

Let us view the recent change in the control of our education in the perspective of:

A Short History of Indian Education

by C. KUPPUSAMI



As its name indicates, the Centenary Indian High School commemorates the centenary of the arrival of the Indians in South Africa. The inset is a flash back to the opening ceremony in October, 1963.

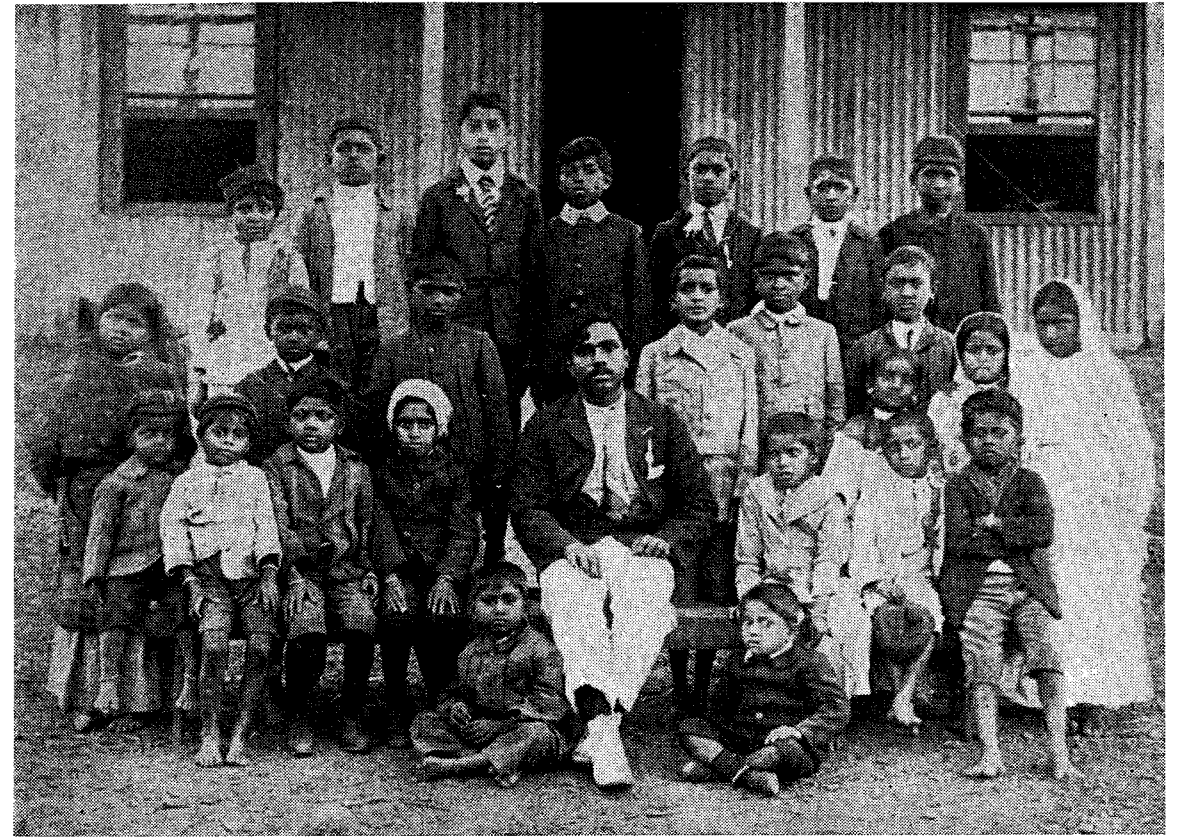
Photo: Natal Mercury.

AT the behest of the then Natal Government, Indians were brought to this country in 1860 to help develop the newly-established sugar industry. The first group arrived in Durban on November 17, followed by regular arrivals which continued for many years. In their wake came the 'free' Indians who helped to serve the material needs of the labourers. By the turn of the century, Natal Indians had become fairly representative of the many linguistic and religious groups that form the population of the Indian sub-continent.

The desire for any formal education did not

appear to have been felt until after the expiry of the first period of indenture, a system under which the labourers were brought into the country. Upon termination of the period of indenture Indians could elect to return home or continue to work under more favourable conditions.

Credit for the early endeavours at organised western education must go to the Christian missionaries, who attempted to serve the spiritual needs of the labourers on the plantations. In 1869, with Government assistance, the Reverend Ralph Stott started a day school for



The Clare Estate Indian School, which was opened in 1902, catered primarily for the children of workers in an adjacent sugar mill. The photograph was taken circa 1909.

