.

‘Medical treatment was absent on estates. This did not bother my great grandfather because it was a traditional Indian belief that hospital rooms were death houses. Seldomly, Indians who visited hospitals, were given good treatment!’⁶

The conditions on the sugar estate really depressed my great grandfather. He was unsatisfied with the wage, the working hours and the system on the estates which can be likened to that of slavery. ‘Once his term of 5 years was over he purchased his certificate of discharge and went to seek his fortunes on the sugar mill.’⁷

6. Y.S. MEER: DOCUMENTS OF INDENTURED LABOUR NATAL
1951-1917 P.4.

7. G.H. CALPHIN: INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA, PP. 270-275.

SUBSEQUENT OCCUPATIONS.

My great grandfather later worked in the sugar mills; although no documents are available to support this statement. I have been told, owing to the indifference and ignorance of my great ~~grandparents~~ ^{these} there valuable documents have gone astray.

The mill workers were differentiated into a class of their own. They earned a shilling more on the mills. My great grandfather drove mill engines and processed the sugars.

He acquired greater skills on the sugar mills. But the ~~con~~ conditions on the mill extended. A system of flogging prevailed on the mills. Once, my great grandfather had been flogged on the mills; he was then fined for reporting it to the magistrate. Furthermore one had to pay a fine for misconduct and being absent from work even if one was sick.

These penalties ^{proved} posed taxing to the employers ~~es~~

Once my great grandfather was flogged on the sugar mills he terminated his services ~~out~~ there and ~~then~~ he moved to GREYTOWN, where he lived in Durban Street, in a wattle and daub house. His next occupation was that of a hawker which he continued throughout his life time up to his death at the age of 99. With this occupation his surname changed from Ramudu to Ramiah Mundhree which signifies a distinguished gentleman in Greytown.

CASTE

It is at this opportune moment I would like to discuss the caste of my great grandfather which he considered to be of utmost importance with reference to marriage, prayer etc. According to the ships list it is believed that my great grandfather originated from a caste known as the GOUA. This according to my grandmother is not true because she believes that my great grandfather is said to belong to the CHETTI caste which in NORTH ARCOT is the highest class on the hierarchical scale. To a certain extent this can be true but I have doubts in accepting the validity of the spoken word.

‘However the Chetti class says, Hutton are a caste of bankers, brokers, merchants, money lenders and shop keepers. Who correspond to the Banyas of Northern India. The word Chetti is linked to the Sanskrit word "SRESHTHI" which means banker or big merchant. They claim to be of Vaishya origin and some of them are vegetarians. They enjoy a position of cultural respect and civic power in modern India!’⁸

8. B. BUTTACHARYA: HINDU CASTES AND SECTS P. 230.

SOCIAL , RELIGIOUS, ACTIVITIES.

While in Greytown my great grandfather played a prominent role in religious activities which is still continued by the present Ramiah family in the ESCORT area. He had religious services at his home which was attended by his neighbours. He however did not participate in political activities. He placed great emphasis on education and thus allowed his children to be educated to a high degree. He was prejudiced when it came to education, allowing very elementary education for his daughters; the unfortunate one being my granny. He adhered to the old adage that a women's place is at home.

NATAL'S PROSPERITY

The sugar industry flourished as a result of Indian labourers. Our forefathers contributed a great deal to the economic development of the colony. Indeed when the Natal government stopped emigration owing to unfavourable working conditions the ruin of the colony seemed at hand; but the withdrawal in 1874 of the Indian governments prohibitions inaugurated a new period of prosperity for Natal. So great was the dependence of Natal's economy on Indian labour that an Indian Immigration Trust Board was set up and the NATAL Government contributed R20,000 annually for the recruitment of Indian labour.

The Indians who display initiative and enterprise provided competition which aroused antagchism towards them.

