

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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J. PILLAY

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INTRODUCTION:

Indian immigration into South Africa was a selective process in which certain individuals reacting to specific pressures in their homeland (India), were induced to migrate. 1.

It appears that the choice of migrate^{ing} to South Africa was left in the hands of the people themselves. In viewing the situation in South Africa in the 1850's we note that for Natal to prosper and progress sugar had to become the mainstay of the new commercial development. The land was fertile, climate was good and land-skilled managers were available but, the biggest problem was that of seeking labour. Sugar above all depends upon a steady supply of labour and it was this factor that was lacking. Although large masses of Natives lived in Natal in the 1850's they were not prepared to work in the sugar estates. They were still in the stage of subsistence economy that is "they could merely in their own land raise all that they required for themselves". 2.

The other factor that created a shortage of labour in French; British and Dutch colonies was the abolishment of slavery. The indentured system of labour served as the only alternative so to maintain a labour force.

The first batch of indentured Indians arrived in 1860 (approximately) on contracts of service. The Lieutenant Governor was to appoint an Immigration Agent who was to keep a register of immigrants, to assign them to employers for a period of three years (this was later extended to five years). The husband and wife were to be allotted together. The coolie (indentured labourer) was to re-indenture for two years but after the five years of service he was free. If a coolie served ten years of residence he could claim a return voyage to India or alternatively at the request of the Lieutenant Governor he could be granted crown land of equal value. 3

Although my subject was not a "Passenger Indian" there will be a short discussion on the passenger Indian. Distinct from the indentured, was a second smaller stream of immigrants who entered the country under ordinary immigration laws and at their own expense. 4. They were the passenger Indians. The majority came specifically to trade or serve in commerce. They opened shops in backward rural towns; coal mine towns; African tribal areas and a few developed European centres in Natal.

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The "Indentured Indians" were desired as long as they fitted into the rate of labourers and menials. Many laws limited their economic and political opportunities.

From records preserved in the office of the Protector, it is clear that the indentured were drawn from a wide variety of tribes and castes and belonged to different religions. 5

This was also agreed upon by my subject during the course of discussion.

Finally we could say that the emigration of Indians from India was viewed by the Indian Government as a permanent migration which would relieve the population pressure in India and from the Natal Government's point of view it was purely a matter of fulfilling the labour needs. My subject however is the son of an indentured labourer. He spent a small portion of his life on the farm with the indentured labourers and moved on to the life of a "working class man".

MY SUBJECT :

My subject 'is' Mr Jaganathan Nagan. He is alive and well. He will be 99 years old on 17 July 1983.

EARLY LIFE :

Mr Nagan came to South Africa in 1895. He was eleven years old when he arrived. He arrived at Point in Durban with his father, mother and two brothers and a sister. He stated he that came by "flag Boat" and that it was the "third boat."

When questioned about his ^{early} life in India Mr Nagan remembered very little. He stated that he was very young at that time. However he was able to tell me that he came from Karibetinagam in Madras in South India. Their reasons for coming to South Africa was that "they wanted to make money". They heard that people were going to South Africa in search of wealth and gold. The author of the book 'Indians in Natal' also gives evidence of this when he states that some recruiters (Government Officials) told villagers in India of a country where 'chilli trees bore gold', money was easy; food was plentiful; gold was picked up in the streets and fruits hung uneaten from the trees. (6)

After arriving in Durban Mr Nagan and his family were directed to a farm in Umtalumi. They were lucky in that they were able to make an immediate settlement at Umtalumi. His father, Mr C. Chinsamy, was given a fairly large plot of land by a European landowner. The plantation on the farm consisted of gum trees, wattle trees, sugar cane and fruits such as pineapples, oranges and mandrines. Sugar cane was not the main crop in that area therefore it was planted in small quantities. There were many other people ie. friends and strangers who arrived on that particular ship. Some people worked on farms nearby while others went to the other parts of the Province.

Mr Nagan stated that many of the indentured men left their wives behind. They married other women who were already in the country. This fact is also supported by the author of Indians ^{People} in Natal, who states the "workers left behind their whole family in some instances, married Indian and Colonial born women who were already in the country". (7)

He further States that the indentured were of different religions, localities and cultures. The majority were Hindus, who spoke at least one of the three Dravidian languages - Tamil, Telegu and Malayam. Mr Nagan was able to speak Tamil and Telegu when he arrived. He later learnt three more languages viz. English, Hindi and Zulu.