Courtesy C. Baijnath, Durban, who is the teacher in the third row.

34 boys and an evening school for 20 scholars. The first teacher was a Mr. Henry Nande from Benares. Some of the boys trained by Mr. Nande became teachers in schools established by Mr. Stott.

In the early days, (up to 1877), there was no control of the education of Indian children and therefore no system of education. Christian missionaries, however, did not wait until the question of responsibility and control was settled. They were already in the field and were largely responsible for the schools of those and subsequent years.

Indian children who conformed to the dress and habits of Whites were allowed to attend the model schools in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and some of them did so. Children in poorer circumstances attended the schools es-

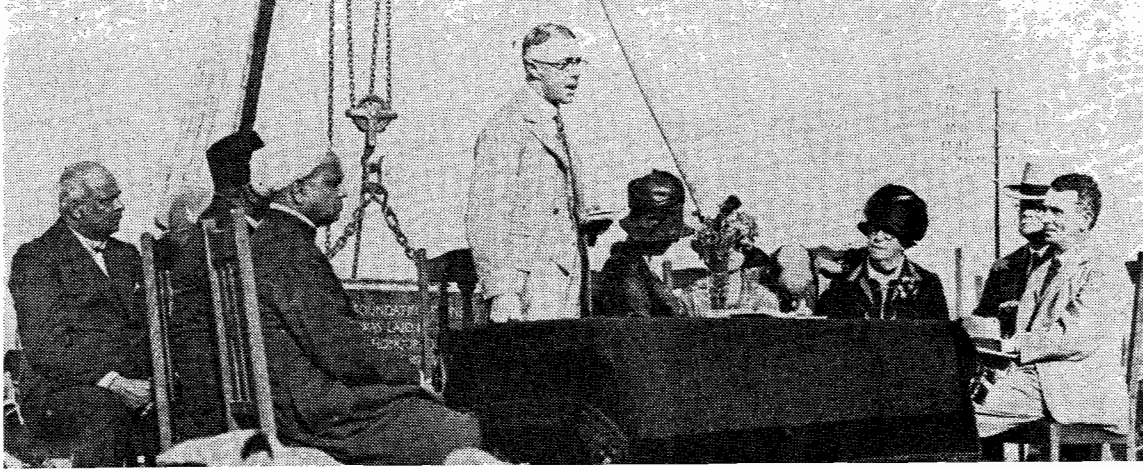
tablished by the missionaries.

That these facilities were far from being adequate is shown by the following figures:

	Children of school-going age	Children at school
1872	950	88
1879	3,752	136

Reporting on the situation in 1877, the Protector of Indian Immigrants stated:

"No systematic effort has even yet been made for the education of the children of the Indian immigrants of the Colony . . . and I am inclined to think that more satisfactory results will be achieved by this means than would be likely to attend any missionary effort in the same field, and that the whole resources at the disposal of the Government



Mr. Gordon Watson, then Administrator of Natal (standing), lays the foundation stone of Sastri College, the first Indian high school in South Africa—in 1928. The Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri (with turban), then Agent-General for the Government of India in South Africa, collected R32,000 for the establishment of the school.

Photo: Courtesy Dr. Killie Campbell.

for this purpose should be directed to the support of its own student schools”.

