

AYUB SHEIK

Reg I6297

History III

THE FORTUNE FATHERS

DEDICATED TO NAZIE

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Abdullah Shaik was born in Hussani, in Hyderabad, in Deccan, India. Little is known of his boyhood save that he received a rudimentary education at Nizam College. An education that was to hold him in good stead in his later years when he so industriously resolved to better himself in the newly developing colony of Natal. It was one day in 1911 that he firmly and finally resolved to leave the college before completing his studies. Like so many before him he made mind to embark on on the exodus to Natal.

Then a youth of eighteen and facing the drab prospect of earning out a living in an overpopulated, ailing city it comes as no surprise that he should hold the distant British colony of Natal to be a potential paradise. Ofcourse this aura of paradise was greatly influenced by the enchanting tales of a fascinating Natal that interlaced the length and breadth of India. Flured by a vision of these glitterings across the sea he came to Natal as a passenger Indian in 1911

ARRIVAL

On arrival he took up immediate residence in five, King Street, Ladysmith. He was soon employed in the Electrical department of the Elandslaagte Colliery. Here he proved to be a long standing employee, having served the company for a total of seventeen years. A period in which he took the opportunity to familiarize himself with the workings of all branches of mine electricity.

It was as a teenager of nineteen that he wooed and



Abdallah Sheik and his first wife, Sakina

Married Sakina, a girl who had lived all her thirteen years in the heart of Waschbank. The pair lived in a house which he himself had laboriously constructed on a small site provided by the mine. In the course of their married life Sakina was to conceive and raise ten children. Their names being: Majid, Gani, Hamid, Fathima, Dawood, Mariam, Cassim, Amina, Howa and Aziz who was the youngest.

Earnestly labouring from seven each morning and shrewdly managing his finances enabled him to periodically store away a little money which over the years blossomed into a small fortune. Like most Muslims he was deeply religious, getting up at four each morning in order to perform the Fajar Namaaz. Whenever possible he made ~~sure~~ he prayed five times daily. He also brought up his children with a firm hand and his quick tempered nature instilled in them a fearfull respect.

For transport he purchased a three wheel vechicle, the name of which none of his children can recall with any measure of accuracy. He later acquired for himself a Morris, an old black vehicle which was to give him a long and trusty service in the dirt roads common to those times. Many of the roads were without names, being called roads by virtue of the fact that a grader from the Natal Provincial Adminstration once or twice a month cleared the roadway after a downpour.

ELANDSLAAGTE COLLIERY

During his period of employment at the Elandslaagte Colliery he qualified as a mine electrician. A distintion truely rare in the Indian community. It was then that he sought to improve himself by seeking alternate employment where he could use his new found capabilities. He found it at the

Wessels Nek Colliery where he was employed as a mine electrician. He was the only Indian engaged in this class of work on the coal mines of Natal. His principle task being to man the control rooms above the mine.

Here he rented a site from the Wessels Nek Colliery, an area relatively near the mine and with the aid of a local carpenter proceeded to build his new home. The house was constructed in the main of hard wood and iron, being topped with a red roof which was common to all the house in the vicinity. It had neat wooden flooring to compliment it. In its entity it consisted of two verandahs leading to a spacious garden, a large kitchen, two bedrooms, a lounge and a spare room. This beautiful house was worth approximately fifty pounds.

HARLEY DAVIDSON

It was then that he sold his Morris and purchased a motorbike. A Harley Davidson which was used in the army. He used it to travel the ten or eleven miles distance from the mine. His work started on the mine at seven each morning and concluded at half past four. It was then that he decided to purchase a plot of land in Waschbank. It was his mind to establish a fruit shop on the site. In due course he finally managed to erect a shop with a house adjoining it at the back. This house consisted of a single bedroom, a lounge, a kitchen and a spacious storeroom. Electricity however was the greatest boon to the house and the shop. A licence to own and maintain a shop was purchased for two pounds.

It was one day whilst hurrying to work on the Harley Davidson that he seriously injured himself in an accident. The main chain of the motorbike was severed and he found himself sprawled on the stoney roadway. Apart from suffering a multiple bruising he fractured his left arm. A fracture that was to leave him slightly maimed in that hand.

This maiming however became evident only when he read Namaaz. His left hand could not quite reach his ear in the salaah posture, a pre-requisite for commencing prayer.

