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Indentured Indians are shown working in the cane field. Instead of the stipulated nine hours, were made to work eleven.

The purpose of this essay is to trace the circumstances surrounding the arrival of my grandparent (my mother's father) who came to South Africa as an indentured labourer. My main sources of information have been my parent and relatives as no documents belonging to my grandparent seem to have been retained. The only document supplied by the Department of Indian Affairs is a copy of the ship's list of Indian immigrants. This information has been supplemented by information obtained from texts,

Before describing how, when and why my grandfather left India, it is important to understand why these indentured ^{labourers} were needed in South Africa.

THE NEED FOR INDIAN INDENTURED LABOUR

The Indian population of South Africa owes its presence in the country to a labour problem experienced by pioneer farmers who established sugar plantations in Natal during the mid-nineteenth century when, following experiments in cultivation, it became apparent that the prosperity of Natal lay in sugar.

For the cultivation, reaping and manufacture of sugar a certain type of labour is needed. The number of labourers needed to adequately cultivate and reap an acre of sugar is comparatively large. Of these labourers a high proportion must be semi-skilled to operate the crushing plants in the manufacturing season. Without this type of labour, sugar planting was useless, and it was this factor that was lacking in Natal.

There was a very large Black population in Natal, but they did not in the middle of the nineteenth century make satisfactory labourers. They were at the time, still in a stage of subsistence economy- they could in their own land raise all that they themselves required. They were not prepared to create profits for others with their hard labour. The hard work of the kraal was traditionally done by women. The men looked after cattle, fought and hunted, built huts and did other tasks customarily held to be male duties. There was also a considerable number of Blacks who were willing to work on the plantations, but on their own terms and at their own times.

The White planters were in favour of applying some compulsion to work and the hut tax was introduced in 1849, with the purpose of forcing the Natives to work. They also demanded that the magistrates assist in providing Native labour recruits, but this proposal was blocked by Shepstone - the Diplomatic Agent to the Natives. Native labour was thus unreliable and unsuitable, and Shepstone steadily blocked any proposal for compulsion on the Black population,

The planters were thus in a serious position - they had the land, capital and hungry markets waiting for the sugar, but no progress could be made until a sufficient supply of labour was available. The colonists had no alternative but to look to other sources for a reliable and at the same time, cheap labour supply.

The system of Indian immigration was first adopted for Mauritius in 1842. Later, other areas, especially the West Indies were granted permission to import indentured Indian labourers. Thus Natal came to avail itself of the provision of Indian labour under the system already marked out for Mauritius and the West Indian colonies. This system guaranteed 2 vital factors for the successful cultivation of sugar. Firstly, it ensured a supply of labour which would be permanent for a minimum period of 5 years, combined with long daily hours of work. Secondly, it guaranteed an extremely low wage fixed in advance for the whole period.

India agreed to allow Natal Indian labour once Natal passed the necessary law stipulating its terms. Laws 13, 14 and 15 of 1859 were then passed. The first Indian indentured labourers arrived towards the end of 1860 and continued to arrive at regular intervals and in considerable numbers. Indians embarked to Natal from two main areas- Calcutta and Madras.

PLACE OF ORIGIN

Jaggan Parag was born in 1885 in the village of Khurharia, Basti. Basti is a district situated along the border of northern India (in Uttar Pradesh). He lived here with his family until he was 23 years old. He was the youngest of three sons.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

My grandparent's family owned a farm on which they grew small amounts of rice, wheat, mustard and sugar-cane. They also kept a few cows for their milk supply and for ploughing the land. Much of what they harvested was stored for their own use.

REASONS FOR LEAVING INDIA

The main reason given for his having left India is that India was experiencing a severe drought at the time, which resulted in famine. Indeed, the History of the Twentieth Century states that between 1866 and 1900, there were four major famines in India. The peasant, with his tiny plot of land, depended on the monsoon for his livelihood. Without adequate rain, his crops failed. These recurrent famines broke the morale of the peasants and artisans. Furthermore about 3/4 of the people of India working on land were adversely affected by the early British land policy, which tried to create and perpetuate a class of large landowners at the cost of the peasant proprietors.