C O N C L U S I O N

It is ^{to} these great pioneers who braved the sea of the Indian ocean that we owe our gratitude. Through their blood, sweat and tears emerged some of the great changes which benefitted our present Indians. When South Africa finally became a republic in 1961 the repatriation scheme was finally abandoned and Indians were for the first time accepted as ^a permanent and intergral part of SOUTH AFRICA. These great pioneers were bound in the wheel of SOUTH AFRICA one by one.

APPENDIX

12

INLAND REVENUE.
BINNENLANDSE INKOMSTEN

16929 1/8/36

Revenue/Inkomste 193. (D.I. 117.)

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA.

1671
1931

No 49339

PASS TO INDIANS PAS VIR INDIËRS



Born in the Province of Natal.
In die Provinsie Natal Gebore.

This is to certify that CHINNAMAH
Hierby word gesertifiseer dat dit

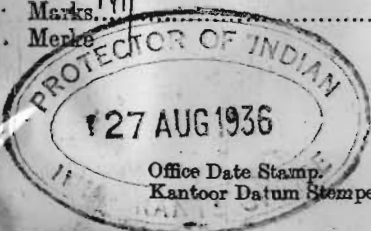
Colonial Born, is at liberty to dispose of HER services.
in die Kolonie gebore, vrystaan om te verhuur.

Father's Name VENKET RAMUDU No. 92702
Naam van Vader KNOWN AS VENKET RAMIAH

Mother's Name NAGAMAH No. 92704
Naam van Moeder

Sex FEMALE Age 20 YEARS Height 5' 0"
Geslag Ouderdom (2 DEC 1935) Lengte

Marks Nij
Merke



Acting Protector of Indian Immigrants.
Beskermmer van Indiese Immigrante.

Pass for Indians

This denotes the birth

of my Grandmother

daughter of Mr Ramudu



Later the Pass
was replaced by
the Identity Card



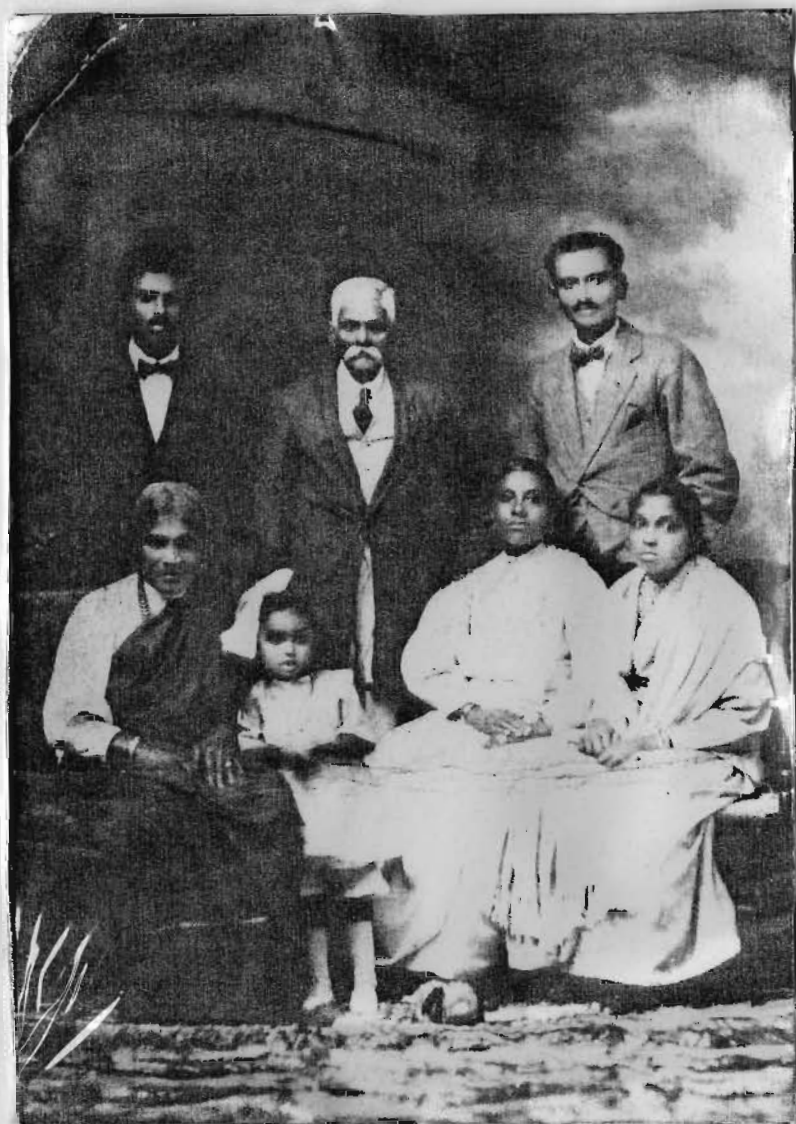
The example of a
female indentured
labourer