After a painful recovery he instantly rid himself of the bike and purchased a 1928 Chevrolet. This Chevrolet he bought for twelve pounds when he attended an auction sale in Ladysmith. A pale yellow car of some immensity, it had only one major failing. It lacked brakes. Because motor spares were virtually impossible to obtain in those days he never got to repairing the brakes. The car he brought to a jerky halt each time by shifting into a low gear and switching the ignition off. He drove this car for the next two years.

ABDULLAH FRUITERERS

The shop namedd after himself, "Abdullah Fruiterers" was relatively busy and succeeded in reaping a reasonable profit. Its main customers being Africans who worked in the mines and in the surrounding small farms. The only serious competition it faced was from "A. Khan", a fruitshop about a mile distant. The other shops in the locality were "Amins", a general dealer, two shops owned by the wealthy brothers, A.K. and M.S. Mall and a big millshop. The many africans in the area should take their after harvest to the millshop in order to have them crushed. The millshop also supplied the flour to dealers. The flour was loaded onto the backs of several donkeys and transported to their shops. His wife, Sakina should keep shop whilst he worked in the mine each day. He also hammered together a huge cart with which his three sons Majid, Hamid and Gani should push each day to a nearby coal mine, the Dundee Coal Company. The three sons sold the fruit, comprising

mainly apples, bananas, pears and peaches to the workers in the mine. It was the white workers who were their best customers. They recall in dread how, if a single apple or peach was left unsold at the end of the day they would face a thrashing by an enraged father.

THE SECOND WIFE

Three years later with the consent of his wife, Sakina he married again. This time to a young lass called Khatoon, another female who had enjoyed all her girlhood in Waschbank. Under Islamic law one is permitted to marry seven times, provided one has the means and the capacity to grant each a happy married life. With her, he was to father four children, their names being Hoosen, Halima, Ayesha and Wahab. The two wives happily enjoyed a most amiable friendship.

THE SECOND SHOP

His sons applaud his business mindedness and this is given ample justification in that, barely a year later he made intention to open another shop in the vicinity. The new shop, also dealing in fruit had an eating house. A licence for operating a fruitshop and eating house was paid for with five pounds. This shop he likewise named Abdullah Fruiterers.

Adjoining the shop at the rear was a house which he himself had constructed. It had two bedrooms, a lounge and a kitchen. This shop was in an area which was predominantly white and separated from the first by a railway line. The shops approximately a mile apart. The second shop was near an immense farm, stretching a few hundred miles across the terrain and owned by an Afrikaner named Rademeyer. It was from Rademeyer Farm that the shop drew most of its

business, serving soup and bread to the african labourers each day.

It was quite an involved and congested lifestyle he had. Managing two shops whilst at the same time keeping his job as an electrician in the Wessels Nek Colliery. It was only his industrious attitude and a capacity for earnest and sustained labouring that allowed him to successfully draw income from three sources simultaneously.

Abdullah Sheik found operating the electricity on the mine largely stimulating and satisfying. Sitting in the control room it was his job to check and ensure the smooth functioning of electricity in the various reefs and positions in the coal mine. Under his authority, in the position of aide toiled a fellow Indian, a Tamil named Ramana. It was this selfsame Ramana who had been painstakingly tutored that one morning approached the mine managers and accused Abdullah Sheik of theft. Asked to appear before the mine managers he was told that they did not believe this most surprising allegation but none the less it was company policy to investigate the matter. Abdullah Sheik was highly indignant and disgusted at the lie perpetrated by his Tamil aide. Being deeply religious he found it impossible to labour under a shadow of suspicion and ill will. He instantly issued a twenty four notice to the mine managers. His beautiful house on the mine, worth no less than fifty pounds he gave away for a mere pittance of ten pounds.

Resigning from his job as electrician in the coal mine he decided to live alternately with his two wives. He spent a week in each residence whilst at the same time he was fully occupied managing his two shops. Now that he was no longer employed in the mine he finally found time to play

a more active role in the community.

