

# Inside Indian Indenture





# Inside Indian Indenture

A South African Story, 1860–1914

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# Preface

He has nothing to lose, he tells himself and so he reaches for the stars. For where do we go when it falls apart in our hands and we are left with less than we started with? Begin again? And with what? Where are the dreams to fill the souls of wandering exiles?

JAMAL MAHJOUB<sup>1</sup>

The landscape of KwaZulu-Natal in the early decades of the twenty-first century still bears the signs of indenture.

Travel up the north coast, look for the pointer that says Kwa Dukuza, turn left, head beyond Mahatma Gandhi Street and you will end up at Kearsney. At the bottom of a hill you will come across a Baptist church. It is in this church that indentured labourers listened with rapt reverence to the sermons of John (the Baptist) Rangiah, who was especially brought from Nellore, Madras, in 1903 to see to their spiritual needs.

Head down the south coast and you will see acres of land bristling with sugar cane and carrying the names of enclaves that signal the sway of British colonisers: Margate, Ramsgate, Port Edward. Before these vestiges of British imperialism, drive through Umzinto and you will see a sign for Lynton Hall. Once the home of the Reynolds brothers, it is now a venue for expensive cuisine and plush weddings. A visit is guaranteed to leave 'a lingering memory of culinary extravagance'.<sup>2</sup> There are other memories of Lynton Hall too, clues of which linger more than a century later and point to the setting of one of the most brutal and compelling episodes of indenture.

We travelled these roads and were moved to tell the stories of indenture, to turn the tombstones on the hill near Lynton Hall overlooking Esperanza,<sup>3</sup> with their stark date lines of 'when-born' and 'when-died', into real living people, and to turn the empty pews of the church in Kearsney into moments when they were filled with the faithful flipping through Bibles marked in Telegu. The stories we uncovered are an incredible slice of history, the impact of which resonates into the present.

We are not the first to traverse this territory. A steady stream of writing on indentured labour has come our way over the past few decades. Much of this literature painstakingly details the number of indentured who came, where they came from, the regional variations, the caste designations, the system's indignations, and so on.

*Inside Indian Indenture* builds on this strong body of information, but also seeks to go beyond the numbers, trespassing directly into the lives of the indentured themselves. It explores the terrain of the everyday by focusing on the development of religious and cultural expressions, the leisure activities, the way power relations played themselves out on the

plantations and beyond, inspecting weapons of resistance and forms of collaboration that were developed in times of conflict with the colonial overlords.

It is a social history that extends beyond the boundaries of institutions, yet is situated in the social web of indenture itself, especially the small intense world of the plantation. The writing that follows seeks to move away from seeing indenture as some Benthamite Panopticon in which the indentured were completely under the gaze and discipline of the master. We show that they 'were as much agents as they were victims and silent witnesses'.<sup>4</sup> Indenture was a time in which old patterns of living could not simply be resurrected in a 'foreign' environment, while new patterns struggled to be born. We enter this world by showing real people in all their ambiguities and complexities as they danced the uncertain edge between improvisation and resignation.

While the system was presented by the colonists as a *fait accompli* and the indentured as a *tabula rasa* on which the economic needs of late colonialism could simply be imposed, in reality, indenture saw its contours being established, resisted and renegotiated as the indentured and their white masters were constantly involved in a shared but uneven economic and political dynamic.

In seeking the voices of the indentured, we faced an important methodological problem, as these voices were 'filtered through the pens of others'. The testimonies of the indentured 'were transcribed or recorded by official scribes. Most of the emigrants could not even read the deposition they were asked to sign, marking an "X" instead. Next to direct evidence, however, they come closest to revealing the voices of bonded labourers.'<sup>5</sup>

We have found this a fascinating story brimming with desire, skulduggery and tender mercies, as much as with oppression and exploitation. None more so than the 1913 strike, studies of which in the main have rendered the crowd largely anonymous as Gandhi, the master puppeteer, took centre stage. Yet the indentured participated in their thousands, more often than not outside the purview of Gandhi and the visible leaders of the strike, in some instances fighting violent hand-to-hand battles with the authorities, throwing up their own leaders and drawing on memories of previous struggles. In telling the story of the strike, we try to reveal 'the faces in the crowd, their hopes, their fears and muddled aspirations',<sup>6</sup> and show how the erstwhile puppets, the indentured, were in many cases pulling the strings of rebellion.

Reclamation can, of course, lead to cultural chauvinism. So we aim not just to tell a story of the internal dynamics of indentured life, but to do so against the backdrop of white rule and its oppressive relationship with the Zulu. Inscribed in this unfolding narrative is the brutal and violent dispossession of the Zulu, and the callousness of the colonial onslaught that destroyed their indigenous economy and turned once courageous warriors against imperialism into 'houseboys' serving at the white man's table or doing his laundry, and into dispossessed migrants tunnelling underground in the mines while their families struggled to survive. We try then to tell a broader history that does not, we trust, lend itself to reinforcing cultural and racial bigotry.

But this is not done in a way that obscures the central narrative. In fact, it renders it more revealing. Those who 'agreed' to indenture were often propelled by desperation as the British

spread their tentacles throughout India. It is apposite in these contemporary times in which the British Empire is dressed up (once again) as a benign, progressive, modernising force, as cover for the ‘civilising mission’ in Iraq and elsewhere, to iterate, as Mike Davis has done in *Late Victorian Holocausts*:

If the history of British rule in India were to be condensed into a single fact, it is this: there was no increase in India’s per capita income from 1757 to 1947. Indeed, in the last half of the nineteenth century, income probably declined by more than 50 percent...From 1872 to 1921 the life expectancy of ordinary Indians fell by a staggering 20 percent... ‘Modernisation’ and commercialisation were accompanied by pauperisation.<sup>7</sup>

It was the very same British Empire that brought misery and subjugation and, ironically, created an opportunity for ‘escape’ to places like Natal. Many were filled with hopes as high as Mahjoub’s stars as they crossed the *kala pani* (the black water – the sea). Dreams of a better life and the opportunity to save money and return to the village as ‘success stories’ were not to be for many who returned ‘home’ with less than they had started out with, and who found that home was not the same place. Neither were they the same people. Caste had been transgressed, parents had died and spaces for reintegration closed as colonialism tightened its grip. Home for these wandering exiles was no more.

A substantial number came to the realisation that the place of exile was the place of home. Like Mahjoub, they wondered, ‘...where do we go when it falls apart in our hands and we are left with less than we started with? Begin again? And with what?’ And so, many made the return journey. To Africa. To begin anew.

This book tells a story about the many beginnings and multiple journeys that made up the indentured experience. The research for this book took several years. We shuddered and gasped as we found snippets of information tucked away on forgotten shelves and in boxes of musty archives. We felt proud and terribly sad as we read letters penned a century ago and more from distant ancestors, so dignified still in their anguish. And some of the photographs that we have included are beyond description.

As authors we come from different academic backgrounds, one a sociologist (Ashwin) and the other a historian (Goolam). There are other differences, too, that are not necessary to go into, but which those who know both of us would find it easy to discern. They have no doubt made many jokes about how such an incongruous twosome has managed to survive the long period that has been the writing of this book. But this collaboration has been a wonderful experience. This is not simply a professional relationship but one of abiding friendship.

Writing this story has been an emotional experience and an incredibly humbling one. The people who are closest to us bore the brunt of the long hours and of a project that seemed to have no end. To them we owe a deep gratitude and we hope that this story, when (if) they read it, will explain our mood swings between sadness, anger even, when we came across the depth of the humiliations and violence suffered by the indentured, and our smiles, joy and pride as we came across the remarkable ability of the indentured to confront and resist the system. The indentured



refused to be disembodied 'coolies' defined by numbers and fought many battles to ensure that they were recognised as people with rights, feelings and a permanent future in Africa.

Ashwin's father died on 11 November 2006 without seeing the final product. He was a history teacher and it is extremely sad that he will not pass judgement over this work. His influence, though, lives through the pages of this book. Goolam's wife, Taskeen, and children, Naseem, Razia and Yasmeen, live many miles away, and they feel the separation intensely. This book, which in essence is about painful separations and multiple journeys, helps suture the wounds of long absences.

We believe that you will feel enriched by sharing these stories. If even a little of the emotion and insight about being alive in South Africa today that came to us through researching and narrating the stories of indenture is transmitted to you, then the many hours of painstaking labour in producing this book will have been worthwhile.

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We would like to thank friends and colleagues who took time out of their busy schedules to assist in different ways. Surendra Bhana, as always, gave liberally of his time. He has been a great support throughout and especially in reading early drafts of the manuscript. Joy Brain very kindly provided documents and photographs from her collection. Others whose help, comments, questions and encouragement are appreciated include Brij V Lal, Isabel Hofmeyr, Parvathi Raman, Paula Richman, Betty Govinden, Brij Maharaj, Sudesh Mishra, Mandy Goedhals and Karin Willemse.

In the course of our research we relied on primary sources from many archives and libraries, and have been fortunate to have had their generous support. We owe special thanks to the staff of the South African Archives Repository in Durban, Maritzburg and Pretoria, as well as the Killie Campbell Library, who often went beyond the call of duty to help. We would like to mention Judith Hawley, R Singh, Mwelela Cele and Nellie Somers by name, though others also helped in various ways. We also thank Mr K Chetty and Emmanuel Narie (Siya) of the Gandhi–Luthuli Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, for their assistance.

Finally, we thank the reviewers for their criticisms and suggestions. All errors that remain are our own. As is the tradition when sociologists and historians work together, the theoretical shortcomings are all Goolam's and the factual errors are all Ashwin's.



TRANSCVAAL

SWAZILAND

MOZAMBIQUE

ORANGE  
FREE  
STATE

DRAKENSBERG

COLONY  
OF NATAL

BASUTO-  
LAND

EAST  
GRIQUALAND

CAPE COLONY

MAURITIUS

MADAGASCAR



Delhi ●

NEPAL

BIHARI DISTRICTS

UNITED PROVINCES

Lucknow ●

DISTRICTS OF THE UNITED PROVINCES

BENGAL

INDIA

HILL COOLIE DISTRICTS

Calcutta ●

CENTRAL PROVINCES

Bombay ●

BOMBAY PRESIDENCY

TELEGU DISTRICTS

Calcutta ●

Madras ●

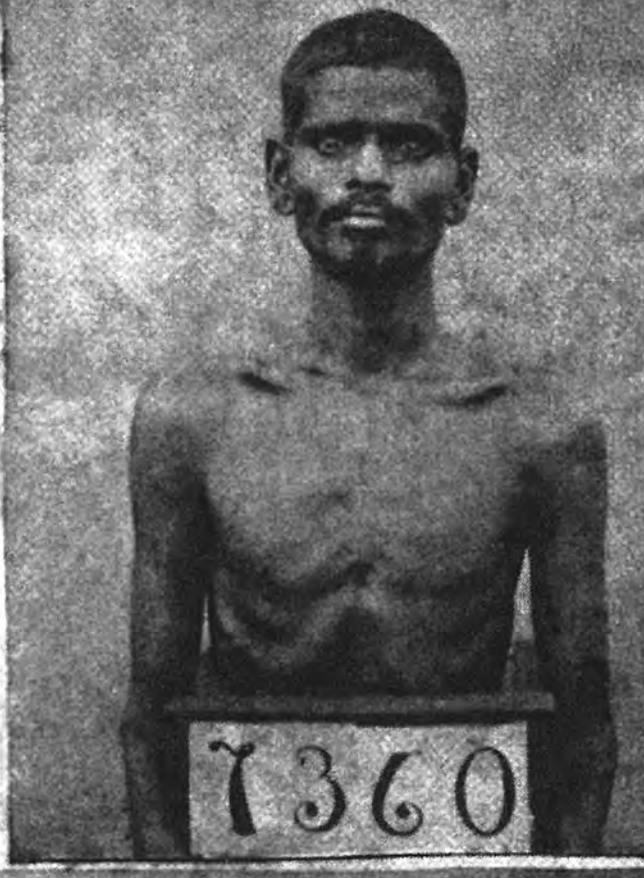
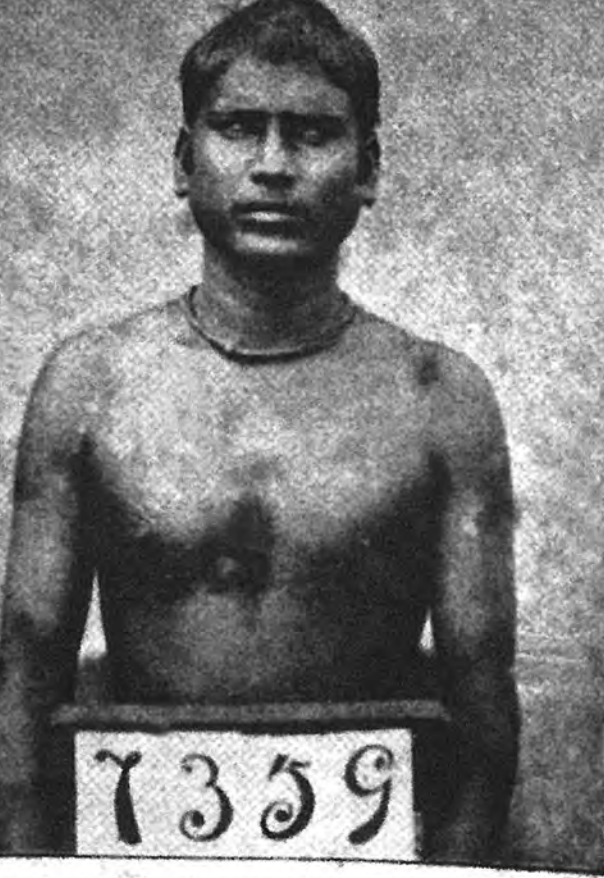
TAMIL DISTRICTS

Bombay ●  
Goa

Madras ●

Ceylon

Indentured recruitment districts,  
sea routes and settlement areas



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# Shiva's dance

Middle-passaged  
 Passing  
 Beneath the colouring of desire  
 In the enemy's eye  
 Scatter of worlds and broken wishes  
 In Shiva's unending dance.

ARNOLD ITWARU<sup>1</sup>

The maps that light up the journeys of the indentured migrants to Natal can be traced through mighty social forces that linger as high as stars over the unfolding personal voyages below. They can also be told through the windows of individual biographies and local dynamics. The most illuminating are those that look upwards at the stars, the social forces that shape circumstances, without losing sight of the bodies that dance through time, making history as much as they are made by it. This is a story, then, that in its telling attempts to deal with the challenges of 'biography, of history, and of their intersections within social structures'.<sup>2</sup>

October 1860. The *Belvedere* and the *Truro* crossing the Indian Ocean, heading for Port Natal. The ship, 'the medium of mercantile capitalism and of the [middle] passage of indenture, [was] the first of the cultural units in which social relations were re-sited and renegotiated'.<sup>3</sup> Hierarchies 'imagined' into being over a long period; divisions based on age-old customs; castes, religions, dialects, centuries in the making, unravelling. Space, place and time compressed. Recent acquaintances beckoned possibilities of intimacy.<sup>4</sup> Many of the indentured will remain burdened by the past; others will embrace the new, relieved of the 'personal' and not so 'personal' forces of history.

But already we hurry Shiva's dance.

Indenture. It is unclear whether the kind of life that they would come to live was immediately apparent to the indentured when they signed or thumb-printed the contract – that they would be bound in a 'legally authorised domination which denied them choice as to work, residence or remuneration, and assumed that their labour lay in the ownership of some lord, master, employer or custodian'.<sup>5</sup>

Sourcing material, especially searching for the voices of the subalterns, is made difficult by the lack of 'their' perspective, and the overwhelming voice of the ruling classes. But we follow Edward Said's pointer of searching in the direction of 'unconventional or neglected sources',<sup>6</sup> of trawling the 'official' archives, while simultaneously 'listening' to the voices of

OPPOSITE: Although the system tried to turn people into nameless numbers, the indentured found all manner of ways to resist this and assert their humanity. Shown here are Napaul Kaloo (7359), Neetye Peeroo (7360), Nathonee Sooraie (7366) and Chand Kahn (7367).

the indentured through letters, newspaper reports and anecdotes handed down through time, matching them with stories of the indentured in different locations. Parvathi Raman lamented that ‘the early narrative of (indentured) workers’ history remains largely unrecorded’; they are depicted in the literature as defenceless victims of the political economy. ‘Hopefully,’ she adds, ‘it is not completely lost to us.’<sup>7</sup> This book takes up the challenge, seeking to recover the narratives of indentured migrants, not just as subjects of history, but as active agents who resisted and contested the attempts of employers and the state to control their lives.

Indentured life was trespassed with systemic violence from the outside, as well as within its internal social life. It had its resisters and its collaborators, its class fighters and its caste defenders. The indentured, as much as the system tried to control and confine them, carved a number of different spaces in the new environment, prayed to a myriad gods and swayed to the beat of many dances. Along the way we gather snapshots of the intricacies of their lives, markers providing a clue to what life might have been like: the desperate but forlorn wish of some to return to India; families separated, lost and mourned; acquiescence and resistance to the bonds of indenture.

The colonists were determined to reduce the indentured to the catch-all ‘coolie’. Their lives were lived in the context of a white ruling class that saw them through the lens of racist stereotypes. *Kuli*, in Tamil, referred to payment for menial work for persons from the lowest levels in the industrial labour market. In the ‘transformation of *kuli* to coolie, the distinct humanity of individual Indians was appropriated and eliminated as the person collapsed into the payment’.<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising that the indentured appear in the official records mainly when they were brought before the colonial authorities for infractions, for ‘criminality’, for being ‘troublesome’. Hopefully, the ‘voices’ that fill this book go beyond, below and between these records to allow the indentured to reclaim their personhood. We seek to recognise their agency, and ‘track the silences, displacements, and transformations’ produced by indenture.<sup>9</sup>

Our challenge is to write a story that illustrates the encounter between a system that had tangible effects and the way in which the indentured submitted, appropriated and resisted it.<sup>10</sup>

## The myth of return

Walker there is no path  
You make the path by going,  
And on looking back,  
You see steps you will never retrace,  
Walker there is no path,  
Only trails in the ocean.

MACHADO ANTONIO<sup>11</sup>

There are many threads to string together in relating the experience of indentured migrants. Some were defrauded into migrating, others chose to make a new start in Natal; some established family, the attempts of others ended in failure or tragedy; some prospered while others lived in abject poverty; many simply endured the hardship of indenture; some collaborated, a few chose to fight; many, too many, took their lives; most made Natal home, others returned to

India; many others tried to go 'home', only to return. Maistry was among the latter. His story was one of a handful of life histories of indentured migrants recovered by Hilda Kuper in the late 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

Maistry was a Telegu of the Dhobi (washermen) caste, born in about 1870 in a small village near Cuddapah in Andhra (Madras). His parents had six sons; he was the second youngest. Maistry would have been expected to contribute to the family economically, even though he had several older brothers. From Kuper's interviews, Maistry emerges as a quiet man determined to build a life for himself and his family. As a young man, he was employed as a *dhobi* by the Royal Battery in Andhra, and produced a reference to this effect on his arrival in Durban.

Before long, the Royal Battery moved off. 'Then,' says Kuper, 'there was nothing' for Maistry, who had a wife and baby to support. After discussing the situation with his wife and parents, they agreed that he should indenture for five years. He was younger than 20 at the time. Maistry and his friends, eight young waiters and three cooks from the same village, made the voyage into indenture, embarking on a journey that changed their lives forever. It must have been an incredible passage for these young men, unsure of what awaited them across the *kala pani* (black water). Upon arrival in Durban, Maistry was immediately swept off to a local hotel, where he took over washing duties, working diligently for five eventless years.

Whether it was the long separation from his loved ones, the loneliness of the new country or a heart inflamed by passion, Maistry took a second wife, a young colonial-born woman, to whom friends had introduced him. 'Colonial-born' referred to children born in Natal to indentured or ex-indentured Indians. Did he still harbour thoughts of his wife and child in India? Leaving India to earn a living for his family must have been difficult, and yet the memory of the family he had pledged to support seemed to have faded, as Maistry registered his second marriage with the Protector of Indian Immigrants. Maistry's story is not unique. Many wives and children were abandoned as the realities of separation in time and space took hold. One cannot help but think of Maistry's wife when reading this heart-rending cry of a wife abandoned by her indentured husband:

All my friends have become mothers,  
And I remain lonely and childless.  
Again and again I pleaded with you not to go,  
For there live women who will win your heart.  
For twelve years you haven't written a word:  
How shall I spend the days of *chait*?

FOLKSONG<sup>13</sup>

Separation between husbands and wives, or migrants and their families, could last for months, years, decades; sometimes they became permanent. This severance of contact affected the very fabric of family life. Married migrants who left their wives and children in India probably intended returning after five years; they may have been apprehensive about taking their families to Natal, or worried about the financial cost of supporting wives and children who would not receive equal pay and rations; or perhaps they were concerned about raising

children without the support of an extended family network. Given that financial hardship induced many into indenture in the first instance, the option of taking families along may not have existed for many migrants.

The memory of his waiting family, it seems, was not enough to tempt Maistry to make the return journey. Perhaps deep down he longed to be reunited with them, but could not afford it. With a new life forming around him in Natal, Maistry remained at the hotel after indenture when his supervisor offered to continue his post. He worked at the hotel for another six years. By then he was in his early thirties, thousands of miles away from the life he had begun as a young man, with another woman at his side, new friends, and without his extended family.

When the First World War broke out, Maistry, like many of his fellow countrymen, joined the thousand-odd Indian stretcher-bearers who served the British Raj under Albert Christopher in East Africa. It was gruelling work, largely invisible yet essential. The reports that filtered back from East Africa were glowing in their praise of the likes of Maistry. The South African cricket test wicketkeeper, TA Ward, found the hospital 'very ably' run by Indians who carried out their duty in a 'conscientious manner'. Ward observed that 'they did everything in their power to make the patient comfortable', and he felt strongly that their 'patriotism should not go unrewarded'.<sup>14</sup> Colonel JH Whitehead wrote that 'the Indian community will be glad to hear that they were not only most courageous in action but did all the work asked of them in a quick, intelligent and willing manner'.<sup>15</sup> Lieutenant Colonel J de Vos wrote that 'they have worthily upheld the traditions of the fighting stock they are descended from in India. It is an honour to have been associated with such men in the field'.<sup>16</sup> Albert Christopher, a colonial-born Indian, was pleased that 'the European South Africans are part of us as we are of them and the best of feelings prevails all-round. And this we hope is but the bright beginnings of a happy future for all the children of the South African soil'.<sup>17</sup> Such hopes would prove futile. Ironically, at the time that Kuper was interviewing Maistry, the National Party was busy codifying racist practices into the system of apartheid.

When Maistry returned from the war in 1916, he joined Addington Hospital as a *dhobi*. He eventually rose through the limited ranks to become head laundryman. By now he had fathered two children with his second wife. After 28 years at Addington, Maistry's health was declining and he was put on pension. In 1947, with almost 40 years of work in South Africa under his belt, and two grown-up children, Maistry decided to return to his homeland. Could the fact that India was on the edge of independence have beckoned him? 'I had half a mind to settle in India,' he told Hilda Kuper, as he had always maintained that he would eventually return to die in the land of his birth.<sup>18</sup> Maistry was no different from the thousands of migrants who struck up an imaginary relationship with the myth of return.

Yet the romantic ideal of what awaited him when he crossed the *kala pani* was shattered. Maistry was bitterly disappointed. Everything was different. The village and villagers had moved on without him. His first wife was dead. So were most of his closest friends and many of his relatives. The infant daughter he had left behind was married. Awkwardly, they were reunited, but she barely remembered him. Only a few distant kin remained. Disillusioned and heartbroken, Maistry returned to Durban to live with his two children. His daughter was



married, his son was a clerk. A life lived so far away had stolen from him his sense of place, of 'home'.

Maistry's story is not unique. What it illustrates is that a narrative of indentured migration to Natal can only be complete with the inclusion of the experiences of the women who were left behind. What were the effects on them, on families and on community life in villages back home? How did family life change in the absence of brothers, fathers and husbands? For many wives abandoned in India, the wait was in vain. One can only contemplate the impact that long separations had. Were wives anxious? Did they have a foreboding that their husbands may create new families in Natal to ease the pain of separation? What they believed might happen is unknown, but the experience of migrants like Maistry offers us a window into the lives of families changed irrevocably by migration. Indenture often created uncertainties regarding the whereabouts of relatives. Where there was no contact, many in India faced penury when breadwinners emigrated.

We still need to break the bounds of our national lens and relate the stories of those left behind, those whose lives were consumed by a 'signal' to come to Africa or by waiting for the return of their husbands, not to mention those women and children abandoned on their return at the docks of Calcutta and Madras by husbands who, because they were already married, 'couldn't possibly take their new wives back to their villages or had married out of caste and could never become part of the village any more'.<sup>19</sup>

## Inside the 'hidden abode'

The ferocity of sexual politics on the plantations is on record and is one of the more barbaric aspects of the old Indian diaspora.<sup>20</sup>

Life in Natal was difficult, even for those who managed to keep their families intact. Socio-economic conditions made family life precarious. Violence was endemic in the experience of indenture. Sometimes it turned inwards. Women were often on the receiving end. Wootme was murdered at Blackburn Estate in Inanda, her place of indenture, on 5 April 1890. Her head had been smashed with an axe. Her killer, it turned out, was her husband, Mulwa. They shared a hut with two unmarried men, Sahebdeen and Moorgasen. Sahebdeen saw Wootme lying in a pool of blood and reported this to the manager, Townsend. When Townsend reached the hut, he found her body 'lying face downward with a large wound at the back of her head exposing the brains, some of which were splashed on the walls of the hut'.<sup>21</sup> Sirdar Baboo, who was sent to look for Mulwa, told the magistrate that he found him in a cane field two miles from the estate: 'I said what is the blood sprinkled on you. He replied, "It was I that cut my wife and I am going to die for it." I got off my horse and tied the prisoner with one side of the reins. Prisoner said, "You need not tie me up. I will follow you." He looked more frightened than excited.' Mulwa testified in court:

I and the woman lay down. The woman said 'go to work now.' I did not go. Then I killed the woman. That is all. We lived with Sahebdeen and Moorgasen who said if the

woman would cook for them they would give her clothing and give us rations. The woman cooked food and took it to the field for the men. She did not bring me food. I went to Mr. Townsend for a house. He did not give us a house. I went to the Sirdar and he would not give us a house. I killed the woman because she went with other men and I said I was not sufficient for you.

The magistrate considered the 'evidence too clear' and found Mulwa guilty. Asked whether he had anything to say in mitigation, Mulwa replied that he had 'nothing more to add. You can do as you please'. In sentencing him to 'be hanged by the neck until you are dead', the jury observed poignantly:

That it is the opinion of the Jury that where there is not sufficient accommodation afforded by the proprietors of estates where Indians are employed, there arises a fruitful source of crime and immorality and they wish to express their condemnation of the system by which both sexes, married and unmarried, are mingled together in living and sleeping in the same hut, thus leading to most disastrous results, both in prostitution and criminality.

While not obscuring the chauvinism of indentured life, environments such as these – comprising cramped living quarters where married men and women often shared accommodation with unmarried men, and aggravated by the huge gender imbalance – exacerbated sexual tensions and jealousies, with sometimes tragic results. Men often reacted with violence when faced with unfaithful wives, or even when they suspected their wives of being unfaithful. There was tension between the new identities and possibilities that the act of migration opened up for women, and the desire of men to assert traditional patriarchal roles.

## Votti Veeramah Somayya

The writing of narratives that focus on women's experiences *and* analyse the way in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics [means that] history then becomes not recounting the great deeds performed by women but exposure of the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organisation of most societies.

JOAN WALLACH<sup>22</sup>

Indentured women faced enormous challenges. They were paid lower wages and received less food rations than men. Pregnant women unable to work, or those who were ill, could also be denied rations. Women were sometimes forced to append themselves to men to gain access to food. Men labelled such women, who acted out of the desperate need to survive, 'rice-cookers'.<sup>23</sup> But women's burdens stretched beyond issues of sustenance and labour. Many were subject to sexual violence and an unforgiving, dismissive system. Votti's story draws our attention to ways in which some women confronted the multiple layers of oppression.

Votti Veeramah Somayya (42129) arrived in May 1890 from the village of Narasannapetta in Madras.<sup>24</sup> When she set foot in Natal she was just 18 and slightly over five feet tall. We have

no photograph of her, but by all accounts she was beautiful; one official document described her as a 'woman of prepossessing appearance'. She was single; in fact, there was no member of her caste or village on the ship. Her youthful courage was not overwhelmed by her new surroundings. She fought to be allocated to Gavin Caldwell of Ifafa with shipmates Govindsamy Veerasami Naik (41895) and Bappu Ponnusami (41866). She lived with Naik as 'man and wife'. Naik hanged himself in November 1890. The circumstances of the suicide are unclear, but depression seems to have been a factor. Shortly after Naik's death, Votti began living with Bappu, who was from Trichinopoli in Ganjam. Votti strained against the 'cage' of the plantation, where owners tried to maintain an iron grip on workers. By early 1891 she was giving Caldwell a 'great deal of trouble'. He complained to Protector Mason on 19 December 1891 that Votti was constantly 'running off' to adjoining estates and refused to work:

My indentured Coolie man Bappu and the woman Votti were put in Umzinto jail for seven days for desertion. They were let out on Thursday afternoon 17th with a pass to me. They slept at Umzinto on Thursday night and early on Friday morning they cleared out. It is the confounded woman who I blame. She will not work any, is always running off to Bazley's coolies and stays about six or eight days, and my kitchen boy Bappu gets annoyed and cannot do his work...I wish you could indenture the woman to some Victoria sugar estate unknown to him. She wants to be on a larger estate where there are lots of men. I insist upon the man coming back to work and it is no use for him to say he cannot live here without her. He gives her a good beating every day in the week.

Caldwell was unsuccessful in getting rid of Votti because, in the Protector's judgment, her 'conduct and character were too well known in the neighbourhood'. Votti remained defiant and would challenge the Protector's opinion in a court case in 1893:

I came from India with a man and we were indentured at Umzinto. He is dead. He committed suicide by hanging himself. I don't know why he did it. He was not my husband. I was only living with him. Six months after that man hanged himself I left. My Master [Caldwell] said that as I was a single woman he did not want to keep me unless I got a husband and I said I did not want a husband and my Master became disagreeable.

In March 1892, Votti was again sent to the Protector (by Caldwell) with instructions to transfer her. The Protector succeeded in transferring her to Charlie Nulliah on 24 March 1892. Love-struck Bappu sought to follow, but Votti shattered his hopes when she told the Protector: 'I have no husband in the colony although I have been living with Bappu...I do not wish to live any longer with Bappu.' Nulliah was the son of indentured migrants who had arrived in 1863. He had prospered in various commercial endeavours and was an employer of indentured labour by the 1890s. The relationship between Nulliah and Votti turned sour within a few months, and she submitted several petitions for another transfer. On 6 January 1893, she gave a deposition to FE Dillon, the magistrate in Durban; another complaint was made to the Maritzburg magistrate, Charles Barter, on 7 February 1893; and to Francis Seymour Haden, the Administrator of Natal, in April 1893, through her lawyer William John Gallwey.

Votti contended that she had transferred to Nulliah 'ostensibly to act as nurse to his children', but was made to work in the stable and kitchen. Nulliah often went on horseback to Maritzburg. When he 'returned at midnight, he used to disturb me then to feed and water the horse. If I refused he beat me'. She also complained of sexual harassment. Nulliah made 'indecent overtures to me'. When she refused, he began to 'ill-treat and assault me and frequently renewed his indecent proposals to cohabit with me'. Nulliah told Votti that his brother Kisnasawmy had several wives and he had the 'intention and ability to do likewise...He wanted me to come to him as his wife. I refused to do so. I told him you have a wife and children, why should I come to you?'

Votti complained about Nulliah's overtures to the Protector in Durban. He instructed her to return to Nulliah but she refused. Instead, she spent the next six or seven months in prison, theoretically for being 'without a pass', but in actual fact for refusing to return to Nulliah. Votti's prison sentences ran as follows: on 6 July she was sentenced to seven days' imprisonment with hard labour; on 13 July she was sentenced to 25 days; on 9 August she was sentenced to 15 days; and on 23 August she was sentenced to 30 days. On and on it went. Each time, she said, 'They used to bring me into court and ask if I would go back to my master and then they sent me to gaol. I am not ready to go back and I will not go back. You can cut my throat but I will not go back...I came to work, not to be a wife to my master.'

Votti claimed in a deposition to Administrator Haden that it was 'quite unusual' to indenture an unmarried Indian woman to an Indian male employer, 'several requests for such course of action by respectable Indians in and around Maritzburg having been refused'. She wanted her indenture to Nulliah cancelled, and to be 'transferred to some respectable European person'. Votti's allegation of assault against Nulliah was tested in court on 29 March 1893. He denied the charges and was supported by Hungermuthoo, a fellow domestic worker with Votti, who had been working for Nulliah for three years, and Sirdar Ramlingam. The charges of assault and indecent overtures, in the court's view, were not proved.

Attorney-General Michael H Gallwey petitioned the Colonial Secretary on 11 April 1893 to transfer Votti, highlighting 'the great hardship and the rather unprecedented action of the Protector in allotting or transferring to another Indian the services of an unmarried Indian woman', when he had refused this 'in the case of Indians of higher caste and respectability than the Indian Charlie Nulliah'. Gallwey added that Nulliah's brother had three wives and was in the process of marrying a fourth. He considered this a blight on Nulliah himself, and was convinced that 'sexual desire' was the only reason that Nulliah refused to transfer Votti: she was a 'woman of prepossessing appearance and the desire and anxiety of Nulliah to get the woman to return is not sufficiently accounted for'. The fact that Votti had spent seven months in prison and 'her readiness to undergo the same again, and more, implies the existence of some good reason such as the main one stated by her for her determination never to return to him'. Votti, in contrast, 'bears a general good character and has worked lately for the magistrate [Barter] for fourteen days and gave satisfaction to him'. Gallwey felt that there had been a miscarriage of justice. Protector Mason disagreed, and countered in a letter to Colonial Secretary Bird on 1 May 1893:

Charlie Nulliah has been personally known to me for many years and I believe him to be, although an Indian, a thoroughly honest and respectable man. I do not for one moment believe that he has been guilty of the charges brought against him...He is the owner of a considerable amount of property and is the registered employer of several indentured Indians who are well treated and regularly paid and as far as I am aware have no cause of complaint.

Mason felt that Votti had trumped up the charges to annul her contract. Magistrate Barter, by sympathising with Votti and writing to this effect to the Attorney-General, had 'encouraged her to absent herself'. For employing Votti, Mason felt that Barter should be charged with 'harbouring' a deserter. In response to Mason, Gallwey wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 18 May 1893 that 'on legal grounds it is in the interests of employers and employed, where a woman charges her employer with making indecent overtures to her, that the contract should be put an end to. The presumption of immorality in the case of Indian men and women is very great; [though] the proof in individual instances may be difficult to establish'. Mason eventually relented. Even though he was convinced that Votti's charges were expedient, he cancelled her contract on 31 May 1893.

Votti had to complete her five-year term but Mason could not find another employer 'willing to accept such assignment'. Barter found one. He informed the Colonial Secretary on 1 June 1893 that Deane Anthony (40211), who owned a 'respectable Indian eating house and was known as of good character', had offered to employ her until she completed her five years on 27 May 1895. Anthony had arrived in 1889 and served his indenture as a waiter at the Victoria Club. Ironically, Votti was assigned to another single Indian male without objection from the authorities. The story, while revealing Votti's determination, also underscores white prejudices, as shown in reference to Nulliah's 'lower caste', insinuations of Indians being liars, and Orientalist ideas of Indians being unable to control their sexual urges.

This is not the last we hear of Votti. She married Rangasami Damodrapilla (33126) on 11 October 1893 while still under indenture. Rangasami, from Chintradipett in Madras, had arrived in November 1884 and served his indenture with Henry Shire. Theirs was a violent six-year marriage. Rangasami was fined for assaulting Votti in June 1898. The following year, on 23 August 1899, he stabbed her and was imprisoned for three years. In March 1900, Votti instituted proceedings against Rangasami for a juridical separation 'on grounds of cruelty', and sued for maintenance, a half share of his assets and the cost of the suit.

She testified that Rangasami was abusive and that her life would be in danger if forced to live with him. Rangasami, in his defence, claimed that his marriage had been 'extremely unhappy' because of Votti's 'violent temper, extravagant habits in contracting numerous debts, neglect to provide and prepare family meals, thus compelling him to cook his own meals at all times', and 'loose conduct in constantly sleeping away from the house, sometimes for days at a time'.

In August 1899 he flung a knife at Votti 'in a fit of temper', for which he was 'suffering' imprisonment and 'for which he expresses deep contrition and regret'. Rangasami testified that

he had handed over his salary every month to Votti for household expenses and the bond on a property they had purchased. As the incarcerated Rangasami did not have an income, he applied for Votti's order to be dismissed with costs. The court, however, ruled in Votti's favour, granting the divorce with costs and dividing the assets equally.

Votti disappears from the archives at this point. Like thousands of other indentured migrants, her story, tragically, can never be fully recovered. But we can pick up the narrative by trespassing on the lives of those that she challenged, like Charlie Nulliah, whom we will meet later. Votti's narrative is one of confronting indenture, though it meant consecutive terms of imprisonment; the perils of being a single woman; refusing sexual 'favours' even if it meant beatings and ridicule; and adeptly using the legal system for protection. She emerges as a strong woman who used the full range of the 'weapons of the weak'. Courageous, she was held down by no man, socially or sexually. The narratives of women like Votti provide a 'gendered reading of the *kala pani*'s maternal origins', and confront the description of women by Hugh Tinker, among a host of others, as a 'sorry sisterhood of single, broken creatures'.<sup>25</sup>

While Votti's 'resistance' was carried out independently, there were rare instances of collective action by the indentured, which will be discussed in later chapters. Mostly, they resorted to individual acts of resistance, which ranged from absenteeism to suicide. In rare but significant instances, the indentured sought more deadly revenge.

## Weapons of the weak?

If you tickle us, do we not laugh?

If you prick us, do we not bleed?

If you poison us, do we not die?

And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

SHA-SHI-PI-YA<sup>26</sup>

Dubar (101999), Brijmohan, Nagishar (102069) and Sarju were charged for the murder of Alexander Arnold on 25 July 1905.<sup>27</sup> Alexander, his brother, Charles, and their father, John Arnold, owned adjoining farms, Bellevue and Springfield, in Durban Road, Maritzburg. They had been employing indentured workers since 1869. Alexander was murdered shortly before midnight while making his way from Bellevue to Springfield. The district surgeon reported that there was blood about the mouth, nostrils and hands, as well as on his clothing. His external injuries included a contusion on the left side of the face; a laceration near the outer corner of the left eye; discoloured eyelids; an indented bone underneath the laceration; a deep stab wound on the left forearm; bruises on the front of the right shoulder, which was also dislocated; a dislocated ring finger on the right hand; wounds below each knee; and contused left ribs. Death resulted from concussion of the brain inflicted by a blunt instrument.

Dubar was 23 when he arrived from Gonda in January 1904. Shortly after joining the Arnolds, he deserted for a year. He returned to work two months prior to the murder. John Arnold was sure that Dubar had come to Natal under 'false pretences': 'We simply came to the conclusion that he had no intention of working under indenture and that he had come out

under false pretences, which I told him when he returned.’ Nagishar was 24 and Dubar’s shipmate. The four men were tried in September 1905.

A reconstruction of the murder revealed that the accused finished work at 5:30 p.m. and reached home an hour later. As they were preparing supper, Alexander instructed Dubar to cut the grass. He refused because it was dark. Alexander pulled Dubar from inside the hut, kicked him in the testicles and pushed him to the ground. Brijmohan confronted Alexander, who struck him on the head with a stick. Alexander again instructed them to cut the grass. This time Budhri, another of the Arnolds’ employees, refused and was smacked in the face for his troubles. Budhri knocked Alexander to the ground and stuffed a yellow cloth into his mouth, while Rugubar held onto his legs, and six others, Bisessor Pholli (84434), Khudoo (102068), Dubar, Nagishar, Brijmohan and Sarju, assaulted him. They eventually took heed of Alexander’s muffled cry, ‘Let me go, you have beaten me enough’, and released him. Eight of the 10 Indians employed by the Arnolds participated in the assault.

Later on the night of 25 July 1905, the murder accused, probably fearing retribution for the earlier incident, waited for Alexander to return from his brother Charles’ home, where he was visiting his fiancée, Miss Culverhouse. He left her at 10:45 p.m. and was killed shortly after. Wilfred Pitchford, from the government laboratory, reported that the murder weapon was a stone that weighed two pounds and was ‘sharp and prominent’ on one side. It had ‘freshly-shed blood trickled all over. Near the sharp angle of the stone, hair was adhering to’. Sarju’s sticks had bloodstains on them, several recent dents, and abrasions and scratches. Brijmohan’s stick had a ‘recent splash of blood’ on the concave side. Dubar was the main perpetrator. His black tweed trousers had a large bloodstain below the right knee, caused by pressing against Arnold’s bloodied face. The left side of his trousers and his waistcoat were also bloodied. Nagishar’s navy artillery jacket and cotton loincloth were smeared with blood.

The jury adjourned at 4:08 p.m. on 25 September 1905, and returned a guilty verdict at 4:32 p.m. for what they described as a ‘planned and vindictive act of revenge’. The men were sentenced to hang.

The murder had been carefully thought through. On the morning after the murder, the murder accused proceeded to the court to lay assault charges against Alexander. They told Indian constable Jam Ramsamy that they had retaliated in self-defence. Ramsamy was unaware of the murder and arrested them for leaving the estate ‘without a pass’. Trouble had been brewing between the Arnolds and their employees. John Arnold told the court that Alexander ‘in general had the working of the coolies...He was severe with them; he kept them to their work and made them do their duty...followed them up and urged them on, telling them to be quick’. Alexander regularly recorded ‘lost time’ and deducted wages accordingly.

Workers did not take this lying down. John Arnold testified that they had ‘occasionally been very insolent’. On 12 July 1905, for example, John and Alexander were at Charles’ house when the workers engaged in a go-slow. John chided Budhri for working as ‘if you are sick’, to which he replied, ‘No money, no work’, in reference to the deductions. Brijmohan, on that occasion, began speaking rapidly. Alexander, who spoke several Indian languages, told his father, ‘That

man is swearing at you and cursing.' John confronted Brijmohan, who said that he was 'cursing the mealies'. John warned Brijmohan that he would 'delay payment for insolence'.

In June 1905, John Arnold was pressing hay and told Nagishar to get ready as soon as he got the steam up. The latter retorted sarcastically, 'Look at the press and see if it is complete.' One portion of the press was missing. Similar sabotage had occurred previously. John Arnold rounded up the men and questioned them. As nobody confessed, he had a replacement cover made and deducted the cost from their wages. He told the employees in 'a few words of coolie and some kaffir' that he would have taken them to the magistrate to have them imprisoned for this 'revengeful piece of work', but could not afford to do so. On three or four occasions, John had left the mowing machines in the field with the spanners and small tools. When he returned to collect the machines, he found that the tools 'had been thrown away'. He recouped the cost from workers. This pattern of challenge, confrontation and collective retribution culminated in murder.

The murder of employers was rare, but the events leading up to the murder point to more frequent ways in which the indentured subverted the system, sabotage being one. These individual acts were interspersed with less frequent forms of collective response. The most spectacular was the 1913 strike, which spread out of the coal mines in northern Natal to the city centres of Maritzburg and Durban, and outwards down the south and north coasts. The narrative of the strike, as we will illustrate, presents a fascinating diary of everyday events, revealing local nuances and the scale of ruling class repression and brutality. There were some indentured whose legacy continues to linger into the present.

## Sultan Sahib

Such men are rare in human history. Such gems are heaven's own gift to mankind. His destiny fulfilled, his life's labour done, Sultan Sahib has gone to the land of immortals, and we in this world will always find him enshrined in our hearts. ASHWIN CHOUDREE<sup>28</sup>

The eulogy of Ashwin Choudree of the Natal Indian Congress at the funeral of ML Sultan was a fitting tribute to a man who arrived as an indentured labourer and left a legacy as a great benefactor.

Sultan Pillai Kannu Muluk Mahomed (43374) was to leave an indelible imprint on his second 'home'. Born in Travencore, South India, on 15 January 1873 to Muluk Mahomed, he attended the local school but was compelled by financial circumstances to leave when he was 14. After selling copperware at the local market, he decided to emigrate to Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Legend has it that the ship's engine failed and he was left stranded. Approached by recruiting agents, he accepted the opportunity to indenture in Natal. The 18-year-old, standing five feet six inches tall, boarded the *Congella* in July 1890 at Calcutta. He was assigned to the Natal Government Railways at the Berea station, where he worked initially as a railway porter and later became a supervisor.

The story of how 'Lappa' was added to Sultan's name is part of Indian folklore in Durban, though its authenticity has never been verified. It is said that at the railway office, Sultan was





Sultan Pillai Kannu Muluk Mahomed (43374), better known as Mulukmahomed Lappa (ML) Sultan, arrived as an indentured labourer and left the legacy of a great benefactor.

asked his name by a white overseer and he replied, 'Muluk Mahomed...lappa sultan', meaning 'My name is Muluk Mahomed, here (*lappa* in Zulu) I am the supervisor (sultan)'. And so, Mulukmahomed Lappa (ML) Sultan was 'born', while Pillai Kannu was dropped. Upon completion of his indenture in 1895, ML Sultan joined the gold rush to the Transvaal, where he worked for three years as a waiter. He returned to Natal in 1898 and took up tobacco farming in Bellair. Later he expanded into banana farming in Escombe and opened several businesses. He and cigar manufacturer RB Chetty opened a business in 1933 that specialised in Vedic medicine. He subsequently started a wholesale firm, ML Sultan and Sons (Pty) Ltd, in Victoria Street.

ML Sultan married Mariam Bee on 20 October 1922. She was of indentured stock, being the granddaughter of Syed Cassim Mothoo Saib (4059) and Asha Bee Hyder Saib (4075) of Chittoor, who had arrived in Natal in October 1864 and served their indentures on the River Prospect Sugar Estate. Mariam Bee was born in 1896. She and ML Sultan had 10 children, four sons and six daughters. In memory of Mariam Bee, who died in October 1933, ML Sultan established the ML Sultan Charitable and Educational Trust in 1949, with a contribution of £100 000 to promote cultural, educational, spiritual and economic activities among Indians 'irrespective of creed, caste or religion'. An indication of his secular intent is that the trustees included his long-time friends Vincent Lawrence, a Christian, and RB Chetty, a Hindu. ML Sultan was the first person to suggest the establishment of a 'non-European' university, and contributed £20 000 towards this project shortly before his death on 6 September 1953 at the age of 80. The ML Sultan Technikon was his legacy to the community.

## Journeys

The past was never beautiful  
but through its knotted strings my ancestors  
speak to me with apocryphal gestures  
and languages you will never understand  
and dances that would strain your gait.

ARI SITAS<sup>29</sup>

Intersections of the narratives abound: Maistry's struggle to build a new life and disenchantment with the 'home' he thought he would never lose; Wootme's tragic end as her husband's rage took its course on her body; Votti's fractured persecution and defiance; the lives of Dubar, Brijmohan, Nagishar and Sarju, who refused to cower, ended prematurely by the hangman's noose; the legacy of ML Sultan that lives on in post-apartheid South Africa. Families torn apart by separation, the humiliation of poverty, alienation, resistance, the struggle to forge new lives, mark these tales, highlighting the multiple ways in which the indentured tried to retain a measure of self-respect and autonomy in a system that sought to deny them the bare rudiments of life and dignity.

Indenture was coterminous with major changes in the political economy of the region. Zulu resistance was progressively undermined, 'Boer' and 'Brit' waged war and then sought to unite and share the 'spoils', honing the structures of racial exclusion and exploitation as capitalism extended its reach, spurred by the mining of gold and diamonds. While these events impacted on the indentured, they were not simply spectators; they were 'players' in these processes too, sometimes quite literally, as stretcher-bearers in the South African War and, later, in the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion. But we cannot get away with a solely 'local' or 'national' frame of reference. In telling the story, an eye is kept on India, as the British Empire consolidated its grip on the subcontinent, in part by ceding some authority to Indians who were inscribed into its governance. The fact that indenture was not a one-way phenomenon forces us to keep returning to India if only to take its leave.<sup>30</sup>

The routine details about indenture, such as the numbers who emigrated, the ships on which they arrived, the employers, the rules and regulations, have been described elsewhere in pioneering works that have proved invaluable.<sup>31</sup> But these studies have not captured the adventures, the doubts and contradictions, the diversity and richness of individual experiences, and its dynamic interplay with historical circumstance. In tracing the biographies of the indentured, it becomes apparent that indenture was much more fluid than previously thought. For example, some of the indentured, having completed their contracts, returned to India, married, and made their way back as 'free' Indians, or sometimes re-indentured. Others, literally one step out of indenture, married those still indentured. And so, while we see South Africa–India as a 'continuous' transnational space, allowance too must be made for the fluidity between indentured and free Indians. This study sometimes goes beyond the plantation to reflect the experiences of those who had completed their indentures. It proved impossible for the authorities to impose an 'iron wall' between the indentured and the free because indentured labour was employed in a large number of settings besides sugar plantations.

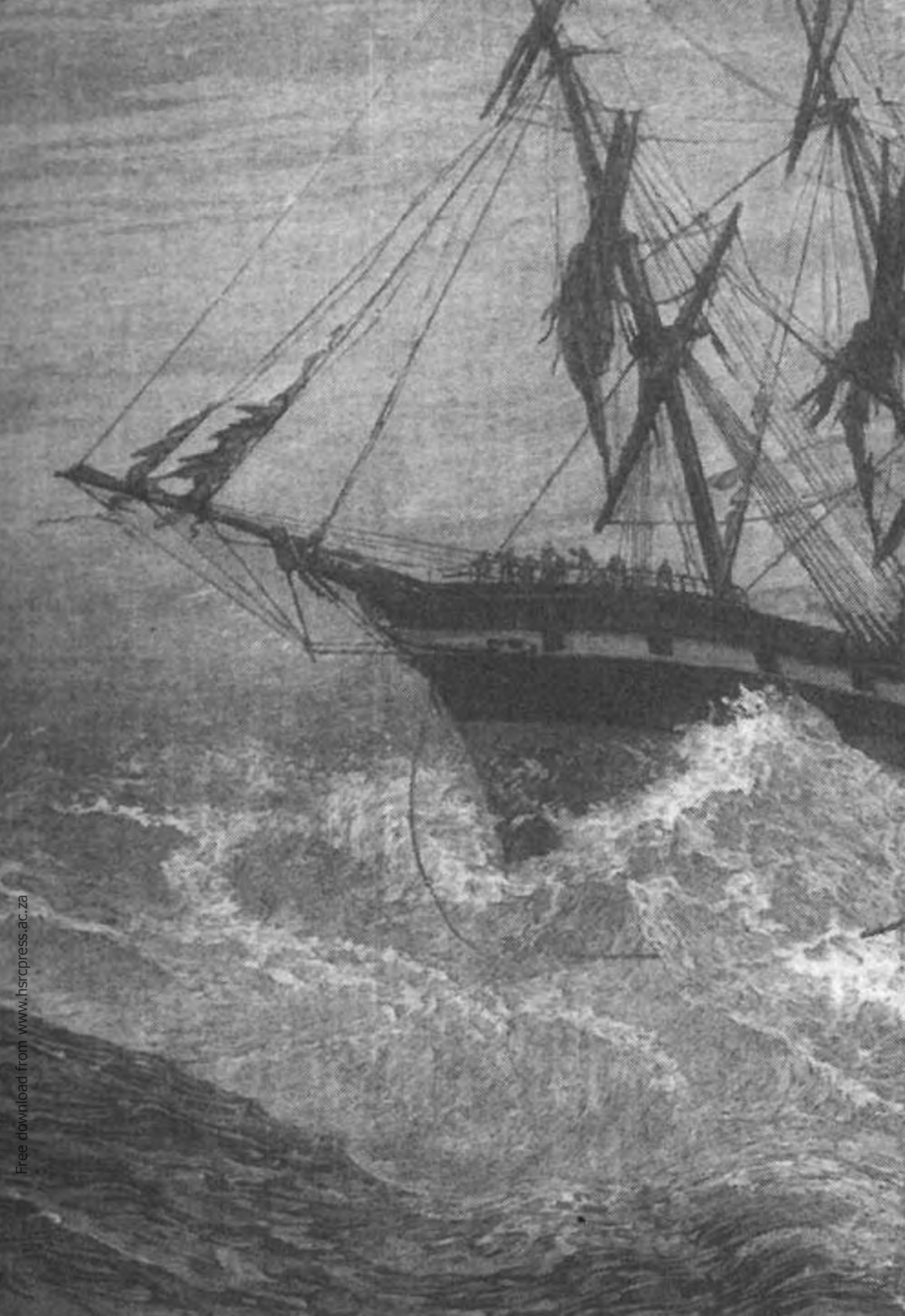
At its core, this book seeks to recover the biographies of those whom history has tried to ignore and to give 'voice' to those hitherto silenced. This includes, in particular, omissions of gender. This is a difficult task for, as Verene Shepherd reminds us, 'the task of uncovering the historical experiences of Indian women is not an easy one, for colonialist historiography has tended to mute the voices of exploited people, and the subaltern, as female, was even more invisible'.<sup>32</sup>

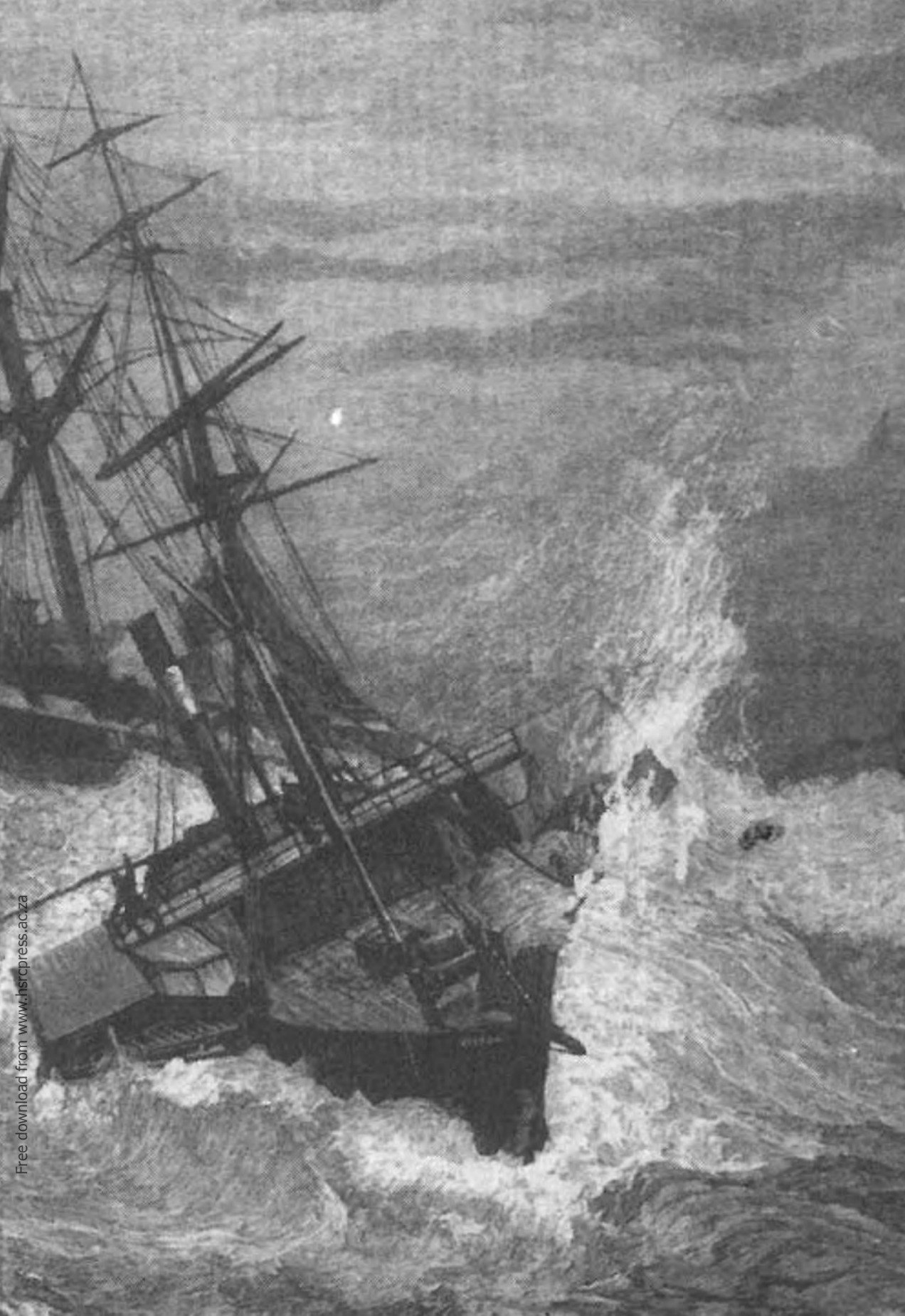
The indentured were imaginative, creative beings who found all manner of ways to resist, survive or escape the strictures of indenture. It is remarkable how often Shiva's 'children' refused to listen to the orchestra and marched to their own tune.

Each life had a story, one that unfolded in the context of many others: those of the families left behind, new ones built, and relationships forged in the wake of absences. Each narrative recaptured here obscures and reveals the many others that lurk behind, while all the time trying to illuminate what C Wright Mills refers to as the 'historical structures in which the milieu of the everyday life' of the indentured was organised. We take seriously his contention that this is the way to understand 'the biographies of men and women [and] the kind of individuals they variously become'.<sup>33</sup>

Journeys, like a dance, are lived backwards and forwards, sideways too. The 'moves' of indenture were much more complicated than the patterns stitched by standard scholarship: recruitment, travel to coast, waiting in depot, voyage, plantation, end of indenture.<sup>34</sup> The challenge is to tell the story in all its complexity without breaking the rhythm.

If the indentured system tried to turn people into numbers, then this book seeks to turn numbers into people, empirical detail into a foundation for a deeper understanding of the life of indenture, and 'our' past into a basis for reflection on the challenges of the present. You *see*, journeys, like Shiva's dance, are unending.





viz: Compounder found 4 cases of  
"chicken pox among Coolie children."  
"The Doctor is very neglectful of his  
"duties, allowing coolies to do absolutely  
"as they like and devoting himself to  
"talking snut with the women. He  
"has only been in the 'tween decks twice  
"since leaving port and the mother  
"of one diseased child has shown  
"him the child the last three days and  
"he takes no notice of it. In fact  
"he seems quite indifferent in regards  
"to the health of the Coolies leaving the  
"Compounder to do everything".

May 7<sup>th</sup> - "The Coolies are getting  
"very troublesome owing to the Doctor  
"not looking after them properly. They  
"are never mustered and examined. The  
"compounder entirely attending to their  
"health."

May 14<sup>th</sup> - "The Doctor has slept in  
"the Hospital since leaving Madras,  
"yesterday a woman suffering from  
"fever was put in the Hospital the  
"Doctor sleeping in the bunk above her  
"the Hospital boy also sleeping there."

May 24<sup>th</sup> - "It is now three weeks  
"since the Doctor has mustered the  
"Coolies called the roll or been down  
" in

# The *paglaa samundar* (mad ocean)

From across the seas they came.  
 Britain, colonizing India, transporting her chains  
 From Chota Nagpur and Ganges Plain...  
 Wooden missions of imperialist design  
 Human victims of her Majesty's victory.

MAHADAI DAS<sup>1</sup>

## Can the subaltern speak?

1 October 1882. The *Umvoti* departs from Madras with 342 passengers aboard. Passenger 122. Muniyammah. Female. Single. Aged 16. 22 October 1882: Muniyammah reported missing. Allegedly committed suicide. Digging deeper we can construct a fuller picture of Muniyammah's short life. We begin with details of her death, as recorded in the Official Log Book of Captain Charles Reeves.

22 November 1882:

Muniyammah had conducted herself in a loose manner. Her husband had remonstrated with her, but without effect and he complained to me. I told her that she must conduct herself properly, or else I should have to put some restraint upon her, and to remove her out of temptation. She said she should leave her husband and sleep elsewhere. Accordingly, I went down with a pair of handcuffs and with a piece of chain. To give her some drift I fastened her by the ankle to a stanchion. At 4:00 a.m, I was called and told she wanted to go to the closet. I released her, and she and her husband went on deck. I also went on deck but seeing that the wind drew ahead I saw to the Yards being trimmed. When that was finished, I looked to see if she had come back, and finding she had not I said to the Interpreter, 'She's a long time. Look in the Closets.' He looked and said 'I cannot find her.' So we had a general search, when one of the sailors said that it must have been her going overboard when we heard that splash. I questioned the men and it is logical to come to the conclusion that she deliberately committed suicide for not a cry was heard. There was not much wind and the ship was quite free from motion and no chance of a person getting over unless they tried to do it. It appears also that during the night she took off her good cloth and gave it to a woman who slept near her,

OPPOSITE: Extract from the log of the *Umvoti*, which arrived in Durban in June 1889, detailing some of the misconduct of the ship's doctor, Dr Bowrie.

PREVIOUS PAGE: A feeling of hopeless banishment was ubiquitous as the indentured sailed through the capricious waters of the Indian Ocean.

and put on an old one, showing that she had made her mind up for it previously. I did not stop the ship and lower a boat because quite fifteen minutes had elapsed since the splash in the water was heard, and the time I was informed of it, and we must have been at least a mile and a half from the place, and it was quite dark. Moreover, it was not advisable to create a panic in the ship unnecessarily.<sup>2</sup>

While Muniyammah's voice had been silenced, we can reconstruct her journey through the voices of fellow passengers, recorded by the pens of others. Crucial evidence was that given by Andi Sinnan (27992), who testified on 4 December 1882 that he had formed an 'acquaintance' with Muniyammah, and that they had 'agreed to live together as man and wife during the voyage'. Andi was 34 years old, of the Chakkiliyan caste (cobblers) and from Madurai. He was elated to have found a woman companion, given the gender imbalance, and had 'no reason to find fault' with her. He was more than twice her age. The captain, however, warned him that Muniyammah had been 'talking' to boatmen.

On the evening of 22 October the captain fastened Muniyammah with a pair of handcuffs. Andi asked why he had done this, and was told that it was 'to stop her talking to the sailors'. Muniyammah 'cried from the time she was made fast until about three o'clock in the morning'. When Muniyammah began to 'mess the deck', the passengers sleeping near her started to 'make a row'. The compounder (pharmacist), on hearing the noise, came below and asked if she wanted to go to the toilet. She answered in the affirmative. He instructed the captain to unlock the handcuffs. Muniyammah left to go on deck, followed by the captain and the compounder. Andi followed shortly after but could not find her. He asked the compounder what had become of his wife. 'He said: "What is her number?" I gave him her number. He then said: "Your wife had drowned herself. Bring me her clothes." I did so.'

Ship, spilling creatures

With long hair and slender waists. I gazed  
Upon the fineness of their lips which the sea  
Soon puffed and burst. Paler than their men,  
Miniature, their hands barely the size  
Of a chintoo leaf, just as softly creased.  
They were not hands to rattle padlock and chain,  
They would sooner beguile knots, with a touch,  
Loosen the greed anchored in men's hearts.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>3</sup>

To the compounder, Muniyammah was simply a number. Was it convenient that Muniyammah 'disappeared'? For if she spoke, the captain and sailors may have had to account for more than they desired.

Protector Mason concluded on 8 December 1882 that Reeves' 'punishment on deceased in fastening her by one leg with a pair of handcuffs to a stanchion was far too severe'. Attorney-General MH Gallwey, however, dismissed the charges because Reeves 'bore a high character...Had the girl not disappeared, in all probability we should have heard nothing of



the severity of the punishment'. Here we have a tacit admittance that such punishment was acceptable as long as it was not made public.

And so Muniyammah, the young girl whose life came to a tragic end, whose search for a better future was brutally halted, disappears from the history books. To the men in charge, she was cargo being transferred from one port to another. After all, is this not one of the meanings of the word 'indenture': 'official requisition for stores; order for goods, especially from abroad'?<sup>4</sup>

Muniyammah's story, while important in and of itself, does signal broader questions. It points to the abuse to which women in particular were subjected during the voyage and exposes the bias and racism behind the cold, clinical and supposedly objective way investigations were conducted, and which almost always lent credence to the voice of the white figure of authority, a point we keep returning to. In the more immediate, Muniyammah's story leads us to a consideration of why so many single women indentured. Muniyammah was young and vulnerable but chose to tread a path riddled with danger. Why? Many held the view that single Indian women were recruited fraudulently to make up the quotas and lived immorally in the colonies. Even CF Andrews, a close associate of Gandhi, wrote that in Fiji the Indian woman 'passes from one man to another, and has lost even the sense of shame in doing so'.<sup>5</sup> Women were accused of marrying for financial gain and breaking the relationship when a better offer came along, and of lacking maternal instincts. The labelling continued through indenture, a point made by Parle when she points out that while the 'pressures experienced by Indian women as workers, house-keepers, wives and mothers in poverty and poor living conditions went unrecognised', emphasis was placed on their lack of morality as the basis for not being able to build long-lasting relationships.<sup>6</sup>

One migrant, Thoy Cunniappa Muda (332228), listed or, as is more likely, had her caste listed as 'prostitute'. She was 20, from North Arcot, and arrived on the *Dunphaile Castle* in October 1884. But she served her indenture as any other, with H Goodwin. Jo Beall argues that these insinuations were colonial myths. Women migrated to Natal to improve their social and economic position. They worked just as hard, but faced additional threats to their rations and their bodies by fellow indentured workers and those who wielded power on the plantations.<sup>7</sup>

So why did so many single women emigrate? In a feminist reading of *kala pani*, Brinda Mehta<sup>8</sup> suggests that widows and adolescent girls who emigrated were usually 'socially disinherited by patriarchal gender infringements' that viewed them or their behaviour as 'a violation against normative expectations of respectability'. Hindu women in nineteenth-century India had 'socially confined roles that were well-defined in subordination to men'. Women who transgressed these norms became outcasts. Widows were especially affected. Their obliteration from official marriage records was 'a further loss of identity for women who already had a "nonhuman status" for being without a husband'. Such women 'transformed social marginality into personalised historicity when [they] embarked on a...journey in search of redefinition and subjective visibility'.

Mehta goes on to say that the *kala pani* journey reinscribed women 'in recorded history through the documents of indenture in which statistical anonymity and impersonal documentation ironically provided a foundational script to reclaim subjectivity'. Women transformed

their 'nonhuman' status into that of historical pioneers by emigrating. Enduring the hardship of the *kala pani* was sensible 'because it offered the potential for renegotiations of gendered identity within the structural dissolutions of caste, class, and religious boundaries that occurred during the displacements'.

According to Mehta, women like Votti (discussed in Chapter 1) and Muniyammah took advantage of the opportunity offered by indenture 'to transcend their marginality within the nuclear Hindu family by embracing a more expansive Indian diasporic community, a community that was nevertheless created by violent disruptions and exile'. This is not to romanticise the 'new'. For, as we shall see, as families congealed and extended in Natal, so patriarchy and 'exclusions', either remembered from the past or forged anew, were reinscribed.

## The floating Jagganath

When the crew is a mixed European one, it is next to impossible to keep the people quiet enough to please them...I have never had a ship with a crew of this kind without having many cases of striking, pushing, throwing of water and refuse at times and much abusing of the people...There is a great tendency among officers, apprentices and men [if European] to consider the coolies a people who may be pushed about, abused and annoyed at will.

DR R WHITLAM, 1882<sup>9</sup>

From Madras and Calcutta, on the *Truro*, the *Belvedere*, the *Umtata*, the *Pongola*, the *Umvoti*, the *Congella*...the indentured sailed through the capricious waters of the Indian Ocean, in winter and summer, the ships carrying their human cargo to Natal. Well-organised and low-cost transportation connected demand and supply. The size and speed of vessels was an improvement on the ships that carried African slaves to the Americas.<sup>10</sup> While the average ship carrying slaves weighed less than 200 tons, the smallest ship from India in the period 1858 to 1873 was 453 tons. Ships were also faster. In the early eighteenth century it would have taken six months to travel from India to Europe; by the mid-nineteenth century it took less than three months. Steamers reduced the journey even further in the 1880s.<sup>11</sup>

Sailing ships took almost two months to reach Natal. The *Umvoti*, which made 23 round voyages between 1860 and 1889, took an average of 62 days from Madras to Natal. Steamers, which had replaced sail ships by the 1880s, reduced the length of the voyage to around 24 days and hence also the risk of seasickness.<sup>12</sup> In Bhana's study, the mortality rate on ships to Natal in the period 1876 to 1902, which together carried 91 798 passengers, was less than 1 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

A feeling of hopeless banishment was ubiquitous during voyages. A doctor observed in 1883 that many of the 'coolies, after leaving India, are very homesick, they have entered another world and everything is new and strange to them. Fear soon seizes them...Soon after leaving port we had some squally weather. I found on going below all the coolies huddled together on the windward side of the between decks and in a state of terror as they fancied they were all going to the bottom.'<sup>14</sup> Though journeys were shorter, packing the indentured into every available space on board the ship created problems. As one British official explained in the mid-1880s:

The limited space, the rude accommodation, the poor and often dirty bedding and clothing, the awkwardness and novelty of the cooking and sleeping arrangements, the strangeness of the poor passengers to each other, the rough and unclean habits of some, and the helplessness of others, and, added to all, the discomforts of sea-sickness, necessarily create a scene even in the best managed ship which is all too well calculated to rouse feelings both of pity and disgust.<sup>15</sup>

Single men and women were placed on either end of the ship, separated by married couples and children who were accommodated in the middle. During a typical voyage, migrants awoke at 6:00 am, made their bedding and helped prepare breakfast. Men drew water while women assisted in the kitchen. Leisure time was spent wrestling, singing or playing cards.<sup>16</sup>

There was little official space for caste or custom. The reply of a Pariah (of the untouchable cast) to a Brahmin (of the highest caste) upset at being bumped into, 'I have taken off my caste and left it with the Port Officer. I won't put it on again till I come back', poignantly sums up the situation.<sup>17</sup> Grierson, a British official, cited a returned emigrant: 'A man can eat anything on board ship. A ship is like the temple of Jagganath, where there are no caste restrictions...[Emigrants] invented a curious theory regarding ship-board life, which shows the adaptability of native customs.'<sup>18</sup>

The Jagganath Temple in Puri, Orissa, has been one of the most famous Hindu pilgrimage centres in India since around the eleventh century. It acquired a reputation for treating worshippers equally, and requiring all to make and serve their food together and eat from the same plate, irrespective of caste. The idea of the ship as the temple of Jagganath also 'arose because pilgrim ships went from Calcutta to Orissa: hence all ships out of Calcutta acquired the same reputation'.<sup>19</sup>

The ship, as Lal points out, was the 'site of a massive social disruption' as old rituals and ceremonial observances of village India were compromised in that crucible. No one could be certain about the true caste of Bhandaries (cooks); high and low caste ate together in a *pangat* (row), shared and cleaned toilets, and took turns sweeping and hosing the deck. The voyage was a great leveller of status.<sup>20</sup>

The one story related almost universally in discussions of caste among the indentured, because it epitomises the difficulty of maintaining strict regulations, is the recollection by a woman on board a ship to Fiji. During the early part of the voyage, migrants were finicky about caste. Then, one day there was a storm, a wave rocked the ship, passengers were tossed about, the food was mixed, and migrants faced a stark choice between eating polluted food or going hungry. From that day on, everyone 'became one'.<sup>21</sup> On another occasion, a Brahmin was caught stealing potatoes to cook a separate meal for himself. He was paraded on deck with a raw potato stuck in his mouth.<sup>22</sup> Yet it would be wrong to speak of a complete breakdown of the caste system during the voyage. Consciousness of caste and other boundaries would persist long after the voyage and indenture ended.

If the indentured failed to fall in line, JM Laing, a surgeon on numerous voyages transporting indentured migrants, proffered a solution in 1889:

When problems arise look out for some return coolie as the instigator. They will give themselves airs among the other coolies, who will naturally believe that they know all about it from having been on previous voyages. They are generally too knowing or too great cowards to complain themselves, but put some other coolie up to doing so... Sometimes Brahmins and other high caste Hindus will come up and say that they cannot eat food prepared in the galley, although they have been told before embarkation that their food would be thus prepared. This man's caste has been broken by the mere fact of his having lived in the depot up-country. N.B. There are a good many pseudo-Brahmins about.<sup>23</sup>

The passage to Natal was helped, ironically, by the disaster that occurred in 1859, a year before the *Truro's* voyage: the burning of the *Shah Allum* en route to Mauritius. While the 75-member crew was saved, of the 400 indentured only one survived.<sup>24</sup> This led to a tightening of safety measures. The one recorded shipwreck in the journeys to Natal occurred in 1903. The *Umona*, which left Calcutta on 5 May, was wrecked off the coast of Ceylon 10 days later. The 449 passengers were transported to Natal on the *Umzinto*, which landed on 29 June. Almost 55 days had elapsed from the time the indentured had left Calcutta until they reached Natal. There were two deaths, while a number of passengers were treated for exposure and illness from eating raw coconuts.<sup>25</sup>

As to information that can provide a window into everyday life on the ships, we have not been able to find such testimonies of the indentured. What has proved invaluable are the diaries of people in 'charge' of the ships. Sometimes filled with racist invective, they nevertheless provide rich insight into the day-to-day life on board, and highlight the kinds of issues passengers faced.

## Potatoes, mumps and boxing

The diary of H Hitchcock, Surgeon-Superintendent of the *Umvoti*, for the journey that left Madras on 26 October 1882 and reached Natal on 1 December 1882, provides a rich account of the daily travails. The *Umvoti*, one of the best-known ships to ferry indentured migrants, was built in 1869. When the *Umvoti* reached Durban on 16 June 1889, it was the vessel's twenty-third and last voyage as a regular Indian immigrant ship.<sup>26</sup>

This diary is wonderful in revealing a number of important issues. It points to the poor quality of food, the indentured being forced to eat outside in the wet because of the obstinacy of the captain, a 'rebellion' by the indentured against their conditions, the emergence and identification of 'ringleaders', protest in throwing sub-par tobacco overboard in disgust, and a boxing match, one of the rare pleasures enjoyed by passengers.

25 October 1882: The coolies in the depot were mustered this morning at 5:30 and ready for inspection of the Medical Inspector and Protector of Emigrants. The Emigrants were inspected and marched down the beach and treated under the Pier, from whence they were embarked on board the barque *Umvoti* where they were received

and made comfortable 'tween decks. There were 173 men (including twenty boatmen for the Port of Natal), forty-five women and thirteen children.

26th: 5:30 p.m. Came on board and found many of the Emigrants sea-sick. No. 207 Latchmanam attempted to throw himself overboard; he was handcuffed by the Captain and kept on the 'Poop' for a few hours. The man has evidently indulged himself with some narcotics. He was boisterous and excitable. Sailed from Madras Harbour at 7:00 p.m. with fair wind.

28th: Strong SW winds from 2:00 a.m. Sea-sickness on the increase. At noon, was abreast of Ceylon. Heavy rains and squalls at 5:00 p.m.

29th: Emigrants improving. Owing to the inclemency of the weather this morning dry provisions were issued. In the evening cooked food given.

31st: 8:30 a.m. Rain and squalls. Mutton and potatoes for breakfast. The sheep weighed only twenty-five pounds after being dressed. The Emigrants were dissatisfied. The Captain promised to them two sheep every alternate week and one in the intermediate week.

1st November 1882: Calm night, heavy rains this morning. Sky overcast. Emigrants doing well...[Some] Sirdars [overseers] and cooks were dis-rated since embarkation as they were found useless and others substituted.

5th: Nos. 71, 201 and 205 stole ship's onions and potatoes. To be deprived of one meal and to do a week's extra duty.

6th: Two sheep were given last evening for the Emigrants which weighed fifty pounds after being dressed. Calm night. Heavy rain. Nos. 26 and 27 admitted with mumps. No. 91 Anushan has been very troublesome since embarkation, finding fault with his meals, regarding quantity and quality. He has the option of taking his allowance of ghee which he considers insufficient. Threatens to make his complaint at Natal.

7th: No. 91 Anushan's turn this day to holystone [soft sandstone for scrubbing the decks] 'tween decks; refused to do it, pretending to be ill. He was taken down by the Captain and set to work. Another case of mumps this morning, No. 122. Rain in the afternoon. Emigrants ordered 'tween decks.

8th: Captain Reeves objects to the women cleaning rice to free it of gravel 'tween decks, and insisted on its being done on the seaward side of the deck, where the wash tubes are placed for bathing and near to the hospital and sailors' house. I told the Captain it would be very inconvenient for the women at work, as they are likely to be interfered with by the crew, and the [male] Emigrants and the uncertainty of the weather, but Captain Reeves will not listen. At 3:30 p.m. the weather was threatening and a heavy fall of rain soon followed. The rice, which was partly cleaned, had to be gathered up.

One of the crew, Wagner, was in conversation with a woman employed. The evening was very wet and a fair case of mumps under treatment. I directed the compounder to serve out the rice 'tween decks. This also the Captain objected to. The women and children, with the rest, had all to sit in the wet 'Poop' and deck, and take their meals.

9th: All those vaccinated on the 2nd instant have failed. I have this morning vaccinated the Captain, a gentleman passenger, and an apprentice lad, and vaccinated the ship's carpenter. I have to state that the weather was rather threatening at about noon, when the women should have commenced sifting rice for their afternoon and tomorrow's meals, and the consequence was that the rice could not be cleaned on deck and thereby the coolies had to partake of their meals full of gravel and sand in their cooked rice. Further, I must state from the quantity of husks in the rice I have my apprehension of bowels complaints showing itself amongst the Emigrants. As it is I have had some cases of dysentery and diarrhoea attributable to the rice not being sifted hitherto. I may mention that the Captain volunteered yesterday that he would look after the rice being sifted, and that he requested me and my assistant not to 'bother' ourselves about it, but he had taken no action whatever to have it done.

12th: While the compounder was serving out the morning issue of water, one of the boatmen named Govindan asked the compounder to serve out their rice. The compounder told him that he was busy serving out the water and when done, he would be attended to. Govindan would not keep quiet and asked again in a most impertinent and insolent manner to serve out the rice. The compounder took no notice of him, and then the boatman began to make use of very indecent language. The compounder turned around, said that he will not serve out their rice first but would serve them last. All the boatmen then in a body refused to wait and the compounder brought the matter to my notice. This was not the first occasion that they have kept giving trouble. They are a most impudent, insolent and unbearable lot. They are always going down and laying in the 'tween decks as often as they are sent up the deck. In spite of all the orders given by me and the Captain they seem to take no notice of it. Three of the ringleaders were brought before the Captain, and they were asked the cause of their behaviour. They stated that they felt hungry, and in consequence of their rice the day previous being with gravel and sand, they had to throw it overboard and eat nothing. The Captain told them that women were put to clean the rice daily, to sift out the stones and what more they wanted! They were warned that if they for the future don't behave better, they will be punished. The women were at work again sifting the rice, and no less than seven women changed, and only cleaned one bag...This was caused, as stated by them, that the wind on the 'seaside' of the hospital on the deck was too strong for them to sift the rice, and asked permission from the compounder to have it sifted 'tween decks. This was refused by the Captain.

14th: The Emigrants refused taking their supply of tobacco, some threw it overboard, being bad and unfit for use. The third officer states that there is no better tobacco to be had on board. Two sheep were given for the use of Coolies.

20th: No. 40 Karuppayi taken ill with labour pains. Not confined as yet.

21st: No. 40 Karuppayi was instrumentally delivered of a stillborn child at 3:00 p.m. Mr. Le Febour was instructed to throw the baby overboard at night when the Emigrants were asleep.

23rd: No cooking could be carried on this morning owing to the inclemency of the weather. Dry provisions to be issued to the Emigrants.

24th: The woman who was instrumentally delivered is progressing favourably.

26th: There was a boxing match this morning 'tween decks, an Emigrant cooly and a boatman, the former got the worst of it.

27th: 'Mumps' continues amongst the Emigrants, all the cases are terminating.

1st December 1882: Arrived at port and anchored at 6:00 a.m. Shortly after was towed-in by the steam tug 'Kovdoo' and the Emigrants disembarked.<sup>27</sup>

## The disciplinarian: 'unfit to carry coolies'

The diary of Dr John McIntyre during the *Umvoti's* voyage from Madras in 1888 provides another glimpse of the experiences of the indentured during the journey. The unsympathetic captain felt that 'order' would only be maintained through strict discipline. Other features that emerge are the cramped quarters on deck, which often denied the indentured the space granted by law; inedible or no food; the humiliation of daily medical examinations; being disinfected with lime; limited availability of water, irrespective of thirst; seasickness; and insufficient care from a crew that regarded this as a 'job' and often took out their frustrations on innocent passengers. Above all, indentured women were anything but compliant and submissive.

25th August: 235 Indians embarked. So far as I could tell, none was affected with venereal disease. I think the men are unusually well fitted for emigrants to Natal. I consider them, as a body, superior to any I have seen. We sailed about one o'clock this morning. Some emigrants are sick so little rice could be eaten at breakfast. They will have dry food for supper.

26th: Breakfast of dry food was issued and cooked rice and dholl will be given for supper. Tin vessels were issued yesterday. Today the badges of the Sirdars [and] cooks...will be issued. Tomorrow I shall issue the clothing.

27th: Comparatively cool morning, cloudy but dry. The blankets have been issued. Three blankets and six bundles of clothes over. I think a mistake to have so few spare blankets. There are four beds in the hospital and I think two blankets to each bed would be a modest estimate if the beds were occupied. It is only prudent to provide for such an, by no means unlikely, contingency. Why are mattresses provided if blankets are unnecessary? Supper: rice, dholl, and potatoes.

28th: Owing to the crowding of men around the neighbourhood of the hospital, and as the available space on the poop was taken up, I requested Captain Reeves to remove the sail under repair to make room for the Indians. This he refused to do, claiming the space on the poop as his right and he required it to navigate the vessel. In an hour, however, he removed the sail, his chairs, and the awning; his wife and himself went below to dine. He is evidently much offended but I cannot help it. I have understood the emigrants as entitled to as much space as they may require. I also understand habitual sail repairing on the poop is forbidden. The tobacco and soap were issued at noon.

29th: So far, the people have been as docile as well-bred children.

30th: Been a very stormy night and this morning continues to blow hard, with a heavy sea, so that no cooking can be done. I had written a note before going on deck, asking the captain to put the awnings over the poop and quarter decks to protect the Indians from the sun, which I considered dangerous the past two days. Last night an Indian woman [single] assaulted several other women below, and threatened to strike the Aya [nursemaid] and the chief male Sirdar too; this morning I enquired into the matter and warned the woman not to repeat the offence. At the inspection there was one case of dysentery, two of earache. Supper: rice, dhol, and fish.

31st: It's been quite a gale with torrents of rain and a heavy sea all night; this morning, the wind abated slightly; but it still rains so that breakfast must be given below...I inspected all the males and found two with venereal disease of recent date and mild type, two new cases of mumps and a few cases of diarrhoea...3:00 p.m.: all on deck.

1st September: About 2:00 p.m. it was black on the northern horizon and a squall was expected. About 3:00 p.m. I was below and heard the captain call for his coat. Shortly after hearing a conversation I went on deck to send the people below. The captain and men were busy taking down the awning. I was looking on when the captain came to me in a rage and said it was my fault, that awnings were never put up in these latitudes, that he had had no sleep for three nights and all because of me. Ever since Tuesday last he has been as sulky as if he was at a funeral and is constantly finding fault with the Indians for some or other imaginary indiscretion.

3rd: The soap, tobacco, and oil are to be issued as per the rules once per week. Captain Reeves says tomorrow is the proper day, and has only yielded to give soap after a long senseless argument, insisting that from Tuesday to next Tuesday inclusive is only a week and not eight days. Supper: rice and dhol.

11th: Has been stormy all night. A few cases of mumps, some minor ailments...Female nurse ailing. The sail which had been torn the night before is today still repairing. Both sides of main deck are taken up repairing sails. Is it according to contract?



13th: Captain frequently complaining of the coolies rubbing of the pumpkins on the rails so that some have fallen through into the sea. I often wonder no children have fallen through. I mentioned the necessity of a net of some strong material being fixed inside and fastened to the ship's rails so as to prevent the likely accident of children shooting through when the ship rolls to seaward. I mentioned this in my report of this ship in 1882, and I again call attention to it, as of great urgency. Also, I beg to call attention to the fire places. The boiler is placed on two iron rods reaching from side-to-side on bricks. Cooking is generally done on the inside, some articles are sooner ready to be removed than others and it should happen, as it did yesterday, that the contents of boiler nearest to the inside be first ready and removed, the others may, and in this case did, fall off the rods, and serious damage of fatal scalding can occur. Fortunately no one was near when the present accident happened.

24th: Bright sunshine morning. Very little wind. Passed Bourbon [Reunion Island] during the night...Sail repairing goes on as usual on the main decks. Those of the Indians who can't get room to sit or lie on the quarter and poop decks, must go anywhere and can do so. Many go below and although it is the rules that all who are not sick, be on deck, I feel my hands tied and am compelled in the circumstances to allow those who can't find space on the quarter and poop decks, to go below.

25th: This morning the chief Sirdar reported to me a disturbance during the night, caused by one of the women having been pushed into the latrine and a man struck by a sailor. At breakfast, the captain said there had been a great commotion from about midnight till two o'clock, that he had gone up and tried to calm them down, but could get no Sirdar, nor any to inform him respecting the cause of the row, nor to interpret. The compounder said one of the Sirdars is reported to have been one who the sailor struck. But why did you not send for me, I asked? He replied, 'Oh I did not like to trouble you.' I could only find that the woman was on her way to the latrine, her husband going with her for protection. They met a sailor who ordered the man below, and concluded he must wish to follow the woman into the latrine. During examination I found one woman had venereal disease.

