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PREFACE

I have based my research on my father's grandfather, PRAGG NIMOO.

Due to the lack of information on my subject I also submit some information surrounding the Indentured Indian.

My interviews with various relatives namely, Mrs. Basdeo Sewpaul of Lot 16, Stanger; Mr. Balchand Sewpaul of Ottawa; Mrs. Nundkumar Pragg of Nonoti; Mr. Narain Kissun of Verulam and various others proved unrewarding, therefore I lack a detailed history of my subject.

Although the Department of Internal Affairs had been quite helpful I am sure I could have obtained more information from the above source.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

General acknowledgements are due to my father who helped me interview my elderly relatives and my sister, Namika P. Balgobind who typed the project.

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Mr. Pillay and Professor Krishna from the Oriental Studies Department.

Mr. Willy Padyachee from the Department of Internal Affairs.

Mr. A.P. Sunder a fellow student (Reg. No. 12942) and cousin.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.

The indenture system of Indian labour started in 1874, soon after the abolition of slavery and it was definitely intended to take the place of slave labour in European colonies. At first it was introduced in Mauritius and later in the West Indies, British Guiana, Dutch Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, Fiji and Natal.

1

Natal was annexed as a British colony in 1843. Initially the colonists grew cotton, but after successful experiments by Edmund Morewood, who became the "father" of the Natal sugar industry after starting his cane plantation at Compensiation along the Natal North Coast, many of them turned to cane cultivation.

However in order for the sugar industry to prosper, a continuous supply of cheap, reliable labour was needed. Although many Zulus were living in Natal, due to their tribal way of life, they could not satisfy the labour needs of the colonists.

2

Recruitment of Indian labour was the solution to this problem.

The first demand for Indian Indentured labourers by Natal colonists was made in 1851. After a meeting between leading colonists such as, Morewood, W. Campbell, I.C. Bryne and Dr. Johnstone at the Durban School Hall a motion asking for the introduction of Indian labourers was passed. 3

1. S.A. Waiz: Indians Abroad, p. 595.

2. S.R. Pather (Mrs.)(ed.): Centenary of Indians, 1860-1960, p.1.

3. Y.S. Meer (ed.): Documents of Indentured Indian Labourers, Natal (1851-1917), p.4.

Thus majority of the South African Indians are descendants of indentured Indians who were brought to Natal between 1860 and 1911.

1. Y.S. Meer (ed.): Documents of Indentured Indian Labourers, Natal (1851-1917), p. 1.

2. GENERAL REASONS FOR LEAVING INDIA.

3.

Although the South African Indians are just over one hundred and twenty years old, their roots are traced in India to one of the oldest civilizations in the world, the Indus Valley which had been influenced by four cultures: the Dravidians, the Aryans, the Turkish Muslims and the Europeans.

India's contact with the West, except the Greeks and Macedonians, proved catastrophic. The European invasions which 'rode the crest of the Industrial Revolution', had great political, social and economic effects on the Indians.

1

As the British increased their power, and ultimately ruled India until 1947, the Mughul Empire which had been the centrafugal force uniting the Indians and keeping them intact for many centuries began to crumble.

The Marathas (from South India) at the same time plundered and devastated India from north to south and east to west, thus affecting the social, political and economic life of the people.

Political instability was accompanied by economic upheavals. With the arrival of the Europeans, Britain having the most adverse effect upon India, men and their skills were swept aside to make room for industries and machines. As a result many Indians were unemployed.

2

1. Y.S. Meer (ed.): Documents of Indentured Indian Labourers, Natal (1851-1917), p. 1.

2. Ibid., p.1.

Within fifty years India had lost her two thousand year old trading position, based on her skilled crafts and processed goods and was reduced into a plantation of cheaply exploitable raw materials and a dumping ground for machine made European (particularly British) goods.

1

British presence also disturbed the rural pattern of life with the introduction of the Permanent Land Revenue System, by the Governor General of India, Lord Cornwallis in 1793. This system created a class of landlords, also known as the Zamindars, who collected taxes for the British in India, from the peasants. The land that belonged to the peasant for many generations became the landlords (Zamindar's) and the peasants became his tenants.