As a result, the peasants had great difficulty in paying the annual revenue demanded by the British. It was at this 'psychological' moment that the colonial planters and governments held out earnest entreaties and rosy promises to these depressed people. Peasants and craftsmen, often lured by unscrupulous recruiting agents, bound themselves for five years and more to unknown masters under little known conditions to fill in the vacancies created by the emancipated slaves. (Slaves in the British Empire were emancipated in 1834). The Protector of Immigrants did some superficial checking and warning of the recruits and handed them over to the ship's captain. They signed no contracts but simply put their 'X' mark under a written statement which read "We the undersigned male adult emigrants do hereby agree to serve the employer to whom we may be allotted by the Natal government under the Natal Act No. 14. of 1859 and we all understand the terms under which we are engaged". This law provided for the appointment of a coolie immigration agent, stipulating a 9 hour working day and a minimum wage of 10 shillings per month, medical treatment, food, clothing and lodging. Women and children received 5 shillings per month.

1. J.C. Jha : "Indentured Indian Migration" in
Journal of Indian History . p.342.

About 12 years later, The Coolie Commission in Natal was to report that numbers had left India with very delusive ideas about the position they would occupy and the advantages which would await them on arrival.

DATES OF DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL IN SOUTH AFRICA

My grandparent (then a 23-year old bachelor) left his family and came to South Africa as an indentured labourer. He travelled on board the "SS Umlazi" which left India on 21 January 1908, and arrived at Port Natal on 18 March 1908, Passengers were so tightly packed on the paddle-steamers that there was little or no privacy. Disease was rampant and death frequent. A space screened off by a sail amidship served as "bathroom".

On their arrival they were herded into barracks. Once they were assigned the workers began their long walks to their places of employment-in this case to Clairwood-balancing their meagre belongings on their heads.

WORK PATTERN

They worked from sunrise to sunset. There was no time to search out appropriate places for ablution and toiletry and none provided, they improvised at the nearest point. In the fields they worked in groups of 100 and more. They prepared the ground-they dug holes in even rows and scooped and dropped equal portions of manure with little tins. They planted the seed cane which the women cut in equal lengths. When weed threatened to stifle the sprouting cane, they moved in again to weed and aerate the soil. When the cane matured, harvesting began. The labourers then bundled the cane and carried it on their shoulders to the mill. If the mill was at a distance, they loaded it on ox-or mule-drawn carts.

SUBSEQUENT OCCUPATIONS

The indentured labourer signed a contract for a 5 year period, at the end of which he had to live in the colony for a further 5 years. Once the 10 years elapsed he was entitled to a free passage to India. However, many preferred to remain in Natal as "free" Indians-self employed as shopkeepers, market gardeners and hawkers or engaged in semi-skilled wage employment such as

domestic servants and tailoring-as they found themselves better off in Natal than they would be in India. They were then employed on the railways and coal mines. Up-country farmers too began to employ Indians who were docile and intelligent and when trained made very good house-servants.

When my grandfather's indenture ended, he chose to remain in South Africa as a "free" Indian and was thereafter subject to the normal laws of the colony. He did not settle down in any particular place but moved from place to place probably doing one of the jobs mentioned above.

MARRIAGE; BIRTH OF CHILDREN

In 1914 he married Parkali Sewjuttan from Sutherland, Pietermaritzburg. They had nine children -6 daughters and 3 sons. While he was married he worked for approximately 10 years as a domestic servant and gardener for a Lady Steele in Claridge, Pietermaritzburg. She was a widow who owned a fruit orchard. He worked there until 1942 (till her death).

Thereafter he worked at a croquette club in Alexandra Park, Pietermaritzburg as an "odd job man," serving tea, mowing and caring for the lawn etc. He worked here until his death in 1950.