4th: Captain Reeves, till the end of the voyage, took every opportunity of showing his disregard and defiance of the rules. In the last entry in the diary I have given the inside surface of the ship's hospital and I would suggest that a hospital of suitable dimensions and properly fitted for the purpose be erected, before the *Umvoti* is permitted to carry Indians again. The fire places are also dangerous and the railway around the bulwarks ought to be higher and covered with netting to prevent young and old falling overboard. There are some other objectionable points in Captain Reeves' conduct and in respect of the ship's fittings, but I think I have said enough to show I consider him unfit to carry coolies.<sup>28</sup>

## The 'drunken butchers'

26 October 1873: Another coolie whelp skedaddled to Kingdom come...

29 October: Another coolie infant vermosed...

7 November: One of the coolies jumped overboard, [the third] assigning as a reason that he had not enough grub. This amusement is getting rather too common.

DR WILLIAM JOHNSON<sup>29</sup>

While Dr Johnson's approach was probably one of the more outlandish, those entrusted with the care of the indentured often displayed scant regard for the 'coolie'. Regulations stipulated that each ship was to have a doctor on board, whose report, along with the captain's log, were inspected by the Protector at the conclusion of the voyage. But because sailings were irregular and at times infrequent, shipping companies appointed casual surgeons 'from the less creditable ranks of the profession'. Captains' logs frequently reflect neglect of duty or worse conduct on the part of doctors. One was even placed under arrest for 'rape, attempted rape, or indecent assault'.<sup>30</sup>

Migrants sometimes travelled with surgeons, captains and crew who had little concern for their welfare. They could be assaulted, verbally abused in any number of ways and raped. There were times when officials were cautioned or dismissed for their misdemeanours, but more often than not they acted with impunity. As Carter has pointed out, the calibre of many officials left a lot to be desired:

The quality of those employed was frequently deprecated by administrators in the colonies and in India. It was difficult to recruit doctors and ships' officers for voyages which were dangerous and disagreeable, with the constant fear of epidemic disease. Mauritius [and Natal] was particularly disadvantaged in this respect because the short passage length meant that it was not sufficiently remunerative, and the colony was unable to employ staff recruited from the Europe–Australia service, as did the West Indies.<sup>31</sup>

The role of the surgeon was similar to that of a floating general practitioner. Guidelines published in 1855 stipulated that the surgeon was to vaccinate patients, ensure that they had regular baths, and that rations were of suitable quality.<sup>32</sup> The surgeon was responsible for everything medical from childbirth to dentistry, although most time was spent treating ailments and infections resulting from a large group of people living in congested conditions for several weeks or months. Medical facilities were sparse. In one instance, the surgeon isolated men and women suspected of contracting an infectious disease by 'having the patients sheeted down in the longboat, where they were confined for the remainder of the voyage'.<sup>33</sup> This haphazard approach is reflected in entries about Dr R Bowrie during the *Umvoti's* voyage from Madras in 1889:

25th April: Compounder Pedroza found four cases of chicken pox among coolie children. The doctor is very neglectful of his duties, allowing coolies to do absolutely as they like and devoting himself to talking smut with the women. He has only been 'tween decks twice since leaving port. The mother of one diseased child has shown him the child the last three days and he takes no notice of it. He seems quite indifferent in regard to the health of the coolies.

May 7th: The coolies are getting very troublesome owing to the doctor not looking after them properly. They are never mustered and examined.

May 14th: The doctor has slept in the hospital since leaving Madras. Yesterday a woman suffering from fever was put in the hospital, the doctor sleeping in the bunk over her, the hospital boy also sleeping there.

May 24th: It is now three weeks since the doctor has mustered the coolies, called the roll or been down in the 'tween decks.

May 28th: This afternoon, compounder mustered coolies on his own account and found seven cases of skin disease that required looking after.

June 2nd: This morning Ahmeda Bee and Mungalal, coolie women, were put in irons at doctor's request from 9:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m....After Ahmeda Bee was chained, doctor joked with her and gave her a glass of wine.<sup>34</sup>

It was because of people like Dr Bowrie that the myth of the 'drunken butcher' stuck with ships' surgeons. Dr Bowrie broke the terms of his appointment which required him to 'muster' the passengers every morning and evening to check for illnesses, carry out a weekly examination of adult males and maintain 'constant watchfulness' over passengers. The Protector concluded that Dr Bowrie 'has been neglectful in his professional capacity and in his general behaviour towards the Emigrants, his conduct on board being most reprehensible'. William McFarlane, an officer on the *Umvoti*, testified that he 'understood the language spoken by the immigrants and on several occasions I have heard the doctor talking "smart" to the women. What he said to them I am ashamed to repeat.'

On another occasion, the chief engineer on the *Umzinto* was warned by his employers:

It has been brought to our notice by the Protector of Immigrants that several men and women complained to him of having been assaulted and otherwise ill-treated by you during the voyage...We understand from the Protector that you admit having thrown water over some of the women, owing to their having congregated in front of your cabin door when warned not to do so...We have to warn you that if any further complaints of this kind reach us they will be very severely dealt with.<sup>35</sup>

Indentured women had to ward off the attentions not only of other indentured, but also of the crew and medical men who wielded incredible power on board the ships.

## The abuse of women

Women, including married ones, as we saw in the diary entries above, travelled under the constant threat of sexual assault from fellow passengers and crew. Some of this is revealed in communication in 1897 between Robert Mitchell, the Immigration Agent in Calcutta, and the Indian Immigration Trust Board in Natal, in response to the latter's concern that too many women were arriving with venereal disease. The Board blamed this on 'negligent' medical examinations prior to emigration. An irate Mitchell was adamant that the blame lay with the 'lascar [Indian seamen] crews of fifty Indians'.

During a three-month voyage to the West Indies, where vessels typically carried over 600 emigrants, venereal disease was a 'rare occurrence'. He attributed this to the fact that the vessels had all-white crews, 'the employment of lascars being prohibited. The presence of European seamen in the 'tween decks would be instantly detected whereas it would be impossible to recognise a lascar there, especially after dark.'<sup>36</sup>

But Mitchell's claims did not bear up under scrutiny. 'Europeans' were also predators. Witness the affidavit of the night Sirdar on the *Pongola*, Appalsamy (passenger 322), to Protector Mason in 1897:

I came by the vessel that has just arrived from Madras. I was a Sirdar on board the ship. My duty was to be at the hatchway on watch at night. One night after I went on duty after relieving Dorasamy, the other Sirdar, a stout man came to me...This man beckoned me to him. He held up his two fingers, pointed down the 'tween decks and then held his hand a certain height from deck, held up his two fingers again, pointed to where I was standing and to where he was going and went away. He came back again, gave me two rupees and went through the same motions and went away again. I did not know what he meant at the time and went and told Dorasamy that the man had given me two rupees. I went back to my post. The man returned, doubled his fist, and I shook my open hand and went below. He followed me and I tried to make him understand that I knew nothing about what he wanted. And he gave me a slap in the face and went away. From the signs made by this man I believed he wanted me to bring him one of the women. I gave the two rupees to Dorasamy.<sup>37</sup>

Chief Officer JH Tamblyn was charged with trying to bribe Appalsamy with two rupees to procure a woman for 'immoral purposes'. For Mason, the main concern did not seem to be the veracity of the charge but rather what to do with the two rupees!

Dr George Paterson, surgeon on the *Umvoti* which arrived in Natal in November 1886, was accused of raping several women who gave depositions to Magistrate Finnemore on 16 December 1886.<sup>38</sup> Kanakamma, passenger 75, was a single woman who had 'taken' a husband at Madras 'but we fell out'. Paterson instructed her to sleep with the single women because she had contracted venereal disease, but this did not stop his own sexual advances: 'The doctor accuses women of being sick and yet enjoys them himself,' she said. Manickam, passenger 53, testified that she was raped at the hospital 'half-way' from Madras: 'I screamed.

He was on top of me and having connection with me. Baboo Naidoo came – the interpreter. He pushed defendant off me. The defendant raped me a second time in quarantine.’

Munisami, passenger 54, Sirdar at the quarantine station, said that when he was putting out the light one night, he heard Manickam crying. When he approached her, he saw Paterson ‘with one of his legs between hers and his arms around her body. The drunk doctor called out to me “you damn fool” and I went away without putting out the light.’ Latchmi, passenger 124, saw Paterson enter the single women’s quarters around midnight. He went to passenger 137, Nagamah, and ‘remained there quite an hour. All the women began to make a noise and he came out of Nagamah’s compartment and taking a broom ran after and assaulted some of the women.’

Captain Reeves told Magistrate Finnemore that Dr Paterson ‘seemed to joke and laugh with certain unmarried girls more than I thought he should, and I spoke to him about it, but he told me to mind my own business’. Weighing the testimony of ‘wily Orientals’ against that of Paterson, Finnemore ruled in the latter’s favour. However, he did feel that it would be best for Paterson to stand down to avert negative publicity.

Officers disciplined indentured passengers through violent, degrading punishment. Dr WJ Jackson, surgeon on the *Congella* which landed in October 1889, was especially masochistic. He struck Chinmah (passenger 243) six strokes with a cane for refusing to bath. While officials attributed this to the woman’s lack of concern about hygiene, the problem was that secluded bathing facilities were not provided and women were not prepared to bath in public. Latchmi (passenger 200) was struck five times on the right leg because her child messed the deck. When Ramalinam (passenger 315) wet her bed, Jackson drew a pig on her chest, painted her face white, tied her hands behind her back and marched her around the deck for all the passengers to see.<sup>39</sup>

## ***Kapal karay* (boat friends)**

Despite the many hardships, the ship was also a site where long-term acquaintances were made and where love sometimes turned into marriage. Moortee (20132) and Meenathchee (20319), who were indentured to G Fanin in October 1878, formed a ‘liaison’ on board the ship, married, and had three children, Maduroy, Nathaniel and Jaunky, under indenture. They registered their marriage with the Protector on 12 October 1883.<sup>40</sup> Latchmi (32843) and Murugasa Moodly (32776) met on board the ship and married at the depot in Durban.<sup>41</sup> Many migrants became lifelong friends as a result of the comradeship fostered during the voyage. N Chetty told Hilda Kuper that on the journey over the *paglaa samundar*,<sup>42</sup> he ‘made a good friend, he is my *kapal karay*, and we worked together till he retired. Now he lives in Chakas Kraal, and we keep in touch through his daughter-in-law who comes to fetch his pension here, in Tongaat.’<sup>43</sup> Similarly Lal informs us that in Fiji this special bond was called *jahajibhai* (shipmates):

Amidst all the disruption and dislocation, new relationships were being formed, none more important than the bond of *jahajibhai*, ship mates, a bond which neither time nor circumstance would be able to erase. It became the foundation of a new and enduring

and intimate familial relationship...The *jahajis* treated each other like blood kin, with all the obligations and responsibilities that such a relationship entailed.<sup>44</sup>

The comradeship and bonds of fraternity that grew among migrants while they travelled on the same ship bound them and their descendants, especially if they were assigned to the same employer or neighbourhood. Thus we find that shipmates created new networks of social relations and often, as the various biographies reveal, their children married, turning that friendship into family ties. The ties were highly gendered, though, as Espinet points out: 'Banding together for strength, these *jahaji bhais* devised new codes that would force women down on their knees, back into countless acts of self-immolation.'<sup>45</sup>

Recent feminist scholarship has portrayed *kapal karay* or *jahajibhai* as spaces from which women were excluded. According to Mehta, the ties between male shipmates are seen as a 'defensive strategy to survive the trauma of displacement and the emasculation of Indian masculinity'.<sup>46</sup> In the colonies, Indian patriarchy lacked political, economic and national agency and was situated at the bottom of the 'patriarchal chain'. Mehta goes on to say that 'this fractured sense of [Indian] masculinity translated into feelings of male powerlessness symptomatic of the insecurities of indenture'. Migration created for women the possibility of improving their situation relative to men by undermining the hetero-patriarchal foundations of the colonial legacy and Indian ideals of femininity. Indian men, on the other hand, felt weakened as a result of the 'new beginnings, especially in terms of their control over women. The *jahajibhai* enclaves consequently provided the foundation for a defensive, male-centred [Indian] nationalism in which women were either reduced to a conceptual value of idealised femininity imported from Brahmanic India or subjected to violent acts of compliance to salve bruised male egos.'

The tension between women like Votti striking their own path and indentured men trying to rein in those impulses and reassert authority runs through this narrative.

## On the move...again

many things were lost during the nautical passage, family, caste and religion, yet many things were also found, chamars [leatherworkers] found brahmins, muslims found hindus, biharis [from Bihar] found marathis [from Maharashtra], so that at the end of the voyage we were a nation of *jahajibhais*...yet this newfound myth fell apart the moment we docked because the *sahibs* [English masters] hacked our bonds with the sabre of their commands and took us away in dribs and drabs... SUDESH MISHRA<sup>47</sup>

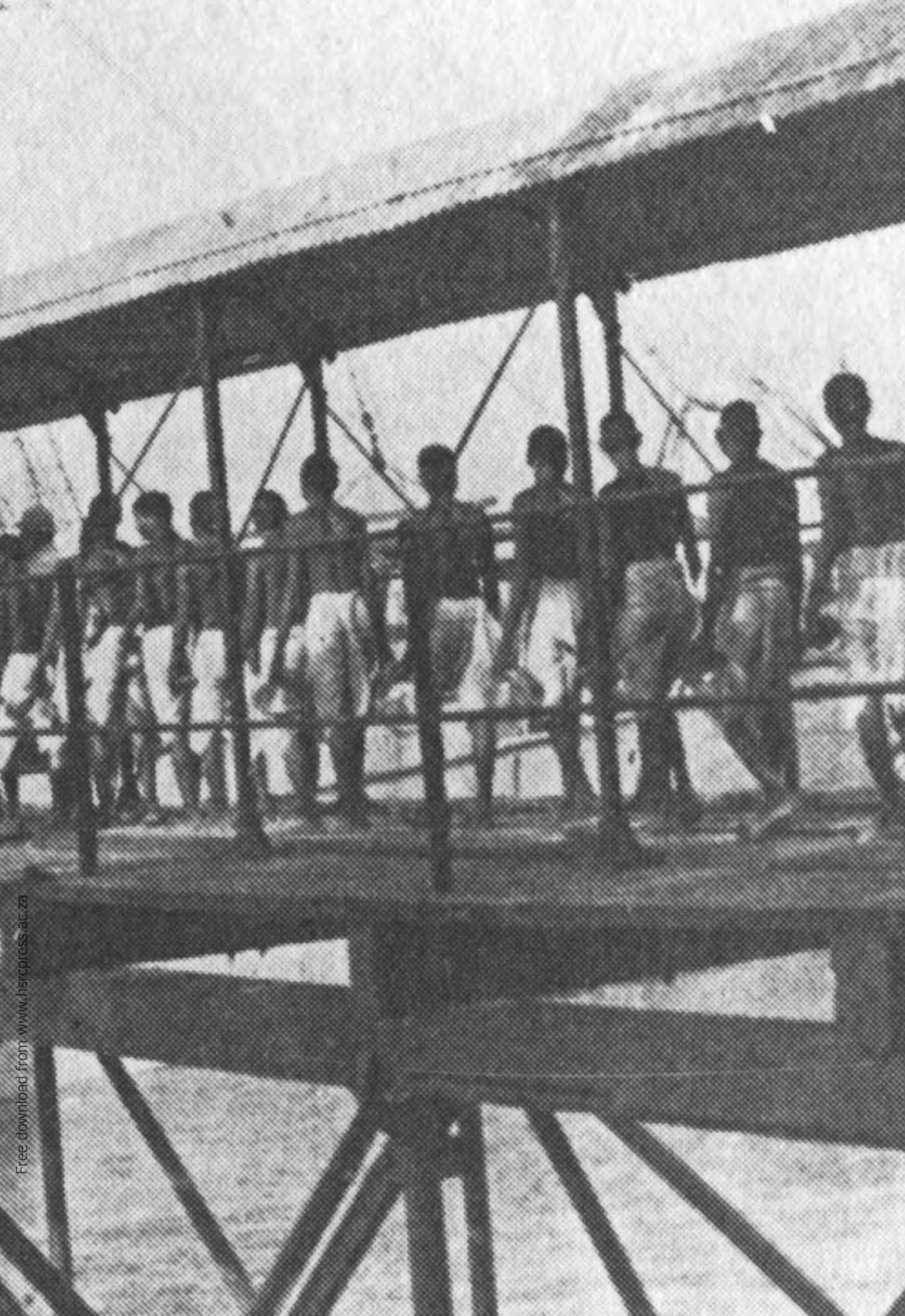
In many senses the journey from village to depot had incredible ramifications. The village had been the sum total of the world for many migrants, and to be thrust onto ships and plantations with strangers, where age-old social distances and customs were tossed aside, must have been disconcerting. The journey hardly provided solace, but there were some who used the opportunity to fall in love and hope that they would be allowed to stay together. Others became lifelong friends, keeping in touch despite the control on movement.

For most, however, the brief respite provided by the new relationships was just as suddenly cast asunder. The ships disgorged their cargo, the indentured were parcelled off to different employers, hasty goodbyes were said to new friends, and they were once more 'on the move'. This part of the journey was often marked by the indifferent attitude of the employer to the difficulties of the journey and, in some cases, by plain callousness. In one instance, for example, Dr WP Tritton of Umzinto reported in 1890 that 'amongst the latest batch of coolies sent to this Circle, some women were sent a distance of over fifty miles from the "depot" very far advanced in pregnancy, in my opinion much too far advanced to be sent such a distance when they would have to walk a good part of the way – two of the women were delivered on the way'.<sup>48</sup>

In all, 152 184 travelled across the *kala pani* as indentured labourers, with the *Truro* arriving first in November 1860 and the *Umlazi XLIII* last in July 1911. Some, like Muniyammah, never made it; some died without completing their indentures; many survived and had varying degrees of success in the new land as 'free' Indians; others returned 'home' permanently. Perhaps most interesting is the fact that many of those who returned 'home' made their way back to Natal, abandoning lives they could never reclaim.







## NOTICE.—IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT.

**T**HE Acting Protector of Immigrants, in continuation of a previous Notice, now has the honour to publish, for the information of Planters and whom it may concern, the exact terms upon which Indian Immigrants have been enlisted for service in Natal.

F. ELTON, Acting Protector of Immigrants.

Immigration Department, August 17, 1874.

### NOTICE TO COOLIES INTENDING TO EMIGRATE TO NATAL.

You will be taken free of expense to Calcutta, and, while there, will be well fed and properly lodged until the ship sails; and should you be ill, the greatest care will be taken of you.

When the ship is ready, you will be supplied with good clothing; the finest ships are selected, and the voyage takes about five or six weeks. The food, medicines, and other appliances on board are of good quality, and your health, comfort, and safety, will be most carefully attended to. The Indian Government has appointed officers, who are most strict and vigilant in securing for you all these advantages.

On and after your arrival in Natal, there is a Protector of Immigrants ready to advise you at all times during your residence there. You will be located on an estate where a medical man is employed.

Your religion will in no way be interfered with, and both Hindoos and Mahomedans are alike protected.

You will find over 5,000 of your countrymen settled there.

You will have a house rent free to live in, with plenty of garden ground to cultivate at your leisure, and care is taken not to separate families and relatives.

The climate is remarkably healthy, and there is an abundance of good water, fruits, and vegetables. If you are ill, medical attendance, medicines, and nourishment, are provided free of charge.

You will be required to cultivate sugar-cane and to make sugar, rum, and molasses. Great varieties of work, either for strong men or for women and children, are available.

You will have to work for five years, six days in the week, for nine hours, between sunrise and sunset—all Sundays and holidays excepted.

Besides rations the men receive for the first year, Rs. 5 monthly; for the second year, Rs. 5½ monthly; for the third year, Rs. 6 monthly; for the fourth year, Rs. 6½ monthly; for the fifth year, Rs. seven monthly. The women are paid half wages, and the children in proportion.

After five years you may return to India at your own expense, and after ten years you will be entitled to a passage back.

You will receive rations as follows:—

1½ lbs. of rice daily, or for three days in the week in lieu of rice	2 lbs of
Dholl	2 lbs. per month.
Salt Fish	2 „ „
Ghee or oil	1 „ „
Salt	1 „ „

H. A. FIRTH, Emigration Agent for NATAL

8, Garden Reach, Calcutta, 21st March, 1874.

# From the Raj to Raju

my destiny was an arkathi with a tongue sweeter than sucrose, who told me a story as steep as the himalayas, and his images had the tang of lassi and his metaphors had the glint of rupees, so that two days later i was on pericles, hauling anchor in the calcutta of my diaspora, and india slipped through my fingers like silk, like silk, it slipped through my fingers...

SUDESH MISHRA<sup>1</sup>

## Ramdeen's story

Ramdeen Ujudha (10596) arrived in Natal on the *Enmore* in January 1875 at the age of 30. He was from Bahraich and, as he told the Wragg Commission of 1885–87 – established to investigate the conditions of indentured workers – the nearest railway line was 80 miles away, while his home was a month's walking journey from Calcutta. In India, he 'did no work except look after two ploughs and see that the people did the work properly'. He served his indenture with Henry Shire at Milkwood Kraal and continued on the plantation for another four years. For 16 months he worked with the hoe; thereafter he was made Sirdar, a position he held for seven years. He earned £1 per month while indentured; this was doubled when he was free. After nine years, Ramdeen joined AD Kennedy in Sea Cow Lake. He did not marry in Natal. 'I have nothing to do with any woman here.' However, when his brother in India died, his sister-in-law and her child joined him in Natal to 'live with me as my wife'.

Ramdeen was due to return to India on the *Umvoti* in 1887 to visit his parents and relatives. He planned to spend a year there before returning to make Natal his permanent home. He was not sure whether his parents were alive. If they were dead, he said, he would return earlier. His wife would not go with him, but 'live on money which I have given to her for her expenses for a whole year. I have left her, as money for such expenses, eight pounds.' He also bought jewellery for her – three bracelets, bangles, a necklace, anklets, nose rings of gold, and a pair of earrings – valued at almost £10. While Ramdeen had not remitted money to India, he was taking back £17 'sewn up in a patch at the top of my trousers at the back. I have some loose silver for the expenses of the way. I shall not have to unstitch my trousers for money before I reach Calcutta. I have also lived well and spent much.' He did not fear being robbed, so long as he kept 'his senses'. He did 'not mind entrusting it [his money] to the captain if I could be certain of getting it on the other side, but I would not entrust it to a coolie'.<sup>2</sup>

OPPOSITE: Notice to 'coolies' intending to immigrate to Natal. Indenture was not always an individual journey into the unknown – some immigrants managed to work the system to their advantage.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Migrants line up to embark from the pier in Calcutta. The ships became sites of massive social disruption as old rituals and ceremonial observances were compromised.

There are many gaps in Ramdeen's story, such as why he left the village to journey into the unknown, but there are also tantalising clues to pursue. While only sketched in its barest outlines, his story gives a wonderful insight into indentured life. It points to the contradictory nature of the relationship with 'back home'. On the one hand is the speedy communication between Ramdeen and his sister-in-law that led to her making a journey across the ocean to build a life with him; the subsequent break in contact with his family and ignorance of the status of his parents stand in stark contrast. Ramdeen's trip to India without his wife for one last nostalgic visit, and his clear desire to return to Natal, make evident that journeys of indenture were complex and intricate; they did not follow a set pattern. In Chapter 9 we pick up why Ramdeen was insistent that he would return to Natal, as he hauntingly reminds us of what the implications of his caste 'betrayal' would be on his (re-)entry to his village.

It is difficult to fill out the picture of what made migrants leave their village, family and friends. This quest is complicated by the fact that the indentured seldom chronicled their reasons; they only left fragments of recollections that belied a myriad of reasons for indenturing. Ramdeen was not an exception. Garriah (129434) of Holmbush Estate, Nonoti, got his manager JV Pearson to write to the Protector on 25 July 1910 regarding the wife, Nookamma, and seven children of his brother Appiah, who had died two years previously. He had heard of the death and wanted to 'adopt' them. They were arriving on the *Umlazi* in August and he offered to pay their fares.<sup>3</sup>

Men like Garriah and Ramdeen probably had to 'rescue' their sisters-in-law because widowhood was considered 'the ultimate scourge of Hindu womanhood'. Without husbands, women were regarded as 'invisible' in colonial India. The death of a husband was considered to result in the woman's own 'moral, spiritual, and, in some cases, physical death'. Widowhood violated 'the *pati vrata* or husband-worship ideal prescribed by Brahmanic codes of morality and social conformity'. While widowhood may have emancipated women from the 'patriarchal contract' in which fathers, sons or husbands imposed moral control 'to safeguard the "integrity" of the Hindu household', it also made women vulnerable. Indian feminist Pandita Ramabai wrote in 1896 that widows experienced 'abuse in the form of starvation, social ostracism, material dispossession, and physical defilement as punishment for having outlived their husbands'.<sup>4</sup>

The ships' lists are filled with the names of many widows. Sundari Ugrah (41795) arrived in Natal on the *Warora* in April 1890 as a young woman of 23. She was of the Barai (betel-vine growers) caste from Ghazipur. Widowed with three children, she had been forced out of the family home. Trying to eke out a living in Calcutta, she was enticed by a recruiting agent. Abandoning her two sons, she clung onto her year-old daughter Bhagirathie (41796) as she boarded the ship. In Natal, she married Dhani Jiawon (37750), a Kurmi (agriculturalist) by caste, from Fyzabad in northern India. He had left home on 5 March 1889 after 'one quarrel too many with his sister-in-law'.<sup>5</sup> The drought that pushed so many to leave the village was causing havoc in his home. His mind drifted to the idea that had been slowly taking root over the previous few months. He imagined himself away from his hardship, in a distant land of gold and riches. There was 'nothing to keep him in the village. Nothing but hardship.' Dhani was 25 when he arrived in May 1889 on the *Congella* and was assigned to Blackburn Estate.

Like Ramdeen's, the journey of many migrants was not a straightforward one from village to plantation. Some followed 'pioneering' family members as they formed a migratory chain, others went back to India and returned for a second stint, some were reunited with family members in Natal after extended separations; there were migrants who were victims of fraud, migrants who returned 'home' when they realised that indenture had been a 'mistake', and migrants who used the system to simply transport themselves to Natal. While the narratives of indenture were multiple, we should not see them as isolated from the overarching context of British imperial rule, the impact of which we discuss later in this chapter.

## The migratory chain

Indenture was not always an individual journey into the unknown, as shown by chain migration. Prospective migrants 'tested' the waters before undertaking emigration. Individuals would come to Natal and, if it was to their liking, family and friends would follow. Correspondence from recruiter Syed Cassim to the Madras Protector, for example, shows that poverty-stricken families sometimes sent a few members to see what conditions were like in the colonies. Cassim queried the 'welfare' of Narainswami Naicker (86083), Kristnappa Naik (86167), Govinthamma (86357), Murivi Ammal Ragavan (86305), Para Thoppalay Munian (86269) and Para Muniammal (86233), who arrived on the *Pongola* in June 1901. 'Their relations here are very anxious to know about them. The mothers of Thoppalay and Ammal are regretting very much for their daughter's departure. Further, if their welfare is known the undermentioned people are prepared to go to Natal. There is no rain here.'<sup>6</sup> Cassim provided a list of 18 prospective emigrants. His comment that 'there is no rain here' underlines the relationship between economic necessity and indenture.

Vellamy (147457), Meenatchi (147458) and their three children, Raja, Pariasamy and Subramanyan, came to Natal on the *Umkuzi* in January 1911. Before leaving India, they entered into an agreement with the Emigration Agent that they would be allotted as close as possible to Meenatchi's brother Nachiyappen, who was a policeman with Mr Higgins at Verulam station. Meenatchi confirmed in writing with her brother that he would adopt Raja and Subramanyan, aged six and three respectively, children from her first marriage. The family was assigned with the Natal Government Railways.<sup>7</sup> In their case, it seems, migration was motivated partly by a desire to be with family and partly so that the divorced (and remarried) Meenatchi could make a fresh start in Natal.

Migrants who followed friends and family to Natal sometimes insisted on being assigned to the same employer. One such woman was Mangah (94570), who arrived from Vizagapatam in August 1902 with her three children and two adult women, Gurrama (94571) and Botchi Auki (94567).<sup>8</sup> This group created a problem for the authorities when Mangah refused to enter into a contract unless they were assigned to the Barrow Green Estate in Port Shepstone, where a relative was indentured. A furious Protector Polkinghorne instructed the immigration department to deport the family. The Attorney-General advised on 28 August 1902 that this would be illegal because Mangah had come under indenture; she did not 'make her way into

nor was she found, in the implied sense, within the Colony, but was brought here and landed by the government'. The fact that she refused to do something which was expected of her did not alter the position. Polkinghorne turned in desperation to the Colonial Secretary on 1 September 1902:

The Board is anxious to put a stop to Indian women coming as Indian Immigrants under false pretences. Mangah (94570) will not sign her contract except she is allotted to her relative who sent for her. The same difficulty happens now on every shipment from Madras. The Board wants to stop this irregularity and would like to probe this irregularity and I would like if possible to have the woman returned to India. I know of no law which would authorize me in taking this action.

The Colonial Secretary decided on 12 September 1902 that Mangah could not be deported. The Protector wrote to India that 'warning should be given that Indians coming as immigrants under false pretences will not be allowed to land in Natal and will be sent back'. Mangah prevailed and joined her relatives at Barrow Green Estate. Clearly, there were Indians with sufficient nous to work the system to their advantage.

## Twice migrants, 'twice born'

Goordeen Bhagoo (41766) and his wife Golaba Lalsa (41767) arrived in Natal on the *Warora* in April 1890. He was 25, she 20. They were of the caste Ahir (cowherd) from Lucknow, though the ship's list has them as 'resident of [French] Guadeloupe', which is located in the eastern Caribbean Sea. Born in Lucknow in 1865, Goordeen moved to Guadeloupe in 1881. After five years he returned to Lucknow, married Golaba and emigrated to Natal. He served his indenture with the Natal Government Railways, and thereafter opened a general dealer's store at Charlestown, and later branch stores at Newcastle and Ingangane. In 1906, he opened a fourth store, Goordeen Bros., at Dannhauser. He farmed extensively and during the South African War (1899–1902) was the only Indian to sell horses to the military. He was prominent in the 1913 strike and was sent by Gandhi from Volksrust to Newcastle to help organise strikers. He also built a temple in Newcastle and was a renowned wrestler. He and Golaba had 16 children. In Natal, it seems, Goordeen dropped Bhagoo and took his caste name as his first name. He died in 1942.<sup>9</sup>

Goordeen's story is significant in showing that migrants were not always 'plucked' fraudulently from villages. He had experienced migration and most likely decided to emigrate to Natal after weighing his options, motivated by adventure or lack of economic opportunities in his home village.

John Thomas, Wesleyan minister, wrote to the Protector on 3 January 1908 about the difficulty that Muthu (81717), the son of Narayanan Muthu (34107/81716) and Alamaloo Moothoosamy (34108/59874), was having paying his tax (the £3 tax on non-indentured Indians). The parents had two indentured numbers because, like many migrants, they had returned to India after serving one term of indenture, found that they could not fit in 'back home', and returned to

Natal. Narayanan, a Pariah (untouchable) from Mathoor, and Alamaloo, a Vellala (village headman) from Nallore in Tanjore, were 24 and 22 respectively when they came to Natal in February 1885 on the *Dunphaile Castle* from Madras. Having met and 'married' during the voyage, they were assigned to Henry Shire. After serving their indenture and spending another five years as free Indians, they took their free passage to India on the *Congella* in March 1895.

They were in Madras for only a few months before Alamaloo re-indentured with her year-old daughter Asakamu (59785), leaving her husband and son in India. They arrived in Natal on the *Pongola* in October 1895. This time she gave her full name as Alamaloo Viran, caste Panchamma (agriculturalists and coppersmiths), from Tiruvalur in South Arcot. They were indentured to the Natal Government Railways and remained there until their indenture was complete on 11 November 1900. Narayanan and Muthu joined them in October 1900. They too were assigned to the Railways and remained indentured until November 1905. Unlike Alamaloo, who had changed her caste, Narayanan gave his caste as Pariah.

Narayanan and Alamaloo registered their marriage on 8 June 1909. Muthu, born in 1887, enters the record books in 1906 when he paid his £3 tax. He is described as having a green tattoo and scar on his forehead.<sup>10</sup> Narayanan and Muthu opened a laundry in Brickfield Road and purchased a home in Overport, where the family lived until Alamaloo's death in 1934 and Narayanan's in 1942. What is of particular interest is that the executor of the estates was Virappen Marimuthu (81968). Virappen and his parents, Marimuthu (81966) and Amirtham (81967), were, like Narayanan, of the same caste, from the same village, came on the same ship and were assigned to the same employer.<sup>11</sup> Again, this rich story illustrates that many migrants came as part of a group. There were linkages of various kinds and movement back and forth between Natal and India.

Migrants had been re-indenturing as returnees from early on. In his Annual Report for 1877, for example, the Protector wrote that many indentured were return migrants. More importantly:

Several of them...have been instrumental in inducing many of their friends and relatives to emigrate which in some measure accounts for the facility with which our Agent has succeeded in obtaining his first three shipments – no need having been experienced for the employment of recruiters. A considerable number too, who did not desire to enter into a contract with the Government have made their way back to Natal coming via Pondicherry and Mauritius and paying their own passages.<sup>12</sup>

This is significant for pointing to the role played by returning Indians in recruiting, and also the fact that some Indians who had returned to India came back as passenger migrants. When the *Unvoti* arrived from Madras on 16 June 1889, of the 204 passengers on board, the Protector stated that 16 were 'old return immigrants from Natal who came as passengers'.<sup>13</sup> The Protector reported to the Colonial Secretary on 2 April 1910 that 'the last shipment from Madras brought thirty-two adults who had previously been in the Colony and they brought with them quite a number of friends and relatives, while the shipment from Calcutta who were landed yesterday contained over forty adult returnees to Natal under indenture'.<sup>14</sup> The Wragg Commission reported that on 30 June 1886 the total Indian population in Natal, excluding

traders, was 29 828 'and, if we include Mauritius Indians and Indians returning to Natal at their own cost, we may take 31,000 as the number of Indian immigrants'.<sup>15</sup>

Employers were wary of returnees, who sometimes developed an 'attitude' because of their familiarity with the system. Lingiah arrived in Natal around 1904 and worked for A Gray of Estcourt. When his indenture was complete, he returned to his village, married Devane and, as arranged with Gray and the Protector, he and his wife were re-indentured to Gray. A few months after they started their indentures, Devane refused to work. She told the Protector that she had married Lingiah 'to look after him'. She was imprisoned and, although in advanced pregnancy, chose to remain in prison. Deputy Protector Dunning concluded that Lingiah 'found that he had not returned to the same conditions as existed when he worked for his master before and has made up his mind to be transferred'. The couple was determined to leave, and Gray and the Protector eventually relented. They returned to Durban on 21 April 1910 to be allocated to a new employer on the coast.<sup>16</sup>

The South African Collieries sent Moideen Sahib (150742) and Musthafa Saib (149796) to India in November 1910 to recruit family labour for the mines. They recruited 11 men and two women, 'all Mahomedans and relatives'. The men were paid £1 per recruit. The problem for the employers was that when they returned, they became 'militant'. They refused to work underground, constantly reported ill and instigated others to 'rebel'.<sup>17</sup>

## The 'quick return'

The story of Ambica suggests contact between family in India and migrants in Natal and points to complex decision-making.<sup>18</sup> Ambica Parshad (142487) was 19 when he arrived in April 1910, and was assigned to Natal Cambrian Collieries in Dannhauser. His father, Kalicharan, a 'licensed vendor of liquor and opium' in Aligarh, wrote to the local magistrate that Ambica had emigrated in 'search of employment' without informing him. The 'separation' had resulted in his 'eyesight becoming defective. I searched for him everywhere but could find no trace of him.' He eventually discovered that Ambica was in Natal but he (Kalicharan) was 'not in such a position as to reach that place, and I have already spent much money in his search. All my business is being spoiled on account of my son's going away.' He appealed to the magistrate to contact officials in Natal so that Ambica could be 'sent for from there. Without his coming here my life is wretched and I am now in a very confused state.' Ambica was married and his wife was living at the home of her father, who was threatening to sue. Kalicharan was prepared to pay 'all the expenses which may incur in his coming here'. Ambica was contacted by the Protector and agreed to go 'home', which he did in March 1911, after being indentured for 11 months. His father had to buy out his contract. The cost of the instalments, rail fare to Durban, depot fees and return passage was around £23.

Alamalu Savu (33630) was 18 when she arrived in Natal from Tanjore in January 1885. She was assigned to H Perron of Muckle Neuk Estate in La Lucia. She informed the Protector on 25 March 1885 that she had 'no relatives in Natal. The only relatives I have are my father and sister and they are in my village in India. I ran away because my father slapped me for not having the food ready.' She seemed, to the Protector, forlorn, and won him over when she told him



that she was not 'strong enough to do any hard work and wish to go back to India. If I am forced to return to the estate I will commit suicide by drowning myself.' The Protector was forced to relent and she returned on the *Dunphaile Castle* on 9 April 1885.<sup>19</sup> In her moment of anger, Alamalu would have been an ideal candidate for a recruiter. But the difficult work and social isolation made indenture an alienating experience and not one she was prepared to endure.

## The reunion

There are some moving stories of families reuniting. Moonien and his wife emigrated to Natal in 1893, leaving their daughter with Moonien's sister, Seeringam Aiyamah, and her husband, A D'Silva, in Madras.<sup>20</sup> After completing his indenture Moonien settled in Duff's Road, where he worked as a barman. After 10 years he decided to make Natal 'home' and wanted his daughter, now 12, to join him. D'Silva contacted officials in Madras, who said that she would have to go as 'a coolie emigrant'. Moonien did not want this and was prepared to pay her fare. He wrote to Parry & Co., the Emigration Agents for Natal, on 6 April 1903. He explained the circumstances and 'beg you will address the agents at Madras, giving them authority to embark my said daughter by the emigration steamer upon my undertaking to pay for her passage; of course, it will be understood that the girl should be delivered over to me on her arrival at the Port of Natal. This would be an act of charity, for which I would prove myself always worthy.' Aiyamah was sent to Natal in June 1903.

Marimuthu Tulukanam (69513) of Chingleput arrived in Natal in September 1897 and was employed as a waiter at FL Johnson's Royal Hotel. Marimuthu kept a meticulous record. He had left India because of poverty and kept in constant contact with his wife, Iyaldum. He arranged in June 1901, through the Protector's office, for Iyaldum to join him, four years after he emigrated.

I very respectfully beg to intrude on your invaluable moments with these few lines in the fervent hopes that it will meet with your paternal sympathy. I beg to attach papers in original which will show how I arrived in this colony and where I am now working. When leaving Madras I was unable to bring my wife along with me and I was necessitated to leave her with my aunt, as both myself and wife have had the misfortune to lose our parents. Lately, my aunt also died and my wife is now living in the house of a stranger. Therefore I wish to send for her to join me here, and to do so I earnestly solicit that you would grant me a permit to send down to her, so as she may be enabled to present the same and obtain a passage ticket by steamer coming to Natal. I am prepared to pay all expenses myself. I also attach my Master's consent in writing giving me permission.<sup>21</sup>

The story of Thunnycody Suther is remarkable.<sup>22</sup> A desperate Suther wrote to the Protector in 1879 that his wife had been indentured by 'mistake':

I beg most humbly to inform you that my wife has been made an indentured coolie of Natal by mistake and I being her lawful husband have come to claim her back and, if possible, to pay expenses. The facts of the case are that about two and half years ago

my wife left Mauritius on purpose to see her mother in Madras. I told her I would follow by the next ship. I being delayed by business was unable to fulfill my promise and my wife after two or three months in Madras got uneasy about me and took her passage in a coolie ship to Mauritius as she thought I was there at that time. But instead of being a Mauritius ship it was bound for Natal. My wife was taken by a gentleman at Ifafa. She says she sent two letters to me but I only received one so I could not have come earlier. But on the receipt of the last letter I came as soon as I could get a ship. This is the whole story of my wife's mistaken indenture. I beg most humbly that you will help me to get my wife back.

The Protector traced her to T Bazley, and wrote to him on 11 August 1879 to release her from indenture. Bazley refused because 'allowing her to go would be a bad example to the other coolies'. Following intervention by the Attorney-General, Bazley agreed on 18 August 1879 to discharge her, but Suther had to pay £15 in compensation. Thus, husband and wife were reunited.

Lutchamma (73366) and her husband, Ramengu, exploited the system to their advantage.<sup>23</sup> After completing his indenture, Ramengu returned to India in 1898 to bring back his wife. As he was short of money and only able to pay his own passage, he returned as a free Indian while she signed an indentured contract, giving her free passage. She arrived in Natal on the *Umzinto* on 2 July 1898. Shortly after her arrival, she asked to be released from the contract. Protector Mason felt that 'it is not her intention to remain in Natal but that the signing of the indenture form was the only means of getting back here to join her husband in Johannesburg'. David Calder, Clerk of the Peace, felt that 'there [was] strong presumption of fraud but no actual proof. Proceedings would be bound to fail.' Lutchamma joined her husband after agreeing to repay expenses.

## The refusal

There are stories also of indenture creating permanent separations because migrants made Natal home.

Chhaju Zaharia (130088) was 20 when he arrived in Natal from Bulandshahar in January 1907 and was indentured to the Dundee Coal Company.<sup>24</sup> Knowing that employers were not keen to recruit Brahmins (priests, members of the highest social division of Vedic people), he gave his caste as Jat (peasants of North India). Zaharia Brahmin, his father, wrote to the Protector of Emigrants in Calcutta in 1912 to secure Chhaju's return for three reasons: he and his wife were old; they were concerned about Chhaju's well-being, ('I might mention here that as a rule Brahmin children are not accustomed to hard manual labours and Chhaju was naturally very delicate'); and Chhaju had a wife in India. The Protector contacted officials in Natal, who informed him that the cost of buying out the contract would be £17. Zaharia could not afford this. Fortunately, villagers came to his rescue: 'Though my circumstances did not permit me to pay the repatriation costs, my village people took pity on my old age and over his young wife [left in India] and subscribed to the amount of 267-8-0 rupees.' This was deposited with the Protector in Calcutta. Chhaju, however, informed his manager that he was

not 'desirous of going to India'. He was 'quite happy and liked his work and at the finish of his indenture in six months on 31 May 1912 he intends to continue working for a further period of four years'. He further stated that he 'liked South Africa better than India'. When this was conveyed to Zaharia Brahmin, the latter wrote to the Emigration Agent in Calcutta that 'the reply that was received was so very disappointing that it nearly killed me and his wife'. The money was returned to Zaharia Brahmin.

## The 'duped'

Come, you from the Grand Peninsula  
Come to dance the immense twilight,  
Here is Money island Rupee island.  
Just lift a stone and be rich.  
Here the master is a friend  
Come for all the gold of Dwipa Aropi.  
The envoys told me.

KHAL TORABULLY<sup>25</sup>

Many of the indentured claimed to have been victims of dishonest and crooked recruiters. Rangasamy, who arrived in Natal in 1862, told the Coolie Commission (discussed in Chapter 4) that recruiter Aperoos Modilia lied about incentives in Natal and bragged to friends: 'Oh, I said they will get ten pounds but they will get nothing but sand.'<sup>26</sup> George Muthukistna told the Wragg Commission that there was 'not the least doubt that the recruiters in India intentionally deceive men, who may perhaps be doing well in their own homes, into coming here, by holding out promises of bettering their condition'.

Govindasamy Suppan (32964) arrived in Natal in November 1884 on the *John Allan* and was assigned to Muckle Neuk Estate in La Lucia. He complained to the Protector in July 1885 that he had been taking surveys and 'drawing plans' for the Railway Department in Madras, while simultaneously studying for his matriculation examination. A recruiter convinced him that he could do the same work in Natal for higher wages. He accepted the offer but was shocked to discover that he had to do 'back-breaking' plantation work.

He told the Protector that by doing 'this base work, I was reduced much and my sense became much confused. If I stay few months in this place, my body will become a prey to this ground. It will be better if I die than loading stone, bricks and earth, and doing menial works. I pray God your Honour will be kind enough to send me anywhere as schoolmaster.'<sup>27</sup> Suppan, tragically, was paralysed from a work-related injury and returned to India in 1890.

Some successfully protested the terms of their recruitment on the basis of false representation. Advocates Dumat and Campbell wrote to the government of Madras in 1886 that five men indentured to the Royal Hotel as cooks and waiters, NL Jones, T Samuel, Moonien, John Lazar and Mooneesawmy, had been recruited by 'fraudulent' means. They left Madras on 15 January 1886 for Calcutta. While waiting at the depot to be inspected by Dr Grant, they heard 'disquieting' stories about Natal and changed their minds about indenturing. Captain Reeves of the *Umvoti* and the Emigration Agent agreed to drop them off at Madras, but instead sailed to Natal 'due

to the smallness of the number of passengers'. The men complained to the Protector upon reaching Natal, but were told that they would have to serve out their contracts. They hired Dumat and Campbell to intervene with the Madras government. A government investigation authenticated their story and they were returned to India on the *Laurel* on 22 February 1887.<sup>28</sup>

F Louch of Effingham asked the Protector to be 'relieved' of three men, Jawak Sing (45520), Jaimangar Rabilal (45698) and Puran Sukke (45699), who said that they were Brahmins who had 'never worked as labourers and never will'. They had arrived on the *Congella* in March 1891. According to Louch, they insisted that the Emigration Agent in Calcutta had promised them 'easy work' and 'falsely' entered a 'lower' caste so that they could emigrate. Sing was listed as a Thakur (part of the Kshatriya military order), while Rabilal and Sukke were listed as Thapar (military). The Protector initially ignored the complainants; however, when they remained defiant, he relented and they returned to India on the *Congella* in July 1891.<sup>29</sup>

In examining stories of deception, we should remember, as Marina Carter points out, that this was more common in the early years, when there was little knowledge of the system or overseas colonies. Historical surveys of indenture have given prominence to recorded cases of kidnapping, abduction and false representation of indenture. This, however, was not the full range of reasons for indenture. Alongside these explanations is the fact that as knowledge of indenture and Natal increased, many migrants would have had a clearer idea of what they were doing.

While many may have been lured by false stories or even threats, there were just as many who emigrated after weighing up the options in their village and its surrounds, options of course circumscribed by the widening ambit of British colonialism. In looking broadly at the impact of British colonial rule, we bear in mind Carter's caveat:

The economic and social transformations played an important part in determining the 'availability' of the raw recruits of colonial migration. Mobility was not necessarily an indicator of willingness to migrate; it was often a sign of vulnerability...Opportunities for recruitment could be created from individual cases of hardship, yet indentured labour did not spring from poverty unaided and the over-arching explanation for migration is seldom found in the migrants' own experience. Recruitment strategies fed off such political and economic conditions, and, operating according to levels of demand from overseas, effectively determined the temporal and spatial features of indentured migration.<sup>30</sup>

There were many casualties from the British push to make their conquest of India in 1763 into a profitable enterprise. Indian subjects were severely affected by land and revenue policies, agricultural and industrial development, and railway construction. The British reorganised the Indian village and economy in important ways. They established a land revenue and taxation system that imposed a greater burden on villagers than had been the case under the Moghuls. The system was known as *zamindari* in Bengal and *ryotwari* in Madras. The *zamindars* (landlords) were tasked with collecting revenues. The concept of private property accelerated the emergence of a landlord class who intensified economic and social exploitation of the peasantry.<sup>31</sup>

British mercantilism had a terrible impact. Trade policies which guaranteed the tariff-free entry of British goods such as embroidery, pottery and silk into India, while imposing protectionist duties on Indian goods entering Britain, destroyed traditional Indian handicraft manufactures.<sup>32</sup> The flood of British textiles hurt town weavers, who had ‘produced goods of high quality, and villages in Madras that had come to specialise in textiles for the market’.<sup>33</sup> Lord William Bentick, Governor General of India, wrote in 1834 that ‘the misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India.’<sup>34</sup>

The transformation of India into the ‘first classic colony of the Industrial Revolution, a de-industrialised consumer of imported British products, and an important provider of primary products [mainly cotton] to the metropolis’,<sup>35</sup> forced thousands of Indians onto the labour market. Le Febour, a surgeon on the *Pongola*, corroborated the link between economic conditions and emigration when he explained to the Indian Immigration Trust Board that ‘the reason the shipments just now are better in number is on account of severity of food. I asked several what they wanted to go to Natal for. They put their hands on their stomachs.’<sup>36</sup>

I fled the misery of the straw-huts of Fyzbad  
 Of Cavares of Ambalcacas  
 To the list I can add the drought  
 In Rajpoutra Sourane  
 The rarefaction of grain and famine  
 In Arcot in Tinnevely in Chingleput  
 And the archives of dust  
 Which deprived me of the fuel of my name...

KHAL TORABULLY<sup>37</sup>

The impact of natural disasters and famines was devastating. Nine famines were recorded in Madras Presidency between 1850 and 1900. The Great Famine of 1876–1879 is estimated to have killed almost 10 million people.<sup>38</sup> This famine, Mike Davis has argued in his superb study, was exacerbated by British policies. In the midst of encroaching famine, Lieutenant Governor Lytton squeezed *zamindars* and tenants for taxes. One of his own district officers described the policy as ‘suicidal’. Millions died at the very time that India’s ‘labor and products were being dynamically conscripted into a London-centered world economy’.<sup>39</sup> Villagers were wrenched from familiar surroundings and put on the march as conditions became intolerable.<sup>40</sup>

Changes in land revenue systems, natural disasters, civil wars and other such factors resulted in many Indians leading a ‘hand-to-mouth existence in a chronic state of semi-starvation, or to use a Gandhian hyperbole, in “perpetual fast.” Life for them was...a ceaseless struggle just to hang on to the very breath of life.’<sup>41</sup> These conditions forced many peasants to look for alternative employment. Large numbers were displaced before indentured recruitment began. There was mass circulation of labour within India by those uprooted by the changes in the rural economy.<sup>42</sup> Jobs were hard to find and international migration was often a means of escape for the poor, displaced and hungry. They may have thought about indenture as a short-term absence from ‘home’ but, for many, temporary sojourn would become permanent displacement.

Economic conditions led Lalita Takravarty to ask: 'When a prospective coolie migrant is pushed so hard in his place of origin, is it meaningful to talk of a choice-margin open to him?'<sup>43</sup>

## The chain of recruitment

Oh recruiter, your heart is deceitful,  
Your speech is full of lies!  
Tender may be your voice...  
But it is all used to defame and destroy  
The good names of people.

FOLKSONG FROM BRITISH GUIANA<sup>44</sup>

While the 'discontents' of British colonialism were ideal targets, the carefully regulated system played a crucial role. From the time they were recruited to their allocation in Natal and beyond, there was close supervision and monitoring of 'the system'.

Indian indentured labour was introduced to Mauritius in 1834. Between then and 1916, approximately 1.3 million Indians went to 14 colonies. Natal started importing indentured labour when the system had been in operation for over two decades. Some of the irregularities had been exposed and attempts were made to address the problems, though the abuses would continue. One significant development was Emigration Act 13 of 1864, which stipulated that instead of being sent to the port, recruits had to be interviewed by a local magistrate to establish that they were leaving voluntarily and understood the terms and conditions of the contract; recruiters also had to take out annual licences and wear badges; and the Protector had to interview each migrant.<sup>45</sup>

Labour recruitment was highly organised. The state supervised the system, from recruitment to ensuring that workers fulfilled the requirements of the law. This was made possible by three-way collaboration between the British Colonial Office, the Indian government and the government of Natal. A network of recruiters tried to sway, convince and pressure Indians to leave home.

The Natal government appointed Emigration Agents in Madras and Calcutta to recruit on its behalf. The Emigration Agent appointed sub-agents who, in turn, employed recruiters. Recruiters utilised unlicensed agents called *arkatis* to extend their reach because they were afraid of *zamindars*, who saw them as competing for the same labour supply, and harassment from police and government officials.<sup>46</sup> Sub-agents were under immense pressure because they were only paid a commission when recruits embarked for the colonies, and had to bear the cost of return if a recruit changed his or her mind. Recruiters were mostly Muslims and higher-caste Hindus.

*Arkatis* operated illegally on recruiters' behalf. WRW James, a former recruiter who subsequently worked as a medical officer in Natal, explained to the Protector, with some exaggeration, that 'ninety-five per cent of the coolies are brought to the recruiters for emigration. The recruiter never stirs out of the town where he has his sub-depot. They sit on the verandahs of their sub-depots and wait for the coolies to come, than tramp the country.'<sup>47</sup>

*Arkatis* were vital cogs in the recruiting machinery as they had an intimate knowledge of those susceptible to enticement. They cut across caste and occupation, and included shopkeepers,

domestic servants and labourers, all keen to exploit the opportunity to make extra money by 'turning in troublesome characters'.<sup>48</sup> Some stalked markets, railway stations and bazaars looking for likely contenders.<sup>49</sup>

According to Hugh Tinker, *arkatis* 'knew who was in trouble, who had fallen out with his family, who was in disgrace, who was wild or wanton. If a big man wanted to get rid of a troublemaker, the *arkati* was in contact. If the police were making things hot for anyone, he was in the know.'<sup>50</sup> *Arkatis* often spun stories of great fortunes that awaited recruits. Mongia makes the salutary point that officials and commissions that condemned indenture on the grounds that Indians were induced 'by misrepresentation and deceit', laid the blame at the door of the 'native crimps' and (Indian) labour recruiters employed by European and Anglo-Indian recruiters.<sup>51</sup>

This largely absolved all from blame except deceitful Indian *arkatis*. But the web was much more extensive. The fact that recruiters were paid per worker, and magistrates, Protectors and medical personnel were pressured to provide recruits, resulted in a longer chain of abuse and both an open as well as tacit acceptance of dubious methods of recruitment.<sup>52</sup>

While a 'continuous history of massive deception seems implausible, there is evidence that cases of abduction and entrapment continued throughout indenture'.<sup>53</sup> Deception, debt, family, adventure and desperation, fuelled by personal circumstances, were part of the mix that saw a steady stream of labourers make their way to Calcutta and Madras.

## From the *arkatis* to the depot

Let us endure the depot  
Why does the boat sail across the sea?  
I remain inconsolable  
But what else is there?  
This depot is rotten  
my mind begins to wander.

JIT NARAIN<sup>54</sup>

Recruits were quickly transferred into the hands of the licensed recruiter at a sub-depot where they could wait up to a fortnight. Deputy Commissioner Manbhum wrote in 1892 that *arkatis* brought 'in coolies generally in the night and in covered carts lest they be seen and detected by their friends and taken away'.<sup>55</sup> They were inspected by the local agent and, if accepted, dispatched as quickly as possible. Sub-agents tried to keep recruits content and in good health because illness or desertion meant loss of income. Strict measures were taken to prevent contact with outsiders. Prospective migrants sometimes expressed a desire to return to the village when the terms of the contract were explained or the reality of indenture dawned. But it was too late. The recruiter would demand the cost of the journey and subsistence from the recruit to secure his or her release. Few could afford this. The recruit was now 'prisoner' of the system, a point made by the magistrate of Ghazipur:

On arrival at the sub-depot the intending emigrants learn of the exact facts of their prospects, and on hearing them, decline to proceed. Very well, says the licensed

recruiter, you are all at perfect liberty to return, but I have a little bill against you for road expenses, and as you have no money I must have your *lotah* (bowl) and *dopattah* (shawl) and anything else that will procure me a refund of the amount I have expended. The wretched coolie may be a hundred miles from his home, and finding that he has the option of returning penniless or of emigrating, chooses the latter; this is not voluntary emigration.<sup>56</sup>

From local warehouses, recruits undertook the lengthy journey to the coast. Before the advent of railways, the hundreds of miles were covered on foot. The journey from Banaras and Patna to Calcutta could take between 30 and 40 days. The railway reduced this to two. Bundled into a single compartment, recruits were unaware that among them could be 'decoys' employed to prevent escapes and feed the propaganda that great fortune awaited them. Once they reached Madras or Calcutta, migrants were 'ready to begin the process of becoming an indentured coolie; henceforth he was just one of many human parts in a vast assembly process'.<sup>57</sup>

Dhani, whom we met at the beginning of this chapter, went first by bullock cart with the close attendance of labour recruiting agents and then by train. Together with recruits from villages in the vicinity of his own, they set off for Calcutta. There, Meer writes, 'they were held for days, prison-like in crowded, unsanitary barracks, waiting to make the sea journey'. All this while the recruiting agents 'scoured the city and villages to secure a full shipload...Not entirely aware of the vast distance he was to travel, the perilous sea journey that was to cut him off from his family, and harsh treatment that awaited him on the sugar farm in Natal, Dhani was filled with thoughts of the better life that lay ahead.'<sup>58</sup>

It started from a dream to follow the stars  
to reach out for some tropical, exotic shore  
where the slim shadows of women dance past the  
candlelight to decorate thatched walls.

ARI SITAS<sup>59</sup>

It was at the depots in Calcutta and Madras that the 'manufacture' of the indentured worker began in earnest. The familiar surrounds of the village were replaced by a bare compound. Movement was carefully policed by the *chowkidar* (watchman). The process of 'dehumanisation' was set in motion as recruits were made to wait anywhere between three weeks and 60 days.<sup>60</sup>

New recruits were subjected to two medical examinations at a 'Reception Shed' to ensure their suitability for hard labour and to minimise mortality so that 'free' labour migration did not degenerate into a 'coolie trade'.<sup>61</sup> But the pressure to fill ships often meant that 'any coolie not suffering from an obvious malformation or displaying evidence of disease would pass'.<sup>62</sup> Medical practice was rudimentary.<sup>63</sup> Le Febour, surgeon on the *Pongola*, admitted that he sometimes passed unfit men: 'once you create dissatisfaction in a village [by rejecting recruits], not a member would volunteer for Natal. Hence it is wisdom sometimes to pass a man not physically perfect, for the sake of the future...Fault finding is very easy but rather annoying to everyone.'<sup>64</sup>

Agents were sometimes 'forced' to include 'unfit' Indians. Doday Jagannaden (147388) arrived on the *Umkuzi* in December 1910 suffering from osteitis, an inflammation of the spine that made him a liability to any prospective employer. The Emigration Agent explained that he had



permitted Jagannaden to proceed 'in consideration of the fact that he had been instrumental in inducing a large batch of coolies, mostly his relations, to emigrate with him'. The 'batch' consisted of 13 men, 23 women, 13 children and five infants from Venkupalam and Anakapalli in Vizagapatam.<sup>65</sup> When the *Quathlamba* arrived in August 1888, Dr Greene complained that the 'aged' Raman Kadvasan (36549), Appavu Naiken (36453) and Kuppusamy (36494) were unable to work. Dr Raju Gopaul, the surgeon in India, explained that they had come as 'dependents' and were accepted by agents because they were members of 'large' families. For employers interested in fit, young labour, such recruits were 'aged' though they were only 32, 34 and 40 respectively.<sup>66</sup>

Around 14 per cent of recruits did not make it on board the ship due to rejection for medical reasons, desertion, a change of mind, being claimed by relatives, or because their relatives were rejected.<sup>67</sup> If approved for emigration, recruits were sent to the 'Accommodation Depot', where they had to wait a minimum of seven days before embarkation. They were examined once more by the Protector of Emigrants before finally embarking. There were some painful experiences at depots as family and friends could be separated. Genash Ganeria, for example, who was indentured to West Lennox Collieries in northern Natal, pleaded with the Protector to locate his brother:

Nearly five years and four months passed, that I and my brother Ram Autar of village Bhadu, Sultanpur, were admitted together at the Cooly Depot of Calcutta. But my brother, on account of bad health, was rejected, and went back to his village home. But I have received a letter from my home in India that my brother has not reached to his home as yet. I therefore request that you will be good enough to make an enquiry at my home. For this act of kindness I shall ever pray for your long life and prosperity.<sup>68</sup>

What happened to Ram? Was he recruited for some other part of the Empire?

As many as 1 000 indentured could stay at the barracks while waiting for ships to fill up. They were awoken at 6:00 a.m. every morning, made to weed and water the gardens until 8 a.m, and then fed curry and rice for breakfast. At 5:00 p.m. they were given a similar meal, allowed some leisure time and forced to sleep by 8:00 p.m. A record was kept for each recruit, detailing marks of identification, names of next of kin, caste and other pertinent details. Officials 'encouraged' migrants to indulge in 'games and amusements to keep away from melancholy and depression'.<sup>69</sup>

## Old ways start to fade

Before all else,  
 India  
 To us Biharis  
 Is a small village  
 In the north.

SOMDUTH BUCKHORY<sup>70</sup>

For many of the soon-to-be indentured, India was, in reality, the world of their village. The patterns and bonds of the village started to unravel in the depot. Barriers of religion and caste

fractured and old attachments began to fragment.<sup>71</sup> Tradition, caste and religion came up against a system that saw migrants as an undifferentiated mass of labour, 'coolies' whose purpose was to make a profit for colonial masters.

The day finally came when the ship was to be boarded. How did the emigrants feel? What thoughts whizzed through their heads? What impressions did they have of the ship, their fellow passengers and those policing them? Excitement, fear, confusion, trepidation, loss and hope intermingled as they set out on their journey. Many, Northrup tells us, would have been 'uncertain and confused' about what lay before them. This may have been due to misinformation by recruiters or because they did not have a geographic understanding of where they were going, though they would have 'grasped the implications of what they had agreed to. The magnitude of the undertaking caused some to desert on the eve of departure and even those who persisted would have suffered from the sadness of leaving home and kin. All but a few would have found life on a large passenger vessel strange and disorienting.'<sup>72</sup>

Clutching a pass in one hand and a disc called the 'tin ticket' adorning the neck, recruits boarded the ship. The number on the disc allowed them to be identified during the journey and beyond. Each migrant was handed a little bundle before boarding. Males were given two *dhotis* (cloths), two jackets and two caps; women were given two saris and one flannel jacket. Everyone was handed a blanket. The *dhoti* and *lota* (bowl) were their most basic possessions. The *dhoti* was a one-piece cloth that Indians wore around their waist; without it they were stripped bare. Without a *lota*, on the other hand, they could not drink water or clean themselves.<sup>73</sup> Migrants took a few possessions of their own, usually bits of jewellery, cloth, medicines, handkerchiefs, turbans and pots. And memories.

They boarded at the crack of dawn. The white manager of the depot was always on hand to ensure that nobody absconded. Departure was traumatic for many. 'Every man, woman and child sensed an amputation, a rupture, a severance with the familiar and an apprehension of the unknown.'<sup>74</sup> The 'myth of return' nourished many. According to Tinker, the 'great majority found the strength to sever the ties with home only because they believed that they would, quite soon, be back again'.<sup>75</sup> For many this was not to be.

K Naicker related to Kuper that he was from a village near Tiruvannamalai. He left his wife in India to seek his fortune in Africa. Shortly after arriving in Natal, he took 'a woman on the estate, a Padayachee. She had one child and had come by herself. I did not marry her by Hindu rites, but registered the marriage.' He wrote twice to his brother but did not receive a reply. By this time, he learnt, it is not clear how, that his 'wife in India was living with her parents'. When his brother did not reply to the second letter, contact between Naicker and his family terminated, permanently. 'I do not write them any more, nor do I get letters.' Kuper reflected that as Naicker spoke, he became terribly sad and sighed, 'I don't know why I left.'<sup>76</sup> Major Pitcher, writing about Lucknow, recorded that many emigrants did not get in touch with family. He had come across wives 'who learnt through me that their husband had emigrated; parents who had given up their children as lost, until I assured them to the contrary...Other wives who knew that their husbands had emigrated, but had vainly waited for news.'<sup>77</sup>

# PROTECTOR OF IMMIGRANTS REPORT

FOR THE YEAR 1877.

Immigration Department,  
Durban, Natal,  
February 26th, 1878.

THE HONORABLE THE COLONIAL SECRETARY, NATAL.

SIR,

I have the honour to submit for the information of His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, and for transmission to the Right Honorable the Secretary of State, and to the Government of India, the following Report for 1877 upon the Indian Immigrants in the Colony :

## I.—ARRIVALS DURING THE YEAR.

During the past year six ships with Emigrants from India have arrived ; three from Calcutta, and three from Madras. The numbers embarked and landed, and the births and deaths which occurred during the voyages, are shown by the following table :

Name of Ship.	Number Embarked.	Births on Voyage.	Total.	Deaths on Voyage.	Number Landed.	Port of Embarcation.
<i>Junna</i> ... ..	423	3	426	4	422	Calcutta.
<i>Glenroy</i> ... ..	463	1	464	1	463	"
<i>Umvoti</i> ... ..	206	...	206	1	205	"
<i>Suffolk</i> ... ..	471	3	474	2	472	Madras.
<i>Northern Monarch</i> ...	498	4	502	12	490	
<i>Umvoti</i> ... ..	215	...	215	4	211	"
TOTAL ... ..	2,276	11	2,287	24	2,263	

NOTE.—The high death rate of the two last ships, may fairly be attributed to the enfeebled state of some of the Emigrants, coming as they did from a famine-stricken region. Eight of the sixteen were children.

The above ships were inspected on arrival, and the provisions of the Indian Emigration Act (VII. of 1871) found to have been complied with. Complaints as to the treatment received on board were only made in one instance, that of the *Northern Monarch*. Some

## The *kala pani*

India receding before the immensity of ocean billows, and now there is no horizon but water, nothing but pani, pani, pani... RAMABAI ESPINET<sup>78</sup>

For Indians, the sea was the *kala pani* and the act of crossing it was considered contaminating and defiling for the soul.<sup>79</sup> It was held to lead to the ‘dispersal of tradition, family, class, and caste classifications, and to the general loss of a “purified” Hindu essence’.<sup>80</sup> *Kala pani* had a much deeper meaning for many Indian villagers. Under British rule, those who committed serious ‘crimes’ in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh had to cross water to serve their imprisonment on the islands of Andaman and Nicobar. *Kala pani* signified a life of internment without return.<sup>81</sup> Many recruits feared that they would be ‘converted into Christians, and the Hindus will be fed with beef and the Mohammedans with pork, the thread of the Brahmins and the heads of the Hindus will be taken off and they not be able to keep their caste’.<sup>82</sup> The decision to emigrate was not taken lightly because it was said ‘those who braved the *kala pani* were automatically compromising their Hinduness’.<sup>83</sup>

By the time the indentured boarded the ship, they would have been away from the village for a long time. In time, the relatives of many would desperately seek information on their whereabouts while the indentured, as they dug deeper roots in their new ‘home’, would harbour thoughts of returning. But as the years passed, and memories and communication faded, so the once ‘temporary sojourners’ would begin to see Natal as home.

This, in its barest outline, would be the biography of many of the indentured. However, this would also be to simplify the experience of indenture and ‘home’. For some, there were many journeys back and forth, and incredible stories of courage and sacrifice to establish home, whether in Natal or India, as the struggles of Raju and his family bear witness.

## Asking for Raju

Refugees are going home. But for what? For many people, the trauma of being driven from one’s home will now be matched by the shock of returning to a home that does not exist.<sup>84</sup>

Attorney SC Hyam wrote to the Secretary of the Interior on 20 March 1924 regarding his clerk Parsapogee Prayanadham, who had arrived as an indentured worker in 1900. In Natal, he married Maria and they had three children, George, Rajandran (Raju) and Sastrulu, all born under indenture. The family returned to India in 1907. Like many returning migrants, they had difficulty reintegrating into Indian society. So this family from Guntur in Madras returned to Natal, not as free migrants but as re-indentured. Parsapogee (138699); Maria (138700); Rajandran (138701), aged six; George (138701), aged three; and Sastrulu (138702) returned in December 1908. They were part of a group of 28 Lutherans who were assigned to Kearsney Estate in Stanger. This experience was symptomatic of many returnees. After serving their five-year indenture, Parsapogee, now free, took up employment with Hyam as head Sirdar on his

Fairview Estate in Umhlali. Concerned about Raju's education, Parsapogee sent him to live with an uncle in India in July 1913. He completed his schooling at the ABM High School in Guntur District. When Raju sought to rejoin his family in 1922, he was surprised to learn that he had forfeited his right of return. Hyam wrote to the Secretary of the Interior, describing Parsapogee as a 'most industrious, sober, and reliable servant; while his home life is exemplary. He is a man who has a great attachment for his children; whose upbringing reflects the utmost credit to both their parents.'

For Hyam, to prevent Raju's return would 'cause very great unhappiness and sincere grief to two very worthy and affectionate parents who now are faced with the prospect of never again being able to see or meet their child. The expense of the Father, Mother and Family paying a visit to India to see their son and brother puts the matter out of the question as will be readily admitted.' There was one more reason, Hyam explained, why Raju should be allowed to return, and that was to be with his wife. Hyam explained that in 'accordance with custom, the daughter of a very old friend of the Father's, also an Indian resident in Natal, was betrothed to this son at her birth; the marriage to be eventually consummated here upon his return from India. This betrothal still exists; and it is the earnest desire of all the parents, as well as the betrothed, that this marriage shall take place.'

GW Dick, the immigration officer in Durban, informed the Secretary of the Interior on 16 February 1923 that if permission was 'withheld it is quite likely that the young man will not be brought owing to the difficulty he will experience in obtaining passage on the other side'. Frustrating Raju was obviously one way to prevent his entry. As a compromise, Raju was allowed to return to marry on condition that his father provided financial guarantees to ensure that he did not remain in Natal.<sup>85</sup>

Stories like Raju's allow us in some ways to complete Ramdeen's biography. The journey of indenture was multifaceted; in fact, it sometimes involved many journeys, and it is this that forms the thread that binds the 'scattered' narrative of indenture. It is a story of the attempts of the Raj and white settlers to 'control' the system of indenture as much as it is the story of determination by the indentured like Raju not to succumb to the 'rules of engagement' and the outcomes predetermined by those in power.

It is this dynamic at the heart of indenture – of contestation and collaboration, of confrontation and concession – that we seek to capture as we move the indentured from the margins to the centre of the narrative. While accepting that indenture was debasing, our focus is on how Indian migrants 'experienced the system...[and] the ways in which the indenture experience led to the creation of a new kind of society' in Natal.<sup>86</sup>

Once we recognise that the indentured were not mere units of labour, or numbers, it becomes possible to see them as not simply 'made' by history, but also as the makers of history.





II 1/6

DEPT No. 4631

# MAN'S

HEALTH CLASS

## EMIGRATION CERTIFICATE.

No. 71

Ship *S. S. Enmore*

8, GARDEN REACH, CALCUTTA, the *5<sup>th</sup> Decr* 1874.

Name..... *Beeroye* 10222  
 Father's name, ..... *Nunda*  
 Age, ..... *36*  
 Caste, ..... *Kavote*  
 Height, ..... *5* Feet. *4 3/4*  
 Name of next-of-kin..... *Sen Dhonye*  
 If married, to whom,..... "  
 Zillah, ..... *Butee*  
 Pergunnah, .. ..... *Pauvee*  
 Village, ..... *Asogwa*  
 Bodily marks,..... *Protruding chest*



I certify that we have examined and passed the above-named man subject for emigration as an agricultural labourer; that he is free from bodily and mental disease, and has been vaccinated.

*[Signature]*

Surgeon Superintendent.

*[Signature]*

Deput Surgeon.

I hereby certify that the man above described (whom I have engaged as labourer on the part of the Government of Natal, where he has expressed his willingness to proceed to work for hire) has appeared before me, and that I have explained to him all matters concerning his duties as an Emigrant according to Section 38 of Indian Emigration Act VII. of 1871.

COUNTERSIGNED.

*[Signature]*

Inspector of Emigrants at Calcutta.

*[Signature]*

Emigration Agent for Natal.

*Beeroye*

*Dhono*



# 'Master Coolie' arrives

and in the salt chuckle of rocks  
with their sea pools, there was the sound  
like a rumour without any echo  
of History, really beginning.

DEREK WALCOTT<sup>1</sup>

The *Belvedere* left Calcutta for Port Natal on 4 October 1860 and the *Truro* disembarked from Madras on 12 October 1860, just months after emigration to Natal was formally sanctioned by the British India Act No. 33 of 21 July 1860. Departing passengers were personally inspected by the Emigration Agent and the surgeon, and an emigration certificate was issued to each passenger.

This was a significant document. As Mishra points out, it marked the entry of the indentured 'into imperial history. People without history, people who are illiterate, finally spell out their personal genealogies – their father's name, their village, their next of kin, their marital status, their age – and undergo, for the first time in their lives, a medical examination by the depot surgeon'.<sup>2</sup>

The *Truro* reached Durban first, on 16 November 1860, as it had 1 200 fewer miles to cover. When this first group of indentured landed on the shores of Natal, the Zulu were still locked in battle with the British. In time, they would witness Isandlwana, the much heralded defeat of the British army by the Zulu (1879), and Bambatha (1906), a rebellion that was marked by a brutal colonial response. In these rebellions were reflections of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, probably fresh in the minds of many migrants.

The beginnings were inauspicious, as described by the *Natal Mercury's* editor, John Robinson:

A very remarkable scene was the landing of the first batch of Indian indentured labourers and one well worth remembrance and record. Most of the spectators who were present had been led to expect a lot of dried up, vapid, and sleepy-looking anatomies. They were agreeably disappointed. The swarthy hordes came pouring out of the boat's hold, laughing, jabbering, and staring about them with a very well satisfied expression of self-complacency on their faces...A queer, comical, foreign-looking, very Oriental-like crowd. The men, with their huge muslin turbans, bare scraggy skin-bones, and coloured garments; the women with their flashing eyes, long dishevelled pithy hair, with their half

OPPOSITE: An emigration certificate was issued to each passenger as they disembarked. This document marked the entry of the indentured into history as people spelled out their personal genealogies and were examined by a medical officer.

PREVIOUS PAGE: One onlooker described the arrival of the first boatload of Indians as 'swarthy hordes [who] came pouring out of the boat's hold, laughing, jabbering, and staring about them with a very well satisfied expression of self-complacency on their faces...'

covered, well-formed figures and their keen inquisitive glances; the children with their meagre, intelligent, cute and humorous countenances mounted on bodies of inconceivable fragility, were all evidently beings of a different race and kind to any we have yet seen...Master Coolie seemed to make himself quite at home, and was not in the least disconcerted by the novelty of his situation...The boats seemed to disgorge an endless stream of living cargo – Pariahs, Christians, Malabars, and Mohomedans...<sup>3</sup>

Contrast this with Robinson's description of British immigrants in September 1860:

Such rosy, weatherbeaten visages; such hardy, thickset features; such bounceable babies, and inquisitive youngsters; such broad British accents, and hearty outspoken welcomes; such supreme satisfaction on every countenance, as though the consummation of bliss were to be a way of shipboard, and as if the great battle of new world existence were finally ended, instead of just commencing.<sup>4</sup>

While many of these British immigrants, like the indentured, would have been victims of the enclosures that forced them off their land, they arrived with the expectancy of free plots of land or jobs that did not have any of the strictures of indenture. Affirmative action has a long history in this neck of the woods!

The indentured were brought to work on the farms of British settlers, for whom shortage of labour, or rather access to ultra-cheap labour, was a major problem. The indentured arrived in an environment in which the local African population was treated with racist contempt. Buttressed by the voices of the church, a link was made between African inferiority and the drive to turn them into workhorses for the colonists. RJ Mann's *The Colony of Natal*, written in 1859, described the local population as 'the wild *kafir*' that possesses 'blind and unreasoning rage...uncivilised barbarians [who] very much resemble the lower and irrational members of creation...He likes to roam free over his wild hills and sit and dream at his own pleasure in his kraal; but he can be made to bend to the rein and the spur.'<sup>5</sup>

There was to be no humanity in showing up the supposed inhumanity of the African as attested by Sir Garnet Worsley, the governor of Natal in 1875: 'I am convinced that for the management of a barbarous people the only punishments ever likely to be effective for keeping them in order are flogging and death.'<sup>6</sup> The civilising mission was often driven by the need to turn Africans into labourers. For example, in 1855, Methodist missionary Reverend WC Holden called for the abolition of polygamy, because it would 'send thousands to work who are at present supported in independent idleness by their wives...But let the *kafir* have only one wife, and he will be obliged to work.' But the Zulu proved resilient in fending off the British. As Jeff Guy points out, it is not necessary to romanticise the pre-colonial Zulu social structure to understand why they resisted change:

The pre-1879 Zulu social formation created in its people a self-sufficiency and a sense of totality which they knew was intrinsically valuable and absent in the manner of existence that their enemies wished to force on them. Once mature the great majority of Zulu were entitled to land and they worked it themselves...The destination of the

surplus was known, and the purpose to which it was applied included their own security. Men and women remained in close proximity to the instruments and means of production, and were involved in the labour process from start to finish. When disasters occurred there were a number of social devices to pull any individuals who had lost access to the means of production into the productive process.<sup>7</sup>

The conquest of the Zulu was to be a long process; too slow for the immediate labour needs of the colonists. But as the nineteenth century merged into the twentieth, the Zulu were increasingly subjugated, their land progressively alienated and their taxes multiplied. The colonists would become more and more attracted to Zulu labour, partly as a means to lower labour costs and partly to avoid making the political situation any more complicated in terms of the racial demography of the population.

## The *Truro*

And I anchored in Durban, Fiji, the West Indies,  
In the dust of waves.  
To be scattered in the gales of continents.  
In the currents of continents.

KHAL TORABULLY<sup>8</sup>

The *Truro* arrived at Port Natal on 16 November 1860. By the time the indentured migrants saw the outlines of the harbour, it would have been over 100 days since they had last seen home. The long walk from their villages and the confines of the depot in Madras was followed by a month at sea. There was no immediate respite. Much would have been going through their minds. The ‘coolie barracks’ at Addington was not ready so they were placed in temporary barracks on the Bluff, not the ideal start after their long and difficult journey.<sup>9</sup>

They would have been occupied with ‘curiosity about home to be, mixed with a yearning for the home that was. Even the old ship, which in moments of great discomfort was cursed, was now left behind with a tinge of regret.’<sup>10</sup> The barracks, in time, became a place from which the newly arrived sometimes tried to escape, with the magistrate of Durban reassuring the white public in June 1862 that ‘to prevent absconding and absence of coolies at the time of distribution, high walls have been built around barracks’.<sup>11</sup>

It was only on Wednesday 21 November that the Coolie Immigration Agent Edmund Tatham visited the barracks. He had been appointed two days after the *Truro* arrived, and ‘galloped through the night from Maritzburg to take up his duties’.<sup>12</sup>

The names of the passengers were recorded in an Indian Immigrant’s Register which would subsequently contain other details, such as the name of the employer/s, period of employment and significant events in the migrant’s life. Mishra points out that the emigration certificate, together with the Register, interpellated the indentured ‘as a “modern” or “Enlightenment” subject, but the knowledge through which this subjectivity [was] created [the information on the certificates] was not known to them. The migrants can’t use these certificates; they do not know their contents.’ But it was through these certificates, preserved in archives, that we can give ‘a certain [retrospective] humanity to a people without “history”’.<sup>13</sup>

Although 342 passengers appear on the *Truro's* list, passengers 143 and 274 were 'not shipped', while passenger 151 'absconded' (absconding was a persistent feature of indenture, with one study putting the figure at 15 per cent).<sup>14</sup> A total of 339 Indians arrived in Natal: 189 males over 16, 80 females over 16, 35 boys and 35 girls. The 95 Christians (33.9 per cent) represented a high proportion in relation to the overall composition of Christians, which was less than 2 per cent of the indentured population. Not all were agricultural workers. There were carpenters, barbers and accountants among the men, and *ayahs* (nursemaids) among the women.<sup>15</sup>

Reaction to the arrival was mixed. While many were critical of what they termed the 'Coolie Farce', a letter to the *Natal Mercury* more optimistically foresaw the time when 'our housewives would be relieved from the menial labour of the kitchen, shirtless and indecent *kaffirs* superseded by clothed and decent coolies...I see gardens kept in order...Horses well groomed...These are minor advantages certainly, but they are conveniences which tend very materially to our enjoyment of life.'<sup>16</sup>

First off were Naguim, her husband Davarum, and their young children, Elizabeth, who was 18 months old, and four-year-old Kirbay. Last off were Nagapen Moneesamy, Veerasay Cunnee and Coombalingum Amachellum from Bellarny in Malabar. Local officials recorded that all three had *godna* (tattoo) marks on their forehead. In Indian colonial society, these highly visible marks aimed to deter offenders and others from committing crimes. This deliberately violent wounding of the skin was a practice that colonial regimes employed to 'teach' a lesson that 'would infiltrate deep into the consciousness of colonised subjects' about the consequences of violating rules.<sup>17</sup> They were assigned to different employers. Moneesamy was assigned to H Middleton and left Natal for the Transvaal or Kimberley after serving his indenture; Cunnee and Amachellum returned to India on the *Red Riding Hood* in 1871.

While the first indentured worker to be assigned was Sheik Ebrahim (49), just four days after his arrival, many of the indentured had a long wait at the barracks, some as long as three months.<sup>18</sup> Some of this had to do with the fact that Tatham was unprepared. Five years after the arrival of the *Truro*, he was to reflect that he was 'overwhelmed by the influx of a large number of strangers, the habits and names of whom entirely unknown to us'; this was compounded by the fact that he had 'neither office, furniture, books, forms or papers of any description, beyond contracts of service'.<sup>19</sup>

By now the indentured would have been on the move for almost half the year. Neglected, living in cramped quarters and left largely to fend for themselves, many became ill. Forty-year-old Kaghery (12) died from exposure on 13 December 1860. Children, ranging from 18 months to 10 years, were particularly affected. Bounded by the discipline of the depot in Madras, squeezed by the tight quarters on board the ship, their plight was further compounded by prolonged confinement on the Bluff in abysmal conditions. Of this 'consignment', three employers, RB Kennedy, J Greetham and A McLeod Hunter, took 150 workers between them; other significant employers included Henry Shire, Aling Osborn, Samuel Bishop and Richard Acutt.

For some, having nurtured their children through what they thought was the worst of the journey, there was wrenching pain to come. Choureamah Aurokuim (99), a 34-year-old Christian woman from Trichinopoly, was separated from her daughters, eight-year-old Megaleamah

(100) and three-year-old Susanah (101). Choureamah was assigned to Grey's Hospital; Megaleamah was considered to be of working age and apprenticed to A Brewer in July 1861; while Susanah was apprenticed to Isabela Ottava. Choureamah, cruelly separated from her young children, died in September 1863. Little is known about her daughters, stripped of their mother, ripped from each other and orphaned before the age of 10.<sup>20</sup>

One intriguing figure on the *Truro* was Chengiah Tirpalay (219) of Chittoor. He must have displayed special qualities as he was sent almost immediately to India on the *Umvoti* in September 1861 as a 'special recruiter'. He returned shortly after, completed his indenture with A McLeod and remained in Natal until 1892, when he left for Johannesburg which, by then, was awash with tales of gold and unbounded opportunity.<sup>21</sup> Dawood Khan (43), aged 34, supposedly 'lost his mind' during the voyage, and was returned to India on grounds of insanity on the *Cataraqui* in November 1862. Khan listed his caste as 'African'. Issues of caste, identity and insanity are all themes we turn to later in the book.

Sheik Ebrahim (49), his wife Janah Bee (50) and daughters Sultan Bee (51) and Coder Bee (52), aged four and three, were assigned to the Natal Government Railways. (It is noticeable in the Immigrants Register that the names of many Muslim women ended in 'Bee', though we are not sure what this signified.) They gave their caste as Fakir, (a community of mendicants whose main economic activity historically had been begging). They were in a minority, having migrated as a nuclear family. Sheik Mustan (327), aged 37, came with his sister Fatima Bee (328), aged 13. They were separated in Natal, with Mustan assigned to the railways and Fatima to W Wilson. Sheik Moideen Emam (292), who was 26 and from Vizagapatam, joined the police force, making him possibly the first Muslim policeman in Durban. He must have come with money as he paid almost £7 to annul his indenture. Mariam Bee (238), who was 28 and from Bangalore, came with her month-old child Syed Hassim (239). The records show that little Hassim returned to India on the *Red Riding Hood* in 1871, while his mother, who had been assigned to Henry Shire, died in Natal in December 1882. We have no means to unravel the mystery of their separation; suffice to say that some of the reasons we put forward as factors causing single women to emigrate may have prevented her return. The 24-year-old Janah Bee (235) from Vijayapatam came as the 'wife' of Moonesammy Pentee, a cross-religious 'marriage' of which there would be many. Twenty-six-year-old Roshen Bee (237) from Bangalore, Mysore, was described as having a *godna* mark on his forehead, suggesting punishment for an unnamed transgression.

Thirty-year-old Sheik Ahmed (282) from Chittoor was posthumously hailed as a great saint. He was of the Julaha (lower-caste Muslim weaver) caste, a landless community whose traditional occupation was weaving.<sup>22</sup> He was assigned to RG Mack and transferred to F Salmon in December 1861. Thousands of Indians of all religious persuasions flock yearly to the shrine of Bādshāh Pīr, as Sheik Ahmed came to be known, at the Brook Street Cemetery in Durban.<sup>23</sup> Other migrants and their progeny also became important figures. One of the greatest Indian cricketers, MI Yusuf, who achieved international fame for scoring a monumental 412 not out in Bulawayo in October 1936, which remains the highest score in any match in southern Africa and was recorded in the cricket 'bible' *Wisden*, was the grandson of Syed Abdollah (279) of Cuddalore and Mariam Bee (238) of Madras, who married on the *Truro*. After serving their

indentures with Henry Shire, they followed the trail to the Kimberley diamond fields. When Abdollah returned to Durban, he worked as an interpreter at the Durban prison. His son, Deen Mahomed Fakir Yusuf, MI Yusuf's father, also became an interpreter.

