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TOPIC : A RESEARCH INTO ONE'S ROOTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Historians have often said that when one researches into one's past, an awareness of one's self, a sense of identification is created. Who am I? What is my origin? What were the circumstances that resulted in me being here? These are the questions, that unless unanswered, creates a void, which needs a kind of fulfillment in an individual. This project, delving into one's past, has been most stimulating, and valuable to me. Never before have I appreciated or thought about the heritage that has been passed down to me. This transcendency into the past had evoked a sense of responsibility which before was quite dormant.

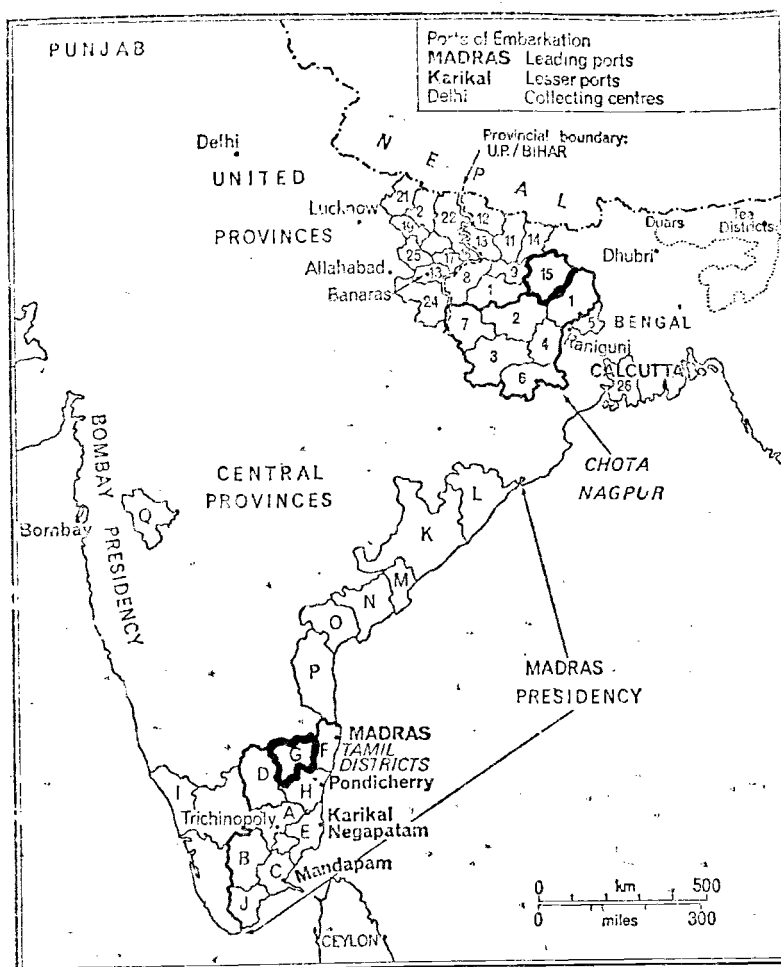
The impression that is created when one looks at a South African Indian today is one of stability and prosperity. The South African Indian has come a long way from the 1860's, days of hard labour and toil.

Nonetheless, the opportunity our ancestors have grasped from the beginning and the continuous expansion of their individual talents have led to a great achievement which in itself is remarkable.

As I said earlier on, that this project had awakened a sense of responsibility in me, that is, the urge to preserve the heritage that has been passed on. This preservation can only be maintained if I myself know what my ancestors were like. It is for this reason I choose to study a great grand parent in-law.