Abdulla Sheik was one of the founders of the Wessels Nek Madressa. He also became the secretary of the madressa, an institution founded to school young children in their virtues of an Islamic lifestyle. The madressa was really an average size building made essentially of tin and sturdy wood. The Moulana's resident in the madressa was M.S. Patel. Moulana M.S. Patel really lived in a minute bedroom and kitchen alongside the madressa, a frugal lifestyle, where he shunned luxuries sought by most men and dedicated himself to the propagation of Islam. By day he instructed his class of twenty children, including the sons of Abdullah Sheik in the teachings of Islam. The madressa was equipped with old well worn desk and benches which the children used. At night the desk and benches were removed and thick mats were carefully spread on the floor ready for the performance of namaaz. A well outside the madressa was used for ablution before prayer. It was a frequent sight to witness a steady congregation of twenty to thirty Muslims arrive at the madressa each night and again at four each morning. Indeed the Quaranic call of "prayer is better than sleep" was rigidly followed by the orthodox Muslim congregation at Waschbank.

THE WASCHBANK MUSLIM JAMAAT

To preside over the affairs of the madressa and assist the Moulana a Waschbank Muslim Jamaat was formed. This was an organisation of selected community conscious men who saw to the maintenance and relative smooth functioning of the madressa.

The Waschbank Muslim Jamaat comprised of ten to twelve members of which Abdullah Sheik was one. Amongst the more prominent social figures in the jamaat were Amod Sahib and the brothers M.S. and A.K. Mall. By a monthly contribution from the jamaat, Moulana M.S. Patel was paid an adequate salary suitable to his position and needs, a salary to which Sheik Abdullah contributed to with a regular handsomeness.

Being the owner of two fruit shops Abdullah Sheik readily had and made many friends. Amongst the best was a likeable Hindu, R.T. Dubree who was by profession a hide and skin buyer. This energetic Hindu who rode about on a bicycle spent many hours most days amusing Abdullah Sheik with his talkative disposition. Abdullah Sheik also had a strong bond of friendship with the brothers M.S. and A.K. Mall.

Unfortunately this bond of friendship did not extend to his neighbour who was at heart a good natured pensioner. His children recall how Abdullah Sheik's fowls strayed into L.M. Smith's land and into his garden. L.M. Smith vented his anger on Abdulla Sheik. The pair proceeded to have a fearful row in which Abdullah Sheik severely beat the enraged englishman with a stout stick. L.M. Smith was hospitalised after the incident.

Everyday produce was obtained from the shop itself which in turn got the necessary produce from the markets in Ladysmith and Dundee. The backseat of the 1928 Chevrolet was removed leaving a rather spacious room at the back with which Abdulla Sheik went to these markets weekly,

bringing back a vehicle loaded to capacity. Fresh milk was obtained from the sole cow owned by Abdullah Sheik. The children affectionately called the cow, which was large and full bodied "Shesh". Shesh had been bought from an African who had given him the name and somehow the name had stuck. Opposite the shop was a small farm owned by an Afrikaner whose name cannot be recalled. He possessed a small but verdant farm upon which his five or six cattle grazed.

Bieng profoundly religious and a man of education he subsequently became a member of the Muslim library in Ladysmith. The library provided him with a constant source of Islamic literature that broadened his outlook as a Muslim. To supplement this he also had a complete set of encyclopedias which he pondered over in his spare time in a most diligent manner and learned expression upon his face. Added to this he was a daily subscriber to the "Natal Witness", a newspaper he purchased from Malls general dealers for a shilling and six pence. He formed a habit of smoking his pipe whilst engrossed in the newspaper.

ENTERTAINMENT

For entertainment he enjoyed a magic show which was held in the hall in the Waschbank school hall fortnightly. The magician, professor Kardanani charged a fee of one shilling and six pence. Once a month they were also treated to a film-show. The Popular Travelling Talkies owned by a man named Cassim Popular came thirty miles from Danhauser to screen his films in the Waschbank school hall. He also charged one shilling and six pence for his filmshows. Abdullah Sheik

and his sons gained free entry into the cinema by virtue of the fact that they served nuts and cooldrinks in the hall. These cooldrinks were got from a company called Suncrush Limited who once a month delivered the cooldrinks to the dealers .

HOODWINKED

Abdullah Sheik led a complete social life which was enhanced by his success in the economic field. However it so occurred that one day two african strangers accosted him with what they claimed was a goldbar worth several thousands on the market. The bar had a registered mine stamp at the back. Abdullah Sheik excitedly paid the -m fifty pounds on the spot and for the remaining fifty pounds asked offered his cow "Shesh" as payment. The Africans stated that they would come and fetsh the cow tomorrow. That same day he sawed th goldbar and gatherin -g the dust took it to the jewellers in ladysmith to be valued .The gold turned out to be mere bronze. Of course the Africans did not return for the cow.