There were 'rebels' on the *Truro* too. Migale Piriam (299) and Annamah Nynan (300), Christians from Bangalore, were assigned to A McLeod. They arrived with a son of seven, Chinapen, and a daughter of four, Chinamah. After 10 years, Migale decided to return to Bangalore with his family. Chinapen and Chinamah, teenagers by then, 'absconded' or, in the language of indenture, 'deserted'. They were eventually captured and deported to India with their parents on the *Red Riding Hood* in 1871.

These pioneers of indenture were dispersed to different parts of Natal. Some friends and families never saw each other again. There were as yet few networks of communication and they had to contend with an environment in which their 'supposed inferiority' was taken for granted by the colonists. As Lord Cromer put it more crudely, there were two kinds of people in the world, those who were British and those who were of the 'subject races'.<sup>24</sup>

Brought exclusively for a life of labour in a colonial environment that saw them at best as numbers, there are very few records of those who came on the *Truro*, which remains the evocative signal of a new beginning.

## The *Belvedere*

Handrails etched into Syrian hands  
Warm from much gleeful rubbing  
Of anticipated early morn landfall  
After too many sea-kept mornings...  
Much shouting of shrill lead voices  
Broke the flat sea glass-faced death  
Arms fell cold in chilled killer swell  
Landlubbers sank in sifted black sand  
Soles dragging across raw coral cuts...

MOHIT PRASAD<sup>25</sup>

'Belvedere' refers to a gazebo commanding a magnificent view. Explaining this to the indentured on the *Belvedere* would have been ironic given their experiences. The 342 passengers were subjected to a much longer journey than those who came on the *Truro*. They left Calcutta on 4 October 1860 and reached Natal on 26 November, spending 54 days at sea. The longer journey took its toll as 29 migrants died from cholera, dysentery and other illnesses. Another 10 died on shore before being assigned to an employer. In addition, 18 more died before their time in the colony was up.<sup>26</sup> One migrant, Keerty (630), was 'not shipped'. The demographics of the 313 passengers were somewhat different to those of the *Truro*'s passengers. There were no Christians, the proportion of women (25.7 per cent) was lower and almost 13 per cent (40 migrants) were Muslim.

Cholera and dysentery stalked the *Belvedere*. In the absence of a description of the journey, we rely on the effect of cholera as it took hold of a ship bound for Guyana in 1859:

A strong looking man died four hours after being attacked. He was quickly followed by his wife and three of his four children. Soon the cholera was taking men, women and children to the number of four or five a day. The ship was filled with wailing and lamentation, the distress of the coolies who had lost their husbands, wives, or children, being heart-rending.<sup>27</sup>

The one tribute we can pay to those who died at sea or after landing at Port Natal is to record the names that are available: Lubnoyan (passenger 382); Mudhoo (387); Goburdhun (395); Gunga (401); Urjoon (407); Chummum (410); Goghurdun (418); Caullichurn (437); Allibaccus (441); Hinggoo (442); Bhooloo (446); Eddoo (474); Lotoo (511); Bhola (539); Fokeera (564); Dooblokhea (564); Godapoy (585); Dhunee (586); Russnee (600); Mayna (611); Jeetony (617); Soophul (644); Jugroo (646); Modhoo (654); Dhurma (655); Soophul (657); Luchnee (670); Juttoo (675); and Boodhny (677). The following 10 persons died on shore within a few days of landing: Bhauttoo (344); Gokhool (345); Goolam Hoosan (351); Jhothe (355); Guzadhur (361); Muggan (426); Ram (432); Beenud (435); Sanjay (535); and Luchman (546).

We know their names but their biographies died with them. Most were young men in their early twenties, probably sent out by families who were counting on their remittances. Some may have left wives and children behind. Despite the tragedy, Captain WB Atkinson reported 'all well' when the ship docked. Questioned why he had said all was well when there was such a high death rate, he replied to the Attorney-General that he meant that there were no cases of 'contagious and malignant diseases'.<sup>28</sup> Disease and death continued to pursue the passengers of the *Belvedere* on landing.

The ship was placed in quarantine on arrival and on the instructions of the Health Officer, the clothing and bedding of the 313 survivors was burnt and replaced. The passengers were housed in a lazaretto and in some tents hurriedly put on the Bluff side of the Bay. Dropsy, dysentery and insanity complemented the cholera – the colonists lived in fear of infection, and resented the extra cost that the calamity had incurred. One can only surmise the state of the *Belvedere* passengers, almost dead with the sheer exhaustion of their 54 days on sea and drained of practically all spiritual reserve, they probably did not even have the strength to regret their coming. If they dwelt on their plight at all, then in typical tradition they must have explained it all as awful punishment [*karma*] they had brought upon themselves for deserting their families and their villages...Ten more died in the wooden lazaretto and stuffy tents in which they awaited their recovery and removal.<sup>29</sup>

We are able to discern the bare outlines of others who arrived on the *Belvedere* and their lives in Natal by tracking the archives backwards and forwards using clues like marriage certificates. One woman in particular, Beemby (1844–1901), stands out because her daughter would marry into the famous Bodasing family on the north coast. Beemby Keenoo (606) was 16, caste Kahar (water carrier) from Hazaribagh, when she arrived in Natal. She married Subnath Bissoonoth Roy (7490), a Chutree (*dhobi*/fisherman) from Shahabad, who served his indenture

at Ottawa. They had a daughter, Lukhia, who was named after Beemby's shipmate, 20-year-old Lukhia Hullen (605), who spent 10 years in Natal before returning to India on the *Red Riding Hood* in 1871. Lukhia married Boodha Sing Dulel Sing (8726), who laid the foundation for arguably the biggest Indian landowning family of indentured stock.

Sixty of the passengers were assigned to James Saunders' Tongaat Estate. In the absence of the voices of the indentured, we rely on Watson's reconstruction of Saunders' first meeting with his workers:

James surveyed the fifty-two souls comprising this first batch of indentured immigrants without enthusiasm. They squatted dejectedly in small groups, according to religion and caste, outside the *kaffir* huts in which they had spent the night of their arrival on the Estate, like martyrs awaiting the lions. Exhausted by their long, hot and dusty march from the port, discouraged by their strange and uncomfortable quarters, and cowed by the taunts, handling, and laughter of the savage-looking *kaffirs*, they seemed a frail and miserable sample. They appeared to be, at the best, five-and-twenty able-bodied men. According to the manifest, two were Brahmins [priests] and five were Rajputs – Kshatriyas [soldiers]. Eleven able-bodied women, of whom four at least were pregnant.

The largest of these wretched clumps of humanity consisted of the Muslims in the assignment, four men, five women, and a young child – a girl. There ought to be no difficulty, thought James, in drafting these to the labourers' gang, though the youngest male, a handsome youth in a green turban, three-quarter-length tunic, and full loose muslin pantaloons, a Punjabi Pathan named Salar Khan, seemed a cut above hoeing sugar-cane. The breeding that showed in his face and bearing – in spite of his wretched condition – seemed too gentle and distinguished for servile employment. The girl, Chandoo, who sat close to him, surreptitiously holding his hand, was also above the ordinary.

'Are you two husband and wife?' demanded James, trying in vain to soften his habitually stern look.

'N-no, sahib,' murmured the boy.

'Friends?'

'Yes, sahib.'

'Well, you're both here for five years. You'd better get married.'

'But hold hard! What's this?' He turned to the girl. 'You're not a Muslim.' She wore the pantaloons, the three-quarter tunic, and the *dawni* – the two-and-a-half yards of material with an embroidered border which Muslim women wear as a head scarf, draping the head and shoulders, but the name and the faintly tattooed centre line on the brow were Hindu. She wore earrings, nose-stud, and bangles, but the Hindu anklets were gone.



'I declared to the Protector of Emigrants at Calcutta,' replied Chandoo, drawing the *dawni* across the lower part of her face, and speaking with quiet composure, 'that I was willing to embrace the Faith if I might remain with this man. But he gave me no paper.' 'Now where,' thought James, 'can I find a Mohammedan priest to make an honest woman of her?'

The next to be attended to were the Brahmins. He who appeared to be the elder of the two males comprising this group wore a saffron-coloured turban and had a long rosary of large brown beads round his neck. Through the hazy lenses of an old pair of steel-framed spectacles he read from the brown and dog-eared pages of a paper-backed book. As he read, he chanted what James rightly supposed to be sacred mantras. Several of the Hindus squatting near him had steepled their hands in the customary gesture of reverence, and an elderly woman of the Ahir caste – that of the cowherds and dairymen – had placed a piece of camphor on a small brass tray and lit it, and was weaving it among the little assembly, as if sensing the precinct. Neither the Brahmin priest nor his younger companion took the slightest notice of James when he addressed them.

So he gave his attention to the next group, the Kshatriyas – the Rajputs or warrior caste, of whom there were five, all males, all youths except one middle-aged fellow named Dussah Sing. The most satisfactory solution for these people, thought James, was to offer them the opportunity – spurned by the *kaffirs* – of clearing and cultivating the forest. But he'd have to get five years work out of them first.

A young couple of the Sonar, or goldsmiths, caste, Jugmoheen and an exceptionally pretty girl, Khadeen, were obviously man and wife. Their profitable employment on the estate would also be difficult. Doubtless the recruiters had assured Jugmoheen that he would find work at his own trade; in any case Khadeen was not far off her time. The remainder, apart from the old, the physically disabled, and the pregnant, presented no great problems, consisting as they did of two Kumbhar couples – traditionally potters – a young family of the sweetmeat-makers' caste, a barber, five men and three women of the Ahirs, the cowherds and dairymen, four whose caste was associated with the catching of snakes and reptiles, three gardeners, two shoemakers – Chamars – and four Bagdee, or sanitary cleaners. The last two groups, being untouchables, sat at some distance from all the others.<sup>30</sup>

Saunders' familiarity with Indian customs and practices had its genesis in Mauritius, where he employed Indians for 15 years before moving to Natal in 1852. He argued passionately about the merits of indentured labour throughout the 1850s. For example, in 1855, after outlining the details of the indentured scheme in Mauritius, the benefits that would accrue to Natal and how to go about importing Indian labour, he concluded that 'for our sugar growing prospects they are indispensable, and their capabilities will make them worth to us quite as much as to Mauritius...I have no hesitation in saying they will suit my purposes.'<sup>31</sup> Saunders' counsel weighed heavily in the decision of the government to pursue indentured labour.

While doubt may be cast on the overall veracity of Saunders' reminiscence, it signals several important themes that were prominent throughout indenture: the long and tiring journey; alienation and fear; the vain hope of holding onto caste alongside marriage across religious divides; the continuing reverence for Brahmins; the distance between Africans and Indians; false premises and promises; and compromises.

Saunders' narrative may have been filled with a mixture of stereotype and paternalism, but subsequent events were to challenge the idea of colonists as 'hard' but 'fair'.

## The *Red Riding Hood*

Girmitya, my maker  
Your journey  
Has broken my heart.

SUDESH MISHRA<sup>32</sup>

The *Red Riding Hood* set sail for India on 12 February 1871 with 387 passengers who had completed their 10 years in Natal and were entitled to free passages. There were four deaths and one birth during the voyage. Two more passengers died before being landed. One hundred and fifty-six passengers disembarked at Madras and 226 in Calcutta. Dr JW Matthews, the district surgeon of Inanda as well as the surgeon on the voyage, recorded:

A home on the rolling sea's [*sic*] sounds very exciting and spirit-stirring when sung on shore, but all the excitement and enthusiasm vanish when one gets to sea on board a ship with some 400 coolies as companions. Yet it was a sight worth seeing to behold the shipment at the anchorage when we left – the lame, the blind, the paralytic, the epileptic, the lepers without toes and the lepers without fingers...<sup>33</sup>

The *Red Riding Hood* was met by the Protector of Emigrants at Madras on 10 April 1871. He reported to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Napier, on 18 April 1871 that the returning Indians 'were loud in their complaints of the manner in which they had been treated on the estates in Natal'. Grievances included late payment of wages, which resulted in some having to borrow money at usurious rates, the working day extending beyond the nine hours stipulated in the contract, insufficient and incorrect rations, false promises about bonuses, and 'ruthless neglect of the sickly'. Of 83 adults who got off at Madras, six did not have any money, while the rest had £21 between them. The following were typical complaints.<sup>34</sup>

Balakistna Doorasamy, from Chittoor, was passenger 336 on the *Truro*. He testified on 12 April 1871 that the recruiter in Madras, Mr Collins, as well as Dr Holland and Edward Tatham in Natal, told him and other recruits that they would each receive £10 upon their return to India after 10 years. Every Indian that he knew confirmed that this bonus had been promised. Balakistna worked for three years for Lister's Estate, where he received 'proper food and wages, but he [Lister] was very severe. If a Coolie did not go to work one day he stopped two days pay, and he often tied up Coolies who made mistakes, and flogged them, and then put salt-water on their backs.' He personally saw Jacob and Moonesawmy, other indentured workers, beaten with a *sjambok*, a piece of bullock's hide 'about a foot-and-a-half long, which he [Lister] carried in his pocket'.

Moonesawmy Chinyamma (841) of Hyderabad arrived in Natal on the *Lord George Bentinck* in December 1860. He worked for Lister as a cowherd. 'I was there till I got my liberty, that is, for five years, the time of contract.' Moonesawmy described Lister as a 'very bad gentleman. He would sometimes put a rope around my neck, and send me to the police. He often beat me with a *sjambok*, tying my hands and pouring saltwater on my back if cattle strayed into the coffee.' Veeran (280), who went to Natal on the *Truro*, worked for five years for Mr Greig as a field labourer and cook. His was not a happy experience. Once, Greig beat him 'on the head with an iron rod and cut my forehead [a scar on the right temple here shown] because I would not make up the fire. I then ran off into the bush for three days. When I came back I worked for three months but never got any pay.' Greig gave them 'small rations of rice and sweet potatoes', but not the full ration to which they were entitled. A recruiter in Madras promised him a bonus of £10 when he returned from Natal.

Baboo Ilyaloo (3049) of Madras went to Natal on the *Sir John Lawrence* in July 1864. He worked for Clement Crozier for three years and nine months. He was paid irregularly and was owed almost one year's pay. Crozier owed the same to 33 others who were still in Natal. The manager, Henderson, and Sirdar Ramasamy Naidoo 'used to worry and bully the coolies so that four men hanged themselves to escape the annoyance of being compelled to work when sick, and of being beaten'. Workers were never given proper rations. Sick Indians were sent to the depot at the Point in Durban 'and made to work in Baboo Naidoo's [the interpreter's] garden. If they refuse he gives them only half-rations. We were compelled to clean the privies while we were sick at the depot. Mr Mason is entirely in the hands of Baboo Naidoo. Mr Mason is the manager at the depot and emigration agent.' Ilyaloo was speaking from experience. He was badly injured at work and returned on the *Red Riding Hood* even though he had been in Natal for less than seven years.

The 'evidence' of abuse and violence was not limited to returning Indians. There were cases of the indentured literally being beaten to death. One case that came to official attention was Sirdar Baloomookund's assault of Nabee Saib (5807) in October 1866, as described by Dheen Mahomed (3674): 'I saw him [Nabee] flogged. Baloomookund tied deceased's two hands together, then tied him with a leather piece to the right hand fore-wheel of a wagon, and then flogged him with a *sjambok*. Blood was dropping along his back. Deceased cried out very loud *amon, amon*, which means mother, mother, afterwards he became senseless. After the flogging, Nabee Saib was taken to his own hut and tied, and there he remained till he died.' Another witness, Chuttee, who took food to Saib, saw 'wounds on his back bleeding. The skin was out like a sore. Sirdar beats the coolies with *sjambok*, sticks, and fists.' Dr Matthews told the court that Saib suffered from a heart condition, which his employer and the Sirdar were aware of. G Jackson, the employer, knew that Saib was incapable of hard work, and once described the 1.46-metre-tall Saib as 'a weak, emaciated creature'. Yet he subjected him to hard work and physical punishment.

Jackson buried the body before a post-mortem was carried out. When Dr Matthews saw the body five days after the murder, 'the skin of his back was peeled off...some of the skin on the heel had also peeled off'. Saib had arrived from Bangalore on the *Adelaide* in February 1866 and died barely eight months later. His death did not result in any convictions. Due largely to

the absence of a proper interpreter, the evidence of the witnesses was deemed contradictory, and the magistrate ruled that the heart ailment was the cause of death. As the prosecutor, Bowlby, said in frustration, 'There was no skilled interpreter and the consequence was that the evidence had to pass through two interpreters before the replies reached the ears of the Court.'<sup>35</sup> The contradictions that led to the exculpation of Baloomookund and Jackson revolved around whether Saib was tied to a wagon or a cart, and whether it was the left or right wheel!

Natal's employers were outraged by what they regarded as a pack of lies by the first returnees. In keeping with the pattern of ignoring abuses, the Natal government dismissed the complaints without a proper investigation. Colonial Secretary Erskine conceded to the Indian government on 21 November 1871 that Lister's 'treatment of his coolie was both harsh and illegal', but dismissed the complaints as baseless.<sup>36</sup> When economic conditions improved in Natal, employers began to request labour.<sup>37</sup> The Indian government, however, refused to sanction further immigration until the treatment of indentured Indians was thoroughly investigated. Forced to take action, a commission was appointed by the Natal government under Attorney-General Michael H Gallwey and Major General Banastre Pryce-Lloyd.

## The Coolie Commission of 1872

A central institution within the South African state...since the late nineteenth century...is the commission of inquiry [which] can be thought of as a theatre of power. It is a theatre in which the central 'truth' of state power can speak freely of their interests, and will be heard; that state power is civilised, is a partner with 'society' in pursuit of the 'common good'. The attitude of the state listening is symbolized materially by the commission's published report – the materialization of the act of hearing.<sup>38</sup>

The Commission heard the evidence of 36 witnesses over three months. Its bias is reflected in the fact that 30 were employers, three were officials, and only three were Indian. The commissioners did not interview any of the returning Indians who had complained in the first instance! Only Rangasammy (2099) of the Indian witnesses gave testimony of value. He told the Commission on 23 June 1872 that he had arrived in Natal in 1863 and was assigned to John D Koch at Reunion Sugar Estate as Sirdar. He was 22 when he arrived with his wife Lutchmee, aged 19. Both were from Chingleput. After completing his indenture, Rangasammy became a hotelkeeper in Verulam. As far as the treatment of indentured workers was concerned:

I heard from the coolies that some masters treat them badly. Mr. Anderson beats them; not only does he beat the coolies himself, but he gets the magistrate to beat them. There are four coolies; they are on the estate now. If a coolie demands a pass, he refuses to give the pass and gives them a kick. Anderson uses whatever comes to hand; stones, sticks, *sjambok*. He treats a coolie like a Bull Buffalo. The only man I hear who does not pay regularly is Captain Smerdon; he only pays twice a year and then keeps a month's wages in hand. The coolies are deducted one shilling for absent days.<sup>39</sup>

THIRD SESSION, SIXTH COUNCIL.—L. C. No. 1.

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R E P O R T

OF

COOLIE COMMISSION,

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE CONDITION OF THE

INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

IN THE

COLONY OF NATAL;

THE MODE IN WHICH THEY ARE EMPLOYED; AND ALSO TO INQUIRE INTO THE  
COMPLAINTS MADE BY RETURNED IMMIGRANTS TO THE PROTECTOR  
OF EMIGRANTS AT CALCUTTA.

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ORDERED TO BE PRINTED, SEPTEMBER 11, 1872.

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1872.

A central institution within the South African state since the late nineteenth century has been the commission of inquiry – a theatre of power.

too hard...'<sup>40</sup> William Lister, identified by returnees as one of the main 'culprits', told the Commission that Balakistna, Moonesawmy and Jacob 'were very badly conducted men', continually encouraging 'other coolies to do the same':

Balakistna used to cause every sort of mischief. He was one of the only men of my gang who could speak English. I don't care to take coolies at fifteen shillings per month, when I can get *kaffirs* who are superior field hands for eleven shillings. *Kafir* food is also cheaper...Under (the) law, a coolie absenting himself, if brought before a magistrate, should for every day he was absent, forfeit two days pay, and I generally forfeited the wages myself...Towards the latter end – say 1864 or 1865 – we used not to forfeit wages, but agreed with the coolie to work for two days without receiving any wages for absence. As regards sending a man with a rope round his neck to the police station, the man had committed a crime; and the police station was distant.<sup>41</sup>

Lister's defence revealed the racism at the heart of colonialism, and the dominant idea that the indentured were there to labour at the lowest possible cost, and not be too 'clever'. Balakistna's crime was really that he could speak English and articulate the concerns of his fellow indentured.

The Commission, which issued its report in September 1872, found that magistrates were required to visit estates at least twice a year but after a few occasional visits in 1861 ceased to do so because they felt powerless against influential planters. Employers were generally left unchecked to do what they willed; 'few reports as prescribed by law appear to have been furnished'.<sup>42</sup> Coolie agents Tatham (who held the post from 1860 to 1865) and his successor H Shepstone were overworked. Their duties included the receipt and disbursement of funds under the immigration scheme; registering births, deaths and marriages; visiting estates; and arbitrating in disputes between employers and workers. The Commission, while highlighting instances of ill-treatment, inadequate housing, poor rations and medical facilities, made light of the abuses.

The Coolie Commission was one of many inquiries, large and small, instituted in Natal. They included the Shire Commission (1862), the Coolie Commission (1872), the Wragg Commission (1885–1887), the Reynolds Commission (1906), the Indian Commission (1909) and the Solomon Commission (1914). In addition, there were numerous 'small' inquiries by magistrates, the Protector and other officials. The inquiry into Muniyammah's death (Chapter 2) is typical.

Mongia, in looking generally at indentured commissions, describes 'the inquiry' as 'one of the most mundane, routine, yet significant practices'. It was a key instrument to produce a 'regime of truth' based on the 'liberal notion of "impartiality"'. Drawing on Foucault, she defines truth not as 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted', but 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true'.<sup>43</sup> Commissions controlled the process by defining what was to be probed, the questions to be investigated, and the hypotheses that should form the foundation of the inquiry.<sup>44</sup>

Members of the Commission were deemed to have 'expert knowledge'. Banastre Pryce-Lloyd had been a major general in the Bengal Staff Corps. As a result of his many years of

living in India, he was fluent in Indian languages and had a deep knowledge of the ‘ways and customs’ of Indians. Pryce-Lloyd was also a wealthy farmer who owned a huge estate in Natal and clearly had a stake in ‘the system’.<sup>45</sup> As Mongia points out, colonial officials like Pryce-Lloyd were deemed to have a ‘practical knowledge of the natives of India’, and the likes of him and Attorney-General Gallwey were seen to have ‘unbiased minds’.<sup>46</sup> This meant that their evaluation of the contradictory positions and their findings were beyond reproach. ‘Expert knowledge’ allowed the Commission to proffer that indentured Indians had to be judged against different standards:

It is essential to a fair understanding of their true position and prospects, and of the question as to whether they have benefited by emigration from their own home or the reverse, to bear in mind that, for the most part, the immigrants of Natal are drawn from the lowest classes of the population of India, and consequently loose and thriftless characters might be expected from the majority of them.<sup>47</sup>

The idea of Indians as duplicitous and as liars has a long genealogy in British colonial history. This bigotry had an echo in Natal. For example, most employers simply refused to accept that the indentured were ill and forced them to work or deducted their wages. The commissioners supported these actions because Indians ‘were in the habit of feigning sickness to avoid work. This is known as “humbug illness” or “sham illness” and is an evil everywhere.’

Not surprisingly, the Commission concluded that Indian labourers were ‘not and have never been subject to any systematic ill-treatment or oppression by their employers’. Premised on ‘expert knowledge’ and ‘unbiased’ reporting, a few changes were recommended, the most important being the appointment of a ‘Protector’. The ‘impartial truth’ of such commissions allowed indenture to continue with minimal change for five decades. Mongia sums up the role of commissions succinctly:

Even though the eventual outcome of each inquiry was the same – a continuation of the system – it appeared as if the system had been evaluated afresh and the best course of action pursued...Indenture thus continued not in *spite* of the numerous inquiries, but *because* of them. The inquiry as a mechanism for ‘impartial’ truth procurement continued to sustain a [system] wherein, the scandal [was] that there [was] no scandal.<sup>48</sup>

## Setting down roots

It would be amiss to write of the indentured simply as victims of the machinations of a system, or as imprisoned by history and circumstance. Of those who survived indenture and remained in Natal, some were able to translate themselves into shopkeepers and market gardeners, taking advantage of opportunities provided by the growing number of indentured and ex-indentured Indians.

Rangasammy Veerasamy, who gave evidence to the 1872 Commission, arrived in Natal on the *Scindia* in September 1863. As he correctly pointed out to the Commission, it was the fifth

ship to bring indentured Indians to Natal. The ship number seemed to be a marker of identity in the early years. Rangasamy was assigned to John Koch in Isipingo, for whom he worked for five years and six months as Sirdar, earning £1.10 per month. Koch had arrived in Natal on the *Justina* in 1850. He was a merchant in Durban and one of the founders of the Durban Club. In early 1862 he purchased two small sugar estates belonging to Robert Babbs and MB Smart, and combined them into Reunion Sugar Estate.<sup>49</sup> After completing his indenture, Rangasamy became a storekeeper in Durban. In October 1870, he opened a hotel in Verulam, paying rental of £8 per annum. As far as free Indians were concerned, 'many of the Coolies have money; only a few foolish people spend their money,' he told the Commission. Rangasamy also told the Commission that six Indians owned shops in Durban.<sup>50</sup>

Ramasamy arrived in Natal in 1861 and was assigned to AH Noon in Isipingo. When Noon became insolvent in 1863, Ramasamy joined GNH Crozier at Claremont as a field hand for two years and as Sirdar for a further two. Crozier's estate, like Noon's, became bankrupt. The 35 indentured workers, including Ramasamy, were not paid for 11 months. Ramasamy told the Commission that workers 'often asked for wages; he [Crozier] used to put us off with excuses. We complained to the magistrate but got no redress.' Trustee of the estate George Russell told Coolie Agent Shepstone on 18 September 1867 that 'the assets in this estate are so small that...there is little probability of the Coolies ever receiving their wages...I shall not be in a position to feed or pay the men.' Natal was in the throes of depression and Shepstone was unable to find alternative work for the indentured. The Attorney-General advised Shepstone that workers' outstanding wages would not take 'preference' over other creditors and that if the estate had money, the law only allowed workers to be paid for six months. While Ramasamy was working for Crozier, three men committed suicide. Ramasamy lost his savings through loans to other workers who were unable to repay him. He had expected returns of six pence per month on his 'investment' but lost heavily.<sup>51</sup>

Migrants returning on the *Red Riding Hood* complained about Ramasamy's exploitative behaviour as Sirdar. Yet Ramasamy prospered. After leaving Crozier, he opened a shop in Durban. His children attended the government school, for which he paid fees of 18 shillings.<sup>52</sup> He was clearly an enterprising man determined to rise up the economic ladder. However, as we shall see, free Indians like him were threatened from the 1870s, not only by the racist policies of the state, but also by the newly arriving Indian traders.

Teluck Sing was another of the free Indian storekeepers. He had arrived around 1861 and worked for Walford for two months. When the latter became insolvent, the indentured transferred to William Palmer's Waterloo Estate in Mount Moreland. After 10 years, Sing opened a store in West Street in Durban. He saved money by 'looking after his own interests, not eating and drinking to excess, or incurring large household expenses'.<sup>53</sup> He bought goods from local white merchants like Arbuckle, Dunn and Rennie, and occasionally from India. He did not purchase from Indian traders because their prices were higher. His clientele included white planters, to whom he mainly supplied fish. Teluck Sing felt that Indians outperformed white traders because of lower expenses.



And then there was 'Raboobee, Durban Indian Mahomedan Woman', as her death certificate stated. Nine-year-old Rabos Bee (2397), as her name was recorded in the Immigrants Register, arrived in Natal from Madras on the *Rajasthan* in January 1864 with her parents, Sheik Mustan (2395) and Hyath Bee (2396), and brother Sheik Ryman (2398). They were assigned to Noon's Sugar Estate in Isipingo where their lives would have intersected with that of Sirdar Ramasamy. Sheik Mustan (1834–1888) died in a railway accident and little is known of Hyath Bee (b. 1836) or Sheik Ryman. Raboobee married Goolam Hoosen in Inanda in April 1867 when she was about 13. They returned to India in March 1868 to perform a Muslim marriage ceremony, then went to Mauritius and returned to Natal in the early 1870s. Raboobee joined the railways as a clerk, earning a relatively good salary of £2.5s per month. She bought a property in Victoria Street in Durban in 1882 with her savings, opened a business in Victoria Street around 1885, another in Field Street, and bought a second property in Alice Street. The stores sold groceries, crockery and baskets. Raboobee was joined in the business by her sons, Emam (1877–1933), Suleman (1882–1922) and Ansari (1883–1927), while her husband Goolam continued to hold his job at the railways. Raboobee sold her store in 1896 and had opened three butcheries by 1900. She became one of the wealthiest Indian businesswomen in Durban. She was one of only two female fee-paying members of the Natal Indian Congress when she joined in 1895, and went on a pilgrimage to Makkah in 1902. At the time of her death on 16 December 1916, her business and properties were worth an estimated £10 000.<sup>54</sup>

## The resumption of indenture

Those who returned to India both penniless and with shattered dreams on the *Red Riding Hood* were not compensated. However, their concerns forced some concessions from the authorities at a time when the Zulu refused to bow to the dictates of whites who wanted them as full-time labourers. In this context indentured labour was 'a necessary evil',<sup>55</sup> to borrow the description of Superintendent of Police Richard Alexander. The Commission recommended the appointment of a Protector of Indian Immigrants, improved medical facilities and a halt to floggings. Laws were passed in 1872 and 1874 to reflect these changes. While outside intervention rankled many colonists, they accepted the changes because they needed cheap labour.

The 'leading merchants' of Durban petitioned Governor Anthony Musgrave in 1872, claiming that labour was 'absolutely essential for carrying on the industries of the coastlands, and for giving to capitalists arriving among us that security which is required in entering on enterprises involving so large an outlay which can only be successfully prosecuted by a more abundant and regular supply of labour'.<sup>56</sup> The 202 signatories were adamant that 'the reintroduction of Indian labourers [was] necessary to the satisfactory solution of the difficulty'. A delegation of sugar planters presented the petition to Musgrave. Sir Benjamin Pine, who became governor in 1873, sent a dispatch to the Earl of Kimberley on 25 August 1873 appealing for the 'least practicable delay' in dispatching indentured labour.<sup>57</sup> This came after he visited estates and saw first-hand the desperate need for labour.

An important development was the establishment of an Indian Immigration Trust Board in 1874 to 'undertake the receipt, disbursement and administration of all moneys for purposes of Indian immigration'.<sup>58</sup> The government advanced £50 000 to the Board to procure labour, and contributed £10 000 annually towards its expenses. The Board's officials consisted of the Protector, the Colonial Treasurer and a secretary. It was responsible for shipping expenses, recruitment in India, the depot in Durban, medical fees, and other matters incidental to indenture. Income was derived from planters' payments, medical fees and shipping fees. Captain WM MacLeod was appointed Special Agent to India to investigate, among other things, the setting up of emigration agencies in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, and to compare conditions in Natal with those in other colonies. MacLeod considered Bombay a viable source of labour, but only opened an agency in Calcutta. He returned from India on the *Blendail* in July 1874 with the first lot of recruits when the 'trade' resumed.<sup>59</sup> Natal initially found it difficult to satisfy the hunger for labour. Deputy Protector Manning recalled in his Annual Report for 1886 that, for several years after 1874, 'the department was unable to supply the numbers applied for. The general deficiency of labour lasted till comparatively the other day. When I first began my tours of inspection in the upcountry districts, I was everywhere beset by the enquiry as to when the Indians that had been applied for might be expected to arrive.'<sup>60</sup> This was resolved with the opening of the agency in Madras.

## What's in a label?

For colonists, the indentured were simply 'coolies'. Many Indians took umbrage with this label. In Tamil, *kuli* referred to payment for menial work for persons without customary rights, from the lowest level in the industrial labour market, while the Gujarati root of *kuli* referred to a person belonging to the Kuli tribe whose members were commonly described as 'thieves, robbers, plunderers, degenerate and inferior – a villainous race'.<sup>61</sup>

'The "personhood" of Kuli and payment of *kuli* were combined to create a new entity: the "coolie". In the 'transformation of *kuli* to "coolie"', Breman and Daniel argue, 'the distinct humanity of the individual was, in a single move, appropriated and eliminated: the person collapsed into the payment.' It is around this label that those who confronted their early lives in Natal gained some vindication, in theory at least. The genesis of the new title of the official in charge of Indians is rarely discussed, but is significant in pointing to the importance that the indentured attached to how they wished to be addressed. As the Commission noted:

There is one point which to most persons may appear but trivial, but which nevertheless to a native of India is a matter of no little consequence; we allude to the term 'coolie.' This word in India is applied to the lowest classes only, and it is regarded as a term of reproach in the nature of abuse. On many estates this term was mentioned to us, in our conversations with the coolies, as one of their objections to the colony, and anyone who has resided in India, will be well able to understand that the objection is far from being without foundation. There is no doubt that the term is galling, and a source of annoyance. We would suggest that the term 'Indian Immigrants' be substi-

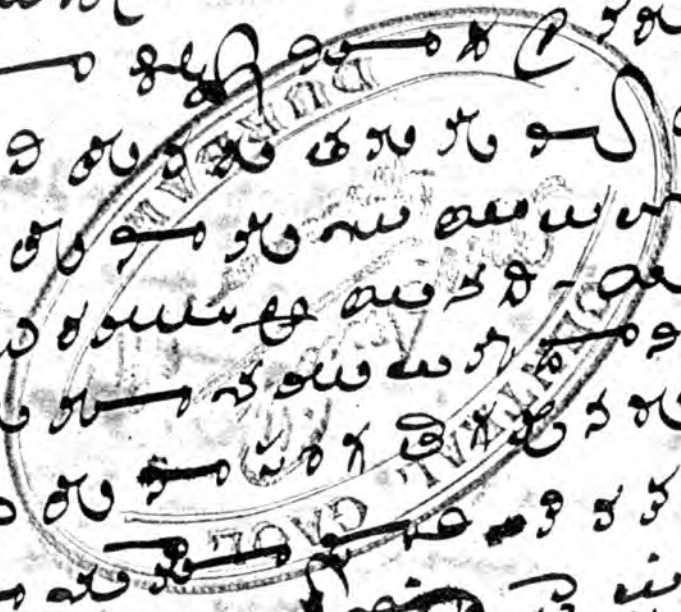
tuted for that of Coolie in all official documents, and that the designation 'Coolie Agent' be changed to that of 'Protector of Indian Immigrants'.<sup>62</sup>

The indentured saw themselves as people; the colonists saw them as numbers. In confronting the label 'coolie' the indentured were confronting the way in which they wanted to be viewed. But the indentured would soon have to come to terms with the fact that, while in official documents they were no longer 'coolies', the very system of indenture was geared to collapsing their person into payment, their histories into numbers.

శ్రీ సుఖము వలన మనము జన్మమును వదిలి  
కరుణ వలన మనము జన్మమును వదిలి  
ఇది మనము వలన

శ్రీ సుఖము వలన మనము జన్మమును వదిలి  
కరుణ వలన మనము జన్మమును వదిలి  
ఇది మనము వలన

Handwritten text in Telugu script, appearing to be a list or account. The text is written in a cursive style and is partially obscured by a circular stamp in the center. The stamp contains the text 'THE UNIVERSITY OF ANDHRA' and 'LIBRARY'.



Handwritten text at the bottom of the page, possibly a signature or a concluding note.

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# The interpreters of indenture

It was only after the Coolie marked his thumb print on the contract ratifying this – the ‘meanest and weakest of bonds’ – after his indenture papers had been issued, after he had been shown to his quarters in the Coolie line, after he had been assigned to a work gang, after he had been defeated by the heat of the mid-day, after his hands had become raw, then hardened from the cane, after he had been beaten, fined, jailed, after his rations had been withheld – that the realization came that he had not crossed the sea to paradise, that the beautiful Queen was not to be found...<sup>1</sup>

Most indentured workers had left India in anticipation of a future that would be better than their present, and would have seen the contract in a ‘beneficial light’. When the agreement failed to ‘live up to its own documented intentionality’, when migrants experienced not the ‘intended thing but its antithesis’, they felt a ‘trauma so epochal in its magnitude that it took hold of mind, body, and soul, eventually throwing up a name that belonged not only to a different order of speech but also, it appears, to an altogether different order of understanding. Not agreement nor disagreement, but *girmit*.’<sup>2</sup>

On paper, at least, it appeared that the indentured had rights in law and would be afforded an opportunity for redress when these were transgressed. The contract seemed to protect both worker and employer; in practice, however, there was a gap between the terms of the contract, the reality of plantation life, and the interpretation and implementation of that contract. The *girmit*, contends Carter, was ‘a powerful weapon for the planters, and they depended heavily on partial colonial judiciaries to enforce its provisions’.<sup>3</sup> The custodians of rights were magistrates who relied on interpreters.

This chapter enters the crucible of ‘the law’ and (cross-)examines the role that various dispensers of justice, from magistrates to interpreters, came to play in the lives of the indentured. Without collective organisation, in a completely foreign environment, and facing the barriers of language and the harshness of employers, the legal system was the one recourse the indentured had, an option that they soon came to question as, by and large, the ‘rule of law’ was translated as the law of white colonists.

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OPPOSITE: Eugene Renaud, Advocate of the Supreme Court of Natal, who, with his brother Leon (see Chapter 7), was one of a few in the legal fraternity willing to defend Indian and African complainants.

PREVIOUS PAGE: In a letter to the Protector written in Telegu, Kota Daliah, serving a 15-year sentence, complained of miscarriage of justice as a result of improper translation. In response, Attorney-General Harry Escombe informed the Protector: ‘I advise that the writer be informed that his petition cannot be entertained.’

## 'Set a rogue to catch a rogue'

There seems to be a very general impression current that truthfulness is a virtue entirely foreign to the nature of the inhabitants of India. Room is not left for the possibility of misunderstanding, allowance is not made for the probability of wrong comprehension, but the Indian is set down at once as a scamp, a rogue, a lying vagabond – all said, as a human being destitute of every vestige of honour.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the Protector, indentured workers depended to a large extent on magistrates in a system that was intrinsically biased against them. While some magistrates may have upheld the law, the law itself was weighted in favour of the employer. This was reinforced by the attitude of the majority of magistrates and judges towards Indians, which was overlaid with racist stereotypes. The court records are filled with examples of such prejudice.

Magistrate WP Jackson refused to intervene in a dispute among the indentured in 1884 that threatened to escalate into violence. Approached by the Protector about his non-intervention, Jackson replied that if 'these Coolies like to abuse and beat each other continually I am not at all sure I can try their disputes – perhaps too much facility for that sort of thing only makes them more quarrelsome'.<sup>5</sup> This was symptomatic of a more general attitude that viewed Indians as unreliable, duplicitous, prone to exaggeration and falsehoods, deceitful and litigious.

Of course, the powerful had justice on their side. Muthan and Kullam, who worked for JL Hulett and Sons in Stanger, were assaulted by William Hulett in November 1909. When the case came before Magistrate Goble, Hulett testified that the men had complained to him on 22 November 1909 that the Sirdar had assaulted them. The Sirdar denied the charge and Hulett accepted his word. The following day Hulett and the Sirdar hit Muthan's wife 'across the face',<sup>6</sup> which Hulett admitted in court. Muthan and Kullam proceeded to Stanger to get treatment for her and returned immediately to the estate. Goble, however, found the men guilty of disobeying orders and sentenced them each to seven days hard labour. Shocked, attorney BO McRitchie wrote to the Protector:

It does seem iniquitous that the unsupported word of an employer as to these men refusing to work, in view of the assault by himself, and the errand they went on to Stanger, should be sufficient to convict...Dr. Creighton of the Indian Hospital tells me they did come to see him on Friday last accompanied by a woman, and that they bore evidence of injuries. The men say they asked for a pass from Mr. Hulett but that they were refused.

The plight of Hureebhukut, as contained in his deposition to the Protector on 10 February 1877, shows that obtaining justice was akin to making one's way through a gauntlet of blows. Hureebhukut was indentured to Thomas Brown of Umgeni. One Friday morning, he informed Brown that he was ill and made his way home. Brown sent a white overseer after him. The overseer struck him twice with a whip on his legs, and dragged him to the mill by force. The following morning, Hureebhukut sent word to Brown and the Sirdar that he was suffering from 'loose bowels'. The overseer went to the hut, choked him and struck him three times on the



back with a stick, leaving marks. Hureebhukut went to the Verulam court on Monday morning to complain. He was met by an Indian constable who said that the magistrate was not present and that he should return the following day. He did so, but was told by the same constable to return the next day. When he went on Wednesday, KR Nyanah, the interpreter, took down his statement and told him to return to the estate. Hureebhukut refused to do so until the case was presented to the magistrate. Despite marks to prove the assault, he failed to get a hearing from the interpreter or the magistrate, so proceeded to the Protector. The automatic sanction of seven days with hard labour applied because he did not have a pass. Hureebhukut's search for justice ended with him behind bars.<sup>7</sup>

Even in the Supreme Court, judges displayed their racist bias on those rare instances when Indians were able to get their cases heard in the highest court of the land. The case of Charlie Nulliah against Pavaloo Padayachee provides insight into the preconceptions of the most eminent legal minds. In August 1895, Nulliah purchased Aasvogel Krantz, an orange farm, from George Sutton of Howick. The enterprise proved to be immensely successful. An inventory in 1900 showed that the farm had pigs, cattle, horses, donkeys, fowls, ducks and geese. Potatoes, oranges and cabbages were planted.<sup>8</sup> In December 1895, he delivered 60 000 oranges to fruiterer Pavaloo Padayachee for the sum of £101.<sup>9</sup> This transaction resulted in litigation, as Padayachee claimed that he only received 38 500 oranges and therefore owed £70. The full bench of the Supreme Court decided in Nulliah's favour in March 1896. Walter Wragg, in delivering judgment, said that while the matter was a simple one and should have been decided in the course of three hours, four judges of the highest court in Natal were engaged for seven days to hear 'this trumpery and wretched dispute'. For Justice Wragg:

The case illustrated how many Indians fell away and deteriorated when they came to this colony. They came into court and said things which they dared not utter in their own land. For instance a man of undoubted low caste would without a tremble inform the court that he was a man of high caste. Such proceedings would be impossible in his country. In the first place, everyone about the court, from the judge downwards, would know the man's caste by his face, and he would make himself the object of ridicule and derision by assuming a higher caste than *de facto* he belonged to, and would receive a thrashing from the men whose caste he aspired to on going home. In this country these people did not hesitate to lie about every matter, however simple.

The judges felt that there were 'lies and discrepancies' and 'evasive and contradictory evidence' on both sides. The court marked 'its displeasure as regards the false evidence of the plaintiff [Nulliah] by making him pay his own cost'. According to a local newspaper, the Chief Justice was 'disgusted with all he had heard...It was ten years since an Indian case was tried in the court and he sincerely hoped it would be another ten years before another case arose. There was approving laughter from the gentlemen of the Bar.'<sup>10</sup>

Many Indians felt insulted and challenged these comments. A deputation of 'prominent South Indians', comprising E Ramsammy Pillay, B Balakistna Naidoo, V Ramsammy Pillay, VNR Chetty, KN Samy, P Navayansamy Chetty, IC Naidoo, Tuppattee Naidoo and NV Naidoo,

met with Attorney-General Harry Escombe on 17 March 1896 to discuss Wragg's 'severe censure of the Indian population for their lack of truthfulness'. They were trustees of the Hindu Temple of Maritzburg and represented Indians of the Madras Presidency. Sixty-eight members of the temple had met on the previous Sunday and mandated them to confront Escombe 'to set the record right'. They presented evidence in Tamil, which was translated into English by George Mutukistna:

We have come here with a grievance which touches us all as Natives of the Madras Presidency. We have come to you as representatives of the Government for redress. The newspaper mentioned that the defendant and plaintiff were telling untruths. The Chief Justice remarked that he was disgusted with the whole proceedings and the net result of the judgments in our minds is that we are considered an untrustworthy race incapable of telling the truth. This was mentioned in the newspapers. These remarks reflected on all of us. We are law-abiding citizens and feel very much lowered in the estimation of ourselves and others. A meeting was held last Sunday of members of our community when we were instructed to ask the Government in the name of the Indian community to remove the stain on our people. The judge's remarks applied to all of us which we respectfully say is not fair. We repeat that we are all law-abiding and loyal citizens. We are not all we should be, but we do not wish to be considered as countenancing such a glaring evil as is now under decision...We have come to you to ask not to be treated like children and to be treated as members of a community who have some self-respect. We are children in the sense that we are powerless to bring the offenders to justice.<sup>11</sup>

The petitioners were ignored. They should have expected this. Escombe, after all, would himself display anti-Indian virulence in the late 1890s, especially against 'free' Indians who, he believed, should either re-indenture or return to India.

A seldom exposed phenomenon was the use of Indian touts by white law firms. The Protector complained to the Colonial Secretary in 1887 about lawyers employing touts to exploit Indians, and wanted the Law Society to 'stamp out the abuses and unprofessional conduct'.<sup>12</sup> He pointed to several instances of this practice. In December 1885 the Town Board of Verulam sent a 'strongly worded' complaint to the Law Society that the system of touting was 'disgraceful'. In August 1885, the magistrate of Umlazi instructed an indentured worker not to pay Attorney SW Rouse when he learnt that he had been sent to his office by a tout. Rouse employed several touts. An interpreter in Umlazi, C Stephen, identified Goolam Hossain as another of Rouse's touts. Ramchurn was a 'notorious tout killed in a train car accident' in early 1887.

Touts often took people away from the Protector's office to lawyers by threatening that they would be locked up if they did not comply. Also implicated were Fenwick & Winous, who employed a Mauritian by the name of Willem Bignoux, two Indians named Soobrayan and Gooraj, and John Cornelius, who were each 'paid 5/- in the pound as commission'. In one instance of extortion, Winous sent a tout to Cornubia Estate, and got £5 off a worker called Suppan by frightening him into believing that he was a murder accused and about to be locked up; in

reality, he was just a witness. Another attorney, Downard, employed Blinkbary (13916) and Frank Ward, a 'Eurasian' who was paid 10 per cent commission on the cost of all Indian cases that he brought.

## 'Coolies' with language

Never mistake, please, your mere translator for your top interpreter. An interpreter is a translator, true, but not the other way around. A translator can be anyone with half a language skill and a dictionary and a desk to sit at while...your top interpreter has to think fast.<sup>13</sup>

John Le Carré was reflecting on events at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries.<sup>14</sup> But his words could easily reflect the period of indenture in South Africa. Between the indentured and the magistrate were situated 'interpreters' of Indian origin, often themselves of indentured stock, who could not simply be seen as translators or as interpreters in a narrow sense. Their command of English, their closeness to those who meted out justice, and the huge gulf between the indentured and the white magistrates and judges gave them a level of prominence that belied their small numbers and ultimately their own impotence in mitigating the racism and brutal excesses of the colonial justice system.

Interpreters occupied a privileged position due to the reliance of both the government and the indentured on them. Without any form of interpretation, the indentured could not make themselves understood in the first instance when they encountered problems, but defective interpretation compounded their problems, a point made by Kota Daliah, a prisoner who complained to the Protector in Telegu in September 1895 that faulty interpretation, coupled with his not being able to afford a lawyer, had resulted in his guilty verdict:

I came to this colony for my livelihood, leaving my native abode. After my arrival here, my fate has led me into jail. Sir, it is for working and earning money I came to this colony, but not for you to put me unjustly in jail. It is not proper on your part to treat me in this manner for a least [minor] offence. At the time of the investigation I was unable to make the judge understand what the affair was. Besides this I was afraid to speak to the judge. Because I have never seen White people in my country, and when the case was pending I had not a lawyer to speak on my behalf, and you have not shown compassion on me. In this matter you must have taken greatest care [blame]. You brought us into this colony and it is your duty to observe that how many are the sufferers and enjoyers. It will not be proper on your part to disregard us...Therefore I request you to favour me with a lawyer and an interpreter from your office. My respects to the gentleman who reads this letter to you. In case you wish to reply me, I request you to write me with a letter in Telegu or Tamil languages.<sup>15</sup>

Attorney-General Escombe advised the Colonial Secretary on 27 September to reply that 'his petition cannot be entertained'. Daliah paid a high price for being unable to make himself intelligible to the judge. His admission of never having seen a white man, the intimidation he

felt in front of a judge, and his request to be written to in Tamil and Telegu speak volumes. But the indentured had no option.

this is the oppressor's language  
yet I need it to talk to you.

ADRIENNE RICH<sup>16</sup>

Reliance on interpreters led to widespread allegations of inaccurate interpretation, as well as exploitative and unscrupulous behaviour on the part of interpreters. The charge of inaccurate interpretation is clear from various official commissions. The Shire Commission (1862), for example, reported that frustrated indentured Indians went to Durban because they did not have confidence in the interpreter in Verulam, CH Harley: 'the one principal reason which induced the memorialists to come to Durban to seek protection, was that they were, and are convinced that the Coolie interpreter in Victoria County can only very imperfectly interpret their language, or rather languages; in consequence of which the magistrate could only partially understand their complaints'.<sup>17</sup> When they reached Durban, they learnt that the magistrate did not have jurisdiction over Shire, and they were imprisoned for being without passes.

The Coolie Commission (1872) also referred to the lack of confidence of Indians in interpreters. HC Shepstone, the then Coolie Agent, testified that Indians were 'averse' to going to the courts because 'they had no faith in magistrates and interpreters'. The Commission concluded that 'a want of confidence in the integrity of the Interpreters attached to the Magistrates' Courts appears to be almost universal among the Coolies, and was especially evinced towards the Interpreter and the Madrassee Interpreter at Durban'.<sup>18</sup> Rangasammy, one of only three Indians who gave evidence, told the Commission that there were no 'proper interpreters: they won't take our depositions properly before the magistrate'. He cited as example that 'if an Indian said "my wife was ill-treated," it would be translated as "my wife was kicked."' The consequence was that after hearing the testimony, the magistrate would get upset and accuse the Indian of lying.' Rangasammy did not 'blame the magistrate but the interpreters'.<sup>19</sup>

The Reverend Ralph Stott, while telling the Coolie Commission that problems surrounding interpretation prevented Indians from getting due justice, used the occasion to regale the Commission with stereotypes that would mitigate attempts by the indentured to get a fair hearing. He argued that Indians were essentially liars who prepared their witnesses with fabricated stories, making it difficult for the judge to decide who was right:

The difficulty is almost insurmountable. It is true the chains are not so well forged, for want of native [Indian] lawyers. But they are forged, and there is a great difficulty in finding any flaw in them with the apparatus you have at command. The magistrates, and judges, and lawyers are, to a great extent, ignorant of the languages and tricks of the coolies. The interpreters are not first-rate, and in some cases, not proof against bribery. I think, however, that these difficulties may be obviated to a great extent. First: by getting higher caste men from India as interpreters, who will be proof against bribes. Second: you might qualify two or three Indians to plead in court in cases of their own countrymen; you would then, at least, *have rogue to catch rogue*.<sup>20</sup>

Aboobaker Amod, the first Indian trader in Natal, bluntly told the Wragg Commission a decade later that he was not 'satisfied with the Indian interpreters; they are not educated and they accept bribes'. He wanted to make it mandatory for interpreters to pass an examination similar to the 'higher standard' in India, which all government officials had to pass. The Wragg Commission reported that most magistrates 'felt uncomfortable and uneasy when deciding Indian cases burdened with a conflict of testimony', because of the questionable levels of interpretation.

Interpreters tended to be more familiar with one or more northern dialects, such as Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati and Marathi, or languages spoken in the south like Tamil and Telegu. The courts, meanwhile, did not have interpreters proficient in the languages of both North and South India, making their 'interpretation broken, disjointed and unreliable'. In one instance, an interpreter knew Hindi but the witness was Tamil-speaking. Shortly after the case began, the judge, who understood a little Tamil, discovered that the interpreter was trying to force the witness to say that he wanted to give evidence in Hindi rather than in Tamil. Some interpreters' knowledge of English was poor. They therefore translated in 'pigeon English, absurd in its sound and ludicrous in aspect when recorded'.

There were no interpreters in prisons and other areas of government. For example, Kurampillei, suffering from a heart ailment, was imprisoned in Durban. The absence of an interpreter meant that he was unable to convey this to officials. He was made to continue with 'arduous labour' and was 'roughly handled' because the guard thought he was 'malingering'.<sup>21</sup> He died on 30 September 1884 after 10 days of ill-treatment. Even the Supreme Court did not have an interpreter proficient in Tamil, the language of the majority of migrants. The 'chance interpretation' at the court resulted in 'miscarriages in Tamil cases of the gravest nature'. The logical solution, having two interpreters at each court, was rejected because of the cost. Gandhi observed:

The interpretation is very defective through no fault of the interpreters. The interpreters are expected to perform the Herculean task of interpreting successfully in four languages, viz., Tamil, Telegu, Hindustani, and Gujarati. The trading Indian invariably speaks Hindustani or Gujarati. Those who speak Hindustani, only speak high Hindustani. The interpreters speak the local Hindustani, which is a grotesque mixture of Tamil, Gujarati, and other Indian languages, clothed in extremely bad Hindustani grammar. Very naturally, the interpreter has to argue with the witness before he can get at his meaning. While the process is going on, the judge grows impatient, and thinks that the witness is prevaricating. The poor interpreter, if questioned, says, in order to conceal his defective knowledge of the language, the witness does not give straight answers. The poor witness has no opportunity of setting himself right...It speaks volumes for the acuteness of the interpreters in extracting even the sense from a forest of strange words. But all the while the struggle is going on, the judge makes up his mind not to believe a word of what the witness says, and puts him down for a liar.<sup>22</sup>

For instance, Soobadoo complained to the Colonial Secretary in 1888 that when he sued Veerasamy, he testified in Telegu, but the interpreter spoke Tamil, with the result that they could not understand each other. Those who spoke English and Telegu were aware that his testimony was 'distorted', resulting in his losing the case and being 'without remedy'.<sup>23</sup>

Incorrect interpretation was not the only issue. Abuse of authority and exploitation were other problems. The Deputy Protector reported in 1884 that when he visited the estate of William Grange in Estcourt, he learnt of a worker who went with a letter from his employer to deposit £20 at the bank in Estcourt. The interpreter at the court, however, took the money and gave him a promissory note for nine months. The Deputy Protector wanted action to be taken, though he did not want the interpreter dismissed, partly because of the shortage of interpreters and partly because the worker 'will have no possible chance of getting the money'.<sup>24</sup>

There were many complaints by indentured Indians that interpreters were involved in extortion and bribery, even assault. David Vinden was suspended from his position as interpreter in Ladysmith on 10 March 1891, allegedly for extorting money under 'false pretences'. Hurree (13262) complained to the Protector that Vinden wanted 20 shillings for a duplicate pass when his original perished during the 1893 flood. Hurree, who had been a tenant of Vinden's and had known him for three years, stated, 'I know it is a common custom for Indians to pay Vinden money for free papers and that he makes them pay for renewals, every three months.'

Indian interpreters earned around £120 per annum, which was very high in relation to the general Indian population, but considerably lower than the salary of white interpreters. Vinden submitted a petition to Governor Hutchinson in 1898 for an increase, being especially 'disheartened by the inequality, which exists, between his rank and salary and that of all the Europeans'.<sup>25</sup>

Anthony Peters was another interpreter that many Indians complained about. Peters began his career at Inanda in 1897; he transferred to Durban in 1902, and to Maritzburg in 1906. On 1 June 1908, E Naiker and 30 disgruntled Indians petitioned the Colonial Secretary that Peters abused his position and had become 'most unpopular amongst the Indians in the metropolis'.<sup>26</sup> He interested himself 'too deeply in cases prior to their being brought before the court'. He was accused of 'training' witnesses as to what evidence to give. Complainants felt that he often acted in a 'capricious manner' by refusing to take the depositions of 'poor and ignorant Indians, unless he is paid'. His conduct and language towards Indian women was described as 'often indecent and insulting, and cannot be tolerated by any honourable and self-respecting people'. This was common knowledge in Maritzburg, 'resulting in substantial injustice and harm to the community'. While the petitioners were 'averse to suggesting the extreme course of dismissing Mr. Peters from office, which is the only remedy that is any way proportioned to the nature of the evil', they proposed that he be transferred to a 'country magistracy as a punishment for his misconduct'.

To have conceded to such a request would have undermined the system of authority and the petition was, not surprisingly, ignored.

## Mimic men?

We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World.

VS NAIPAUL<sup>27</sup>

Interpreters were crucial for the system of indenture to function effectively. They facilitated communication between white colonists and indentured migrants who spoke a host of languages. Interpreters had multiple responsibilities. A questionnaire to magistrates in 1901 found, in the words of the magistrate of Verulam, J McKnight, that interpreter JB Stephens did 'practically all the clerical work and also [found] time to assist in a general way in whatever clerical work is going on in the office and most of the typewriting that has to be done'.<sup>28</sup> Interpreters were responsible for registering births and deaths, making out the returns of various departments, completing cash book summaries, copying notes of evidence in court cases, registering correspondence and recording civil cases.<sup>29</sup>

These civil servants constituted an aspiring middle class that enjoyed a special status. In *Siting Translation*, Tejaswini Niranjana shows that the act of translation is a political act because it perpetuates unequal power relations.<sup>30</sup> As mediators in colonial Natal, interpreters were well positioned to exploit vulnerable indentured workers. As a result of the many roles they played, they are depicted in the literature variously as victims, subservient, champions and intercultural brokers. They were ordinary people and had aspirations such as a desire for economic mobility or education for their children. Unlike most migrants, their command of English, their contact with officials, and the dependence of indentured Indians on their skills gave them a huge advantage. The number of interpreters was small. In 1909, for example, when the Indian population in Natal numbered over 100 000, there were just 26 Indian interpreters. The most prominent were HL Paul, Deen Fakir Yusuf, SI Seepye, Chelivum Stephen, David Vinden, Anthony H Peters, Frank Ward and JS Joshua.

By adopting 'British ideals', interpreters largely won the favour of those in authority. For example, in 1901, magistrates were asked to evaluate the 'competency/incompetency' and 'general character and efficiency' of interpreters. Every magistrate replied that his interpreter was competent; adjectives like 'good', 'efficient', 'very favourable', 'competent', 'honest', 'industrious', 'sober' and 'obliging' were employed to describe them. Complaints about interpreters from other Indians were, according to one magistrate, 'stabs in the dark – none of his accusers daring, or having the courage to come forward and make them openly. I cannot help therefore looking upon them as frivolous and malicious.'<sup>31</sup>

Interpreters received higher wages; most owned private property and even employed domestic servants. Baboo Naidoo's story (see Chapter 4) serves as an example of an early interpreter who elevated his and his family's status. He opened the first Indian-owned shop in Natal in 1861 in Field Street in Durban, selling 'condiments and other delicacies'. George Russell described him as 'an interpreter and high caste man'.<sup>32</sup> Naidoo was interpreter at the Coolie Depot at the Point in the 1860s. Several of the returnees on the *Red Riding Hood* complained that he used sick Indians to work in his gardens and that he had Louis Mason (Emigration Agent and manager at the depot) 'in his pocket'.

The children of interpreter AH Peters did not fare too badly. His will stipulated that James Christopher Peters was to become a religious minister in India; Frederick Anthony Peters was to be sent to St Mary's College in Madras and then proceed to England to become a lawyer; Maurice Joseph Peters and daughter Beryl Peters were to study medicine. Beryl, who studied at Edinburgh University, was, with Dr Goonam, one of the first Indian female doctors in Natal. Peters was a 'success'; his upward mobility was founded largely on the privileges that came with being an interpreter.<sup>33</sup>

A particularly colourful interpreter was Henry Louis Paul (1862–1935), who was born in Madras and arrived in Natal in 1879 with his parents Mary and Anthony Joseph Paul. On 1 May 1891, M Sinappen complained to the Colonial Secretary that Paul 'cannot either read or write Tamil. The Tamil he uses towards us when interpreting corresponds to pigeon English of the Chinese, or the kitchen *kaffir* of Natal...He cannot possibly speak a language which is not his mother tongue, to us Indians.'<sup>34</sup> There were more serious complaints. An anonymous letter to the prime minister on 22 March 1901 from 'Poor Indian Sufferers' accused Paul of 'villainy, intrigue, injustice, immorality of the worst types'. He was charged with 'coaching' witnesses to 'ruin those he has a grudge against, whilst he poses as a saint in the eyes of authorities'. He was also accused of 'sucking the life-blood of poor Indians who go to court' by sending them to his 'favourite lawyer', who paid him a commission.

On 4 January 1907, a colonial-born educated Indian named Lazarus Gabriel, who was probably aspiring to climb up the bureaucratic ladder, informed the chief magistrate of Durban of Paul's attendance at a political meeting of the Natal Indian Congress on 1 January, attended by 2 000 people, where Gandhi spoke about his visit to England. Paul sat on the platform. Resolutions were passed, animated political speeches made, and the meeting ended after midnight amidst cries of 'Bande Mataram', the freedom song of Indians. Gabriel reported that Paul also spoke at another meeting on 3 January in violation of civil service rules that barred interpreters from involvement in politics. Paul replied that he was not a member of the Congress and attended as a 'spectator'. Chief Magistrate Percy Binns accepted the assurances of Paul, whom he regarded as 'an excellent public servant'. He did, however, warn Paul not to do anything that would result in 'statements of this kind being made'.

There was great prestige attached to the office of interpreter, and accusers often coveted the position. Paul embodied the ambivalent position of interpreters. On the one hand, they were fractious and arrogant; on the other, they were pivotal in establishing social, educational, economic and political organisations. Paul himself founded the Natal Indian Football Association, the United XI Cricket Club and the Indian Benevolent Society, and played a decisive role in Indian education. He lobbied for a high school as Indians could only acquire primary education, and was the first president of the Natal Indian Educational Association (1911–1914) which was formed to pursue this goal. Paul's life story supports Badassy's observation: 'Jealousy and competition amongst interpreters was commonplace, because they struggled not only with each other but also with the government to become more influential, and obtain more recognition or be offered a better job. The quest for good employment...fostered a spirit of keen competition and even bitter rivalry.'



Interpreters often saw themselves as socially superior to 'ordinary' Indians. When a train arrived late in Ladysmith in October 1906, investigations showed that this was due to the 'obstinacy' of the 'Indian Vinden'. He sat in a compartment reserved for 'Europeans' and refused to move to that for 'Coloureds' because, he said, he was 'as good as any European...[and] could not travel with *kafirs* and low-class Indians'. Vinden was forcefully ejected. He wrote to the local magistrate that he was travelling on government duty, and restated that he was as good as any white citizen and entitled to the same accommodation:

It is inappropriate to travel with a low class Indian waiter and an uncivilised native whose smell caused me to put the shutters down...I have often seen natives and Indians of a lower social scale and position travel in those compartments...It is below the dignity of a respectable person to travel with Indians who are not socially equal. It is not respectful for me to allow my wife and children to travel amongst this class of people.<sup>35</sup>

While Vinden's views were unambiguous, the same cannot be said of his social location. As an educated Indian, he might have been expected to be a spokesman for Indians, but he did not want to be a part of them. The racist colonial structure, however, placed severe limits on his desire to live as a 'European'.

Vinden had absorbed imperial ideology to the extent that he embraced the hierarchical race and class structure. But Vinden and others like him – HL Paul, Anthony Peters, David Peters, Soobhun Godfrey, Robert Somasundram, to mention a few – were to find that no matter how they dressed, what language they spoke and in what accent, whom they married, how they were brought up, or where they educated their children, they could not escape their skin colour. They were privileged relative to other Indians, but faced limits as far as colonial society was concerned. All this mattered little to ordinary indentured and ex-indentured working-class Indians, who often suffered at their hands. These vignettes point to interpreters serving their personal interests, while also serving the system. But there was another side. Their command of the language and closeness to power sometimes translated into a belligerence against a system that forced them back into the third-class compartment with the 'coolies' they despised. Their presence exposed the lie of Empire, even for those who acquired the requisite accoutrements of 'civilisation'. Equal membership of the Empire would remain elusive.

It is probably appropriate to end this section by focusing on one of the interpreters, Dabee Bramdaw, who used his education and position to get involved in community affairs and pursue business interests while successfully confronting a legal system that he had served. Dabee Ramdhane (18552) and Bathsi Jhotoorus (18544)<sup>36</sup> arrived on the *Poonah* from Calcutta in July 1878. They were single when they boarded the ship but, like many indentured migrants, formed a relationship on board. Both were assigned to HY Pepworth of Durban.

Eldest son Dabee Bramdaw, also known as Bhurmacho, was born in Maritzburg in November 1881 and died on 26 October 1935. The archival records show that his father returned alone to India on the *Congella* in March 1895, leaving his wife and son in Natal. There is no record of Bathsi returning with him nor any indication of what happened to her in Natal. His father's departure did not prevent Dabee from obtaining a privileged education. His

parents were determined to educate Dabee, who was one of the few Indians to receive an education at the White Boys Model School in Maritzburg, where the authorities were not as stringent in the 1890s as they would later be, and allowed him to enrol at the school as there were no facilities for Indians. He passed the Union Lower Law Exam and obtained a position as interpreter in the courts in 1908 and was admitted as Sworn Translator of the Supreme Court of South Africa.

Dabee Bramdaw married Phulkuwar, colonial-born daughter of Kulupnatah Sewsaye (10439) and Dhunessee Rowdy (10746). Both arrived on the *Enmore II* in January 1875 and served their indentures with the Durban Corporation. Dabee and Phulkuwar had eight children: Dhaneer, Gangadevi, Sewprakas, Jumnadevi, Deepakchand, Saraswati, Inder and Bhim. Gangadevi provided the link between the Bramdaws and the Bodasings of the north coast. She married Rajdeo Sing Bodasing, fourth son of Babu Bodasing.

Dabee Bramdaw entered the public service on 13 June 1913. He served in magistrates' courts in Umlazi, Verulam, Bulwer, Stanger and Pinetown. He also acted as clerk to the Rural Licensing Officer for Provincial Council and Legislative Assembly elections, and the Rural Licensing Board; gave evidence before the Graham Commission into the Public Service in 1933; and was invited to draft the Rural Licensing Board regulations.

Bramdaw used his access to language to write several petitions and lead deputations to the education department to request funding for Indian schooling. He was one of the founding members of the Hindu reformist organisation the Arya Samaj in South Africa. Like most of the business and educated elites, he was also involved in sport. He introduced a five-a-side football competition among Indians, was life vice-president of the Maritzburg and District Indian Football Association, and the first Indian to pass the football referee's examination.

Bramdaw was also an astute businessman. He owned a fuel business, the Central Fuel Distributors, at Lord's Siding in Durban. Another of his activities was purchasing sugar cane. This was a fairly common practice among Indians with capital. Indian farmers who lacked capital leased and farmed land, with 'men of means' speculating on the crop. For example, Bramdaw secured the first option to purchase the sugar cane of Soni Morarjee at River Nonoti in Victoria County for £330. He paid a deposit of £50 on 27 May 1920 and the balance was to be paid by 20 July 1920. However, the price of sugar rose dramatically and Morarjee broke the agreement. Bramdaw successfully sued for £600 in October 1921.

Bramdaw left the public service in 1930 under rather unpleasant circumstances. Having served faithfully from 1913, he was suspended on 29 August 1929 pending an investigation into allegations that while in the magistrate's office in Pinetown, he accepted 'fees' or 'rewards' for assisting applicants to fill in their forms. Camperdown magistrate Robert Talbot investigated the allegations in October 1929. While conceding that Bramdaw did not accept 'rewards' and that the evidence was 'contradictory', Talbot concluded that he had accepted unauthorised payments in 1927 and 1928.

Secretary of Justice WE Bok remarked that Bramdaw was lucky to have been found not guilty on the main counts. He found him guilty on the alternative charge and recommended that he be dismissed. Bramdaw was dismissed on 8 November 1929.

Bramdaw sued Oswald Pirow, Minister of Justice, for £3 951 for unlawful dismissal. His claim included the fact that 'there was no reasonable prospect of being able to obtain other employment' as he was almost 50.<sup>37</sup> The case was heard in October 1930. The Supreme Court accepted that the allegedly anti-Indian Bok had no power to make a recommendation; only Talbot was authorised to do that. The court also took into account that assistance rendered by Bramdaw was done with the full knowledge of his superiors, that he received no remuneration for this, that the evidence of witnesses was contradictory, and that there was a likely conspiracy given that all the witnesses lived within 100 feet of each other. Following several appeals by the defendants, the case was finally concluded in February 1932 with judgment in Bramdaw's favour for £1 250. Bramdaw passed away in November 1936, having meshed a life of interpreter, community activist and businessman.

## The Protector

I do not say abolish the office of Protector of Indian Immigrants, but I would suggest the Indian Government appointing a man to come out who understands the Indians' ways and customs, and who would be more competent to deal with these affairs. By adopting this suggestion we would have a man who would be a quasi-consul and independent protector, so far as the Indian is concerned, and who would be beneficial to both employer and employee.

BERNARD GABRIEL<sup>38</sup>

Bernard Gabriel, a colonial-born educated Indian, was articulating what many Indians thought of the Protector. Whether an Indian Protector would have made a difference is a moot point given that the system was heavily weighted in favour of planters. It was the Coolie Commission of 1872 that proposed the appointment of a Protector of Indian Immigrants to act as 'caretaker' of Indians, largely to placate colonial authorities. The Protector's task was to 'secure the perfect and effectual supervision' of the indentured.<sup>39</sup> In the Natal Archives Repository there are 196 volumes compiled by the Protector, recording his work and that of his deputies who traversed the areas where the indentured found employment. This served an important purpose, as Mongia reminds us:

Yearly and often quarterly 'returns' of the situation of the migrants, including information on the births and deaths, the money earned, the amount saved, the beatings endured, the contracts breached, the misconduct prosecuted, the diseases contracted, the letters received or dispatched, became a regular, indeed required, feature of the system.<sup>40</sup>

The Protector was an important cog in the indentured enterprise, less to 'protect' the indentured than to project the 'impartiality' of the state. 'Impartial' state control supported the notion that Indians were well treated and perpetuated the system. The Protector had extensive powers and was expected to have skills to match. The Commission recommended that he should have some experience in India and knowledge of Indian languages, and be qualified to head an important department. His duties involved inquiring into and settling petty disputes between masters and workers, and among Indians. This, the Commission hoped, would relieve magis-

trates of a large number of what were seen as trivial but ‘difficult and troublesome matters’.<sup>41</sup> There was no question that the Protector would be a white male.

HC Shepstone was appointed the first Protector but could not take up the position immediately, so Captain Murdock MacLeod, who had been instrumental in the importation of indentured labour, deputised.<sup>42</sup> MacLeod was replaced by Shepstone, who served until June 1875. Thereafter, Major General Banastre Pryce-Lloyd (1875–1876), Major Graves (1876–1883), Louis Mason (1883–1903) and JA Polkinghorne (1903–1911) filled the position.

MacLeod was charged with culpable homicide for the death of Vencatapah in Uppersammy’s store in Red Hill in January 1877. Late on the evening of 15 January 1877, while returning from Verulam, MacLeod stopped at Stone’s Roadside Inn for a bottle of ale. He went outside, spoke with another gentleman, took a gun out of his pocket, fired it into the road, put it back into his pocket, and rode off. Near Red Hill, he stopped at the store of Uppersammy, which was 40 feet from the road and fenced to keep strangers out. Uppersammy was in the store with Narsimaloo, Vencatapah and his wife Vencatamah, Seekhunder, Moonsamy and Parsooraman.

MacLeod called out, ‘Coolie, Coolie, give me a woman.’ There was no response as it was raining heavily and the patrons probably did not hear him. MacLeod forced his way through the shut gate. The men later testified that MacLeod smelt of liquor. There was an altercation and MacLeod took out his pistol and fatally shot Vencatapah. The other Indians grabbed hold of MacLeod and tied him up to a post until Dr Seaton and a neighbour, Mr Buchanan, arrived and freed him. MacLeod’s defence was that he had lost his way to town and wanted directions. He admitted calling out for a woman, but this was because he thought the men were drunk. When he went into the store, the men attacked him and he shot in self defence. MacLeod was acquitted.<sup>43</sup> The irony of appointing someone with his reputation among Indians as ‘Protector’ deserves little additional comment.



Staff of the Indian Immigration Department, with JA Polkinghorne, Protector from 1903 to 1911, circled.

Who was the Protector to protect? According to Colonial Secretary Henry Bulwer, the Protector had to 'guard the interests of the employer against the misconduct of the Indians employed; it is equally his duty to guard the interests of the Indians'.<sup>44</sup> In reality, changes in the law and the appointment of a Protector meant little in the context of the overwhelming power of colonists. As Thompson has pointed out, no matter how diligently the Protector undertook his duties, his effectiveness was seriously compromised by the political alliance of the governor and the planters, and the apathy of many magistrates 'who dared not flout the interests of the prosperous sugar planters, the social lions of their districts'.<sup>45</sup> Protectors were 'people of their time' and some imbibed the racist stereotypes of the environment in which they worked. Their class interests and social circles often made them more sympathetic to employers than to the indentured.

In an unusual breaking of ranks in 1884, George Burgess, a clerk in the Protector's office, wrote a devastating critique of the Protector. Burgess pointed out that when Indians complained to the Protector, their deposition, whether serious or not, was sent to the employer 'for his information and for any remarks he may wish to make'.<sup>46</sup> Employers' replies were 'almost invariably' accepted and 'there the matter ends'.

According to Burgess, Protector Mason had himself stated that Indians were 'cruelly treated' at Blackburn Estate, but were afraid to complain because they feared 'greater ill-treatment than ever'. Burgess mentioned an incident at Blackburn in October 1883 when four workers complained of physical abuse by assistant manager Hardouin. Hardouin was found guilty and dismissed, but immediately obtained a position at Virginia Estate. This made the Indians 'repent of having complained to their Protector, and to cause them to determine never again to utter a murmur', because they felt that there was little point in it since the employers and managers were in collusion.

Burgess reported that at Canonby Estate an investigation in July 1882 showed that the 'many serious complaints' of ill-treatment were justified but no action was taken. Indians were 'aware that the Government was made acquainted with the wrongs they suffered, and that no action was taken'. This led many to believe that 'it is useless to complain'. According to Burgess, the Protector had made it clear that legal proceedings against employers should be instituted 'reluctantly and not until it has been made apparent that they are determined to defy authority'. Mason responded that Burgess' allegations were a 'tissue of falsehoods':

One has only to say to an Indian 'have you any complaint to make against your Master?' and he will concoct one on the spot...The most worthless characters are the first to complain; men who have never worked in their own country and do not intend doing so here. As a rule, lazy and indolent men have a profound objection to being on estates managed by Frenchmen from Mauritius, and the reason is not difficult to find. An English manager, if an Indian does but little work will not bother much about him. On the other hand, the Frenchman is quite *au fond* with the many little intrigues of the Indian; and does not view with the same lenient eye the skulking of any of them, and it is in trying to obtain a fair day's work out of such men that many complaints arise.

The Indian leaves the estate at the first opportunity and wanders about begging until he is arrested by the police and prosecuted for being without a pass. When it comes to this point he tries to excuse himself by making a complaint against his Master and it is in dealing with such cases that my note book is almost filled.<sup>47</sup>

Here we have all the racist stereotypes about the 'Oriental' revealed in their crudest form. While this was not unusual, given the tenor of the times, Mason was not just 'another colonist'. He was the Protector and was expected to be even-handed. These preconceived notions meant that he was deeply prejudiced and, far from acting as Protector, could only render the indentured increasingly vulnerable to the brutality and perversions of the employer. Rather than facilitating the complaints of the indentured, Mason's views became another barrier to their obtaining redress.

But while Thomson and other critics are correct on one level, we should not ignore the fact that the indentured often creatively used the office of the Protector to advance their own cause. In trying to understand the effect of the Protector, rather than simply looking at his social location and drawing conclusions from that, it is also useful to look at some of the unintended consequences of the work of his office. The visits of the Protector, his deputy and inspectors, and Indian interpreters limited the absolute control of plantation owners. The Protector's presence was sometimes skilfully used by the indentured to air their grievances, and the very office of the Protector was used to demand passes from the 'Master', which placed the latter under pressure.

The manager of Equeefa, JH Turton, complained to the Wragg Commission that 'every visit of the Protector upsets the coolies for a week at least because he asks them if they had complaints to make, and he sends for all the hands to be brought from the fields to the mill-yard, no matter what hour he arrives'.<sup>48</sup> SWB Griffin of Willow Grange revealed that one of his workers consistently took advantage of the Deputy Protector's visits: 'As a rule, after the visit the Indians show themselves more independent, and do not show that respect which they should. I do not attribute this so much to the Deputy-Protector's visit, as to a lawyer-like coolie whom I have.' We see here an example of what employers referred to as 'ringleaders'; unfortunately another of those who remain nameless.

William Woods of Estcourt described how Ismail Baksh 'crawled up and kissed the Deputy-Protector's [Manning's] boots and complained that I had deducted a shilling a day for his absence'. Manning ordered Woods to pay Baksh. According to Woods, prior to Manning's first visit, he did not have any 'difficulty with my coolies; afterwards they ran away and gave me much trouble'. Woods was also angered that Manning had 'suddenly turned upon him in the presence of workers and threatened to take them all away, there and then'.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Richard Gresham of Forest Lodge near Maritzburg felt that Manning's visits had eroded his absolute authority:

Before he ever came I was master, my coolies would do anything for me, even if it were mid-night, I had only to call them; but after the Deputy Protector's visits, charges are trumped up against me by my coolies...The last lot of coolies have actually tried to

provoke me to assault them. One man named Jeebodli (31682) shoved me and said, 'Now strike me, and I will report you to the Deputy-Protector.'<sup>50</sup>

Jeebodli Matadin was 26 when he came to Natal in July 1884 from Sooltanpore. He persisted with his complaints of ill-treatment until his contract was cancelled on 24 March 1886. Clearly, these confrontations had an effect on the indentured and allowed some to be more assertive in defending their rights. But lest one romanticise the effects of the Protector, the system worked in such a way that if gains were made there were immediate attempts to rejig it in favour of employers. So, for example, Mason's response was to try to dilute the authority of his deputy, notably by removing some judicial powers.

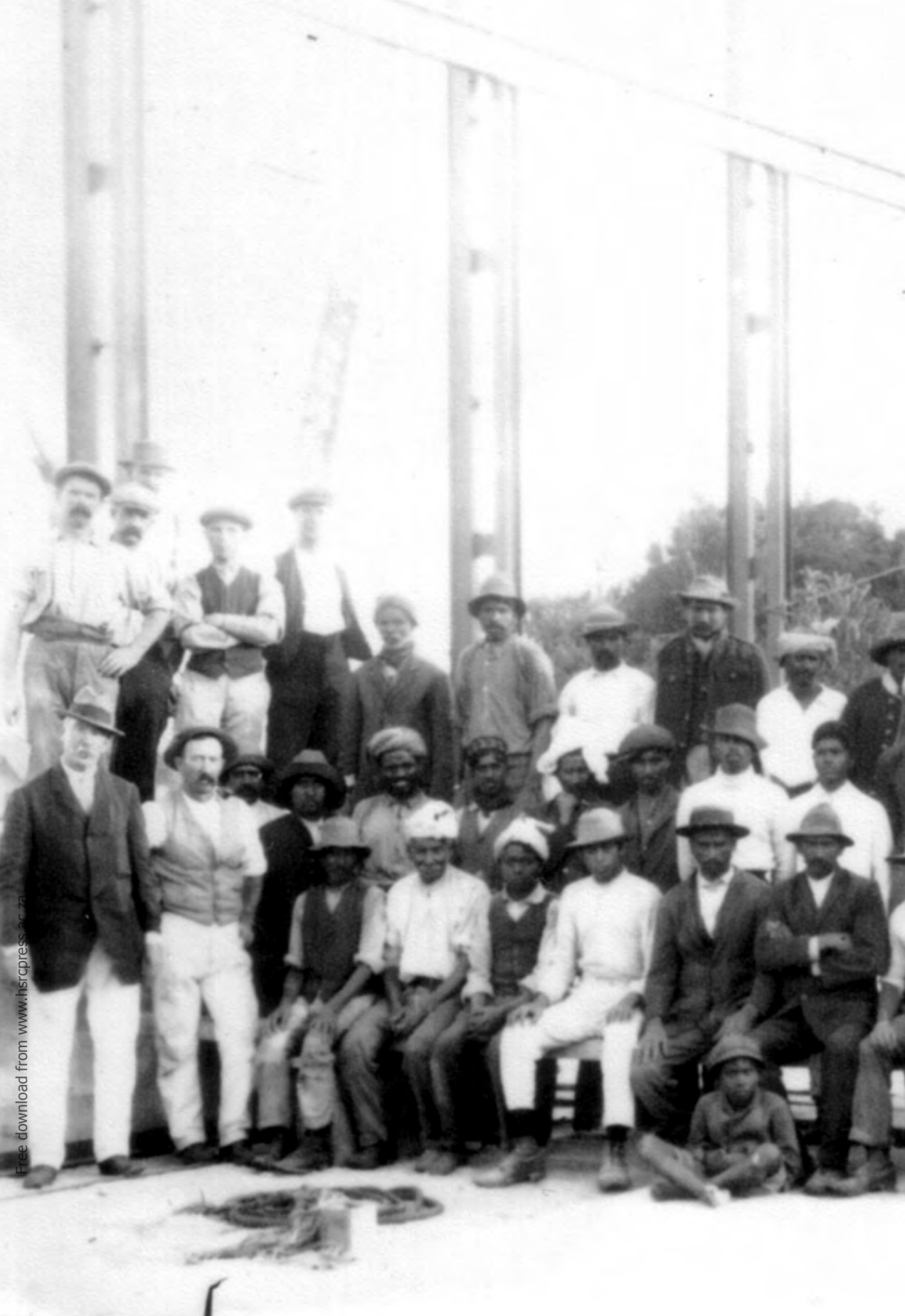
Mason wrote to the Trust Board on 18 August 1885 that Manning had been employed for 'more constant personal inspections and supervision of upcountry Indians' and that hearing cases was distracting him from his primary duty. Manning disagreed:

This would have a disastrous effect on the efficiency of my supervision of the Indians. I have never before had so much trouble in securing the punctual payment of wages as at the present time. It requires all the prestige of judicial powers as well as determination and tact to secure any approach to punctual payments...This prestige of office would vanish if the powers are withdrawn or abridged.<sup>51</sup>

In this context, the Wragg Commission was especially crucial, pointing out that this would 'encourage the institution of false and frivolous cases...irritating to European employers. Indians are fond of litigation...They can harass their employers by false and frivolous cases.'<sup>52</sup> The Commission came down heavily against the Protector having judicial powers.

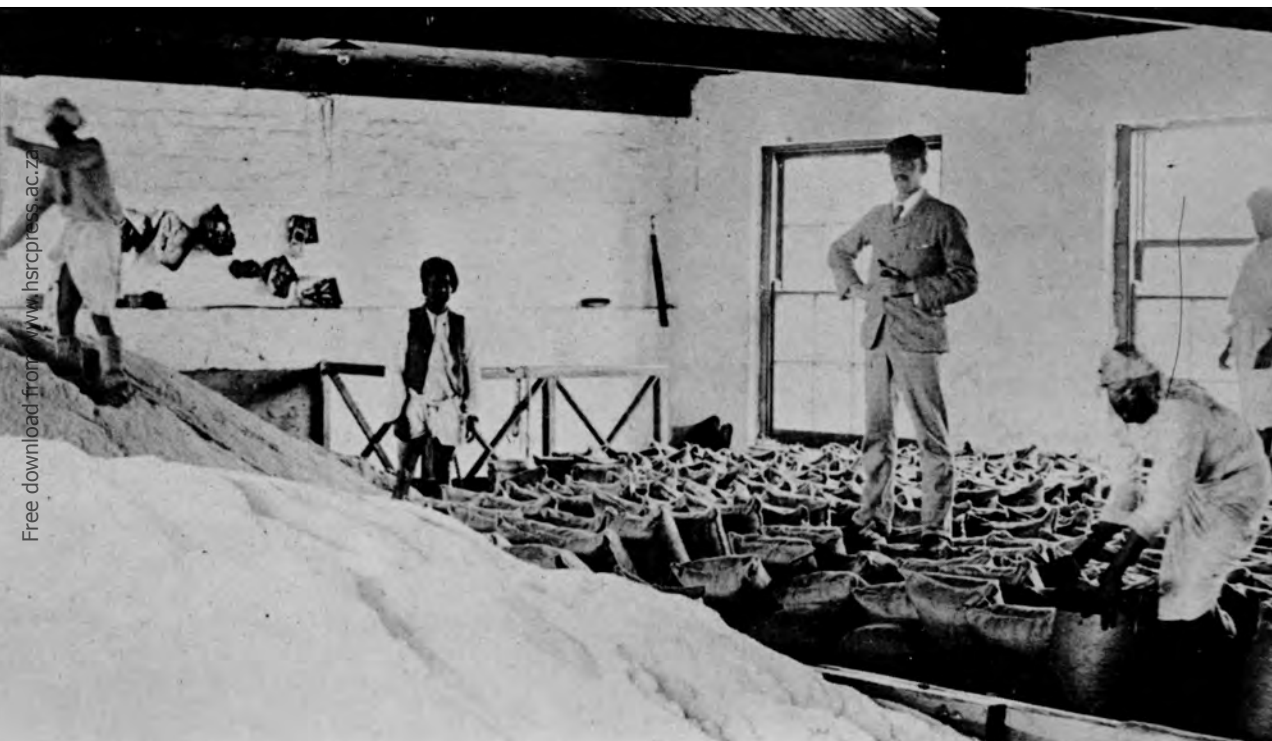
The indentured faced a legal edifice that was weighted heavily against them. Racism, language, resources, the 'pass' system and the lack of effective collective organisation all militated against being able to get redress through legal avenues. And when use was made of the Protector's legal powers and visits, these were quickly closed down. But many did persevere and won some crucial victories which allowed for individual respite, as the case of Votti in Chapter 1 reveals. It will be shown later how the indentured, especially women, creatively used the courts to defend and advance their interests. But these 'victories' often made the system work more smoothly, and did not alter the inequities that allowed employers despotic power.