IMMIGRANT BOARD

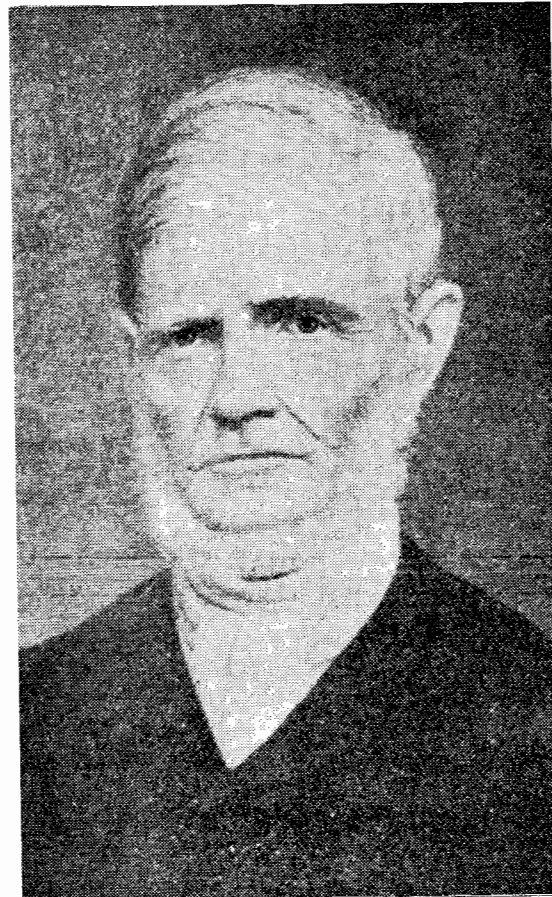
In 1878 an “ad hoc” body known as the ‘Indian Immigrant School Board’ was created. The Board’s function was to encourage education among Indians, to improve standards and to give financial assistance to schools. It also established three Government schools. In 1881 Mr. George Dunning, an Englishman from Madras, was appointed as Inspector of Indian Education, because of his special knowledge of Tamil, Hindustani and English and of his experience in teaching. In 1894 the Indian Immigrant School Board was abolished and education of the Indians came under the general supervision of the Natal Education Department.

The desire for education was becoming keener. There were not enough schools and barely enough teachers. In 1904 the St. Aidans Provincial Training College was established. It was staffed by lecturers from India. The College served a very pressing need, but the output of teachers was still inadequate.

Initially White schools were open to Indians and were attended by a small number of the children of ‘free’ Indians. By 1905, when White schools were closed to Indians, the latter already had 31 of their own, accommodating 3,149 pupils. Ten years later the number of Indian schools had increased to 39 with a complement of 5,189 pupils.

The first decade of the 20th Century was characterised by strong opposition to Indian

The Reverend Ralph Stott, who was responsible for building the first primary school for the Indians of South Africa—in 1869. He received a grant-in-aid of R50 from the Natal Government for the purpose.



immigration, settlement and progress. Nevertheless, the position was better than in 1894.

In the year 1909-1910 there were five Government and thirty-one Government-aided schools. Some of the latter were conducted by bodies other than the missionaries. The enrolment was 3,387, of whom nearly 400 were girls. The average school life of the pupils was about two to three years.

Indian Education was still hampered by a lack of competent and reliable teachers.

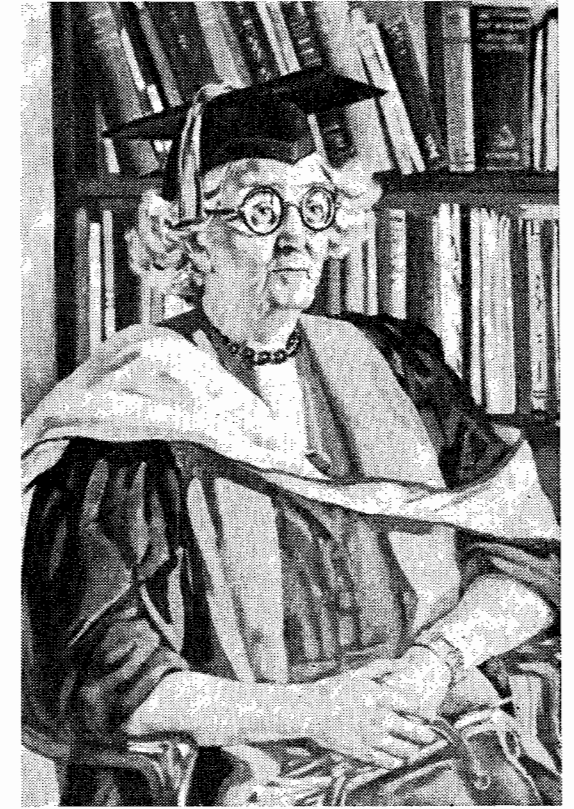
EDUCATION COMMISSION

In 1909 an Education Commission was appointed by the Natal Government. Although the terms of reference did not specifically mention Indian education, the Commission felt bound “to call attention to the grave disabilities under which the Indians of Natal are placed as regards education” and recommended that “it should be made compulsory on the holder of any estate, where there are twenty or more children of indentured employees between the ages of five and twelve to supply them elementary education at the employer’s cost. With regard to the children of ‘free’ Indians, the Commission recommended that “in districts in which this class of our population is most congested, Government primary schools should be established.”

