594 [ROOTS :

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE]

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Also to my father who helped me in every possible way including the collection of information.

Also to the many who have contributed in some way or the other to make this project a success.

And last but not least, my friend Jaya Pillay for the typing of this project.

S. Naidoo

INTRODUCTION

The base of the Natal Indian population was built on the flow of indentured labour which began in 1860. Between 1860 and 1911, when the importation of Indian labourers from India ceased at the request of the Union Government, about 154 184 came to Natal from Madras and Caloutta.

Indian labourers were brought to Natal because of the scarcity of labour. Slavery had been abolished and the Zulu relatively secure in their tribal economy, refused to market their labour.

"In the early years of indenture the sugar planters of the coastal belt, were by far the largest importers of Indian labour. Later, in the nineteenth century, however, the new coal mines in Northern Natal also came into the market for such labour."[1]

A rosy picture was painted of the conditions for potential immigrants. A free trip from Madras or Calcutta on one of the finest ships, well fed and properly lodged, until the ship set sail, and should the person be ill, he would have the greatest care. The climate of Natal was described as remarkably healthy, with an abundance of fruit and vegetable and good water, and if immigrants became ill medical attention, medicine and nourishment would be provided free of charge.

CONDITIONS IN INDIA

My subject is Vulasi Venkat Reddi, my mother's grandfather who came from the village of Beginapoli in the district of Guntur in B Burma.

He had worked in the paddy fields for his uncle. The rice seeds were planted just before the monsoon. Once the shoots were one or two feet (30 - 61 cm) tall, they were transplanted to water logged

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1. Report of Protector of Immigrants, 1906, p. 34.

fields. To keep the plants underwater, they were surrounded by mud walls. The rice was harvested after six months.

Over 70% Indians depended on the land for their livelyhood. Many of them only eat what the land produced and were ruled by the monsoon. If the monsoon was good, they had enough to eat, it it failed they had to live on inadequate government aid.

My great grandfather's departure from India was prompted by the failure of the monsoon, which occasionally led to famine and starvation.

"Immigration relied mainly upon 'push' factors rather than 'pull' factors. The need for people to obtain relief from a situation that was no longer tolerable."[2] The emmigrants mainly came from the most surrounded districts of India where crop failure could plunge sections of the village community into real starvation.

JOURNEY FROM INDIA

Before his departure from India, my great-grandfather married 24 year old Mada Papakka. She was of the Balya caste and came from the village of Nellore.

Together they boarded the "S.S. Umkuzi 17" which left the port on the 1 November 1904. They arrived at the port in Durban on the 24 November 1904. There was a total of 606 people who boarded the ship. Passengers aboard the ship consisted of:

Men	378
Women	138
Boys	34
Girls	23
Infant Boys	13
Infant Girls	20
TOTAL	606

Conditions on the S.S. Umkuzi 17 were good. There were no instances of mishaps, epidemics, infections and no reports of death.

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2. H. Tinker: A New System of Slavery, p. 54.

OCCUPATION ON ARRIVAL

"On arrival indentured labourers were assigned to employers under the Natal law, that is they 'voluntarily' signed a contract binding them to serve the party to five years."[3]

"Coal was originally discovered in Natal in the 1840's. The Natal coal fields are not very extensive, the reserve being estimated at less than 4 % of the Union total. In the initial stage of large scale coal mining most of the Indian labour was brought directly from India, although a lot more were recruited from local free market. From 1901 coal constituted the second largest export from Natal and from 1906, the largest."[4] Coal was also an important energy source for the development of Colonial economy itself and as such was vital to the establishment of an infrastructure and industrial growth.

Illustration 1: Screening was mostly done by women.

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3. E. Michael: A History of India, p. 107.
4. C.C. Ballard: "Vital Economic Statistics of the Colony of Natal", Unpublished Report, University of Natal, 1981.

After blasting coal was manually loaded into tubs which were mechanically hauled on to a platform to a "jigging" screen.