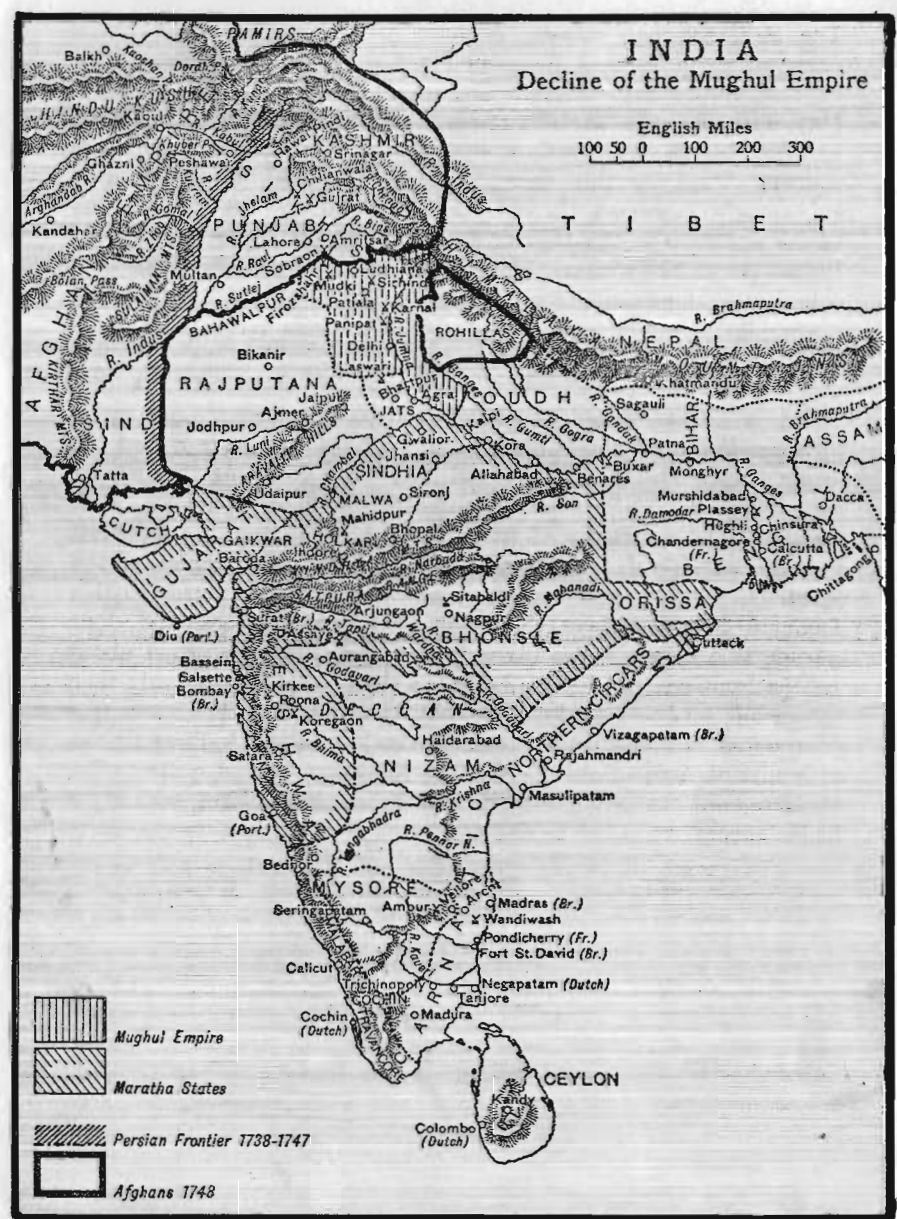
The peasant was 'converted' from a 'land-holding peasant' to a rootless labourer who could be manipulated in the factories or on the plantations. He could be deprived of the land allocated to him by the Zamindar if his work was regarded as unsatisfactory. Many of them became landless with no income.

2

Basically those who left India were of Shudra origin. Majority of the Hindi speakers came from the Bengal Presidency consisting of: Bihar, Calcutta and Orissa. Majority of the Tamil speakers came from Madras. Most of these Indians came from the lowest stratas of the caste system.

1. Y.S. Meer (ed.): Documents of Indentured Indian Labourers, Natal (1851-1917), p. 1.

2. Ibid., p.1.



A map of India during the decline of the Mughul Empire and the various European settlements.