Walvin has shown how the slave plantation sought to 'continue the process...of hammering millions into a disciplined submission'. Crucially, he adds, 'of course it did not always work exactly as the British [or other Europeans] wanted'.<sup>53</sup> He could have been writing about indenture in Natal. Faced with a system geared to ensure submission, some of the indentured skilfully used the 'spaces' that were open. While the gains might have been meagre and the retribution swift, they left traces of resistance, building confidence and signalling a consciousness and creativity that confounded the employers' approach of seeing them as mere units of labour. The legal edifice, with its magistrates, interpreters and protectors, might have been an 'ass', but it was an ass that the indentured now and then chose to ride, sometimes opening a few doors that provided relief, even if those doors were, in time, more securely bolted.









# Inside the world of Uriah Heep and Jabez Balfour



Look at the sun how it's fixed in the sky like a taskmaster's eye  
 At the coconut-tree that watches over us like an overseer  
 Threatening to spill his load on our maiden heads...  
 I'm thirsty, dust and vinegar choke my mouth  
 Sweat leaks over me like gutter-water  
 Heat hatches lice in my hair.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>1</sup>

Colonial rule included an ideological offensive that was predicated on defining 'native' cultures as caught in the mire of backwardness and ritualism. From the time of the Enlightenment and European colonial expansion, Edward Said argued, Orientals were disparaged as 'backward, degenerate, uncivilised, and retarded'. Without scientific proof, this view became hegemonic because westerners had the power of definition. Orientals, Said concluded, were 'analysed not as...people, but as problems to be solved'.<sup>2</sup>

This approach legitimised all manner of brutalities as part of the historical mission of colonialism, and explains the religious dedication to 'civilise' and teach 'natives' the value of discipline and hard work. The hypocrisy was colourfully exposed by Dr HW Jones, the medical officer in Stanger:

Woe unto the Pharisaical psalm-smiler of the Uriah Heep and Jabez Balfour type, mean underhanded, dishonourable skunks and toady, who make use of religion simply as a cloak to cover Humbug and self-aggrandisement; Woe unto the cruel Sweater, who compels his fellow men, aye, and women too, to toil in the blazing sun or pouring rain for twelve or fourteen hours a day, the contract time being nine hours; with, in most cases, wretched hovels to live in, the profit accruing to the Sweater. No wonder that these rascally Sweaters are able to build fine mansions at the expense of the flesh and blood of the poor Indians. Texts such as 'Fear the Lord' meet me on every turn, but 'Fear the Independent Military Protector of Immigrants' would be more appropriate. The Sweaters creed is maximum comfort for self and progeny; maximum discomfort for the miserable employees. Minimum-wages, maximum-work. There you have the up-to-

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OPPOSITE ABOVE: Workers load heaps of sugar cane onto an ox-driven cart. BELOW: An overseer watches closely as bags are filled with sugar. During the harvest, workers in the boiler-room toiled from 2 a.m. to 7 p.m., six days a week.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Workers, Sirdars and overseers. The sugar plantations were designed to extract maximum labour at minimum expense as colonialism's ideological offensive legitimised all manner of brutalities.

date psalm-smiling Sweater in a nutshell. Woe unto the greedy political scheme, the Company promoter and concession-monger, who accumulates wealth at the expense and detriment of the community. Woe unto the breakers up of homesteads, the selfish insatiable Land-grabbers.<sup>3</sup>

The comparison with Uriah Heep and Jabez Balfour suggests that the doctor was well read, and reveals his contempt for the exploitative practices of employers. Uriah Heep is a fictional character in Charles Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*, famous for his cloying modesty and insincerity. Like many of Dickens' villains, greed is Uriah Heep's main motivation. Jabez Balfour (1843–1916) was a businessman, politician and, despite the biblical undertones of 'Jabez', a criminal. He founded the Liberator Building Society to help ordinary people buy homes, but lived a glitzy life with cellars full of champagne and the finest suits. When it emerged that Jabez had inflated the company's turnover on paper to make massive payouts to himself, he fled to Argentina in the mid-1890s, but was extradited and imprisoned for 14 years in London. Jabez was the equivalent of the modern-day Enron and WorldCom.

Long before George Orwell's *1984*, Dr Jones was illustrating how words used to describe things were, in effect, doing the opposite. So the 'Liberator' Building Society, rather than freeing people, actually imprisoned them in debt. And at the heart of the civilising mission was the squeezing of profits and greed. Dr Jones, as an 'insider', saw the rough treatment and greed first-hand. This could take the form of humiliating workers, for example. At Barrow Green Estate, Bisset, the manager, in addition to using 'filthy and abusive language' and throwing stones at employees, had a unique method of issuing rations, as the Protector reported in 1891:

Weekly rations are weighed out in bulk to different gangs consisting of seven or eight persons, sometimes more. Each member of the gang helps himself to the quantity he considers himself entitled. After a general scrimmage all-round the last man invariably comes off short. The result is dissatisfaction and rows amongst the Indians. The women also stated that the weekly rations were not sufficient to last them for the week. With the exception of mealie meal, the women only receive half the quantity of the rations issued to men.<sup>4</sup>

Fines were used not only to discipline the indentured, but sometimes to deny them wages altogether. Arbitrary deductions of one shilling per day as 'fines' for a range of offences meant that workers were indebted to employers. Immigration Agent Shepstone informed Colonial Secretary J Ayliff in November 1865:

I believe that the coolies, owing to the fines, have little or no wages to receive at the end of the month, and on some estates I hear this is carried to such an extent that when the fines for sickness, etc., as imposed by the master, exceed the wage of the coolie for the month, they are carried to his debit in the next month's wages, so that unless some measures are adopted for stopping this practice, coolie employers may manage in such a way that they may have little or nothing to pay their coolies for wages.<sup>5</sup>

Alongside the use of food to humiliate employees and fines to ‘cheat’ them, many employers ‘routinised’ corporal punishment. An eyewitness account spoke of the ‘pleasing spectacle’ of waiting by the ‘weighing machines and watch[ing] the women struggling home with their heavy loads, and if they are a few pounds underweight, down comes the *sjambok* on unprotected head and quivering shoulders, while a torrent of abuse is poured upon them’.<sup>6</sup> To continue with the thesis of the ‘civilising mission’, employers would argue that they were confronting centuries of tradition as they tried to literally beat the women into the modern world. And this is what Dr Jones was trying to expose. The narrative of the ‘civilising mission’ and its supposed heroic confrontation with Orientals provided cover for humiliation and exploitation.

It is into the hidden abode of the plantations of the ‘Uriah Heep and Jabez Balfour types’ that this chapter travels.

The indentured were involved in a variety of occupations, although sugar was the engine of economic life in Natal and approximately 60 per cent were allocated to sugar estates. Indians comprised over 80 per cent of labour in the sugar industry in 1907/08.<sup>7</sup> Indentured workers were also utilised by the Natal Government Railways, municipalities, coal mines, tea industry, wattle plantations, as domestic servants, and as ‘special servants’ in hospitals, hotels, private clubs and dockyards. In fact, there were 1 300 employers of indentured labour in 1904.<sup>8</sup> While, strictly speaking, the situation in Natal was not analogous to a colony where sugar was a monoculture, the plantation did define the life of indenture for many.

Walvin has written that plantations continued the process begun on slave ships, that of ‘shap[ing] slaves into labouring instruments of tropical profitability’.<sup>9</sup> The plantation, according to Beckford, bound ‘every one in its embrace to the one task of executing the will of its owner. And



Indentured women faced enormous challenges. They were paid lower wages and given smaller food rations than men; they could be punished and denied rations if pregnant or ill. Many also were subject to sexual violence. The writing of their stories is less a recounting of great deeds and more about uncovering the often quiet relationships that were defining forces in most workers’ lives.

because it [was] omnipotent in the lives of those living within its confines, it [was] also a total social institution. Social relations [were] determined by the economic organisation that governed production.<sup>10</sup> As slavery gave way to indenture, those who managed the plantations were determined to turn the indentured into tools of labour.

And yet, we should recognise that while there was coercion and violence, planters were compelled to use a ‘carrot and stick’ approach; otherwise, small bands of managers would not have been able to supervise large groups of workers who, at times, were armed with agricultural implements. Further, as discussed in Chapter 5, the government was forced to introduce the office of the Protector. In the beginning, however, the system was highly unregulated and porous, and even when the Protector was appointed, his office was too close to powerful planters and too often trumped by the broader legal edifice to eliminate ill-treatment completely. Abuses occurred regularly. The fact that inquiries were held throughout indenture is testimony to this.

## ‘Minimum wages, maximum work’

Smudges of red veiled threat to soiled morning  
Haphazard the cold cut of a siren yelling clock  
Hammered into foreheads with a pass number  
The familiarity of the body with hour minutes  
Stretching to pause beneath gray wire netting  
Tying up of a stretch of dun unbleached linen  
Holding up cores and limbs and eggs in one place  
Breath upon warm breath stealing of a woman  
Alternate dawn and dusk tasking among men  
Divine muttering fleshed by water from chalice  
Placed among idols on brown polished shelf.

MOHIT PRASAD<sup>11</sup>

The plantation was designed to extract maximum labour at minimum expense. The crucial cost was the wage of the indentured. Here, the employer was ‘well looked after’ as wages for the five years were strictly regulated. Remuneration for men was 10 shillings per month for the first year, and rose by a shilling per month each successive year. The rate did not change for the half century of indenture! The fixed wage meant that workers did not benefit from increases in the market value of sugar and labour, nor was allowance made for inflation.<sup>12</sup> Working women received half the wage of men, and children were paid proportionate to their age. A monthly food ration of rice, dholl, salt, fish and ghee, medical care, and lodging was provided by the employer.<sup>13</sup> From 1865, indentured workers forfeited two days’ pay for every day’s absence without a valid reason. The indentured could not choose their employer or employment. They were assigned and had to remain with the same employer for the full five years.

Draconian formal and informal mechanisms were instituted to ensure that they fulfilled the terms of their contracts. Formal laws imposed criminal penalties for breach of what was, in essence, a civil contract. This included things like vagrancy, refusal to work, desertion,

'laziness' and absenteeism.<sup>14</sup> Penal sanctions were needed to control indentured labour, according to British Colonial Secretary Herman Merivale, quoting Karl Marx: 'In civilised countries the labourer, though free, is by a law of nature dependent on capitalists; in colonies this dependence must be created by artificial means.'<sup>15</sup>

After completing their indentures, Indians could return to India at their own expense after five years or remain in the colony for a further five years to claim a free return passage. Until 1891, they could forego the free passage in return for a plot of land. Although thousands of free Indians applied for land, only 53 grants were made. Whites were loath to encourage Indian settlement and delayed the grant of land while debating questions such as where the land was to be given, whether wives and children were entitled to grants, and the size of the plot. In the process, the ex-indentured were denied what they were legally entitled to.<sup>16</sup>

Indenture formed the labouring backbone of the sugar industry. Sugar production involved unskilled agricultural as well as skilled industrial work. Unskilled workers cultivated and harvested cane while skilled workers crushed the cane and boiled it in the mill to produce sugar. The division of labour was racially differentiated. The indentured performed unskilled work and whites, mainly imported from Mauritius, initially did skilled work.

The sugar industry experienced low prices from the mid-1870s because of international competition and overproduction. This was compounded by crop disease, natural disasters, soil exhaustion and difficulty in obtaining credit.<sup>17</sup> Difficult economic conditions forced out smaller planters. From the 1880s, domestically owned plantations were replaced by central factories owned by large corporations. The number of mills declined from 75 in 1877 to 37 in 1898.<sup>18</sup> Natal Estates (Campbells), Tongaat Sugar (Saunders), Illovo Estate (Pearce), Reynolds Brothers, and JL Hulett and Sons were 'miller-cum-planters'. They grew cane and crushed it in their factory, and also crushed cane for outside growers. From 1890, large 'miller-cum-planters' sold shares in Britain and strengthened their monopoly of the industry.<sup>19</sup>

Workers were involved in industrial production between July and December/ January. During these months, they cut cane and carried it on their shoulders, or in ox-wagons on bigger plantations, as soon as it matured. Speed was crucial because cane had to be cut and processed within 24 hours. Instead of hiring more labourers during the crushing season, the indentured were forced to work for 14 to 16 hours. The plantation marked a massive change for the indentured. Protector Polkinghorne observed in 1906:

My eyes have been considerably opened to the causes operating against the indentured Indian. Workers who have recently arrived from India have to acclimatise and in many cases have to assume work of which they know nothing about before and in many cases eat food to which they are unaccustomed, and to cook their food which is not a universal custom for men in India to do. Take a man in the coastal climate, who is made to work in the months from October to March, the most unhealthy period, over the contract time [of nine hours]. He is turned out at daybreak. It may be an extremely hot or rainy day, and he is allowed half-an-hour for breakfast and half-an-hour somewhere about 12:00 to 1:00 p.m., then he knocks off work at 5:00 p.m. and has to walk some

two miles and reaches his barracks just before 6:00 p.m., tired out as all this implies. He then has to fetch water, cook his evening meal, and then, unless he gets up at 3:00 a.m, his breakfast for the next day. You repeat this day after day, then on Sunday he has to collect fuel. Is it to be surprised at if he turns sick, say of diarrhea or dysentery, that his system is so weakened, the chances are he succumbs?<sup>20</sup>

Many employers did not respect the 'agreement' that they formally entered into with the indentured. The plantation, to paraphrase Michel Foucault on prisons, was the place where power was manifested in its most excessive form and was justified as a moral force.<sup>21</sup> Employers felt obliged to inculcate the virtue of discipline to squeeze labour out of the indentured. The objective of the indentured was to survive the years of indenture. It was a contest in which the bosses held all the aces. The files of the Protector and court records are replete with the complaints of workers. According to Swan:

Plantation labourers were overworked [as much as a 17- or an 18-hour day during the overlapping crushing and planting seasons], malnourished and very poorly housed, usually in barracks arranged in rows of back-to-back rooms without window or chimney. This resulted in abnormally high disease and death rates...There is a solid weight of evidence in the Protector's files to suggest [that] degrading conditions formed the pattern of daily life throughout much of agriculture.<sup>22</sup>

The main complaints of workers, as evidenced from the files of the Protector, were overwork, insufficient and deficient rations, assault, non-payment of wages, unlawful deductions and abusive language. But, as we shall see, the indentured did not simply yield, but found all manner of means to subvert the 'system' to protect themselves, including direct physical confrontation.

## Task work and violence

In cold rasping of file on steel, shredding steel each morning at the same one hour of ritual to mark onset of field tasking taking the mark of raw sickle pressing into warm salty hide branding furrows on that soil width by width scooped wave breaking into crests for ratoon.

MOHIT PRASAD<sup>23</sup>

In 1900, Dr Jones wrote the following to sugar baron Hulett:

Mr. Hulett, you don't err on the side of mercy in the treatment of your coolies. During the summer months you make your Indians toil in the blazing sun from sunrise to sunset, a period of twelve or thirteen hours...It is a rare thing to see any of you in the field. You employ a highly paid *SWEATER* to boss the show. It is not an unknown incident for Indians to drop down in the field from sheer exhaustion. You profess a lot of Christianity, the psalm-smiling machine [American organ] is on the jog nearly the whole day – but you don't practice it.<sup>24</sup>

Dr Jones points to the many infractions, abuses and circumventions of formal laws, or things not covered by law. Task work, while not officially sanctioned, was used, and was one of the



most onerous practices, as it drove workers to exhaustion. Dr FW Greene, the medical officer in Isipingo, told the Wragg Commission that he had seen ‘men who were almost in a state of collapse from over-exertion. I was informed that they had been put to task work...[T]his task work is still in force. I was told so on the Reunion Estate the other day.’<sup>25</sup> In another instance two decades later, Deputy Protector Manning informed the magistrate of New Hanover that Vass Devan (138875), Anamally (138871), Munsamy (138805) and Kistan (138774), who were indentured to JH Smith of Haslemere, were given task work. Those unable to complete their tasks had to do so on Sunday. If they refused, they were punished by Smith and marched to court where the magistrate imprisoned them for absconding. Manning reminded the magistrate that ‘task work [was] not provided for by the law and...men cannot work all day on Sunday to make up their task’. An unrepentant Smith replied:

I thrashed all four of them for not doing more than four bags. The day before I left, I thrashed Anamally and Munsamy for direct disobedience to orders; these two would probably have a few marks on their backs. Vass Devan, I thrashed on as far as I can remember three occasions some time ago, but it did no good and I gave it up. As to the working on Sundays, if they won’t work in my time they must finish their tasks in their own time.<sup>26</sup>

Inspector Waller visited Frasers Wattle Syndicate in Hillcrest in August 1909 to investigate complaints of overwork, Sunday work, assault, short supply of rations, and illegal deductions against sick employees. Waller found that the men worked up to 10 hours without a break, and spent an hour walking to and from their barracks; overseer Schoon forced them to work on Sundays, and assaulted them with a *sjambok*; Sirdar Thondroyan handed extra food to his ‘favourites’ while depriving others of their share; and wages were deducted when employees were hospitalised. Waller concluded:

A *prima facie* case has been made out against this estate. The majority of the hands are in a state of great discontent, and at the present time there are ten men in desertion...I could not be blind to the threatening looks cast at Mr. Schoon when he appeared on the scene and consequently I warned him to be careful. It was only that morning that he kicked one of the men. I warned Mr. Schoon that indiscriminate kicks and thumps would only bring about retaliation. I sat down by the overseer’s side and had a long conversation with him, speaking to him and advising him as I would a brother. I would be the very last man to belittle an overseer in the eyes of his men. I know the Indian [too] well to do that.<sup>27</sup>

The power of bosses was buttressed by violence meted out by employers, African or white overseers, and Indian Sirdars. Testimonies in magistrates’ records and the files of the Protector show that violence was woven into the experience of indenture. Court cases also make this visible. Henry Polak alluded to a number of graphic cases: in one particularly brutal instance in October 1908, JL Armitage was charged with cutting off Manawar’s earlobe with a pocket knife. Armitage’s defence was that ‘the Government allowed the cutting of sheep ears, and the complainant was

no better than a sheep'.<sup>28</sup> In the Natal Midlands, Ramasamy and Poli were indentured to a PD Simmons. Although not lawfully married, they lived together and had two children:

[In February 1909], for some reason or the other, the employer tied the man up to a nail in the wall, and whipped him severely, but as his victim could still wriggle about, he had him tied to the rafters of a room and lashed him with a *sjambok* until he himself was overcome with fatigue, and the man's back was one mass of raw and quivering flesh.<sup>29</sup>

Poli managed to take Ramasamy and the children to the local magistrate. He listened to their complaints, and ordered them to return to the estate as they did not have a pass. Instead, they walked to Durban and presented themselves to the Protector, who promptly arrested them for desertion, and imprisoned them as the law required.

## Sirdars

Sometimes, the Sirdars are too tyrannical and suppress complaints made by indentured Indians, which are, therefore, not brought to the master's notice. Sometimes, the Indian leaves his work in order to report the case to the Protector, and he is punished for being absent without a pass. In other cases, the Sirdar either levies blackmail or stops a man's rations, without the master's knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

This testimony of George Mutukistna, who worked for the notorious J Manistry of the Natal Government Railways, before the Wragg Commission, reveals as much as it obscures about the role of the Sirdars. In claiming that they were 'too tyrannical', Mutukistna underplays the physical violence they meted out. And by alluding to the fact that complaints were 'not brought to the master's notice', the crucial role of Sirdars as buffers between the indentured and employers is revealed. However, the implication is that the master was ignorant; had he known he might have acted against the Sirdar. The records show that Sirdars, while prone to their own excesses, acted at the behest of employers, and were secure in their privilege and brutality because they had the backing of employers who regarded them as pivotal to maintaining control.

The value of the Sirdar was that he was one of the 'indentured's own', speaking their language and networked into their lives. Sirdars were often men of higher caste, as planters attempted to use what they regarded as traditional forms of Indian hierarchy to keep workers 'in their place'.<sup>31</sup> Sirdars were entrusted with the means and opportunity for violence, with many freely using the *sjambok* as a tool of violence to impose authority. The relationship was symbiotic. Employers gained the loyalty necessary to make the 'system' work; Sirdars acquired influence and material advantages.

One of the estates where Sirdars were notorious for acting with impunity was Umhloti Valley. For a long time indentured workers found it difficult to find redress in the courts. Sirdar Valayadum was eventually convicted in December 1901 of assaulting a woman, Chengamah (82679). So weak and vulnerable was she that Magistrate Knight commented that she was 'afraid to go back, and I think she has, under the circumstances, good reason to fear.

May I therefore recommend that she be transferred? She is old, a widow, and weak, and without protection'.<sup>32</sup> While at one level the magistrate strikes a sympathetic tone, it is noteworthy that Chengamah was seen as the problem and not Valayadum. Chengamah also had two children to take care of. She had arrived in Natal from North Arcot on the *Congella* in December 1900 with her children, Chengiah (82680) and Guruvamma (82681). Given that this was the Sirdar's second conviction in a month, the Protector wrote to Knight that it would be 'advisable in the interests of the Indians to insist upon the removal of the Sirdar'.

Arde, the manager, refused because 'good Sirdars are very scarce'. As was often the case, magistrates could not challenge the prerogative of sugar barons. Knight replied to the Protector that he did not 'think the course you propose would be advisable as it would undermine the authority on the estates'. Clearly, Arde felt he could act with impunity. In 1904, the death rate at Umhloti reached 91 per 1 000, while the average in the colony was 15.

Between January 1904 and September 1907, the average death rate on the estate was 73 per 1 000 for indentured males, against 13 on other estates.<sup>33</sup> Arde argued that the main cause of death was the paucity of women, which forced male workers to collect firewood and resulted in them going to bed cold and hungry! He ignored the fact that employees were being 'worked to death' by Sirdars with the connivance of white managers.

Sirdars were in many instances guilty of extortion. The position brought with it material rewards. Sirdars, for example, opened stores on plantations and used coercion to compel workers to patronise them. The deposition in 1891 of Cunny (39461) of Blackburn Estate underscores their clout:

I was assaulted by Sirdar Baboo because I dealt at a Bombay man's store instead of Baboo's store. Baboo has a store at Blackburn. He pays an Indian to look after it for him. Baboo sells there himself on Sundays and any other days he has time. Baboo's wife is at the store all day. Baboo gives credit to any of the estate and on pay day, as the Indians get their wages, he collects his accounts from those who owe him money for goods supplied, and any Indian who does not pay in full, has a bad time of it until he does pay his account to the store. I can get more for my money at the Bombay man's store.<sup>34</sup>

Sirdars consolidated their power by living for extended periods on plantations in contrast to the rapid turnover of the workforce. For example, James Aiken of Ruthville Estate requested permission from the Protector in May 1890 for a gun for Sirdar Ramasamy. Ramasamy had worked for him for eight years and 'has sixteen years previous good service in Natal'.<sup>35</sup>

The Protector informed the Colonial Secretary in 1896 that 'several of the Sirdars have been on the place too long, and I feel sure that if these men were discharged it would be a great comfort to the Indians'.<sup>36</sup> There were occasions when Sirdars used their positions to organise workers; for example, Sirdar Gunpath Singh of Maritzburg was one of the leaders of the 1913 strike. But such instances were rare and were quickly and harshly dealt with by employers.

We close this discussion of Sirdars with the amazing story of Sirdar Sheosaran, who can be viewed as an enterprising individual but also as one of those who grandly profited from an intermediary role.

Sirdar Sheosaran (10117), the son of Ram Charan Kahar of Kutumba District of Monza Bara Station, Nahinagar, arrived in Natal on the *Umvoti* in November 1874. He was 24 years old and described as being of 'tall stature, moderate body, fair complexion, wheat-colour face pock pitted, marks of tattooing on both hands, two front teeth given away'. He met Suhodree Kaharin (10114), who was 22, on the ship. They claimed to be of the same caste, married shortly after their arrival, and registered the marriage with the Protector. They were assigned to the Durban Corporation. After 13 years the couple returned to India on the *Quathlamba* on 6 April 1888. Inspector Womesh Chunder Sen of Aurangabad wrote to Calcutta Agent Robert Mitchell on 2 May 1889, claiming that for several months after his return, Sheosaran lived like an 'ordinary ryot [subsistence farmer] without attracting much attention'. He drew interest to himself in March 1889, when he offered to sell a diamond, which was valued at Benares at 3 000 rupees, to help Narain Sing, the *zamindar* (collector of land revenue) of Chandragarh, clear his debts.

Rumours that Sheosaran possessed many valuables besides the diamond 'reached the ear' of Sub-inspector Jhoomak Lal of Nahinagar who, with Head Constable Bala Dass and Constable Ram Autar Singh, searched the house in the presence of 'prominent citizens'. They found a diamond, silk *ghangras* (long pleated skirt), silk *chadars* (sheets), gold necklaces, bangles and rings valued at £60, around £50 cash, a medal from the Anglo-Zulu War (1879) and a silver watch. They seized these items because they felt that 'the man could not earn so much property by fair means'.

Sheosaran explained that he had been in the police department in Natal, 'Darban ka Baresan', for 13 years as a constable and Sirdar under Superintendent Alexander, earning 20 shillings per month. He and his wife purchased the diamond from Caney and Company for £7 in 1879; he bought the watch from Inspector Peterson and the war medal from police authorities; the ornaments and clothes were made in Natal from materials bought by him. Also recovered was the police uniform supplied by the government which, according to Sheosaran, was not taken back. Sheosaran told the police that his story could be verified by Alexander, Protector Mason and his 'acquaintances' in Natal, Salik Maharaj, Lochooman Kahar, Mehdi Ali and Sheorathan Chowdhri. The police in Calcutta asked the authorities in Natal 'to [verify] the truth of the statements'. Lal believed that the 'recovered articles were beyond his [Sheosaran's] means. His statement that they are from his own earning is not trustworthy. His statements that the woman belonged to his caste and that he married her are not reliable. Some say that she is a "Marinain" [a sub-caste of the untouchable Dalit caste]. This rumour is supported by her recovered garments which are after the fashion of the "Marmar." This gives difficult kinds of suspicion in my mind.'

Enquiries in Natal corroborated Sheosaran's story. He had been employed by the Durban Corporation under Inspector of Nuisances, Peterson. Sheosaran lived in his own house rather than in the barracks, and was a moneylender and trader who sold to workers under his supervision. The Protector reported to the Colonial Secretary on 26 June 1890 that the couple 'were in good circumstances here, and were the possessors of a considerable amount of jewellery and expensive clothing'. Peterson confirmed that he had sold the watch to Sheosaran. Goldsmith Mody Sunar testified that the couple was in 'good circumstances'. Sheosaran had made several pieces of jewellery for Suhodree, including *hasalis* (bead necklaces), *kudis* (earrings of precious

stones), *kaddas* (bangles) of silver, and the gold *nattia* (nose ring) mentioned in the inventory. Mody recalled cleaning her gold jewellery, which was manufactured by Madras goldsmiths in Natal, 'two or three times'. In particular, he remembered the *karanphool* (earrings with flower motifs) and *jhoomak* (long tassle-style earrings); he had also seen the necklace, three *kanthas* (gold coins minted in British India) and two *mohurs* (sovereigns). Mody confirmed that Sheosaran was the 'owner of a house on Corporation land'.

Chas Burton-Jones, clerk and interpreter in the office of the Protector, knew the couple 'to be in good circumstances. The woman always had on a good amount of jewellery, and dressed expensively, and I distinctly remember Sheosaran wearing a necklace of three gold beads and two gold chains. I embarked them when they were returning to India. They appeared to be among the wealthiest on board.' Mehdi Ali, a free Indian, described Sheosaran as a Sirdar who received 'good wages', hawked vegetables and was a wholesaler. He bought potatoes, mealies, rice and dholl cheaply, and sold them 'into the country at a profit'. The family 'lived very comfortably in their own house. They had lots of good clothing.' Sheorathan Chowdhri, a free Indian with a store on Umgeni Road, had known Sheosaran and Suhodree since their arrival. Sheosaran traded as a wholesaler and hawked vegetables, and had bought a house on Corporation land, which he renovated.

Richard Alexander, Superintendent of Police, testified that Sheosaran had served his indenture as a night soilman (one who collected faeces from domestic households) for the Corporation and was appointed Sirdar, a position he held until his departure. Suhodree 'at all times wore a large quantity of jewellery on any special occasion. I cannot trace the diamond beyond the fact his fellow servants knew he had it long before he left. Sheosaran was always a steady saving man and a moneylender, so it is probable he obtained it cheap from some of the many natives and Indians returning to Durban from the Diamond Fields.'

The Protector wrote to the agent in Calcutta that there was nothing on the list 'to take exception to...It is not [an] uncommon thing to see Indian women parading the streets of Durban almost daily dressed in velvets and most expensive silks, adorned, particularly on special occasions, with jewellery of very considerable value, and there are, at the present time, Indian women in this town possessing jewellery considerably over the value of five hundred pounds each. By the last shipment of return to India in June 1890, one woman, Mungathoyee, wore two gold bangles valued at fifty pounds a piece.'

The majority of the indentured who came to Natal worked according to 'the rules' and often went back to India with meagre or no savings. The successful few faced harassment and suspicion when they returned 'home' in good stead. Robert Mitchell, Calcutta Agent, was upset that the authorities considered an investigation necessary. He wrote that 'if the particulars of this case were fully known by Indian immigrants in good circumstances who think of returning to their native land, few, if any, would have the courage to face such a reception'.<sup>37</sup>

Sheosaran's story, though, does indicate that to paint the system as one in which the indentured were simply victims hammered into submission would be to ignore the spaces that some found and exploited and their inventiveness in working within and around it without having to directly challenge or succumb to it.

## The '(tres)pass system'

In the House of Assembly a lone champion of the rights of Indians, H.M. Meyler, raised the case of a man Muruga Gouvidam who was sentenced to twenty shillings fine or ten days imprisonment with hard labour for trespass. This was even though it was known to the court that he had only visited his wife who was employed as an indentured worker on another sugar estate.<sup>38</sup>

The 'pass system' confined workers to estates. Employees wanting to leave the estate had to obtain the permission of their masters, even to visit a magistrate to complain about their employer. If they left without a pass they could be fined and imprisoned with hard labour. This stemmed from the belief of colonial officials like Dr Henry Mitchell, the Superintendent of Indian Immigrants in Trinidad, who wrote in 1851 that 'the Asiatic, unless controlled, invariably leaves the estate upon which he has been located, and seeks another domicile of his own choosing'. Instead of linking desertion to conditions of work, Mitchell believed that 'it does not appear that their wandering habits could be traced to any ill-treatment received on the estates they left'.<sup>39</sup> Arumoogam Govender, indentured to GN Wilkinson of Town Bush Valley in Verulam, wrote to Deputy Protector Dunning on 14 April 1910:

This few lines compiled for you. G.N. Wilkinson, he said we can send to India. Mr. Cottom the manager. He allway trobbling me and my wife and the childrens. But I don't know why. Sir, I am very very sorry for that. The Happy New Year 1st January 1910. The manager Mr. Cottom beet my son Moonsamy. He came home to have his breakfast at fifteen minutes past eight o'clock. My son said to me, 'Oh, Dear Father, Manager said to me to cook Natives food. I said sorry, I don't know how to cook.' My son said so to Mr. Cottom. So, the manager did beet my son and I been to manager. I asked, 'Dear Sir, what mistake my son done today.' The manager said to me I must not speak about my son. I heard that word, and I asked, 'Please Sir give me a pass to go to Magistrate Court.' Manager said, 'no pass.' Him said I can go to magistrate court without pass and I been to court Saturday 1st January 1910 and it was holiday that day. No court. I turned back to do my work. It was laite Saturday. I been on Monday 3rd to do work. I did been working on Monday. The police man came at twelve o'clock and arresting me for nothing. Sorry I never made any mistake of my work. Sir, the message been to City Court. They arrest me in the jail one day. Again I never took any message to Court about my son...I won't make any mistake of my work. I am good Boy for everyone. I thanks very much for you. Please I want you to come up here. See my manager. Please complied with this letter. If you come I pay the charge for you.<sup>40</sup>

Arumoogam had to belittle himself, relegate himself to the status of a 'good Boy' in the hope of getting a hearing, even watch his son be beaten as he searched vainly for some form of protection.

An employee required a pass to complain to the Protector, usually from the very 'master' about whom the complaint was being made. If the master refused a pass, no matter how valid or

compelling the complaint, the worker was arrested and imprisoned for leaving the estate. The story of 22-year-old Sewpershad, indentured to Trevor Sinclair of Cowick Estate, which straddled the banks of the Ifafa River, underscores the abuse that resulted. He told the Wragg Commission:

For the last two months I have received only one month's wages. I have not been absent during that time and I have not been sick. Every coolie is kept a month in arrear with wages. I want my money regularly every month...I went to the Umzinto court. Mr. Kirkman was magistrate, and I was fined five shillings for being absent without a pass. I asked my master for a pass but he refused it. Eleven other coolies went to the court to complain at the same time, and were all fined five shillings each for being absent without a pass...Please ask my master not to beat me for any complaint; he has boxed my ears before.<sup>41</sup>

When the Commission visited Cowick Estate, they discovered that Sinclair did not even keep a wage book.

Workers who were unlawfully absent lost all claim to wages; males had to pay one shilling for each day's absence and women six pence, and there was a prolongation of the contract, with workers making up double time. Moosai's testimony to the Wragg Commission showed the abuse that could result. Moosai, who worked for Equeefa, complained of an ulcer on his foot caused 'by a stick running into it' while at work.<sup>42</sup> He had been ill for five months, three weeks of which were spent in hospital. His wages were deducted during this period. The treatment recommended by the doctor was for Moosai to apply castor oil to the wound. Turton, the manager, ordered Moosai to work and threatened imprisonment if he failed to do so. The Wragg Commission found that the ulcer was so severe that Moosai could not stand or walk, let alone work.

Dr HW Jones pointed to the neglect of employers through his description of one patient at Kearsney, who had a 'big deep ulcer on his leg: it was two inches in diameter. I ordered him to be sent at once to the hospital. Two days afterwards...I saw the poor wretch, working with the gang in the field: he had a dirty rag tied round the leg. This was stuck into the sore. There was no ointment or oil of any kind, to prevent the rag from adhering.'<sup>43</sup>

Decisions about 'fitness' and 'unfitness' to work were arbitrary. This left the door open for abuse – abuse that was widespread and 'normalised' as a legitimate part of the system.

## 'The psalm-smiling Sweater'

We inform complaining about our trouble with the boss in the Tongaat. In India the depot people saying the Natal is very good place. I am looking in the paper. Indians getting every Sundays and other Christmas days and January days. This boss not giving Sunday to my children. He is keeping my childrens. Dear Sir, I am a preacher and schoolmaster in India. I am a Christian man in India. It is the third commandment in the Bible that we must go to church to pray to Lord in every Sunday. It is a sin to speak bad word. But this boss speaking bad word to me. I beg you come and see all my troubles. We don't like this.<sup>44</sup>

The law excluded Sunday work. The contract that the indentured entered into stipulated that the indentured were to work 'for five years, six days in the week, for nine hours between sunrise and sunset – all Sundays and holidays excepted'. Yet employees like Maddu Samul (90155), who gave the above deposition to the Protector, were compelled to work on Sundays if the employer wanted them to, irrespective of their wishes or the law. Maddu and his wife, Sundramma (90156), and sons, Benjamin (90157) and Prakasam (90158), had arrived in December 1901 and were assigned to EH Done in Tongaat. Despite the strong plea, they failed to get redress.

Dr Miller of Isipingo reported in June 1898 that Veedi Venkadu (57773), who was indentured to Charles Francis Parsons, attempted suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. Venkadu had arrived in March 1895, aged 18, from Godavari in South India. Dr Miller reported that after a slow recovery, he gave as his reason 'for so doing that he is badly treated by his master who makes him work early and late on Sunday thereby depriving him of the means of getting firewood'.<sup>45</sup> Dr Miller's 'saving' of Venkadu was in vain, for he committed suicide a few months later.

The Wragg Commission was sympathetic to employers and recommended that indentured workers should be required to work on Sundays and public holidays for a maximum of two hours, 'if such work be immediately necessary'.<sup>46</sup> Attorney-General GA du Roquifein was asked in December 1902 whether the subsequent law (No. 25 of 1891) compelled Indians to work on Sunday. His response was that the Sunday *corvee* of two hours was a long-established institution: 'I do not think,' he added, 'any question should be raised. All the men should turn out on Sunday.' Again, we see a propensity on the part of authority to side with employers.

Protector Polkinghorne noted the decision with 'deep regret'. While the law required Indians to perform work that was '*indispensable and immediately necessary* for the preservation of property', employers were 'extorting' labour on Sundays for work that could be performed during the week. Simply put, they were 'abusing' the law.<sup>47</sup> The Attorney-General dismissed his concerns. The Protector, he felt, was 'apt to cause a good deal of friction and mischief by untimely and unnecessary intervention...It has been common practice in this colony to have this Sunday *corvee*. Strictly speaking none of this work is of "immediate necessity"...If it is customary to have a Sunday *corvee*, then the Protector should not interfere.'<sup>48</sup>

This duplicity remained throughout. Workers' contracts stated that they did not have to work on Sundays but employers, in connivance with magistrates, compelled them to.

## Rations

I [Sonnar] am wife of Futtising. I complain that when my husband was in hospital, I had no one to look after my children, and I could not work, and therefore had no rations.<sup>49</sup>

JH Thurston, Sonnar's manager, responded to her allegation by telling the Wragg Commission that women who 'apply for rations get them; this is on the understanding that...they have to work; but some of them prefer a life of indolence to industry'. Even though Sonnar's husband was an employee of Thurston, and she had minor children to take care of, Futtising's illness was sufficient reason to starve the family. The contract of indenture stipulated that the inden-



tured were to receive rice, salted fish, salt, dholl and ghee as part of their rations. They were also promised 'fresh fruit and vegetables' and 'ground to cultivate at your leisure'.<sup>50</sup>

Dr LP Booth, whom we meet again later in several guises, complained to the Protector in January 1880 that the quantity of rice compared poorly with the meal meal that Africans received, rations were defective in nitrogenous matter, and indentured workers did not receive fruit.<sup>51</sup> Employers often failed to meet their basic obligations. Govinthan Narayanan Govinden (15213) and 10 workers employed by Duncan McKenzie of Nottingham complained to the Protector in February 1882 that they had not received rations for three months.<sup>52</sup> Runglal (8558), who worked for Evans of Umgeni, complained in November 1877 that he had only received half-rations in the preceding three weeks.<sup>53</sup>

Some employers were particularly miserly. After visiting M Thompson in November 1909, an inspector reported that his employees had left the plantation en masse because he repeatedly handed out short rations. They refused the short rations which Thompson handed out. He instructed them to divide it among themselves at the barracks. They insisted that he weigh and hand out the rations individually and marched off the estate when Thompson declined. The Protector summed up the issue:

Mr. Thompson extracts the greatest possible work out of his men and gives them the absolute minimum of food allowed by law. He will not let his son-in-law Murray give out rations because the men may get a little more than usual. It was through his unreasonable attitude that the men revolted. Here is a case in which an employer is not thankful that his men are working properly but goes out of his way to make them dissatisfied. The men have my sympathy. They are worked about eleven hours a day exclusive of meal times.<sup>54</sup>

Employers initially denied rations to women and children. The law, as amended in 1866, entitled women and children under 10 to half-rations. Employers did not see the productive value of women and did not compel them to work. Sentiments changed by the 1880s and the law came to support the idea that women should be compelled to work unless they had a medical certificate to attest otherwise. The largest single employer of indentured labour was the Natal Government Railways, where workers were constantly on the move laying down new lines. Women were not given work by the Railways and so did not receive rations or wages.

In the smaller towns of northern Natal, the plight of families was so severe that it forced 'men to send their wives away from the line as they plead, and rightly, that a twelve pound ration is insufficient for two people to live on'. Moved by accounts of the hardship, the Deputy Protector tried to get the Railways to provide women with six pounds of rice per week. But the Railways held that its reading of the law was 'no work, no rations'. Reflecting on their experiences, Beall commented that it was 'amongst the most tragic in the colony'.<sup>55</sup>

Women, faced with the possibility of their rations getting cut or earning the wrath of their employer, often pushed on with work despite their personal circumstances. As late as 1912, Magistrate Bunton Warner was shocked by a visit to J Morphey's farm in Riet Vlei to investigate the death of the child of Manimandram and Vallima. Vallima worked until shortly before the birth.

Deputy Protector Dunning said that Morpew 'must have been aware of her advanced position and was the proper person, as employer, to have taken action'.<sup>56</sup> Not only did he not arrange for medical treatment, but he forced her to work and sent Manimandram to his new farm, Hamilton Hall, at the time of the birth.

His request for a doctor not met, Manimandram paid 10 shillings to 'two native women' to assist with the birth. Three days after the birth, the baby died. Instead of calling Dr Hensen to the farm, Morpew made Manimandram take the baby to him wrapped in a cloth and placed in a small sack, which was laid across his shoulder as he walked to the doctor. Not having any other means, Manimandram explained that this was the 'most decent manner'. Magistrate Warner was shaken when Dr Hensen 'rolled the baby out of the sack as if it was an ordinary article'.

## On lunatics, destitutes and invalids

The indentured were brought to Natal to labour. Those who could not perform to their optimum were weeded out and shipped back to India. As was the case later with African migrant workers who were dumped in the rural hinterlands of South Africa with nothing except broken bodies, so too were many of the indentured dumped, often penniless, at Madras and Calcutta.

The Wragg Commission recommended in 1887 that certain classes of Indians – such as priests, professional beggars, weavers, ex-policemen, clerks, barbers, tailors, shopkeepers, discharged convicts, goldsmiths, persons suffering from mental infirmity, men over 45, and prostitutes – be barred from entry into Natal. Those already in the colony who were considered a 'liability' were to be shipped back to India. This started from the earliest days. Passenger 43 on the *Turo*, Dawood Khan, supposedly 'lost his mind' and was returned to India on grounds of insanity in 1862. This practice continued throughout indenture.

Take the case of Doorgiah, as reported by Immigration Agent HC Shepstone in July 1864. Doorgiah Goindarajoo arrived from Mysore on the *Tyburnia* in March 1861 and was assigned to WH Middleton. This 24-year-old suffered a terrible fate, recorded in a matter-of-fact way by Shepstone: 'Coolie 1379; Doorgiah; decision, return to India on the grounds of having lost his leg and being thereby unfit for service.' What happened was far more disturbing:

After having been in his service for about a year, he was rendered unfit for service by the scar on his leg which seems to have been neglected and after three months it became so bad that he was sent to hospital, when the doctor found it necessary to amputate it. On his leaving hospital he returned to Mr. Middleton's where he was put to light work such as women usually do. After six months he again became ill, when his master said he was shamming, and gave him a thrashing and he was fined one pound by the magistrate, Mr. Middleton, who told him that he must return to hard work or pay him ten pounds to buy-off his unexpired term of service as he was unable to do hard work. His friends among the coolies raised the ten pounds to pay Mr. Middleton and he left. Since his departure he has been living about amongst his friends.<sup>57</sup>

A cripple by 25, Doorgiah was returned to India, most likely a burden to an already burdened family.

A particularly brutal and tragic case was that of Mewa Ram Bhagirath (128337), who was indentured to Thomas Robinson of Mayville, a man with an especially bad reputation for cruelty. Mewa had arrived on the *Pongola* in December 1906, aged 26. His job was to sell five bottles of milk per day. Unable to sell all the milk, he returned with bottles of unsold milk. An irate Mrs Robinson 'threw the milk all over him whilst Robinson himself violently assaulted the poor man. The man managed to crawl away to the barracks, and eventually to the Indian Market in Grey Street, Durban, where he was found in an exhausted condition.'

Dr Nanji, an Indian medical practitioner, referred him to the Protector, who in turn referred the matter to the Umlazi magistrate. Mewa Ram was sent to the depot hospital, where he spent five to six months recuperating. Certified a cripple, he was shipped to India on the *Umkuzi* in October 1907. He had married Gangajali Jalessar (128349) on board the ship, and a few days before the assault she had given birth to their child. She had scarcely been convalescent a week when Mrs Robinson 'dragged her out of bed, stripped her almost naked, threw cold water over her, and told her to turn out to work – all this in the presence of a number of other employees'.<sup>58</sup> Mewa Ram returned home without his wife and child, and disabled.

Of 54 053 indentured workers introduced between October 1901 and July 1911, 3 800 (7 per cent) were returned to India as invalids before their indentures had been completed. This included large numbers who contracted phthisis in the coal mines.<sup>59</sup> As Julie Parle points out in her excellent and innovative study, indentured workers who were mentally ill, blind or suffered from diseases like phthisis, leprosy, heart and liver disease, chronic bronchitis or general debility were repatriated to India because neither the government, the employer nor the Indian Immigration Trust Board was willing to bear the cost of treatment.<sup>60</sup>

## 'Coolie lines'

The poor wretches have to live in miserable huts made of tin packing cases or grass. Most of them are full of holes, admitting wind and rain freely. I would feel ashamed to put a pig in them. Contrast these wretched hovels with the fine mansions which dot the sky-line, looking towards the west...In my opinion it is your plain duty to remove all Indians who have not been given proper house accommodation.<sup>61</sup>

The contract specified that employers would provide accommodation. This mostly consisted of 'coolie lines' – lines of corrugated iron divided into tiny rooms using wood, or small wattle and daub huts made of dried cane or mealie stalks, which new arrivals had to improve in their own time. According to the 1904 census, there were 4 702 Indian families living in wattle and daub homes as compared to 208 white families. It was in these tiny huts that Indians had to hang wet clothes and store crockery, firewood and water. Privacy was severely compromised as walls rarely reached the ceiling. The Wragg Commission observed that 'too little regard is paid to this very essential requisite towards purity of life. This general huddling together of the sexes, of all ages, has much to be deplored.'<sup>62</sup>

The medical officer in Umzinto reported to the Protector in 1880 that huts averaged 150 cubic feet per adult, whereas a 'fair allowance' was 500 cubic feet.<sup>63</sup> After visiting an indentured 'home' in 1877, Mason, then a magistrate in Durban, wrote to the Protector that 'in visiting such shanties, I feel it almost impossible to breathe, then what must it be to inhabit them?'<sup>64</sup> But as Lal shows from folksongs recorded in Fiji, the indentured tried to 'create fleeting niches of happiness in these crowded and ugly "coolie lines"':

The six foot by eight foot CSR room  
Is the source of all comfort to us.  
In it we keep our tools and hoe,  
And also the grinding stone and the hearth.  
In it is also kept the firewood.  
It is our single and double-storey palace,  
In which is made our golden parapet.<sup>65</sup>

Floors were usually lower than the outside surface, resulting in dampness because there was no provision for carrying off rainwater. Dampness was also caused by leaking huts.<sup>66</sup> There was considerable risk of fire as these were lit on floors in the absence of proper cooking facilities, and the 'windowless cells' filled homes with poisonous smoke. Children were particularly vulnerable and there are many cases in the archives of those who died through burns. In Avoca, the medical officer explained to the Protector on 29 January 1887 that 'night blindness' was common among Indians. One cause was the closing of the entrance of the hut when the fire was lit. Damp firewood gave off 'strong and offensive smoke which filled the place and irritated the eyes very much'. Another cause was the 'bright clear light' and 'reflection on the eyes from the sand' followed by 'utter darkness' on entering the hut.<sup>67</sup>

Health problems were also caused by poor sanitary conditions. Employers did not provide latrines, forcing workers to relieve themselves in the vicinity of huts. When it rained, drainage would run into nearby streams from which water was obtained for drinking, cooking and bathing. Water was also contaminated with sugar refuse from nearby mills. The Wragg Commission, for example, found the Little Umhlanga River 'black and impure. The water throughout its course is sluggish and has many stagnant pools of almost inky colour.'<sup>68</sup>

At the Natal Government Railways, manager D Hunter forbade Indians from using bottles and tins to wash themselves. Several workers complained to the Protector in March 1900 that they were prevented from washing 'as was their custom'.<sup>69</sup> Hunter told the Protector that workers could use brass vessels only. Hunter did not relent even though Protector Mason advised the Colonial Secretary that his actions were illegal and that many indentured Indians could not afford *lotas* (bowls). Bathing facilities were absent in many cases, forcing indentured workers to bathe in the open.

Dirty-skin, distressed,  
Shake off our babies  
When we reach waterside  
Shake off our cunts.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>70</sup>

Protector Polkinghorne took this up with employers. He explained to the Trust Board in 1911, when indenture was almost at an end, that 'provision [had to] be made for wash-houses or bathrooms where the Indians, especially women, may wash themselves'.<sup>71</sup> While visiting estates to check on death rates among Indian children, 'a deputation of women waited upon me and stated that they had no place where they could wash themselves. Owing to the sanitary arrangements the little shelters which they had put up for themselves had been disallowed.' Polkinghorne considered this 'a very reasonable request. This not only applies to adults, but I find that, when children have been put out in the field with their mothers, it is the custom to wash them in the evening and in the open, and from what I am able to judge, there is no question that some of the deaths resulted from washing the children in the open late in the evening.' On 28 February 1912, Polkinghorne circulated a memorandum to medical officers to push for bathing houses so that women and children could 'wash themselves under cover'.<sup>72</sup> This was when indenture was almost at an end!

Such conditions resulted in the prevalence of intestinal diseases and those of the respiratory system. This led a frustrated Dr Kretschmar to write to estate owner Harry Binns of Umhlali on 25 April 1877 that 'medical skill is exercised in vain' considering conditions on plantations in the area.<sup>73</sup> Three decades later not much had changed. Between 1904 and 1909, 28 per cent of Indian deaths were caused by tuberculosis, bronchitis and pneumonia. Diarrhoea, dysentery and enteritis accounted for a further 16 per cent. These diseases were connected to occupation and environment. And yet, as Parle points out, officials and employers continued to believe that Natal, as stated in an 1891 report, was a 'perfect Paradise for these people and they know it'. And, to compound matters, 'by implication, and sometimes by accusation, illness and mortality were represented as being in some way the fault of the individual... "Race" served as a self-evident explanation for behaviour that might otherwise have required closer investigation and intervention by the state.'<sup>74</sup>

## Railway workers

This chapter has focused mainly on agricultural workers since they made up the bulk of the indentured workers. However, conditions were equally terrible for railway and municipal workers. For example, Dr George Lindsay Bonnar, Acting Medical Officer in Durban, prepared a report for the Colonial Secretary in March 1886 on sanitary conditions at the Railway Coolie Barracks, which were situated at the Point in Durban. There were 100 tin rooms (7 feet by 8 feet) which housed 317 Indians; 17 wooden rooms where 362 Indians lived; and 30 brick rooms housing 126 Indians. Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions were the order of the day.<sup>75</sup> Protector Louis Mason submitted a report to the Colonial Secretary on 9 October 1885 about the misuse of the Railway Coolie Hospital. Mason discovered, by chance, that part of the hospital was used illegally as a prison:

I was sitting in the room called the 'surgery' taking statements of patients regarding the food when I was interrupted by a loud knocking or banging at a door. Narayansamy had been locked in a room and it was he who had been banging at the door. I found that

there were four prisoners who had been locked up when I came...The attendants at the hospital admitted that this room was used as a lock up. A book was produced ('Daily Report Book') in which the word 'prisoner' was entered against the names of certain Indians who were locked up in the small room. The state of affairs calls for immediate alteration...<sup>76</sup>

Mason found that JW Manistry, the Railway Superintendent of Labour, regularly conducted illegal trials and punished workers by deducting their wages or imprisoning them in the 'cell', where they were incarcerated for several days and given only water. Manistry kept a case book in which he recorded trials of Indians for offences like theft, drunkenness or creating a disturbance – all of which should have gone before a magistrate. Manistry was the employer, prosecutor and judge of the workers.

In one instance in 1885, Maniappen (32402) was caught with rum in his possession. He was taken to the hospital, 'ordered to take my trousers down and given six cuts' by Manistry, and locked in the tiny 'cell' with three other men for a week. An uncovered bucket was placed there 'for the purpose of nature'. Mason said that he could not 'think that six strokes on the posterior with such a cruel instrument as a *sjambok* (whip) is a punishment to be regarded as a light one, or as a chastisement an ordinary parent is likely to inflict on an offending child. Maniappen was ordered to take his trousers down and doing so Mr Manistry gave him six cuts on his bare bottom. The administration of corporal punishment of so severe a character is opposed not only to all law as far as I am aware but to the common principles of humanity and justice.' The case book runs into 150 pages and is full of extracts like the following:

5.1.83: Alibux. Abusing police in the discharge of their duties. Fined. 2/6.

12.1.83: Sherif Khan. Absent from hospital without leave. Fined 6/-.

12.1.83: Emam Saib. Wearing uniform in irregular manner. Fined 6/-.

25.1.83: Narainsamy and Alibux fighting. Fined 6/- each and cost of repairs to clothes to be deducted from pay.

28.3.83: Emam Saib neglecting to leave a gate open. Fined 2/6 and to leave his gate.

9.11.83: Metoye quarrelling in the barracks. Fined 5/-. A week in the hospital on *kunjee* [arrowroot] water.

20.11.83: Lutchman absent without leave, ordered to hospital on *kunjee* water.

28.8.84: Soobrayadu absent without leave. Fined 10/-. To be locked up in the hospital 4 days. Pay to be deducted for all time absent.

20.11.84: Seeruncharry. Absent from work. Found at the Umgeni by the police. To have a good application of mustard and sand.

21.11.84: Murugasen charged by the Sirdar for refusal to work. Stripped and sent to hospital cell for a week.

27.4.85: Bulith charged with exposing his person to Kanabatchi against her wish. Placed in hospital with spare diet.

20.6.85: Hariparsad. Traveling to Isipingo without a pass. Fined 2/- and seven days in hospital.

18.8.85: Hurdut deserted. Ordered to remain in hospital and to forfeit all pay due for this month.

## Turning numbers into work-mules

Once indentured Indian labourers...identified only by numbers, had broken their backs to clear this land...storing in their hearts the deep resentment born of their sweat and the cancellation of their names. SALMAN RUSHDIE<sup>77</sup>

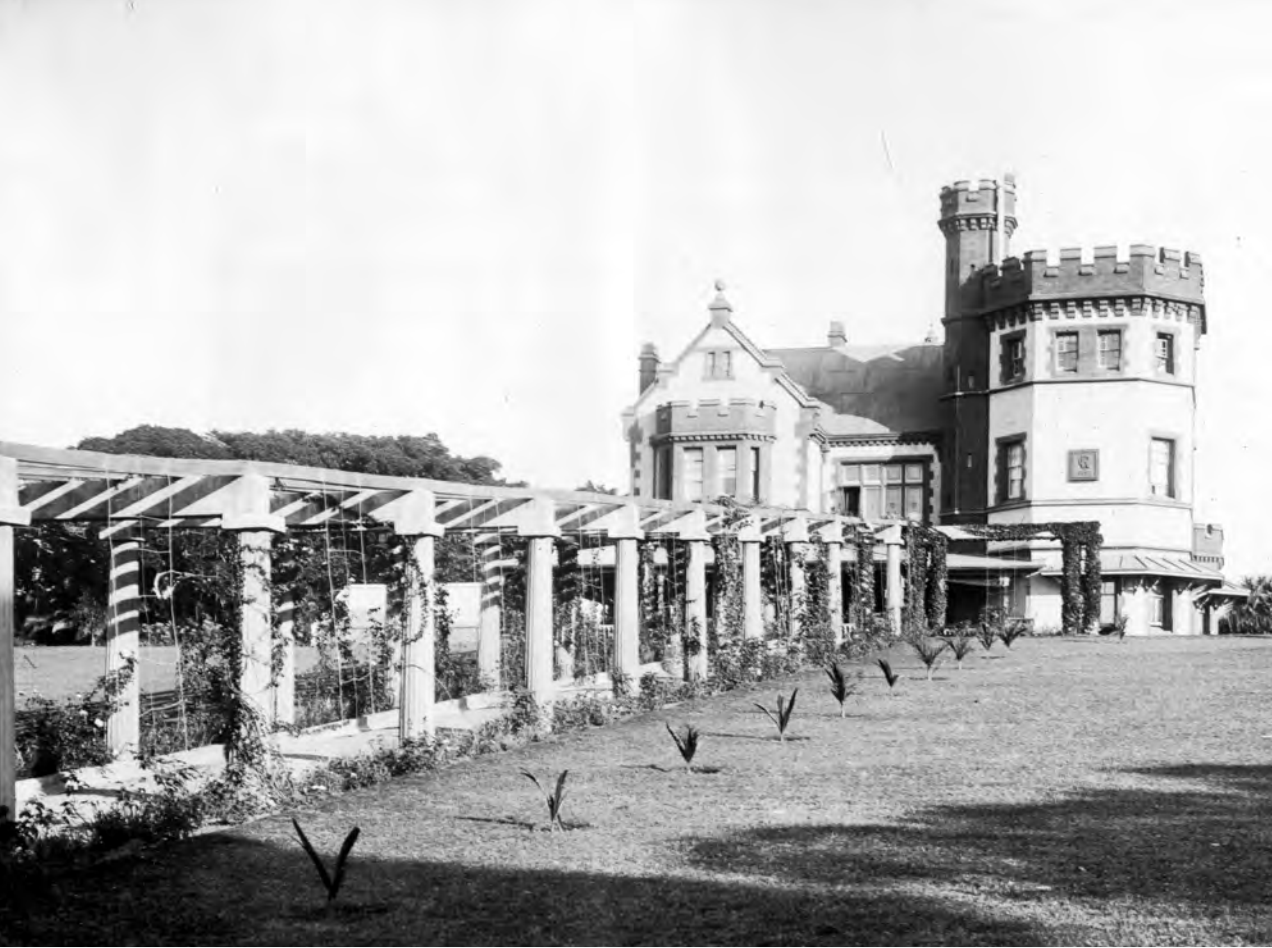
The 'system' sought to make the indentured conform to the new regime to meet the needs of planters. The overarching imperialist ideology rendered this process as part of the civilising mission. As Denis Judd puts it, by projecting on all those not of European descent 'all manner of delinquencies, inadequacies and barbarities, the European imperial powers could, to a very large extent, rid themselves of guilt as they overcame, manipulated and frequently abused colonial subjects'.<sup>78</sup> And where the imperial powers led, the local agents followed, often with greater brutality. By viewing Indians in a deprecating way, whites could justifiably treat them unsympathetically, and apportion blame to Indians when the system did not function effectively or abuses were uncovered.

But lest we allow the process of 'flattening out' the indentured into numbers to be seen as a one-way process, we need also emphasise that the indentured were (re)forming networks and developing the capacity to mitigate the blows of the colonists, often adopting the posture 'of scamps, rogues and vagabonds', as later stories will reveal. To really come to terms with how this played out on the ground, we will look at the world of one particular plantation, laying bare its inner workings and allowing us to fully appreciate the prescience of Dr Jones' reference to Uriah Heep and Jabez Balfour. It is to this story that we now turn.









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# Esperanza: a place of hope?

The trouble had begun as early as the 1880s. Charlie Reynolds had been put in charge of Indian labour and in many cases had literally driven workers to death. Coolies had been expected to work fourteen hours a day, both men and women, viciously lashed with sjamboks and half-starved on inadequate rations. Some had committed suicide; many more had been killed or seriously injured in work-related accidents. People wanting to complain, as was their right, had been dissuaded by threats of a terrible revenge...When it became known that Reynolds Bros. fatalities were twice the industry average, the government ordered an inquiry. Hearings began in 1906 and evidence was still being led in the next year. Charlie Reynolds himself had gone on a long overseas trip while waiting for the heat to die down. It never did. In 1908 the Natal government told Reynolds Bros. that unless he was expelled, its supply of labour would be terminated. There was no appeal. Utterly disgraced, Charlie Reynolds again left for overseas and four years later died in a bar in Mexico City, allegedly stabbed in the back by a jealous husband.<sup>1</sup>

The above quote by Hocking, a historian of Natal's sugar barons, presents a watered-down but instructive history of Reynolds Brothers.

## The present is history

I do not mind the glasshouse; I do not mind the botanical garden. This is not so grand a gesture on my part. It is mostly an admission of defeat...I cannot do anything about it anyway. I only mind the absence of this acknowledgement: that perhaps every good thing that stands before us comes at great cost to someone else. JAMAICA KINCAID<sup>2</sup>

About 50 kilometres out of Durban on the stunning south coast of KwaZulu-Natal, just past Umzinto, is a signpost 'Esperanza',<sup>3</sup> which means 'hope' in Spanish. Not too far away stands Reynolds Bros.' Lynton Hall, decorated magnificently in nineteenth-century Indian colonial style. It has been host to royalty, prime ministers and 'captains of business' throughout the twentieth century. During the royal tour of 1922, King George V's sister, Princess Alice, and the Earl of Athlone stayed at Lynton Hall. King George VI chose it for his recuperation in 1952.

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OPPOSITE ABOVE: Sanctuary to a long line of sugar barons, Lynton Hall masks a history both fascinating and brutal.

BELOW: Women were often harshly treated and many had to fetch water, cook and attend to children after an 11-hour working day.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Sugar was the engine of economic life in Natal and Indians comprised over 80 per cent of the sugar industry's labour force in the early 1900s.

Lynton Hall's historic acreages incorporate the 'Chequers' of South Africa, Botha House, which was donated to the 'nation' in 1920 for the exclusive use of prime ministers and presidents. It presently boasts one of the leading restaurants in the country, and is also home to a fabulous wedding venue and lodging. The tourism 'bible' *Exclusive Getaways* describes Lynton Hall as follows:

It rests at the head of Umdoni Park, the region's most picturesque golf course, meandering through pristine coastal forest and spilling down to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean...Our reputation is our most important asset. It does not belong to us; it is the legacy of our children, and that is your guarantee of an unforgettable visit.<sup>4</sup>

Like so much of South Africa's past, if you dig a little deeper and move beyond the selective amnesia of historians like Hocking, you will stumble onto a story that is as fascinating as it is brutal.

Esperanza was once part of Umzinto Sugar Estate in the then Alexandra County. For years, stories filtered throughout the province of the cruel working conditions of indentured workers. Esperanza seems to aptly fit Beckford's description of the plantation as a total economic institution (see Chapter 6). It encapsulated the close relationship between planters and government, the pivotal economic role of indentured labour and, above all, the exploitation, abuse and neglect of the indentured. Despite the brutal conditions, it would be several decades before somebody with clout, like Protector Polkinghorne, challenged the power of planters.

## Beginnings

The Reynolds brothers, Thomas and Lewis, arrived on the *Justina* in November 1850 as part of the government's immigration-assisted scheme to encourage white settlement in Natal. They were part of the Murdoch/Pelly emigration scheme whose agent was Edmund Morewood. They were given lands between the Tongaat and Umhlali rivers on the Natal north coast. The Reynolds descended from an old Devonshire family in south-western England, which traced its ancestry to 1510.<sup>5</sup> They joined Oaklands Sugar Estate near Umhlali, which had been started by Alistair McLean on land granted free by the government. Thomas Reynolds produced 'Umhlali Water', potent rum he advertised as 'equal to the best in Jamaica'. By 1867 he was producing nine gallons a day.<sup>6</sup> Lewis left Umhlali in 1860 to become manager of the newly opened Canonby Estate, south of the Umkomaas River, where he had 130 African and 60 Indian workers under his charge. He purchased a half-share in the estate in 1864.<sup>7</sup>

The Reynolds' future became linked to Umzinto when Lewis, while managing Canonby, bought 2 000 acres of land at Umzinto. English investors bought the rest of the estate, which was renamed Umzinto Plantation and Trading Company. The company experienced financial difficulties and was purchased by Lewis Reynolds for £5 000 in 1873. In appreciation of his knowledge of sugar, the *Natal Mercury* commented that Umzinto was 'at last in the hands of a man who will make it what it ought to have been, one of the best paying concerns in the colony'.<sup>8</sup> Umzinto Plantation and Trading Company would become one of the largest employers of Indians.

Umzinto is situated 400 feet above sea level and the climate was well suited to agriculture. Sugar cane, mealies, tea, coffee, tobacco, beans and a myriad of other fruits and vegetables flourished. The legacy of Lewis Reynolds went beyond the cultivation of sugar. He acquired a reputation for recapturing the English landscape he had left behind. John Robinson, editor of the *Natal Mercury*, wrote in 1871:

There are other things to see at Canonby besides sugar and canefields. There are the loveliest roses, and one of the most carefully tended gardens I have seen in Africa. Behind the house stretches a rose-walk some hundreds of yards in length. Pigeons of fancy breed flutter about everywhere. A large vinery occupies a sheltered position to one side. I must be pardoned for mentioning these domestic surroundings, but it is so refreshing in a new colony to find the home-making propensities of the Englishman manifested in good, practical and pleasant fashion, that fact cannot be passed over.

After Lewis' death in 1875, Thomas took charge of Umzinto. Like other large enterprises, Reynolds Bros. gradually swallowed several adjoining estates like Ellangowan (1871), Ifafa (1878), Greenwood (1881), Cowick (1884), Equeefa (1889), Maryville (1899), John Kirkman & Sons (1928) and Hawksworth Brothers (1930). In 1882, a mill was erected at Old Esperanza; in 1889 Equeefa was rebuilt to house the main Esperanza mill, which produced 8 000 tons of white sugar annually.<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Reynolds was an important figure in settler society. He was acting resident-magistrate for Umzinto in 1877, and served in the Legislative Council as member for Alexandra County between 1881 and 1883. When Thomas died in June 1885, the *Natal Mercury* remarked that his 'name was a household word...The enterprises presided over by Mr. Reynolds were amongst our most courageous and successful ventures in that line. Bubbling over with vivacity, he placed no restraint upon the expression of his sentiments...A correspondent remarked "he was the life of Umzinto parties".'<sup>10</sup>

Thomas' two sons Frank and Charles, born in Umhlali in 1852 and 1854 respectively, took over the estate after their father's death, renaming it Reynolds Bros. Ltd.<sup>11</sup> The Reynolds were symptomatic of the white planter class that formed the subject of a penetrating study by Robert Morrell in 2001. Such families developed a class and gender identity fashioned strongly along metropolitan lines. Ownership of land, access to capital, and class and racial solidarity gave them 'literally and figuratively the whip-hand':

They constituted themselves as gentry, in the process socially distancing themselves from other classes and races. They employed servants, they patronised civic affairs, they associated with charitable causes, they built grand houses...Many of these affectations were derived from the imagined lives of landed British aristocrats...The men can be presented as evil, manipulative, exploitative, domineering.<sup>12</sup>

It was in the hands of this class that many of the indentured found their immediate futures placed.

## 'Poor devils'

Work, nothing but work, Morning noon and night  
Booker owns my cunt, Booker owns my children  
Pain, nothing but pain, One million thousand acres cane  
And Booker owns my cutlass, So sun in my eye like thorn  
So Booker searches deep in my flesh, Because Booker owns my arse  
But I'm done with cursing; God let me not curse any more  
Corn in my finger, corn in my foot-bottom.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>13</sup>

Protector Polkinghorne told a Commission of Inquiry in 1906 that during one of his visits to the south coast, he was accompanied by two officers. On arrival at Esperanza Station, some newly allotted Indians alighted from the train. One officer remarked to the other, 'Poor Devils, they will know Charlie [Reynolds] in the morning.'<sup>14</sup> Mungi Dhian Sing (25086) was one of those 'poor devils'. She died trying to make her way to Reynolds Bros. News of her death was conveyed by Nelson, a hotelkeeper, who reported that a dead woman's body 'was left to rot by the roadside'. The Protector reported the sketchy details of how Mungi came to die to the Colonial Secretary on 19 August 1881.

Mungi had arrived with her husband, Halhori, from Shahabad in July 1881. They were young, aged 25 and 24 respectively. She was in an advanced stage of pregnancy and, according to Dr Lindsay Bonnar, gave birth 'instrumentally' to a stillborn child in Durban on 12 August. The following day, still weak and incapacitated, she was forced to go by rail to Isipingo with a group of Indians under the supervision of Reynolds Bros.' agent FWB Lindi. From Isipingo, they had to walk 40 miles to Umzinto on a 'cold and rainy day' because 'there was no wagon or means of shelter, the want of which was doubtless the cause of the poor young woman's untimely death...When the woman complained of poor health no attempt was made to obtain any sort of accommodation for her...No carriage was provided for her either.'

Attorney-General Gallwey reported on 7 November 1881 that 'there can be no doubt that the woman's death resulted from her being moved too soon after her confinement. The Protector should inform Mr. Reynolds that the woman's death was caused by the improper and undue haste by which she was conveyed to the estate.'<sup>15</sup> The recommendation by Dr Charles Garland, chairman of the Medical Board, that 'no woman ought to be required to work for fourteen days after a miscarriage or a confinement' was disregarded because planters did not want 'idle' labour.<sup>16</sup> Mungi's death was not isolated. Complaints about Reynolds Bros. were laid before the Coolie and Wragg commissions, and individual evidence was regularly tendered to the Protector.

Charlie Reynolds' reputation as an 'enforcer' was well known. In February 1879, during the Anglo-Zulu War, his father, Thomas, wrote to the Colonial Secretary requesting that Charles, a member of the Alexandra Mounted Rifles, be substituted by his brother Harry 'on the following grounds – that Charles is the manager of the Umzinto Estate where we employ from 200 to 300 hands, that is, Indian indentured labour...and since his absence the whole gang

have become demoralised and the estate threatened with ruin for the want of his presence and supervision'.<sup>17</sup> For almost three decades after 1880, Charles supervised Indians while Frank was in charge of machinery, white labour and general finances.<sup>18</sup>

The situation was especially terrible during the early period when the Protector did not have assistance. One woman, Reheman, was 'discovered' by Magistrate Lucas while visiting the Central Hospital in Alexandra on 21 January 1881. She was suffering from the effects of an assault by Sirdar Moonsawmy 10 months previously. Confined to bed and unable to work, she still bore marks on her chest and back caused by rows of nails on a hook. Lucas submitted a report to Attorney-General Gallwey, who, in turn, reported the incident to the Colonial Secretary on 7 March 1882:

It is much to be regretted that this serious assault has only been reported after the lapse of nearly a year. Even if the matter escaped the notice of the Protector, it ought to have been reported to him or the Resident Magistrate by the Medical Officer, who seems to have been aware, at the time of the woman's admission to the hospital, that the injuries sustained by her were the result of a 'severe assault.' I would ask you to consider also the Resident Magistrate's suggestion that he should himself inspect Coolie Estates in Alexandra County. There appears only too much reason to believe that the supervision at present exercised in this part of the Colony, as regards Indian immigrants, is quite inadequate.

In his response on 11 March 1882, the Protector conceded to the Colonial Secretary that supervision was 'not adequate'. The deputy who was being appointed was to focus on the 'up-country Districts [and] will not affect the matter of the visitation of estates on the coast, which extends from the Lower Tugela to the Lower Umzimkulu. It is not possible for the Protector to discover every matter, especially if there is a conspiracy to keep me in the dark.'<sup>19</sup>

Indentured workers were literally collapsing, even dying, on the cane fields from a combination of overwork, neglect and malnourishment. Workers in the boiler-room started at two o'clock in the morning and finished at seven the following evening. Frank Mellon, manager of the boiler-room from 1894 to 1900, asked by a commission in 1906 how much time workers were allowed for meals, replied, 'no time during crushing. They did not stop crushing, they had to get it [food] the best way they could.' Sick men, Mellon added, 'had to work until they could not stand'.<sup>20</sup>

There were numerous accidents. Munchi (82080), for example, returned to India a destitute widow in 1906 when her husband, Angamuthu Gounden (82079), died after falling into boiling sugar juice at Esperanza. They had arrived from North Arcot in October 1900, and Angamuthu died a few months before completing his indenture. Munchi returned on the *Pongola* on 16 January 1906. Another worker was 'blown a distance of eight yards' when the mill boiler burst.<sup>21</sup> EB Gaultier, manager at Reynolds in the late 1880s, was asked by the 1906 commission whether any field hands died while he was at Reynolds. 'A good many,' he replied, 'on one occasion there was a dead Indian kept in a shed for three days waiting for the doctor to examine him, and we could scarcely work, for the stink preceding him.'<sup>22</sup>

## The Wragg Commission

The promised life of ease, 'sifting sugar,' was never to be. They did not anticipate the back-breaking toil of the cane fields and the relentless passing of the eighteen-month sugar-cane cycle: plant, burn, cut, harvest, grind, plant, burn, cut, and so on and so on and so on.<sup>23</sup>

The problems at Reynolds were well known to the authorities and came under the purview of the Wragg Commission in the mid-1880s. The first chapter of the Commission's report referred to an altercation between Charlie Reynolds and Protector Louis Mason when Mason visited the estate on 13 July 1886. Mason told the Commission:

I had the Indians mustered as usual. To the end that my conversation with them might be perfectly free and that the men might be relieved from any influence the presence of their superiors might have, I desired Mr. Reynolds and his overseers and Sirdar to withdraw. He declined to do so, and the Indians being asked questions in their presence did not seem inclined to speak freely on even minor matters.<sup>24</sup>

Charlie Reynolds defended his actions on the grounds that Mason had an 'obnoxious' effect on Indians. After the Protector's visit, workers tended to 'defy their Sirdar and set people in authority at defiance...I have more men punished within a month after one of those obnoxious visits of the Protector than for six months when he has not made a visit.' Commissioners were impressed 'with the knowledge which Mr. Reynolds possessed concerning the habits of the Indian labourers, and with the sympathy which appeared to guide his arrangements for their comfort and welfare'. As far as the Commission was concerned, the Legislature 'did not intend to place in the hands of the Protector a power which could not but annoy employers, would inevitably lower them in the eyes of his servants, and would lead to insubordination and the concocting of many false complaints'. As Warhurst observed, the Protector 'had been firmly put in his place while Reynolds Bros. received an unsolicited testimonial. The reality was very different but it was to take twenty years before the true picture emerged.'<sup>25</sup>

Charlie Reynolds continued to abuse his workers, aware that he had a powerful ally in the form of the state. What the commissioners did not know was that Reynolds primed workers for their visits. Renaud, a manager on the estate, testified in 1906:

When the last Commission came (1886), we were told of all the moves of the Commission, and before the Commission came all the women in the yard were dressed in new clothes given to them by the storekeeper, the cost of this being deducted from their wages at the end of the month. This troubled my conscience. If you go to Reynolds, and compare their Indians with Hawkesworth or Kirkland [surrounding estates] you would have no doubt as to how the Indians are treated. You could see the difference.<sup>26</sup>

Despite reports of 'unnatural' deaths through suicides, burns and assaults by overseers, the Wragg Commission concurred with Reynolds Bros. that the Protector's actions resulted in a 'loss of respect and consequent insubordination' against employers.<sup>27</sup> The Commission came to this



conclusion even though visits to the estate on 22 and 24 June 1885 recorded horrendous conditions. The water was infested with human excrement, venereal disease was rampant, and assault common. There was no finding against Reynolds Bros., and maltreatment continued unabated.

Vanuatu Ramudu (49361) arrived in Natal on 30 May 1893 and was assigned to Reynolds Bros. with 30 shipmates. He reported to the Protector on 16 October 1893 that seven had died, mainly through committing suicide because of excessive work, terrible living conditions and ill-treatment by Sirdar Ramiro. He refused to return to the estate, opting instead for imprisonment. Charlie Reynolds' riposte was that Ramudu had not done 'a single day's work, continually absented himself, and took to hiding in the fields for weeks'. This response was typical. Sirdars and overseers were the 'lynchpins' of indenture, and employers went out of their way to protect them and preserve the symbiotic relationship. After visiting the estate, the Protector reported that 'field hands looked both dirty in their person and clothing. They had moreover a miserable and unhappy look about them. They looked to me to be thoroughly worn out. Men are continually deserting.' He blamed their 'dirty condition' on excessive working hours, which left them with insufficient time to attend to domestic arrangements.<sup>28</sup>

The authorities did not take action even though there were eight suicides between July 1892 and June 1893.<sup>29</sup> When Protector Mason visited the estate in May 1892, he found that the manager, Mr Ashton, had locked four men and one woman in the Estate Hospital. However, when this was referred to the Colonial Secretary, it was decided not to prosecute the company. The Protector reported that sick Indians, as a rule, were sent to the Estate Hospital, where they received 'a dose or two of simple medicines' and remained under police supervision for the day. They were not given food as they should have 'eaten their morning meal before roll call. Those who have not eaten their morning meal before roll call must necessarily remain at the Estate Hospital the whole of the day without food.'<sup>30</sup> In 1896, the Protector came across a room where 'as many as four or five Indians have occasionally been locked up at night. On Friday three men were taken under the instruction of Sirdar Armoogam. Persons confined to this room are at times fastened together with handcuffs attached to the leg.'<sup>31</sup>

The Reynolds were well connected to those who held the reins of political power. Frank was a member of the Legislature. Their neighbour, RM Archibald, was a member of the Legislative Assembly and, for a long period, the Speaker. The Reynolds and Archibald families were very close, with Frank Reynolds leasing land to Archibald in 1899 to prospect for minerals.<sup>32</sup> Charlie Reynolds acted with impunity, emboldened by the knowledge that he could escape flagrant breaches of the system.

## The 'butcher' of Umzinto

Legend has it that Christian Casimir Schiffer was the most brutal overseer at Umzinto. He was charged with culpable homicide in 1900 after systematically beating Ramasamy and Papadu and leaving them for dead. Sergeant Peter Blake described the horrendous wounds caused by blows to the body while numerous witnesses described the assault.<sup>33</sup> Schiffer's history of abuse was exposed by a slew of workers. In a prior incident his assault led directly to a death,

but he was acquitted due to a lack of evidence. The all-white jury also brought in a verdict of 'not guilty' on 24 August 1900 in the charge of Schiffer's culpability in the deaths of Ramasamy and Papadu.<sup>34</sup> In one of his all-too-rare missives on the trials of indentured labourers, Gandhi complained to Protector Mason on 9 October 1900:

There has been a failure of justice. While the charge of culpable homicide could not be sustained, that of assault was clearly made out...The revelations made during the trial require an enquiry into the whole working of the estate to which the poor unfortunate men belonged. Sunday does not appear to be respected nor the health of the labourers. It would hardly be an exaggeration to state that the case has created quite a sensation both among the Indians generally and a large body of Europeans. All are eagerly waiting to learn what steps you propose to take in the matter.<sup>35</sup>

Even the generally anti-Indian *Natal Advertiser* reported that 'the verdict has caused some surprise in legal circles'. The testimony revealed that both men were healthy on the morning of 24 July and worked without problem until they were assaulted, whereupon they 'fell to the ground and were unable to rise again'. Six Indians witnessed this; the only variation in their testimony concerned distance and time, 'two matters of judgement upon which even educated White men often disagree', the *Natal Advertiser* opined.<sup>36</sup>

Schiffer conceded that he was 'strict', that he was disliked by the majority of Indians and that he had 'pushed' both men. His defence was that they were 'frail' and died from exposure in the cold. The assault, he said, had nothing to do with their deaths; rather, this 'shipment' was perennially ill and incapable of working through debility and sickness. After the men had been assaulted, Schiffer was informed by other workers that they were badly injured and poorly clad, but he callously abandoned them in the open field in the middle of winter.

'If the theory of death from exposure be accepted,' the *Natal Advertiser* continued, 'it was, to say the least, inhuman, to leave these sick men, ill-fed, and ill-clad, lying on an exposed part of an open field in the rain and wind for up to close upon six hours in weather which the manager of the estate, Mr. Barker, described as "the coldest he had experienced since his five years".'

The jury also accepted the testimony of another white overseer that the men died of 'illness', even though all six Indian witnesses swore that he was not at the scene. And so the focus shifted to the 'quality' of the Indians rather than their inhumane treatment. The 'blame-the-victim' syndrome was a perennial characteristic of indenture because it obviated the need to examine the conditions of the indentured. Schiffer was acquitted. The only consolation for Protector Mason was that Reynolds Bros. informed him on 13 October 1900 that Schiffer had left its employ.

## 'Walking on coals'

Mason, like Gandhi, felt that the voluminous complaints over many years demanded an official inquiry. Durban magistrate Herbert Miller assisted Mason in an inquiry in November

1900. Reynolds Bros. employed 1 350 Indians (1 027 men and 323 women) on its estates at Umzinto, Humberdale, Esperanza and Abrams. During the inquiry, 33 men were in desertion and 41 'unlawfully absent'. Five men were described as 'habitual deserters' who hid in the cane until Barker, the manager, allowed them to do 'odd jobs in the mill, the easiest work on the estate'. Desertion was a popular form of protest, and through this tactic many of the indentured succeeded in effecting change to their working conditions. Mason felt that the manager chose the right option as 'imprisonment has no beneficial effect on men such as these, whereas by keeping them at light work for a short time they can earn a few shillings and eventually turn out good labourers which would never be the case if they were continually imprisoned for desertion'. A number of workers complained of assault. Doorga and Gounden, who were assaulted by Sirdar Jugah, threatened suicide if they were not transferred. Others complained of being assaulted by the French overseer, who admitted that he 'slapped the men...to make them keep up their work' and gave some employees 'a few strokes on the back with a piece of old dry sugar cane'. This assault on the body and dignity of Indians did not merit much attention as it was routine, though Mason and Miller advised him to be 'careful in future, especially in regard to newly arrived immigrants'.

It is interesting that workers were assigned to estates according to origin. Those at Humberdale were 'Calcutta people', who were deemed 'not so clean either in their persons or clothing as the majority of people on the other estates, and taken as a whole they appeared to be a weedy lot altogether'. Workers at Abrams were 'an exceptionally fine body of people. They all looked remarkably well and clean.' There was little sickness in this group, mainly because the barracks was very 'close to the sea-beach, where the Indians frequently indulge in sea-bathing, and fishing'. Physical conditions, rather than regional origins, were causes of ill-health among the indentured, though the authorities generally refused to acknowledge this.

During the period 1 January 1899 to 31 October 1900, the company employed 1 220 Indians. Of these, 74 died, at an exceptionally high rate of 60 per 1 000. The most frequent causes were phthisis, dysentery, pneumonia, enteritis and marasmus, a form of severe protein-energy malnutrition. All the diseases were related to socio-economic conditions.

The most prevalent ailments that, while not fatal, were extremely painful were jigger flea and burning feet. The jigger embedded itself in the skin under the toenails and fingernails, resulting in sores that became infected and prevented sufferers from walking or carrying out normal activities. Burning feet, Mason and Miller reported, are 'incurable and hospital treatment has no beneficial effect whatever. As a consequence, the unfortunate sufferers are altogether incapacitated from work of any kind.' Caused by things like diabetes, nerve damage, chronic alcoholism, vitamin deficiency and heavy-metal poisoning, sufferers described its effect as akin to 'walking on coals'.

Despite the many complaints, the commissioners concluded that there was no evidence of 'systematic abuse' and that most workers 'appeared to be quite contented and satisfied with their work and treatment'. Attorney-General Henry Bale expressed his satisfaction to the Colonial Secretary on 7 December that 'after so many complaints have been made as to the treatment of Indians, they were not justified'.<sup>37</sup>

## Enter Polkinghorne

Despite support in important places, the high death rates continued to raise eyebrows. The appointment of a new Protector, James A Polkinghorne, towards the end of 1902 gave impetus to calls for another investigation. Shortly after his appointment, Polkinghorne visited the estate with Dr WP Tritton, the medical officer, and noted the long working hours and poor quality of food. He would recall in a report to the Colonial Secretary in 1905 that 'as far back as 1902 I have been trying my best to get matters put right on this estate'.<sup>38</sup> When Dr Tritton died, he was replaced by Dr AA Rouillard as medical officer. In 1904, Dr Rouillard reported that the company had lost 25 men and eight children. In August 1904, when Polkinghorne visited the estate he found that workers had not received their rations (dholl and ghee) for two months. Despite him bringing this to the attention of Charlie Reynolds, the overdue rations were only given to employees on 1 November.

Polkinghorne warned the company on 29 December 1904 that the death rate was 'excessive' at 36 per 1 000 per annum, 'more than twice the average for the Colony among the same class of Indians'. Polkinghorne quoted Rouillard's Annual Report for 1904 that diarrhoea and dysentery were caused by the 'poor hygiene, diet, and conditions under which the labour exists. The diet is not a generous one for hard work and that, together with exposure in all sorts of weather, weakens the subject.'<sup>39</sup> In the letter of 29 December 1904, Polkinghorne wrote:

It appears to me that Indians on certain estates are so worked that their systems are weakened, rendering them liable to contract disease and militating very much against their recovery when taken ill...Not only are the hours long, but the work is very laborious in the cane fields.<sup>40</sup>

In January 1905, Polkinghorne queried the acting medical officer, Dr Gilroy, about why so many Indians were dying from diarrhoea. Gilroy replied on 15 February 1905 that Indians were not supplied their full quota of firewood and 'have, in many instances, to eat their food uncooked or partially cooked'. The long working day made them so tired that they did not cook their food properly. Polkinghorne visited the estate on 21 and 22 February 1905. He found that excessive working hours was a major grievance. The contract stipulated that the indentured were to work between sunrise and sunset, six days a week, nine hours per day. Polkinghorne found that 'on ration day, some of the Indians do not reach the barracks until it is quite dark, and on Sundays spend at least three hours and more in getting firewood. I am firmly of the opinion that the Indians indentured to this company have been overworked.' Polkinghorne concluded that Reynolds Bros. was squeezing an extra two days' labour per week from workers at no extra cost. Polkinghorne tested a sample of the rice and reported that it was second grade.

Despite warnings, the death rate continued to increase. Polkinghorne identified long working hours and overwork as major causes. He asked the government on 28 March 1905 to suspend the allotment of indentured Indians until the company's treatment of workers improved. Polkinghorne was especially concerned that in summer, Indians were turned out to work earlier, and that as the 'sickly season approaches, there is bound to be an increase in

sickness amongst Indians, and consequent death rate unless they are better treated and supplied with good food’.