CONCLUSION:

The first Indians who came to Natal were regarded by the white settlers purely as a temporary labour force, and it was assumed that most of them would return to India. ^{However, many chose to remain in South Africa.} Indentured or immigrant labourers were followed by other groups known as passenger Indians as they had paid their own passage: they were British subjects travelling freely within the Empire, who had decided to live and conduct their commercial activities in Natal. The descendants of ^{these} indentured workers in these cane fields of Natal and of these passenger Indians are now part of South Africa's heterogeneous population.

SOURCES

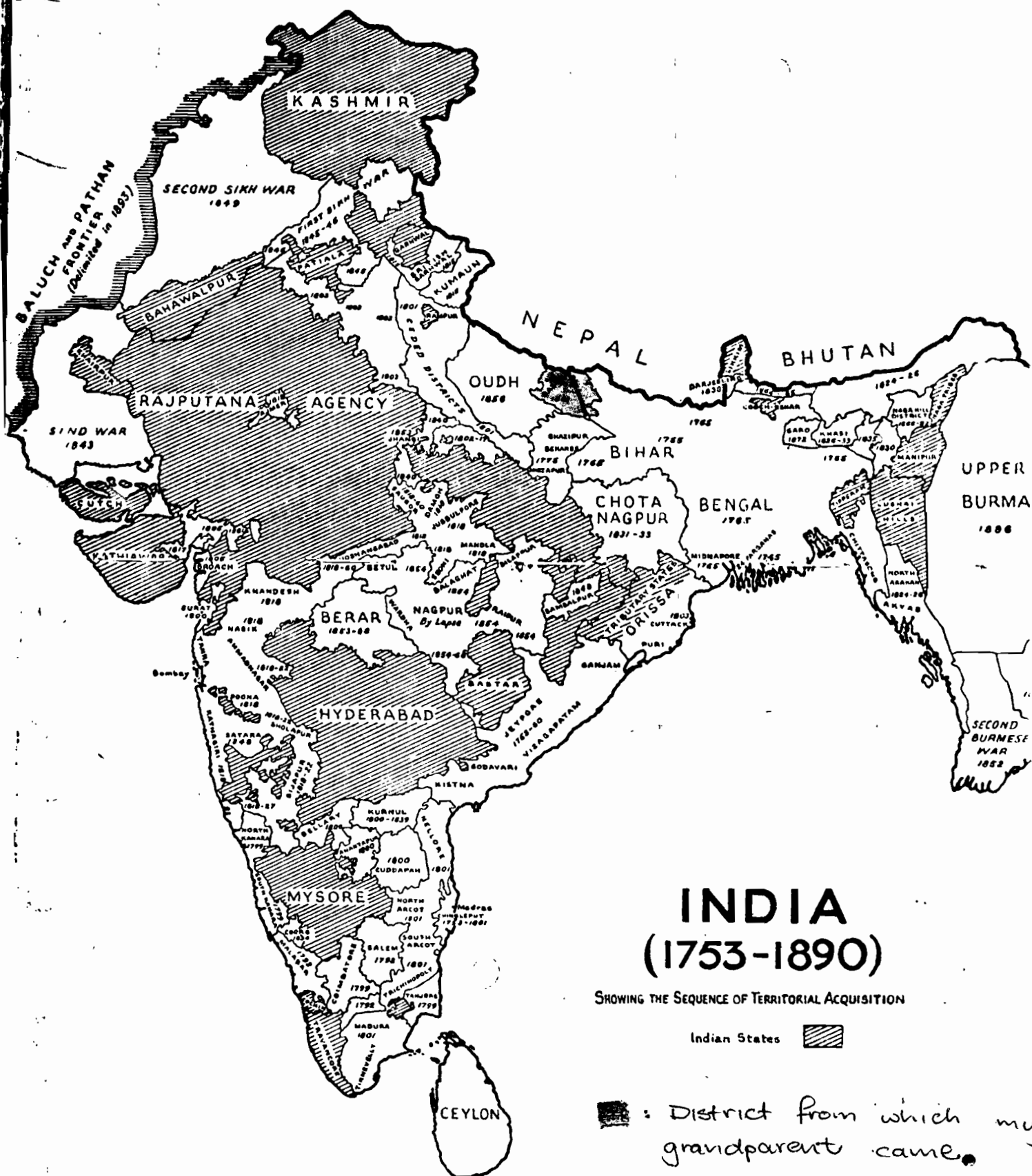
1-). Centenary of Indians - 1860 to 1960, a Cavalier Publication

2). Meer, Y.S. and others : Documents of Indentured Labour,
1st edition, Institute of Black research, Unity Publications,
1980.