1. R.C. Majumdar and others: An Advanced History of India, p. 525.

Even today the caste system is very strong and has an adverse effect upon Indian society and everyday life, so we can imagine what an effect it had had one hundred and twenty years ago.

Some of the labourers may have left for personal reasons such as an unhappy marriage, guilty of a serious crime, adventure or an unhappy love affair.

It was under these conditions of high vulnerability, insecure political and economic life and social discrimination, that they began contracting their labour to go and work in foreign places and for unknown employers.

1. Y.S. Meer (ed.): Documents of Indentured Indian Labour, Natal (1851-1917), p. 2.

3. CONDITIONS OF THE INDENTURED INDIAN'S CONTRACT.

7.

The Indian Government agreed, after turning down the requisition previously, to allow Natal to recruit labourers once Natal had passed the law which stipulated the terms of contract.

After the passage of Laws 13, 14 and 15 of 1859 the Natal Government and private persons were able to obtain labourers from India. The above laws provided for:

- a). appointment of a "coolie" agent in India;
- b). a nine hour working day;
- c). a minimum wage rate of ten shillings per month;
- d). medical attention, food, clothing and lodging at a deduction of two shillings per month;
- e). the imprisonment or a fine for leaving the estate without a written pass.

They were contracted for five years but could buy their freedom for five pounds after three years. After five years they were allowed to re-indenture for a further five years. Thereafter they were offered a free passage to India or alternately a piece of crown land of equal value.

The labourers were examined by the Protector and then handed over to the captain of the ship who recorded their names, place of origin, age, marks, etc. This list was deposited in Natal to the 'coolie' Immigration Officer who numbered each name. This became the labourer's indenture number.

1

1. Y.S. Meer (ed.): Documents of Indentured Indian Labourers, Natal (1851-1917), pp. 3-4.

4. CONDITIONS ON BOARD THE SHIPS.

8.

A number of ships such as the Truro, Belvedere, S.S. Umlazi and the Umvoti brought the Indians to Natal.

The Truro (left India from Madras on 12 / 10 / 1860 and reached Natal on 16 / 11 / 1860) and the Belvedere (left Calcutta on 4 / 10 / 1860 and reached Natal on 28 / 11 / 1860) were the first ships to bring Indians to Natal.

Conditions on the ship were not satisfactory. The passengers were tightly packed. Disease was rampant and deaths frequent. The passengers suffered from measles, colds, insanity, etc., and the so called 'hospital inn' was in continuous use. From 1860 to 1866 there were 180 deaths on board the ship and 67 from 1881 to 1882. There was constant fear of assault, especially sexual assault not only from fellow emigrants but also from the ship's crew. On one voyage a surgeon was arrested for 'rape, attempted rape or indecent assault against female emigrants'.

Single women were kept with married people and single males were kept separately.

Sirdars kept watch on board the ship all through the night.

After landing they were housed in lazarettos or tents until the colonists came to claim their 'commodities' for 'which' they signed bonds.

1

1. Y.S. Meer (ed.): Documents of Indentured Indian Labourers, Natal (1851-1917), pp. 5-7

5. MY SUBJECT.

9.

My great-grandfather was Pragg Nimoo, also spelt as Prag Ninoo (refer to ship's list on page 10). When refering to him I shall use the former spelling because that is how it is spelt by my relatives.

He was born in Calcutta, in the village of Dostpore and the district of Ghazeepore in 1850.

He belonged to the Gararee caste which when translated means sheep farmers or herders. I presume that his parents and probably himself were either sheep farmers or herders thus belonging to the peasant class. They were most probably affected by the British administration with particular reference to the Land System. Since he belonged to the peasant class, he most probably belonged to one of the low caste groups.

When he left India he was twenty five years old. He was accompanied neither by friends nor relatives. He boarded the ship, Peterborough which was captained by W. Gardiner, at Calcutta and reached Natal on 1 14 / 4 /1875. His indenture number was 11864.