## Hypocritical oath

There were many inquiries and commissions as well as ‘knowledge accumulation’ by the Protector, inspectors and medical officers. There had also been a substantial inquiry by the Protector at Reynolds Bros. in 1900. All these ‘ever more minute and bloated’ inquiries failed to solve the problem. And so it was necessary to hold another ‘larger “special” inquiry’ as a result of persistent reports of abuse and increasing death rates. Once more, there was a ‘meticulous investigation’ by commissioners representing ‘a range of positions to guarantee impartiality’. But as Mongia tells us, ‘regardless of the composition of the endless committees or, to some extent what they recommended, the system of indenture continued into the twentieth century’, abuses and all.<sup>41</sup>

Reynolds Bros. was the subject of another commission in 1906. In his letter of 28 March 1905 Polkinghorne had called for an inquiry as his pleadings were in vain:

I have done my best to get matters rectified on this estate. I have several times spoken to the Managing Director and I have written to him. I have spoken to the managers of the various portions of the estate, and it appears to me that letter writing or communication by word of mouth is no longer of any avail in this matter.<sup>42</sup>

As pressure mounted, Charlie Reynolds agreed to, even called for, an official inquiry as he was confident that his name would be cleared. He had the support of overseers and Sirdars, and knew that workers would be reluctant to tender evidence against him. As employees wrote to Polkinghorne on one occasion, ‘We will not complain again because we are assaulted the moment you leave.’<sup>43</sup>

More importantly, Polkinghorne had swayed Dr Rouillard. In 1904, Dr Rouillard had written to the Protector that ‘the diet is not a generous one for hard work and together with exposure in all sorts of weather undoubtedly weakens the subject, and so makes him liable to sickness’.<sup>44</sup> In August 1904, Dr Rouillard told the Protector that Indians were being killed ‘by the treatment they were receiving’. He repeated this in November 1904 and in January 1905 before going on sick leave to England. At the time of his departure, he told the Protector that he had left things in a ‘bad way’. During the interim, conditions worsened. Yet, when Dr Rouillard resumed his duties in June 1905, he committed a *volte-face* by formally congratulating Reynolds Bros. on the condition of Indian labour in a letter dated 5 November 1905.<sup>45</sup>

The Protector was clear in his mind why Dr Rouillard did this. Medical officers were appointed by the seven-person Indian Immigration Trust Board, of which Frank Reynolds had become a member. Polkinghorne regarded the letter of 5 November as ‘a clear illustration of the Medical Officer being won over by the employer’. Dr Rouillard had formally given the Board his notice of resignation, but withdrew it. His letter withdrawing his resignation read ‘having seen Mr. Reynolds...’. The Protector asked rhetorically, ‘Is any further comment

necessary?' But he did add one more comment in his handwriting: 'Dr. Rouillard is related to Mr. Reynolds by marriage. Mr. Reynolds' sister having married his brother.'

When Frank returned from an overseas holiday in April 1906, he brought pressure to bear on Dr Rouillard, who claimed before the Commission in 1906 that 'the condition of Indians on this estate is most satisfactory from my point of view'. He blamed prostitution and alcoholism for the poor health of workers and, pressed by commissioners, added malaria and the poor quality of rice, but not overwork or ill-treatment. A frustrated Polkinghorne commented that 'Dr. Rouillard has been brought up in the school of deceit'. Dr Rouillard summed up his dilemma when he told the Commission that he had 'two masters', the Protector and the employers: 'It is my duty to keep on good terms with them for my own benefit.'<sup>46</sup> By such actions, Dr Rouillard remained within the ambit of colonial sugarocracy, delivering many of their offspring, while his daughter eventually married into the prominent south coast Crookes family in the 1920s. Dr Rouillard's turnaround focused attention on a crucial flaw in the system, namely that medical officers were appointed by employers.

Polkinghorne became isolated and commented despondently that he was 'fighting a very strong and influential company backed up in many quarters...The medical officers are against me, the whole neighbourhood has been against me, and were it not for the figures showing the death rate, I should have a very difficult matter in proving my case.'<sup>47</sup> The 'figures' showed that the death rates at Reynolds Bros. in 1904 were 43 per 1 000 for men, as against 16 per 1 000 for the indentured in Natal; the mortality rate in 1905 for persons over 15 was 18 for indentured Indians in Natal; at Reynolds Bros. it was 37.<sup>48</sup> In the Umzinto area there were four other estates. The death rate at those was 14 per 1 000 in 1904, as compared to almost 40 at Reynolds Bros.<sup>49</sup> Fortunately for Polkinghorne, he himself was well invested in the province's hierarchy of privilege. His father served as head of the Legislative Council; he married Alice Cato from Durban's pioneering Cato family; and he had himself served in the Legislative Assembly. Polkinghorne had one other ally, Dr Ernest Hill, Natal's first Chief Health Officer (1901–1911), who was determined to improve the living conditions and hence the health of Indian employees. Hill also argued that a higher mortality rate among indentured workers was due to poverty and social conditions, and not intrinsic racial characteristics.<sup>50</sup>

Polkinghorne impressed the importance of the investigation on the three-man Commission in passionate language: 'This, gentleman, is not an enquiry into whether somebody is to reap a few pounds, or whether in the supply of goods, short delivery has been made; the whole question is a question of life and death.'<sup>51</sup> Polkinghorne pursued the question of long working hours relentlessly:

Having been at Umzinto on 4 November 1903 in another connection, I noticed from the hotel, Indians returning from work at a quarter past six, and next morning, being up early, I noticed that all the Indians had passed to their work before five o'clock, and those who came from the Hill Barracks would have left before 4:30 p.m., making thirteen-and-half hours, deducting one for meals, against the contract of nine hours...My contention is that when the roll is called men and women place themselves

at the disposal of their employer, and if the employer chooses to send them to a field two or three miles away from the barracks, they are actually employed whilst walking to and from.

During the sugar-processing season from July to January, Indians worked up to 18 hours. Some began work at 1:00 a.m. to continue the milling which had started the previous day, or fire the cane so that harvesting could begin at dawn. While workers were made to toil long hours, overseers and Sirdar had the luxury of working two shifts. CW Petchell, an engineer with the company, conceded that some employees worked from 3:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. the following afternoon, then returned for night shift: 'Extra men took the place of men as they dropped out.' Another supervisor, F Mellon, testified that in the mill, workers could start as early as 2:00 a.m. and finish around 7:00 p.m. They were not provided with food nor allowed to eat while crushing cane in the boiler.

The work was arduous. Polkinghorne received numerous complaints from workers about the loading of cane onto railway trucks. He provided evidence of overwork by comparing the number of workers per truck at Reynolds Bros. with other estates. At Hulett & Sons and TG Colenbrander, 'the difference between six men to a truck and the two men allowed by Reynolds Bros. is very marked indeed'. EB Gaultier, head sugar boiler at Old Esperanza Mill, told the Commission that the same 70 men worked the morning and night shifts. He recounted a conversation with one employee who told him that he worked for Reynolds Bros. 'in the time of Ashton [a former manager], the hot time, when the boys used to hang themselves in the cane'.

## Women and production

So wind howls from the heart of bush  
Like a bird meshed, torn upon twigs  
Hear how it cries, cries, how it bleeds on the air  
And broken over buds we women, sickles in hand  
Sweep and sway all day to its song  
Babies strapped like burdens to our backs.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>52</sup>

Women were particularly harshly treated. Polkinghorne presented evidence showing that those with suckling children were out in the fields for 11 hours. When he raised this with a white overseer, he was told that Indians had never been 'so well treated as at present, and if they were to be treated better he would have to leave'.<sup>53</sup> Overworking women was a long-standing practice. Dr LP Booth wrote in 1879 of the deleterious effect of women working long hours in the cane fields hoeing and weeding:

In that crowd of women are always some in the earlier stages of pregnancy, some suckling babies, and many who have left a number of little children behind them in their huts. So that not only is the health of these women subjected to risks, which need not be particularised, at a time when they require all care and consideration, but the children are left to injure themselves...and to scramble up to adult life as best they may.<sup>54</sup>

Protector Polkinghorne described the impact of physical work on women:

With cane cutting, the work is of the dirtiest nature as the canes are usually burnt and consequently the clothing and skin of the Indians becomes covered with the burnt trash, and consequently they arrive back in a filthy condition. It can easily be imagined what is the state of women with children who arrive back late in this condition, when water has to be fetched, food cooked and children attended to after the toil of the day...seeing that they have to turn out at dawn, and they also have to get what fuel they can. They employ Sundays to gather fuel for the week, but in some barracks at least firewood is very difficult to procure and the Indians have therefore to depend on dried cane chiefly, which burns out very quickly.<sup>55</sup>

The Commission heard that women were forced to work until the seventh month of pregnancy. In some cases, because women were denied rations when they stopped working, in breach of the contract, they worked until the ninth month, gave birth and immediately returned to employment. Vellay Munami (94999), ill and pregnant, was forced to do exacting task work. She was just 19 when she was placed at Reynolds Bros. in September 1902. The Protector noticed during one of his visits that she was pregnant and ill, and instructed the manager to send her to hospital. However, she was made to work the whole of the following day before receiving medical attention, and lost the baby through a miscarriage. As soon as Vellay returned to Esperanza, she was put back to work in the fields, despite Dr Rouillard prescribing a minimum of 21 days' rest. The excuse of the manager, Tracey, was that Vellay did not have a 'note' from the hospital to be put off work. Polkinghorne replied that 'common humanity should have suggested this to the manager'.<sup>56</sup>

This was not an isolated incident. Reynolds Bros. flouted Section 17 of Law 25 of 1891, which required women to do light fieldwork and not be made to carry heavy loads of sugar cane. Dr Rouillard reported to the Protector in August 1904 that Chinnamati was suffering from spinal disease as a result of persistent exposure to poor sanitary conditions. Despite her debilitating disease, she was 'assaulted by a Sirdar when she stated that she was unable to work when she was already suffering from the present disease'.<sup>57</sup>

Reynolds Bros. provided a meagre diet. Essential items such as dhol, salt and ghee were often not supplied for half the year. The Protector reported in 1904 that the company was not supplying dhol, which constituted half the monthly protein content of the diet. And when food was provided, the quality was often so poor that workers took ill. Dr Conran, medical officer for part of 1905, certified that a sample of food he tested was bound to produce illness.<sup>58</sup> When workers complained of stomach pains or dysentery, they were prescribed castor oil.

The boundary between being fit or unfit for work was often crossed when a worker was too ill to stand up. Dysentery, enteritis and other diarrhoeal diseases resulting from polluted water, poor diet and lack of adequate shelter ranked highest as causes of death on the estate.<sup>59</sup> Men who were ill but could stay upright were forced into the female gang, where they received half-pay. Dr Hill reported that housing at Umzinto was 'appalling', and that the barracks failed to meet rudimentary standards. Many were condemned as 'unfit' for human habitation.<sup>60</sup>



Overwork, malnourishment and squalid living conditions contributed to the high death rate. McLaren, an employee at the estate hospital, told the Commission that Reynolds Bros.' workers were 'usually weak individuals. You would make no mistake in picking out Messrs Reynolds Indians in the hospital as they are a needy looking lot.'<sup>61</sup> WT Pemberton, a manager at Reynolds Bros., attributed the high death rate to 'the stamp of the coolies allotted to us'. Asked how long workers 'who are unfairly allotted to you take to die', he replied: 'I cannot say. Some linger a long time, some die as soon as they get into hospital.'<sup>62</sup> Pemberton was brutal, as emphasised by Polkinghorne:

The real culprit is Mr. Pemberton, manager of the largest portion of the estate, who has been brought up in a bad school and with callous indifference and has so treated the Indians under him...He deserves to be dismissed. The Indian is the real sufferer as usual and he is cheated and buffeted without any recourse.<sup>63</sup>

An indication of the discontent of workers is that many chose to 'escape' by refusing to re-indenture. Of the 532 Indians who completed their indentures between 1901 and 1904, only 20 re-indentured.

Despite marshalling evidence of maltreatment from many sources, Polkinghorne was concerned that little would be done because Reynolds Bros., reach was long. He felt that the case, notwithstanding the evidence, was slipping away.

## Enter 'the insider'

A breakthrough came from an unexpected source as Frank and Charlie Reynolds were put under pressure for the first time in decades. The man responsible for this turnaround was Leon Renaud, who, at the time of the Commission, was an advocate in Durban, but had supervised the mill from 1886 to 1894. Renaud had arrived from Mauritius as a child in the early 1870s. Commissioner James Schofield, accused by Polkinghorne of acting as 'inside counsel' for Reynolds Bros., objected to Renaud's testimony on the frivolous grounds that it was outside the Commission's terms of reference as he had served during the tenure of a previous Protector. However, the other commissioners took a different view and accepted Renaud's submissions, which confirmed that overwork was common:

These people had no time to fetch wood nor cook their food, and they had to soak rice in water and eat that instead of food. That gave them dysentery and they died, and a good few of them committed suicide. Indians were compelled to work at night. If they refused they were thrashed. Workers did not complain because life became harder when they got back. For instance, if a man is fond of a woman, and lives with her, he gets shifted from one end of the estate to another.<sup>64</sup>

Questioned by commissioners why he remained with the company for eight years, Renaud replied that he 'was young and a willing machine'. Asked what happened if a man reported himself sick, Renaud replied:

If he said he had fever we gave him quinine, and for anything else, dose of salts or castor oil. If diarrhea, laudanum and water. We were allowed so many sick men in the gang. Say, a Sirdar had twenty-five men, he would be allowed two. Sirdars always got a promotion if they could turn out their field gangs complete.

Did you ever continue to give men medicine day after day?

Yes.

Were they not put in hospital?

It was only when a man fell down that he saw the Medical Officer.

How long was an Indian kept working and him professing to be ill?

As long as he could walk.

Renaud admitted assaulting a worker, for which he was fined £5. Race came into play when it was time to evaluate Renaud's evidence. It was imputed by other witnesses that he could not be trusted because he was French Creole rather than European. One manager, CW Petchell, told the Commission that 'the average White man would not associate with him'. Renaud, it seems, had made a Damascus-like turn in life. His aggressive behaviour towards Indians in his early years was replaced by a passionate desire for justice, and he pursued many legal cases on behalf of poorly treated Indians. When he died in 1934, he left a large tract of land to his Indian cook Jean David 'as a reward for his fidelity in my service'.<sup>65</sup>

## 'Blaming the victim'

Reynolds Bros. could not argue about the death rates, but provided an ingenious explanation that fed racist myths about the 'Orient'. Charlie Reynolds' first line of defence was that 'the Indians allotted to this estate are certainly not up to the standard of Indians allotted to other estates'.<sup>66</sup> Exactly why authorities should single out Reynolds Bros. for weak and sickly men was not made clear, especially since Frank Reynolds was highly influential.

The company further argued that the statistics included the deaths of children 'of which there are a very large number on the estate' due to the 'carelessness of the Indians themselves' and the 'predominance of venereal diseases'. Indian parents' lack of knowledge about child-rearing and their promiscuousness were blamed for high death rates. Charlie Reynolds resorted to a similar defence to justify the 'terrible living conditions' and lack of ventilation: 'An Indian does not believe in fresh air...Indians prefer a close, dry, and dark place, to an airy and bright one.'

Reynolds Bros. was also accused of arbitrary finings. In one instance Ramsami Gounden was fined by Tracey, the manager. Polkinghorne saw this in the wage book. When he queried it, Tracey insisted that Gounden had 'borrowed' the money from him. Gounden had in fact accused Tracey of assault. The latter was charged but acquitted when a key witness, a fellow indentured worker named Rayaman, changed his evidence in favour of Tracey. Tracey admitted to the previous brutal assault of what he termed the 'ringleader' of a gang. In reality, 'ringleaders' were workers willing to represent the interests of fellow workers. Tracey was fined £3 for that assault but was unrepentant because his actions 'appeared to have a good effect on the gang'.<sup>67</sup>

Reynolds Bros. also had an explanation for the poor quality of the rice, blaming the Indian-owned B Ebrahim Ismail & Co. for providing the 'wrong quality'. The company was in a 'no-win' situation, management argued. If it had not handed out the rice, the Protector would have complained that rations were delayed. As to charges of overwork, the commissioners were reminded by Charlie Reynolds:

Indians were brought into the country for the purpose of working and not of doing as little as possible. The Protector argues that an Indian's daily hours of labour commence when he or she leaves the barracks and finish on their return to the barracks. Why, the thing is absurd on the face of it. Are we to drive our Indians to work like flocks of sheep, to see that they do not loiter on the way and drive them home again, keeping the good workers on the field until the lazy ones are knocked off their work?<sup>68</sup>

Workers returned late to their huts, Reynolds told the Commission, because they 'prefer to visit the village or some of their friends on their way home'.

## The verdict

Two of the three commissioners accepted the veracity of Polkinghorne's evidence, but a third, James Schofield, a member of the Legislative Assembly, presented a minority report which, astonishingly, concluded that 'Indians were well fed and looked after; there is nothing to warrant a charge of overwork or ill-treatment'. To support this conclusion, he pointed to evidence 'in the course of the enquiry where the Indians, free and indentured, on the Estate had given a present of a horse, trap and harness to an overseer on his marriage; this act is an indication of the good feeling existing between master and servant'.<sup>69</sup>

The Commission, however, was loath to take action despite the mass of evidence marshalled by Polkinghorne. Whites remembered that when similar complaints were made in 1871, the supply of labour was halted. No one was prepared to take a similar risk when the colony's economy was just emerging from recession and Africans, responding to the merciless imposition of taxation, were stirring. The Colonial Secretary advised Polkinghorne on 17 August 1907 that he did 'not consider it necessary to interfere with the management as long as the present improvement is maintained'.<sup>70</sup> Polkinghorne was distraught, and wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 20 September 1906: 'To me it is the shame and injustice of it all, that such a state of affairs should be allowed to continue and that as a statutory officer I should be compelled to allot Indians to the company under the circumstances.'<sup>71</sup> Subsequent to the inquiry, reports of ill-treatment persisted. And so did Polkinghorne:

The whole thing is patent. The treatment on the estate is reported against, a commission is appointed, then the Indians are well treated and apparently so for quite twelve months after the decision of Government had been given. Then directly it is in the interests of the Estate to get all they can out of the Indians, they do so. Both Mr. Tracey and Mr. Pemberton did not scruple, for one moment, to resort to the former ill-treatment directly it suited them...It is absolutely unfair to bring these Indians here on

a specific agreement and work them like this, and as I have stated, over and over again, without any recourse. If these things are allowed to go on, then, in all fairness, His Excellency, the Governor, should be acquainted with the facts, so the Indian government may be advised.<sup>72</sup>

The Protector had a point. Yerringadu (128759) was a healthy 25-year-old when he arrived in Natal from Cuddapah in December 1906. After working for Reynolds Bros. for 18 months, he took ill in November 1907, suffering from diarrhoea. He was treated for two months at the estate, then at Umzinto Hospital, and from there sent to the depot in Durban to be returned to India as he was unlikely to make a full recovery. He did not want to go back, he told the Protector on 11 March 1908, as the illness was not his doing. Half his ration consisted of coarse mealie meal, which he was 'not accustomed to in India'.<sup>73</sup> In the period 1 November 1907 to 28 February 1908, there were 124 cases of diarrhoea at Reynolds Bros. Of these, three were returned to India and eight died. In June 1908, Polkinghorne wrote to the Colonial Secretary about the quality of rations:

In terms of the contract the employer undertakes to provide workers wholesome and suitable food. It cannot be asserted that long continued supply of meal ground from fermented and diseased mealies is wholesome and suitable, causing as it has done, a great deal of sickness and many deaths. It is in my opinion nothing short of culpable homicide and the employer should be so charged; but if it is not thought advisable to go to this length, then he should certainly be charged under the Law for ill-treatment of his Indians. To me, it is simply scandalous that such things should take place, and especially on this Estate after the experience of the past. In 1906, after the sitting of the Commission, I tried to debar the Company from receiving any more Indians, so long as Mr. C.P. Reynolds held the management of the Estate. I was overruled, and here we have the disgraceful state of affairs under his continued management.<sup>74</sup>

Polkinghorne finally prevailed in 1908 when the government indicated that indentured labourers would not be allowed at Esperanza until Charlie Reynolds was removed. Despite the Reynolds' tentacles of intimidation, stretching from the medical officer of Umzinto to time-expired indentured labourers about to depart for India, Polkinghorne, to his credit, persevered. Charlie Reynolds was replaced by George Crookes of Renishaw. Frank Reynolds assumed total control and continued to receive indentured labour.

But the threats of violence and general abuse continued. Batcha Kannamma gave a deposition to Magistrate Chas McKenzie regarding the suicide of her husband, Yarkadu, at the end of September 1909. Both worked for Reynolds Bros. She last saw her husband on Monday, 20 September 1909, a week before the body was found. He got up before sunrise and left the hut with his blanket and overcoat around him. She thought he had gone 'to attend to the calls of nature'.<sup>75</sup> When he did not return, she reported this to the manager, who told her to go to work. After a week, she went back to the manager, who did not carry out a search but 'comforted' her that Yarkadu was hiding in the bush. On Tuesday 28 September, Constable

Rajoo informed her that her husband's body had been found in the Isezela River, lying on its face and knees in the sand of the lagoon where the water had been let out.

Batcha testified to the Protector that Sirdar Anthony, Reddy Ramsamy and Gonda Naraidoo 'used to frighten my husband by telling him that he was possessed of the devil and they were constantly getting money out of him'. On the Saturday prior to her husband's disappearance, he appeared frightened. When she asked what the problem was, he said that Sirdar Anthony had threatened that unless he paid £3, 'it would be up with him before Monday, that he would be constantly ill-treated and in the end will be sent to gaol'. On Sunday they reported the matter to the manager, who 'did not call the men up. We then returned home. My husband was very nervous and depressed all day.' And so he took his life the following day.

## Redemption?

The exile of Charlie Reynolds and his ignominious end represented a pyrrhic victory; indentured labour was terminated a few years later but, as we will show, the introduction of migrant labour from Pondoland would see the worst excesses of indenture return with a vengeance. While Charlie met a less than agreeable death, Frank Reynolds (1852–1930) sat on the first Natal Parliament and, after Union in 1910, was Member of Parliament for Umzimkulu. He was knighted in 1916 for his political and economic contributions in Natal. In 1928, aged 76, Sir Frank Reynolds lost his leg through amputation. As Hocking points out, 'with characteristic flair he insisted it should have a proper funeral – but with proviso that when he died it should be reunited with the rest of his body. That happened in 1930. Behind him he left Reynolds Bros. as memorial, easily the greatest sugar enterprise on the South Coast.'<sup>76</sup> When the feats and accomplishments of the Reynolds are eulogised, rarely is the fact mentioned that their hands were soaked in the blood of indentured labourers, followed by that of workers from Pondoland. And when it is, it is done as an aside to the main story of the hard-working, God-fearing white pioneers.

In relating the story of Reynolds Bros. one runs the risk of concluding that indentured workers were passive victims abused by white overlords and rescued by well-meaning whites, and that the system worked in the interests of justice. Reading between the lines, though, Polkinghorne clearly benefited from a solid network of 'informers' on the plantation who learnt over time not to openly confront but to make use of the opportunities afforded by the Protector and his assistants.

Remember Polkinghorne's quote from a letter written by one of Reynolds Bros.' employees: 'We will not complain again because we are assaulted the moment you leave.'<sup>77</sup> There was in that letter a tacit signal that all was not well. While resistance was not overt, workers played an important part in providing information to the Protector's office and in feeding and hiding deserters from the hands of Charlie Reynolds and his henchmen.

It is precisely this theme of resistance that we now pick up. The indentured, far from allowing the authorities to mould them into submissive instruments of labour, found many creative ways to resist, subvert and even escape the system.





3  
The astigmatic geologist

stoops, with the crouch of the heron

deciphering - not a sign.

All of the epics are blown away with the leaves,

blown with the careful calculations on brown paper;

these were the only epics: the leaves.

No horsemen here, no cuirasses

crashing, no fork-bearded Castilians,

only the narrow, silvery creeks of sadness

like the snail's trail,

only the historian deciphering, in invisible ink,

its patient slime...

DEREK WALCOTT (FROM ANOTHER LIFE, CHAPTER 22, 1973)



## *Bhen Choodh* and the politics of plays

I was assaulted by James Wilson, manager of John Milner's estate, on last Friday the 15th just about 9:00 a.m. – he struck me with a whip on the face, the end of the lash marked me under the eye. After this he was drawing out his knife to strike me, and I said '*Bhen Choodh*, I will cut your throat,' after which he threatened to shoot me.<sup>1</sup>

The speaker of these words was Whootum Singh (11396). He was 30 when he arrived in Natal on the *Plassey* in February 1875, and was assigned to John Milner's Springfield Estate. Singh was humiliated in front of other indentured workers as Wilson lashed out. Embarrassed, dishonoured, wounded and angry, he had to weigh his alternatives carefully. Striking back was not the most prudent option. Ranged against him was the despotic power wielded by bosses, the legal system that was often in the hands of those with direct links to plantation bosses, and the fact that his fellow indentured lacked any collective organisation.

In this context, the indentured often sought indirect ways of circumventing the system. But there were overt confrontations like that of Singh's. Inevitably, these men would be 'broken' over time, for it was people like him that bosses feared would become the lightning rod for collective dissent.

While *Bhen Choodh* could be used in a variety of ways, like the word 'bad' used by African Americans or 'damn' in English, in the context that Singh used it, it was a means to show Wilson that he would not cower; it was used as a counter-humiliation and as a threat. While not a signal for rebellion, *Bhen Choodh* was an indication that Singh, in the face of violence intended to bring him to his knees, would not simply bow down. The fact that he repeated these words when he lodged his complaint with Acting Protector Graves in 1877 suggests that he did not want to conceal his defiance; rather, it was important in indicating that he would not be a willing victim.

Singh might have been a rarity, but this must not cloud the diverse forms of resistance, mostly small and not always obvious, which were embraced by the indentured, and the creativity involved in subverting, if not always overtly challenging, the power of employers.

### Thinking through resistance(s)

Resistance with its implicit David versus Goliath romanticism has one very distinct disadvantage: everything has to be forced into the dichotomy of resistance or submission and all of the paradoxical effects which cannot be understood in this way remain hidden.<sup>2</sup>

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PREVIOUS PAGE: The ordinary weapons of the relatively powerless – foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, pilfering, slander, arson, etc. – require little or no planning and typically avoid direct confrontation with authority.

In looking at employer domination and indentured resistance against it, we need to explore what we mean by the concept. Many have taken a macro approach to resistance, seeking out overt acts of aggression and physical violence, which may have involved major public confrontations or rebellions, where often the very 'system' was at stake. This approach meant that, for long periods, ordinary people were seen as passive victims who every now and again rose up in rebellion, only to disappear from history. There was a reaction against the idea of naturalised domination by those exploring the resistance of ordinary people against what were often overwhelming odds. The work of EP Thompson was an exemplar in looking at the 'making' of the working class in a more nuanced way, and in particular the 'everyday' defences they created against the trespass of capital.<sup>3</sup> But this sometimes lent itself to seeing resistance everywhere and in everything. Despite the dangers, the challenge of this approach was a crucial corrective, and facilitated a turn to 'reinsert resistance at the mundane, micrological level of everyday practices and choices about how to live'.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst the everyday practices of the indentured seemed submissive, simmering below was what James Scott refers to as actions '*intended* to mitigate or deny claims' declared by 'superordinate classes'.<sup>5</sup> Scott's work allows us to move beyond thinking about resistance as embedded in formal organisations and collective action. It also creates the avenue to, as De Certeau would have it, start thinking about resistance as 'the politics of ploys' inscribed in the 'practice of everyday life'.<sup>6</sup>

There are limitations in Scott's approach of only seeing resistance outside the 'direct observation of the powerholders'.<sup>7</sup> As Gyan Prakash points out, there is 'potential for resistance within the structure of power' as well.<sup>8</sup> We see this in the appointment of the Protector and the use made of his office by the indentured, even if there was limited redress. Scott's work, however, alerts us to less overt forms of resistances, and in looking at indenture we see how influential the work of Scott and De Certeau has been in allowing us to enter the world of indentured resistance. To more precisely understand what guides our focus on resistance, witness Scott's definition of everyday resistance in *Weapons of the Weak*:

The ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on. These Brechtian...forms of class struggle have certain features in common. They require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority.<sup>9</sup>

In his later study, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), Scott wrote that relations of power involved 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts. In public the indentured may have expressed deference and respect, but in private many probably felt resentment and contempt, which was 'masked' from the planter as a necessary tool for survival. While the expectations of power of the 'dominant' classes generally prevailed, they never had absolute control.<sup>10</sup> The 'public transcript' of the indentured did not mean submissive obedience to rules imposed by employers. On the contrary, they responded in multiple ways to the systems of control and abuse.

Employers and colonial authorities saw the indentured as numbers, whose task it was to produce sugar at the lowest possible cost. Resistance was not a reaction to indenture but a part of it, a defining characteristic of it. Migrants did not meekly accept their subordinate positions just because they did not have recourse to petitions and the other bric-a-brac of middle-class organisations; it would be incorrect to assume that workers only protested under the guiding hand of Gandhi and Indian traders. Indeed, there are suggestions that there were attempts at resistance on the first boat to Natal, although it is not clear what form this took.<sup>11</sup>

In what was a complex spectrum of resistance, the indentured mostly used 'weapons' available to 'the weak' to undermine the power of planters, though occasionally they were willing to join forces and confront the system directly.<sup>12</sup> A number of factors other than repressive state regulations hindered a collective response. These included the short-term nature of indenture; the lack of mobility across plantations; differences of culture, caste, language and religion among the indentured; limited communication networks; and the absence of leadership, as those who showed leadership potential were either siphoned into management as Sirdars or quickly silenced.<sup>13</sup>

## Rebellion in Henry's Kraal

The earliest recorded organised resistance took place on 17 January 1862, when 22 workers walked off Henry Shire's Melkhout Kraal Estate in Umhlanga, which was considered one of the finest sugar estates in Natal. But Shire's employees remember him most for his brutality. He had had experience with indenture in Mauritius and welcomed Indian labour. Eleven of the *Truro's* cargo were assigned to him. Shire came under the spotlight when his employees petitioned the authorities about their maltreatment. They divided themselves into 8 'Madrasee Coolies' and 14 'Bengalee Coolies', suggesting that early forms of identity were based on regional divisions.<sup>14</sup> Workers complained of irregular payment of wages, floggings from Shire and Sirdar Ramsamy, the poor quality of rations and long working hours.

Sirdar Ramsamy had arrived on the *Truro* in 1860. He was from Malabar (present-day northern Kerala), and was among the youngest men assigned to Shire. He was just 19, whereas most men were between ages 27 and 36. Yet he was appointed Sirdar within two years. By all accounts he did not let Shire down. Faced with a biased magistrate in Verulam and an interpreter who did not fully understand their languages, and therefore translated their complaints 'imperfectly', the workers left the estate en masse and turned up at the magistrate's office in Durban 'in hope that the magistrate of this court, where there is a properly qualified interpreter – could and would grant redress for their grievances'.<sup>15</sup> Instead, they were imprisoned for 14 days for leaving the estate without Shire's permission, an additional 14 days when they refused to return to work, and a further seven days when they hired an attorney to petition the governor.

The authorities eventually relented and constituted the Shire Commission, whose three members, Immigrant Agent Edward Tatham and the magistrates of Verulam and Umhlanga, held hearings in Verulam on 19 March 1862. Johannes Francis, a 'house-servant', complained that he was made to work 14 hours per day, including Sundays, and when he asked for overtime pay was threatened with fieldwork. Dooklist testified that Shire 'had me flogged by four kaffirs

with a cane. [They] gave me twelve lashes by my master's orders. This was on account of some report Sirdar Ramsamy made to my master about me. Three coolies have been flogged in this way – Caniah, Latchman, and myself.' A litany of abuse was laid at the door of the commissioners.

The Commission reported on 10 April 1862 that Shire extended the work day, deducted wages unlawfully, placed workers on half-diet, and used Africans to administer beatings. The commissioners, however, decided to take a 'favourable view' and not punish Shire because he had 'great difficulty in obtaining work from his coolies'. This made him 'exceedingly irritated' and accounted for his actions. The Commission was emphatic, however, that the authorities should not accede to workers' requests to be transferred, as they were entitled to by law, as this would set a 'bad precedent'.

The findings were a clear signal to employers that they could act with impunity; for workers it became clear that they could not rely on the law. This act of open defiance was remarkable given that workers were in an alien setting; they were divided by caste, religion and origin; their movements were closely monitored; and the law was stacked against them. Yet they found the means to take collective action. The Shire report may have muted collective protest, but the spirit of resistance had been raised.

## ***Vetoo, vetoo! (cut him, cut him!)***

The Shire protest was followed by intermittent, albeit rare, collective action. On many occasions, indentured workers flouted the law and made their way to the Protector's office to seek redress. On 19 May 1886, JW Harvey's employees went to the Protector 'in a body' to complain that their wages for April had not been paid. Thevakkul (29052) and infants Mariamma (31690) and Gunaprakasan (29154), Rungasamy (29082), Michael (29083), Thuraikugadum (29053), Gopal (29079), Maruday (31689), Veerapan (31692), Latchmanen (31693), Ramasamy (31789), Hussain Bux (31802), Vengalual (31828) and Vurulayn (33985) were each sentenced to between one and 30 days for leaving the estate without a pass, even though Harvey admitted not paying them.<sup>16</sup> In another incident in 1887, 55 indentured workers who left C Acutt and Co. 'in a body' were imprisoned for six days each. Camarin and Kupen were identified as 'ringleaders' and given 15 days' hard labour.<sup>17</sup>

Member of the Legislative Council and landowner, George C Cato, related an incident to the Wragg Commission in which 'two or three coolies working on Cato Manor Estate beat the White field overseer, and were apprehended and sent into Durban to be tried by the magistrate; all the field gangs left the estate with their hoes over their shoulders, and marched into town without permission or authority. It is my opinion that there is no remedy but the lash in certain cases, which the present law does not reach.' There were other forms of solidarity. The manager of Milkwood Kraal, JR Bramley, told the Wragg Commission about 'a common fund among coolies to which all pay, and out of which fines inflicted by the magistrates are met'.<sup>18</sup>

The Acting Protector reported on 5 October 1909 that 91 men from Reunion Estate went to his office 'in a body'. The problem started when Reuben Aubrey Swales, the manager, assaulted Mallan (81794) and Lakshmanan (131000) following a dispute over excessive task

work, which was an illegal practice. Detective FH Pegge reported that on 24 September 1909 there was a dispute between Mallan and Sirdar Murugan. Swales, riding by on horseback, grabbed hold of Mallan. Seeing this, the other Indians 'came to Mallan's assistance and commenced beating Swales with sugar cane. Swales made good his escape by firing his revolver.'<sup>19</sup> The authorities regarded Swales' actions as 'indiscreet' as he had been warned that Indians were bent on killing him. Further, they could have killed him had they wanted to 'as they were armed with knives'. Trouble had been brewing for some time as Indians were 'under the impression that they are being given extra work'.

Pegge concluded that the assault was premeditated because bamboo was used: 'they could not have picked them up haphazardly in the fields as there are no bamboos on the spot where the assault took place'. In his deposition on 25 September 1909, Swales told magistrate WR Saunders of Umlazi that he managed a workforce of 300. On 24 September, he was in the field supervising 90 men. He saw Mallan cutting cane 'contrary to instructions' and sent Sirdar Murugan to 'give him orders as to what he should do'. Mallan declined to listen to the Sirdar, so Swales went over to 'urge' him to obey:

He became insolent. I pushed him in the direction in which I wanted him to cut, whereupon he turned round and attempted to use his cane knife on me. He rushed at me and this appeared to be the signal for the whole gang to assault me with sticks of different kinds, and some attempted to strike me with their cane knives. Finding that I was overpowered, I produced a small revolver as Mallan and the large mob were closing in on me. I fired at Mallan and thus stopped the rush. I spoke to the men without effect. They were throwing sticks, stones, etc. at me...If I did not have a revolver I would have been killed as the men were determined. Whilst they were assaulting me in a body they were shouting 'Vetoo, vetoo,' meaning 'Cut him, cut him.' I am bruised all over.

The police and estate management identified five men – Natha Gulab (135123), Mallan Thondroya (81794), B Venkulloo (77541), Vella Mundiri (108034) and Lakshmanan Kolantah (131000) – as 'ringleaders' and transferred them to estates in Stanger. Acting Protector Mason found that managers at the estate carried revolvers as a rule in the execution of their duties. Swales, it emerged in court, had a history of assaulting Indians and threatening them with his revolver. He was fined but retained his position, as 'good men' like him were hard to come by.

Mallan was 22 when he arrived in October 1900, and was well into his second term of indenture; Venkulloo came to Natal in February 1900, aged 18, and was also serving his second term; Lakshmanan, a Pariah (untouchable) from South Arcot, was 25 when he arrived in 1907; Natha was 28 when he arrived in November 1907 from Sultanpur; while Vella came to Natal in November 1904, aged 20, and was on the verge of completing his indenture. While Mallan and Venkulloo were in their second terms, old hands who were probably frustrated by the economic conditions which prevented them leaving indenture, Vella and Lakshmanan, it seems, did not take to indenture or life in Natal, as they returned to India immediately after serving their indentures.

This story is important for several reasons. During the 1913 strike, Isipingo would be one of the hotbeds of protest and the tactics and strategies used then indicate that strikers relied on memories of previous struggles. A feature of the 1913 strike was the hiding of sticks in the bush and ambushing the police with these, a tactic that had a prior history in Isipingo. This incident is also important for showing the protection given to overseers and others in authority, and how 'ringleaders' were silenced, a *modus operandi* that was consistent throughout indenture.

The coal mines were the nub of strike activity in 1913. Those who believe that the strike came out of nowhere or relied solely on Gandhi's inspiration might want to consider correspondence from management in the years leading up to 1913. To take one example, on 4 May 1905, the manager of Ramsay Collieries wrote to the Protector:

The labour on this mine is totally out of control owing to the action of certain Indians who have been employed for some time. The Indians, men and women, wish to work when and where and at what they like. Certain of them argue that there is nothing in the law regarding their working night shift. Some of them are noisy and insolent...The undermentioned men have on more than one occasion incited the others to leave and go to Ladysmith and I have again advised their being got rid of. Some of the Indians state they had no reason of refusing to work, but did so as they were threatened by others. The Chief Sirdar is also afraid of some of the men and women. Karian, an old policeman, has been discharged as he is useless as a compound Sirdar. He is afraid to go into the barracks by himself to call the Indians out to work...Some of them stoned or threatened to stone the police when they attempted to take charge of certain men who had refused to work on Sunday night and again on Friday morning, and the police had to be reinforced.<sup>20</sup>

The 'ringleaders' were identified as Sowrimuthu, Tambiran, Vel Gounden, Ramphul, Timul, Mahomed Ali, Namoo, Jugoo, Ramkisore, Ramdass, Debi Sing, Abdul Karim, Pakiri Lingadu, Kaylan, Paranju, Solukandu and Patabi. The solution, Deputy Protector Dunning felt, was to get rid of 'a few of the oldest hands who have been more or less concerned in the past troubles, [then] matters will be better'. Several of the men were serving their second terms of indenture. As with the example of Reunion Estate, 'old hands' provided leadership and were more likely to confront perceived injustices.

'Ringleaders' were always the cause of 'problems'. Peter Paterson, magistrate of Estcourt, told the Wragg Commission of 'cases of insubordination on the part of gangs of Indians'. His solution was 'whipping' which, if 'administered to ringleaders, has the most beneficial effect on the gang and upon other Indians, in the neighbourhood, thereby preventing them from getting into trouble'.<sup>21</sup> Punishing 'ringleaders', according to Tinker, 'was an absolute principle of the system' to ensure 'that no Indian labourer should ever acquire a recognised position as a leader or even as a negotiator'.<sup>22</sup>

But the indentured were also drawing their own lessons from collective struggles, testing the system, spreading stories of confrontations as much as they were storing them in their bodies.

## 'Coolies' with attitude: petitions

One by one  
The small refusals  
Add up to a life.

INGRID DE KOCK<sup>23</sup>

Petitions were used every now and then to expose the system and bring to the attention of the authorities various transgressions. Petitions were disliked by employers who relied on the isolation and 'lack of language' of the indentured to get away with flagrant disregard of the agreement that bound the system. Petitions written by the indentured give us all-too-rare insights into the system from their point of view, rather than through the documents of the authorities.

John Kotayya (28146) arrived in Natal in December 1882 on the *Umvoti*. He and 19 others joined the Natal Harbour Board as lascars, a Persian word adopted by the British to refer to Indian seamen. Kotayya explained that five years previously, approximately 50 boatmen were collected by *arkati* (agent) Moidin Sahib and taken to recruiter Mr Ross, who selected 20. Ross outlined their wages, rations and the nature of their work, and specifically told them that at the end of five years they would be given a free passage to India. The Protector of Emigrants told them the same thing. On arrival in Natal, they learnt that the free passage was only available after 10 years. They approached Captain Reeves, who assured them that they would get passages after five years. Kotayya and his colleagues complained to the Protector on 3 December 1887 that the terms had been 'misrepresented' to them. During their indenture, four men had died and three were returned to India as invalids. The remaining 13 wished to return 'at once at the expense of the Government. None of us have been able to save any money during our indenture. Eleven of the thirteen men have families.' The request of the petitioners was declined as the authorities were 'certain' that they knew exactly what they were getting into.<sup>24</sup>

One appeal in particular shows that petitioning, while not common, was occasionally adopted by the indentured. Ten waiters – Rughnian, J Thomas, Palliam, Rungasamy, Anthony, Chinnian, Narain, Moses, Simon and Candasamy – who were employed at the Royal Hotel complained to the Protector about their working conditions. They found to their 'astonishment, surprise and regret' that the agreement was not honoured by FL Johnson. Their complaints included being made to do 'general work', long hours, no pay for overtime, no time 'allowed to devote ourselves to recreation, religious, or ecclesiastical purposes, save a few hours every alternate Sundays', housing 'unfit for human habitation' and inadequate medical care.

They complained of assault by FL Johnson Senior, which they did not mind because they had the 'greatest respect' for him 'on account of his age and reputation'. After Johnson's departure for England, his son F Johnson, instead of 'appreciating our services, gives us kicks'. He was supported by Sirdar Rajahgopaul. Under such 'heartrending and distressing circumstances', the men 'humbly beg and supplicate of you as our *Refugium Peccatorum* to do the necessary for us, the amount we are at all time ready to pay, through your office, or see the articles of Agreement complied with'.<sup>25</sup> While they did not get redress, the petitioners clearly placed great stock in the office of the Protector as a place of refuge.

Some went a step further than petitioning officials in Natal. Remarkably, they drew on resources at 'home' and in 'exile'.

## Kanniah Appavoo and the appeal 'back home'

Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the others' game, that is, the space instituted by others, characterise the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in the network of already established forces and representations.<sup>26</sup>

Kanniah Appavoo (90775) arrived from Madras in January 1902 on the *Umkuzi* as part of a group of 14 special servants. He, together with shipmate Akambaram Chinnathambi (90776), was assigned to GL Graham on the *Berea*. They were of the Dhobi (washermen) caste. In May 1902, a few months after starting work, Kanniah complained of being made to work on Sundays. As this was 'just for a few hours', the authorities did not address his grievance.<sup>27</sup> He complained in December 1902 that he was forced to do 'bedroom work', had been hit on the toe by Graham and did not receive rations due to him.<sup>28</sup> He complained again in 1903 of assault and of being made to empty night-soil buckets and chambers.<sup>29</sup> He also complained of being compelled to do work considered taboo by his caste.

In light of the failure of the authorities in Natal to address his grievances, Kanniah wrote to his sister Kanniammal in Madras in 1904. He asked her to hand over two letters to the authorities, one from him and another from her, which he also drafted. The letter from Kanniah asked the authorities to take heed of what his sister was saying and warned of suicide if he did not get his wish:

I, Kanniah, respectfully write to my respectable elder sister. The matters specifically in my last letter should be attended to as early as possible. If you will not trouble yourself on my behalf I shall have to end my life and to this Goddess Amalatchiamman will bear witness.

Kanniah also drafted the letter that his sister was to hand to Indian authorities:

Your honour Sir, my brother Kanniah, son of Appavoo, per *SS Umkuzi* to Natal on Friday the 20th December 1901 and to work as Dhobi and General Servant under Mr. Graham of Natal – on a monthly wage of £2. This gentleman, just as he pleases, wants him to do all sorts of dirty work not permitted to our caste rules; that he has so beat him on three occasions if he refuses to do. Once he broke his toe for which he had to remain in hospital for seventeen days. After recovery he went to court, the result that the gentleman was fined 4 *annas*. He complained thrice to the Collector of Natal [Protector] of the maltreatment and prayed for a transfer to some other gentleman but in vain. His master annoyed at the fine, had been harassing him beyond measure. My brother therefore intends suicide. I therefore request that your honour will be graciously pleased either to get him transferred to some other gentleman or send him back to Madras.



Besides asking his sister to prepare two copies, one for the Emigration Agent and the other for the Protector in India, Kanniah also instructed her on the manner in which she was to hand over the letters.

Draw up in English two petitions as above and send one to Agent Parry and Co. and hand over the other personally to the Collector at the Custom's Office at eleven o'clock weeping bitterly and beating your breast. You should intimate to me his reply at once. If you do not take so much trouble it will not be possible for me to return to Madras alive. Believe these as true.<sup>30</sup>

The letter to the Emigration Agent was forwarded to the Protector in Natal but Kanniah was not transferred. He survived his indenture and did not carry out his threats. He wrote again to the Protector in 1905 that Graham was off to Johannesburg and requested a transfer, as he would 'be without work, a house and wages for two months'.<sup>31</sup> This time his wish was granted. He was transferred, though the records, as was the practice, do not state who his new employer was. It just states 'other'. Shortly after completing his indenture, however, he obtained a licence to leave Natal.<sup>32</sup>

Kanniah disappears from the historical record. But what has been recovered is his resourcefulness and ingenuity in confronting the circumstances in which he found himself. His letter is one of those rare written records that provide a wonderful illustration of how the indentured were not passive victims, and how resistance cannot only be measured in overt collective actions. In an alienating and intimidating environment, where fellow workers were new and often browbeaten, many found novel ways to resist.

## Prone to 'running amok'?

This battle was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. The gratification afforded the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death.

FREDERIK DOUGLASS<sup>33</sup>

'Victims' no longer able to contain the emotional and physical violation of their beings sometimes reacted defiantly to the environment of violence that marked their day-to-day existence, refusing to 'observe the rules' and living by a code of revenge, not shirking from physical confrontation. The Deputy Protector reported in September 1884 that during his visit to Illovo, he learnt that one of the employees had 'got Mr. Hall down on his back and was about to pound him with a *knobkierrie* but was prevented by another White man'.<sup>34</sup>

Daljeet (32052) told the Protector in 1885 that his employer J Saville of Camperdown punched and kicked him because he was not happy with his work. Daljeet hit Saville three times with a wooden mallet before being overpowered by Peter, the overseer. Saville's son then 'handcuffed my [Daljeet's] hands to the roof in the mealie meal room, tightening it until I stood tip-toe and I was in this position until 2:00 a.m.'.<sup>35</sup> He was freed by his friends, Persad and Rameshaur, and went handcuffed to the Protector to report the incident. Daljeet was punished

for raising his hands against Saville, who got off scot-free. The Deputy Protector reported in September 1884 that when he visited the prison, 'a man named Veerasamy assigned to Kidsdale of Camperdown was very defiant and full of threats of what he will do when he gets back to his employer'.<sup>36</sup> The court records and Protector's files reveal instances of the indentured simply damning the consequences and the inevitable violent retribution.

White woman hard like fish-bone stuck in your gums  
Cassava pelts from her eyes when she stares at us in scorn  
Dressed up in silk in the daytime, a proper cunt in her silver slippers  
Everyday there's something wrong with her, the way she fusses  
It's like a bitch in heat the ways she yaps and spits and scratches and curses...  
And you bow your head until your neck becomes rubbery. DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>37</sup>

Prinisha Badassy, in her superb study of domestic indentured servants, relates the story of Sheik Ramthumiah (115627), who worked for Elizabeth Macdonald of Maritzburg.<sup>38</sup> Ramthumiah had arrived from Madras on the *Umlazi* on 25 October 1905. Official documents described him as a young man of 21, of medium height at five feet and five inches, clean-shaven, of light complexion, with a scar below his right nipple.<sup>39</sup> Ramthumiah wrote regularly to his parents. In one of his letters he indicated that he was experiencing problems with his employer. In reply to a letter from Ramthumiah on 4 March 1907, his father, Sheik Allie, wrote that he was 'sorry to hear from your letters that there had been a quarrel between yourself and your mistress. We are troubled in mind since we heard of it, for you have written some time back that your mistress was very kind and like your mother. Let me know the cause of your quarrel at once.'

Allie would never see his son again because Ramthumiah was hanged for stabbing Elizabeth Macdonald to death in May 1907 after she dismissed him. His problems started when he got into an argument with fellow domestic Jessie Francis, who dropped a vase of flowers shortly after he had swept the floor, and she instructed him to sweep again. Ramthumiah struck her with a bucket. He was taken to the magistrate, who jailed him and fined him £5 for assault. In prison, he befriended Vellappa Gounden, who lived on the same street as him. When they were released, Ramthumiah visited Vellappa every night. The latter would read aloud from an Indian storybook involving a powerful *Nawab* (ruling prince) who exploited a weak man whose friend annihilated the *Nawab*'s army. This story and the discussions he had with Vellappa led Ramthumiah to believe that if he killed his mistress, his indenture would be terminated and he would be returned to India. Jessie Francis described the murder of Elizabeth Macdonald:

That morning about half-past-seven I was in and out of the kitchen several times to get breakfast ready. The Indian Ramthumiah was in the kitchen cleaning knives. He left for the dining room setting the breakfast table. I went again into the kitchen, he came out of the dining room behind me and while I was stirring the porridge on the stove he

stabbed me once on my left shoulder with a big butcher knife. I screamed and rushed into Mrs. MacDonald's room. She came out of the room to meet me. Opening the door I ran in. The Indian was in the passage. She tried to protect me and the Coolie flew at her. She tried to push him away from me. He stabbed her three or four times. I tried to pull her away and he stabbed me again in my right shoulder. Mrs. Macdonald fell on the floor very heavily, bleeding profusely.

Paton, Ramthumiah's attorney, argued that his client had suffered 'temporary insanity'. Dr Ward, the district surgeon, 'did not like Indian servants' because they were 'more excitable and [had] less power of self control than Europeans'. He found that Ramthumiah did not show signs of 'mental deficiency'. S Wynne Cole of the police department, who had lived in India, told the court that Indians were 'prone to running amok...After having what is called "run amok", an Indian, if he once draws blood, seems to have the feeling that a wild animal does to want to go on. I have seen that occur. Because he does not stop at the first person whom he has assaulted, the Indian will generally assault anybody who comes in his path.' Court proceedings ended at 12:40 p.m. on 22 August 1907 and the jury returned a verdict within five minutes! Ramthumiah was found guilty of 'willful murder' and sentenced to death. Like an animal that draws blood, Ramthumiah had to be put down.

The assault or even murder of employers was one of the most overt and dramatic ways that the indentured responded to their treatment. Court records reveal that this usually came after long periods of abuse. Shortly before Ramthumiah murdered Elizabeth MacDonald, he received a letter from his father outlining the problems his family was experiencing in India. His sister was suffering from *carkeides* [*sic*] under the armpit, his father was blind in one eye and had poor vision in the other, the cows and heifer had died, one brother had left home in search of work, the tank had dried up, prices had risen and famine was afflicting everyone:

I am stricken with poverty by God, I am sorry to say. I could not work for any length of time, my age being against me. I and your brother and others are anxious to see you, and we constantly are thinking of you. If my eyes are better I would be able to see you when you return home. We would be glad to get a little help from you. The closing of foreign mails being irregular in this part of the country delays our letters considerably but we get your letters in time. If you wish to open a store here you should have sufficient capital to make it profitable.

Many of the indentured were weighed down by such concerns. They had to consider their reaction carefully because of the consequences, not just in Natal but for family 'back home' in the event that their remittance was lost. On the other hand, the problems of his family may have weighed heavily on Ramthumiah when he reacted as he did. In a climate of prejudice, however, 'extenuating circumstances' did not apply.

While some, albeit in rare instances, stood their ground and fought it out with employers and overseers, many more opted to 'run'.

## Going 'AWOL'

Not paid for eight months, struck with a horse whip when he claimed wages, so deserted from Master J. McLean of Southdown, Fort Nottingham. Stayed three weeks at a *kafir's* place. I then worked for a Dutchman for one month until I was arrested under the Berg, when I was with the Dutchman's wagon. Imprisoned for fourteen days for being caught without a pass by the Klip River magistrate and then sent to employer.<sup>40</sup>

Desertions such as that described above were a 'chronic plague'. This is confirmed by the large number of convictions. In Durban there were 450 convictions in 1902, 850 in 1906 and 1 100 in 1907.<sup>41</sup> The Protector reported that between 1882 and 1892, desertion had cost his department £1 809.<sup>42</sup> According to Henry Polak, in nearly every case of 'desertion' before the courts, the defence was 'ill-treatment' or 'abuse' by employers.<sup>43</sup> For the indentured, desertion was an alternative form of resistance to open confrontation and domination.

The extent of the problem is illustrated in correspondence between the Protector and the Colonial Secretary in 1884. Protector Mason always imposed 'the maximum punishment allowed by law'. Many deserters were arrested far from their estates, and he had no doubt that they 'intended to absent themselves permanently...It would be a weak policy to deal lightly with such offenders and tend to create in the minds of the many we have in the Colony of the same stamp, a feeling that their transgressions met with some countenance by this department.' As some repeatedly deserted because they 'preferred jail to work', Mason put them on a 'spare diet' (starving them) in prison, which had 'the salutary effect of keeping in check the threatened serious evil of a class of indolent, slothful Indians gaining any great strength in our midst'.

Mason's 'indolent, slothful Indians' were, in fact, those indentured who refused to conform to the labour regime. Informed by the Attorney-General that it was illegal to starve prisoners, Mason said that 'under the circumstances I consider the sentence fully warranted although undoubtedly illegal. The offenders boasted that they did not mind going to gaol as they were well fed there, and it appeared that far from being a terror to them, gaol was looked upon as a comfortable abode.'<sup>44</sup>

Desertions increased from the mid-1880s with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley, as attested to in a letter from JF Manistry, Superintendent of Indian and Native Labour, Natal Government Railways, to the Protector after one of his workers deserted:

This makes four desertions to the Diamond Fields during the last twelve months, and I have on my table no less than eight letters from these deserters to assigned men in this department. By these means, the men in this Department are kept in a state of continual ferment and incited to desert. I should be glad to know if you can see your way to have these four men arrested and brought down from the Diamond Fields...The expense for the four will be very little more than for one, and the example thereby would be most beneficial to our future working.<sup>45</sup>

Some deserters made it as far as Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. Iyaloo Naidoo, for example, wrote to the Protector from Uitenhage on 23 October 1885 that there were nearly 200 'absconded' Indians at Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth:

I now take the opportunity to write you these few lines concerning my countrymen. There are a lot here and in Port Elizabeth that has run away from Natal. I went to the magistrate and I spoke to him about it. He says that if [Protector] Mason sends him a letter and the description of these men, he will try his best to catch them and I will do my best also...So please do me a favour and write me a letter and also for the magistrate. We will catch them soon.<sup>46</sup>

Others got even further. F Bazley, the employer of Coopoo Seeneesavan (19114), informed the Protector on 28 July 1879 that she had absconded on 28 June 1879 with her two children Veerappen (19115) and Meenalchee (19116). According to Bazley, her nose was 'pock-marked, she is aged twenty-five and two children are with her. We suspect she may have gone to Mauritius as she has relatives there and she speaks a little French.'<sup>47</sup> The family had arrived in Natal on the *Inveravon* in August 1878 from French-speaking Pondicherry and was assigned to Bazley & Tyson Sugar Company. They were never traced. Coopoo came without a husband and seems to have had a clear idea of where she was headed.

The deposition of Vencatasamy (14756) provides rare insights into the life of a deserter. Deserting workers became vagrants and were always on the run. Some moved from employer to employer, place to place; others begged; some even died of starvation. Vencatasamy was indentured to Cheron of Virginia Estate when he arrived on the *Suffolk* in October 1877. After 10 months, he deserted with a fellow worker, Aroomugam. They went to Maritzburg, where they worked for a certain Pierson for four months at the rate of £1 per month. Aroomugam and Vencatasamy parted ways. Muthoo, a free Indian whom Vencatasamy had befriended, 'spoke for me to a White man who was the overseer' at the Maritzburg Corporation. He worked there for two months.

Vencatasamy next worked for GH Wilkinson for a month before proceeding to Kimberley, where he stayed for four months. From there he went to Winburg for three months, and on to Kroonstadt for four months. He returned to Maritzburg, worked for a Mr Purgose for a month, and then at a hotel 'on the other side of the Upper Umgeni' for two months. He returned to Kimberley for several months and was 'doing various jobs' in Maritzburg when apprehended.<sup>48</sup> The life of a deserter, as the example of Vencatasamy shows, was one of tension. As well as being on the run, there was the fear of being apprehended by the authorities, or turned in by a fellow citizen for monetary reward. But this story, together with the claim by Manistry above that he had eight letters from deserters to his workers, also suggests a network, comprising friends, relatives, shipmates and others, that deserters could rely on and perhaps obtain information from.

Some were perennial deserters. Coopa Mutha and Mangalam, who worked for Mr Sinclair 'beyond Maritzburg', were sentenced on eight occasions – 26 September 1885, 16 October 1885, 5 November 1885, 25 November 1885, 9 December 1885, 28 December 1885, 11 January 1886 and 26 January 1886 – for refusing to work. Each time they were caught 'without a pass'.

The superintendent of the Durban prison reported to Magistrate Finnemore on 27 January 1886 that they 'refuse to go back to him [Sinclair] on account of ill-treatment, but are perfectly willing to work for another master'. They were imprisoned with their children. The Protector informed the magistrate on 28 January 1886 that he did not know of anybody who would take the family as 'the man is an old and feeble individual and not at all a desirable labourer'.

Finnemore replied on 28 January 1886 that 'in previous cases of this sort I have sent the people off under a strong escort and they have been compelled by force to go. In addition, I insist on their going on foot, which has proved satisfactory hitherto, and I have no doubt this case could be dealt with in the same way'. The Protector asked the Colonial Secretary on 3 February 1886:

[Should I] obtain a strong escort and compel these people to return to their employer? The family consists of an elderly man, his wife, a brother about twenty years, and two small children, and I fear they are unlikely to go without causing considerable trouble. I believe [Finnemore], when he refers to previous cases has in mind the return of the Indians to Mr. Marais of Estcourt in which the people were handcuffed, carried to the Durban railway station in a hand-cart, forced onto the train and were with great difficulty conveyed from Maritzburg to Estcourt. It is a matter of fact the Indians shortly after being returned deserted from Mr. Marais' service.

To concede to the demands of workers, however, posed a problem, as the Protector explained:

To allow these Indians to succeed in their endeavour to overcome law and right would offer an inducement to Indians who desired a change of employment or locality to similarly rebel against authority. The Indians concerned belong to the 'cow-herd' [Ahir] caste and they were especially allotted to an upcountry employer because of their experience in pastoral occupations.

Finnemore was adamant that 'if no force was to be used to compel such return, then the practice of sending an escort was a useless expense, as the absconding Indians can, if they choose, find their own way back to their employer. I have always looked upon the escort as police and the returning servant as in custody.' Attorney-General Gallwey agreed, adding in his ruling on 15 February 1886 that it was 'obvious that on their return force should be used to detain them'.<sup>49</sup>

Desertion prompted repressive measures from desperate authorities. Law 2 of 1870 imposed strict penalties for harbouring deserters and offered a reward of five shillings for the arrest of male deserters, though no reward was paid for the capture of women. The law was applied indiscriminately. Cassim, for example, was fined for 'harbouring' Bheemadu (22081), whose clothes and belongings were found at his house. They were in love but had been refused permission to marry until she completed her indenture.<sup>50</sup> In another instance, Ebrahim Saib (21795) was fined for harbouring Vencatamah (21795), who deserted from Cato Manor Estate to live with him. They were forced apart even though they had lived 'as man and wife' for a year.<sup>51</sup>

Those who absconded were literally hunted down. The Indian Trust Board employed African constables to seek them out. Sometimes, the wider African society joined in this effort. WB Lyle of Lower Tugela wrote to the Trust Board on 4 April 1900 that 'Indian deserters are frequently arrested at the Tugela mouth by the Natives residing there and handed over to me with the request that I should reward them for their trouble'.<sup>52</sup> And rewarded they were. Rewards were also paid for the arrest of Indians without passes, even if they subsequently proved they had passes. Another deterrent was to compel deserters to make up double time at the end of their contract. For example, when Ahmed Saib (116358) missed a month's work, his employer JA Freeks added two months to his contract.<sup>53</sup> This applied to all deserters.

Desertion remained a major response to indenture; it was one way for workers to escape the clutches of employers and the authorities, and build a life in which they were not constantly bullied. A shorter-term option was absenteeism. Temporary absences were part of everyday life on most plantations. Lasha Chellan's description of a missing room-mate was routine: 'I woke up about three in the morning and noticed Kurruppan was not in his bed. He had hidden himself in the canes for the day. It is usual for Indians when they do not intend to work to hide in the canes.'<sup>54</sup> Marshall Campbell of Mount Edgecombe explained to the Protector in 1885 that when he took over the plantation, an average of 106 men were absent and 31 sick in hospital daily: 'Some of the coolies would get their weekly rations and clear out and live in the bush till the next rations were issued, some selling their rations for rum and clothing, and would only stay on the estate when too ill to go to the bush.' Marshall instituted daily rations to force Indians to report to work. Though illegal, 'with your support I will make useful men of those who are now a trouble to themselves'.<sup>55</sup>

Others took the route of denying the employer both their labour and retribution permanently.

## The 'man with the missing thumb'

I slept on the wheel of despair  
Immigrant fire-hydrant heading for suicide...<sup>56</sup>

Kundasamy was making his way to work at the brick-making firm of R Storm & Co. in Umgeni on the morning of 27 February 1906 when he came across two bodies near Storm's Brick kiln, eight kilometres from central Durban. They were identified as those of 35-year-old Ponappa Naiken (118199) and his four-year-old son Arumugan (118203), who had been run over by the 3:40 a.m. goods trains from Durban to Verulam. The district surgeon reported that Ponappa's body was that of a 'well-nourished' man. His head was lying between the rails of the railway line, half severed from below his right ear. His lower jaw was fractured in five places, as were his left shoulder, right shoulder at the head of the arm bone, collarbone, right arm, five ribs on the right, and six on the left. His body was totally mutilated; the skin had darkened and was a mass of contused flesh. Internally, his lungs were laxated and his liver had ruptured.

Arumugan's body lay two metres away. His head and arms, severed from the body, were found about five feet apart between the rails of the railway line. His collarbone was fractured and his intestines were contused and torn, and protruding from his body. All the internal

organs were tattered. Blood marks, pieces of bone, portions of their brains and pieces of blanket were traced for a distance of 250 feet from the bodies.

Ponappa had committed suicide. He left his hut early that morning, laid himself and his son over the railway line, and waited for train number 306 to run them over. On account of an uphill curve, the train had to travel slowly, at around 20 kilometres per hour. Though the engine had a headlight and a side lamp, the driver (A Spencer), fireman (WE Schill) and guard (J Hutchinson) saw nothing untoward. The engine weighed five tons, which explains why they did not realise that they had killed Ponappa and Arumugan, whose bodies caught in the brake gear and were dragged a considerable distance. It was only upon his return from Verulam that the driver learnt of his part in the double suicide.

Father and son were last seen alive by Chellamah (118198) the night before. They had gone to bed at 10:00 p.m. with their other three children, Manikkam (118201), Angama (118204) and Thangavalu (118202). As usual, the whole family had slept on the same bed on the floor. When Chellamah awoke at 'cockcrow', she noticed in the dark that they were missing. She had not heard them get up as she was very tired from a long day of hard work, cooking and taking care of the children. She informed her relatives, Velu and Paligurutharan, that her husband and son were missing. They told her not to worry as Ponappa had 'probably gone to work'.<sup>57</sup> On her way to work, Chellamah saw a crowd gathered around some bodies at Storm's Crossing and was stunned to discover that it was her husband and son.

Ponappa, Chellamah and their four children had arrived from Chingleput on the *Umkuzi* in February 1906. Ponappa had complained to Chellamah about being assaulted by William Storm and Indian Sirdar Marie. He was 'much concerned' and 'upset'. To add to his humiliation, Chellamah had witnessed her husband's assault. Chellamah felt that Ponappa committed suicide because he had been subject to ill-treatment during the three weeks on the estate. Sirdar Marie often struck him with a belt. On 24 February, around lunchtime, William Storm, known by workers as 'Willie, the man with the missing right thumb', struck Ponappa 'a severe blow on side of face' because he had dropped a brick from the heavy load he was carrying. Ponappa immediately began to cry.

On another occasion, Muniamah (103136) had seen Sirdar Marie strike him 'several blows on the back and face and then throw him to the ground and kick him with his boot'. Data Ram (97686) saw 'Mr. Willie strike the deceased a severe blow with his open hand on the right side of his face'. Witnesses, including Chellamah, testified that Ponappa and Arumugan had been inseparable. Since birth, Arumugan had slept on Ponappa's chest every night. Distressed at his work conditions, disillusioned with life in the new colony and traumatised by management, Ponappa could not part from the child he loved so dearly and took both their lives. Hattrill, the Verulam Clerk of the Peace, concluded on 19 April 1906:

What inspired P. Naiken to destroy himself and his son was a feeling of despair engendered by being suddenly, after a slack period on board ship, set to such real hard work as is incidental to a brick factory. He possibly felt he could not hold out for five years at such work though the chances are that had he been set to work more gradually he would not have taken such a gloomy view.



Protector Polkinghorne wrote to Hattrill on 19 May 1906:

In view of the many suicides among indentured Indians it would be advisable if Mr. W. Storm and the Sirdar were prosecuted. I am decidedly of the opinion that the treatment the man received was the cause of the suicide...You have two sworn statements attributing the suicide to ill treatment and I think the case should be brought forward. Even if you fail to obtain a judgment against the accused the mere fact that a prosecution has been instituted will become known.

The case was tried on 6 June 1906. It should come as little surprise that Storm and Marie were acquitted. In the face of daily beatings and humiliation, the likes of Ponappa had reached the point where 'the terrors of life...outweigh[ed] the terrors of death'.<sup>58</sup> The widowed Chellamah was left to look after three young children, 12-year-old Manikkam, one-year-old Angama and six-year-old Thangavalu. Aside from the fact that the family did not return to India, there is no record of how she and the children fared.

Sometimes, the difficult working and living conditions were exacerbated by the loss of a loved one. Dr Richmond R Allen of Maritzburg reported on his post-mortem examination of Ramayana (22128) on 2 September 1884:

I broke open the door, and found the deceased hanging from a rope in the centre of the room, quite dead. His back was turned to the door; he was dressed – coat and trousers. The left leg was slightly flexed and the toes touching the ground. The right leg was extended, abducted and in advance of the other, with about the anterior of foot resting against the floor...He had evidently made more than one attempt to destroy himself, because his *lungaree* [loincloth] had been twisted like a rope and broken – one half on the floor and the other knotted to the beam above...The noose was artistically made, and placed round the neck with anatomical precision – the knot of the noose pressing against the artery and jugular vein on right side, so as to completely arrest the circulation of blood to and from the brain, thus causing death by Apoplexy.

*History of Case:* The deceased had always been peculiar. He was a man of ungovernable temper, and used to burst out in periodical fits of passion. In the interval he was melancholy and snappish, but a good workman. His wife died about twelve months ago, and he has since lived alone. The other Coolies have always been afraid of him. He had his head shaved on Sunday – a significant act. He appears to have had a fixed delusion from one o'clock on Monday when, he stated, he was sick, and that some *kaffirs* wanted to murder him, and he wouldn't leave his hut. He remained there until 7:00p.m., when he entered the kitchen complaining that the *kaffirs* were still after him and that he was very thirsty. He was given a cup of coffee which he drank and returned to his hut, saying he felt better. He was not seen alive afterwards.<sup>59</sup>

Suicide was a dramatic way of escaping indenture. The suicide rate of indentured Indians in Natal was 661 per million in 1906, compared to 39 per million in India.<sup>60</sup> In their study of suicide among the indentured, Bhana and Bhana conclude that the major causes were the

health, work and family problems experienced by the indentured, which produced distress and despair, resulting in 'cognitive and motivational deficits'.<sup>61</sup> No longer able to take the double punishments of fruitless toil and physical pain, depressed further by failing strength and deteriorating health, alienated from loved ones, and perhaps clinically depressed, many of the indentured made a calculated decision to die by their own hands. According to Lal, suicide 'was both a cry of despair and an act of protest directed ultimately at the principles and ethics of the indenture system itself. In its own way, suicide was a rational and understandable response to a terrible and alienating situation.'<sup>62</sup> The indentured may have felt their only recourse was to deny their oppressor labour by ending their lives. It was, ironically, their ultimate revenge against the profit and property of the planter.

## 'Weapons of the weak'

I hope still,  
therefore  
I am

ARI SITAS<sup>63</sup>

Collective resistance, such as occurred on the estate of Shire, the assault of employers and the writing of petitions was exceptional. Unable to get redress through collective labour withdrawal or the use of the legal system, the indentured protested through acts like absenteeism, insubordination, theft, flight, malingering, feigning illness, destruction of property and neglect of duty, which were camouflaged in everyday routines and did not threaten to 'overthrow the authority at the workplace but constantly undermined it'.<sup>64</sup> These stories will emerge as this narrative unfolds.

Exposing this 'everyday' resistance is crucial, given that the forms of protest and 'the self-interested muteness of the antagonists...conspire to create a kind of complicitous silence that all but expunges everyday forms of resistance from the historical record'.<sup>65</sup> We should not see resistance in every act of the indentured, but recognise the multiple ways in which they frustrated employers' objective of total control, while not challenging formal definitions of hierarchy and power.

This 'everyday' resistance has been termed the 'weapons of the weak' by James Scott. While seemingly mundane and individualistic, resistance of this kind restored and validated the integrity and reputation of workers and, importantly, gave them a sense that they could get one over their masters.<sup>66</sup> This created an 'invisible' subculture in which the master was made fun of and bonds were created among the indentured that involved secrecy and trust, valuable weapons in future battles.

According to Bush, we should not uncritically accept indenture as a legal institution, but establish what it meant in practice, especially 'the extent to which the [indentured] could make a nonsense of the system'.<sup>67</sup> To understand the meaning of indenture, we need to go beyond the laws and controls imposed by masters and recognise the various ways in which the indentured resisted being 'passive victims', not all of which we can quantify.

Devasagayan Madan (30635) is a case in point. Smith Batten, his manager at Blackburn Estate, complained to the Protector on 28 October 1884 that Madan, who arrived at Blackburn Estate on 29 April 1884, frequently stole poultry, feigned illness, was absent without reason and deserted. Madan, a 23-year-old from Bangalore, had arrived in Natal in April. During May, June and July he was sick for 10 days and absent for 20; he was absent for 11 days in August; in September he was absent for six days, and imprisoned for 10 days for theft. Released on 19 September, he deserted the following day and was not heard from again.

Madan's record of theft, absenteeism and desertion underscores the difficulty of quantifying indentured protest and resistance.<sup>68</sup> Madan, rather than being broken, frustrated the system to the extent that his desire to escape indenture was granted. He was returned to India on the *Dunphaile Castle* in April 1885. Madan was one 'coolie' that the authorities failed to break; he achieved this not through outright defiance, but a wearing down of the system through dogged determination.

Consider another example. Four employees – Balakistan (33605), Abboy (33731), Subramanian (33646) and Ramsamy (336100) – of the Natal Central Sugar Company complained to the Protector on 15 April 1885 of assault and being made to do excessive work by Sirdars Cooposamy and Raju, and overseer Morrell. Alfred Dumat, the manager, informed the Protector on 3 May 1885 that the men were 'shirkers and malingers'. Between February and July 1885, of 130 working days, Ramsamy had been away for 79 days, Balakistan 42, Abboy 80, and Subramanian 104, through a combination of absence, illness and imprisonment.<sup>69</sup>

Another example is the frustrated reaction of J Parkin of Hull Valley Estate in Lower Umkomaas, who wrote to the Protector on 26 January 1908:

I would like your definition of the word discipline. It may be of inestimable service to me. Last July I put in a field overseer. He stayed less than one month, remarking that he would be either killed or be killing some of these fellows. Last December I put in another field overseer. On my arrival home on Saturday I learned that a gang had attacked him...The overseer gave notice to leave...One of those who made deposition against me got his rations and again cleared out. Ten others who came from Umgeni jail remained one day and then deserted. Indians around harbour them...Work means reasonable work, but if a man only performs three hours actual work in the nine hours, it proves at once that he is practicing fraud or deception in the performance of his work and is liable to a fine. Now, not having a surplus of labour, it is impossible to have all these people before the court without interfering with estate work.<sup>70</sup>

Some workers took this further by just refusing to do some kinds of labour. P Ellerker complained to Protector Dunning on 22 March 1906:

I should indeed like to see you as my Indians are getting very insolent. Up to the present year I have had natives to do the work but the poll tax problems caused all the boys to leave. My last boy left yesterday at 6:00 p.m. I told a coolie to clean the children's boots for school next morning. He point blank refused to clean the boots and

was very insolent and said cleaning boots was not indentured work. Another Indian has been working in the kitchen since November 1904. He has now turned nasty. This man I always pay more than his indentured price as an inducement to do his work...Some two years ago one Indian refused to lead a team of oxen and no coolie has led a team since; in fact the only work they will do is weed and cut grass. Like many other men I would never have an Indian on the place if I could rely on a supply of natives; they are the most insubordinate beings I ever met.<sup>71</sup>

Dunning advised Ellerker on 6 April 1906 to be 'firmer' with Indians who are 'inclined to take advantage of their employers' leniency'.

## The art of resistance

The indentured constantly fought to get redress for their grievances. They frustrated their employers as they confronted their oppression innovatively. From rare direct assaults on their bosses, to malingering, absenteeism, desertion, using obscenities against employers, damaging tools, arson, insolence, self-injury, even suicide, the indentured did not simply bow to the dictates of employers. Whether it was individually (mostly) or collectively (rarely), in the cane fields or in estate hospitals, in the courts or the office of the Protector, there are a number of examples of the indentured acting to thwart and confront the system.

As Tinker reminds us, in resisting, the indentured thought mainly 'in terms of immediate objectives...There was no Coolie rebellion like the slave rebellions.' Part of the problem was the absence of leadership; with few exceptions, and we have discussed some in this chapter, leadership was 'almost all in the service of the masters, with a stake in the small advantages which the system gave them'.<sup>72</sup> Individual acts of resistance, while self-affirming for workers, did not transform the essential 'basis of domination. [It] certainly threatened the system and forced dominant classes to renegotiate relationships, but the substance of the power structure remained virtually unchanged.'<sup>73</sup> Most of the indentured sought survival within the system, often adjusting to what Karl Marx refers to as 'the dull compulsion of economic relations' so that they could survive and start new lives, or return to India.

That is why the 1913 strike, a story that will be told in later chapters, was such a seminal event.

Our analysis of resistance in this chapter has focused mainly on agricultural workers, partly because they constituted the largest segment of the indentured workforce but also because we discuss the open rebellion of indentured coal miners in detail in chapters 19 and 20. The indentured included agricultural workers, better-paid special servants, industrial railway workers, domestic servants and miners. The conditions of employment, including wages and treatment, differed from sector to sector, and the responses, too, would have been influenced by factors such as workers' treatment by individual employers and the size of the workforce. We have attempted to shift from the extreme ends of the resistance debate, domination and resistance, and explore the blend between these. Improvisation and deception at times meant

that employers were rarely able to exercise total power, even on a brutal estate like Reynolds Brothers. The indentured did not simply oscillate between suffering and individual forms of resistance. While working and living conditions were difficult, many were still able to construct a cultural, religious and family life, and use whatever spaces they could find for leisure, fun and religion. As De Certeau so wonderfully put it, '[e]ven the field of misfortune is refashioned by [a] combination of manipulation and enjoyment'.<sup>74</sup> It is to these aspects of the indentured's lives that we now turn.









## Cast(e) on an African stage



Indians acquire caste status by being born into a particular caste group; they generally marry someone from the same caste. In earlier times, castes were also occupational groups...Because of the link between purity, pollution and caste, a person's caste can also influence personal relationships, particularly with whom they may eat and where they live.<sup>1</sup>

### The man of many parts

Charlie Nulliah, whom we first met in Chapter 1, was 'leader' of a local community in Maritzburg, and head of a *panchayat* (sub-caste council) that decided on matters affecting the religious-cum-caste group of Telegus.

Court records provide fascinating insights into the way boundaries were policed and the importance of men of influence like Nulliah in these processes. Nulliah was accused in 1905 of assaulting Poonsamy at the home of Chilapata Rajaha in Thompson Street, Maritzburg. Nulliah had been invited by Rajaha, his relative, to attend the wedding of his daughter to Pitchey Konar. The assault took place during supper in the presence of a large number of guests. It was very cold and Poonsamy was milling around 'with his hands in his pocket'. Nulliah came up from behind, grabbed him by the throat, clasped him around his body and threw him to the ground. He then punched him several times; his protruding diamond rings caused deep cuts on the scalp. Nulliah was famous for the three diamond rings that he always wore, two on his right hand and one on the left.

Rajaha separated the men and told Poonsamy to leave. Before he could do so, Nulliah struck him two more blows with a hunting crop, with such force that they cut his hat. SK Moodley, one of Nulliah's relatives, warned Poonsamy to 'run away or he would die'. Poonsamy was not a guest at the wedding, but he and his friends Sadasian and Cooposamy, who, he told the court, were 'of the same caste and shared a home', had been employed by Rajaha to decorate the tent for guests.

Nulliah's rage stemmed from Poonsamy's wanting to marry Anchemel, daughter of Kistasamy Naidoo. As head of the *panchayat*, protocol demanded that Poonsamy ask Nulliah first for the 'girl's hand'. Pitchey Konar, bridegroom turned witness, explained how the *panchayat* operated:

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OPPOSITE: Charlie Nulliah became one of the most prominent Indians in Natal. Passionate about both Tamil identity and fostering broader Indian unity, caste, class, ethnicity, religion and gender all collide in his story.

PREVIOUS PAGE: From the moment the indentured left India, there was little official space for caste or custom. In return, they dressed themselves up at every opportunity in the best finery they could lay their hands on, and fought to turn their status as heathens into one in which their religion and right to family were recognised.

'We recognise accused [Nulliah] as superior to us and in these matters we call him, as is the custom in India. It is a meeting of the *panchayat*. At these meetings the decision of the head is accepted, if the others present approve of it. Accused was called for that purpose before my marriage.'

Nulliah was unhappy with the 'match' between Poonsamy and Anchamel, even though her parents approved. According to SK Moodley, Nulliah fined Poonsamy five shillings for 'asking for the girl without his permission'. After assaulting Poonsamy, Nulliah allegedly warned him that if he ever came close to her, he would 'break my teeth, take out my eyes, kill me, put me in a sack, and bury me on his farm'. SK Moodley, who was willing to testify on Poonsamy's behalf, was warned that if he gave evidence against Nulliah, he would be 'sent to the graveyard'. Nulliah was found guilty and fined £3.<sup>2</sup>

The *panchayat*, in policing the 'rules' of proper conduct for Telegus, was seeking to keep alive the myth and memory of a particular identity, which was carried, in some cases, even in death. Thus the preamble of Nulliah's will stated: 'This is the Last Will and Testament of Charlie Nulliah, of the Caste Naidoo, of Maritzburg, Free Indian.' Its provisions included the following:

It is a condition of this my Will that should any of my children or grandchildren marry any person other than a person of pure Indian blood and other than a person belonging to the Telegu or Tamil caste and other than by Hindu Rites, then such child or grandchild shall not be entitled to inherit...If any of my wives or daughters is leading an immoral life she shall forfeit all claim to the use of any part of my estate and to any of the income from my estate.<sup>3</sup>

The reading of Nulliah's biography from this alone would be a severe mistake. The ambiguities of living in a world that was much broader than a village point to how someone like Nulliah would need to operate on a number of levels. Nulliah, the child of indentured labourers, whose formative years were spent with his indentured family on an estate, became one of the most prominent Indians in Natal. He was a major figure in the struggle to give Hinduism a base in Maritzburg as trustee of the Hindu temple and patron of the Hindu organisation Veda Dharma Sabha (roughly translated, Society of Righteous Knowledge).

At various times he was member, vice-president and president of the Natal Indian Congress, Maritzburg branch; he was chairman of the reception committee to welcome the Indian nationalist politician GK Gokhale during his visit to South Africa in 1912 (see Chapter 19); and he accompanied numerous deputations to the South African government on Indian grievances until the 1930s. During the South African War of 1899–1902, he was active as a member of the Home Guard. In the 1920s he was also a member of the Maritzburg Indo-European Council, which consisted of liberal whites and wealthy Indians who sought to improve interracial relationships.<sup>4</sup>

Nulliah was passionate about education and sport. He was a prominent racehorse owner, member of the City Sporting Club, and only Indian member of the Durban Turf Club, formed under the chairmanship of WG Brown in March 1897. Nulliah's horse Mealies won the Coronation Cup in 1905. He exhibited at the Royal Agricultural Show for 28 years, securing

first prize on many occasions. This was the single largest event in the province since 1851, annually attracting thousands of visitors to its exhibits of crafts, livestock, birds and produce.

The life of Nulliah dramatically illustrates the ways in which different impulses impacted on the lives of migrants, and how these were negotiated. On the one hand, Nulliah was policing the boundaries of Telegu/Tamil identity. On the other, he was building a broader Hindu identity. At other times he joined in endeavours to unite Indians under the banner of the Natal Indian Congress. He was also incredibly wealthy and keen to participate in social activities dominated by whites. He could not write in English and had no formal education, but seemed at ease in the company of whites, participated in a premier white event and mixed freely with white liberals. And, as we see later, contrary to the law in Natal, he practised polygamy.

Nulliah had to make difficult choices. Caste, class, ethnicity, religion and gender (witness his multiple wives and the conflict over his will) all collide in telling Nulliah's story.

## The disinherited

Boodha Dulel Sing (8726) of Rajput arrived in Natal in September 1874. After serving his indenture with Glasgow Natal Sugar Co. in New Guelderland on the north coast, he bought a few acres of land in Nonoti and began planting sugar cane, tobacco and vegetables. In 1880 he married Lukhia, the colonial-born daughter of Subnath Bissoonoth Roy (7490) and Beemby Keenoo (606). They had five sons and three daughters. By the time Boodha Sing died on 15 November 1919, arguably the wealthiest ex-indentured Indian in Natal, his farm 'Hyde Park' measured almost 5 000 acres, while he employed over 100 Indian workers. His property was left to his male offspring. Each of the five sons received slightly more than 1 000 acres each, while the three daughters received a nominal 10 acres each. The will also stipulated that in the event of any son predeceasing him, the inheritance due to that son would be divided among Boodha Sing's living male children; further, if any son did not have male children, his family would also not inherit.

In Bodasing (as Boodha Singh came to be known and which became the family surname), we have another instance of an indentured migrant replicating the patterns of inheritance remembered from 'back home', where women in north-west India were denied land ownership. This practice was not left in the village or lost on board the ship. Women were disinherited, their 'future' left to the goodwill of male family members. While emigration created opportunities for mobility for women, this gendered inheritance pattern is an example of patriarchal relations being reinscribed over time and place.<sup>5</sup>

Caste was part of the 'baggage' that Indians carried from the village. While it was 'there', casting its shadow, it did not dominate social interaction and was more often marked by its transgression. This was born not necessarily out of an anti-caste consciousness, but rather the circumstances in which people found themselves. Caste systems in India were geographically based, usually incorporating a few contiguous villages. There was thus variation from area to area. Rules were enforced through local *panchayats*. Caste membership determined how individuals should interact ritually and economically with other caste groups, and clearly defined who the 'stranger' was.<sup>6</sup>

It was difficult to transplant the caste system in Natal. Recruitment focused on individual rather than family migration and took place over a large area. There were substantial caste differences among recruits who were not part of social groups, and did not have defined obligations to each other. In short, the structural basis for caste-related behaviour was absent.<sup>7</sup> However, most sought to reconstruct (modified) aspects of their culture and religion through myth and memory. Jayawardena makes the point that indentured migrants, in the main, left for social and economic reasons, and were not 'visionaries setting out to build a new society and a new culture'. The implication is that most did not intend to radically transform their way of life:

[Most] expected to continue to live in the new land in accordance with the institutions to which they were accustomed. It is therefore likely that they consciously or unconsciously attempted to maintain in the new setting the cultural patterns they had learned at home and presumably valued. [However], a complete and comprehensive re-creation of the culture of the homeland was clearly impossible.<sup>8</sup>

Caste in the new environment was neither simply abandoned nor duplicated.

## Travelling castes

How did caste travel across the *kala pani* and into the southernmost tip of Africa?

The indentured came with multiple ways in which they thought of caste, despite the fact that many officials observed or believed that by crossing the *kala pani*, they were stripped of caste. The caste system has common characteristics such as ascription by birth, hierarchy, endogamy, occupational specialisation and restrictions on social interaction.<sup>9</sup> Caste was almost impossible to respect on the ship, which was the site of massive social upheaval. Migrants had to eat, sleep and drink together. The forced 'closeness' on the ship suspended notions of hierarchy and privilege. Further, to non-Indians they were simply 'coolies'. To say, though, that Indians were stripped of caste and arrived in Natal 'scrubbed clean', and that their conception of society and community was developed from their experiences in Natal, would not capture the entire story. It would be equally foolish to argue that their entrenched views were simply reproduced in the new setting. The truth is somewhere in-between.