2. PERSONALITY

During the interview the impression that I received of DHURUM SING SAWAN was that, he was a tall sturdy man, to be exact, five feet fourteen inches. This characteristic seems to have been passed on to the present generation. My interviewee also mentioned that his father was a sort of soldier. However, this characteristic cannot be testified since there is no evidence. He also mentioned that during the Anglo-Boer War he helped the British to fight against the Boer. On these grounds I



Main Districts of Recruitment

Note: each group is listed in order of concentration of recruitment

SOUTH INDIA

The Tamil Districts

- A. Trichinopoly
- B. Madura
- C. Ramnad
- D. Salem
- E. Tanjore
- F. Chingleput
- G. North Arcot
- H. South Arcot
- I. Malabar
- J. Tinnevely

Telugu Districts

- K. Vizagapatam
- L. Ganjam
- M. East Godavari
- N. West Godavari
- O. Guntur

P. Nellore

Bombay Presidency

- Q. Ahmadnagar District

NORTH INDIA

Hill Coolie Districts

1. Santal Parganas
2. Hazaribagh
3. Ranchi
4. Manbhum
5. Birbhum
6. Singhbhum
7. Palamau

Bihari Districts

8. Shahabad
9. Patna
10. Gaya
11. Muzaffarpur

12. Champaran

13. Saran

14. Darbhanga

15. Monghyr

Districts of the United Provinces

16. Ballia
17. Ghazipur
18. Azamghar
19. Fyzabad
20. Basti
21. Gonda
22. Gorakhpur
23. Banaras
24. Mirzapur
25. Jaunpur

Calcutta Metropolitan Area

26. Twenty-Four Parganas

DHURUM Sing came FROM the Bihari District, Monghyr,
indicated by number 15

participate in the war. I also think this military feature has become a sort of heritage in the family. My interview'ee who is one of the son's himself is very orderly, stern and a uthoritative person.

3. DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL

Dhurum Sing came to South Africa on 1 May 1885. He had departed from the Calcutta Port on the 13 March 1885. He came by means of the ship called MERCHANTMAN V. The ship list reveals that there were three hundred and eighty members on board. During this journey, seven people died and two children were born. Comparatively it seems that Dhurum Sing had quite an uneventful journey. No dangerous mishaps or any kind of fever seems to have affected the people on board.

4. REASONS FOR LEAVING ORIGINAL COUNTRY

The coming of Indians to Natal was no spontaneous uncontrolled movement of adventurous individuals seeking a better livelihood. It was part of the elaborate system organised and controlled by the government of Great Britain and India. Thus Dhurum Sing came as one of the Indentured labourers to South Africa. He was recruited from Monghyr village which was one of the many districts of Bihar in Northern India. Northern Bihar and the Banaras 'Province' as it ~~is~~ was then called, provided most of the recruits for the East India company Bengal Army around the beginning of the century. Thereafter, the tall, dignified Brahmans and Rajputs of the princely state of Oudh became the infantry sepoys of the Bengal Army and the Biharis were no longer much in demand. The Calcutta Emigration Agencies began to concentrate their activities in this North-West-area. The Biharis were steady and patient and accustomed to hard toil. They also spoke dialects of Hindi and Hindustani was becoming the lingua-franca of the Emigration traffic.

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1. H. Palmer : The history of Indians in Natal, p. 4.

As part of the Bengal Presidency, the Bihar^{as} Province and Bihar were brought under the permanent Settlement of the late eighteenth century which created a class of landlords revenue collectors with enormous powers over the rural population in who, at law, became their tenants. Layer upon layer of intermediary tax-collectors-cum-landlords fastened upon the countryside. The people at the bottom, both economically and socially inferior, felt the heaviest weight of the landlordism. Those low caste folk were almost all landless labourers. Many had lost their title holding to superior caste because of exaction placed upon them. In Behari there was a kind of semi-slavery known as Kamuti, by which poor people sold their services, and sometimes those of their children in years to come, in order to obtain resources to meet their needs. Such people were easy prey for the recruiters for emigration overseas. It required little persuasion to show that they would be better off by engaging themselves to indenture, a form of servitude which must seem light compared to the yoke of Landlord or money holder. " 2

My interview^{ee} was unable to tell me why his father had come to South Africa. However, the information presented on the Bihari districts itself reveal the conditions and toil that the poor low caste people were undergoing. I assume that Dhurum Sing had left his country in the belief that South Africa would provide better prospects for him and which would at the same time release him from the bondage to his landlords.