The Wessels Nek area was policed by the Waschbank police but because of the sparce po ulation they were not taxed to a great extent. Because the area lacked a court all the cases were troed in Dundee.

CONCLUSION

It was one day when he was just past his forties that suffered a stroke in his left arm . He remained at home that day. The next day he was driven to a white doctor Dundee. He was hospitalized after six and in the early hours of the morning died .

Abdullah Sheik , a tall, strapping youth who had abandoned his native India to make his fortune in the distant colony of Natal, had painstakingly cultivated it ... and died.

Like so many Indians on the exodus to British Natal , indentured and passenger Indians alike, he had forged the foundation upon which we today thrive and build upon . It is these bold men who have cultivated for us our fine sense of our heritage in this land , it is therefore our moral duty to perpetuate and uphold all that they symbolize ,so that our forefathers who have sailed here long ago may not have journeyed in vain .

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH HAWA SHEIK

QUESTION: (Q:) You are a daughter of Abdulla Sheik, is that right?.

RESPONSE: (R:) Yes.

Q: How many children did your father have?.

R: I am one of ten children.

Q: Could you give the names of your brothers and sisters?.

R: My eldest brother's name is Majid. He is followed by Gani, Hamid and my sister Fathima, then my brother Dawood, Marian, Cassim, Amina, myself and my youngest brother Aziz.

Q: Do you remember much of your father?.

R: No, not really. I was very small when he died.

Q: Can you describe your father?.

R: Well, I do know he was tall and ... well... nothing much else.

Q: Where did he live?.

R: We stayed in Washbank, on the main road I think it was.

Q: Do you recall the name of the Road?.

R: Why, I think it must be Washbank Road. We had a fruitshop there, and another one across the railway line.

Q: What was the name of the fruitshop?.

R: Both were called Sheik Abdulla.

Q: Could you tell me more about Sheik Abdulla Fruiters?.

R: No, I can't. You see I was so small. I really can't tell you much more.

Q: One last question, could you tell me anything else about your father, even the slightest thing would help.

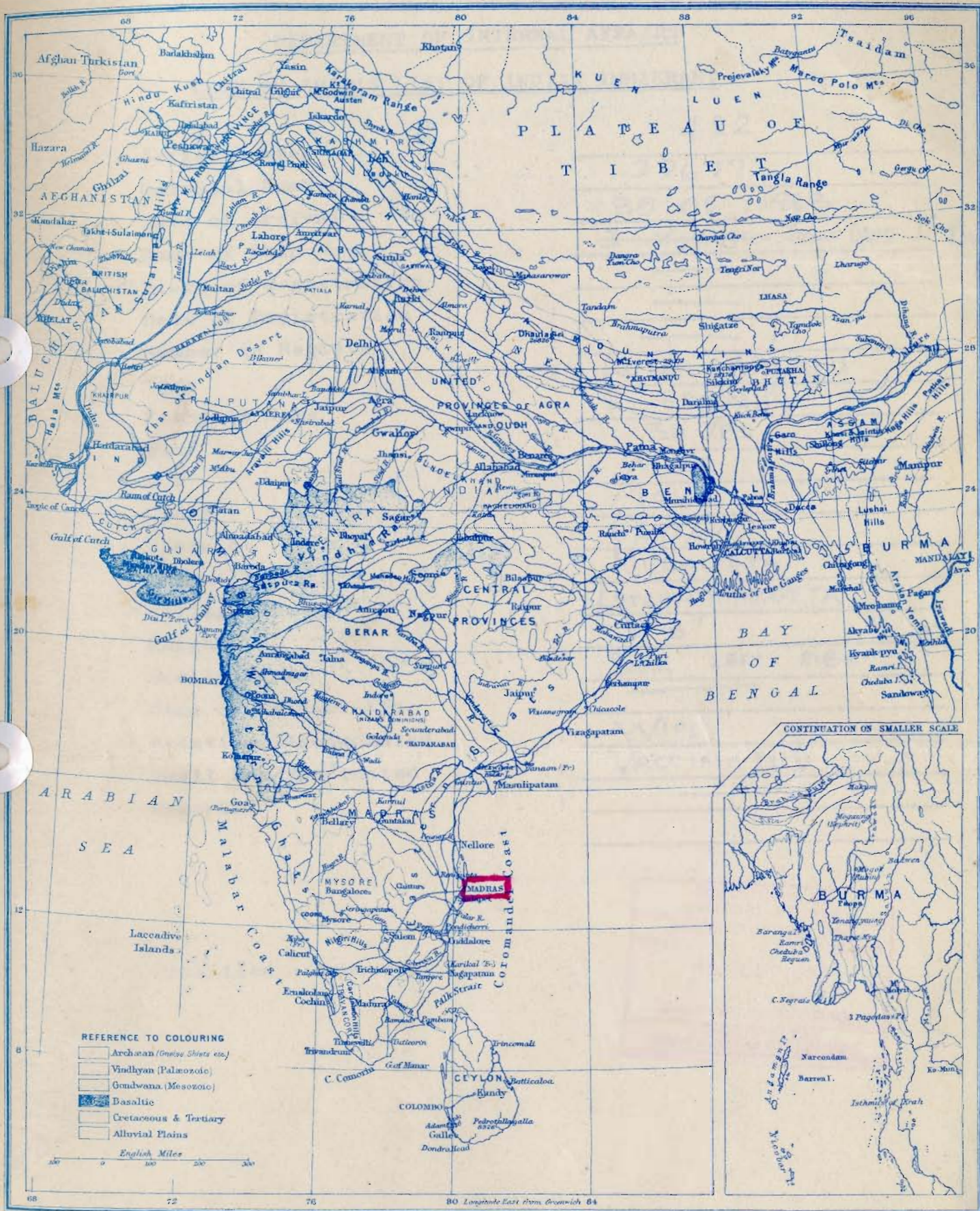
R: I can't say...but I knew he had a very bad temper.