The indentured remained aware of the importance of caste, and a myriad of responses were recorded under the description 'caste' on the ships heading to Natal. The *Truro* included Christians, Malabars (from western India), Gentoos (Telegu Hindus), Rajputs (landowners), Pariahs (untouchables), Marathas (from West Central India), Muslims and even an African.<sup>10</sup> The list from the *Belvedere* is even more varied. *Dosadh* (village watchman), *Koormee* (agriculturalist), *Koiree* (weaver), *Hajjam* (barber), Brahmin (priest), *Gowala* (herdsman), *Musulman* (Muslim), *Tantee* (lower caste from Orissa), *Chamar* (leatherworker), *Dhobi* (washerman), *Noniya* (agriculturalist) and *Kahar* (personal servant) are some of the labels the indentured attached to themselves. This shows the diverse regional and occupational background of indentured migrants.

Bhana's invaluable study, which includes an analysis of caste, shows that the majority of migrants were from the low-to-middle castes, though there were a good number from higher castes.<sup>11</sup> In considering caste, we should remember that colonial record-keeping was sometimes

lax and that the indentured themselves often gave false information. Sometimes they gave a lower caste in order to migrate because the authorities did not want Brahmin and Muslim indentured migrants, while at other times the indentured gave a higher caste to raise their status and social standing in Natal.<sup>12</sup>

To cite an example of 'up-casting', consider a letter from the Superintendent of Police in Nalappuran, who was trying to locate Madathi Raman Nayar. He had left without informing his family, and his uncle Raman Kutti wanted to get in touch with him. The Superintendent warned the Protector in Natal that Madathi had added Nayar to his name: 'I would point out that in adding "Nayar", the boy Raman has assumed a higher caste, and he may therefore be a little unwilling at first to admit the truth.' The Protector succeeded in tracing him to Umzimkulu Sugar Company in Port Shepstone. He had dropped Madathi and become Ramen Nair (95727).<sup>13</sup> To cite another example, a very large number of descendants of indentured Indians have the family name 'Maraj', which is linked to the Brahmin caste, or 'Maharaj', which is used as a title for a king or prince.

Some migrants designated themselves as Brahmins after leaving India. As ship doctor JM Laing noted, there were 'a good many pseudo-Brahmins about'.<sup>14</sup> The desire to be categorised a Brahmin is understandable. The only duties Brahmins performed were to 'study and teach the Vedas, to offer sacrifices, and above all to receive gifts';<sup>15</sup> hence, they could argue that they should be exempt from plantation work. Natal's employers instructed the Emigration Office in India in 1892 to stop recruiting Brahmins as they 'cause much trouble when put to fieldwork'. The Protector of Emigrants in Calcutta replied that he had conveyed this to recruiters, but warned that it was 'difficult to prevent Brahmins personating the lower castes, especially when they have hard hands. They are then labourers just the same as other emigrants, but when they reach the colony, they pretend they are not, as they find they can make much by priestcraft.'<sup>16</sup> We saw in Chapter 3 that Chhaju Zaharia (130088) changed his caste from Brahmin to Jat (North Indian peasant) to be indentured.

Caste, the status that was supposedly fixed in India, was quite fluid in the journeys across the *kala pani*. But how did caste play out in Natal?

## The bearable lightness of caste

The setting in Natal would have made it difficult to transplant the conventional caste system. Employers did not respect purity, rank or duty. All workers had to do the same work. In fact, the higher castes were frowned upon for being less productive. Economic opportunities in Natal permitted mobility for free Indians, irrespective of caste, and many took advantage of this. And Indian migrants themselves had different understandings of caste. Ramdeen Ujudha (10596), introduced in Chapter 3, recounted to the Wragg Commission:

I am going back to India to see my father and brothers and sisters. Here I have eaten with different people and broken my caste. My friends in India will not even eat with me, so I must come back. When I go back I will ask my mother to cook, but I will tell what I have done; she will cook, and I will eat outside; she will not allow me to eat

inside where she and my relatives are. No fine could bring me back my caste, being a Brahmin. Just before coming my last offering to the Ganges was that of the holy thread: I was not worthy to wear it any longer. When the coolies come here, they lose all caste, even the Brahmins intermarry with the Chamars. What is to be done? In my own country if a Brahmin even goes for a call of nature, he must put a thread round his ear.<sup>17</sup>

There were others who were determined to hang on to their caste affiliations. Telucksing, who had come in the 1860s and was a storekeeper by the 1880s, told the same Commission:

I have not suffered in my caste in any way by coming across the ocean to Natal, because I observed all my religious ceremonies and I have done nothing to debar me from enjoying my caste privileges. On my return to India, my relations will receive me as one of themselves. I am of the Kshatryia caste, which is the caste of the fighting men and agriculturalists. If a Brahmin came here, he would not lose his caste unless he did something detrimental to his religion. Brahmins are vegetarian and do not indulge in strong drinks. Simply crossing the ocean, or 'black water' as the Indians call it, does not involve the loss of caste. The Indians here drink to excess and do not comply with any of their caste observances.

What Telucksing could not contemplate was the effect on people who had transgressed caste boundaries through marriage when they returned 'home'. The possibility of reintegrating into the social relations of the village would have been very difficult. Major Commins, the Protector of Emigrants for a short period in Calcutta, wrote of an indentured man who had married a woman from another caste. When they returned, at the Howrah Railway Station in Calcutta 'he told her and his child to sit while he got tickets, and heartlessly deserted her'.<sup>18</sup> The experiences of Totaram Sanadhya, an indentured labourer who returned from Fiji to India and recorded his life story, is also illuminating. Vijay Mishra summarises Sanadhya's experiences back in the Indian village:

He was constantly asked to declare that he had remained true to his caste, that his Brahminhood remained inviolate, that his marriage had been conducted within the structures of caste and religion...A *panchayat* is called to look into the propriety of his plantation marriage, the morality of crossing the seas...of eating with people of other caste on board the ship. His wife's cooking habits are scrutinised by other women to see if she knew all the right rituals...Finally he leaves the village and flees to the town of Ferozabad.<sup>19</sup>

Totaram's experiences were symptomatic of the experiences of many indentured and, alongside the economic imperative, must have played a major part in encouraging so many of the indentured to return to Natal. Reverend SH Stott testified to the Wragg Commission:

I have no complaints from Indians in connection with their caste; many of them have no caste, or have lost it. I think it is advisable that the Government, by neglecting to

make provision for the up-keep of caste, should allow caste prejudices to die out in Natal. Caste can scarcely be kept up on estates, on account of the inter-mixture there.<sup>20</sup>

George Mutukistna, a railway clerk, told the same Commission:

I think that caste feeling has disappeared in Natal; this disappearance commences immediately the Indians get on board ship. The little feeling of caste, which exists in Natal, is kept up by the Mauritius Indian merchants who think themselves better because they are rich and who think that, by observing caste distinctions, they can set themselves apart from the Natal Indian people. Men can regain their caste, on returning to India, by going through certain ceremonies, but women cannot regain their caste under any circumstances and are thrown off by their husbands and resort to prostitution for a living.

As these testimonies show, migrants had different understandings of caste. While there was no group basis for caste behaviour and, with one or two exceptions, no means to enforce standardised practices, individual migrants would have been members of caste groups in India and carried with them caste-related ideologies, which would have led to caste-based prejudices.<sup>21</sup> Caste consciousness may have been compromised on the ship but did not disappear. The Coolie Commission reported that indentured Indians were reluctant to use estate hospitals. One of the reasons cited by witnesses was that they objected to 'take water from the hands of any person not of his own, or of a superior caste'.<sup>22</sup>

When Cassythevan (34171) deserted, his employer, Sherwood, told the Protector that he had worked well for a year but became 'obstinate' and unsettled because of his isolation: 'he is of the Pariah caste and the other Coolies will not associate with him.'<sup>23</sup> JW Watts of Devon Gillits wanted to know from the Protector on 16 June 1885 whether indentured workers' caste was 'to interfere with their work as I have suffered much inconvenience through this. They can't do this and won't do that as their caste forbids them. I have also had to take one of them off the herding work as he has already managed to kill a cow of mine that took first prize at the Richmond show.'<sup>24</sup>

In journeying through the different responses to caste, the words of the medical officer for Isipingo in the 1880s, Dr Greene, are apposite: 'I do not think that caste has entirely disappeared; it is of course not observed to its full extent.'<sup>25</sup> When the governor of Jamaica expressed poignantly in 1854 that 'prejudices of caste sit very lightly upon the coolies', he could have been writing of the years of indenture in Natal.<sup>26</sup>

## ***Kalkatia and Madrasi***

While the files of the Protector reveal instances of 'caste consciousness', caste was beginning to mutate into two very broad regional identities, *Kalkatia* and *Madrasi*, which reflected origins in the Aryan north or Dravidian south of India. As caste was being deconstructed, so it was being reconstructed into regional identities. The irony is that many of the migrants were born

far from Madras and Calcutta and may never have seen these port cities before disembarking for Natal. Those who came via Calcutta were mainly from Bihar and the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, while those who came via Madras were recruited in present-day Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka. In a sense, this identity was imposed by colonial authorities who found it convenient to refer to migrants according to the port they were shipped from. Nevertheless, the port would become crucial in shaping Indian identities in subsequent decades. The main languages of migrants who came via Calcutta were Bhojpuri, Magahi, Awadhi and Kanauji, while those from Madras mainly spoke Tamil (71 per cent) and Telegu (25 per cent).<sup>27</sup> Two-thirds of migrants to Natal were from the south.

Veeramootoo's example shows the persistence of north/south divisions. After completing his indenture, he opened a store and, within a few years, employed five indentured Indians. Deputy Protector Manning visited the store in January 1884 to investigate problems between Veeramootoo, 'a Madras Indian storekeeper and pedlar', and two of his indentured employees from Calcutta. Manning had 'some trouble in settling their differences and adjusting their accounts' because these were written in 'Tamil and I could make nothing of them'. Once they were translated into English, Manning established that Veeramootoo owed one of the men 11 shillings, which was paid in his 'presence and that settled their accounts to date'. But Manning was faced with a more significant problem, namely, that employees from Calcutta 'consider[ed] themselves superior to the employer...I told him [Veeramootoo] that the men had better be transferred, and he agreed. One of the men had been most noisy in his complaints and had called the master in my presence a "common coolie"'.<sup>28</sup>

There are other recorded examples of regional divisions leading to tensions at the workplace. Chimania Parasuraman (33402), a Pariah from Madras who arrived on the *Dunphaile Castle* in 1884, was assigned to George North of Northbank.<sup>29</sup> He complained to the Protector in 1885 that Sirdar Shumshair Ally did not allow him 'to get food or sleeping place from any of the Madras men', but forced him to share accommodation with workers from Calcutta. Tensions between *Kalkatias* and *Madrasis* were heightened by the divide-and-rule strategies of employers. Chimania explained that the Sirdar had used 'two Calcutta men to kick me in the chest and strike me on the leg with a stick'.

They were found guilty of assault and fined by the magistrate. Chimania deserted and stayed in the bush 'for some time past and begging and eating where I could get'. He told the Protector that he was 'afraid to go to the estate on account of the Sirdar and Calcutta men ill-treating me'. Sirdar Ally, a Muslim from Tirhoot, had joined Northbank in June 1874. He was there for over a decade and, like many Sirdars, had entrenched his power and privileges. The main division here was not Muslim and Hindu, but north and south.<sup>30</sup>

Jhaggo, a *Kalkatia*, of Ramsay Collieries, spent a month in hospital 'following a fight with the Madras Indians'. His complaint that his wages had been deducted and he had to pay his hospital fees was not entertained.<sup>31</sup> At Hattingspruit, Deputy Protector Dunning found that the *Kalkatia* Sirdar 'is in bad odour with the Madras Indians'. They assaulted him and claimed that he had orchestrated the incident to get them into trouble.<sup>32</sup> At Ramsay Collieries, the (Madras) Indians were 'in a better mood now that the Calcutta men who were the cause of



former trouble have left'.<sup>33</sup> There is a plethora of references in court records, the files of the Protector and petitions by the indentured signifying regional identities at play.

Ramghulam (104497) and his wife, Sanchri (104498), opposed the marriage of their daughter Kalpa (104499) to Coopoosamy, because he was a *Madrasi* while they were 'Brahmins'. They had arrived in May 1904 and served their indentures at the Dundee Coal Mines. Kalpa was nine when she arrived and 17 when she sought to get married. In fact, they were not Brahmins but of the Thakur (warrior) caste. Nevertheless, as *Kalkatias*, Coopoosamy was unsuitable for them. Ramghulam accepted the dowry money, but subsequently assaulted Kalpa and reneged on the agreement. Kalpa disobeyed her parents and went to live with Coopoosamy.<sup>34</sup> In Chapter 10 we will see that of almost 5 000 marriages recorded by the Protector between 1874 and 1886, there were more marriages between Hindus and Muslims than between Hindus from North and South India. The evidence, mainly fragmentary and anecdotal in the form of complaints and petitions, suggests that regional identities were more profound than religious ones, a situation that would change over time.

The congealing of caste into *Kalkatia* and *Madrasi* was reinforced by the approach of employers, the authorities and the indentured themselves, who often attributed character traits to those from the South and North, helping to (re)construct regional identities. Stereotypes existed even before the indentured left India. The north/south divide 'was inscribed within the colonial paradigms of difference'.<sup>35</sup> On top of the oppression of class and race, those from the south as compared to those from the north suffered from particular stereotypes. Recruits from Madras had a reputation for being quarrelsome and hard to manage. According to an agent in India, 'they come and go as they like, any attempt to confine them in the depot grounds...will lead to riots...They are as a class addicted to drink and when intoxicated are very violent.'<sup>36</sup>

These stereotypes were carried over to Natal. The perception that *Madrasis* were more prone to drinking alcohol was strong. Ramdeen, for example, in his evidence to the Wragg Commission, called on the authorities to deny Indians access to drink because 'lots of Indians get bad from drink...The Calcutta people, as a body, would like the stoppage of the sale of liquor very much indeed; but the Madras men would not like it.'<sup>37</sup> Aboobaker Amod told the Wragg Commission that the 'Madrassie is the greatest drinker in India, and, when he comes here, he imports his drinking habits with him. I think the Madras man teaches the other Indians to drink.' On the other hand, *Kalkatias* were perceived as lovers of dagga. *Madrasis*, observers remarked, also differed from *Kalkatias* in that they 'ate pork, loved elaborate ceremonies with loud drumming, and did not have the same antipathy towards Christianity'.<sup>38</sup>

Distinctions between the north and south were also associated with colour and physique. An indication of the importance of physical differences is that 'fair' and 'beautiful' are used synonymously in most Indian languages, while folk literature emphasises fair skin and virginity as the two most desirable qualities in a bride. Northerners are generally fairer than southerners, and upper castes fairer than lower castes.<sup>39</sup> Skin colour was a source of discrimination. Thus, Ralph Lawrence, a Catholic from Madras, recalling his early days at St Anthony's School, wrote: 'My skin colour is dark brown, in keeping with my South Indian ancestry, and the bullies drew attention to this, as they were a lighter brown. One of the stories in our class

reading book was about a charcoal burner called Ralph, so it didn't take long for the bullies to nickname me "charcoal".<sup>40</sup>

Together with skin colour, there was also the 'inherent Aryan belief in the primitiveness and cultural inferiority of non-Aryan social systems [which] depicted *Madrasis* as cultural anomalies who were less Indian and, therefore, less Hindu than the fair-skinned northerners from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar'.<sup>41</sup> According to Lal, these cultural prejudices are rooted in Tulsidas's ancient Hindu text *Ramcharitmanas*, which is based on the exile of Lord Rama, a North Indian king, who eventually defeats the demon-king Ravana of Sri Lanka. The followers of Ravana, ancestral cousins of South Indians, are depicted as 'lesser human beings'.<sup>42</sup>

Nicolas Dirks warns against seeing caste as 'a central symbol for India, indexing it as fundamentally different from other places as well as expressing its essence', nor should we see it as 'omnipresent in Indian history'. Dirks argues that it is 'a modern phenomenon, the product of a historical encounter between India and western colonial rule...It was under the British that "caste" became a single term capable of expressing, organising, and above all "systematising" India's diverse forms of social identity, community, and organisation'.<sup>43</sup>

Dirks may be right that colonialism naturalised caste; further, various commentators may be right that Indians compromised their caste when they crossed the *kala pani*, but crucially, the memory and myths of caste did not disappear. While caste may have been perceived as rigid in India, it was fluid when it travelled. Given the huge gender imbalance and common conditions of labour and living, central pillars of caste like endogamy, heredity and status were compromised. While some migrants could draw on broadly similar 'experiences and values', there were no mechanisms to enforce compliance.<sup>44</sup>

An important consideration is that single migrants often 'married' during the voyage to Natal, increasing the likelihood that South Indians would find partners from the south, and North Indians from the north. Most marriages, while not between partners from the same caste group, were intra-regional. Regional endogamy superseded caste endogamy. A closer analysis might reveal other factors at play, such as language and ethnicity. Lurking in the shadows, though less pronounced than the *Kalkatia* and *Madrasi* distinction, was the Tamil/Telegu division. So, for example, the small Baptist community split between Telegu speakers who formed the Natal Indian Baptist Association and Tamil speakers who formed the Indian Baptist Mission.<sup>45</sup> This would become more of an issue as Indians evolved into settled communities.

Inscribed in this deconstruction of caste was an attempt by the middle classes to build a homogeneous ethnic and racial political identity as 'Indians'. The government in Natal defined Indians as a separate social group on the basis of race, stymieing absorption and integration into the wider society. The colonial society that Indians entered into after completing their indentures was a highly segregated one that defined them as a distinct group in the political, legal, economic and social spheres.<sup>46</sup>

How did Indians relate to Africans? Any attempt to understand this must be seen in the context of the fact that the indentured were restricted in their movements, large numbers of Africans were placed in reservations, and points of constructive interaction were limited.

## The outside cast(es)

In 1901, the Reverend S.H. Stott reported the marriage of an Indian girl named Gangi to an African man named Loombu...<sup>47</sup>

There are no substantial records of the individual social relations between Africans and Indians in the early years of indenture. Instances such as the marriage of Gangi and Loombu were rare. When African and Indians did meet, it was usually at a 'distance' and fraught with tension. In tracing the journey of this relationship, an important starting place is probably the immediate 'unintended consequence' of the arrival of the indentured.

The introduction of indentured labour, Fatima Meer tells us, undermined the negotiating power of the Zulu vis-à-vis white settlers. Thus, whatever African 'perceptions of Indian indentured workers was in 1860, included in it must have been the suspicion, if not the knowledge, that they had been brought in...to be used against them in ways perhaps not immediately understood'.<sup>48</sup> The crucial question, to paraphrase Madhavi Kale, is to what extent Indians were 'victims and unwilling instruments' and to what extent they were 'cannily complicit' in the creation of a racially inflected society in colonial Natal.<sup>49</sup>

Stereotypes formed almost immediately. The *Natal Mercury* reported within a few days of the arrival of Indians: 'Our "poor Zulus" hardly know what to make of these nondescript newcomers...there is evidently no love lost between the two races...No, no...Mongolian and Negro will never intermingle, at least not in Natal.' After his first experiences with Indian labour, JR Wilson of Umhlanga said: 'The Coolies, though not so physically strong as the *kaffirs*, do on the whole a better day's work, as they are not only diligent and regular, but they economise their strength, and finish their appointed task in much more satisfactory manner...Their capacities for devouring food are happily much less than Zulus.'<sup>50</sup>

The debate over raising a force to confront growing unrest among the Zulu points to early tensions among Indians and Africans. Law 25 of 1875 allowed for the formation of a Coolie Volunteer Corps. The Colonial Secretary asked Protector MacLeod to ascertain the views of planters. MacLeod replied on 22 March 1877 that they opposed the idea because it would 'be detrimental to the commercial interests of the Colony even to do anything which would appear to be admitting the necessity for extra armament'.<sup>51</sup> MacLeod was willing to raise a corps among free Indians. In fact, he had just the right people to lead it, 'two Sikh soldiers who were introduced last year as overseers...These men were taken over by the Railway contracts but I have no doubt could be obtained for this purpose. One has been an officer in the Native Regiment and wears the Abyssinian medal. They would have to be drilled to the new drill.'

The response of employers provides fascinating insight into the thinking of whites. James Aiken, member of the Legislative Council, felt that Indians were a 'very broken reed to lean upon'. Sydney Clarence of Effingham Sugar Mill expressed similar sentiments on 27 February 1877: 'the idea is impractical. In the first place, the class of people who come to this country are a cringing, cowardly, often physically weak lot of men who would not face an enemy of any sort. In the second place there is a great amount of treachery in their character which might possibly render them more dangerous than serviceable in an emergency...' John Bazley

of Nil Esperandum, speaking with 'twenty-six years experience amongst the *kafirs*', was forthright in his response to the Protector on 26 February 1877:

Leave well alone. Do not disturb the *kafir* mind by trying to make the coolies into a Corps. That would make them quite unmanageable and out of place. They came to work, not to protect us, but service us. It would agitate the *kafirs* to see the coolies drilling and make them, the *kafirs*, ask questions, saying who are they to fight. The *kafirs* are DOWN on the Coolies and would ask, 'are these spider legged bags to have guns, and *kafir* men not to have them?'...No coolie force will have any weight with *kafirs*. Believe me. One evil must not be lost sight of. The old coolies that pretend to speak the *kafir* tongue would be sure to make a mess of it, in telling the *kafir* the wrong end first. The *kafir* will not try to master the coolie tongue. Too low for him.

Bazley's testimony is significant because it points to Africans considering Indians as 'too low', weak and cowardly; Indians, on the other hand, are portrayed as conniving and scheming. Conversely, Warren Lamport, who arrived in Natal in 1860, told the Coolie Commission that the 'presence of a large number of coolies adds materially to the security of the Colony, as, in case of an outbreak amongst the natives, the fidelity of the coolies might be depended upon, and they would prove a great element of strength, if led by men whom they knew and respected'.<sup>52</sup>

The literature, newspaper reports and archives in the immediate decades following 1860 point only occasionally to interaction or conflict between the indentured and Africans. References are mainly anecdotal.<sup>53</sup> For example, we know that some Indians borrowed money from Africans. Edward Mason, manager of the Natal Harbour Board, wrote to Protector Mason on 13 August 1885 that he wanted to transfer Narainsamy Soobroyulu (22655), who had arrived in August 1880, because he was 'a bad character and has during the four years I have had to do with him given a great deal of trouble'. 'Trouble' included desertion, theft, neglect of duty and borrowing from Africans. This made him 'an unprincipled man. He has been stopped his wages for some time past to pay debts to *kafirs*. I found he had been borrowing money from them to the amount of £6.10.0. I have an Agreement that he would pay five shillings per month until the amount is paid up in full.'<sup>54</sup>

There are rare instances of Africans utilising Indian labour. Dr HW Jones of Stanger informed the Protector in 1884 that Umlavu at Umvoti Mission Station had been employing 16 Indians from August 1884. Dr Jones commented: 'things are coming to a pretty pass in this colony if *kafirs* are to have coolies assigned to them.'<sup>55</sup> In November 1907, Isaac Mkhize, 'an exempted Native Chief' of Cedara, wrote to the Protector that Mottai (95580) wanted to re-indenture to him. The Colonial Secretary turned down the request on 18 December 1907. Mottai was 14 when he arrived in 1902 and served his indenture with the Town Hill Wattle Company.<sup>56</sup>

Deputy Protector Manning informed Protector Polkinghorne in August 1910 that when he visited John Muriel in Richmond, he met Chadakhari, whose wife had died in mid-July, leaving him to look after a four-year-old child. As Chadakhari worked all day, he asked Muriel to request an indentured woman whom he could marry. Muriel refused because Chadakhari

had 16 months left on his contract. Chadakhari would not allow two Indian women on the estate to take care of the child because they were Chamars (low caste), while he was a Bania (trader) and considered himself of higher caste.

Chadakhari paid an African woman four shillings a month to look after the child at her kraal and six shillings when she came to look after the child at the barracks. Polkinghorne replied on 1 September 1910 that it was not in his power to change Muriel's mind, and that Chadakhari should continue the arrangement with the 'native woman'.<sup>57</sup> We see here a case where an indentured labourer of 'high caste' would not allow his child to be looked after by a 'low caste' Indian, but was quite happy for an African woman to do the job. Unable to 'locate' the African woman on the caste map, Chadakhari regarded her as more 'acceptable' than a lower-caste woman.

Some whites accused Indians of spreading vices among Africans. R Jameson, a policeman in Bellair, told the Wragg Commission that Indians sold liquor to Africans: 'I notice that, as hawkers and small storekeepers they seem to depend upon the sale of liquors for a living...with the result that the natives around Bellair are now lazy, drunkards, and pauperised.' Jameson reported that 'more than one coolie has taken up his permanent residence in native *kraals*'. He also alluded to sex between Indian men and African women: 'I regret to say that syphilis, which at one time was unknown among the natives, is now the rule among both men and women instead of the exception...The use of the girls in the kraals is exchanged for liquor provided by coolie visitors.'<sup>58</sup>

There are very few recorded instances of liaisons between Indian men and African women. One was that of Abdullah Kulla (26830), who was sharing a house with a single male worker. In November 1884, he asked his employer, Alice Dykes, for a separate house because 'he has for a sweetheart a *kolwa* [Christian] *kafir* girl who often comes to visit and stay with him'.<sup>59</sup> Abdullah was 20 when he arrived from Mooradabad in June 1882. As a man of 22, he seemed willing to break racial barriers. Whether this was motivated by the shortage of women, or was an example of the way love can break boundaries, is impossible to ascertain. There are traces of other cases of cohabitation but the records are largely silent on these matters.

There were points of conflict as well, particularly on plantations where Indians and Africans worked alongside each other. There were 5 292 Indians on plantations against 7 457 Africans in 1875. The percentage of African workers on cane fields dropped to 28 per cent by 1888 and 18 per cent by 1908, but increased to 44 per cent by 1915, following the end of indenture.<sup>60</sup> Employers created conditions for racial tensions by employing Africans as overseers. In 1862, the *Natal Mercury* reported that an African was used by his employer to punish an Indian tied to a tree.<sup>61</sup> This became common practice. By placing one group in authority over the other, employers exploited differences.

Ruthere (34970) complained to the Protector in January 1888 that her employer, J McIntosh of Gillits, allowed two African male workers, Sagope and Chune, to 'take hold of my breasts and take out their private parts...Both of them have asked me to go to the bush with them.' When she asked them to stop, they replied 'toola' (shut up). Ruthere could not communicate her problem to Mrs McIntosh as she did not 'know the *kafir* language', which was often the

language of communication between employers and workers. Hanwant, a fellow worker, told Mrs McIntosh, who did not do anything. Katharayn (34969), Veeran (34970) and Venkatasamy (35214) complained that Mr McIntosh was often away from the estate, and Mrs McIntosh got Sagope and Chunee to maintain order with the use of a *panga* (machete).<sup>62</sup>

C Kannippa (94704), who was indentured to D Douglas of Bencorrum Hotel, told the Protector that his employer 'throttled' him and warned that 'the next time he would not hit me but would tell the *kafir* to beat me'.<sup>63</sup> Dorasamy of Redcliffe Estate complained to the Protector in November 1882 that he had been beaten by '*kafirs*': the '*kafir* was on top of me beating me with his fist. I took the first thing that was near me, a cane knife. The *kafir* told my master who was in the field. My master told six or seven *kafirs* to take hold of me, put me in the ground, where they held me when the master thrashed me with a *sjambok*.'<sup>64</sup> Veerasami (43852), who worked for JA van der Plank of Camperdown, complained on 30 March 1892 that he and two other indentured workers were forced to share a hut with four Africans. Their employer failed to honour his promise to give them their own hut. The biggest problem for the indentured seemed to be that the African workers 'won't let us cook in the hut'.<sup>65</sup>

Several witnesses to the Wragg Commission complained of the attitude of African policemen. Telucksing, a storekeeper, stated that 'the *kafir* constables here treat the Indians like dogs and sometimes arrest us for doing nothing wrong at all, saying that we have been drinking; they tyrannise over us in every way imaginable'.<sup>66</sup> Aboobaker Amod echoed these sentiments when he said that the '*kafir* constables tyrannise over the Indians very much indeed'. Doorasamy Pillay's petition to the Viceroy on 14 July 1884, on behalf of 'traders and storekeepers from Mauritius and other colonies', objected to Indians being arrested by '*kafir* constables, who treat them with great cruelty, using unnecessary and undue violence'. The petitioners requested that Indians should be apprehended by 'European or Indian constables, who do not use harsh measures, but treat all alike'.<sup>67</sup>

*Indian Opinion* weighed in with the assessment that Africans used disproportionate force against Indians: 'It is common knowledge that a native, an excellent servant, once promoted to some authority becomes a tyrant over those he has under him.'<sup>68</sup> GE Hutchinson of Umgeni Road wrote to the Inspector of Police, Durban, on 28 February 1902, describing a scene he had witnessed:

At 9:30 a.m. on 26 February, I heard excessive screaming of such a peculiar nature that it was evident somebody was being choked. On running out I found the neighbours on both sides of me already there, and found a native police dragging a helpless half-witted Indian named Ramlal along the ground...taking him by each arm...I found the peculiar shrieking was caused by one of the police trying to stop the Indian's yells by throttling him...At the police station I found the police natives dusting down the Indian so as to obliterate the marks of having dragged him on the road. All this rough usage was quite uncalled for as either of them could have picked the wretched Indian up and slung him over their shoulder. The Indian is an old resident here – known to be half daft.<sup>69</sup>

The use of Africans to punish Indians added to distrust between these subordinate groups. Tensions along race lines emerged from early on. Take for example the occasion in 1877 when 86 of the 'Delta coolies all armed with large sticks and bludgeons' marched towards the Albion Estate in Isipingo, 'shrieking vengeance against four *kafirs*' who had been hired to prevent Indians from passing through the estate's mill.<sup>70</sup> This description of a 'city faction fight' in a local newspaper in 1890 is equally powerful:

The railway barracks near the Umsindusi were on Saturday evening the scene of a big fight between a number of coolies and *kafirs* employed on the railway, whereby a native and a coolie lost their lives, and several were seriously injured. Both the coolies and the *kafirs* had been drinking during the afternoon, and towards evening became quarrelsome. Words developed into blows, which eventually ended in a free fight, the coolies taking one side and the *kafirs* the other. Both sides armed themselves with sticks, and some of the natives possessed themselves of assegais, and blows were showered for upwards of half-an-hour, blood flowing freely on either side. One native received a heavy blow on the head, which fractured his skull and gave him quietus. A coolie child, who ran out into the thick of the fight, was also killed, while a coolie man received a blow which is expected to terminate fatally. A large number of combatants were more or less seriously injured, the majority sustaining fractures of the skull. After the fight had been in progress for some time the railway police appeared upon the scene, and the combatants were separated, the injured men, together with the native who was killed, being sent to the hospital. By yesterday thirty-three arrests were made.<sup>71</sup>

For the colonists, there was a persistent debate about the relative merits of Indian and African labour.

As free Indians became visible and constituted a 'problem' for whites, the latter saw in African labour a potential alternative. Even before the sacking of Ulundi in the aftermath of the defeat of the British at Isandlwana in January 1879, whites were already making economic calculations regarding African and Indian labour. African labour was seen as cheaper and could be beneficially used to divide the workforce along racial lines. James Morton told the Wragg Commission that if he could get a 'sufficient supply of *kafir* labour, I should prefer to have a mixture of *kafir* and coolies, because they cannot all combine against me and delay the work. The coolies get up very early in the morning, and that leads the *kafirs* to do the same.'<sup>72</sup> James Turner told the Commission that he preferred '*kafir* labourers than coolies, because they are cheaper; that is, if I could obtain a sufficient number. Another reason is that you have less trouble with them than with coolies.'

The Wragg Commission concluded that throughout Natal 'the *kafir* is preferred to the Indian as labourer in all respects save one, his dislike to remain in service for a long period'. Rations, medical fees, wages and annual instalments over five years to defray the cost of importing indentured workers made Indian labour more expensive, though it was seen as more reliable.

Taking the railway department as an example, the Commission calculated that £1 930 would be saved per annum if Africans replaced Indians.<sup>73</sup> The Wragg Commission was

making its findings not too long after the conquest of Ulundi, which signalled the accelerated erosion of Zulu power, the cynical alienation of Zulu land, and the increased dependence of Zulus on wage labour on white farms.

The relationship between the indentured and Africans was marked by 'distance'. This was as much a product of the material conditions as it was of political choices. The living quarters of the indentured on the plantation, for example, were largely racially homogeneous and cut off from the broader social environment. African workers, still tied to the land, were more mobile and itinerant. Where the indentured and African did meet, it was just to touch at the fingertips. Exacerbating this was the way in which Gandhi challenged the afflictions facing the diverse group of indentured, traders and upwardly mobile colonial-born Indians by calling on all Indians to unite.<sup>74</sup>

But Gandhi's attempt to build an overarching Indian identity in South Africa did not stop there. He saw the struggles in South Africa as having a direct effect on 'the Motherland'. For Gandhi, this did not mean a rejection of the British Empire but a commitment to equal treatment for Indians. To this must be added his rejection of any 'alliance' with Africans, which he justified as pragmatism: 'the bracketing...of African aboriginal natives and Asiatics, British subjects and non-British subjects, is to ignore the peculiar position occupied by British Indian subjects of the Crown.'<sup>75</sup> In other times it was dressed up in a cultural chauvinism. The views that produced an approach of 'going it alone' had an impact on broader social relations, and it is a story we return to, especially in dissecting the anatomy of the 1913 strike.

As the indentured manoeuvred through the new environment, many saw in education the opportunity for their children to escape the life that they themselves had to labour through, but they would soon find that this quest came up against a new caste – colour.

## 'Educating' Bernard Gabriel

To hustle save she one-one slow penny,  
Because she son Hiralall *got* to go to school,  
*Must* wear clean starch pants, or they go laugh at he,  
Strap leather on he foot, and he *must* read book.  
Learn talk proper, take exam...  
Not turn out like he rum-sucker *chamar* dadee.<sup>76</sup>

With the desire to return to India fading, the indentured built places of worship, consolidated relationships into extended families and began to envisage the longer term in Africa. Crucially, many saw in education an escape for their children from a life of labour and the limited horizons of the plantation. Initially parents came up against an almost complete lack of educational facilities. Indian migrants were seen as transients, and neither the government nor estate owners made provision for the education of their children for the first few decades.

The first schools for Indians were established by missions. Father Sabon of the Roman Catholic Mission requested financial assistance from the Natal government in November 1863 to build a school, as 'many Coolies have expressed their earnest desire to have a school established



for them and their children', but this was declined.<sup>77</sup> Sabon eventually established a school for 30 pupils in 1867 with books in Tamil provided by the Ceylon Mission. Reverend Ralph Stott of the Wesleyan Mission Society established a day school for children and an evening school for adult Indians in 1869. By 1872, only 88 children, including 15 girls, were receiving formal education out of a school-going population of 903.<sup>78</sup> There were 21 mission schools by 1883. These were handicapped by a shortage of funds and facilities, poor attendance, language difficulties and lack of capable teachers.<sup>79</sup> Missions continued their efforts enthusiastically until the 1920s, when it became clear that this was not leading to evangelisation and the earlier zeal dissipated.<sup>80</sup>

Government involvement in Indian education began with Law 20 of 1878. An Indian Immigration School Board was established in 1879, comprising the Protector of Indian Immigrants, Reverend Stott and the Colonial Secretary.<sup>81</sup> Attempts by the Board to get planters to open schools with government grants were unsuccessful, the Board reporting in 1879 that employers considered education financially 'hurtful'.<sup>82</sup> By 1885, there were 24 state-aided schools for Indians. Although 1 702 Indian children were enrolled in 1886 (1 428 boys and 274 girls), the average daily attendance was 664.<sup>83</sup> Responsible government (self-government) in 1893 retarded Indian education because local white colonists were determined to institute a clear racial hierarchy. The 1878 law was repealed and the School Board abolished.<sup>84</sup> Indians could not progress beyond standard seven, and fewer than 30 per cent of Indian children of school-going age attended school at any one time during the period under review.<sup>85</sup>

The authorities feared that education would raise unrealistic expectations among Indians and threaten the racial status quo. Addressing Indian children at the opening of St Aidan's School in 1913, school inspector Loram said:

I know what you want. All you boys want to go into office, and the girls want to do fancy work at home. But that will not do. We are to keep the offices for the White boys, and thus it will come about that you Indians will have to work by your hands...go in for manual training, as the Superintendent put it. It is in that way that you will have to earn your living, and the sooner you realise that, and the sooner your education is directed in that way the better. We European people have taught you how to earn your living...and now you must work.<sup>86</sup>

Many of the indentured, and those recently freed from bondage, refused to heed Loram's advice. They were persistent in their attempts to ensure that their children would acquire a 'solid' education. The struggle of free Indians to build a home in Africa involved a determination that their children would have access to decent schooling. In this the early Christians often took the lead.

One of the best examples was the 'education' of Bernard Gabriel, son of indentured labourers Perumall and Amonnee, whom we will meet again in Chapter 13. In some senses, Gabriel vindicated Colepeper's warning that the educated indentured could become 'disturbing elements' to the status quo:

Just listen to the boy talking...  
Look how he walks, like white man  
Cork-hat on his head, wrist watch on his hand!  
Isn't your father called Dabydeen who plants vegetables?  
Doesn't he cut with a sickle and dig with a fork?  
Doesn't he sell in the marketplace, plantain and corn?  
Well fuck me! Whose child are you then?<sup>87</sup>

Bernard Gabriel was born in Durban on 29 January 1880. After completing his education at Boys Model School, he obtained a position as clerk for a Mr Brokensha in Dundee. While there, he was 'coached' for the civil service examination by solicitor WD Turnbull. Trapped in northern Natal for several months during the South African War, he made his way to the Transvaal and from there to Delagoa Bay, before landing in Durban on the SS *Malabele* on 15 January 1900. After the war he pursued legal studies overseas. His parents, who had arrived as indentured workers in the 1860s, borrowed £128 from their daughter Josephine and son-in-law Vincent Lawrence to finance Bernard's studies at Cambridge in England.

In England, Bernard married Londoner Constance Ethel Carthew. They returned to Natal after he was admitted to the Bar by the Honourable Society of Lincoln Inn on 5 July 1905. Gabriel's achievement drew the praise of *Indian Opinion*:

Mr. Gabriel comes of Indian parents who are drawn from the indentured class. It reflects the highest credit on them that they and their elder sons sacrificed almost all they had in order to give their youngest son a sound education. They have raised the poor Indians, who for their livelihood have to serve under indenture, in the estimation of all right-thinking men. Mr. Gabriel has to consider himself as trustee for his fellow young men and it is his example which, if well set, will induce other parents to send their children to finish their education. If his profession is used as a means for amassing wealth, there may be failure staring him in the face. If his attainments are placed at the service of the community, they will grow more and more.

Gabriel did not consider the efforts of his parents as 'anything special' for 'every Indian parent is conscientiously bound to do everything possible to ensure that his children enjoyed the best possible education'. The article concluded with Gabriel saying: 'Let us work together, let me be guided by you, and you will not find me lacking in my duty to you as an Indian.'<sup>88</sup>

Bernard Gabriel typified the emerging educated class among Indians. Turnbull described him as 'a well educated Indian who dressed as well as any European...He rather fancied himself in dress and I should think that his suits would not cost less than five pounds each; he was in fact a swell.'<sup>89</sup> He wore rings, none of which were worth less than £2. By 1899 Gabriel owned five 'tailor-made' suits, a silk coat and vest, 20 pyjamas, and a set of three gold buttons with gold chains attached. He also owned a camera, a collection of rare stamps, a pair of swinging clubs and numerous articles of jewellery. Gabriel acquired all the paraphernalia of the white middle class.

A 'swell' he certainly was. Bernard Gabriel's nephew Ralph remembered him as 'a smartly dressed, tall man who smoked cigars and had a chauffeur-driven car'.<sup>90</sup> Bernard and Constance Gabriel had three children, Graham Bernard Carthew (b. 1909), Vivian George Carthew (b. 1913) and Noel John Carthew (b. 1915). After Constance's death from cancer at an early age, Bernard relocated to Durban and married Louisa, daughter of H Velkoop, who was originally from Mauritius. They had two children, Marian and Max. While a widower, Bernard employed a white governess, Mrs Freeman, to take care of the three young boys. He had a daughter named Phyllis from her. He was also 'extremely friendly' with Nurse Fernandez, known as 'Ramona' after a fashionable song of the time.

Gabriel was admitted as an Advocate of the Supreme Court of South Africa in November 1905 and opened an office at 232 Grey Street in the heart of Indian Durban. On 20 December 1905, he wrote to the Colonial Secretary to be made a Commissioner of Oaths. This was declined, ostensibly on the grounds that there were too many commissioners in Durban. He applied again on 6 October 1906 after the appointment of several whites. He stressed in his letter of motivation that it was 'highly desirable that a commissioner should be conversant with Indian languages in view of the fact that the majority of the people having to go before a Commissioner of Oaths are Indians'.<sup>91</sup> The authorities turned him down once again.

The racism that Gabriel faced led him to complain to the Governor General of South Africa in 1911 of 'injury and insult resulting from colour prejudice'. This was 'of vital importance to myself, as well as a case of gross injustice and hardship'. Gabriel pointed out that he was born in Natal, 'where my parents have been resident for the last fifty years. At great personal sacrifice my good parents sent me to Cambridge.' His wife was 'an English lady, a daughter of a Lord and solicitor, and granddaughter of a solicitor. On account of the colour prejudice that prevails in Natal and elsewhere in South Africa, this marriage was the subject of much comment. I regret to say ever since I have been persecuted in more ways than one. However, in spite of all this my married life has been a perfectly happy one.' Gabriel was convinced that whites could not tolerate seeing a 'coolie' with a white woman, and were hounding him to bring about his downfall.

In September 1908, three years after Gabriel started his practice, he was accused of attempting to 'defeat the ends of justice' by asking a witness not to appear in court. The authorities accepted the word of the witness, who had 20 previous convictions, over Gabriel's testimony. He was fined £3 and suspended for two years. Gabriel did not have the means to challenge this decision in the Supreme Court, and moved to Lourenzo Marques with his wife and daughter. In April 1911, shortly before the suspension was over, the Natal authorities accused him of drawing up a forged will in 1907. The decision to raise this four years after the alleged incident, and just before he was to return, convinced Gabriel he was being punished for challenging the racial status quo. The latest charge, he contended, was 'absolutely false' and he placed the matter before the Governor General to 'closely watch these proceedings. Given a fair trial, I can establish my innocence, but as I have said people in Natal are much prejudiced against me on account of my marriage and would not hesitate a moment if they saw

the opportunity of crushing me.' HJ Stanley, Private Secretary in the Governor General's office, remarked that the matter 'does not seem of sufficient importance to make the subject of a Minute to Ministers'.<sup>92</sup> Bernard Gabriel did not get immediate redress, but he did return to practise law until his death in January 1940.

There were others like Gabriel who, through practising Christianity, wearing European clothing, obtaining a solid English education and, occasionally, marrying a white woman, could have expected to escape the caste system. While they might have succeeded in escaping the noose of 'internal' caste-ism, they came up against another caste system that policed its boundaries as zealously as any found in an Indian village.

David Vinden, whose story we came across in Chapter 5, was one of them. He felt himself superior to the 'run-of-the-mill' Indian, served the government of the day, but still could not escape the strictures of the colour caste system. Such men emulated whites in every way but failed to get access to white society, and this often made them very bitter. They were constantly reminded of their status and colour and often felt alienated from both Indian and white society.

## A new cast?

Indenture was but one aspect of the ongoing displacement and immiseration precipitated by colonialism. Given this and the fact that migration took place over an extended period, during which both sending and receiving societies changed, Kale rejects the notion that migrants reproduced 'remembered village communities to the best of their abilities'.<sup>93</sup> While agreeing that we should not obsessively focus on origins, caste did not simply disappear. Consciousness of caste, whether based on myth or memory, lingered even though caste as an institution was unenforceable.

Dislocation, the move from village to plantation, being lumped together on ships, treated alike at depots, subject to similar living and working conditions, the shortage of women, and so on impacted on old ways of doing things. This often led to a bewildering combination of old and new. Charlie Nulliah epitomises this. We find Nulliah trying to reconstruct forms of authority that may have prevailed in villages 'back home', happily trespassing into white society, and being part of political organisations like the Natal Indian Congress which, while having a class bias, did not police caste.

While the indentured might have been re-enacting some 'remembered customs', these were played out in a different terrain from that of the villages left behind. It was impossible to re-institute a caste system that included hierarchy, specialisation and separation in matters of food, touch and marriage. Customs and identities were rejigged to take account of new circumstances. Those who made up the caste had often just got together as migrants in Natal, and the old lines could not simply be repeated.

For Freund, 'caste had at most a shadowy importance' while 'language and religion survived as important building blocks'.<sup>94</sup> While the caste system did not survive, caste status survived 'as a subsidiary source of prestige...a bonus of esteem' which was 'added to prestige

achieved on other grounds such as wealth, education, and white-collar and professional occupations. High-caste status provided individuals competing for influence within the Indian community with an edge over less favoured competitors'.<sup>95</sup> New actors arrived alongside new identities emerging. Caste-specific identities would mutate into broad-based identities like *Madras*, *Kalkatia*, Muslim and Christian. In addition, there were 'passenger' Indians, who arrived outside the strictures of indenture. These categories, in turn and over time, fragmented further into Tamil, Telegu, Hindi, Gujarati, Memon, and so on. Some embraced 'European' culture but found that breaking from the shackles of Indian society presented other barriers.

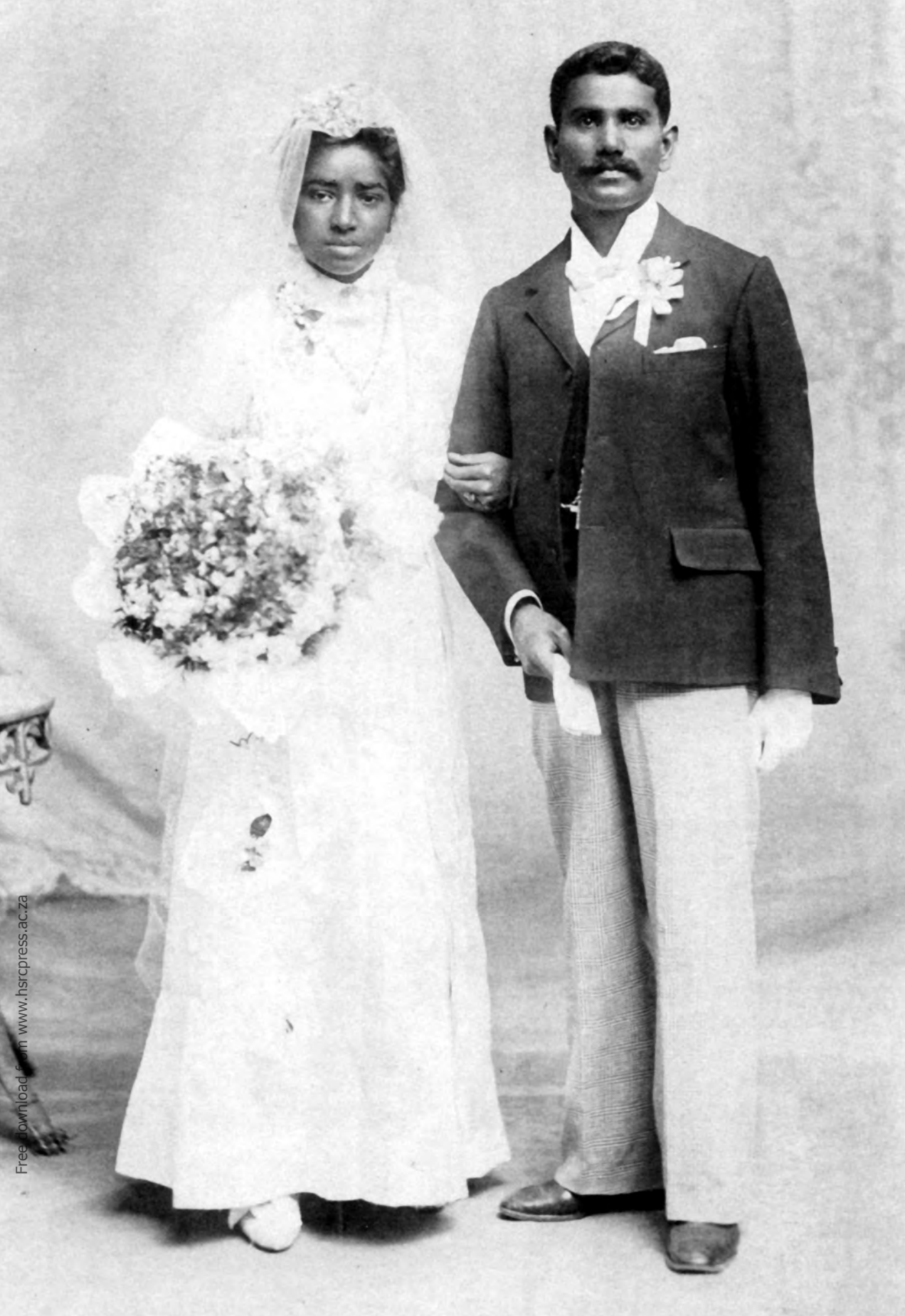
Inscribed in this deconstruction of caste was the attempt to build a homogeneous ethnic/racial identity as 'Indians', a difficult project given the huge differences of class, caste, language, ethnicity and religion that existed. The division of Indians along communal lines prompted *Indian Opinion* to advise in April 1908 that the 'different Indian races inhabiting South Africa have to be welded together and made to think corporately, to sink their sectarian prejudices and enjoy free and easy social intercourse among themselves'.<sup>96</sup> Middle- and trading-class Indians took on the mantle of 'spokesmen' for Indians against a range of racially based restrictive measures by a white-minority government, coalescing around the secular Natal Indian Congress and the figure of Gandhi.

Migrant identities, however, were fluid, as 'Indian' was always in a state of tension with other identities like religion and region. Contingency of identity had its limits when it came up against the system of colour caste, as Bernard Gabriel was to find out. It is apposite, then, to end this chapter with those who attempted to escape not only the strictures of caste, but also the ceilings imposed by the colour caste system. John L Roberts, a colonial-born Indian, underscored the dilemma Indians found themselves in when he said, 'If we follow the European mode of living and dressing, we are called "upstarts;" but where, if we follow our own civilisation, we are called all the hard names in the calendar and Decalogue. We do not know how to please the European population of South Africa – I hope a policeman will tell us.'<sup>97</sup>

On the horizon were the policemen that Roberts wanted, but they did not come wearing official uniforms and bearing guns. They came dressed in beards and beads and bearing books, some of which spoke of parables, others of the victory of good over evil, and others that demanded the book be read from back to front.









# Family matters

Imagined, or shoveled in *logies*  
 They were not accustomed to space  
 Except a piece of porthole showing sky  
 Doorways cracked open to cane-fields choked with work.  
 His mother dropped a new child every year  
 And all affection crowded out.

And all my furious talk of fidelity  
 Was because of that you see.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>1</sup>

## The inversion of tradition?

An anxious Muthoora (7443) visited Protector Mason in April 1887 with a note from his employer, Laurence Plat of Isipingo, confirming that he and Tejia (9596) had married on 9 February 1887, and wanted to register it 'in some way'.<sup>2</sup> Plat witnessed the marriage. In fact, Muthoora borrowed £5 from him to pay Tejia's father 'in consideration of his assent to the marriage. That assent was affirmed in my presence and that of several other Indians, the girl also being present, and the father signed a paper to that effect.' On 5 May, Plat questioned Mason why the registration had not been completed. He was frustrated because Muthoora 'has already been several times, and has been put off, and directed to go again at some other specified time, and still no conclusion has been arrived at. Surely there is something wrong in all this, and a great waste of time.' Plat wanted the matter settled so that Muthoora could 'return to his work. His frequent absences on this matrimonial business are inconvenient, and annoying to me.'

Mason replied on 6 May 1887 that the delay was due to his 'discovery' that Tejia was already married to Shewdal Persad (7010), who had paid £10 to her father, Matadin Nancoo. That marriage had been 'duly solemnised' and he could consequently not register Tejia as the wife of Muthoora. Shewdal and Tejia were married in 1882, when she was 11 and he 34, with the consent of her parents. A marriage ceremony was performed at the Durban Corporation barracks by Ganesh Maharaj, Matadin's 'guru'. Two years after the ceremony, when Tejia was 13, she went to live with Shewdal, who told Mason that 'the day after she came to live with me, I consummated the marriage'. In early 1885, however, Tejia left Shewdal and went to live with

OPPOSITE: Vincent and Josephine Lawrence, married in 1901. The formative indentured family tended to be nuclear and lived by 'rules' very different from those of the patrilocal joint family found in India at that time.

PREVIOUS PAGE: One of the most powerful responses of the indentured to a system designed to brutalise them into units of labour was their determination to build families.

Muthoora 'as his wife'. They tried to register the marriage shortly after Muthoora paid the dowry. Mason was at a loss because 'the law does not appear to be framed to deal with instances of this kind':

I have had many instances of fraud of the most direct and indefensible nature practiced by mercenary parents on the men who desire and marry their daughters, and fear that such deceptive and fraudulent practices used against men belonging to a proverbially excitable race might lead to serious personal reprisals. The scheme of the offenders may be briefly described in this way: A young native woman is betrothed by her parents to one of her male suitors who, in order to obtain the consent of her parents, has had to purchase it by making a substantial money present (five to ten pounds). The parents, however, stipulate that the marriage shall be deferred, and in the meantime the man who has thus purchased his betrothal is generally coerced into entrusting all his earnings with the parents who live on them. After a time the girl, at the instigation of her parents, expresses distaste and aversion to the proposed union, and the parents do all in their power to make the victim of their plan dissatisfied and uncomfortable. It is sometimes the case that this ends in the breaking off of the betrothal and the man is thus cheated out of his money and his hopes of marriage...Quarrels arising from complications of this kind have frequently come before me. There is, under the law, no special provision made for people who thus cruelly cheat and defraud. All the unfortunate sufferer can do is to sue civilly for restitution of his money, a course rarely taken.<sup>3</sup>

'Forced' by the Protector to resume their lives as husband and wife, Tejia and Shewdal lived together for almost half a century until Shewdal's death in 1930 and Tejia's in 1949. They had five children. The story of Tejia, Shewdal and Muthoora, at once fascinating, tragic and complicated, serves as a metaphor for the kinds of challenges the indentured faced in building long-term relationships in the early decades.

Mason's comments are important in several respects. His use of 'proverbially excitable race' underscores widespread racist notions of the Oriental. The comments also point to the broader workings of indentured society. One was the exchange of dowry in nineteenth-century India. In matrilineal societies, where women were prohibited from directly inheriting parental property, dowry provided a vehicle to transfer their share of wealth to the filial home.<sup>4</sup> The situation was inverted in Natal, where men were sometimes compelled to pay dowry or risk losing the chance to marry.

In blaming Tejia's scheming parents, Mason takes away the agency of women entirely, something alluded to by his predecessor, who reported in 1877 that Indians were in the habit of 'contracting their daughters in marriage at a very early age, but when they reached puberty the girl as often as not refuses to live with her husband'. Without 'strong public opinion', which would have resulted in India, the girl 'obtains her own way'. The man usually appealed to the Protector. If adultery was proven, the woman was fined but the Protector lacked the power 'to compel the girl against her inclinations'.<sup>5</sup> While females were often dragooned into

acting at the behest of their parents, in other instances they used whatever leverage they had to pursue independent choices.

As much as the colonial authorities tried to impose a system, the indentured responded innovatively. Traditions 'imagined' in India were 're-imagined' in the new setting, hence the payment of dowry by men. At the same time as tradition was being re-imagined, and inverted in this case, culture and religion were continuing threads. The suggestion that the paucity of women somehow gave them greater leverage is to discount the continuing power of patriarchal domination. Tejia was 'married off' as a child to a considerably older man. Women and girls were subject to domination not only from the state but within families as well.

Some chose to fight to achieve respite from the pincer of 'external' and 'internal' chauvinism.

## Searching for family

One of the most powerful but under-researched responses of the indentured to a system designed to brutalise them into units of labour was their determination to build a family. This confronted employers' quest to see them as numbers, and the politicians' mission to return them to India after serving their time in Natal.

The indentured struggled against difficult odds to build a semblance of family life. It was not only against the wishes of the employer that they fought. The very act of migrating meant leaving the familiar surrounds of the village and, more often than not, rupturing family. Husbands left wives; sometimes wives left husbands; sons and daughters left parents and siblings; grandparents were never to see grandchildren again. Some, though, maintained family in India, even while they formed networks in Natal.

Migration in family groups averaged 20 per cent;<sup>6</sup> the majority were single migrants, mostly men, whose quest to re-establish 'family' was complicated by the gender imbalance which, according to Tinker, 'was the main factor in shaping the life of the coolie lines'.<sup>7</sup> Sex disparity undermined efforts to establish family for those who wished to do so, and festered social problems.

This was compounded by problems such as the break-up of families in Natal; the absence of marriages across racial lines; the plantation system, with its long hours of work under extreme conditions and housing that rarely afforded privacy; and a dearth of laws pertaining to marriage, divorce, adultery, dowry and polygamy when the indentured first arrived, mainly because the Natal government did not imagine a settled Indian population.

Despite these unpromising beginnings, the indentured family survived the adversity of bondage. By the end of indenture, the 'moral family' was very much a feature of Indian society. The story of Tejia and Shewdal is indicative of a broader process. Initially the family was unstable because single men predominated, but it stabilised as the proportion of women increased. The formative indentured family was nuclear and lived by 'rules' that were different from those of the 'patrilocal joint family' found in many parts of India at the time.

This chapter examines the rupture of family in India and problems encountered in Natal; the second half examines the intervention of the state to stabilise relationships, a process fraught with difficulties.

## 'No relatives'

In Chapter 1 we saw that Maistry migrated alone, married in Durban and never again met the wife he had left behind. This was not unique. The narratives of wives and children following after the husband had 'set up' are outweighed by the number of times this did not happen. Many women, like Maistry's wife, were abandoned and faced the prejudice and opprobrium of tight-knit communities as 'married but not really'. Some, though, refused to be victims. They fought to have their claims recognised. In most cases the government did not intervene. Colonial authorities, having established a system that produced these kinds of anomalies, took a hands-off approach. Their culpability was rendered invisible. The women, perpetually suspended between the poles of marriage and divorce, were unable to remarry and had to find other means to support their families. While some would appeal in vain, others took matters into their own hands.

Adary Venkiah (117677), aged 25, arrived as an indentured migrant in January 1906 with a four-year-old daughter and a year-old son. She refused to be 'assigned' to an employer. On the ship's list, under the column 'employer', the entry reads 'not allocated'. She had come to find her husband, Ramsamy. The Protector's investigation led him to the Natal Navigation Collieries in Dundee, where Ramsamy (112027) had been indentured from March. He had promised to send money to Adary, but did not do so, and probably had no intention of doing so, as he remarried in Natal.

Second wife Mahalatchmy (112028) was his shipmate. They were of the same caste, Gavara (a small Telegu-speaking caste group from the north coastal districts of Andhra distributed in and around Anakapally in the Visakhapatnam district), and from the same village of Anakapally. It seems likely that they eloped to start a new life in Natal. They did not bargain for Adary's resilience. She not only presented a problem for her husband, but for the state as well, since the law forbade polygamy. Protector Polkinghorne wanted Ramsamy to annul his marriage to Mahalatchmy, in order to register his marriage with Adary. Recognising that her journey to meet Ramsamy would not recreate the kind of relationship she expected, Adary returned to India in April 1906.<sup>8</sup> Her journey, though, was not in vain. It provided relief for other women facing a similar predicament, as the state changed the law in 1907 to conditionally recognise polygamy.

Narrainsami (53979) was 35 when he left India in 1894. He served his indenture in Umzinto and joined the Durban Corporation. He was shocked to discover in 1901 that the wife he had left in Chingleput was living with another man in Natal. Ammagi (69760) and her new husband, Munsami (69759), arrived in November 1897 and registered their marriage with the Protector. They were both 20. Ammagi was just 17, half Narrainsami's age, when he indentured. By 1901, she and Munsami had two children, one born in Natal. Though Narrainsami tried to reclaim his wife, and wrote to the Protector that Ammagi was willing to return to him, he found no legal recourse as she had no such intention. He died in Natal in 1911, the comment on his estate papers 'no relatives' summing up his lonely fate.<sup>9</sup>

As these stories so tragically illustrate, indenture often left families in India uncertain of the whereabouts of relatives. Many, having lost a breadwinner and facing deprivation, lived in

hope of the money that was promised. As months turned into years, despair trumped hope as it dawned that they would never see kin again. Sometimes, family members were able to share news and provide comfort or vent their frustrations through letters.

Olagammal, from Madurai, made a poignant plea regarding her son Narayaran (34318), whom she described as being 'of the Vellala caste [affluent Tamil-speaking agriculturalists from Tamil Nadu], with black complexion, moderately sized with equal standard height to any detective (5ft 5in.), and moderately educated in Tamil'. Olagammal and her husband, Mahalingam Pillai – which, incidentally, is a title used by members of the Vellala caste – were 'bent with old age and the excessive sorrow' of their son's departure to 'a very great distant foreign land'. Narayaran did not communicate his 'welfare and happiness', while his residence 'were not known by anybody'. Equally important, there were no adult members in their family in India 'to support us at this important crisis, or to attend to our expecting death and as a marriage should be celebrated to him for the improvement of my family. I most humbly pray your honour to protect us by sending him back to this place.' Olagammal and Mahalingam had lost another son, Raman, a few years previously, while their daughter Irulayee had been widowed and was living 'with me helplessly'. A 'half *anna* stamp' was enclosed for the Protector's reply.<sup>10</sup> Narayaran, who had arrived in March 1885, served his indenture with Thomas Milner of Redcliffe and remained in Natal.

Aside from the obvious pain of a mother pining for her son, there are many threads running through this story. Poverty is one; the presence of their son to ensure that they received a proper burial is another; raising the economic standing of the family through his marriage is also significant. Above all, the story signals that the impact of migration on families left behind has not been given sufficient attention, largely because of the dearth of material and also due to a 'national' frame of reference in writing about indenture. These references provide enough of a glimpse into the pain that the departure of family members caused, and the incredible efforts to maintain communication. What made these separations more profound was that, for some, there was a period of communication followed by long silences. Parents, spouses and children waited in vain. In an era when communication occurred via letters transported by steamships, this could take months. The wait could translate into years and eventually into the harsh realisation of permanence.

## 'Grass widows'

Migration fractured family in India, but also created opportunities for new relationships in Natal. As many migrants were to discover, Natal was not a veritable 'Garden of Eden'. The situation was especially appalling for women. Some were hounded out of plantations through the chauvinism of indentured males or white employers, who sometimes acted in concert. Many employers regarded wives as a burden, while others were not willing for indentured women to marry men outside of their plantations.

JF Manisty, manager at the Natal Government Railways, wrote to the Protector on 31 August 1888, objecting to 16-year-old Pechayi (35498), daughter of Maduveeran (35495) and Madurayi

(35496), marrying Munsamy (6798), a free Indian who had arrived in 1874. Pechayi's family had arrived in August 1887 and she had exactly four years of her indenture left to serve. Employers, according to Manisty, were not paying for indentured labour in order for 'outsiders' to get wives. Manisty informed Pechayi's parents that Munsamy could marry her on condition that he joined the Railways Department, effectively re-indenturing himself, or paid the cost of 'importing' Pechayi. We have no record of the option Munsamy took, but given that he was 10 years removed from indenture, it is unlikely that he would have chosen to re-indenture. What we do know is that despite Manisty's objections, Munsamy took the hand of Pechayi in marriage and they lived as man and wife until Pechayi's death in 1945.<sup>11</sup>

Another example is that of JM Turnbull, who sought advice from the Protector in 1883 on how to prevent an indentured worker from bringing a woman to live as his 'wife':

I have one Indian who had a wife when I engaged him to work for me, and his wife also was to work, but after one month's pretence at work the woman refused to work any longer, and curiously enough my fowls at the same time discontinued to lay eggs! This last referred to woman sits with a basket at my gate hawking oranges, and my neighbour Mr Wallace complains that all his oranges within five feet of the ground are never gathered by him, but always by some unknown person or persons, and my Indians are suspected.

Turnbull complained that he did not have suitable accommodation, especially as the woman in question had separated from her husband 'and per adventure may have a family of one, two, three, or more, youngsters. Am I compelled to find shelter for the lot?' Deputy Protector Manning visited Turnbull and reported to the Protector that he forbade the marriage 'for I find that the woman is a grass widow and though she and her husband have been separated a long time he is living at the Umgeni'.<sup>12</sup> Two things stand out in this story – the woman's refusal to comply with Turnbull's request to work as an indentured labourer, and the use of the term 'grass widow', obviously so commonly used in reference to indentured women that Manning felt comfortable using it in official communication.

As first used by Sir Thomas More in his *Dialogue* of 1528, the phrase referred to an abandoned mistress or unmarried woman who, after cohabiting with several men, usually surreptitiously, was 'put out to grass' (abandoned). By the 1840s, it was used as slang under the British Raj for wives sent away during the hot summers to the cooler hill stations while their husbands remained on duty in the plains, creating opportunities for 'hanky-panky' in the hill stations.<sup>13</sup> This phrase had additional bearing in Natal, where many Indians lived in grass huts. 'Grass widow' referred to women of 'loose morals' who were deemed to constitute a serious problem.

## The 'wicked' angel

Young and fresh and pretty  
She swallow the world and get belly,  
All man a-take from she and go their way  
Whilst stupid you want stay.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>14</sup>

H Grant, manager of Spring Grove in Nottingham Road, reported to the Protector on 15 May 1907 that Angel (105829) was absent from roll-call on 9 April 1907. While Grant reported the matter to the police, Angel proceeded to Howick magistrate PW Shepstone to complain that on the previous Friday, when she requested her rations, Grant told her that she should return the following morning. Her husband went to Grant on Saturday but was not given the rations either. Angel confronted Grant, who called her a 'pig and a dirty beast', threatened to assault her with a stick, and accused her of being 'immoral with Natives and Indians'; he was especially upset that she would 'not have him, a White man, but preferred *kafirs*'. He warned her that he would tell the '*kafirs* to carry me to a donga and give me as much as I wanted – meaning that they all would rape me'.

From Magistrate Shepstone, Angel proceeded to Protector Polkinghorne in Durban to lodge a complaint. Angel Rangadu had arrived from Madras in August 1904. She was 24, single, Christian and stood just under five-feet tall. During the voyage, she 'married' Abdul Gaffoor Naresiban (105716), who stood out from the other passengers because of the raised mole below his right eyebrow and large tattoo on his forearm. Twenty-two-year-old Gaffoor was a Muslim from Anantpur. They lived together as man and wife on the farm. Angel was imprisoned by the magistrate in Durban while Polkinghorne wrote to Deputy Protector Dunning on 18 April to 'visit the farm and inquire into the matter'. Dunning was busy and had not attended to Angel's complaints on previous occasions. His response to Polkinghorne on 11 May 1907 was that he had 'so many matters to deal with, and letters from employers asking for visits, that I intended to call at Nottingham Road in the beginning of June'.

Dunning eventually visited Angel's employer, Greene, on 5 June. Gaffoor testified that he and Angel had been in Greene's employ for three years. She had been imprisoned by Magistrate Shepstone in Howick for 14 days and had just returned to work when she missed roll-call. Grant asked him where Angel was, and he, Gaffoor, replied that she was 'answering the calls of nature'. Grant did not believe him and punched him on the nose. Gaffoor reported this to the Howick magistrate but was told that he must 'have hurt himself'. Angel told Gaffoor that Grant accused her of 'sleeping around' and that she wanted to complain to the Protector. Gaffoor asked Greene for a pass. When he refused the request for a pass, Angel left the farm. Gaffoor appealed to Dunning, 'I want my wife back...I am in difficulties re. cooking, etc.'

Roop Sing, who was in Greene's employ for four years, testified that he had asked his employer to transfer Angel because she was causing 'serious trouble'. She was 'sleeping' with Harilal, 'a Calcutta man in Dr. Austin Robinson's employ, [who] used to often visit at her house even when her husband was in, and on one occasion when her husband was in gaol, he was there all night'. Harilal had been cautioned not to visit the estate by other workers, but continued to do so. Angel also 'had something to do with other single Indians'. On one occasion an employee from a neighbouring farm belonging to Mr Welch was robbed on that estate and 'some of the things were found in Angel's house during the week'. Gaffoor was in prison at the time and could not have been involved. Roop Sing was convinced that she was 'a bad woman [who] ought not to come back. Angel's house was like a prostitution place.' Vella Gounden, another of Greene's long-serving employees, saw Angel and another worker, Buddhia, 'having connection

in the bush'. Buddhia confessed to paying 10 shillings to have sex with Angel. On another occasion, when Vella Gounden returned to his home at 10:30 p.m., he found Harilal, with whom he shared a hut, 'hiding under my blanket and Angel was sitting on the bed'. Buddhia pleaded with Dunning to transfer Angel as she 'will ruin some of us before she has done'.

Angamuthu (112580), who had worked for Greene for two years, complained that while he was standing on the verandah of Greene's house in February 1907, he asked Angel why she slept around and she 'caught hold of me by my private parts'. Poongavanam (112730), a single woman of 20 who arrived in April 1905, a few months after Angel, claimed that Angel 'got me to sleep with a Calcutta man who was working for Dr. Robinson. This was without the knowledge of my Master till my advanced stage of pregnancy was visible.' She also testified that Angel had sexual intercourse with 'at least two or three other Calcutta men. Another Calcutta man was transferred from this farm for the same reason'. Port of origin became an important reference point for identity. Angel was a *Madrasi*, and there seemed to be an underlying concern that she was involved with *Kalkatias* (see Chapter 9). Angel and Gaffoor were transferred to The Glen in Alfred County, where they worked until their indentures were completed in 1909. He re-indentured to EM Greene, while Angel returned to India.<sup>15</sup>

What are we to make of Angel's story? We have shown that in official discourse women acquired a terrible reputation. They were seen to constitute the 'dregs' of Indian society. Respectable single women, it was held, would never emigrate. The Wragg Commission regarded single women as 'no doubt dissolute and abandoned characters'.<sup>16</sup> Police Superintendent Richard Alexander told the Wragg Commission that 'the women are constantly forgetting to whom they are married, which I don't wonder at much as the mothers of some of the girls also forget and often sell, or promise their daughters to several different men'. While the racist and sexist prejudices of white officials characterise Indian women as being of questionable morals, feminist readings of the *kala pani* see women as migrating to escape the patriarchal gender order in India and their subordinate roles within it. Migration presented an opportunity for women to renegotiate gendered identities.<sup>17</sup>

Angel's story is remarkable for the way in which she challenged the marginalisation of women. She was not tolerated, either by colonial society or by 'respectable' Indian men, because she disrupted dominant stereotypes about how Indian women should behave. There are tantalising silences in her story. One is why she chose to return to India. Another is why her 'husband' Gaffoor continued to live with her and accepted her alleged sexual 'excesses'. Was it utilitarian in that, though 'liberated', she continued to do his 'cooking'? If so, why did she continue doing these chores? The attempts of women like Angel to remap both race (accusations of sexual intercourse with African men) and gender ideologies had to be reined in, from the perspective of white and Indian men. The indentured space was a dangerous site for rupturing the patriarchal order and, over time, the story would be that of legislation to reinscribe the gendered patriarchal order, or approximations of it, and re-institute 'stable' family.

Part of the problem was the skewed gender ratio. Indenture was for a fixed period, and single men were easier to recruit, could be made to work harder, and were more likely to return to India if there were no women in Natal. Around 30 women migrated for every 70 men during



indenture. The Wragg Commission, for example, reported in 1886 that 6 703 (29.9 per cent) of the total Indian adult population of 22 359 comprised women.<sup>18</sup> In 1902, males, numbering 49 072, made up 62.4 per cent of the Indian population of 78 654. The adult ratio was much more skewed, however, as this figure included 23 073 children who were split evenly between girls and boys. Among adults, men comprised 72 per cent of the Indian population.<sup>19</sup>

## The violence within

I responded to a message at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday the 12th to visit Mt. Edgecombe to attend to Muni who had been assaulted by her husband Ramsamy two days earlier on Thursday. I found her much exhausted. All over the trunk of her body were marks of scorching from fire and the piece of the vulva and was laying by a section of skin. There was a thickish discharge of blood from the vulva. She had been assaulted by her husband two days before, her hands had been tied, also her legs, he had taken embers of burning wood from the fire and burned her all over, he had thrust his hand into the vagina and womb and forcibly extracted her two month foetus, then took the foetus out to his mealie ground and burned it, then he ran off. She started shortly after and reached Mt. Edgecombe on Saturday afternoon.<sup>20</sup>

So ran the 'bare-boned', horrifying report of the Avoca medical officer on 14 May 1883. Ramsamy was arrested in August 1883 and charged with the assault and murder of an unborn child, but committed suicide before the trial began. The reason for his actions died with him. Such violent assaults were not isolated. The life of indenture was trespassed with 'internal' violence. The institution of family itself was often an arena of brutality, as revealed in court records and complaints to the Protector. Gajadhar Ramphal (48401) was 18 when he arrived in Natal from Azingurh in 1892. He served his indenture at Blackburn Estate. With a family in India reliant on his remittances and perhaps eagerly awaiting his return, Gajadhar was hanged on 1 December 1901 for killing his wife. His letter to a brother in India, written while he awaited execution, is chilling in its practical concerns:

After I came to Natal I married a woman here. She committed adultery by going away to another person, whereupon I got so angry that I took a chopper and murdered her, and I am now going to get hanged...Kindly be good enough to perform the necessary ceremonies by calling about five or six Brahmins and distributing among them some money and clothing. Kindly don't be sorry over my misfortune but forget me. We all must die one day. I am not sure if mother has died. If she is dead kindly be good enough to conclude the necessary ceremonies on my behalf.

Gajadhar was a man of fair means, as the inventory of his estate showed. He had completed his indenture a few months previously, and leased four acres of land on which were planted pineapples, bananas and beans. He owned sheep, 200 bundles of tobacco, jewellery, clothing and cutlery. Gajadhar and his wife had lived near Tilak, his father-in-law. By all accounts they had been a fairly stable family.<sup>21</sup>

The following report poignantly captures the extreme violence of wife murders, while at the same time raising questions about what drove men to such extremes:

At the coolie huts in the vicinity of Botanical Gardens, an Indian entered his hut shortly before 9:00 p.m. and deliberately killed his wife by hacking her head well nigh into pieces with a spade. He used such force that the edge of the spade turned and had particles of flesh and hair on it. When sergeant Home arrived on the scene the coolie cut his throat with a razor.<sup>22</sup>

There are two mainstream explanations for wife murders. The first was the shortage of women. For example, the Reverend HH Stott told the Wragg Commission that he often heard ‘complaints from men that women run away from them to other men on estates. There is a good deal of immorality on the estates. I think that the percentage of women who come out should be increased.’<sup>23</sup>

A higher proportion of women would have provided stability and reduced tensions, the argument runs. The gender imbalance was compounded by the ‘immorality’ of Indian women. Dr WP Tritton of Umzinto offered economic necessity and ‘lust’ as contributing factors. He told the Wragg Commission that when husbands were sick, women were forced into prostitution for ‘their means of subsistence’. More than that, ‘I distinctly think that they do it for the love of lust.’<sup>24</sup> In his 1877 report, the Protector felt that the punishment for adultery (£10) ‘appears to be excessive when the description and too often character of the women are taken into consideration’, an affirmation of the scorn with which they were held.<sup>25</sup> A second set of explanations was cultural. Colonial officials, planters and missionaries held that the phenomenon of wife murders was transplanted from India, where men were predisposed to violence to resolve disputes, and were not concerned about the consequences for themselves or their victims.<sup>26</sup>

Recent scholarship has challenged these explanations and suggested that we factor in the authoritarian structure of plantations and the absence of social support systems.<sup>27</sup> As Mishra points out in his review of Brij V Lal’s *Chalo Jahaji*:

Lal debunks some tenacious myths – such as the popular view that...sexual jealousy was a primary cause of murder and suicide in Fiji...In the end, however, it was an expression of all that was wrong with a labour system based on gender disproportion, narrow barrack housing lacking in privacy, non-recognition of customary marriage practices, and collusion in the excesses of task-work that forced some women into prostitution.<sup>28</sup>

Lal suggests that ‘sexual jealousy’ was a convenient catch-all phrase that masked complex underlying problems. This included the inability of indentured men to restore traditional patriarchal dominance. When women like Angel and Votti challenged them, some men resorted to violence, both against their wives and themselves.<sup>29</sup> The ‘challenges’ from women, which frustrated men, may have been small, everyday matters, as reflected in this letter, dated 22 March 1908, from Govind Naicker, a gatekeeper at Jameson Crossing at South Coast Junction, to the Protector:

I am tired of my wife and life owing to her awful miserable self; she is in fact a regular bane to my sacred body and soul. It seems to me that if I do not get in the first blow, this fiend in human form will surely do so. Am I then a man to suffer more humiliation from a woman? By the beard of Sultan Tippoo Sultan I will...But the point in issue is how are you to know if I am telling the truth. Well, how would it do if your excellent body can visit my humble abode. Of course, I will prepare tea...If you are cross I hope you will strike my wife first...[and] after the thrashing can you not send her to another place and scratch out my name as being her awful husband. If your Worship in conclusion will give this humble cry your right ear, I will pray with all my hugs to Shiva to give you a long life and abundant riches.<sup>30</sup>

Not only did the Protector ignore the appeal, he made fun of it by writing to Naicker's manager that his visiting 'will depend upon what brand of tea I am refreshed with'. Even allowing for Naicker's excesses, this simple appeal points to the kinds of challenges faced by men with traditional expectations of women, such as 'acceptance of fate, glorification of motherhood and virginity, deference to male authority and, above all, worship of the husband', which were endorsed by religious scripture (Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*), gurus and sages, as well as the patriarchal structure of Indian agrarian society.

Migration, as we have pointed out, restructured gender relations. If we add to the gender imbalance the dependence of women on men for rations, then the ability of some women to earn an independent income, so ending their dependency on men, combined with the absence of kinship networks and lack of recognition of Hindu and Muslim marriages, in part explains why relationships between indentured men and women were fraught with tension and violence.<sup>31</sup>

## 'Tonight, have your door open'

I [Sasamah] am the wife of Chengadoo of Rydal Vale Estate, Duffs Road. I am employed on the estate as field labourer. Three Mondays ago the overseer asked me to lie with him. I refused. He asked me several times after this to lie with him. I declined to do so on all occasions. On Monday week last in the afternoon I was put to work alone apart from other women close to a cane field. I refused to work alone. He said that I must work where he says. I was doing my work. He left me and came back a few minutes after and said that he would have connection with me. With that he carried me into a large cane field. I cried out for help but there were no one working near to hear my cry. He carried me and threw me on my back in the field. He lifted up my cloth and got between my legs. Before committing the act he stuffed cloth in my mouth and had connexion with me. I felt he passed semen into me. Before leaving me he said if I told anyone he would cut my throat.<sup>32</sup>

Such sexual assaults, carried out by men who wielded power, appear in the record books from time to time. According to Tinker, there was great 'obscurity' about white planters abusing Indian women sexually. The 1871 Commission of Enquiry in British Guiana reported that it

was not 'at all uncommon for overseers, and even managers, to form temporary connections with Coolie women'. In many instances, whites 'merely demonstrated their contempt for the Indians by taking their women casually' but sometimes there was 'genuine affection in a stable, long-lasting relationship'.<sup>33</sup>

Leslie Philip, an overseer in British Guiana, wrote a memoir of his life on the plantation, entitled *Single Men in Barracks*, in which he described his 'liaison' with Rajama, 'a comely but slightly promiscuous young *Madrassi* [*sic*] whose husband was indolent...Their ideas of entertainment differed: she being interested in the body, and he in the spirit, so to speak. Thus it was that Rajama spent one Saturday night in my quarters.'<sup>34</sup>

Natal was no exception. The racist nature of colonial society ensured that 'affection' and long-lasting relationships were considered an aberration. Goolam Khader worked on the south coast. He asked the manager, Ramart, for a pass to go to Umzinto one afternoon, and returned the following day. When he returned, his 'two wives' told him that shortly after he left the 'young master' visited them and told them 'tonight have your door open', as he and Ramart would pay them five shillings each for sex. A 'coolie named Isebode saw Mr. Ramart and the girl come out of the ration shed at ten o'clock at night. Mr. Ramart went one way and the girl the other.'<sup>35</sup>

In another instance, Vellach complained to the Deputy Protector that Hulley, her employer, offered to pay her for sex while she was in his bedroom 'regulating it...He came in, striking his pocket and saying he would give me £3 if I were to lie with him, as the mistress and her family had gone to town. I refused saying my husband would beat me. He said he would not tell him.'<sup>36</sup> Hulley's defence was that he could not have made this proposition because Vellach was 'unattractive'. He was found not guilty. The employer's word was sacrosanct.

The story of Chengadoo's wife Sasamah yielded similar results. Prosecutor James McLaren of Verulam informed the Protector on 4 October 1881 that he would not prosecute because of 'lack of witnesses'. It is hard to imagine witnesses risking giving evidence against men in authority who, in most cases, had the backing of employers.

## The ultimate taboo

Sex across race lines did not only involve white men and Indian women. We saw in Chapter 9 a few liaisons between Indians and Africans, and while we do not have many examples, we can assume that there were such encounters between Indian men and white women. We are indebted to Badassy for pointing us to some of these.

He burnt his mind in acid of his own alchemy  
Desperate to colonise her  
To redeem her from the white world  
That would reduce him to mute captivity.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>37</sup>

Venkaya, a 32-year-old domestic servant, was found guilty of raping 18-year-old Stella Mary. The incident, which took place on 31 December 1917, was described by Venkaya as follows. Stella's mother had gone to the city, her brother was in Maritzburg, and her father at work.

Venkaya brought the mail into the house and handed it to Stella, who was cutting meat in the kitchen. As she turned, he grabbed her arms, threw her to the ground and raped her. He managed to 'hold her to the ground' even though 'she struggled'. He heard nothing of the matter until he was charged two months later. The family would not have laid charges because of the scandal and embarrassment, but had to do so when Stella became pregnant. It is not known what happened to the child.

In another incident in 1907, Masilamy Mudali was charged with indecently assaulting Gladys Maud and sentenced to 10 years with hard labour. Frederick Nicol, a trooper with the Natal Police, related to the court what Mudali told him. He, Mudali, was cleaning his master's boots in the kitchen when Gladys walked in. She sat 'on a sack and pulled up her clothes. She told me in kitchen *kafir*...that I was to put my person in her. I took out my person and put it into her undergarment and emitted my semen on her garments.'<sup>38</sup>

In reviewing such cases, Badassy argues that while clearly there were sexual assaults and rapes, in many instances the verdict was determined more by the concern of white men to 'guard' sexual and racial boundaries, and less by the evidence.

## (Un)holy cows

It was because we were deemed animals in the first place that the recruiters sold us into indenture. We learned animal ways right from the start. AN INDENTURED 'GURU'<sup>39</sup>

In discussing the struggle to build family life there is a danger of romanticising the victory of 'good' over 'evil'. This would gloss over the degradation that the indentured had to contend with. Many men were in the prime of their lives, working hard and, if 'back home', might long have been married.

These marriages would have invariably been facilitated by family and village elders, and for both men and women might have been their first and sometimes only relationship. In Natal, the indentured male was cast into an environment where established 'ways of living' were torn asunder, and while this might have freed him from the strictures of time-honoured traditions, the gender imbalance created an immediate barrier to developing a relationship or even satisfying sexual needs.

Outlets were found. Prostitutes, sharing a woman and homosexuality, of which there is total silence, were all options. Rare charges of sodomy involving Indians were brought to light: Gopal (1885),<sup>40</sup> Manjoo (1903)<sup>41</sup> and David Ramsamy (1904),<sup>42</sup> to name a few. There was another outlet that, while largely hidden, was every now and again made public: bestiality. Reading through the court records, there are some references to bestiality as a solution adopted by some to meet their sexual needs.

So, for example, Behron was accused of bestiality and appeared in court on 18 February 1905. He worked in the orchardist's department on a government farm at Cedara. Daniel Main, a carpenter in the department, caught Behron in the act of bestiality on 27 November 1904. He testified:

About quarter past eight in the morning I was at the Dairy for milk. On approaching the door I observed the accused standing behind a cow on a stool. When I went close up to the door I could see him plainly insert his penis into the cow's vagina. His penis was straight. I stood back then to see if anyone was about the place...I stepped in and asked him where the boss was and he said something, at the same time turning his back to me. I do not know what he said. He was at the same time buttoning his trousers. He went out. I examined the cow. I found what I thought was the coolie's discharge. I waited until the stockman came down and I reported the matter to him.

Behron was sentenced to six years with hard labour. Another who faced a similar accusation was Ramsingh, a waiter at the Imperial Hotel. Antar drove the 'bus' to the station at 10 p.m. every night. One evening, when he returned from the hotel at 10:40 p.m., he put the horses into the stable and went to fetch corn for their feed. When he returned, he saw Ramsingh on a box in the stable:

I then saw the accused having connection with the mare. He was standing in this position [indicated] and was holding the mare's tail with his left hand. He had on a black pair of trousers. His body was naked just below his person and his trousers were down below his privates. I saw him putting his penis into the mare's privates. He saw me and ran away. I then went and informed the manager what I had seen. The mare was white with a little black hair. On two previous occasions I saw the box behind the mare. The next day with his two hands he forced two pounds into my pockets. I took it to my Master. He said 'you take it to the Court.'