Example of a
Sahib

15





திருமண விஞ்ஞாபனம்

ஸ்ரீமான் துரைசட்டி
ஜயா, எம்பெருமான் திருவருளால் கடும் 1935 ஆம் ஏப்ரல் 7ம் திதிக்குரியான
பவஞ்ஞ பங்குனிமீ 25உ ஞாயிற்றுக்கிழமை பஞ்சமி திதி ரோகணி கஷத்தி 10 திதியோகமுட
கடிய சுபதினத்தில் காலை 8 மணியிலிருந்து 9 மணிக்குள் ரிக்ஷா லக்கினத்தில்

எனது துதியை குமாரன்
சிவஞ்சீவி

அருணாசலத்துக்கும்

கீதேடவுன் ஸ்ரீ இராமய்யா மந்திரி
குமாரத்தி

சௌபாக்கியவதி

அம்பிகை அம்மாளுக்கும்



எனது குமாரத்தி
சௌபாக்கியவதி

அம்பிகை அம்மாளுக்கும்

மேரிட்ஸ்பர்க்

ஸ்ரீ தி. முருகப்ப செட்டியார்
துதியை குமாரன்
சிவஞ்சீவி

அருணாசலத்துக்கும்

பீட்டர்மேரிட்ஸ்பர்க் ஸ்ரீ சிவ சுப்பிரமணியருடையத்தில் நடைபெறும் திருமணத்திற்கும் அதனை
ச்சாரந்த சகல சடங்குகட்கும் தாங்கள் தங்கள் மந்து மித்ர குடும்ப சகிதராய் விஜயஞ் செய்து
கிறப்பிக்க கோருகின்றோம் பந்திபொஜனம் 12 மணிக்கு 102B ரிட்டிவ் ஸ்ட்ரீட் மணமகன்
கிரகத்தில் நடைபெறும். இவகனம் தங்கள்மீபுள்ள

தி. முருகப்ப செட்டியார் இராமய்யா மந்திரி [கீதேடவுன்]

சனிக்கிழமை இரவு சுங்கித காலகேபம் நடைபெறும்.

Messrs M. CHETTY

of Maritzburg

and

V. RAMIAH MUNDREE

of Greytown

request the pleasure of the company of

Mr & Mrs P. V. Govindarajan family

on the occasion of the marriage of

ARUNASALUM

son of Mr & Mrs M. Chetty

with

AMBEKAYAMMALL

daughter of Mr & Mrs V. Ramiah Mundree

ON SUNDAY 7th APRIL 1935.

at the Siva Subramonier Temple

Longmarket Street, Maritzburg.

Nuptial Ceremony between 8 to 9 a.m.

Reception 12 Noon

Concert Saturday

at 102B Retief St.

Evening

WEDDING CARD

M. P. Govindarajan
Bride

Krishna Vilas-Prop Maritzburg.

A Wedding Invitation -
written in Tamil and
translated into English

S O U R C E L I S T

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