His first employer was Thomas Brown who, together with Gavin and Dr. Bonnar founded the Abergeni Sugar Estate in 1872. The estate was situated on the north bank of the Umgeni River and occupied twenty five acres of ground. After nine years the mill had to close down. The estate was sold to E. Snell for 600 pounds to enable Thomas Brown and partners to pay their debts. This area later became a residential site. 2

Pragg Nimoo was re-indentured to J.E. Shires in 1880. 3

1. Information received from Department of Internal Affairs.

2. R.F. Osborne: Valiant Harvest; The Founding of the South African Sugar Industry, 1848-1926, pp. 85-86.

3. Information from Re-Indenture Register, Department of Internal Affairs.

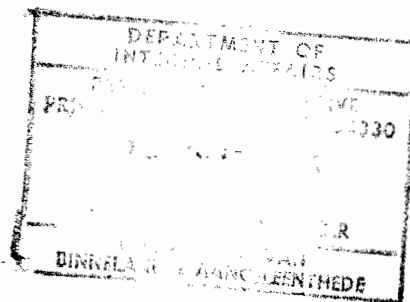
B.M.25

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

Serial Number	:	469
Colonial Number	:	11864
Date of Arrival	:	4. 4 1975
Name of Ship	:	PLATE BROUEN
Place of Registration	:	—
Date of Registration	:	—
Number in Register	:	—
Name	:	PRAB
Father's Name	:	NINOO
Age	:	25 yrs
Sex	:	MALE
Caste	:	THAREE
District	:	CHAZEEPORE
Thanna/Taluq	:	MOHENDABAD
Village	:	DOSTPORE
Height	:	5'6"
Bodily Marks	:	SCAR BENS LEFT ELBOW
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	—
Relations Accompanied	:	—
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	VACCINATED
Remarks	:	—

Certified a true copy.

Banhal
REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE



Pragg married Purumgottia (Purimajothiar) Seebaluck on 20 / 3. / 1880. She 1. also belonged to the Gararee caste. She was born in the village of Ramgurrh, district of Arrah in Calcutta. She came to Natal at the age of seven together with her parents on board the same ship as Pragg. On arrival she was assigned to the Umgeni Sugar Company. She married at the age of twelve whilst my great-grandfather was thirty five years old. 2.

According to the information I received from the Department of Internal Affairs my great-grandparents were married on board the ship on the same date as above and the marriage officer was C.W. Hurton-Tours.

I have doubts about the above information because the ship's lists that I have obtained, two on Pragg Nimoo (one from the Department of Internal Affairs and the other from the History Department of the University of Durban-Westville) and one on Purumgottia Seebaluck (from the History Department) proves that they arrived in Natal in 1875. Secondly the information was obtained from the Re-Indenture list and Pragg was re-indentured in 1880. After serving his ten year indenture period he settled in New Germany near Pinetown in 1884. Thereafter he farmed at Umhali for about two years before moving to Holmbosch where he farmed for a year. At Holmbosch he owned one hundred (100) acres of land. After a year he sold his property and moved to Nonoti where part of the Pragg family still remains, carrying on the family calling of farming. In Nonoti he owned one hundred (100) acres of land. 3.

1. Information from Department of Internal Affairs, Re-Indenture Register.

2. Ship's List from the History Department.

3. M.E. Manjoo (ed.): The Southern African Indian Who's Who, 1971-72, p. 301.

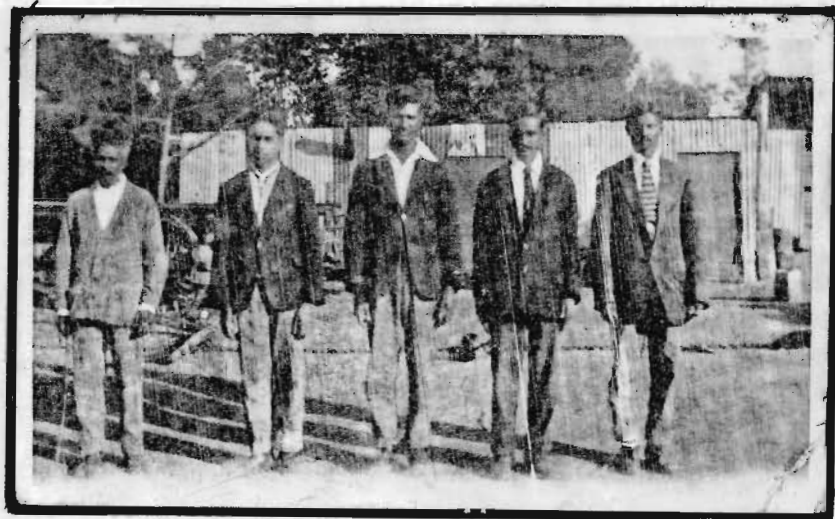
My great grand parents had six children. The eldest was Sewpaul who was born in 1884 and died in 1960. The second child died at an early age. 1
The third child and only daughter was Soopalie. She was followed by three sons, Kissun (my grandfather) who died in 1978, Sunder who died in 1970 and the youngest was Nundkumar (died in 1964).