Ramsingh was sentenced to two years with hard labour.<sup>43</sup>

## Regulating relationships

Many single migrants formed relationships on board ships, at depots or at places of employment. Whether a ceremony was performed or not, it was clear to officials and employers that the migrants understood themselves to be 'married'. Marriages solemnised by religious leaders were not recognised in Natal, and the status of such relationships was unclear. As the numbers of Indians increased and domestic complaints began filtering through, the authorities were unsure how to resolve such disputes as there were no laws governing Indian marriages and divorces. The existing laws applied to Christians only.

The Coolie Commission's recommendations translated into a law which required the Protector to compile a register of Indian women, stating whether they were 'married', 'single' or 'concubines', and to register 'valid' marriages. The law also made the registration of future marriages compulsory. It was an offence for men to 'seduce' married women or 'entice' unmarried girls under 16 from their parents. Those guilty of adultery or seduction could be punished by a fine of £10, 30 days' imprisonment or 20 lashes.<sup>44</sup> Between 1873 and June 1886, 4 998 marriages were registered. This included 27 cases in which the husband had two wives (25 Hindu and two Muslim). Some couples married across religious lines.

20. 11. 1877  
69

COPY OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS MARRIAGE REGISTER, Section 70, Law No. 25, 1891.  
FOR SUBMISSION TO THE PROTECTOR OF IMMIGRANTS.

Official Numbers of Contracting Parties	If Colonial Born, Official Numbers of Parents.	Name.	Sex.	Age.	Alode.	Race.	Religion.	Date of Declaration of Marriage.	Date of Registration of Marriage.	Signature of Registering Officer.
132659 ✓	-	Joggaru Annah M	M	24	do	Indian	Heathen	1 <sup>st</sup> October 09	1 <sup>st</sup> October 09	R. C. [Signature]
132759 ✓	-	Sulbahal	F	28	do	do	do	1 <sup>st</sup> October 09	1 <sup>st</sup> October 09	R. C. [Signature]

Although marriage certificates listed their religion as 'heathen', the indentured proved much more resilient in following their own faiths than Christian missionaries anticipated.

There were 115 marriages between Hindus and Muslims, one between a Muslim and a Christian, 12 between Christians and Hindus, 23 between migrants from Madras and Calcutta, and 22 between Christian Indians.<sup>45</sup> The Wragg Commission would observe a decade later that registration did not put an end to adultery but provided a means for the authorities to establish the 'validity' of marriages. It also gave married women 'a proper status, making them respectable in the eyes of the men, and thereby raising their own self-respect'.<sup>46</sup>

Some Indians were prevented from registering their marriage because the law required a ceremony before registration without specifying what that ceremony should be. Deputy Protector Manning reported in 1883 that he had come across many couples who considered themselves 'married' even though there had been no civil marriage, Brahmanical ceremony, nuptial feast or registration. He regarded it as 'natural that when single men and women are working together they should form attachments, and when I find that to be the case I urge they should be married. Almost without exception they eagerly consent but say that neither they nor their masters know what the law is'.<sup>47</sup>

Manning felt that if couples considered themselves 'married', the authorities should register them. The requirement for a ceremony should be dropped for a practical reason. Many couples had children, even though they were of different castes or religions. They 'wish to acknowledge their union and legitimise their children, but the marriage of such different castes being contrary to their traditions it would be very difficult except as a civil contract'. The Wragg Commission concurred that a ceremony was not practical when the bride and groom were of different 'races, religion, and castes'.<sup>48</sup> Registration should constitute the marriage.

Another problem was that many Indians could not 'write at all and when they can write any language it is Tamil, Telooqoo, Nagari or Farsi. These languages would be unintelligible to the Marriage Officer'.<sup>49</sup> The authorities were also reluctant to register marriages when migrants first arrived. The reason, the Protector explained to the Colonial Secretary on 11 June 1877, was that many migrants 'who eagerly desired on their first arrival to live together no less eagerly demanded to be separated from one another in the course of a month or two'.<sup>50</sup>

The indeterminate status of Indian marriages compounded problems caused by the shortage of women and socio-economic conditions, and as the indentured built a semblance of family life and gained in confidence and numbers, so the colonial authorities found it difficult to ignore the fundamental changes going on in indentured life and the 'silences' of the law.

The response was not born out of benevolence. One of the crucial ideological edifices of indenture was the sanction of 'the law', and once this was exposed as in any way lacking by the agency of the indentured, the gatekeepers of indenture had to respond.

## Mahadeo of 'the distillers' caste': can marriage be dissolved?

Because I drank rum and beat your  
Young, soft, wet-eyed face  
You didn't sing with the gladness of other women  
How your mouth was sour like tamarind.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>51</sup>

If what constituted marriage was uncertain, so was what to do when marriage broke down. The 1872 law did not give the Protector or magistrates the power to dissolve marriages. Only the Supreme Court could grant a divorce, an option that few Indians could afford. In the period 1860 to 1887, only two marriages were terminated by the Supreme Court.<sup>52</sup> The Protector noted in 1877 that 'the necessity an Indian is under of suing for divorce in the Supreme Court is often felt to be a hardship – as the expense of such a course is, as a rule, altogether beyond his means'.<sup>53</sup>

This created obvious problems, as highlighted by an investigation by Protector MacLeod in October 1877 involving Soyrub Nudairchand (9799) and Mahadeo Madho (9610), who met on board the *Blenheim* and registered their marriage on 16 October 1874. Soyrub was 20, of the Bagdee caste (lower-caste agricultural worker) from Burdwan, while Mahadeo was 22 and from Allahabad. They served their indenture at Kennedy's estate in Sea Cow Lake. Giving credence to what Mason observed about the tenuous nature of such relationships, Mahadeo 'got rid' of Soyrub after 10 days. 'Hardship' followed as she 'supported [herself] by working on the estate of Mr. Kennedy by the hoe for two years'.

Mahadeo continued to live on the same estate. He was of 'the distillers caste and frequently gets drunk and smokes dagga, and used to beat me when in that state. I have been obliged to stay with other men when I could not get sufficient work to keep me.' A year later she moved in with Buldeo. A child was born and they wished to legally marry. To do this Soyrub had to divorce Mahadeo. Several witnesses testified on her behalf. Seetha, a co-worker, described Mahadeo as 'a drunken violent character' whom the manager, Agnew, 'frequently had to fasten until he was sober', whereas Soyrub bore 'the character of a good quiet woman'.

MacLeod found Mahadeo 'guilty of cruelty and desertion' but had 'no power by law to afford any redress'. Unlike the Secretary for Native Affairs, who was authorised to dissolve African marriages, Attorney-General Gallwey confirmed on 7 December 1877 that the Protector could not grant divorces among Indians.<sup>54</sup> From the ships' lists it seems that Mahadeo deserted shortly after and disappeared from Soyrub's life, but she was not able to get a legal divorce.



## Rungabee: can a husband be guilty of adultery?

I can see, how in stature, thou didst grow

Shoulders up, head held high, the challenge, in thine eye.

RAJKUMARI SINGH<sup>55</sup>

Women like Soyrub found themselves in an untenable position when attempting to file for divorce. At the same time, as Rungabee's case shows, while the law was biased against women, occasionally some successfully fought for justice. On 4 February 1884, Rungabee (234) of Church Street in Martizburg wrote to the Protector for assistance 'as a poor and helpless woman. What am I to do? Am I to be deprived of all I had?' Rungabee Seethojee cuts a fascinating figure. As her indentured number indicates, she had arrived on the very first ship – the *Truro* – from Mysore as part of a group of three single women, the others being Vyradoo Reddy (233) and Janabee Peer Ahmed (235). Her caste is listed as 'Muslim/Maratha'. She was a Muslim as her name, like those of most Muslim women, ended in 'bee'.

She had married Veeramuthoo (5397) on 20 June 1873. By 1882 he had left her and moved in with another woman, with whom he had a child. Rungabee was left 'entirely without any means of subsistence. Do you, Sir, consider this right? Am I to get no justice at all? As you are my Protector so I appeal to you to have him brought to justice. If I had means to afford a lawyer I would take him to court.'

Veeramuthoo Murday was 20 when he arrived on the *Porchester* in September 1865. He was of the Malabar caste (agriculturalists from Kerala) from Chittoor, and 14 years her junior. Rungabee wanted the Protector to charge Veeramuthoo with adultery, desertion, cruelty and theft of her property. The law was biased against women. As Protector Mason explained to Attorney-General Gallwey, the law of 1872 did not 'contemplate a wife charging her husband with going with other women. A man may charge another man with seducing his wife or his unmarried daughter or he may charge his wife with adultery but it does not say a wife may charge her husband with adultery.' Deputy Protector Manning could therefore not adjudicate on the adultery charge.

But Rungabee was not to be denied justice. She instituted proceedings in the civil courts for 'provisions' for herself and their son. Veeramuthoo offered 30 shillings per month, lodging, and a bag of rice every three months. Manning considered this a 'fair offer' and complained that Rungabee would take 'nothing but that which it is beyond my power to give'. She wanted an equal division of the properties and jewellery, and would not budge 'until justice was served'. According to Manning, 'although she keeps saying she is starved almost to death, she persists that she will not accept an allowance, but will take nothing less than a division of the property'. Mason opined that while Rungabee 'may be right...I believe it is not in my power to give'.

Rungabee persisted until Manning investigated her claims. He discovered that she and Veeramuthoo had purchased three properties in 1875, 1880 and 1882 in Longmarket, Church and Prince Alfred streets in the name 'Veeramuthoo Rungabee'. Mason decided on 24 January 1884 that since the names 'Veeramuthoo Rungabee' appeared on the title deeds, Rungabee was fairly entitled to her share 'notwithstanding that the copulative conjunction "and" appears to have been omitted, and to my mind this was obviously a mistake by the conveyancers'. The

couple owned jewellery worth £130 and properties valued at £680. Manning gave Veeramuthoo two properties worth £400, and Rungabee one valued at £280 and the jewellery.<sup>56</sup> While Rungabee was not able to file for grievances under laws pertaining to adultery, she achieved justice by demanding her share of the properties.

Women like Rungabee, who persisted in their claims despite the reluctance of authorities to prosecute them, were the exception, but it was these 'exceptions' that helped bend the 'rules', albeit ever so slightly.

## Thoyee and the imperative of control

Marriage and divorce remained major bones of contention. Women often sought separations from husbands who deserted them or were abusive, but the Protector could not dissolve marriages. He commented in 1876 that he was 'frequently besought by the women to grant them divorces, but never by men'.<sup>57</sup>

Essop-Sheik has discussed one especially striking example which exposed the anomaly in the law.<sup>58</sup> Thoyee (5531) arrived on the *Porchester* in September 1865 with her parents, Nirsimloo Ramsamy (5529) and Lutchmee (5530). When she was 13, she married Rungiah, and they registered the marriage with the Protector in July 1877. Rungiah was already married with three children. After five years, in March 1882, he sent Thoyee back to her father, who could 'scarcely afford to keep her'.

Rungiah was subsequently accused of 'seducing his eldest daughter and [having] connection with her'. She complained to the magistrate and Rungiah fled Natal. Thoyee, who was around 18 or 19, wanted a divorce but the law did not permit this. The Protector described Thoyee as 'a very respectable woman. Since her husband ran away she has been living with her parents. The father is unable to keep her any longer. Can anything be done towards obtaining a divorce for her?' The Colonial Secretary ruled that divorce could not be granted but that a Bill was being debated in the Legislative Council.<sup>59</sup> However, this Bill was withdrawn at the second reading in 1883.

The absence of provision for divorce may seem surprising, as it would have allowed women whose husbands had deserted or abandoned them to remarry. However, as Essop-Sheik rightly suggests, this must be seen in the broader context of the imperative of 'control' that animated indenture. The state wanted to bind women in marital unions under male control and feared that divorce would increase the number of 'vagrant' women, which would constitute a 'moral' problem.

But there was more in the silences that permeated the law. The system of indenture was designed to accommodate atomised individuals who would, at the end of their contract, either re-indenture or return to India. The indentured, in trying to build family life, were not only challenging the lacunae in the law but, in the process, subverting what the 'system' desired to turn them into.

## The three 'sisters'

Following the recommendations of the Wragg Commission, the government intervened in Indian Personal Law with Law 25 of 1891, which made marriage into a civil agreement permitting monogamous unions only. This law did not eradicate the practice of polygamy. In some ways the law left women more vulnerable because the marriages of second and third wives were not recognised. The struggle over Charlie Nulliah's will is one fascinating example of this. We met Nulliah in Chapter 1 when he was accused of trying to seduce Votti. The authorities stopped him then, but not for long. Nulliah lived in Maritzburg. This son of indentured labourers had turned himself into a wealthy businessman and leading 'community figure' in the city.

He had three wives and 20 children. All three wives lived with him in the same home. Eight children were born to first wife Veeramah (1871–1955), who had a direct link to the *Truro*. She was the daughter of Permall Subroydoo (4808) and Vencamah Ramchandaroo (207), who had arrived on the first shipment of migrants. Nulliah and Veeramah married according to Hindu rites on 7 February 1889, and registered their marriage with the Protector on 3 July of the same year. They were married in community of property. Second wife Natchara (1881–1943) had five children, while seven children were born to Nulliah's third wife, Alloomaloo.

The law only considered Nulliah's marriage to Veeramah legal. His will records that this marriage was 'legal' while the other two were conducted according to Hindu rites. Nulliah regarded all three women as his *bona fide* wives, and provided for them equally in his will. To do so, he had to change his marriage contract with Veeramah. On 25 June 1931, they executed a postnuptial contract in English excluding community of property from their marriage. After Nulliah's death, Veeramah challenged the contract on the grounds that she had only signed it because she was 'an illiterate person who could not read English, who was unsure of its nature and effect, and in consequence of the undue influence exercised over her by her husband'.

Veeramah declared that 'during the subsistence of the marriage deceased had, by his domineering manner, established an ascendancy, and throughout enforced compliance not only by verbal commands but, when necessary, by the use of physical violence'. She also claimed that she had been 'instructed' to sign the contract, the implication of which was not 'explained or interpreted' to her until after Nulliah's death, when she 'repudiated it'. Had she understood the contract, she 'would not have taken a knife and cut my own throat...By that I mean I would not have consented to give away what was to come to me.'

Veeramah sued Nulliah's estate for cancellation of the postnuptial contract and an order entitling her to a half-share of the estate. Justice Broome, giving judgment on 15 September 1945, accepted that Nulliah 'intended to be, and succeeded in being, master in his own house. His family usually complied with his wishes though, on occasion, he had to enforce compliance by a resort of force. The same might be said of any Indian patriarch of his class.' This comment is important in suggesting that the patriarchal nature of Indian society and the prevalence of violence were accepted as 'normal'. But Broome dismissed the notion that Nulliah succeeded in 'establishing an ascendancy' over Veeramah; rather, she 'realised the

importance of peace in the house and would be ready to defer to him as the head of the house, particularly in business matters'. He had no doubt that Veeramah knew what she was signing.

Broome established that on 25 June 1931, Nulliah, his three wives and Natchara's son, Mariemuthoo, went to the office of Nulliah's attorney, Leslie Smith, who explained the contract to Nulliah, Veeramah and Mariemuthoo, while Alloomaloo and Natchara waited in the car. They proceeded to the City Hall and signed the new contract in English before William Stranack, the Justice of the Peace. Nulliah then told his three wives in Tamil, speaking 'affectionately, quietly, clearly, pleasantly': 'Now that the registration of Veeramah's marriage is broken, and now that I am not feeling well, I will be drawing up a will and leaving the estate to the three wives and their children. In the event of my death I want you [Veeramah] to look after the other two wives as your sisters.' For Broome, it was clear that Nulliah 'wished to ensure that after his death his three wives would be upon an equal footing'. Broome therefore gave judgment against Veeramah on 15 September 1945. He revealed his ingrained prejudices when he admitted that he did not understand why Nulliah did not sign the contract at Smith's office: 'The reason remains hidden in the inscrutable recesses of the Oriental mind.'<sup>60</sup>

In trying to build family life, the indentured forced changes in legislation and, where this did not work in their favour, found innovative ways to circumvent the law. The Indian Marriages Act of 1907 tried to make space for some aspects of religious law. The state discovered that prohibiting polygamous marriages sometimes made women more vulnerable and accepted as valid such unions contracted in India, as well as marriages where men contracted a subsequent union in Natal without the knowledge of the first wife. Monogamy was thus compromised.<sup>61</sup> The Immigrants Regulation Act of 1913 tightened this loophole by permitting only the first wife and minor children of a domiciled Indian to enter the country, even though Hinduism and Islam recognised polygamy. The famous 'Searle Judgment', which confirmed this interpretation of the law, would form one of the grievances of Indians during the 1913 strike.

## (Re)constructing the 'moral' family

We have witnessed many misfortunes and heartbreaking stories in the preceding pages. And yet many Indians succeeded in establishing a family. By 1886, almost 5 000 marriages had been registered. While the struggle was difficult and the obstacles many, towards the end of indenture the 'moral' family was evident. This is shown in photographs taken from the late 1890s where family, and occasionally the extended family, dressed in all their finery, stare at the camera lens.

The gradual move towards demographic maturity was due partly to more females than males being born, more males returning to India under the repatriation scheme, and immigration being restricted to the wives of males already domiciled in South Africa. The proportion of males to females dropped from 130.9:100 in 1921 to 106.4:100 in 1946.<sup>62</sup> Many of the families that emerged were of the extended variety. In a 1945 survey of Merebank and Springfield, Kuper reported that 57 per cent of households were extended.<sup>63</sup> An analysis of

marriage patterns would show that the development of solidarity and communal life centred on friendships formed during the journey from India. Jithoo has recorded examples of extended families 'constructed' as migrants moved out of indenture.

Choudhry (1864–1920), for example, came to Durban as an indentured migrant in 1886. After completing his indenture, he worked as a fisherman. He married Rajni and they had two sons and three daughters. Though he was not educated, Choudhry made sure that his sons received an education. The family took up market gardening in Greyville, until Choudhry opened a dairy in Sydenham where he, his wife and sons Ramataur and Ben, who were both married, lived. After Choudhry's death in 1920, Ramataur and Ben lived in the home until 1930, when they split over a business dispute. Ramataur lived with his mother, wife, three sons and two daughters. He sold the dairy and opened a small shop. The two eldest sons left school early to help in the business and they supported the youngest son to obtain a university degree. The business flourished and Ramataur opened a second shop in Isipingo, as well as a cinema. By now Ramataur was prominent in various charities and promoted the Hindi language and culture. All three sons continued to live with him. The glue that bound them was that they 'all worked for the common good'.<sup>64</sup>

Another example is that of Chellan, who came to Natal in the 1860s at the age of 17. He worked at Glendale and, upon completing his indenture, married a woman from Springfield, where they took up market gardening. They had six sons and two daughters. Chellan's sons were chefs at white-owned hotels in Durban. By 1918, four were married and, as grandchildren were born, it became impossible to continue living together. Three sons and their wives moved to a house close by, while Chellan lived with his wife, two unmarried sons, and eldest son and his wife and children. Chellan died in 1921. Joint living gave families material security against poverty, and provided internal economies of scale through joint management and division of labour.<sup>65</sup>

As a result of differences in class, religion and custom, we cannot speak of 'the Indian family'. What was clear though is that the traditional joint family was 'patrilocal' with brothers, their wives and children living in a common household with the father of the men as patriarch.<sup>66</sup> Patterns of domination, in theory, included fathers over sons, men over women, mothers over daughters-in-law, and elders over the young.

The extended family was an important strategy for surviving in Natal, as scarce resources were pooled to escape the more pernicious effects of poverty. It also allowed for the reproduction of cultural and religious practices – a vital part of the indentured armoury in protecting them from becoming dehumanised units of labour. However, it is important that we do not idealise the Indian family, for inscribed in family life would be the reassertion of patriarchy and the oppression of women in the household. If we have (re)covered the way family came to be under indenture, much work remains to (un)cover the social relations that marked its inner workings. For now, the crucial point is that from the crucible of indenture, family was reinvented through 'myth, memory, mind or manner', and 'provided a deep anchorage in terms of survival'.<sup>67</sup>

## Turning numbers into families

Social relations on plantations saw the freedom of movement of the indentured minutely policed, time and resources for entertainment limited, and social interaction shadowed by the disparity in the ratio of men to women. It was in this environment, permeated by violence, the vulnerability of women to assault and rape, and a lack of clarity around what constituted marriage, that the indentured and their offspring tried to build family life.

There are many threads to pick in this narrative. We see in the dowry system the capacity of the indentured to be flexible with regard to traditional practices, while in the reliance on the 'guru' and religious sanction, we see the continued importance of tradition. As the indentured found themselves in changed circumstances, they pragmatically wove together old and new ways of doing things. But this process was often inscribed with tension and conflict, especially when men found their power undermined as women challenged gender norms.

Many women lived lives where violence or the threat of it was an everyday experience. Their vulnerability was created by a system that saw them at best as an 'unnecessary nuisance' and made them largely invisible at the level of the law. The irony was that their subordinated status was mostly highlighted when they were victims of violence. Witness the case of a woman who required emergency surgery for a debilitating illness. As the medical staff prepared her for surgery, they noticed that her thighs and legs were covered in sores and weals. When confronted with the wounds, her employer nonchalantly replied that he had whipped her to get her to perform her duties.<sup>68</sup> Stories like this could easily portray women as abject victims, silencing their voices and denying them agency. As some of the women in this book show, they fought back valiantly. Even in cases like that of Veeramah, where they failed, their struggles paved the way for others to take up issues. The overt violence of men, at least in the immediate, was sometimes neutralised through the legal route.

While faced with religious, regional and a myriad of other divisions, the indentured were, here and there, piercing the legal, physical and spatial boundaries of the 'system'. Important changes were occurring. In opting for divorce, in marrying across religious and caste boundaries, in sometimes preferring not to marry, they were imagining themselves into being a 'community', to paraphrase Benedict Anderson.<sup>69</sup> As Bill Freund has pointed out, what was 'recreated was not exactly a duplicate of any particular Indian society, but a new, creolized world that reflected mutual influences among Indian people and interaction with White, "Coloured" and African people in the new environment'.<sup>70</sup>

Many other changes were visible. We have seen examples of men helping their wives deliver babies, men cooking, men tending to children. In various ways, the institution of family was different from that which Indians had left behind in their journey across 'the Mad Ocean' into indenture. At the same time, we should not overstate this difference. The stories related in this and other chapters also point to men insisting that wives cook, clean the home, nurse ill workers and take care of children. We have anecdotal evidence of women taking meals to the fields, tending to children, engaging in formal and informal work, and generally

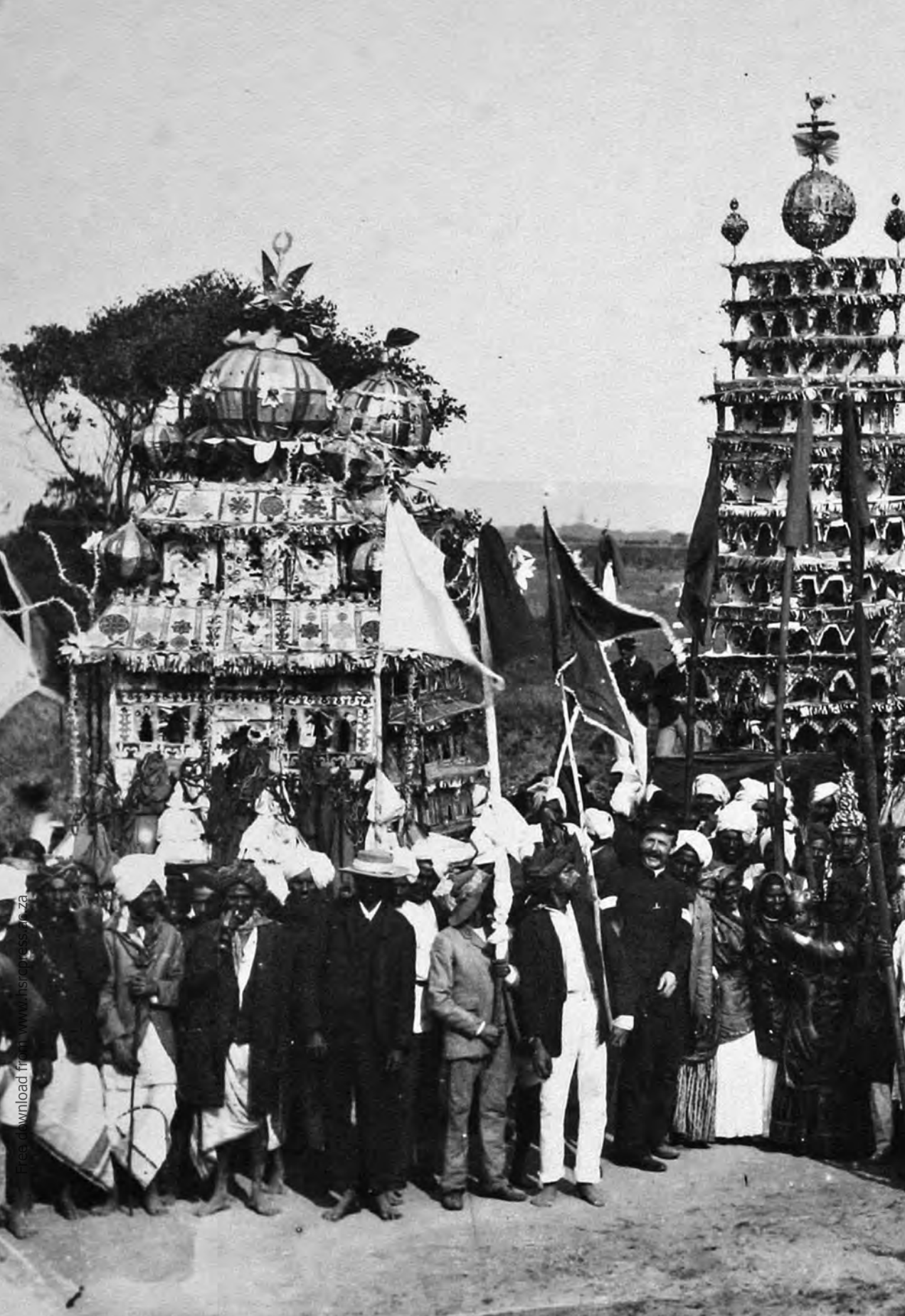
taking care of the 'household'.

The Indian 'community' was not built *de novo*. It often relied on the myths and memories of 'back home'. But the places of worship built as replicas, and the increasing salience of religious men, only served to mask the remarkable changes in the life of the indentured. The system was designed to turn numbers into units of labour. The most important counter to this was the building of family, which facilitated networks of sharing and communication. For Freund, the family 'must have been an enormously important and absorbing aspect of life in this period'.<sup>71</sup> While we have mostly focused on the 'problems' faced by Indians, there were many examples of husbands seeking redress for wives and vice versa. For the majority, the family was the shield against the worst excesses of indenture, the suture that provided solace, affirmation and even dignity.

But it was also a shield that in many cases hid power relations, that reinscribed patriarchy, as much as it proved the antidote to a system driven to treat the indentured only in the present, a people without history or future. While family brought with it changes in the legal system, it also brought children. With children came thoughts of a life without the strictures of indenture, and demands for education. The desire for children to have a life beyond indenture, and a determination for their children to trespass into the 'White man's economy', with more resources than they had, is poignantly captured by a group of ex-indentured Indians – Jhankie, Dookhan, Ramburn-Davy, Herbut Maharaj, Goorah, Bundoor, Padaret, Martin, Jubsing, Guthar and Bargubin – who travelled to the Wragg Commission hearings in 1885 to tender the following evidence: 'We are Calcutta men... We should like our children to be taught English.'<sup>72</sup>

A simple but powerful message.

In the next chapter we focus on the only time of the year when the indentured streamed out of the plantations, coal mines and urban barracks in huge numbers, lighting up the streets with song and dance and floats of dizzy colour.







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# When the 'coolies' made Christmas

The carnival was the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom and abundance...As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated a temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.

MIKHAIL BAKHTIN<sup>1</sup>

Indentured Muslims, Christians and Hindus all participated in the festival of Muharram,<sup>2</sup> or 'Coolie Christmas' as it was known in Natal. This was the one time in the year that the indentured from different plantations could come together outside the persistent gaze of the employer. For some, the mixture of piousness, blasphemy and challenge inherent in the festival provided a cathartic release from the unyielding labour regime in the company of fellow indentured; for others it was a time to settle old scores with rival 'gangs', or a chance to confront the police. For all the participants, it was an opportunity to take over the streets of Durban even if only for a fleeting moment.

Muharram went beyond a religious occasion. It looked increasingly like a carnival which 'inverted the normal experience of daily life, celebrating excess for its own sake in pleasure...Hardship and morals could thus both be mocked.'<sup>3</sup> For this reason, it evoked a mixture of unease, antipathy and anger on the part of employers, the authorities and even middle-class Indian cultural brokers, who worked together from the turn of the twentieth century to rein in what they regarded as the unacceptable.

## A 'mass' for 'coolies'

Muharram was the first communal indentured event to be observed in Natal. Indentured workers were granted three days' annual leave for the festival.<sup>4</sup> A letter from H Peron of the Victoria Planters Association to the Protector in September 1885 suggests that the festival climaxed with the convergence of Indians from various plantations. The letter also points to whites distinguishing between indentured and passenger Indians, and the fact that participation cut across religious lines:

Which is the proper day for the conclusion of the Coolie Christmas festival? I have the honour to request you to be good enough to make enquiries amongst the leading

OPPOSITE: Thaziyahs were led by dancers known as 'tigers', who wore masks and painted their faces and bodies to resemble tigers.

PREVIOUS PAGE: A cutting from the *Natal Mercury Pictorial* of 17 July 1906, showing a thaziyah procession ready to march through the streets of Durban.

Mohammedans in Durban so that the doubt and uncertainty, which have hitherto existed, may this year be done away with. Coolies on the estate being generally uneducated and illiterate were unable to fix the date accurately, and that until they have found out what day coolies on other estates in the neighbourhood had fixed upon, they were unable to inform their employers on what day they wished to meet to put their gods in the river.<sup>5</sup>

The letter in fact is revealing of the ignorance of white colonists. Muslims follow a lunar calendar, and the beginning of each month is determined by the sighting of the lunar crescent. The indentured could not have known in advance the days of Muharram and this would have been exacerbated by at best rudimentary communication networks.

The indentured, Hindu, Christian and Muslim alike, demanded the right to observe Muharram. The Deputy Protector reported in February 1885 that there was 'much talk about matters such as leave for the Muharram' when he visited plantations.<sup>6</sup> In 1890, Superintendent Alexander informed Durban's mayor that he had been 'besieged with applicants representing the various classes to take part in the festival'.<sup>7</sup> When police stopped a Muharram procession in Ladysmith in October 1886, Indians of the town petitioned the governor that other Natal towns allowed 'the religious procession through the public streets of people making much noise by musical and other sounds, following their creed unmolested by the police. Therefore your petitioners humbly pray that when your petitioners desire to practice the religion of their Fathers they may be free from the hardship of arrest and that your petitioners may enjoy the benefits and privileges proclaimed by His Excellency Sir George Napier to all residents in the Colony of Natal without creed or colour.' A Hindu, Ratnasamy Pillay, a clerk in the Locomotive Department of the Natal Government Railways, presented the petition, while only nine of the 25 petitioners were Muslim, even though Muharram was regarded as the 'creed' of Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

In 1896 a Hindu, Kistnasamy Naidoo, requested permission for public processions until midnight on five nights in Muharram, which were to include 'displays of fireworks' and the 'casting of thaziyahs [explained in the next section] into water on the tenth'.<sup>9</sup> A few years later, on 8 May 1899, Naidoo petitioned the Protector to complain that police in Maritzburg were placing severe restrictions on Muharram festivities. He wanted permission to march in the 'Indian quarters' at the 'extreme end of Church Street'. The participants intended parading with their thaziyahs in Church, Retief and Longmarket streets, and marching to the river on the tenth. He also complained that the police prevented them from 'tom-tomming' and banned 'tigers' on the street during the day. The police superintendent replied on 11 May 1899 that Indians could parade, but under his strict supervision and without interfering with the 'general business of the town'.<sup>10</sup>

## Thaziyah builders

Play [often] eludes power rather than confronts it.<sup>11</sup>

During the Muharram festival, Indians from various plantations gathered to dance, play music, parade and make merry. From the sketchy evidence, a story emerges of the unfolding organisation of Muharram. It included two elements: public processions by neighbourhood groups,

and their converging on the tenth to immerse thaziyahs in water. Thaziyah, which translates into 'mourning' or 'condolence', was a replica of the martyred Imam Husain's mausoleum at Karbala. Individual thaziyahs were ornately decorated, gaudy simulacrum of the tomb. James Meldrum, an Englishman visiting Natal in 1893, described the thaziyah as 'made of a light framework covered with muslin, adorned with wonderful emblematic designs in all colours of the rainbow, and surrounded with bannerettes'.<sup>12</sup> Most were made of bamboo and wood, and covered with coloured paper and gold and silver tinsel. They ranged between 15 and 25 feet in height and consisted of three levels, each rising from within the other, with the base, about 10 feet square, being the largest. They were built with great care and the task was passed from generation to generation. Families believed that failure to continue this tradition would lead to severe tragedy.<sup>13</sup>

The Baccus family featured among early thaziyah builders. In an incident recorded by the Protector in November 1882, Hassenbaccus Subrathy (10999), Kaddar Baccus and Munoo 'spent five days making Coolie cages and the Idol for the approaching Indian festivities'. They smoked Indian hemp (dagga) during this period, and a heavily drugged Hassenbaccus committed suicide by slitting his throat on the evening of the fifth day, the official explanation being that it was 'as a result of hallucination'. George Ward, then superintendent of police, was informed that Hassenbaccus had cut his throat on the beach. Ward put him on a stretcher and rushed him to Dr Bonnar, but it was too late. Munoo told the inquiry that he had known Hassenbaccus for eight years, and 'he was always a great consumer of hemp'. Kaddar was a market gardener at Umbilo and had been staying with Hassenbaccus for five days to help him make the thaziyah. Kaddar testified that Hassenbaccus was married and had one child. As far as he could tell, he was 'perfectly happy in domestic life'. For three days prior to his death, however, he 'refused to take food, was often muttering to himself, saying "people must pardon me, I am going away," but we who heard him did not understand his meaning'. Hassenbaccus had arrived from Sultanpore in February 1875, served his indenture with the Durban Corporation, and was living on the Berea at the time of his death.<sup>14</sup>

Competition among Indians regarding the most attractive thaziyah gave rise to tensions that were regarded as detrimental to public order. According to Alexander, 'there was natural jealousy between the different parties respecting their ability to build pagodas and other "Artistic devices"'.<sup>15</sup> Muharram festivities began on the first and lasted until the tenth. Close to where the thaziyah was built stood the *imambada*, which served as a place of worship for devotees during the 10 days. Each thaziyah group built *panjas*, which were replicas of the right hand of Husain. According to tradition, when Husain was going out to battle and his wife enquired when they would meet again, he raised his right hand and replied: 'At the Day of Judgement.' *Panjas* were clothed in green and smothered in garlands of flowers brought by devotees, who believed that they had the power to cure problems. *Panjas* were immersed in water, 'thereby, it is supposed, removing the sins of the faithful'.<sup>16</sup>

From the fifth to the ninth, Indians marched through neighbourhoods with their thaziyahs, drumming continually and beating sticks. James Meldrum observed that 'for some days previous to the actual celebration the tom-toms were almost continually beaten'. 'Coolie

Christmas' became a time for the display of high spirits and the assertion of neighbourhood pride. In 1890, Alexander informed the mayor that 'tom-tomming has on many occasions been stopped by your police and the offenders prosecuted'.<sup>17</sup> But the practice continued, Alexander reporting the following year:

On Sunday morning, during the Divine Service the public were distracted by tom-tomming carried on in the Railway compound. I went myself to stop it. I found about 1,500 half-drunk Coolies enclosed in this compound nearly a mile away from the Railway station, the whole in charge of a couple of Coolie Policeman and an Indian Sirdar, none of whom I could find. I stopped the Tom-tomming, but heard it again before I reached home.<sup>18</sup>

In 1896, W Goodwin and '215 other Europeans' petitioned the mayor of Maritzburg to stop this 'nuisance of tom-tomming' because it was 'a very great annoyance and dangerous to sick persons'.<sup>19</sup> As a report in the *Natal Mercury* in 1910 shows, police action failed to eradicate drumming. More important, it also shows that drumming was not 'senseless noise' by 'naked fanatics':

All the processions without exception had a tom-tom hand. The throb of tom-toms filled the air for miles around. Let no dog bark at the tom-tom, for it is an institution at least as important as the English 'waita'. Its manipulation is quite a high art, and to some ears no doubt it is inspiringly musical, though to European ears a trifle monotonous...the tom-tom music touched every plane from an insinuating purr to a wild hullabaloo. The tom-tom beat so furiously that presently the ears of the artists – trained to a finer perception in these matters than those of laymen – detected that the instruments had got out of tune, and forthwith there was a cessation while little fires were lighted, and the drums held over them till the contraction by the heat had tightened the skins up to concert pitch again. It was curious to watch how the instrumentalists tried their instruments with their fingers, as seriously as any piano-tuner, to see if they had attained the right tone, before discontinuing the shrinking process.<sup>20</sup>

## To 'Coolieland'

They've emerged, wearing masks, to unmask the power that humiliates them.<sup>21</sup>

On the tenth, groups of Indians gathered around each thaziyah and pulled it by hand, while singing *marsiya*s, or laments, to the memory of Husain, beating on drums, dancing wildly, or engaging in stick fights. Participants believed in the potency of the thaziyah and offered fruits, vegetables, sugar, money and other objects in return for the birth of a son, a long life, and cures from illness.

The tenth began with a 'gatka', a play in which some participants represented Yazid's army and others Husain's, to symbolise the actual battle. Men acted the part of women. Moonean, for example, who was giving evidence in a rape case, testified, 'I went to it [Muharram festival] and dressed myself as a woman', because he played the role of a woman in the play.<sup>22</sup>

The festive celebration could be dangerous, particularly as the consumption of alcohol was part of the festivities. In her evidence against alleged rapists, Patchay, the wife of Patchamooloo, testified that some men had 'forcible connection' with her after a heavy bout of rum-drinking.<sup>23</sup> The *Natal Advertiser* reported that 'from sunrise yesterday, coolies were lingering chiefly in the vicinity of coolie bars. They were not allowed to eat food but their religious regulations did not prevent them from imbibing freely in the viles of all liquors sold within the Colony.'<sup>24</sup>

Depending on the number of thaziyahs, the fragmented processions that made their way to an assembly point could be several miles long. It was always close to a river or sea because thaziyahs were immersed in water to remind participants of Husain's suffering when he was denied water.<sup>25</sup>

In Durban and surrounding districts, thaziyah processions marched through the neighbourhoods towards the Umgeni River, which a contemporary newspaper referred to as 'Coolieland'.<sup>26</sup>

Thaziyahs were led by dancers known as 'tigers', who wore masks and painted their faces and bodies to resemble tigers. Participants told Meldrum that these dancers represented tigers in India that often attacked participants.<sup>27</sup> The one newspaper described the 'tigers' as follows: 'By their dilated eyes and eccentric actions it could be seen that the strain on their nerves had almost overpowered their mental faculties.'<sup>28</sup> Large crowds were attracted yearly to Umgeni:

From sunrise yesterday, little assemblies of painted coolies were seen all over town. As the forenoon wore on the little bands moved on towards Umgeni, the majority of them joining the larger procession which they met en route. By two o'clock, the assembly exceeded 10,000, while carriages and *rikshas* continued to arrive with hundreds of passengers. The slopes for hours prior to the ceremony were crowded by Indians, and the brilliant coloured clothing of the Indian women showed up vividly against the green of the banks.<sup>29</sup>

On another occasion, Umgeni was described thus:

'Coolieland', which means in this instance Umgeni, blossomed into colours which would have dazzled a rainbow. All the people donned their brightest silks and muslins, and came out to enjoy the fun which preceded the ceremony of 'drowning the gods' and the result was that the main street was filled with a motley throng of thousands, ranging from patriarchal parents to tiny tots one did not see till they were almost under one's feet. All the afternoon they were pouring in in processions, and all of them having a tom-tom and 'tigers'.<sup>30</sup>

Participants, contemporary records suggest, experienced great enjoyment during the festival, which represented a world very different to their rigidly controlled work environment. Stick fights, wrestling (*kushiti*), food and alcohol, various festivities, and the immersing of thaziyahs in water were part of the day's activities. Stick fights captured the attention of crowds. According to one report:

'Sammy' is never tired of watching that process which resembles a single-stick encounter, and where this was going on the crowd was dense. The Indian likes his pleasures served up with a certain amount of ceremonial, for in this stick business the first nine minutes are occupied in rhythmic circling around one another with the seriousness of a sacred rite, and then in the tenth someone gets a crack across the shoulders. The object at first is to be as far away and look as fearsome as possible, and to get in one good smite before the end.

*Kushti* was another prominent feature. 'Tigers' were usually champion wrestlers and represented their district or plantation in *kushti* competitions to determine the best wrestler. It was a source of great pride for a neighbourhood to have its representative win. One report described a confrontation between 'tigers' thus:

Clad in their traditional costumes of little fabric and much paint, they danced and curvetted in more or less rhythmic movements before the admiring multitudes. They unmistakably rolled forth a challenge when two rival schools of 'tigers' found themselves facing one another in a cleared space in the middle of the road. One party was daubed all over with green and yellow war paint and grovelled in the road beneath a lurid standard whereon two fearsome wild beasts faced one another on opposite cliffs. As the opposing parties drew near, the accompanists thumped and thundered louder than ever and, as if in reply, the dancers danced and leaped more furiously than before. The native police thought well to stand back.

According to Meldrum, 'like Christmas', Muharram had 'largely altered from fast to feast':

Around the pagoda was a motley crowd: Mohammedans in white and in red, with turbans generally in pure white; masqueraders, dressed up to represent tigers, who rushed through the crowd, pretending to assault the worshippers, in imitation of the real tigers which frequently attack the procession in India; Hindoo men and women in costumes which nearly defy description, all possible colours and materials seem to have been used. Jewellery was abundant: earrings, nose-jewels, necklaces, bangles, rings, anklets, toe-rings – all of the most gaudy description...The din was terrific. Above the noise of the drums and tom-toms came the yells of the groups of those engaged in mimic battle with long sticks, while the rest of the faithful vied with each other in producing strange weird sounds.<sup>31</sup>

The day ended with thaziyahs immersed in water. The flowers and coloured paper on the thaziyahs were thrown in the river, while the wooden structures were immersed in water and taken home to be used the following year. Thaziyahs were submerged in the river from around 4:00 p.m.; 'each conveyance was accompanied by a large cheering crowd, and the applause was kept up as the various contingents went down to the river'.<sup>32</sup>

Records suggest that at least until the 1890s, some participants killed animals ritually. When Alexander arrived in Natal in 1878, he was 'staggered' by the first Muharram he witnessed. In Bamboo Square, in the harbour area in Durban, he saw a 'horrible case of cruelty, where the





The day ended with thaziyahs immersed in water. Flowers and coloured paper were thrown in the river, while the wooden structures were immersed in water and then taken home to be used the following year.

tigers were worrying a young goat, endeavouring to tear the throat and drink the blood'. Alexander shot the 'nearly killed' goat to put it out of its misery. According to Alexander, this 'demonical practice was put down' in Natal through his efforts.<sup>33</sup> However, when evidence was being led in 1889 in the alleged rape of Patchay in Verulam on the north coast, Moonea testified that he had missed the festival but 'was at the pig killing at two o'clock',<sup>34</sup> raising questions about whether the practice was totally eradicated. And, interestingly, the animal in question was a pig, the most taboo of animals for Muslims and many Hindus.

## 'Logan's coolies'

Bone Sculpture

A mourner in the Mohurrum

Procession, mixing blood with

Mud, memory with memory.

AS ALI<sup>35</sup>

Local authorities did not take kindly to the Muharram festival because heavy drinking, fighting and the spilling of blood at the slightest provocation made it a raucous and boisterous affair. Many whites came to regard Indians as 'fanatical' beings who erupted at the slightest opportunity. The *Natal Advertiser*, for example, concluded:

The Mohurrum, or Coolie Christmas, as celebrated in Durban, has now become an occasion for the Easterns on which all their innate fanatical ideas seem to let loose. What religion could tolerate such series of scenes, as those enacted in Durban during these last few days, cannot be imagined. The hideously decked 'tigers' and gaudily attired women, alike, become insane. The nerve shocking yells of those almost naked fanatics, together with the monotonous thumping of tom-toms are sufficiently convincing that participants know nothing of the history of the patron saints whose sad deaths they pretend to commemorate.<sup>36</sup>

Religious grief, large crowds, streets packed with observers and participants, and thaziyahs jostling for public space produced a potent combination that could explode into spontaneous, or even planned, violence. The patterns of Muharram conflict differed. There were clashes between processionists and the police, participants and white civilians, and between the indentured from different plantations or neighbourhoods. Thaziyah groups usually had a geographical base, linked as they were to specific plantations or neighbourhoods, which often coincided with occupational category.

The restriction of Indians to plantations and curbs on their mobility fostered neighbourhood pride and identity. In this climate, the superiority of thaziyahs in terms of size, appearance, splendour or numbers; the strength of processions; and the excellence of wrestlers were contentious matters. Some conflicts followed predictable precedents when Muharram triggered existing tensions, while others exploded randomly over specific incidents. In November 1884, when the medical officer of Isipingo, Dr Green, had gone with his wife to 'view the Coolie Christmas Festival', his carriage inadvertently ran over an Indian child, Raminguru. The crowd became 'enraged...and as the doctor drove along...the procession met him on the road, seized the reins of the horse and assaulted him'.<sup>37</sup> Only quick action by the police saved Dr Green.

There are many references to violence, which trespassed into the very heart of Muharram. D Hunter, manager of the Natal Government Railways, complained to the Protector that he had given Sulehman 'leave all day for the Coolie Festival. He was there all day, but he did not return here at night as he should have; he had been fighting, and all next day he was lying about doing nothing. I had to engage a free Indian at higher wages to take his place.'<sup>38</sup> Perumal and Koman Nilladoo were imprisoned for 12 months for assaulting Chattiah 'with intent to do grievous bodily harm' near Verulam on the north coast. During Muharram on 4 August 1892, an altercation between different processions resulted in Chattiah being stabbed in the head and chest: 'The man was so badly injured that he was paralysed, and for some time his life was in danger. Other people were injured severely, and witnesses came into the box with marks of the fray upon them...Even women were engaged in the altercation.'<sup>39</sup> The *Natal Advertiser* reported on 7 February 1906 that 'there was a large section of police at Umgeni as yearly there is a tendency to indulge in fisticuffs by the various contingents'.

Rivalries connected to occupation also led to conflict. This was the case, for example, with employees of the Natal Government Railways and the Durban Municipality. According to D Hunter, manager of the Railways, 'it is well known to the police that measures for keeping the Railway men and the Borough men from coming into collision are necessary every year, there being an understood rivalry between the two bodies of people at this festival'.<sup>40</sup> In 1891, Sirdar Parnee of Magazine Barracks in Sontseu Road, where employees of the Durban Municipality lived, requested police protection because residents of the Railway Barracks in Umgeni Road had collected pieces of wood, bottles and stones to assault them during Muharram:

They made two small coolie gods for Christmas, the one god they are going to bring out in the night and the other one in the day. That one they are going to bring out in the

night they are going to fight with it, in front of their houses when we pass their houses on the public road. When we pass in front of their houses on the public road then these peoples begin to throw stones, bottles, loose woods over us. If you would have a look around in these days at the Railway Barracks you will find bundles of wood lying on the top of their houses. They have started to put these woods on the top of the houses since the Coolie Christmas began. The Railway peoples starts the row first, so the basket sellers, kitchen boys, waiters and other strangers goes and fight with them against the Corporation peoples...Will you kindly give me orders which way to go? I will not bring out my god till you send your police boy and white constables. They can see to us, that what men does wrong and bring them before you.<sup>41</sup>

On the tenth, Parnee's group set off for Umgeni under the supervision of police superintendent Richard Alexander and 12 mounted policemen. They first went into the city centre, where they were joined by 'half-a-dozen different parties with their pagodas from all quarters'. En route they met the Railway party, 'all armed and ready to attack our party'. The Railway group comprised 300 men, a hundred of whom were armed with 'long heavy sticks and pieces of iron bars'. When Alexander instructed their leader, Sarakan, to wait until Parnee had completed his rituals, a 'clamour and threatening with sticks commenced' before he obliged. Parnee made his way to Umgeni and Sarakan to the city.

At Umgeni, a fight was already under way between another group of Railway workers and 'Logan's coolies'. After 'some ugly blows were dealt', the Railway men 'chased them [Logan's 'coolies'] to their huts'. The police prevented the Railway men from entering their huts. Meanwhile, Sarakan's group, forced by police to return to the city, 'set upon' a procession from Cato Manor, destroyed their pagodas, and attacked Constables Bird and Baker. Their horses 'show marks of violence'. Narrain, one of the Railway leaders, hit the constables while Sarakan hit the horses. When Alexander got word, he went to their assistance. Sarakan, Narrain and nine others identified by Bird and Baker were arrested. The remaining men returned to their barracks, leaving the pagoda on the road. Alexander removed it to the station yard, 'just in time to save it as the returning parties from the river had armed themselves and were in search of the offenders'. The arrested men were found guilty of 'breach of the peace' and 'molesting the police', and fined £2 or one month's imprisonment.

William Cooley, the town clerk, wrote to Hunter on 9 June 1891 to employ a 'European constable' to live at the Railway Barracks to maintain order. Hunter replied on 18 June that trouble at the barracks was caused by 'the "nagging" of the *kaffir* policemen connected with the borough, and I believe to that cause more than any other, is disturbance attributable'. He pledged, however, to continue to seek to find a suitable white man to live near the barracks to 'exercise a moral influence over Indians'.<sup>42</sup>

The attacks refused to abate and became a feature of Muharram. The roles were reversed in 1902, when municipal employees attacked Railway Indians, who were proceeding to Umgeni, with 'a volley of stones and bottles'. There were over 10 000 people at Umgeni. The large crowd was moved to one side to make way for the Railway pagoda, so that it 'could be committed to

the water in peace'. There were rumours 'afloat in town' that a fight had been premeditated. These turned out to be true, for no sooner 'had the pagoda arrived at the top of the incline leading to the bridge than the Corporation employers hurled a volley of stones and bottles':

A scene followed which will long be remembered, and had not the police been well mounted, a large number of deaths would have occurred. As it is a number of coolies are now lying in hospital, and the recovery of several is doubtful...When the two forces came together the air was blackened with a shower of missiles, mostly chunks of road metal, stones, bottles, sticks, etc. In the first volley many on both sides were hit, and not a few Europeans received nasty blows. The inspector [Alexander] divided the forces, and taking the lead himself, galloped amongst the infuriated Indians, and with the help of a hunting crop, induced them to retire...A portion was driven to the bridge where a burly *kafir* police boy kept them in amusement by tickling them in the ribs with an assegai. Assisting the Natal police was a swarthy Sikh, a corporal of the Bengal Lancers, who seemed to be quite in his element, and, mounted on a fine charge, laid out quite a number of the dusky rioters.<sup>43</sup>

When police separated the groups, they 'turned on the officers, and many of them [police] had narrow escapes from serious injury...The Indians, worked up to such a frenzy, were ready for almost anything'.<sup>44</sup>

That evening, when municipal employees were returning home, the police asked them to use an alternative route in order to bypass the Railway Barracks. They refused on the grounds that 'if we sneak home this way they will think we are afraid of them'. As municipal workers passed the Railway Barracks, they 'were pelted with a storm of missiles of every description, mostly coal'. The following morning, workers from the Railways challenged municipal employees to a fight. 'The invitation was promptly accepted, and they swarmed out in hundreds.' Sergeant Ward and some African policemen forced the Corporation employees back to their barracks. Instead, they ran around Magazine Barracks and met the Railway workers at the new May Street Mosque, where a 'Donnybrook' ensued – this in reference to the first great battle of the American Civil War in July 1861. The Indians turned on the police, with several African policemen injured.<sup>45</sup>

At the Railway Barracks, the 'railway boys immediately started stoning any constable they saw'. The police 'at first had to retreat, so dangerous was the "fire" to which they were subjected'. Constable Welsh was hurt in a 'cross fire of stones...which will likely incapacitate him from duty for several days. After some time peace was restored.' This attack on the police was not isolated. In another incident, a policeman who tried to stop a confrontation between warring factions was knocked unconscious when both groups turned on him. When the police heard of this, 'the *kaffirs* with their knobkerries were sent out'. As soon as they saw a thaziyah 'they fell upon the crowd, the Indians ran for their lives and the pagoda was smashed to smithereens'. It later transpired that the police had destroyed the thaziyah of an innocent party. When the wronged Indian, 'with a heap of tinsel', wanted to lay a charge against the police for destroying his 'God', Alexander gave him a sovereign to settle the matter.

## 'Of playful cats and growling tigers'

Resistance can have at least two 'surfaces': one facing towards the map of power, the other facing in another direction, towards intangible, invisible, unconscious desires, pleasures, enjoyments, fears, angers, and hopes.<sup>46</sup>

In 1891, Alexander called on the government to put a stop 'to this absurd Indian Pagoda parading business about our streets'. He considered it 'nothing less than an excuse for about 3,000 men to get drunk and settle old scores with supposed enemies, and so long as there is nothing but a five shillings fine to prevent them trying to settle old scores, we may expect shortly to have an army of those skull-breaking fanatics taking charge of our Borough'.<sup>47</sup> The problem was that there was no law on the statute books preventing the holding of meetings. The Attorney-General had advised the Colonial Secretary on 12 September 1887 that he could not ban an assembly that was not unlawful when it assembled, even if it subsequently became an unlawful assembly, and that ruling still held.

Alexander felt that many of the approximately 3 500 Indians who were arrested annually in Durban used the Muharram festival as an opportunity to 'take advantage and settle old scores' against the police.<sup>48</sup> The preconceived notion that they were dealing with 'fanatics' resulted in the police reacting harshly against Muharram processions. Meldrum witnessed police violence that he regarded as 'unwarranted'. While Indians were marching with their pagodas, the police 'decided that in defiance of custom the procession not move any further in that direction. Result: what had been a playful cat turned into a growling tiger'.<sup>49</sup> The authorities were determined to regulate Muharram which, the mayor of Durban informed the Colonial Secretary in 1891, 'has become an intolerable nuisance, resulting only in drunkenness and riot'.<sup>50</sup>

In a memorandum to the mayor in 1902, Alexander described Muharram as a danger to the public, 'especially situated as we are in the midst of a large Native population, who are becoming yearly more interested in this festival. The fact is, the hordes of Indians who carry out this fanatic ceremony have no religion at all, and do not in any way follow the instructions laid down in the Koran'.<sup>51</sup>

Alexander called on the Town Council to give police a 'positive order to put down this nuisance' by 'preventing the unseemly noise made on the Tom Toms'; barring Indians from public places after 9:00 p.m.; 'permit none in any public thoroughfare painted up, insufficiently clothed, or in any dress likely to frighten children or other persons'; and 'permit not any public thoroughfare within the Borough to be obstructed by pagodas, or those who follow them'. The new measures were introduced to the satisfaction of Alexander, who reported in 1904 that with the exception of two Indians arrested for disobeying the police, 'the Indian community generally behaved better than on any previous occasion'.<sup>52</sup> Alexander was pleased that in 1905 the 'principal day passed off very quiet and orderly'; but 'the night previous was most intolerable'. He was determined to prohibit the night parades preceding the tenth. He reported on 3 April 1905:

The night previous was most intolerable, through the noise they made with their drums, etc. I should be justified in asking you to stop the evening procession altogether. It does little good to either party. The evening's amusement is fatiguing to themselves and an annoyance to most of the Burgesses. It is an old custom which they can very well do without. The same as they have the Coolie Tiger performance. I consider these quite unnecessary.<sup>53</sup>

Alexander appealed for a 9:00 p.m. curfew on the night preceding the tenth. In 1906, he again called on the government to 'stop the hideous night parade in our streets and reckless consumption of drink'. The government relented. Night parades required special permission and were restricted, while Indians were only allowed one day, the tenth, to observe the festival.<sup>54</sup> Educated Hindus and religious leaders also attempted to curb Hindu participation in the Muharram, albeit only into the first decade of the twentieth century. The early opportunities offered by mission schools resulted in the emergence of a small, western-educated class of colonial-born Hindus around the turn of the century. Some were critical of the practices of the Hindu masses. An editorial in 1909 in *African Chronicle*, whose editor PS Aiyar personified reformist-minded Hindus, opined that it was 'the lowest strata of the labouring classes, just for fun and frolic that make all the fuss, and noise, and disgrace themselves...We do not see how these confounded Tom-Tomming and hideous display of fantastic figures, can have any sanction from true religious doctrine.'<sup>55</sup>

'Bhessmasoor' complained in April 1907 that Muharram had developed into a 'barbarous and foolish act', and that 'Hindoos ought to consider that the world is laughing at them on their moral degradation and stupidity in taking part in the Festival of Mohammedans. Let me hope that the Colonial-born Hindoos would try to put a stop to their compatriots taking part in this festival.'<sup>56</sup> B Mahatho considered it 'very grievous that the Hindi community, ignorant of the fact that Husain was murdered by another Muslim, took part in a celebration that is opposed to a part of the Mahomedan section, and still more so to the lofty religious views of the Hindoos and it is equally opposed to common sense'.<sup>57</sup> Aiyar also condemned Muharram as a 'waste of money [which] benefits no-one but the beer shops and the Tom-Tom drummer...Our countrymen would do better service by utilising the same amount for some national purpose.' As we will see later in this book, the arrival of Swami Shankeranand in 1908 heralded an increasing alienation of Hindus from Muharram and the first signs of Deepavali as the dominant Hindu festival.

## The carnival of the indentured

making  
with their  
rhythms some-  
thing torn  
and new

KAMAU BRATHWAITE<sup>58</sup>

The indentured were not stuck in a primordial culture that they simply 'borrowed' from India and replicated in South Africa. Muharram shows graphically how cultural practices were reconstituted. In these new surroundings, Muharram became a time that was outside the purview of employers. It was the one time that they were allowed to leave the plantation in a collective and the result was the promotion of an 'Indianness', albeit temporarily. But it was also a time of carnival, of immense expectation and festivity, a time to act in a manner different from the way they had to act out the terms of indenture that had become an 'exhaustive disciplinary apparatus'.<sup>59</sup>

Once a year, the indentured could be themselves and somebody else, performing to their own script, casting aside for a few days the control, humiliation and social arrangements of the rest of the year. While the colonists tried to control the naming of this moment in the lives of the indentured, changing it from Muharram to 'Christmas', they were never able to control its content and the accompanying high spirits.

During the 1913 strike, when Muharram was observed in December, just as strike action was abating, the *Natal Mercury* reported:

The Mohammedan festival of Muharram came at an opportune time this year because it gave 'Sammy' and 'Mary' a chance to show that in the midst of their troubles they still retain their wanted capacity for enjoying themselves. The Indian is a genius at smiling his sorrows away, and yesterday, in spite of the fact that the rain, like the poor, was always with us, the Indian community honoured the festival in right royal fashion.<sup>60</sup>

The carnivalesque atmosphere of Muharram strengthened links between the individual and the 'community' and helped to constitute a diverse collection of migrants into a collectivity, while also excluding others, particularly whites and Africans, who stood at the touchlines and watched the 'coolies' make Christmas. Muharram, ostensibly a religious occasion, was turned into a carnival of exuberance, exhibitionism and noise, as once a year the indentured streamed out of the plantations and the barracks and took over the streets. In reading through the police reports, the 'eyewitness' accounts and newspaper articles, and studying photographs, there were street scenes reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's description in his study *Rabelais and His World* of carnival as a social institution in which the social hierarchies of everyday life are turned upside down by normally suppressed voices.

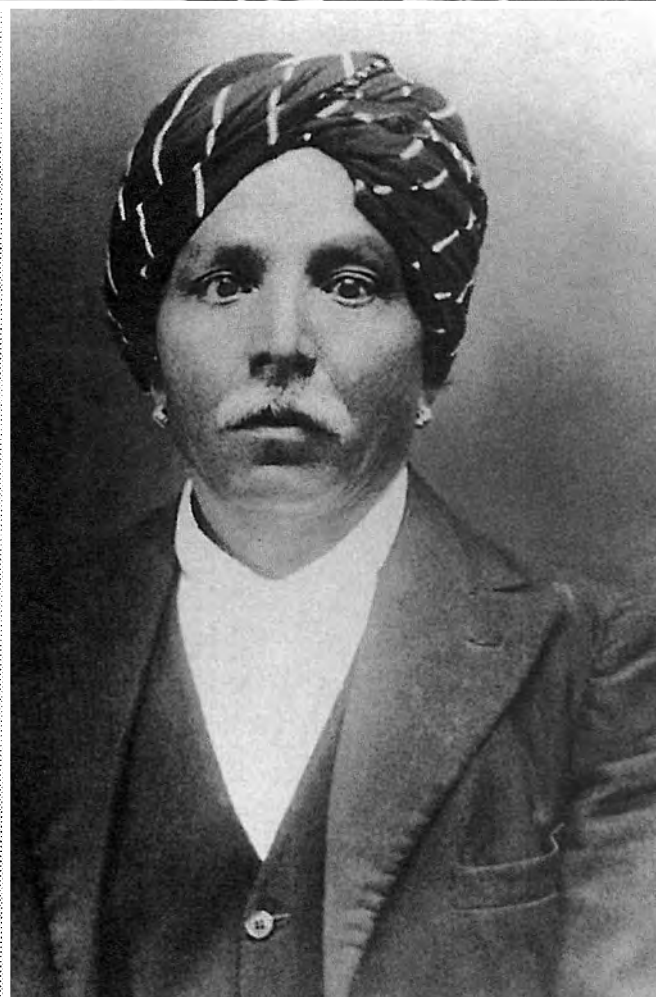
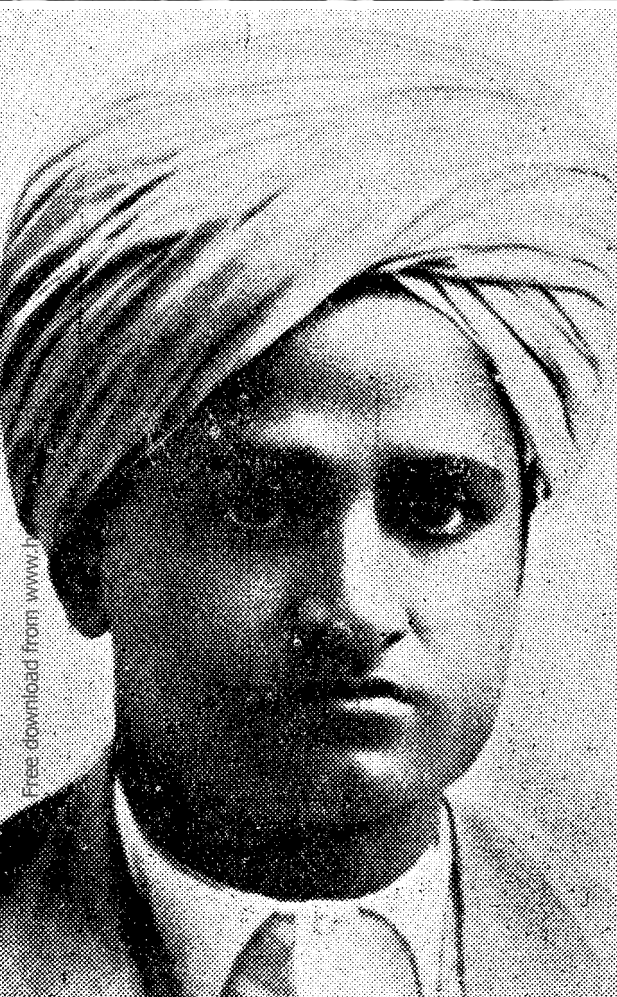
Muharram became a transgressive space, albeit a celebration permitted by law. As the indentured mocked each other during the processions, they also mocked the morals and 'rules' of the ruling class. By situating Muharram in the broader context of culture, religion and power relations, we see the dynamic interplay that makes culture and religion refuse to 'sit still'.<sup>61</sup>

Muharram and its 'transgressions' were reined in by the pincer of white 'morals' and the emergence of organised religions that were determined to filter the 'street' into the confines of buildings and institutions, replacing exhibitionism with prostration, exuberance with ritual, noise with prayer.









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# From heathens to Hindus



They were not amateurs but believers. There was no theatrical term to define them. They did not have to psych themselves up to play their roles...They believed in the sacredness of the text, the validity of India, while I searched for some sense of loss...I was polluting the afternoon with doubt and with the patronage of admiration. I misread the event through a visual echo of History – the cane fields, indenture, the evocation of vanished armies, temples and trumpeting elephants – when all around me there was quite the opposite – a delight of conviction, not loss.

DEREK WALCOTT<sup>1</sup>

Derek Walcott's reflections on an Indian festival in his native West Indies when accepting his Nobel Prize in literature in 1992 poignantly highlights the role and meaning of religion in the survival of indentured Indians. Cultural robustness, reflected in festivals and other religious practices, was an important mechanism for dealing with indenture. Like Deepavali, the 'festival of lights', whose significance is the return from exile of Rama and Sita, many of the indentured considered themselves 'banished', and harboured thoughts of returning 'home' to adulation. For many, this remained a forlorn hope but, like the god Agni, the flame of Hinduism continued to burn within and made it easier to cope with 'exile'.

To whites in Natal, Hindu and Muslim migrants were 'heathens'. This was affirmed when they married, for example, as the certificate listed their religion as 'heathen'. But Hindus and Muslims proved much more resilient than the missionaries anticipated. As the Reverend Stott would exclaim in frustration, 'it [mission work] is still sowing and watering, but there are very few indications of any harvest'.<sup>2</sup> By and large, indentured migrants resisted attempts to 'save' them from moral degeneration by becoming Christian, and instead made great sacrifices in creating conditions for the advancement of 'heathenism' that involved both song and dance as much as it involved the institutions of religious propagation. As we shall see, heathenism was not a charge made by whites alone. As the indentured took to celebrating their faith in song, dance and merriment, middle-class Indians entered the fray through Indian media like *Indian Opinion* and *African Chronicle*, and reformist organisations sought to control this exhibitionism of the faith by also giving it the label 'heathen'.

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OPPOSITE ABOVE: Swami Shankeranand (front row, centre), photographed with the Sydenham Hindu Young Men's Society in 1912, visited South Africa from 1908 to 1913 and played a major role in shaping Hindu culture and identity in the colony. BELOW LEFT: Bhai Parmanand, a missionary of the Arya Samaj movement, helped to establish several Hindu organisations in South Africa. BELOW RIGHT: Kistappa Reddy (1863–1941), who arrived as an indentured worker in 1898, helped build the present Hindu temple at Mount Edgecombe.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Craftsmen put the finishing touches to the Vishnu Temple built by Tamil and Telegu indentured workers in 1880 and rebuilt by Kothanar Ramsammy Reddy in 1924. Reddy built nine temples in South Africa between 1893 and 1924.

This chapter focuses on the establishment of Hindu practices in Natal and their role in the lives of the indentured. It is premised on the notion that Hinduism is not monolithic. Despite the attempts of reformers ‘through the ages to force Hinduism into a narrow conceptual framework’, it remains a ‘loosely knit tradition with a variety of beliefs and practices’.<sup>3</sup> Under colonial rule, ‘Hindu’ referred to what was, in reality, ‘a wide field of South Asian religious discourses and ritual practices...To say that someone is Hindu is to specify very little about the person’s religion.’<sup>4</sup> The indentured and their descendants instituted a range of customs, traditions, beliefs and values in Natal. These were not simply inherited and transplanted from India, but often refashioned in a fluid and complex situation.

## Transplanting Hindu practices

Migration and indenture disrupted the *girmityas*’ [indentured migrants] religious and cultural life. There were few shrines and sacred places, few *murtis* or images [of God or gods], few learned men, *pundits* [Brahmin scholars], *sadhus* [Hindu holy men] or *maulvis* [Muslim learned men], versed in the scriptures to impart moral and spiritual instruction. Their absence facilitated an essentially emotional, egalitarian and non-intellectual moral order among the *girmityas*.<sup>5</sup>

Over 80 per cent of indentured migrants were Hindu. Most would have been practising some form of Hinduism in India and, we can assume, either introduced or tried to introduce aspects of their beliefs and practices in Natal. We have virtually no oral or written testimony to establish the role of religion in migrants’ lives. Evidence from indentured life elsewhere points to its importance. One indentured worker in Fiji said that ‘indenture was very harsh...It was religion that enabled both Hindus and Muslims to survive.’ Another said that on his plantation there was no one able to read the Koran or Ramayan; nevertheless, ‘it was our religion that saved us’.<sup>6</sup> And so it is that in Natal we find sparks of Hindu consciousness, which points to the continued significance of religion.

For example, Olagammal of Madurai, writing to the Emigration Office in Madras in September 1893 about her son Narayan (34318), who had emigrated to Natal in 1885, wanted to know, among other things, ‘whether my son was remaining under his original Hindu religion’.<sup>7</sup> While there is a dearth of information about early Hindu practices in Natal, we can establish from the cursory information that migrants sought to introduce some familiar practices, modified perhaps by circumstances. We saw in Chapter 10, for example, that Matadin Nancoo’s ‘guru’, Ganesh Maharaj, performed the wedding ceremony of his daughter Tejia in 1882; we have seen elsewhere that migrants practised polygamy; and we came across indentured workers who declined western medical treatment in preference to their own ‘doctors’.

Soorujbansee and Hurrybanse were the children of Sookun Suhan (1002), caste Gunjhoo (sub-caste of Kshatriya [military/ruling order]), who came to Natal in February 1861 and worked for Mr Groom at Bridgeford, near Verulam, and Jodheah Praug, a Rajput (warrior caste from Punjab), who arrived in 1864 and worked at Ottawa Estate. They married around 1870. After completing his indenture, Sookun took up market gardening and subsequently bought two

pieces of land and opened a store. Jodheah died in April 1881 and Sookun in October 1885. At the time of her death, Soorujbansee and Hurrybanse were 13 and 11 respectively. When the Protector was sorting out the estate, Hurrybanse was visited by the mother's 'spiritual adviser Nepaul Doobey [Gooroo]...at Bridgeford [he was not my Father's spiritual adviser]'. Hurrybanse told the Protector that 'about nine days after Nepaul's visit, his son Madho came to see us. He asked in whose name was the land and particulars of my Father's death.' Gurus were clearly an important feature in the life of Hindus from the earliest days of indenture. The Protector transferred the land to the children because he believed that the guru had sinister motives.<sup>8</sup>

A very revealing reference is that of a funeral ceremony involving a woman, Pulpa Venkama (30325), who had arrived from Vizagapatam in October 1883 and was assigned to B Clarence of Clare Estate. She gave her caste as Telaga, which is a sub-caste of the agriculturalist Naidu community in the coastal areas of Andhra. Venkama died in February 1887. Clarence, her manager, informed the Protector that they 'had a Pagoda-shaped erection over the body, elaborately decorated, and placed long strips for the "bearers" to walk upon. The ceremony lasted two hours. They then adjourned for the usual feast, which was subscribed by the Bearers.' The funeral was organised by her nephews Gurannah (30323) and Appalasawmy (30324).<sup>9</sup> And, of course, we have learnt of the role of Brahmins and pseudo-Brahmins, who were targeted by employers. Deputy Protector Dunning found it fit to 'record my disapproval of Brahmin and Mahommedans who are coming over in large numbers as indentured Indian immigrants...The former as priests of the Hindoos have a great influence over the lower castes which in many cases leads to insubordination. The Brahmin [Hindu priest] generally has not been accustomed to labour.'<sup>10</sup> The Deputy Protector reported in March 1908 that when he visited VM Blake, he found that a Brahmin made 'more money by his preachings at night than his wages. The employer has no objection as long as he does his work.'<sup>11</sup> Many of the migrants continued to rely on Brahmins for emotional succour and spiritual guidance in a harsh environment.

Even though priests played a crucial role in cushioning the most terrible aspects of indenture, loneliness, powerlessness and self-estrangement, the authorities remained sceptical. When the Shri Vishnu Temple in Umgeni wanted to import two priests in 1909 to officiate at its services, the immigration officer refused because 'the majority of these so-called priests are mere charlatans who use the working day in money-getting and some part of their spare time in the practice of Eastern mummerly'.<sup>12</sup> There was a similar reaction over the appointment of Subra Reddy as priest in Estcourt. Protector Mason wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 5 May 1885 that the likes of Reddy 'imposed' on Indians by 'playing upon their superstitions; they style themselves Brahmins, and claim to exercise priestly function without in the majority of cases anything to support them...[They] succeed in duping those who believe in them and pay handsomely for the privilege of their counsel.'<sup>13</sup>

That these Brahmin 'priests' may not have been scholars in the commonly accepted sense of the term, and may have been considered 'pseudo' by the authorities, is irrelevant. They exerted an important spiritual influence on indentured Hindus. A popular folksong of the indentured points to the role of Brahmins as spiritual guides, priests and healers in facilitating spiritual rites, paying respect to their deities and 'saving' Hindus from Christianity:

I bow to the Brahman, who reads me the *Katha*  
who teaches me the *puja*, *sandhya* and *havan*.  
Hail to the Brahman who built temples here,  
who save us from the exploitation of the missions.

FOLKSONG FROM BRITISH GUIANA<sup>14</sup>

And even where Hindus may not have been able to practise certain rituals, they at least had knowledge of them. Telucksing, who had completed his indenture and was a trader, told the Wragg Commission:

Cremation should be allowed here amongst the Hindoos. In India the bodies of all Hindoos are burnt, but in Natal we have to bow to the law. It is believed among the Hindoos that, if their bodies are buried instead of being burnt, their souls are converted into devils. We have not complained because we came to a new country under different laws; therefore we did not like to raise the question.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1860s and 1870s, the Indian population was small and spread across many employers. It is therefore not surprising that there were few known temples. As the Indian population became more substantial and began to settle from the late 1870s, following the resumption of indenture, temples started appearing in various parts of Natal.

## When Vishnu met Shiva

We want temples wherein to worship. We should like the government to establish a Coolie location, and let us build a shrine there. They will nominate the holidays when the temple is built, as the law of the Colony allows. Whatever ceremonies, according to the calendar are fixed, the free Coolies would celebrate the feast for ten days; in those days are the principal ones, and the assigned Coolies would take leave to attend for those three days.

The above testimony of Rangasammy to the Coolie Commission reveals the desire of Indians to reconstruct their cultural and religious lives in Natal. The belief that one was contaminated by crossing the *kala pani*, poverty, the difficulty of observing caste rules, the violence of indenture and the absence of a priestly class would have made this difficult. However, there is evidence that Hindus established temples from the earliest days. C Behrens, who managed the estates of the Colonisation Company from 1867, told the Coolie Commission that the 'Coolies at Riet Valley have built a Hindoo temple, where they celebrate their own feast days. Those days are in addition to the holidays given to the Coolies by Law [for Muharram].'

Even on sugar estates, Indians erected shrines and temples to their deities. They were sometimes encouraged by employers, who provided land, contributed money and even gave workers time off for worship.<sup>16</sup> Given their circumstances, the building of temples would have been an onerous undertaking. Temple-building was regarded as a sacred activity and was mostly a community effort. Most were tiny, often no more than six feet by six feet, and made from wattle, daub, thatch and, later, corrugated iron.<sup>17</sup>

The building of places of worship was an important first step in establishing formal practices. The lush plantations in the Natal sugar country allowed temples to be built in serene surroundings. In general, they faced in an easterly direction, were built close to a river because of the importance of water in the Hindu belief system, and had bright colours and elaborate designs because of the importance of visual imagery, or *darshana*, in religious worship. Many Hindus do not worship Shiva or Vishnu per se, but rather one of their avatars, consorts or children. South Indian temples were built to Shiva and his consorts, like Uma, Parvati, Durga and Kali, who are each worshipped in their own right. Migrants from the Ganges plains named their temples after Vishnu, who represents love and harmony and is referred to as Perumal and Emperumal, or Narayan in South India.<sup>18</sup>

Gradually these elementary structures were replaced by more elaborate temples as the migrants finished their indentures. The indentured and ex-indentured began erecting shrines on sugar estates in Umbilo (1869), Newlands (1896), Cato Manor (1882), Isipingo Rail (1870) and Mount Edgecombe (1875). Employees of the Durban Corporation, who were housed in the Railway and Magazine Barracks in the city centre, built three temples in the 1880s. Of these, the Durban Hindu Temple in Somtseu Road still exists, and continues to host the major celebration of Ram Navami annually in March.

Babu Talwantsing and Chundoo Sing, both of whom came as indentured workers, founded the Gopallal Hindu Temple in Verulam in 1888. Talawantsing was born in Fyzabad in 1877, and came to South Africa as an indentured migrant in 1891. After completing his indenture he went into cane farming in Verulam in 1896, later opening businesses. He was a member of the Natal Indian Congress, served in the South African War, was one of Gandhi's staunchest supporters, and a key organiser during the 1913 strike. Chundoo Sing was born in Jaipur in 1851 and came to Natal as an indentured worker in 1883.<sup>19</sup> The Sings renovated the temple as they prospered and the community became more settled, and it was opened officially by Gandhi in May 1913. They also formed a temple called the Hindu Mintra Mundal.

The Umgeni Road Temple, originally built in 1885, is today the largest temple in South Africa. One of the main financial contributors was a woman, Amrotham Pillay, who had come to Natal as an indentured migrant in 1889. She married KK Pillay and they ran a successful business in Greenwood Park. She gave a portion of her wealth to renovate the temple and was a regular contributor. In Maritzburg, the Sri Siva Soobramoniar and Mariamman Temple was built in 1898, and the Shri Vishnu Temple in 1907. A key figure in the Shri Vishnu Temple was Gokul Rambuli Singh, who was born on a plantation in Inanda to indentured parents, studied in Durban, and worked as a legal clerk and photographer in Maritzburg. He helped found and later became president of Hindu cultural/religious organisations like the Shri Vishnu Temple, Veda Dhrama Sabha, and Vedic Vidya Parceharak.<sup>20</sup>

Charlie Nulliah, discussed in earlier chapters, was a trustee of the Sri Siva Soobramoniar Temple. A key member of that temple was Moonsamy Gooroosamy Naidoo, who was born in Mardalam, Madras, in 1867 and came to Natal in 1890. He married the daughter of a prominent trader in Maritzburg, Krishnasamy Naidoo, and ran his businesses in both Maritzburg and Tongaat. He was a founding member of the Hindu organisation Vana Vilas Society (1895),

treasurer of the Bhai Parmanand Reception Committee (1905), founding member of the Hindu Young Men's Association (HYMA) in Maritzburg, and committee member of the Sri Siva Soobramoniar Temple.<sup>21</sup>

The Vishnu Hindu Temple in Umzinto provides an excellent example of how the indentured, as they moved out of indenture and established themselves in business, built temples and other religious and cultural markers and in the process created a more familiar environment that resonated, however imperfectly, with the world that they had left. The trustees of the temple – Soubiah (18911), Moothoosamy (4498), Muthialu (36621), Ayyavu (36672), Ramsamy (2987) and Murugan (22740) – were all market gardeners who had come as indentured migrants.

Soubiah Narraindoo was 20 when he arrived from Polur in August 1878. He was of the Reddy caste (landowning South Indian caste) and served his indenture with Umzinto Sugar. Ramsamy Ellapen, just four when he arrived from Chittoor in July 1864, served his indenture on HJ Milner's Springfield Estate. Moothoosamy Vurdapen, who came to Natal in December 1864, served his indenture with AB Kennedy in Sea Cow Lake. He was 23 when he came and in his late sixties when the temple was built. He was of the Malabar caste (agriculturalists from Kerala) from Chittoor. Murugan Naik was 26, of the Vannia caste (Tamil military caste) from Arcot. He arrived in August 1880 and served his indenture with Hawksworth Bros. in Avoca, north of Durban. He would have been 55 when the temple was built, and died in 1936 at the age of 82. Ayyavu Muniappan, caste Muppa (military sub-caste of the Naidu) from Tanjore, landed in Natal in October 1888. He was 26 when he began his indenture at the infamous Esperanza, and in his late forties when the temple was built. He died in 1935. Unfortunately, we were not able to trace Muthialu's fate as there is no record of him in the archives. Several aspects are relevant: trustees were of different castes; all were successful market gardeners; they were from different parts of Madras Presidency; they had been in Natal for several decades; and, interestingly, several of them had moved long distances to start market gardening.<sup>22</sup>

The opening of a temple was an important occasion. For example, in August 1906, JS Done, a Christian, reported that the Sea View Hindu Temple provided 'a sumptuous feast for friends, and entertained them with an instructive Tamil play, in honour of his new place of worship being consecrated. I do not borrow the sense of the term consecrate, as from time immemorial the Hindu High Priests have been performing the ceremony, similar to our Bishops in newly-built Christian Churches.' Done provided a short sketch of the play – as he put it, the 'leading current' rather than a literal translation.<sup>23</sup>

Temples were a source of comfort for many, as it was here that communal worship was experienced; birth, marriage and death ceremonies observed; and festivals carried out. When Surgeon Major Commins of the Indian Immigration Service in Calcutta visited the Caribbean in the 1890s, he recorded the following poem, which could apply equally to Natal:

You dwell so very near a church,  
A Christian church, with tolling bell;  
You never enter it, alas!



For marriage peal or funeral knell.  
A Coolly temple far away,  
Pagoda-shaped, with colours loud;  
'Tis there you wend your stately steps,  
Arrayed in winsome gauzy shroud.<sup>24</sup>

This poem is also important in highlighting the fact that though the Christian mission worked untiringly and determinedly among the indentured, few embraced Christianity.

The Shree Emperumal Temple is one of the best-known temples in South Africa, and its environs are filled with the history of indenture. The very origin of the temple in Mount Edgecombe is intertwined with sugar. It was the English captain William Smerdon who named the area Mount Edgecombe when he arrived from Devon in the 1850s. The Emperumal Temple was built in 1875 in close proximity to the sugar mill, the barracks where workers were housed, and the Dumat Dam, which was named after Alfred Dumat, the Mauritian manager of the mill. Besides the Shree Temple (1875), several other temples were built at Mount Edgecombe, such as Ganesha (1898), Soobramoniar (1920), Kalammen (1925) and Gengiammen (1935).

According to legend, a *Puthu*, a mound similar to an anthill in appearance and regarded as home to the sacred Snake Goddess, materialised on the present temple site. For believers, this was a sure sign that the temple was located on an auspicious spot. The *Puthu* has been growing each year and stands at over two metres. The first wood and daub temple reflected the poor economic status of recently arrived indentured; later, railway sleepers were used to erect the walls of the temple, and a tin roof was added. Worshippers dedicated the temple to Lord Vishnu, the 'Preserver of the Universe', who is viewed as representing balance and harmony. This is perhaps related to the strange and difficult environment in which the indentured found themselves. They were calling on Vishnu, the blue four-armed god, to ward off evil and ensure harmony.<sup>25</sup> Vishnu was called annually to shower blessings and ensure a successful harvest. As the survival of the indentured depended on a good harvest, this may have been why Vishnu temples were built along the north and south coasts where sugar was planted. It is interesting that the Shree Temple was dedicated to Vishnu, traditionally a North Indian deity, when South Indians were in the majority.<sup>26</sup>

The present temple at Mount Edgecombe was built by Kistappa Reddy (1863–1941), who arrived as an indentured worker in 1898 and was assigned to Marshall Campbell's Natal Estates Sugar Mill. Once his temple-building skills became known, he was involved in building and renovating temples throughout Natal. He and Kothanar Ramsamy Pillay, a passenger migrant from Mauritius, were responsible for most temple renovations in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> Reddy's life reveals much about the indentured experience. He worked as a field labourer, but was a *koluthukar* (bricklayer) by profession. He could read Tamil and possessed manuals on temples, though it is unlikely he had detailed drawings.

Reddy created scriptural forms from memory. After completing his indenture, he settled in Cato Manor and set up business as a builder. He prospered, purchasing six acres of land and

building a large house. Two of his sons followed his vocation initially, but went a step further to become draughtsmen. At some point before Reddy's death in 1941, the family went into the printing trade. Reddy visited India twice to purchase Tamil type for the press.<sup>28</sup> After the opening of the Marriaman Temple in Maritzburg, the *Natal Witness* carried the following report, which also serves as an appropriate tribute to Reddy:

An old Indian, K. Reddy, is the sculptor, and he is held in great veneration by his countrymen all over South Africa. This worker possesses most wonderful hands. He has erected the most artistic domes and temples all over the Union. His eyes are regarded as wonderful, and his sense of proportion most exact. He never uses a rule to measure, and yet his work is exact to the finest degree.<sup>29</sup>

The impact of Hinduism can be seen in the temples that dot the landscape across the south and north coasts. But it would be remiss to see the influence of Hinduism only in the temple and its related activities. While temples were a source of community bonding and provided the organisational backbone of Hinduism, it was really through their everyday life that most Hindus became immersed in their religion. Drama served as an important religious function, but was also crucial in filling the void in migrants' leisure-time options.

## Festivals

The colonial Europeans had little comprehension of, or patience for, the Indian religious *tamasas*, ritual festivals of indenture days. They saw heathen, ungodly, lewdness, dangerous tumult and disorder, and all the more evidence, they thought, of the Indians' 'bad character'... There was more than cheap thrill and particular revenge available from these rituals.<sup>30</sup>

Hinduism in Natal was replete with festivals. While not reaching the wanton excesses of Muharram, they nevertheless were a vital vantage point for building a presence and collective consciousness of Hinduism. While we do not provide a comprehensive checklist of the festivals, we point to the crucial ones and trace some of the debates and conflicts that trespassed into their nature and content.