In 1910 came the Act of Union, but with it little improvement in the facilities for Indian education. Nothing was done to implement the recommendations of the Commission. Nevertheless schools were still being established, most of them being state-aided. Between 1912 and 1926 the number of Government schools increased from four to nine, the number of State-aided schools from 35 to 45 and the school population from 4,096 to 9,155. Throughout this period there were thousands of children of school-going age who were not at school.

In 1921 the Superintendent of Education, Mr. H. R. Dukes, stated in his report that “the fact must be faced that we have a large and increasing population entirely unprovided for and totally neglected.”

In 1924, the Superintendent reported: “The numbers are practically stationary, but the attendance probably does not represent half the children in the province.” In 1926 there were at least 32,000 Indian children of school-



A painting of the late Dr. Mabel Palmer, who was largely responsible for opening up University education for the Indians of Natal. The University of Natal awards six annual ‘Mabel Palmer’ bursaries to non-White students—from monies bequeathed by Dr. Palmer for this specific purpose. The painting is by an artist who was attached to the University.

going age in the Province, less than one-third of whom were at school.

There were very few Government schools in the Province. The quality of the Government-aided schools was generally poor and the teachers here received very poor remuneration. In spite of this position, the number of schools and pupils had increased to 52 and 8,706 by 1925.

In 1927 the famous Cape Town Agreement was concluded whereby the Indian Government accepted the policy of assisted repatriation and the Government of South Africa, in turn, undertook that “in the provision of education and other facilities, the considerable number of

Indians who will remain part of the permanent population, would not be allowed to lag behind other sections of the community." In pursuance of the agreement, the Rt. Hon. Mr. Srinivasa Sastri, the first agent-general for India in South Africa, collected R32,000 from the Indian community, established a high school cum training college and handed it over to the Natal Provincial Administration. Sastri College was opened in 1930. It was initially staffed by Whites but later by lecturers from India.

In 1935 there were exactly 100 Indian schools in Natal and the school population had grown to 22,648. In 1936, through the magnificent efforts of Dr. Mabel Palmer, a separate section of the Natal University College was created enabling Indian and other non-White students to acquire degrees. A large number of Indian teachers took advantage of the facilities offered.

In 1945 the amount spent on Indian education rose to R600,000. There were close on 35,000 pupils at school. The proportion of girls was steadily increasing.

The St. Aidans Primary School—originally the St. Aidans Provincial Training College, was the first institution in South Africa to offer teachers' training courses to Indians.



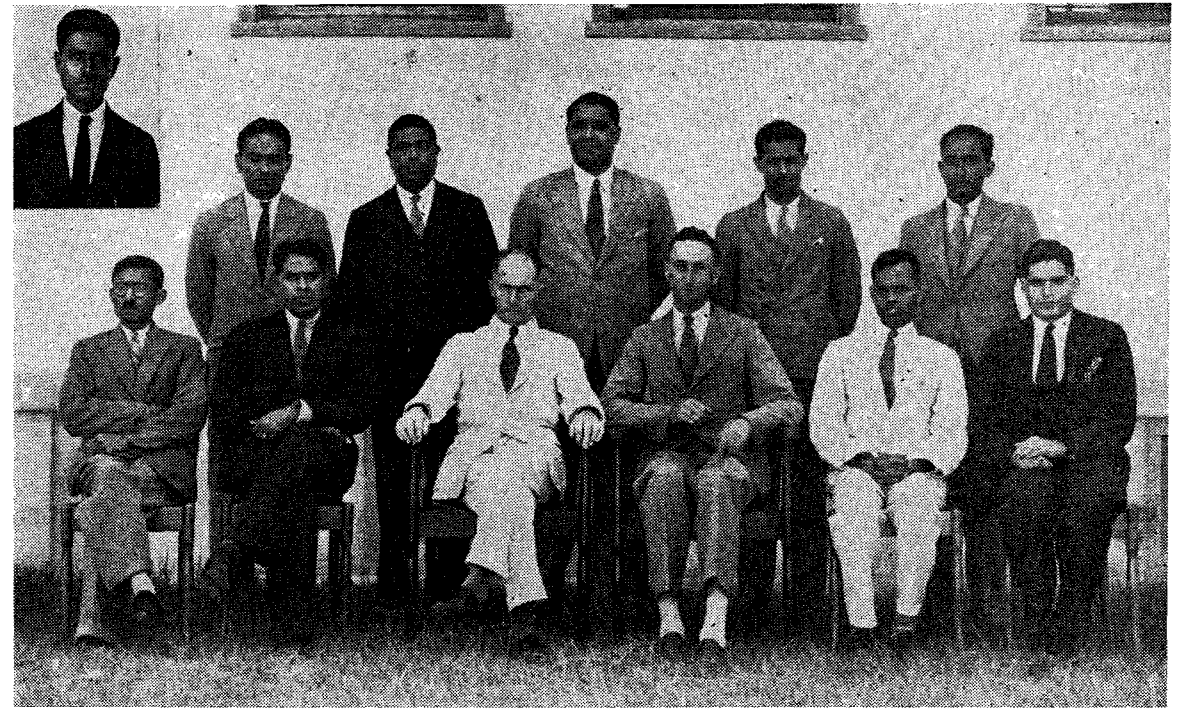
Adult education in the form of part-time classes had been conducted for some time by the Indian Technical Education Committee. These efforts were encouraged by Hajee M. L. Sultan, who offered to donate a substantial sum of money towards the erection of a technical college. In 1946 the building in which the technical classes were held came to be known as the M. L. Sultan Technical College. It was not until 1956, however, that the College buildings bearing the name of the donor were actually opened. Subsequently two branch colleges under the control of the main college in Durban were established in Pietermaritzburg and Stanger. The late Mr. Sultan had also created a 'Charitable and Educational Trust' which, among other things, has contributed large sums of money to establish state-aided schools in various parts of Natal.