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LIFE ON THE FARM :

Mr Nagan's father performed very well on the farm. A few years later he became foreman. By this time Mr. Nagan was a teenager and he had to take part in all the chores. Work began just before sunrise. The African boys would bring the cows from the paddock for milking. He assisted them with the milking of the cows. His father a tall and well built man merely supervised the workers. Some of the workers, worked the fields ie. attending to the fruit plantations, weeding the farm. Work in the field, and with the cattle became a routine for many years.

When the indentured period expired (after five years) some of the Indian men went to Durban and then returned to India. This fact is mentioned by B. Pachai in his book (8)

Mr Nagan's father had to remain in South Africa because his boss wanted him to remain. Mr Nagan reached adulthood, (age not mentioned) his sister married a man from Mooi River. He and his family continued to live on the farm. After a short while his brother-in-law died suddenly. This incident caused much bereavement. Mr Nagan was forced to live with his sister, now a widow and her three children. While at Mooi River Mr Nagan changed his occupation from that of a farm-hand to a factory worker.

A WORKING CLASS HERO :

Mr Nagan started work at a dairy in Mooi River. He worked at Natal Creamery. Initially the job was very challenging but he gradually became familiar with the job. He learnt to make cheese and butter. He worked for approximately seven years and then searched for another job. He approached the boss of a "Bacon" factory where his late brother-in-law worked. The boss Mr P.W. Clark was very pleased to have him because his brother-in-law had previously created a very good impression. The boss stated that he would teach him to make bacon from a "live pig up to the actual delivery of bacon". to Durban. He was promised 'high wages and promotion if he worked well. Mr Nagan had to speak a lie to the boss of Natal Creamery (ie. he told him that his parents were going to India) so that he would be allowed to resign from that job. As Mr Nagan progressed in his job at the bacon factory he received ten pounds a month in gold. He received other concessions like ration of groceries, monthly, and a rent free house. His father and younger brother joined him in Mooi River. His mother passed away few months earlier. When his mother died his father retired from work. Then his father, brother and sister moved from Mooi River to Durban. Mr Nagan now lived alone at Moor River. He found it difficult to live alone. There was a time when he became very sick with flu. There was no one to care for him. The only companion he had was his dog, who slept near him. He considered it a miracle to have survived the flu. Thereafter he decided to leave Mooi River because of the loneliness and isolation. He had to resign from the factory. His boss refused his resignation.

He had to go to a police station nearby and with the assistance of a sergeant he was able to receive his resignation from his boss. A few weeks later Nagan was on his way to Durban. He met his father and brother again and they lived at Cato Manor. Nagan and his brother did casual jobs and saved money. They decided to build a house. They bought second hand timber and iron. The house was built on a relative's property. (Nagan is unable to state his approximate age or how many years he lived there in that house). Nagan began a new job as a tin-smith. He worked for H.N. Booth who had a firm opposite the Berea Road Railway Station. This job involved making tin gallons for oil and petrol. This tins were transported to Umbogwintini. Nagan was a machinist.

An important event in Nagan's life followed. He decided to get married at a very 'late' age. He married Veeramma, who was approximately twenty five years his junior. Nagan enjoyed excellent health and he appeared many years younger than his age. On 2 February 1930, Nagan married. He was about thirty six years old. His first child, a daughter, named Ponnema was born. By this time his father had passed away. This was a great sorrow to him and his death took him long time to recover .

Nagan started a new job, when an Indian friend opened a "sheet metal work" in Leopald street. He did not enjoy working there and found the job unpleasant. After working for nine years he resigned.

A friend told him about an advertisement in the newspaper for a person in the sheet metal trade. He applied and was successful. He worked for Alex Murray Sanitary Engineers. In addition to sheet metal work it also involved plumbing. After a couple of months the second world war broke out. Nagan does not remember much of the war. He only remembers seeing soldiers parading the streets. When the war was over his job was "stopped". He then worked for W. H. Hatton Plumbers, in Umgeni Road. Sometimes there was 'short time' because of the down turn in the economy. This made living with a large family difficult. He experienced financial problems. His elder children were now teenagers. They were able to help with the household chores and bring in some income by selling food stuffs such as samoosas and murukos.

Nagan was transferred from his old wooden house to a housing scheme in Cato Manor. He built a small temple in his back yard so that he could continue with religious work which had began when he was a teenager. During this time the Indian Community in Durban was involved in the riots with the Africans. We assume that this was the 1949 riots because that was the only major riot that the Indian Community was involved in.

Nagan stated that 'the riots wrecked his family' he had to lock the doors and windows. The main doors had to be nailed. They had to hide in wardrobes and under the bed. A black out followed and there were no lights. Loud screams could be heard throughout the night. They were mainly the screams of women and children (9). They heard loud footsteps in their back yard. Nagan asked his wife and children to pray to god to save them from being killed or assaulted. Fortunately, this most painful and frightening night came to an end. The next morning Nagan opened his door and was confronted by a man who said 'you still here! the Natives are killing the people and kidnapping the women).