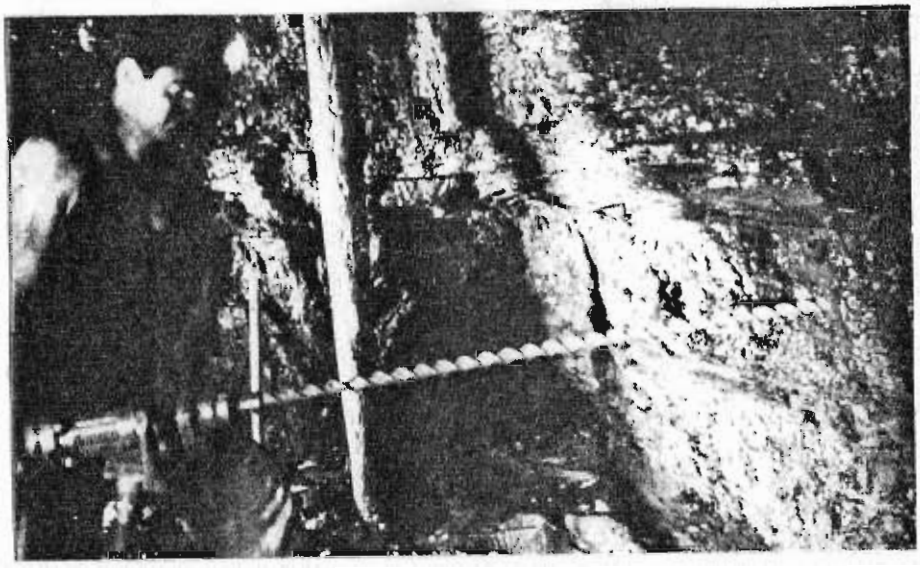

Illustration 2: Mechanical Drilling.

When my great-grandfathers contract expired in 1911, he then worked at Harringspruit as a general surface miner. This collery was run by the Natal Navigation Company.

Due to his suffering from psinisis he was compelled to work on a surface mine rather than on an underground mine. A year later this mine was closed down.

My great-grandfather was sent to Paulpietersburg by the same company. He worked here till 1921. He had to retire because his illness was worsening. Thereafter, my great-grandfather worked as a gardener for the Zungweni mine manager. When the mines closed down in 1929, he retired.

My great-grandfather was appointed to the Crown Collieries in Natal whioh was a coal field. The oollieries were in the Newcastle region. My great-grandfather was employed in as an underground worker. He was required to cut coal manually. My grandmother worked in the soreening plant. Her job enta ls separating the coal from the stone in the conveyor belt.

My great-grandfather worked at the collery for a year and he was forced to leave when the mine flooded due to heavy rains. My great-grandfathers earnings per month were:

Maximum wage for adult male	-	14 shillings
Minimum wage	-	10 shillings
Average wage	-	12 shillings

While my great-grandmothers earning per month was:

Maximum wage for women	-	7 shillings
Minimum wage	-	5 shillings
Average wage	-	6 shillings

SUBSEQUENT PLACES OF OCCUPATION

My great-grandfather was transferred to the Cambrain mines, near Danhouser. He occupied the position of rail boy, underground miner and timber man. As a rail boy he had to build rails for coco-pans. As a timber man he cut timber to support the roof of the mine.

In 1908 their first son was born, Pitcha Reddy. A year later they had their second ohild which was a daughter.

In 1909 my great-grandfather's indenture expired. But he re-indentured for a further two years to avoid payment for the £3 tax. Acoording to Aot 17 of 1895, after expiry of indenture (5 years) Indians were either forced to reindenture or return to India. If they remained in the oolony they were bound to a £3 tax.

"By 1909, 13 of 26 productive collieries used mechanized coal cutters (Cambrain mines being one of them) and coal undercut represented 61,97 % of total output."[5]

5. Natal Industries Coal Commission, p. 207.

Although my great-grandfather retired from the mines, his sons continued in the mines. Their earnings supplemented the home inoome. Their work entailed greasing coco-pans, repairing boilers and underground pumpfitters.

"From 1904 the conditions on the coal mines were improving and increasing the accomodation for Indians, and setting up improved barracks on the new site with the view of trying to stamp out phtisis."[6]

In addition to free lodgings, my great-grandparents received rations. The new scale of rations for 1908 was:

6 lbs rice and 7 lbs meal	-	per month
or 11 lbs rice	-	per month
4 lbs dholl	-	per month
1 lbs ghee	-	per month
1½ lbs salt	-	per month

Rice constituted an important article of diet for them. While bread was consumed occasionally. The principle source of vegetable protien was dhall. A variety of other vegetables were acquired from home growing. Meat was only bought at the weekends. Poultry was consumed when the family could afford it.

CASTE

Caste has been described as "the foundation of the Indian social fabric" so far as the Hindu society is concerned. Every Hindu necessarily belongs to the caste of his parents, and in that caste he inevitably remains. No accumulation of wealth and no exercise of talent can alter his caste status.

My great-grandfather belonged to the "Reddi" caste. The Kapu together with the "Reddi" are one caste. Hutton writes "the Telegu caste of Kapu which was the familiar title "Reddi" is probably the most numerous single caste in the south of India. It numbers two or three million, mostly cultivators, farmers and landowners. Socially they take

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6. Report of Protector of Indian Immigration, 1904, p. 28.

a place next to Brahmans in many districts and claim citizen from Northern India and kinship with the Rantha clan of Rajput."[7] In the South African context, decendants of the caste sometimes spell their names as "Reddy".