Q: Yes, that's helpful, tell me more.

R: I can't...you see I was so small.

Q: Well, thank you for your time.

INDIA. GEOLOGICAL.



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

Serial Number	:	422
Colonial Number	:	29677
Date of Arrival	:	30.06.1983
Name of Ship	:	I. VOYAGE JOHN DAVE I VOYAGE
Place of Registration	:	—
Date of Registration	:	—
Number in Register	:	— 1
Name	:	SULLAH APPGADU
Father's Name	:	S. ERREPAH
Age	:	30 YRS
Sex	:	MALE
Caste	:	MALA
District	:	GAUJAM
Thanna/Taluq	:	NURSIPIETA
Village	:	LUTCHMINAIDUPETA
Height	:	5'3"
Bodily Marks	:	SCAR LEFT RIBS
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	—
Relations Accompanied	:	WIFE
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	VACCINATED
Remarks	:	—

Certified a true copy.



 REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

C O P Y

Geo. J. Gatland.
P.O. Box 275

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS
GATLAND

57 & 58, Club Arcade

Durban 19th July 1939

19

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Being in ill health and at present confined to my house in consequence and being uncertain when I may be able to resume work, I am of necessity obliged to close down my office and reluctantly dispense with the services of my employee ROBERT. W. SULLAPHEN. In doing so, I desire to place on record, and have pleasure in doing so, that he has been with me since the year 1902 and has always rendered me very capable and efficient service. He is very respectful and respectable in manner and habits, regular in attendance and always ready and willing to attend to any instructions given by me. He is fairly well educated and speaks English thoroughly; Has a good knowledge of bookkeeping and preparing statements therefrom.

I can thoroughly recommend ROBERT to anyone requiring services within the sphere he has rendered to me.

He is well known in the Town in connection with my office.

(s.d) G. J. GATLAND.

SPRINGFIELD

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25 June 1981

MISS/MRS/MR/DR/PROF/THE HON/THE REV.

Thine Sullaphen.....
Kington Gardens.....
.....
.....

Dear Miss Sullaphen.....

We would like to take this opportunity of thanking you for the interest you are showing in our 'Indiana 81' Exhibition and the establishment of the Indiana Museum and Documentation Centre at the College.

At the same time we would like to acknowledge receipt of:

1. Photographs of Sullaphen Appigadu &.....
" " Paupee.....
2. Pass to Indian born in Colony (Nelamah)
3. Birth Certificate 14 February 1890 (Nelamah)
4. Graphical articles (Nelamah Sullaphen)

Yours faithfully

P.L. Samuel
Indiana 81 Committee

J.M. de V. Bravat

RECTOR
SPRINGFIELD COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

J. Bagcoendes

HEAD: DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES

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