Nagan states that he may have been spared because of the prominence of his temple in his back yard, which constantly had a lamp burning every night. He believed that the Africans respected the temple. Within a few hours in the morning Nagan and his family (he now had six children) were taken by the government and looked after. This can be substantiated by an article in the Graphic of the 13 July 1982. He was taken by buses with other families to a police station in Mayville. Close to the police station was a dairy. The night was spent in a cows stable. The following day relatives took them by lorry to Gandis hall in Victoria Street. A few days were spent at Gandis Hall and later they were sent to a hotel in Beatrice Street. This Hotel was owned by an indian man, named Puckrie. By this time the riots had stopped.

Nagan and his family were afraid of going back to Cator Manor. They heard that most of the houses in that area were looted and burned. Mr Nagan and his family lived for eight years in a small flat in Old Dutch Road. It was owned by a Gugerati family. The flat was named "Jeenas Building".

Nagans youngest son named Younosagren had taken ill.^{at} He was seven years old. He passed away and was buried Cator Manor Cemetery. Nagan still has a photograph of his son in his lounge.

Nagan applied to the Durban Corporation for a municipal house. Within a year he was given a house in Overport. He is living here for thirty years. All his children are married. His wife now seventy three years old is a sickly person. He has twenty six grand children. The eldest is thirty years old. He also has seven great grand children.

While living in Overport Mr Nagan worked for a plumbing firm in Pinetown. The firm was named "Bax Brothers Plumbers", a firm owned by three brothers. Nagan realised he was growing old, at the age of 87. He was experiencing pain in the knees, because of arthritis. He was unable to climb a ladder and scaffold. He decided to leave work. In 1971 Nagan retired. He could now spend more time with his religious work.

9. This can be substantiated by an article (letter to editor)
Graphic ~~bulletin~~ on 10 July 1982.

A RELIGIOUS FIGURE :

Mr Nagan devoted a large part of his life to religion. In 1925 he took great interest in religion. He remembers this date well because it was approximately this year that he had to pay the "Poll Tax".

While in Mayville he was a member of the Mangolan Temple, which was in Bellair Road. He later became a member of the main temple in Cator Manor, that is the Vishnu Temple. Nagan was able to fall into a state of "Holy Trance" which he continues even till today. While in Overport Nagan built a temple in his backyard. he has a large number of devotees attending service. Nagan is also an important member of a nationally known religious organisation, Sathie Sanmarka Sangum. Many holy festivals are held annually, namely the "Kavady Festival and the Porridge Prayer".

A BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH MAHATMA GANDHI :

Nagan stated that while he was in Durban there was a lot of colour bar.

The Europeans did not want the Black People to do the "Top Jobs".

Only a few Indians had businesses, outfitters, grocers and trading stores.

They were mostly the Moslems. In West Street the Indians used to sell fruit and vegetables in baskets. Soon the white people put a stop to this. These Indian business men could have been the "Passenger Indians" as described in the book "Indians in Natal". 10

Nagan stated that he saw Gandhi only once in his life time although he heard much about him. He saw Gandhi in town. He described Gandhi as "very thin; bald head, small face and thin nose." Gandhi carried a walking stick, and wore a dhoti. He stated that Gandhi fought against the Poll Tax.

"He fought for all the Indians. The Tax was too high. He succeeded in having the tax reduced. The tax was originally 2 pounds but it was reduced to 1.5 pounds."

He also mentioned that we should thank Mahatma Gandhi for establishing the Phoenix Settlement which is now a large Indian suburb today.

Finally, he mentioned that Gandhi left South Africa after a few years to continue his work in India.

FINDINGS AND SHORT COMINGS

Initially it was very difficult to find a subject. A previous interview with another person whose father was supposed to be the subject felt short because of very little information received.

Through persistence the researcher was able to receive assistance from friends who introduced him to the subject.

The subject had no reference number, indicating that the documents that he had were lost many years ago. The subject showed the researcher a few photographs which were of some help. The subject placed great emphasis on his jobs and his successes.

He spoke very little about the other members of his family. Subject deviated from the topics which felt were too personal. Subject had very little ^{knowledge} of his early life while in India. Subject is not outstandingly prominent person in the community. He holds a respected position in the "Sathie Sanmarka Sangum" today, as a result of decades of religious work. Most of the facts given were oral. There were no written documents. However certain facts could be proved by reference to historical literature. Some of these facts were reflected by footnotes. The subject lived a fairly great distance away from the researcher. This hampered progress with ^{the} interviewer.