After selling his property in Holmbosh, Pragg bought land in Lot 14, Stanger, which was inherited by Sewpaul. He had another twenty acres of land in Nonoti which was given to Soopalie. After donating three acres of land in Nonoti for the erection of a school (on page 13) the balance was divided between Kissun, who received twenty acres because the land given to him was level, Sunder (twenty eight and a half acres) and Nundkumar who also received twenty eight and a half acres. 2

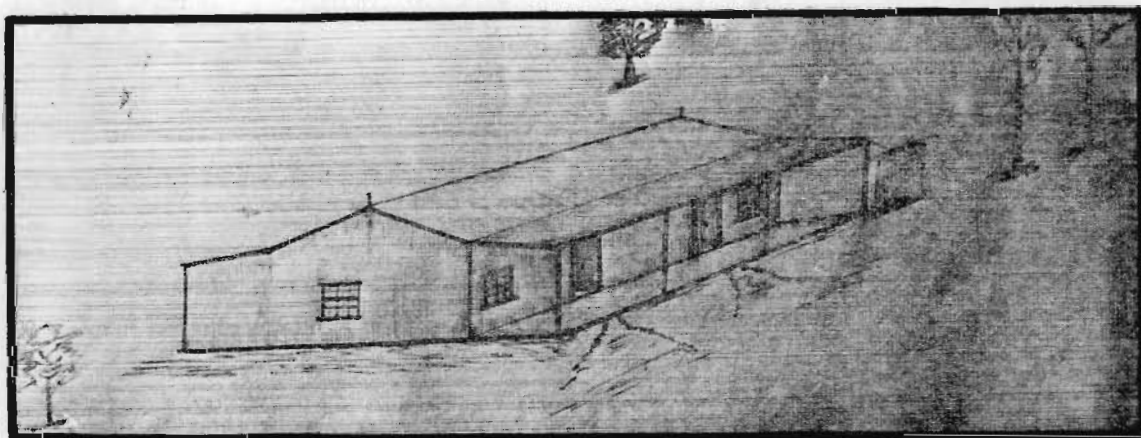
Pragg was one of the few pioneers who realized the value of education. On the land that was donated by him, the Nonoti School consisting of two rooms and made of wood and iron was erected in 1920. In 1941 and 1971 the school was extended and thus the new brick building replaced the wood and iron building. In 1956 a water pump was installed drawing water from a borehole. In 1962 the caretaker's quarters and in 1965 the school toilets were erected. Virtually all his grand-children and a number of his 3 great grand-children attended this school.

He was a member of the Nonoti Sanathan Vedic Dharma Patshala, a religious body which was also in charge of the maintenance and running of the school.

1. M.E. Manjoo (ed.): The Southern African Indian Who's Who, 1971-72, p.301.
2. Interview with Mr. J. Kissun.
3. Souvenir Brochure, Golden Jubilee - Nonoti Indian School (1920-1970), pp. 15-16.



THE ORIGINAL SCHOOL BUILDING - 1920.



My great grand-father died in 1917.

Although memories of him shall fade, the Nonoti Government Aided Indian School will stand as a monument to the man.

This project has proved to be very rewarding to me and to my family in more ways than one. It has brought more light to my family background. As a result of going through various secondary materials, I am now aware of the many problems 'our' fore-fathers faced both in India and South Africa.

However, the sugar industry improved to a great extent as a result of the Indian labourers. As free men they contributed a great deal to the economic development of South Africa.

Various individuals (Indians) did a great deal with the objective of improving their lot in South Africa.

Thus this project has made me realize the importance of 'my own history'.

7. SOURCE LIST.

17.

MANJOC, S.A. (ed.): The Southern African Indian Who's Who, 1971-72.

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