OCCUPATION AND PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT

India is basically an agricultural country, and the people that came to South Africa were more or less farm workers. Dhurum Sing came as an Indentured labourer and after his five year contract he remained in the capacity of a gardener. When he came in 1885, he was immediately recruited to the Muckle Neuk Estate. The Muckle Neuk Estate was near the mouth of the Umhloti River. The Estate was established

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In 1889. It was started by William Campbell. During this early period of development of the estate, Campbell continuously disapproved of employing Indians Labour on his Estate. However, William Campbell then died in 1865 and the estate was controlled by his son who later sold it to Michel and Perrow in 1870. It was during Michel and Perrow's ownership that Dhurum Sing was employed. Later in 1893 Michel became the sole owner of the estate who in turn sold it ultimately to the Umhloti Central Sugar Mill and Estate Company Limited. However, after the five year contract, Dhurum Sing was no longer an employee of the Muckle Neuk Estate, rather he had become a free citizen. He then went to live in a place known as 'Kachara' in the Inanda District.

SUBSEQUENT PLACE OF SETTLEMENT AND OCCUPATION

Dhurum Sing lived for a number years in Inanda before his family came to live in Merebank. Since he was an indentured labourer, his life on the Estate was no better than his fellowmen. Some of the workers had to work at seventeen hours a day, very poorly housed and they were malnourished. "They were misused by their Employers who were determined to obtain the maximum measure of service possible in return for their outlay. The terms of contract were never observed and the employees were guilty of improper stoppage of wages and of supplying unsatisfactory rations. Some planters even refused to provide rations for the women and children who did not work. Deductions from pay were made for absence from work of as much as a shilling a day from a wage of 10/- a month. One month's illness therefore meant the loss of three month's wages. Also the system of medical care and supervision was very defective."

By 1890 Dhurum Sing's contract had expired. He like many others had become a free in every sense of the word. However, on expiration of their period of indenture their movements were restricted to Natal and he was not allowed to leave the colony without a licence. These free citizens having little or no money with which to buy land, leased

small holdings from European owners. In some cases those holding were subsequently sold to tenants who purchased them out of savings or paid him over a period on hire purchase plan. In this way most of the land held by Indians in the Durban, Clairwood, Catomanor and also North Coast in the districts of Inanda and Stanger were acquired. In the case of Dhurum Sing he settled in the Inanda District where he worked for a man called 'Karchra' as a gardeher.

7. OCCUPATION AND CASTE

By virtue of caste, Dhurum Sing had established himself as a gardener. He belonged to the caste called Kurmi which means in hindi a gardener. S.V.Ketkar in his book called 'History of caste in India' states that a caste is a social group having two characteristics (1) membership confined to those who are born of member and include all persons so born; (2) the members are so forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. Each one of such groups has a special name by which it is called." 4

Amongst the Indian, in the earlier days, the caste was the deciding factor for their livelihood. Today a man can take to any occupation without changing his caste. The only exception are that nobody of a good caste would like to take to the occupation of a shoemaker or scavenger and no man who is not born a Brahman would be accepted as a priest in the community.

Hindus believe that all men in the world are divided into four castes. They are the Brahmanas (priests); Kshatriyas (warriors); Vaishyas (common people); and Shudras (servants). Caste is due to the occupation which a man's forefathers were in. The precedence given to a caste is not given by man, it is absolute, and the order is supposed to be known and fixed and it ought not to be otherwise. Though no man can raise his caste, he can degrade it by neglect of the ceremonies or by connections with the low and common people. In such case he may either degrade himself completely or hold on intermediate position.

I think that Dhurum Sing belonged to the Shudra category of the caste system. The name Sh'udra is applied as a collective to various caste engaged in commerce and skilled trade, unskilled labour and household service and other occupation held to be low.

8. MARRIAGE AND BIRTH OF CHILDREN

Dhurum Sing and his wife Jamine had four children of which two sons are still living. All these children, were born in Inanda. The children that are still living are Rampensadh Dhurum Sing, who is about eighty years old and the second son, my interview'ee, Dhurum Sing Budda n. Buddan was born on six of October 1912.

9. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

During the period of their indenture, by virtue of contracts, these were unable to follow their religious and social patterns as they were accustomed to in their native villages. Many of the old customs, had to be abandoned and some were considerably modified in keeping with new circumstances and altered conditions.

Once Dhurum Sing and his wife had become free citizens, they were able to practise the social and religious cults of hinduism. They soon began their religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals. They celebrated Deepavali which marks the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness. Dhurum Sing's family up to this day still celebrates other important religious and social functions such as Raksha Bandan, when sisters bless brothers, Ram Naumee, to honour the birth of Rama who one spent fourteen years in the dark forest fighting evil with good, Nau Rathan, nine days of joy to honour the Divine Mother

10. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

The year 1885 was a significant year in that there were commissions and laws which directly influenced the lives of the Indian in the South Africa . Significantly in 1885 Dhurum Sing had come to South Africa in the hope a bright new world was going to open up before him. From 1860 onwards the indentured labourers had suffered many tortures by

their employers. Now that they had become free, some of them returned to India while some went to the South African Republic. They were soon followed by 'passenger' Indians. These were people who came under the ordinary Immigration Law, consisting of Gujarathi Muslim, Hindus, Urdu and Marati. Some of them were land owners, some had position in the local government and many came as ordinary peasants. These passengers traders were mainly traders who established a lucrative trade with local Africans and Europeans." The traders and hawkers soon spread out into the village, where they attracted attention and provided inconvenient competition for the European trade. The European trade protested against this unrestricted entry of Indian into the Republic. The government then introduced a Bill that affected the residing Asian in the Republic and those intending to come. Later this Bill became Law 3 of 1885 whereby they became ineligible for citizenship rights, they could not own property and had to pay a registration fee of £ 25. The penalty for evading registration was a fine or imprisonment. "5

While on the one hand the government was tightening up on the Indian in the Transvaal, the people of Natal were being given some consideration. Many of the Indians who had returned to India had already complained of their mistreatment by the employers. Consequently the Indian government had put a stoppage to further recruitments. As a result the indentured system was temporarily suspended until an inquiry was commissioned. The Wragg Commission of 1885 (The Indian Immigration Commission), under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Wragg, made a thorough inquiry into the entire indenture system. The Wragg Commission affected Dhurum directly, since he was able to live under more humane and tolerable conditions. Whether Dhurum Singh participated in the passive resistance movement is unknown since my interviewee was unable to recall, any ~~the~~ political activities associated with his father.

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CONCLUSION

The purpose of this exercise was to research into our origins. It has been a most revealing and stimulating experience, in^a sense that a way of life of its own kind and a ge had unfolded itself. Although the information about my subject was very obscure and uneventful, the circumstances surrounding his period of time has been most thought provoking. This triggered off a change in my values and attitudes to life. Prior to this project, I never had the urge to think or question my origin^d. The heritage that Dhurum Sing has passed th his family has now more significance since this project had involved them as well. At the beginning of their new adventure, their lives was not one of bliss but rather hardship and struggle. Thus the achievements of Dhurum Sing and his impact on his family has been most remarkable. He had brought with him not only the ways of the East, but the cultur- a l wealth, the social and religious lore, which is Hinduism. Thus, "the opportunities that they have grasped from the beginning and the continuous expansions of their individual spheres of influence which today might reach out to enrich their ancestral⁶ motherland" is most apt of the South African Indian today.

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6 M. PHILLIPS : Passage FROM India, p. 7-8

REG. NO : 34426

PERSON'S NAME : DHURUM SING

FATHER'S NAME : SAWAN

AGE : 22

SEX : M

CASTE : KURMI

PLACES OF ORIGIN :

RISHRA

DEQGHUR

MONGHYR

MARKINGS : WART ON RIGHT THIGH

EMPLOYER : MUCKLE NUCK ESTATE

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