CONCLUSIONS (AND FINDINGS)

The researcher found the project to be very interesting and a novelty. The subject was a very pleasant person and was willing to co-operate wherever possible. The researcher learned that Mr Nagan (subject) is one the very few people originally from India to be alive today.

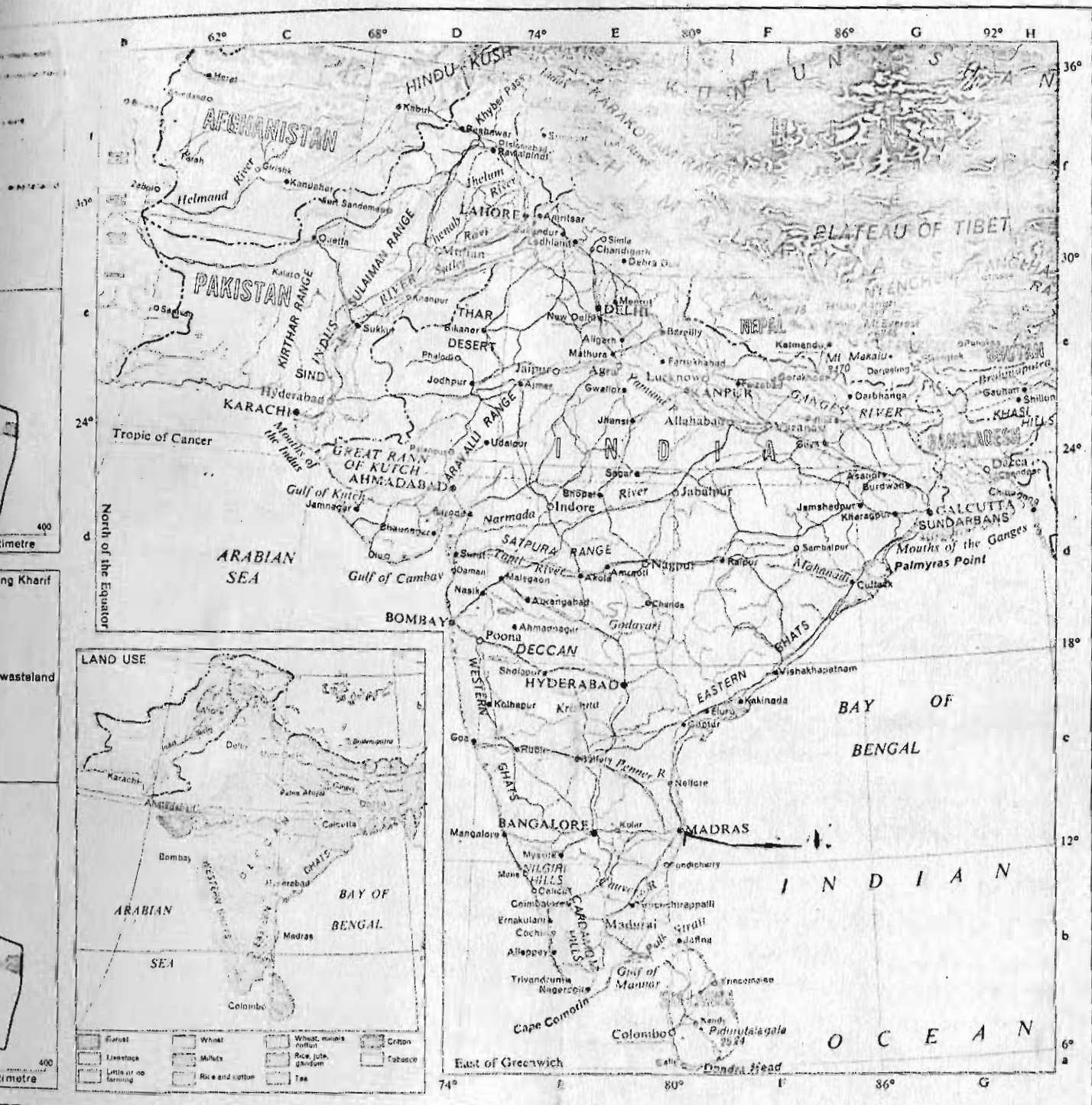
The subject's life took two directions namely his early life as an indentured labourer and his life as a working class individual. When one traces the subject's life , one notices that there is progress from being an indentured labourer to a fairly successful person both religiously and as a working class person. There seems to be correlation between certain historical events mentioned by the subject and evidence given in historical books.

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MR NAGAN AT THE AGE OF 99 YEARS



1. PLACE OF SUBJECT'S BIRTH