Education cannot expand fast enough without adequate teaching personnel. Sastri College was not producing teachers in sufficient numbers. In 1951 the Provincial Administration built a modern and well-equipped training college at Springfield. Year by year enrolments have increased and more advanced courses are being offered. Females comprise a considerable proportion of the student enrolment.

RAPID EXPANSION

The decade subsequent to 1955 has seen a considerable expansion in Indian education. Movements of Indians to proclaimed areas necessitated the establishment of many Government schools in the new areas. More and more girls were seeking admission to primary and high schools. The percentage of school-going children was increasing. The demand for school accommodation forced the Department to inaugurate platoon (double-shift) classes especially in and around Durban.

The Natal Indian Teachers' Society, which contributed a percentage of the teachers' salaries for the purpose of assisting state-aided schools, was concerned at the development of platoon schools but accepted them as a temporary expedient. The magnitude of the developments may be gauged from the following figures. In 1955 there were only 3,024 high school pupils. By 1965 the number of high school pupils had more than quadrupled—to 13,000. Twelve new high schools were established during the period under review. In 1955 there were 76,433 pupils in Natal Indian schools



The first staff of the first Indian high school — the Sastri College — to be established in South Africa. The College was opened in 1930. Back row, from left to right: Messrs. B. T. Trivedi, S. M. Moodley, A. Shakoar, M. B. Naidoo, A. D. Lazarus. Front row, left to right: Messrs. G. Sinha, R. Nair, W. M. Buss, H. S. Miller, P. K. Koru, F. U. Khan. Inset Mr. B. Somers.

whereas ten years later the number had increased to 130,990.

Whereas the Springfield Training College had 218 students in 1955, the enrolment figure had doubled by 1965.

By 1965 pupils were no longer clamouring for admission to primary schools and the problem of high school accommodation was nearing solution. The year 1965 also marks the commencement of a new era in Indian education in the Republic in the form of the Indian Education Act, which provides for the creation of a Division of Education. The Division of Education came into operation early in 1965 in order to effect a smooth take over from the Provinces. Education of Indians in Natal fell under the supervision of this Division from April 1, 1966.

PLANNING SECTION

A Planning section, which form part of the Division, is now busily engaged in the problem of how best to reduce platoon classes and

how to meet the pressing needs of school accommodation in certain areas. The planning section is giving serious consideration to the establishment of comprehensive schools wherein to provide a diversified curriculum to meet the interests and aptitudes of individual pupils in the high schools. It also proposes to expedite the development of psychological services with a view to ensuring the most profitable use of our human resources.

The Division of Education will take full advantage of the existence of the Indian University College which was established in 1961 in order to produce more highly qualified teachers to staff our future high and comprehensive schools. The University College is already assisting in the supply of teachers for our schools.

By special arrangement with the Natal Education Department, thirteen inspectors appointed by the Division of Education have already been given their inspectorial circuits and have begun their inspection work.