3). Jha, J.C. : "Indentured Indian Migration" in Journal of
Indian History , August 1970, Vol. 48, p335-343.

4). Palmer, M. : The History of the Indians in Natal, Oxford
University Press, 1957.

5) Interview with parent.



Reference Number: 29/2/2/4. (7)..COPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT.

SERIAL NUMBER : 47
 COLONIAL NUMBER : 137102
 DATE OF ARRIVAL : 17-3-1908
 NAME OF SHIP : "SS UMLAZI"

PARTICULARS OF REGISTRATION.

PLACE : FYZABAD
 DATE : 27-1-1908
 NUMBER IN REGISTER : 8
 NAME : PARAG
 FATHER'S NAME : JAGGAN
 AGE : 23 YEARS
 SEX : MALE
 CASTE : AHIR

RESIDENCE

DISTRICT : EASTI
 THANNA : DHEBARWA
 VILLAGE : KHURHARIA
 HEIGHT : 5 FEET 5 INCHES
 BODILY MARKS : (NIL)
 NAME OF NEXT-OF-KIN : NOT STATED
 RELATIONS ACCOMPANIED : NOT STATED
 REMARKS : VACCINATED

CERTIFIED A TRUE COPY:

[Signature]
 REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE,
 DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS.



mitting this exchange was repealed in 1891, in spite of 13,000 applications, and Indians were thus arbitrarily deprived of their legitimate dues.

There were many difficulties which delayed the granting of the land. In which part of the territory was the land to be given? Were wives and children of Indian immigrants also entitled to land? What was to be the area of each grant? Who was to pay for the cost of the survey?

Although a solution to these questions was not difficult to find, the Governor, Colonial Secretary and Surveyor General did not immediately do anything in the matter. After immense pressure from Indians, the Protector of Indian immigrants and the Secretary of State for the Colonies decided to make grants of land at Braemar, near Umzinto. Reluctantly 53 Indians signified their willingness to accept the 15-acre plots. Some immigrants were not anxious to apply because of the announcement that the size of the lots was to be reduced from 60 to 15 acres.

By 1872, these Indian gardeners were occupying land for which they paid annual rentals of up to £1 per acre. In Durban, they carried on a lucrative vegetable and tobacco trade and the monopoly of supplying markets both here and in Pietermaritzburg soon passed into their hands.

Having completed their ten years' industrial residence in the Colony, the first batch of labourers who had returned to India complained about ill-treatment received in Natal. In spite of their value, they were misused by their employers who were determined to obtain the maximum measure of service possible in return for their outlay. The coolies were flogged and driven to work. The terms of their contract were never observed and the employers 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.

This is a facsimile of the Certificate issued to Indians upon completion of five years of industrial labour. The document was referred to as "Certificate of Freedom" and failure to produce it rendered ex-indentured labourers to immediate arrest and imprisonment as vagrants. The Passes and the Certificates of Industrial Service were the two most important documents in possession of Indians in the early days.

7.97801

NATAL

Certificate of Industrial Service,

UNDER LAW 2 OF 1870, SEC. 58.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that Muniamma
 Official No. 30655 Father's Name Nardyanasami
 Indian Immigrant, having completed her indenture, is hereby released from
 further Industrial Service.

DESCRIPTION:—

Age 9 years
 Height 30 1/2 inches.
 Bodily Marks nil
 Date of Arrival in Colony April 23rd 1884.
 Ship Arndot XII
 Last Employer R. J. Smith

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION,
 DURBAN, NATAL.
May 2nd 1889.

L. M. ...
 Protector of Immigrants.