SOCIAL LIFE

There was very little social activity because the men usually worked long hours. When they returned from work they were exhausted However, my great-grandfather used to organize rooster fights. People from barracks were drawn to it, to bid their stakes. But gambling proved improfitable and he had to abandon it. "Gambling helped to make the reality more acceptable by holding out the possibility of an objective improvement in conditions."[8]

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

My great-grandfather took part in the 1913 strike. The £3 tax prevented workers from being free and forced them to reindenture. "Gandhi explained the strike as a result of the governments failure to redeem the promise to Gokhali, to repeal the £3 tax, and stated that the strikers would be immediately advised to work, regardless of any other grievances, as soon as the government gave assurance that they would carry out their promise."[9]

The coal owners set an ultimatum that provided that the strikers return to work or they would be removed from the compounds or sent to jail.

On 29 October, the day the coal miners attempted to issue their ultimatum, Gandhi led some 4 000 strikers out of Newcastle towards Charlestown (the Transvaal border) in an attempt to "move the conscience of the government and also the inhabitants of the Union."

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7. Hutton: Caste in India, p. 11.
8. Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants - 1904, p. 29.
9. Rand Daily Mail, 1913.

The strike was finally stopped at Balfast on 11 November and workers were returned to their place of work, at the same time their leaders were arrested.

The 1913 strike or the Natal strike, which resulted from the abolution of the £3 tax in the passive resistance platform, entered into success after its spontaneous spread to the coastal sugar plantations.

My great-grandfather died in 1938 and he was survived by fifteen children.

CONCLUSION

Most of the South African Indians owe their origin to the indentured labourers. South Africa from the 1860's provided them with little relief from the impoverished conditions in India. They were faced with harsh living and working conditions. But, with the abolishment of the indenture system in 1914 provided them with a field of opportunities to improve their conditions.

PROBLEMS FACED WITH THE PROJECT

There was no other person to varify the information provided by my grandfather, Mr P. Reddy because he is the only surviving child. However the information that was provided by my grandfather was validated by the documents.

Secondly, I was unable to locate the village or district from which he came on a map.

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B.M.25

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

COPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	306
Colonial Number	:	108206
Date of Arrival	:	20/11/1904
Name of Ship	:	" S. S. UMKUZI "
Place of Registration	:	—
Date of Registration	:	—
Number in Register	:	—
Name	:	VULASI VENKAT REDDI
Father's Name	:	V. PITCHI REDDI
Age	:	30 YEARS
Sex	:	MALE
Caste	:	REDDI
District	:	GUUTUR
Thanna/Taluq	:	KANDUKURU
Village	:	BEGINAPALLI
Height	:	5' 11"
Bodily Marks	:	SCAR ON LEFT SIDE OF BACK
Name of Next-of-Kin FATHER	:	V. PITCHI REDDI
Relations Accompanied	:	—
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	VACCINATED
Remarks	:	—

Certified a true copy.

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
PRIVATE BAG X[illegible]
15 -10- 1979
DURBAN
EVEREEK VERTEENWOORDIGER
DEPARTEMENT VAN INDIENSTEN

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

CROWN COLLIERIES NATAL

107969.	Mahamed Kasim	M	20	Umkuzi 17	29th Nov.
107994.	Koppati Swamy	M	22	✓	
108052.	Shaik Hyder	M	29	✓	
108053.	Suddapalli Venkia	M	25	✓	
108054.	Annam Nagabushanam	M	23.	✓	
108167	Kasturi Latchmigadu	M	20	✓	
108169	Abdul Kader	M	35	✓	
108173	Venkatigan	M	25	✓	
108206	Vulasi Venkatreddi	M	30.	✓	
108218	Vaka Chenchiah	M	20	✓	
108282.	Chevuru Mahalatchmi	F	25	✓	
108283.	C. Rathanam	M	12.	✓	
108284.	C. Subbama	G.	7.	✓	
108289.	Vani Errama	F	24.	✓	
108292.	Manga	F	25	✓	
108297	Annammah	F	19.	✓	
108308	Yerra Akkanna	F	23.	✓	
108315	Kumba Koti	F	23.	✓	
108316	Kumba Nagadu	B.	1½	✓	
108317	J. Atchama	F	17.	✓	
108318	Handigapu Saniasamma	F	21.	✓	
108321	Nada Pappaka	F	24.	✓	
109176	Gunaparti Potugadu	M	22	Umzinto 35	10. 1. 03
109177	Puli Gavirasu	M	18.	✓	
109178	Masa Veerappa	M	23	✓	
09326	Bodapati Atchi	F	28	✓	
09327	B. Appi	G.	7.	✓	
09344	Gandarapu Veeri	F	25	✓	
09393	Akumarti Kotadu	M	24	✓	
09394	" Mahalatchmy	F	21	✓	
09405	Kinthadi Appigadu	M	28	✓	
09406	" Sethy	F	25.	✓	
09407	K. Al[illegible]		[illegible]		