Chaita Masam was organised from around 1890 at the Shree Temple to mark the Tamil New Year in April. Believers hold that it was on this day that Lord Brahma started the creation of the world.<sup>31</sup>

*Draupadi* (fire-walking) was celebrated in March in honour of Goddess Draupadi, who is regarded by Hindus as 'the model of duty, love and devotion, who bore various trials with great fortitude'.<sup>32</sup> The ceremony was held from around the turn of the twentieth century in Maritzburg, Umbilo and Clairwood, but not at Isipingo or Mount Edgecombe. Participants were mainly of South Indian origin; their traditions contain stories of Draupadi walking on fire to cleanse herself from attempts to degrade her. According to one report, at the Umbilo Temple 'the annual fire walking ceremony was performed with great pomp and grandeur. The ceremony

not only interested the followers of Hinduism, but all sections of the community, Hindus, Christians, Mahomedans.’<sup>33</sup>

Kavadi was celebrated in honour of the God Muruga, who, devotees believe, has the power to cure illness and get rid of misfortune. The Kavadi was a bamboo arch decorated with flowers, peacock feathers and coconuts. On each end was a brass container filled with milk, with which devotees washed the statuette of the deity. These structures were usually thrown into a river as sacrifice, before devotees walked across glowing coals.

There were two main sets of opposition to the Hindu festivals. One was from whites concerned about ‘law and order’. For example, in 1916, DP Carnegie of Umgeni Road wanted the police ‘to abate the Coolie noise by their customs, day after day, Sunday after Sunday as they march backwards and forwards...By what right can they occupy the public roadway without any consideration for others, sick or dying?...No God could be pleased by such discord.’<sup>34</sup> The Chief Constable of Durban complained on one occasion that ‘every celebration practiced by the Indian community – from a christening to a waking – is accompanied by the ear splitting noises of tom-toms and other forms of music. Every temple appears to have its own set of feasts and festivals, entailing perambulating excursions through one district or another, sometimes continued late into the night or small hours of the morning.’<sup>35</sup> The authorities sought to control festivals by demarcating routes and limiting activities, despite protests from Indians such as SR Pather, a member of the Sydenham and Umbilo temples, who wrote to the Town Clerk that ‘one of the most important and fundamental principles is complete freedom of religious worship and toleration...It is absolutely impossible for us to assent to the proposition that our religious practices should be made subsidiary to the dictates of the police. In fact it is a dangerous power to entrust to the police.’<sup>36</sup>

A second source of opposition was ‘internal’. The visit of Professor Parmanand, and the organisations he formed, resulted in reformist-minded Hindus coalescing and speaking out against Hindu practices, especially festivals, as a distortion of ‘authentic’ Hinduism. In 1909, *African Chronicle* claimed that ‘the lowest strata of the labouring classes, just for fun and frolic, make all the fuss, and noise, and disgrace themselves...We do not see how these confounded Tom-Toming and hideous display of fantastic figures, can have any sanction from the religious doctrines.’<sup>37</sup> According to the publication *Dharma Vir*, these ‘practices and usages...may have suited our forefathers with their ample leisure in our Homeland...[but] are somewhat wearisome in these modern days and must give way to simpler modes’.<sup>38</sup>

Middle-class reformers ignored the importance of ‘festivals’ in allowing Indians to band together as a collective, as a ‘people’ with history and tradition, a time in which the perpetual threat of verbal beatings and the *sjambok* vanished. The ‘faithful’, however, refused to be moulded in the image of reformists, as we will see from the controversy surrounding the Mariamman festival. While the emergence of Hinduism had its own ‘internal’ developments, it was also stimulated by ‘outside’ influences. One of the first significant Hindu leaders to visit South Africa was Professor Bhai Parmanand, who arrived in Durban on 5 August 1905 to ‘create some sort of religious awakening so that people could take pride in their religion and nationality’.<sup>39</sup>

## Bhai Parmanand and the seeds of reformism

Parmanand, a descendant of the famous Sikh martyr Bhai Mati Das, was a missionary of the Arya Samaj movement, founded in Bombay in April 1875 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1825–1883). The Samaj's aim was to redefine Hinduism by abolishing rituals and social practices such as enforced widowhood, child marriage, idolatry and the caste system. Samajis considered the Vedas, the oldest scriptural texts of Hinduism, to be revealed by God to humankind, and as containing the eternal truth that formed the basis of all Hindu life and beliefs.<sup>40</sup> The Samaj project had several key features: propagate and defend the Vedic religion, exploit mass media, missionary work, education, and *shuddhi* ('reconversion' and uplifting untouchables).<sup>41</sup> While the Samaj had limited impact in South Africa, Parmanand, and Swami Shankeranand who followed, had an important influence on a large number of Hindus.<sup>42</sup>

In South Africa, Parmanand lectured on religion, education and philosophy before Indian and white audiences under the auspices of the Theosophical Society, whose members were mostly white. The Society, founded in 1875 by Madame HP Blavatsky to instruct the west in 'true Spirituality', was based in Madras. It studied Eastern religions and did not discriminate on the basis of race or colour. Parmanand's most important contribution was to get colonial-born, educated Tamils to form the Hindu Young Men's Society (HYMS) in January 1906.<sup>43</sup> The HYMS implored members to study Tamil, visit India to understand Hindu culture and appreciate India's grandeur, and establish education facilities for the study of Tamil and religious texts.

The Hindu Sudhur Sabha, which considered itself a branch of the Arya Samaj in Durban, was founded at the residence of CKD Pillay, with 26 members, during Parmanand's visit. At its first AGM in September 1906, membership had increased to 46. The chairman was PV Sanghavi; the secretaries were Anand Rai and SK Pather; and vice-presidents included PS Aiyar, CV Pillay and B Megrajh. They collected £500 for the Dayananda Anglo Vedic College.<sup>44</sup> A Hindu Progressive Society was formed in January 1909 with branches in Umgeni, Clare Estate, Springfield, Sea Cow Lake and Avoca. Office-bearers included Rampershad Maharaj, Mewa Maharaj and B Somers.<sup>45</sup> A Hindu Crematorium Committee was formed to pressure government to allow cremation. Its first petition in March 1908 was turned down.<sup>46</sup> Professor Parmanand's message appealed to educated Hindus, largely because Samaj discourse, paradoxically, was based on Vedic fundamentalism and western science. It was also 'counter-Christian and counter-colonial'.<sup>47</sup> Key features of Samaj discourse were to establish a 'purified, respectable, modern, scientific, and self-sufficient Hinduism' and an intense 'commitment to social and political action'. Samajis in Natal were mostly colonial-born, educated in English and the vernacular, and held good jobs or were traders.<sup>48</sup>

Parmanand's influence was significant as the organisations he established were heavily involved in the contestation to define Hinduism; they challenged a Hinduism inscribed in rituals and superstitions.<sup>49</sup> One of these battles came into the public spotlight when a temple sued reformists for castigating its 'porridge prayers'.

## Contesting Hinduism: who gets to eat the porridge?

[Festivals] made real an alternative, disintegrating understanding of the 'coolie' situation. They were rituals of resistance, and more. They did not merely open a temporary *communitas* (a feeling of well-being), but proffered the vision of a self on different terms of order, a permanent new start beyond the *girmit* [indenture].<sup>50</sup>

The Mariamman 'Porridge' festival was associated with the popular Goddess Mariamman, whose ambiguous character is seen in her name which, literally translated, means 'Mother of Rain and Death'. Like the Vaishnavite and Shaivite traditions, the goddess tradition is part of what in South Africa is known as 'Sanathanist Hinduism'. Mariamman was invoked to regenerate the soil and protect the community against disease and death. Invoking images of life and death, the festival drew large crowds in Natal. Devotees offered 'cooling' foods such as milk, porridge, pumpkin and coconut to the goddess to 'cool' her anger. The food was placed in buckets around the temple and eaten by devotees. Sometimes chickens and goats were sacrificed and blood spilled on the earth to represent life and fertility.<sup>51</sup>

The festival was celebrated annually from the beginning of the twentieth century at the Mariamman Temple in Isipingo Rail. This temple was different to other temples in that it was privately owned. It was built by Narainsamy, and taken over by his wife, Anandie, and their son, Kristnasamy, after his death in 1914. The festival was held for 10 days over Easter, and attended by large crowds of mainly indentured Indians from plantations all along the south coast.<sup>52</sup> It was a mass-based festival of the working classes, mainly from South India.

The festival came into the broader public spotlight when CV Pillay, editor of *The Vineka Bhanoo* and proprietor of the CV Press in Queen Street, criticised the festival. He felt that Christian and Muslim Indians were 'laughing and jeering at it as the work of ignorant fools'; that Indians could put the money to better use by using it for education; there was no recognised priest; and no cooking facilities or proper sanitary and lodging arrangements for the thousands who attended. This resulted in devotees bathing in the pond and drinking unhygienic water. Pillay questioned Anandie's right to call herself a 'trustee', criticised her for not accounting for monies collected, and accused her of enriching herself by 'robbing poor superstitious Indian people, using religion as a cloak to delude and entice money from them'. He called on Tamils to stop 'these superstitious doings'.<sup>53</sup>

Anandie sued Pillay for £300 for defamation. At the trial it emerged that 18 000 people attended the festival on Good Friday. A representative of the Natal Government Railways at Isipingo said that 13 000 Indians had come by train alone. Extra trains were provided every year as participants came from all over Natal, and even the Transvaal. Devotees offered about 300 chickens as sacrifice and approximately £200 in cash. They also offered boiled rice, fruit, flowers, cakes and sugar, while incense and camphor were burned. The image of Mariamman was ceremonially washed with water, oil, coconut milk, rose water, sandalwood, honey and limes, and carried around the village on the shoulders of devotees.

Anandie was criticised by several witnesses. MP Pather testified that the crowd was so large and the assistants so few that it was impossible to carry out the ceremony properly. Most devotees did not even make it into the temple to offer their sacrifices. There were no 'recognised' priests, while Brahmins would never accept the sacrifice of animals. Notwithstanding the evidence against Anandie, including the fact that monies collected were not used solely for the benefit of the temple, the magistrate gave judgment in her favour because devotees were attending of their own free will.<sup>54</sup>

After pointing out that 'the most heathenish customs were fire walking and the pricking of needles in the whole human body and the annual Isipingo festival when streams of blood are made to flow by slaughtering of thousands of dumb animals', *Indian Opinion* opined that the festivals have become 'haunts for gamblers and other money makers, who seem more to be in the forefront than the religious ceremony itself'.<sup>55</sup>

This struggle was part of a larger contestation over what it meant to be a Hindu. Until the turn of the century, the situation was fluid. Institutional Hinduism didn't exist as such and it was pretty much left to devotees to practise as they wished, hence the large numbers participating in Muharram. The establishment of institutional Hinduism resulted in a great deal of contestation. The arrival of a Swami (religious teacher) in late 1908 upped the stakes. He went by the name of Shankeranand and, almost immediately upon his arrival, challenged many existing practices and powerful people.

## Enter the shepherd

In March 1908, Lala Mokham Chand appealed to the 'Hindu Public of South Africa' for funds. He stated that because of his 'persistent and continued application for a religious leader', the 'well wishers' of South African Hindus in India had agreed to send the Swami to work 'for the betterment of the Hindu nation and Indians generally'.<sup>56</sup> By June, over £50 had been sent to India to cover the cost of the Swami's journey to South Africa.<sup>57</sup>

Swami Shankeranand, a Brahmin, was born in Punjab in 1866. He married at an early age, but within a few years after the death of his wife he became celibate. The Swami spoke Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Gujarati, Sanskrit, Bengali and English. He believed that religious reform had to be accompanied by social reform, and preached against child marriage. He edited an Anglo-vernacular newspaper which advocated the use of home-made goods. In 1894 he founded the SAS High School, and in 1896 became a sanyasi (religious mendicant). He visited Italy, France, Scotland and England on a lecturing tour.<sup>58</sup>

The Swami, an Arya Samaji like Bhai Parmanand, arrived in Durban on 4 October 1908 aboard the *Carisbrook Castle*. An 'enthusiastic' crowd over a thousand strong attended a public reception at Congress Hall on 8 October 1908. The eclectic crowd included Hindu, Muslim and Christian Indians, while part of the hall was reserved for 'European ladies and men'.<sup>59</sup> The chairman of the reception committee, VRR Moodley, also president of the HYMA, welcomed the Swami as Hindus 'urgently needed a shepherd', and prayed that 'we should prove ourselves worthy of the respect that he has shown us by choosing to come to South Africa'.<sup>60</sup>

In the coolie village there is rejoicing tonight  
Deepavali is sewing its lights  
In our eyes with their constellations of hope...

HINDI FOLKSONG<sup>61</sup>

Shortly after his arrival, the Swami found to his consternation that the most widely celebrated festival of Hindus was Muharram. He immediately raised the issue that employers gave Hindus three days off to celebrate Muharram, but not Deepavali which is celebrated at the end of the autumn harvest with ceremonial worship of the goddess of wealth and learning.

The Swami opposed Hindu participation in Muharram, partly because it was a Muslim occasion and partly because he regarded Muharram, as well as other Hindu festivals like Kavadi, as 'ridiculous ceremonials adopted through unreasonable imitation and slavish fashion, costly rituals, these and such as these have arrogantly usurped the title and misnomer of religion'.<sup>62</sup> The Swami requested that the Town Clerk set aside 12 November 1909 as a holiday for indentured Indians to celebrate Deepavali. When Leslie, the Town Clerk's assistant, investigated the matter, he found that only the 'better class' Indians celebrated Deepavali, and concluded that he was 'not at all convinced that the general indentured population of the Colony would wish this day set apart'.<sup>63</sup>

A memorandum in the Town Clerk's office in 1909 observed that it was impractical to give Hindus leave to attend all their festivals, as they celebrated 18 festivals which had different degrees of importance for different groups of Hindus.<sup>64</sup> When the opinion of Protector Polkinghorne was sought, he also warned that the Swami's movement was a religious one 'to induce Hindoos to keep their own festivals and have nothing to do with the Mohurram...I think care will have to be taken lest the opinion of the few people living in Durban should be regarded as representing the opinions of the Hindoo Indians in the Colony'.<sup>65</sup>

The Swami's protests, though, would yield tangible results. In 1910, the Deputy Protector reported that Muharram was always well attended by Hindu indentured workers 'as an outing for a day or two, although it is a Mahomedan occasion of mourning'.<sup>66</sup> Two years later he was 'pleased to see that a move is being made by the Hindus to celebrate their own religious occasions, "Deepavali", etc., instead of taking a prominent part in the Mohurram'.<sup>67</sup> From 1910, the Durban Municipality granted employees leave to celebrate Deepavali.<sup>68</sup> In January 1910, the education department declared Deepavali a school holiday.<sup>69</sup> The societies formed by the Swami established a communal celebration of Deepavali. For example, the Sydenham HYMS celebrated it in a 'fitting manner' in 1910. The children met at 10:00 a.m. at the Society's hall and marched to Overport, where a sports meeting was held, toys handed out to children and lunch served to around 500 people. The officiating pundit, Chickurie Maragli, said that in the three decades he had been in Natal, this was the first time he had seen Deepavali celebrated in this manner. After lunch, a special *havan* (singing of Vedic mantras) was performed and a concert held.<sup>70</sup>

The interventions of the Swami were decisive in marking a ritual shift that would eventually see Deepavali emerging as the principal holiday of Hindus. Swami Shankeranaand's influence was not limited to Deepavali, but had a wider canvas. In outlining his work through the Deepavali 'struggle', we see the outlines of his *modus operandi*. He was happy to reach

agreement with the authorities, seeing collaboration rather than confrontation as more productive; he opposed what he saw as ritualism dressed up as religion; and he was determined to develop a 'national' organisation that would be instrumental in redefining Hinduism by replacing 'degenerate' aspects with a 'pure Hinduism'.<sup>71</sup>

As a substitute for the festival of Muharram, the Swami organised the procession of a chariot through the streets of Durban to celebrate the birth of Rama. The Ram Navami Festival was first held in April 1910. Hindus met at the Umgeni Road Temple, where the Swami explained the significance of the occasion. Also present were Harry Smith, the Immigration Restriction Officer, as well as W Daugherty, the Sanitary Inspector, and his wife. Smith addressed the crowd before being garlanded 'amidst roars of cheers'. A news reporter noted sarcastically, 'I was rubbing my eyes and wondering for it certainly seemed as if Ram, Luchman, and Sita were being garlanded.'<sup>72</sup> Protector Polkinghorne and Chief Constable Donovan were also invited but could not attend.

After the speeches, the crowd of approximately 4 000, accompanied by chariots, marched through the streets of Durban chanting 'Shree Ramchandraji' and carrying banners on which were inscribed 'Ram Jayanti', 'Rath Yatra' and 'Om'. The procession returned to the Umgeni Temple, where there was a feast and three wrestling bouts between North and South Indians, at which the 'indentured Indian [South] was the best'.<sup>73</sup>

## ***Gai mata*: 'the cow as the mother of all'**

Poorer Indians were receptive to the Swami, who established local societies in areas like Sydenham, Mayville and Sea Cow Lake. At the third anniversary of the Durban HYMA in 1908, the president, VRR Moodley, noted that 'owing to the Swami's presence there was great enthusiasm among the Hindus, which was working so forcibly in removing their racial differences and establishing better understanding between the various sects'.<sup>74</sup> In November 1908, a chapter of the HYMA was formed in Overport. Addressing members, the Swami explained that 'society' implied union for a common purpose. Hindus had too many 'different ideals and ways of realising their God'; they had to set aside their differences and work for the common good.<sup>75</sup> During 1909, the Swami travelled throughout Natal, visiting Verulam, Mount Edgecombe, Stanger and Maritzburg. Large crowds flocked to hear their 'spiritual guide'.<sup>76</sup>

Swami Shankeranand was a catalyst in increasing religious awareness among Hindus, and brilliantly exploited opportunities to do so. For example, in 1909, when the authorities wanted to put down two cows afflicted by tick fever, he organised a mass meeting in Mayville which was attended by 2 000 Hindus. Veneration for the cow, and moral prohibition against its killing, dates to around the fourth century BC. In the group of Hindu religious texts known as the Puranas the cow is symbolic of wealth and prosperity – hence the notion of *gai mata*, 'the cow as the mother of all'.<sup>77</sup> The Swami's politicisation of the issue was a masterstroke in raising Hindu consciousness.

Pundits from all over Durban, and 'respected Hindoo colonists', stressed at the mass meeting that 'the Mother-cow is sacred to the Hindu religion and the slaughter thereof is



regarded with more abhorrence than the murder of a human being'.<sup>78</sup> The *African Chronicle* captured the emotional state of the large crowd: 'The indignation caused in consequence of the threatened shooting of two cows is not likely to be forgotten by those who have been an eye-witness to the scene of their activity...Women were crying and shedding torrents of tears as if their very children were being snatched away by the mighty hand of the messenger of death.'

A delegation met with the Administrator of Natal and explained the religious significance of the cow. Women 'of the district were going to offer themselves to be shot before the cattle', they told him. They also stressed that there was no need to kill the cows because 'the area for some miles around is occupied by Hindus and there was scarcely a person of any other religion in the district'. The delegation succeeded in stopping the killings. Through incidents such as this, the Swami raised religious consciousness. He was helped by the residential clustering of Hindus, which the delegation emphasised.

The Swami organised the Hindu religious and cultural organisation Veda Dharma Sabha in Clare Estate, Sydenham, Mayville and Overport. These were formed to improve the general knowledge of Indians through reading, cultivating the art of speaking, spreading the Hindi language and 'national' script (Devanagiri), creating a love for the motherland, and rendering assistance to all Hindus.<sup>79</sup> The Swami was keen to 'reconvert' Christian Indians to Hinduism. While orthodox Hinduism denied admission to its fold of those who had converted to other religions, the *Shuddhi* movement started by Swami Dayananda placed emphasis on reconversion. Thus, for example, when the HYMS held its anniversary celebrations in 1908, 'the usual ceremony of re-conversion was performed for Ramsamy Naidoo by Swami Shankeranand, and after singing some sacred hymns, the new convert was announced to have been admitted by the Holy man'.<sup>80</sup>

## 'Creating strife and fostering agitation...'

The Swami also had an economic agenda. He urged indentured and ex-indentured Hindus to circulate money among fellow religionists and establish cooperative movements, educational institutions and political bodies.<sup>81</sup> He organised an Indian Farmers' Association (IFA) to unite market gardeners, who were mainly Hindu. The IFA held a meeting on 30 May 1909 to discuss how to set up a Hindu-controlled market. As soon as their meeting was over, they attacked a meeting of Indian banana growers, organised by ML Sultan, a Muslim, with 'sticks, *sjambocks* [*sic*], and a few rounds of revolvers'.<sup>82</sup> The following day, an Indian Market Committee was formed at the Swami's house. Hindu farmers boycotted the Indian market at the Grey Street Mosque, and demanded that the Town Council arrange a separate market for Hindus. The IFA objected to the market being run by Muslims because profits were used to benefit Muslims and fund Gandhi's 'political propaganda'.<sup>83</sup> Trustees of the mosque denied the allegations and stated that the market was run on a non-profit basis.

During the boycott, there was an altercation between some Muslims and Hindus, and seven Muslims were charged with assaulting Hindus on 20 May 1909. In handing down judgment, Judge Brunton-Warner stated that 'the whole affair is a quarrel over religion...the accused were

provoked by criticism of their religion'. The judge discharged four of the accused, fined three, and observed that it was 'the first time to my knowledge of the Mahomedans and Hindus having a disturbance of this nature. They have always in the past lived amicably together until the arrival of the Swami Shankeranand who seems to have stirred the Hindus and created strife...I think the sooner this man Swami Shankeranand abstains from fostering agitation amongst these people, the better it will be for the Indian community at large or otherwise he had better leave the country.'<sup>84</sup>

The Town Council met with 'representatives of the various classes' of Indians on 31 August 1909 to resolve the dispute.<sup>85</sup> Mayor Walter Greenacre informed Indians that the Durban Corporation would be opening a new market in Victoria Street, with revenue going to its coffers and not to religious groupings.<sup>86</sup> The new market opened on 1 August 1910.

The Swami also founded the Swadeshi Company because he felt that Gandhi paid less attention to poor Hindus than to 'people of wealth'. Herbert Wynne-Cole, the Maritzburg licensing officer, pointed out to the Colonial Secretary in 1909 that the aim of the Company was a 'determined attempt on the part of the colonial-born Hindu community to establish themselves in trade and obtain trading licences all over the Colony'. Wynne-Cole added that he had always received applications from Muslim traders, but it was only after the Swami formed the Swadeshi and Veda Dharma societies that he received applications from colonial-born Hindus. A delegation of colonial-born Hindus told him that their status was different to that of Muslims and passenger migrants, and that stringent anti-Indian trade laws should not be applied to them. They had been 'educated and brought up in European ways and know no other country than this country in which they have made their homes', and should have the 'right to earn an honest livelihood'.<sup>87</sup>

Swami Shankeranand had a strong support base in Maritzburg, which centred on the figure of Charlie Nulliah. He formalised this in the form of the Maritzburg Veda Dharma Sabha in 1909. The first anniversary celebrations were attended by 400 delegates who participated in a programme lasting from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. It included the performance of the *Yagna* (offerings to Hindu deities through priests for an individual's specific needs) and *Bhajanas* (songs in praise of deities), a lecture by the Swami, lunch, as well as a talk by CE Nelson of the Theosophical Society of South Africa. A school was started for Hindu boys, providing lodging for 20 pupils. It was funded by donations and a *chapti* fund, whereby students were sent from house to house to collect 'gifts' like rice, dholl and other provisions, or money.<sup>88</sup>

## Mourning King Edward, 'so universally loved by the Hindus'

In March 1909, shortly after his arrival in Natal, the Swami boarded a tram car in Maritzburg. He was 'rudely' ordered out and 'abused and sworn at' when he asked why. As a result of this 'high-handed action, the Christians, Hindus and Mahomedans have sunk their differences, held a mass meeting and appointed a committee' to protest. When the committee warned the Town Council that a boycott of tram cars was being organised, the Council replied that in future 'respectably dressed' Indians could sit in the car.<sup>89</sup>

Influenced by the Swami, the Durban Veda Dharma Sabha chose Wynne-Cole in 1909 to present their political address to Sir Matthew Nathan, the retiring governor of Natal. Given the problems that Indians were experiencing at the hands of the licensing officer, who refused licences to Indians without justification, the Swami's opponents considered this inappropriate. As *Indian Opinion* remarked, this 'implied all is well with Indians when the writing on the wall says all is ill'.<sup>90</sup>

When King Edward died in May 1910, the flag at the Durban Hindu Temple was raised at half mast to mourn the death of a man who, according to one message of sympathy from local Hindus to the royal family, 'was so universally loved by the Hindus'.<sup>91</sup> The Swami published a notice on 8 May 1910 in local newspapers, and circulated it to employers via the Protector:

All Hindus are hereby informed that they as loyal subjects of the British Empire are to observe the strict rules of mourning and to take no part in any sort of amusements, except marriages already arranged, or other strictly religious functions, till the day of the funeral of our noble and beloved late Sovereign...and to offer prayers to Almighty Father to give peace to our new Sovereign and other members of the Royal family in their sad bereavement.<sup>92</sup>

The Swami successfully obtained permission from employers for Hindus to attend funeral services. The attitude of Illovo Sugar was typical. It granted workers leave 'in good time prior to the fixed hour of the funeral. I hope this will meet with your approval and shall be glad to fall in with any suggestion you may think fit to make on this occasion.'<sup>93</sup> At a mass meeting of Hindus at the temple in Umgeni, speaker after speaker 'eloquently dealt upon the great and irreparable loss which the British Empire and the civilised world have sustained by the death of the greatest monarch of modern times who will be remembered by posterity as Edward the Peacemaker'.<sup>94</sup>

The Swami's plan to organise a 'Grand Indian Sports and Festivities Day' to mark the coronation of the new king failed because the Natal Indian Congress formed pickets to warn Indians not to 'dance to the tune of Corporation officials'.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, when the Congress sent its message of sympathy, it included a 'prayer that the reign of the new king may be characterised by a deep desire for the realisation of the sentiments of the Proclamation of 1858 and that his rule may be marked by the growth of wider sympathy for the Indian people'.<sup>96</sup>

The Swami also observed Empire Day. For example, in 1909, the Maritzburg Veda Dharma Sabha organised a general meeting 'to express loyal devotion to His majesty the King-Emperor'. The Swami remarked that India had derived numerous positive benefits from British rule and that the destinies of India and England were 'interwoven'. Queen Victoria had 'possessed an inexhaustible fund of perfect loving sympathy for her Indian subjects'. The Swami 'exhorted the audience to be most sincere and steadfast in devotion' to the King, and proposed the following resolution which was adopted: 'That this meeting wishes to convey the assurance of the sincere devotion and loyalty of the followers of the Vedic religion in this Colony to our beloved Sovereign, His Majesty the King, Emperor of India.'<sup>97</sup> The meeting ended with three cheers for the king, and for the governor and government of Natal.

A lavish banquet was held on 31 May 1910 to mark the Union of South Africa, at which the Swami rendered religious sermons. PS Aiyar, editor of *African Chronicle*, asked, 'Why was the high priest of the Hindoo Vedic Arya Samaj religion invited to preside at the banquet? On what did he speak? On market gardeners or Union – neither belongs to the domain of religion. What has a Sanyasi got to do with vegetables and bananas and the Union Ministry?'<sup>98</sup>

## South African Hindu Maha Sabha

The Swami organised a conference of South African Hindus in Durban between 31 May and 2 June 1912 to 'popularise the teachings of the Hindu religion', 'devise means to make this Religious Conference a permanent institution', and 'appoint officials to further the cause of the Conference by communicating with the various Hindu Societies in South Africa'.<sup>99</sup> Hindus attended from all corners of the country. The Swami, however, gave a highly controversial address which was contemptuous of Indians and critical of Gandhi. He said that Hindus had 'always served their masters most faithfully and industrially as long as they were not given a free hand, but whenever given freedom to accomplish independently they could not agree among themselves, and failed quite miserably'.<sup>100</sup> A strong national body was needed to 'guide' Hindus. The Swami opposed Gandhi's passive resistance campaigns, which, he argued, resulted in the 'authorities becoming prejudiced against the actions of such people, and in their efforts to re-establish law the whole race has to suffer for the follies of a few'. He called on Hindus to dissociate themselves from Muslims and Gandhi, and to be more conciliatory towards the government:

Many elderly Indians have invariably told me that they were much happier here and under the Boer Government of the Transvaal before the advent of Mr. Gandhi...I do not believe that if the Hindus had an absolute Hindu as their leader instead of a Tolstoyan, the Government of South Africa would have ever hesitated to better the condition of so useful an asset to the Colony, if properly approached.<sup>101</sup>

Some delegates were angered by the comments. PA Joshie and CB Gihwala of the United Hindu Association of the Cape Colony complained that the 'movement seems to be political rather than religious. We are not party to the remarks passed against Mr. M.K. Gandhi. We hereby completely dissociate ourselves from the South African Hindu Maha Sabha (Great Society) which has been formed as a result of the conference'. Kalidas Patel, who represented Kimberley Hindus, announced that they would be withdrawing for the same reason.<sup>102</sup> The Tamil Benefit Society of Johannesburg did likewise.

Notwithstanding this backlash, the conference was a landmark event for Hindus in South Africa. The national gathering became an annual event. Swami Shankeranand left for India on 17 May 1913. His stay was controversial. While, as PS Aiyar pointed out, he brought about 'disunion and dissension in the community' and 'estrangement' between Hindus and Muslims',<sup>103</sup> as Pandit Bhawani Dayal observed, Swami Shankeranand effected huge change:

On reaching Natal I noticed the effects of his religious propaganda. To have created in the Hindus, who at one time were groping in darkness, faith in Vedic Dharma, interest in *Sandhya* and *Havan* [ritual prayers], pride in their festivals, devotion to Aryan culture, practice in greeting one another with *namaste* [greeting in which the hands are placed together at the heart, eyes closed, and head bowed], a feeling for the mother tongue, respect for the mother country and confidence in the bright future of the Aryans.<sup>104</sup>

## Agni, the fire god

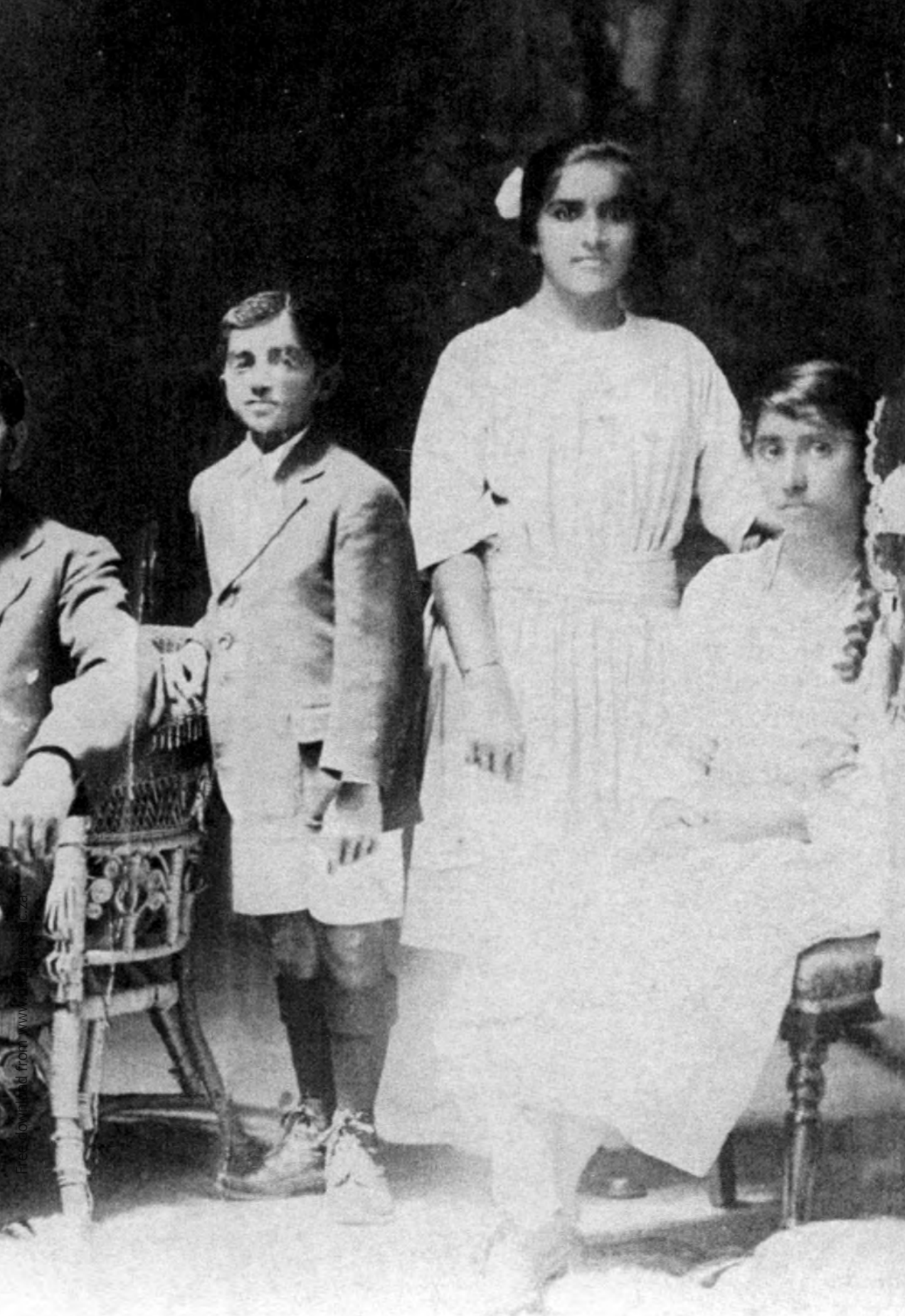
In looking at the early history of Hinduism, we see how relatively quickly, and with great sacrifice, the indentured, and those who were one step out of indenture, built their temples and celebrated their relationships with their gods through festivals. While South and North Indians mostly had their own temples, there was no 'space' for separate temples for different castes and sub-castes. Compromises had to be made. The temples, drama and festivals played an important role in fostering social solidarity and allowing Indians to survive and resist the harshness of indenture. Prior to visits of overseas reformers and the institutionalisation of Hinduism, the 'lower forms' of Hinduism, based on the Shaivite, Vaishnavite and goddess traditions, were crucial in helping the indentured to cope with socio-economic conditions in Natal.

During the early years, there was a relatively 'open' religious community as Hindus participated in Muharram and Muslims in Hindu religious activities. In the process, the indentured were transforming themselves from the individuation of indenture into a 'community', which often cut across caste and religious lines and forged new boundaries. Two important figures in the first decade of the twentieth century were Bhai Parmanand and Swami Shankeranand. Like Agni, the god of fire, the flame that is said to burn in all people, these 'warriors', in their different ways, lit the flame of Hinduism.

It was through Swami Shankeranand that Hindus stopped celebrating Muharram and gradually came to regard Deepavali as their major festival. The Swami also helped form organisations throughout Natal. Aside from the numerous small Sabhas, 12 major Hindu organisations emerged between 1905 and 1912.<sup>105</sup> While Gandhi's Hinduism was the basis for a broader Indian unity based on equality and justice for members of the Empire, the Swami saw the need to separate the Hindu from other influences as a basis for unifying Hindus, and using this unity to advance Hindus both spiritually and economically.

The arrival of the Arya Samajists, the organisations that mushroomed after their departures, the free settled population by the time indenture ended in 1911, the building of temples and the availability of more money to pay for Indian festivals invigorated Hinduism. On the one hand, as 'Hinduness' was being constituted, the prejudices of class and contestations over traditions were becoming apparent. On the other hand, the establishment of the institutions of Hinduism would reinforce the divisions between Muslims and Christians. These divisions sat uneasily with the call for 'ethnic unity', a tension that was to persist throughout the twentieth century.









# Coolies with Bibles

Even where writing existed, as in India, printing technology didn't and bamboo or bark or parchment had to be used for purposes of writing...Which of course meant that texts couldn't be moved easily...With colonisation came a different political world order, but with it also came the book, in two forms: the Bible which contained the mysteries of God and the means by which heathens may be saved, and the book in which the White man read or in which he wrote. Both were mysterious objects: the reading of one was transferred on to the other by subject peoples so that the book itself, regardless of its value or its content, became magical.

VIJAY MISHRA<sup>1</sup>

## The man of two books

Munshi Henry Nundoo (3624) arrived in Natal on Sunday 9 October 1864, on the *Ocean Chief* from Benares. He would stand out for many reasons. One of them was that in the period 1860–1866, 300 of the 6 445 indentured migrants were Christian; of these, Nundoo, remarkably, was the only indentured Christian from North India.<sup>2</sup> The 18-year-old Anglican, according to family legend, carried with him his most prized possession, his Bible. He was assigned to Trenance Estate. Nundoo had studied at a college in Benares, and spoke English and Hindi. He was also proficient in printing, as a printing school was attached to the college.

As with many migrants, we cannot apply a 'one-cap-fits-all' approach to why he emigrated – adventure, poverty and religious intolerance could be among a myriad of reasons. He was rare, though, to the extent that he was a learned man when he arrived as an indentured labourer. After working for a few years at Trenance, he was 'discovered' in 1867 by the Reverend Ralph Stott, who was keen on establishing schools for Indian children. Nundoo joined him as a teacher, even though he had two years to run on his contract. By 1873, Stott was running schools in Umgeni, Umbilo, Verulam and Durban. Nundoo, at this time, was teaching 40 pupils at the day school in Durban. He was a treasure for the missions and the inspector of Indian schools, who were scouring Mauritius and India for suitable Indian teachers who could fit in 'with dignity'.<sup>3</sup>

Munshi Nundoo produced *Light of Knowledge*, a 'survival guide' for Indians published by TL Cullingworth of Durban in 1873.<sup>4</sup> It was a compilation of English words and phrases, together with their Hindi equivalents. Nundoo indicated that he would be following it up with a second book, but there is no evidence that it was published.<sup>5</sup> *Light of Knowledge* was

OPPOSITE: Amonee Gabriel and one of her grandsons, Father Claude Lawrence. The alliance between the Gabriel and Lawrence clans made them one of the most prominent Christian families in Natal.

PREVIOUS PAGE: The arrival of Vincent Lawrence, a staunch Roman Catholic, (pictured here with his family) did much to ensure a Christian presence among Indians in South Africa.

probably the first book by an indentured labourer in South Africa, and Nundoo was most likely the first indentured schoolteacher.

Nundoo was also associated with the mission, possibly even as a part-time catechist, as he was among the signatories in 1876 for a public appeal for funds to build a chapel in Queen Street, at a cost of £235. Nundoo and Indian catechists C Stephen, Josiah and Bissessor raised the money, in the words of the Reverend Stott, by 'begging first among their own people, and both heathens [Hindus] and Mohammedans gave towards the Christian building. They then begged of White men.'<sup>6</sup> Munshi Nundoo died quite tragically in 1902 when a nail pierced his foot, causing blood poisoning. He left a widow, Christiana, and six children – Daniel, David, Nelly, Elsie, Paul and Grace – who would all make important contributions to the Indian Christian community.

Early indentured Christians like Nundoo and their children placed great store by both the Bible and the book. The mission schools were the embryo of Indian education, and Christians, with their knowledge of English, had a head start in economic mobility among Indians. In the Bible and the book, they saw magical possibilities for advancement in an environment where the dominant values were those of white Christians, to whom non-Christian Indians, as we note from the words of the Reverend Stott, were 'heathens'.

## In the beginning there were Christians...

The *Truro*, the first indentured ship to reach Natal, brought with it an estimated 87 Christians. In fact, the first 10 names are those of Christians. While at one level surprising, at another it is not, for Christianity has a long presence in India. The Portuguese established the Roman Catholic Church at Goa in 1540, and the French founded a Catholic station at Pondicherry in 1674. Protestants were situated mainly along the east coast. The Dutch settled at Pulicat (Madras Presidency) in 1609, and the British at Madras in 1639 and Calcutta in 1689. In tracing the migration of indentured Christians, it becomes immediately apparent that most Roman Catholics arrived during the first six years, while most Baptists came after 1900. One of the reasons for the stoppage of Catholic migrants from French areas was British legislation prohibiting the shipping of Indian labour through ports such as Pondicherry, Yanum and Kariakal.<sup>7</sup> Except for a short period of British rule, Pondicherry was under French rule from roughly 1643 to 1954, when the territory was ceded to the Union of India. In all, 2 159 indentured Indians (1.4 per cent) were Christian, the majority (2 128) being from South India.<sup>8</sup> Around 300 Christians arrived in the 1860s, 73 in the 1870s, 145 in the 1880s and 170 in the 1890s. Most indentured Christians (1 469) arrived between 1900 and 1911. This included 443 Baptists.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of indentured Christians would have been from the lower castes, for whom conversion was 'a counter-cultural movement and an escape route...[which met] a secular need for an upward social and economic mobility'.<sup>10</sup> A few gave their caste as 'Syrian-Christian'. According to tradition, they were the first Christians in India, converted by St Thomas the Apostle, who arrived at Kodungallur on the Malabar Coast of India in AD 52. These converts included natives of India as well as members of the Jewish diaspora settled in Kerala. Their Christianity includes Jewish elements and Hindu customs, and they speak Malayalam. Various writings depict them as a prosperous people who enjoyed a high status on the Malabar Coast.<sup>11</sup>

Indentured Christians arrived in an environment where churches and other religious institutions already existed. But the churches, albeit with important exceptions, were often the handmaidens of colonialism, and this was reflected in their racially separate organisation. Recalling the Roman Catholic Church early in the twentieth century, Ralph Lawrence wrote that segregation 'was very much condoned by the Catholic Church as by all the other religious denominations. Even in the cathedral it was customary for the White congregation to occupy the central aisles, Indians sat on the right and Africans on the left.'<sup>12</sup> Brain likewise stated that indentured Catholics and Anglicans 'had the most difficult adjustment in the colony. Expecting to be welcomed and received into the Natal congregation, many were to be disillusioned.'<sup>13</sup>

Despite this, many of the early Christian families, because of their religious contacts, style of dress, 'familiar' names and language, took advantage of the limited access to education, and came to fill positions such as that of interpreter, which placed them in influential positions between 'non-literate coolies' and 'civilised' whites. Some, like Bernard Gabriel and David Vinden, even sought to enter white society, or at least to differentiate themselves from 'common coolies'.

Others though, like Bernard Sigamoney, put their education, access to the church and language at the service of the downtrodden. Like Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), the French abbot regarded as the 'voice of conscience' in the Catholic Church, the Reverend Bernard Lazarus Emanuel Sigamoney was the 'voice of conscience' on many issues affecting Indians. The glowing tribute by RG Pillay, Chief Indian Scouts Commissioner, at his funeral on 3 April 1963, at the age of 75, aptly sums up his massive contribution:

[His] sudden death removes from the South African scene a great leader of youth, a versatile sportsman, and above all, a doughty fighter for the rights and privileges of the underdog. As a diplomat, an organizer, and leader of men, the Reverend stands supreme among his contemporary leaders, and our world is poorer by his passing.<sup>14</sup>

## Humble beginnings: 'Emanuel of Johannesburg, hotel waiter'

The Reverend Sigamoney's life is more than the story of one person, as it is revealing of the broader developments of the time. He was intimately involved in many facets of Indian life and was one of the few leaders of the community who sought to move his 'activism' beyond the confines of the Indian community. He was a trade unionist, church minister, educationist and household name as sportsman and administrator.

He was involved in political mobilisation, transcended racial boundaries as he linked up with Clements Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, lived beyond the identity of a Christian (his farewell party before he left for England was held at the Tamil Institute and hosted by Muslims and Hindus) and, at the age of 70, he was an important player in uniting the African, coloured and Indian cricket boards, and all the while he held court as an Anglican minister.

The Reverend Sigamoney was the grandson of Francis (15534) and Santhanam (15535) Sigamoney, who arrived as indentured labourers on the *Northern Monarch* from Madras in October 1877. They were part of a group of 10 Pariah Anglicans from St Thomas Mount in Chingleput. Francis Sigamoney had joined the 10th Regiment of Native Infantry in March 1864 as a *sepooy*.<sup>15</sup> After serving close to 10 years, he resigned in January 1874 and emigrated to Natal

with his wife and their sons Lazarus (15536) and Emanuel (15537). A third son, Francis, was born in Durban and baptised at St Emmanuel's Church in October 1885.<sup>16</sup>

Francis senior was a constable with the Umlazi magistrate's court from January 1879 to October 1892, when he advised the Colonial Secretary that he wished to be pensioned because of 'advanced age' and 'dimness of sight', or be transferred to Durban. A medical examination in November 1892 confirmed that his muscles were 'affected with slight tremors' and that he had cataracts in both eyes. Instead of a pension, he was given a month's dismissal notice on 21 November 1892. A distraught Sigamoney asked to be 'kept in mind' when an opening came up. Although magistrates WP Jackson and AE Titron provided testimonials that Francis had performed his duties 'faithfully and energetically', he was not given another government position. His family in distress, Francis Sigamoney made one last plea to the government in March 1893: 'Having spent all my life under the government in India and here [and] having no other means of sustenance, unless I earn my daily livelihood for both my wife and children, they are simply starving for food. I shall be glad if you will have pity on us and give me a post to prevent starvation.' He never received a reply.<sup>17</sup>

Francis' son Emanuel, whose name means 'God is with us', was known as 'Emanuel of Johannesburg, Hotel Waiter', which appears on his estate papers.<sup>18</sup> He had nine children: Michael (b. 1884), Elizabeth (b. 1886), Bernard Lazarus Emanuel (b. 1888), Cecelia (b. 1892), Mary Anthonya (b. 1901), Samuel Dunborough (b. 1903), Simon Peter (b. 1905), and two others who died in childbirth. He moved to the Transvaal in the mid-1890s to work as a waiter but, like many Indians, was forced to flee when the South African War broke out in 1899. He returned to Johannesburg after the war, but died of gangrene in December 1906. Bernard Sigamoney applied to go to Johannesburg in January 1907 to wind up the estate. Even though he was a teacher at the St Aidan's Mission School, and had a recommendation from Arthur H Smith, Superintendent of Indian Missions in Natal, the Registrar of Asiatics in the Transvaal declined his request.<sup>19</sup>

Sigamoney was a keen sportsman and administrator. He was involved in cricket as a member of the Durban United Cricket Club in 1901, and later the Schools and Railways cricket clubs, and was also vice-president of the Durban and District Indian Cricket Union from 1901. He was instrumental in the participation of the Natal team in a national cricket tournament in Kimberley in 1913 against Griqualand West, Eastern Province and Western Province. Sigamoney was commended for his 'superb fielding'. He took two wickets against Griqualand West and five against Eastern Province.<sup>20</sup> An amateur journalist, Sigamoney was for several years a correspondent for *Latest*, a local weekly managed by George Bull, contributing 'Notes on Indians'.

During the First World War, Sigamoney invited whites to play a cricket match against Indians at the Albert Park on the Victoria Embankment in Durban to raise funds for the war. 'Are not our Europeans and Indians fighting together? Is not the bond of fellowship strengthened by the shedding of their blood for the same cause as our White brothers are cut out for?' he asked.<sup>21</sup> Such optimism was in vain. Sigamoney's involvement in Indian affairs extended well beyond the boundary. During the poverty years of the First World War, he addressed meetings on food shortages in Durban and helped form the Indian Workers Industrial Union in March 1917. He was its first secretary, with Gordon Lee of the Industrial Workers Union as chairman. By 1917,

the Union had organised Indian dock workers, painters, hotel employees, tobacco workers, municipal workers, catering and garment workers. During this period, Sigamoney was also a boxing promoter for Jimmy Dixon.

In December 1922, Sigamoney went to England to undertake a four-year course in Lincolnshire to train for the priesthood. His farewell at the Tamil Institute was attended by prominent Indians like Shaik Emamally and Vincent Lawrence, as well as whites like George Bull and the Reverend Mullet. In addition to gifts like a walking stick, fountain pen, wallet and books, he was given an address that captured his contribution to Indian sport: 'As a player you won a place in representative teams and as an official you occupied at different times several offices; whether as president or as a lesser official, we know you have had your heart and soul in the game and its good governance.'<sup>22</sup> In England, Sigamoney played cricket for his college. The *Skegness Standard* reported in 1924 that 'the Coloured student [Sigamoney] was again in great form with the leather, and secured seven wickets for thirty-four runs. Sigamoney gave the visitors some leather-hunting when he went to the wicket, and topped the half century.'<sup>23</sup>

Sigamoney returned to South Africa in March 1927. En route to Durban, Indians in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London entertained him, such was his esteem nationally among Indians. When he reached Durban, 'despite adverse weather conditions, three hundred eager Indians gathered at the wharfside to meet him, including representatives of the Natal Indian Congress and sports bodies. From there he was motored to his home in Sydenham, where many more could not resist the temptation of seeing him at once. Remarked one man, "So this is good old Ben: back home again".' Receptions followed at the Gandhi Library and other institutions.<sup>24</sup> Sigamoney married Georgina and they had seven children: Bernard, Rosa, Minnie, Reginald, Leslie, Eda and Emanuel. He moved to Johannesburg in 1928, where he was a minister in the Anglican Church at Vrededorp, in charge of the Indian and coloured section of the congregation; principal of an Indian School in Doornfontein; and active in Boy Scouts and sports.

Politically, he remained a champion of the underclasses. The Reverend Sigamoney was a close associate of Clements Kadalie of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union. He addressed Union meetings when Kadalie visited Johannesburg during the 1920s. At the time the Union was the largest black-led organisation in the country, with a membership of 100 000 at its peak. A confidential report from W Binnie of the Central Investigations Department (CID) stated that Sigamoney's speeches were 'sufficiently hostile to give the impression that he is an agitator'.<sup>25</sup> In July 1931, Sigamoney toured Durban with a group of Indian Boy Scouts who were not officially recognised by the white South African Scouts Association. On Sunday 19 July he addressed a meeting of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (Natal) during a period of great unrest among Africans in Durban, who were protesting the municipality's monopoly on beer-brewing. He told the large, mainly African crowd that he had been asked to deliver a message from AWG Champion, a former leader of the Union in Natal, now turned businessman and politician and exiled in Johannesburg: that African protestors should put aside their 'sticks' and marshal the women to engage in non-violent mass demonstrations against the pass laws. Gandhi's non-violent strategy would be the salvation of Africans because the jails would soon be full, paralysing the state. Sigamoney was one of 10 'agitators' identified by police at the

meeting.<sup>26</sup> He was also active in the Transvaal Indian Congress, and regularly attended ANC meetings in Ferreirstown.

The Reverend Sigamoney's religious, educational and political activities did not diminish his involvement in sports. He was instrumental in forming the South African Indian Cricket Union in Johannesburg in March 1940, and at the inaugural tournament in 1941 appeared in Transvaal colours as player and manager at the age of 53. His skills had clearly not dimmed, as he took 7–27 against Eastern Province. He also managed a South African Indian cricket team in 1951, in the inaugural national interracial cricket tournament against coloureds, Malays and Africans under the banner of the newly formed South African Cricket Board of Control. In January 1958, he used all his powers of persuasion to get the cricket bodies to drop racial designations and merge into a single non-racial body.

From a background that saw his grandfather treated shoddily to his father, a waiter at the white man's table, whose affairs he was prevented from wrapping up, Sigamoney was privy to the colonial system's assault on dignity that followed the 'non-white' into his grave. He was witness both to the devastating effects of African dispossession and to the fact that the Union of South Africa offered no respite for 'non-whites'. His biography illustrates vividly his journey through these events, marked by his ability to be deeply embedded in the Indian community while at the same time having the foresight to support the struggles of African people. Throughout, he kept the 'faith' and played a vital role in building Christian institutions in both Natal and the Transvaal, while challenging a Christianity that duplicated the racial compartmentalisation of the political masters.

The numbers of indentured Christian migrants would remain small throughout indenture and the missions would largely fail in their proselytising efforts, but, as the example of the Reverend Sigamoney illustrates, the contribution of Indian Christians was far in excess of their numerical presence.

## The Reverend Canon Dr Lancelot Parker Booth

We want to place on record the deep sense of gratitude the Indian community owes you for your many acts of charity and kindness...It is hard for us to tender to you, unmixed with sorrow, our congratulations on your preferment. Umtata's gain is our loss. You leave behind a gap that will be hard to fill.<sup>27</sup>

This tribute, dated 29 June 1900 and signed by 837 Indians, was handed to the Reverend Canon Dr LP Booth (1850–1925) when he left Durban to continue his mission work in Umtata. It was an apt summation of his considerable contribution to the spread of Anglicanism among Indians.

The Church of England was active in Natal when indentured Indians first landed. The first Anglican Bishop of Natal was John William Colenso (1814–1883), who fell into disrepute with the colonial and church authorities for his sympathy with the Zulu.<sup>28</sup> This led to a hiatus in missionary activity. While there was no organised missionary activity, several individuals began working among Indians. The Reverend Joseph Barker opened a school in his Umzinto parish for Indians and Zulus, and reported in 1865 that 'the coolies will not join the natives in

a place of instruction, neither will they attend the same services; and there is still the same difficulty that no one is acquainted with their language'.<sup>29</sup> However, he believed that 'separated as they are from their country and its influences, as well as from the superstitions of their forefathers, a great work is open here for the Church'.

By 1875, missions were run in Umlazi and Isipingo by the Reverend Baugh, who was impressed by 'the quickness of mind' of Indian children. In Maritzburg, the St Paul's Mission was started in 1868 in George Street, and a catechist, Charles David, started a school in 1880. In Durban, the Reverend HF Whittington opened a church in Smith Street and a school in Field Street for six Tamil-speaking Anglican families. Subban Godfrey, a migrant from Mauritius, was employed as teacher and conducted services in Tamil, while Anboo Royeppen ran a Sunday school. Royeppen may well have been passenger 331 on the *Truro*, a 38-year-old Anglican migrant from Bangalore who served his indenture with shipping agent Holiday. The Reverend Joseph Barker pointed to caste and the attitude of employers as factors inhibiting conversion among the indentured:

Any Coolie becoming a Christian would become an utter outcaste, so far as his social relations are concerned. And the Church would not get much assistance from the employers. One or two would assist, but the greater part care only for cheap labour. The coolie to them is but an animal, whose soul's welfare they are not called upon to look after.<sup>30</sup>

Other factors inhibiting conversion were the shortage of Indian evangelists and the racism of whites. Durham-born Dr LP Booth had arrived in Natal in 1876 as a district surgeon in Umzinto after completing his medical studies at the University of Edinburgh. He was horrified by the conditions of indentured workers, and offered his services to the diocese so that he could dedicate himself to the spiritual and medical health of Indians. Booth was made a deacon in 1883 and ordained in 1885 after completing his theological studies at the University of Durham. He was raised to the status of canon in 1889.<sup>31</sup>

While he did not speak Indian languages, Canon Booth acquired an intimate knowledge of Indians as a result of his work in Umzinto. He lived close to the Alice Street Bridge, which was in the heart of the 'Indian quarter' in the Durban CBD, and built the St Aidan's Church in nearby Cross Street. He acquired the services of Indian schoolmaster John Thomas in 1883. By 1885, Anglicans were running nine of 21 Indian schools in Natal. This increased to 15 in 1886. The first girls' school was opened in 1889 with two English women, Miss Saunders and Miss Grimes, as superintendents. Booth opened separate orphanages for Indian boys and girls. Many Indian immigrants were involved, such as Godfrey (Durban), Manickum Royeppen (Umbilo), Phillip Pakianathan (Sydenham), Mark Pakianathan (Maritzburg) and Swamikan Nullathumby (South Coast Junction).

The efforts of Anglicans in education became more ambitious with the arrival of Draviam Kollipillai in 1904. He started high schools in Durban and Maritzburg, built a hostel and began training teachers. Kollipillai was appointed catechist in 1908 and ordained a minister in 1915. He was only the second Indian to be ordained in Natal. The Anglicans pioneered medical work among Indians, with a dispensary built at St Aidan's Mission in 1889.

Booth saw a great future for Anglican missionary work among Indians and visited Madras in 1890 to recruit Tamil missionaries. Solomon Vadakan was sent to Johannesburg to minister to Indians on the gold mines, while Simon Vadamuthu remained in Natal until 1911. Subban Godfrey was active among Hindi speakers. The Anglican church had around 70 members in Natal by 1885, and 400 by 1911. This does not reflect the extent of its work, as many pioneer parishioners had moved to India or other parts of South Africa.<sup>32</sup> The mission's greatest contribution, though, was in the field of education.

## They were 'somewhat black'

Among the Indians who lately arrived there are about fifty Catholic. In coming from Maritzburg I went there immediately to visit them. The agents of the government were very kind to me and gave me full permission for my ministry amongst them. The Indians are somewhat black, though in some degree less black than *kaffirs*. They are encamped two miles from [Durban]. Having assembled them around my person, I spoke either by myself or through an interpreter, for few know how to speak French. Eight or nine speak Portuguese and about twelve can speak English. I had a long conversation with them; they appear very intelligent and they are much respectful towards a priest. Before leaving the place they knelt before me, asked for my blessing, and in the streets they greet me, stopping for that purpose. They are desirous of obtaining medals and crosses; some had these objects of piety already, hung around their necks. They also say the Rosary. Among the 350 immigrants, fifty are Catholics, five or six Protestants. Before they leave [Durban] I will try to get the names of all the Catholics and the names of their masters.<sup>33</sup>

This was Roman Catholic priest Father Jean-Baptiste Sabon's first impression of indentured Christians, expressed to Bishop MJF Allard on 25 November 1860. Father Sabon had been in Maritzburg when the *Truro* arrived, but visited the port in Durban a few days later and was clearly pleasantly surprised by what he found. All the major Christian churches were established in Natal when the *Truro* docked. The *Natal Courier*, in its 5 December 1860 issue, reported that there were 87 Christians on board the *Truro*.<sup>34</sup> According to Brain, if Father Sabon was 'delighted to welcome so many new Catholics into his tiny parish', the indentured that had come to an unfamiliar land 'must have been aware of their good fortune in finding such a warm and unassuming man'.<sup>35</sup>

For the first few years, Sabon was the only missionary to focus on Indians. The number of (white) Catholics was small, comprising a few Irish families and French-speaking settlers. This gave Sabon time to focus on Indians.<sup>36</sup> His knowledge of Portuguese gave him an advantage because some of the migrants were from Portuguese enclaves in South India. Sabon, who had opened the mission in 1852, took his work seriously and set about learning Tamil. Within a year he knew the alphabet and by July 1861 employed an interpreter to teach him Tamil. Sabon's excellent relationship with Coolie Agent Edmund Tatham meant that he was free to visit plantations, and he spent a great deal of time travelling along the north and south coasts. He wrote to Bishop Allard in March 1861:



The Catholics at Umzinto received me with great pleasure. The ministry to the Indians is a great joy to me especially as they are allowed to fulfill their Christian duties. Except for those at Umzinto, most of them are not far from [Durban] and some of them come on Sundays from the country to hear mass. Amongst them the Pope is called *papo*, the bishops *Periakourouvanever* or *Metranias*.<sup>37</sup>

By April 1861, Sabon had compiled a list of 150 Catholics. There were 13 in Umzinto and three in Pinetown. He performed the first Christian marriage among Indians when Charles Joachim, a 32-year-old Catholic interpreter, married the newly baptised Catherine Curpiah, a 20-year-old widow who was a domestic servant at the home of Edward Tatham. The wedding took place at St Joseph's Chapel in West Street, Durban.

After the initial burst of arrivals, the stream of Catholics dried up and Sabon's optimism waned. Compounding his problems was the fact that those who completed their indentured contracts had moved to various parts of Natal. Many indentured Christians were employed as house servants on isolated white farms. This made it difficult to minister to their needs. Indian catechists like Andrew A Shillong and Daniel Pillay were appointed to work among Indians. Father Sabon was succeeded by Father Radulfus Maingot in 1904. This Tamil-speaking priest extended the activities of the Indian parish to Isipingo, Mount Edgecombe, Darnall and Verulam. Father Justin Barrett and Father August Chauvin, who succeeded him in 1887, were in charge of the Indian mission in Maritzburg, where the St Anthony's Chapel was built in Loop Street.<sup>38</sup>

The early Christian community, especially the Catholic community, was marked by prominent family dynasties. None more so than the Gabriel and Lawrence families, who were connected through marriage.<sup>39</sup> Earlier we met Bernard Gabriel when we discussed his education, marriage to a white woman and rejection by colonial society. Here we encounter his parents. The Gabriels were one of the most prominent Indian Christian families in Natal.

## The Gabriels of Leopold Street: 'very old colonists'

Perumall Gabriel, born in Bangalore in 1847, and Amonee Singh arrived separately in Natal in the early 1860s. It was here that they married. While little is known about them, an official document stated that they spoke English 'very well...as both are very old Colonists'. While family members are not absolutely certain of their indentured numbers, all indications are that they were the Perumall (5465) and Amonee (5471) who arrived in September 1865. They had seven children: Mary Madeline (Stephens), Alice Fanny (Nayanah), Lazarus (1873–1947), Elizabeth (1875–1973), Bryan (1876–1953), Bernard (1880–1940) and Josephine (1882–1974). Perumall died in Durban on 22 January 1921 at the age of 74. He owned a property at 31 Leopold Street, which was sold for the then large sum of £1 200. Amonee subsequently purchased a home near the Greyville Race Course, where she lived until her death in 1939. The Gabriels were staunch Roman Catholics. After completing his indenture, Perumall worked as a photographer. Bryan and Lazarus followed in his footsteps, and were well-known photographers during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup>

Bryan, who married Lourdes Mary Abrahams, had a studio in Stanger, where he lived until his death in October 1953. Like most of his family, he was buried at the Roman Catholic cemetery in West Street in Durban. Lourdes Mary, the daughter of Francis Xavier and Grace Abraham, was born in Madras in 1885. She did not arrive in Natal as an indentured migrant; rather, Bryan was sent to India to find a suitable Roman Catholic wife. They married at the Church of St Francis Xavier in Madras on 29 November 1901, and had seven children: Lourdes Mary Sophia, Henry Leopold, John Felix Emmanuel, Leo Anthony Clement, Joseph Manickum Sylvester, Michael Stephen Lazarus and Florence Mary Elizabeth. Lourdes Mary died in 1942.

We state these names in full to illustrate that many long-standing Indian converts adopted English or Biblical names because they might have had 'disgraceful' caste names; the new names gave them a 'new respectable identity'.<sup>41</sup> In comparison, Anglican Christians still carried a semblance of Indianness in their names, and this had to do with the fact that many would have been first- or second-generation converts from the evangelical drive in India in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The Gabriels are also an example of the multiple exiles of many migrants. While most of the Gabriels moved into English society in the United Kingdom, Florence's daughter Jeanette married French Canadian Clement Archambeault and made her home in Quebec. She died in 2005 but her husband and sons continue to live in Quebec.

Lazarus initially worked as an interpreter, but later became a photographer. He married Marie Eugene in September 1898. She was born in Port Louis, Mauritius, in 1877 to Louis James and Marie Lourestine Telesie. At the time of his death in 1947, Lazarus was living in Browns Avenue in Overport, but also owned property in Essendene Road in what would become the elite white suburb of Berea. Lazarus was politically very active in the Natal Indian Congress. During the South African War (1899–1902) he was a 'leader' of the Indian Bearer Corps and received the Queen's Medal for his services. He was on the committee that welcomed the Indian nationalist leader GK Gokhale (see Chapter 19) in 1912, secretary of the breakaway Natal Indian Association which was formed by Gandhi in 1913, and actively participated in the 1913 passive resistance strike. After Gandhi's departure to India, he remained involved in politics as secretary of the South African Indian Congress, Durban branch. Lazarus and Eugene had five children.

Of Perumall and Amonée's daughters, Mary Madeline married Joseph Benjamin Stephens, the son of Indian catechist Charles A Stephens of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. JB Stephens, born in Madras in 1859, worked as an interpreter in Verulam. Elizabeth Gabriel married Andrew Aloysius (AA) Shillong, who, with Daniel Pillay, was the first Indian catechist employed by the Roman Catholic Church. They lived in Cato Manor until Andrew's death in 1910 at the age of 50. Elizabeth outlived him by 63 years; she died in April 1973 at the age of 98. Andrew and Elizabeth had four children, Cyril, Stella, Adeline and Celestina.<sup>43</sup> The trajectories of the daughters' lives make interesting reading. Adeline married MM Metha of Madras. Stella married a white man, William Silvo, of Cape Town and had a photographic studio. Celestina married Chinnasamy 'Diamond' Chetty (1903–1970), who owned Covent Garden Jewellers in Cape Town. Chetty also married Patamah Naidoo according to Hindu rites. He lived a double life: one Christian, one Hindu, one in Durban, one in Cape Town. The children of Cyril, who would be

the great-grandchildren of Perumall and Amonee Gabriel, showed how far the family had moved from its original Madras roots. Leo settled in California; Harold and Patrick in London.

## The dominant Victorian father: Vincent Lawrence

By tracing the strands of the life of Perumall and Amonee's daughter Josephine, and through her marriage to Vincent Lawrence on 15 July 1901 at the St Joseph's Church in West Street, the fascinating story of the Lawrence family emerges. Around 40 per cent of indentured Christians who arrived in the 1860s returned to India when the free passage option became available in 1871. The Christian presence would have been negligible were it not for the arrival of passengers like Vincent Lawrence.

Lawrence was prominent in the social and political affairs of Indians for many decades. Vincent, whose actual name was Vedanayagum, was born in Madras on 10 September 1872, where he qualified as an English teacher and taught in missionary schools. He took six months' vacation in 1894 to visit Natal, where he was almost immediately employed by Gandhi as a clerk and private secretary for six years. He lived with Gandhi in Beach Grove, Durban, opposite the home of Attorney-General Harry Escombe. Vincent was engaged to Josephine on 8 December 1900. Shortly after, he visited Madras and Bombay for six months, where he spoke on the situation in South Africa. He married Josephine on his return; Gandhi was guest speaker at the wedding reception.

Josephine and Vincent had nine children: May Antonnia, Sylvia, Mary Johanna Christina, George Anthony Clement, Vincent Joseph Claudius, Roselind Josephine Prague, Francesca Mary Lourdes, Ralph Augustus Arthur Rustom and Therese Marion Elizabeth.<sup>44</sup> They lived in Gale Street on the periphery of the Durban CBD until Vincent Lawrence's death on 30 October 1965 at the age of 93. Josephine died almost a decade later, on 2 November 1974, at the age of 92. Lawrence was active in all aspects of Indian life. He served with Gandhi in the Indian Bearer Corps during the South African War, for which he gained a Queen's Medal. When the Roman Catholic Church opened a school in Durban, Lawrence was largely responsible for collecting £800 for the new building.<sup>45</sup> He translated the first two Annual General Reports of the Natal Indian Congress into Tamil, which Gandhi took to India in 1896.

Josephine attended the Durban Girls' School (founded 1877), usually the preserve of whites, and studied music (organ). She acquired a reputation for entertaining guests in exquisite style, with fine china, silverware and European lace cloths. Her son Ralph described her as being of the 'gentle type...[who] ran the home as well as bringing up all the children. Her repeated childbearing must have contributed to her varicose veins but, like a good Indian wife, she was uncomplaining.'<sup>46</sup>

According to Ralph Lawrence, 'meals were taken *en famille* and with Dad at the head of the table. We all had to sit in our allotted places. We all had to stand for grace before meals and then for thanks once we'd finished. There was certainly no sparkling conversation during meals.' The Lawrences were a deeply religious family. Ralph recalled that his father was 'an intensely religious man and went to the 6:00 a.m. mass at the Durban Cathedral every morning but he was also strict in the home – very much the dominant Victorian father. His word was

law and we didn't dare question his authority. He certainly laid down the law as far as my religious upbringing was concerned. Attendance at mass was compulsory.'

The Lawrence children were well educated and made a significant contribution in the fields of education, music, health, advancement of women and the Catholic Church. They learnt classical European music, a rare accomplishment. A famed feature of Durban society for many decades of the twentieth century was the 'Lawrence Trio' of Sylvia, May and Christina entertaining appreciative audiences. They were described as 'always well dressed, Mamma [Josephine] having made their dresses. It was not unusual for White children to shout taunts at them because they were neat, tidy and well dressed.'<sup>47</sup>

Vincent Lawrence's son Father Claudius Lawrence and his cousin Father Leo Gabriel made an important contribution to the Catholic Church and its laity in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) as members of the OMI (Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculates, a religious order of the Roman Catholic Church). Father Claudius had studied for five years at the seminary in Ceylon and spent a further five years in Rome. When he returned to Durban, he experienced racial prejudice within the local Roman Catholic Church. For example, he was not permitted to stay at the presbytery with white priests, but was instead given a house in the Indian quarter. Disillusioned, he requested a transfer to Ceylon. The bishop of Durban, Henri de Lalle, was unhappy, and while Claude was granted a transfer, it was to the remote fishing village of Negombo.<sup>48</sup>

Ralph Lawrence qualified as a medical doctor at the University of Cape Town. His personal history of frustration born of racism is chronicled in his autobiography *A Fire in His Hand*, in which he reveals the racism endemic in South African society, the restrictions to which he was subject during clinical training, and how this awakened his political consciousness.<sup>49</sup>

The legacy of Vincent Lawrence lives on in that bastion of former white education the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His granddaughter Dr Josephine Naidoo, who grew up in Canada, donated a piano to the music department in Christina's name; established the Joseph AM Naidoo Endowment Fund for underprivileged students in the English programme; and is in the process of establishing a fellowship in Vincent Lawrence's name in the Department of History. The children of many early Christian families moved abroad to the west. Despite the trappings of white society, their skin colour forced them back into the rubric of 'Indian'. They are the examples of what Vijay Mishra has called the 'twice-displaced'. It is revealing that Josephine, the great-granddaughter of Perumall and Amonee Gabriel, wants to remember, and make sure that we all remember, her roots in South Africa through the establishment of bursaries and endowments in the name of her great-grandparents. The difficulties of the 'twice displaced', away from the familiar and engaged in the quest to fit in, are often hidden, a 'feeling' hauntingly captured by Sri Lankan-Canadian poet Rienzi Cruz:

Don't ask for answers,  
ask for history: the pain  
of my woundings, the diaspora  
that runs through my life  
like an alphabet.<sup>50</sup>

The likes of Josephine, the 'Canadian', return to South Africa to ensure that a legacy lives on. But the descendants of many indentured Indians who emigrated from South Africa are now from somewhere else, still carrying the wounds of history.

## Providing 'spiritual consolation': the Reverend Ralph Stott

The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society sent the Reverend Ralph Stott, who had worked in Ceylon for 18 years, to Natal in January 1862. Stott's regular correspondence to the Methodist Missionary Society in London described conditions in the new colony. While Father Sabon was fortunate to be ministering to relatively large Catholic groups, Stott identified six Protestants. In 1866, he recorded that his congregation included members from various parts of India. He was full of praise for them, even while reinforcing stereotypes of the day: 'The coolies are not like the *kaffirs* vegetating in their kraals, but a busy, active, enterprising race taking their share in pushing on in the world, right or wrong.'<sup>51</sup> Stott's statement highlights the racist perspectives even of churchmen.

Reverend Stott had visited 39 estates by 1864 and 80 by 1886, going as far north as Stanger and to Umzinto in the south. He was joined by his son Simon in 1866. By the mid-1880s, he was conducting services on Sunday evenings in Durban and running a night school with the help of an Indian teacher named Balagdoroonda. Instruction was given in English, Tamil and Hindi. The night school was closed in 1864 because of curfew laws forbidding people of colour to be out at night.<sup>52</sup>

Stott was zealous, even ministering to prisoners, though with limited success. For example, Sunichur and Dusswant were found guilty of murdering fellow worker Unged, raping his wife and burning their hut on New Guelderland Estate. They were sentenced to hang. While awaiting execution, they 'were constantly visited by Reverent R Stott, who has done everything for the spiritual consolation of the poor wretches'. Judging from a newspaper report, it seems that he failed:

The executioner, a Hottentot man, by name Scheepers, was brought in from Victoria County yesterday, and last night he spent his time in his usual cool manner in the Durban Police Station. The gallows were prepared for the execution of the culprits yesterday afternoon...Notwithstanding that such an early hour was fixed for the launching into eternity of the two unhappy beings, a number of persons assembled outside the gaol, but all that could be observed was a glimpse of the upper portion of the scaffold, nothing whatever being seen of the two men. Both acted with great composure, not a sign of fear being visible. They walked up to the gallows firmly, and immediately began shouting at the top of their voices to *their* God, until the drop was given.<sup>53</sup>

During the period of indenture, very few Indians embraced Christianity. In this instance, despite the fate that awaited them, the men snubbed Stott's overtures: 'On the contrary, the men, in accordance with their religious faith, have frequently expressed their belief that no punishment awaits them.' This did not deter the likes of Stott, who continued his mission

enthusiastically. In 1876, Stott built a chapel in Queen Street in the Indian quarter of the Durban CBD with funds collected from his congregation. This chapel served Indian Methodists until 1914, when a new one was erected in Lorne Street. It was a gift from Stott's daughter, Lady (Mary) Greenacre, who was married to Sir Benjamin W Greenacre, mayor of Durban.

The Queen Street chapel had 40 members by 1880, and employed a Hindu catechist, John Choonoo, who was assisted by lay preacher Charles A Stephen. Choonoo was born in Gaya in 1829 and moved to Mauritius in the early 1850s, where he served as a catechist for the Church Missionary Society, and joined the Wesleyan Methodists in Natal in 1880 with his wife Amy Sydney. He lived in Durban until 1894, before transferring to Verulam. He built several churches and schools on the north coast during his 42 years of service to the Methodists. Two of Choonoo's sons, Arthur and Reuben, were Methodist ministers, while three others, Timothy, Ezekiel and Walter, were school principals in Verulam, Tongaat and Prospect Hall respectively.<sup>54</sup> Methodists made inroads on the north coast in Umhlali and Chaka's Kraal, where, led by Paul and Daniel Lutchmansing, around 40 Baptists applied for membership of the church.

John Thomas, a Tamil-speaking teacher who arrived in Natal in 1890, was the first Indian to be ordained a Christian minister in South Africa (1902). He was minister and principal of the Methodist Indian Mission and School in Longmarket Street, Maritzburg. The Reverend John Thomas was to play an important role in the Samuel family establishing itself in Natal. John Michael Samuel (1873–1937), an Anglican, married Tabitha Masilamoney in November 1896. After the birth of daughter Caroline (1898) and sons Ephraim (1901) and James (1903), Samuel emigrated to Natal. Like many migrants, Tabitha and the children remained in India. Samuel arrived in 1904 and obtained a position as legal clerk with Attorney RJ Harrison. After a few years he requested his family to join him, but Tabitha was reluctant to leave India and said that she would await his return 'after he made his fortune'. The Reverend Thomas intervened on Samuel's behalf and personally appealed to her. She found it hard to resist this call and arrived in Natal in 1908, even though the rest of her family moved to Singapore.<sup>55</sup>

The boundary between indentured and passenger Indian was fluid, especially for Christian families wanting to marry spouses of the same denomination. Samuel's daughter Caroline, for example, married Solomon Mark, the son of indentured parents in 1922.<sup>56</sup> In many instances, migrants married Christians from other denominations because of the small numbers. We therefore cannot draw a rigid boundary between the indentured and non-indentured, or various denominations.

## John the Baptist of Kearsney

Baptists comprised an important segment of the indentured Christian population. They stood apart from other Christians in that they were a relatively cohesive, mostly Telegu-speaking group, while the majority of indentured migrants from South India spoke Tamil. At Kearsney, they were supported in various ways by JL Hulett. The Hulett family, we should remember, were the same sugar barons described by Dr Jones as the 'Uriah Heep and Jabez Balfour type' in Chapter 6.

Baptist migrants came mainly from Telegu districts in South India, where American Baptist missionaries had been active since 1835. In 1840, the Reverend Samuel Day opened a mission in Nellore and by 1900 there were 65 000 Telegu Baptists in Madras Presidency. Baptists began arriving from the earliest years of indenture from areas like Vinukonda, Markapuram and Cumbum. They numbered around 150 by 1900. Between then and the end of indenture in 1911, more Baptists arrived from the west coast in the vicinity of the Godvery River. Most were assigned to Liege Hulett's tea estate at Kearsney.<sup>57</sup>

This was not arbitrary but followed a request in 1903 by WR Manley of the American Baptist Telegu Mission in New Town, Madras, that Baptist emigrants should 'be sent to one station'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, on 18 January 1908, the Emigration Agent in Madras wrote to the Protector that a large number of Telegu Christians from Markapur, in the present-day Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, were en route to Natal on the *Umfuli*:

We think you will find the coolies a fairly satisfactory lot. A great more are likely to emigrate from this tract if favourable reports are received from those now proceeding and anything you can do in the matter of allotting them to an employer where they are likely to receive good treatment would be of advantage. If they are placed where coreligionists are employed they would be grateful.<sup>59</sup>

There were 80 Christians on the *Umfuli*: passengers 48–52, 150–154, 245–249, 291–293, 377–417 and 560–582. Migrants 136235 to 136239, five males aged 16 to 27, were assigned to Balcomb, Horace and Sons in Kearsney; migrants 136329 to 136331, a single mother and two children, were assigned to Kearsney Estate; migrants 136332 and 136333, a single mother and daughter, were assigned to Balcomb, Horace and Sons; migrants 136375 to 136377, a single mother with two daughters, were assigned to Kearsney; migrants 136464 to 136501, comprising six nuclear families, were assigned to Kearsney Estate. On the same ship, migrants 136521 to 136569, 49 migrants in all, were of the caste Uppavara/Wappara, a Tamil agricultural caste from the village of Tiruvannamalai in South Arcot. All were assigned to Barrow Green Estate in Port Shepstone. Other large groups of Baptists included 34 on the *Umzinto* (June 1900) and 83 on the *Umhloti* (August 1910), all from Kurnool. This detail is significant in rectifying the idea of migrants as individuals. There were many who came individually, but equally significant was group migration. This allowed the indentured to form linguistic, cultural, religious and ethnic clusters which would survive indenture and lay the basis for post-indenture community.

Baptists had one other advantage. They were served by ministers from the 'same linguistic group...who understood their background and aspirations'.<sup>60</sup> One group of Baptists came with an Indian lay preacher, Dupati Benjamin, who spoke Korangi, a dialect of Telegu. After Benjamin's death, Sir JL Hulett asked Wesleyan minister Reverend Stott to assist in caring for the spiritual needs of Indian Baptists. When 40 Baptists on the north coast joined the Methodist Church in 1903, they applied to the Telegu Baptist Home Missionary Society in Nellore, Madras, for a replacement minister. The Reverend John Rangiah was sent in June 1903. He had been born in 1866 and was principal of the Girls' High School in Nellore before moving to Natal. According to Rangiah, when the request for a minister came from Natal, the Home Mission

Society undertook a search which proved futile. Eventually, committee members asked, 'Why not you, John?' After serious prayer and reflection, he became convinced that God wanted him in Africa. Though his family was sceptical, particularly his wife, who was about to give birth to their third child, Rangiah felt that he had no option but to heed the call.<sup>61</sup>

Hulett provided a house for him at Kearsney and paid his salary. Rangiah built the Kearsney Telegu Baptist Church, the first Baptist Church in Africa, which opened in December 1903 with 64 members. Churches were established in Verulam, Darnall, Durban and Stanger in 1904; Dannhauser, Maritzburg and Tinley Manor in 1908; and Amatikulu in 1909.<sup>62</sup> The Durban church was built by A Reuben and 22 indentured Indians from the African Boating Company.<sup>63</sup> A baptismal pool was opened in the Mokovana River near Gospel Hill in 1909. Clearly, the mission of the Reverend John Rangiah was directed at working-class Indians, mainly of an indentured background, as the churches were in rural locations across Natal.

Rangiah was revered, particularly in Kearsney. He converted an old laundry on the estate into the Indian Baptist School, which was opened in October 1904 with four pupils. His wife, Kanakammah Rangiah, was the first teacher. In addition, she taught Telegu at the church. By 1909, the church had 150 members. Prominent community members included DN Nathaniel, D Benjamin, D Yohan and Z Robert, who was the first pastor. An indication of the persistence of caste and ethnicity is that the church split into two in 1913, with divisions along Tamil and Telegu lines. John Rangiah died on 23 December 1915 at the age of 49.<sup>64</sup>

The difference between Baptists and the Catholic families discussed earlier becomes clear from life histories of Kearsney migrants, who remained more rooted in the working class. Take, for example, the story of Bundy Nagamma (101278). Nagamma (Asseerwadhum), caste Madiga (Telegu leatherworkers), was nine when she arrived from Nellore on the *Pongola* in 1903. The Madiga are mostly found in present-day Andhra Pradesh where, together with the Mallas (Telegu agricultural workers), they form the largest segment of what is regarded as the Dalit castes (untouchables) of Andhra. Nagamma was part of a group of 10 indentured migrants, numbering from 101269 to 101278, all from Nellore, who were assigned to Kearsney. She was accompanied by her parents, Pitchiah and Pachiamma, sister Kotamma, and brother MUSAIAH. Nagamma and Manikkam, who embraced Christianity, married at Kearsney. While the family would later affiliate to the Apostolic Faith Mission, during this period they belonged to the Telegu Baptist Church. Nagamma was literate in Telegu and read the Telegu Bible at family prayers. She learnt Tamil, the language of her husband, worked on the tea estates, and lived in Kearsney her entire life. She evolved in important ways:

[She] developed into a confident, dignified, matriarchal figure through what she learnt from her everyday experiences and communal sharing in traditional Indian culture as well as in Christian religious life...[She] grew into a woman of stature, running a household that became the centre for family and friends, missionaries and community leaders.<sup>65</sup>

Namma, who died in 1948, achieved this without overtly challenging the patriarchal order into which her life was 'embedded and inscribed'. A powerful influence was Pandita Rama Bai



(1858–1922), an Indian feminist who embraced Christianity in 1883 at the age of 25. Rama Bai was trenchant in her criticism of caste and class domination. Though communication was relatively undeveloped, she influenced many Indian Christian women searching for ‘Christianity in an “Eastern cup”’.<sup>66</sup> In this sense, Baptists differed from Catholics in not seeking to merge into white Christian society. They retained their Indian heritage through their linguistic, cultural, culinary and dress practices, even though missionaries preached against syncretism. Thus we see a difference between the western dress adopted by Bernard Gabriel and the Lawrence sisters, and the likes of Nagamma, who wore a high-necked, long-sleeved blouse with a sari.

## The Lawrence trio

Christian families were in the forefront of the drive to educate women. When Miss Stephens returned from India as Durban’s first Indian nurse in 1914, a large reception was held in her honour at the Union Theatre, Victoria Street. It was attended by over 500 ‘representative and enthusiastic’ Indians, including prominent politicians.<sup>67</sup> She set the yardstick that others emulated.

All the Lawrence girls were educated. Christina qualified as a teacher and married Grahamstown-born and Ceylon-educated Joseph Naidoo, son of Marayan and Minnamal Naidoo. The Naidoos were the only Indian Catholic family in Grahamstown. Because of rabid racism, even Catholic schools refused entry to their children. Determined to educate his children, Marayan sent them to St Joseph’s College in Ceylon. After marrying Christina, Joseph settled in Durban, where he was a school principal. After her retirement, Christina opened a music school in Reservoir Hills, preparing students for the Royal School of Music examinations. They had 10 children.

Sylvia was one of the best-known musicians in Durban. She, like Christina, was educated at St Philomena’s School, qualified as a teacher in 1934, and taught at Umgeni Government Indian School. She was principal of the HS Done Girls’ School in Durban, and in the 1960s was appointed lecturer in music at the Springfield Teacher Training College for Indians. She certainly inherited her mother’s musical genes. Sylvia introduced music education to Indian schools, held diplomas in music (Associate of Trinity College for the violin and the Licentiate of London College of Music for pianoforte), and received a gold medal for the violin and piano at the Indian Eisteddfod. She was an executive member of the National Council of Women, Durban Branch; a foundation member of Red Cross Nursing Division; served full time during World War Two and was Unit Commander in the Durban Civilian Protective Services, for which she was awarded the South African War Medal. Sylvia was also a founding member of the welfare organisation the Durban Indian Women’s Association in the 1930s. In 1960 she was elected a Life Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in London.<sup>68</sup>

May Lawrence, born in 1902, attended Umgeni High School. When she was 15 she became an organist at St Anthony’s Church. After completing her schooling, she continued her music studies and at 20 became the first Indian woman to complete a pianoforte course at the London Licentiate College of Music. She married Alfred Lazarus and they had two sons, Eugene and Joseph. May taught music at Clairwood High – about 20 kilometres south of Durban, an area

that was home to the largest concentration of ex-indentured Indians – until her retirement in 1962. The Pope honoured her in 1996 with the Papal Award in recognition of her services to the Catholic Church. Ten great-grandchildren celebrated her one hundredth birthday on 10 May 2002.<sup>69</sup> The Lawrence sisters regularly organised musical evenings, book launches, play readings and various church gatherings.

The difficult circumstances of the majority meant that mainly affluent women could involve themselves in formal public work. There were several attempts at forming women's associations and securing the patronage of white women. One of the earliest formal attempts to get women involved was the Indian Women's Association (IWA), formed in 1907 by Tamil Christian women. The IWA did sterling work in Tamil vernacular education, including forming and running the Durban Tamil School.<sup>70</sup>

In reports of the IWA, as well as contemporary newspapers, women are always addressed by the names of their husbands so that we rarely know their real names. For example, the name of the vice-president, who was referred to as Mrs VR Moodaly, was Shrimati Sowbagyammal. The IWA met monthly, with talks by women that aimed to provide 'moral and intellectual education', according to Cecilia Sigamoney, sister of the Reverend BLE Sigamoney. For example, Miss Goonurathinum spoke on 'perseverance' in July 1908, while Miss Simons spoke on 'friendship' the following month. In its first year of existence, the IWA petitioned the education department to provide education for girls, the Colonial Secretary to repeal the 'iniquitous' £3 tax on women, started sewing classes, and passed a resolution condemning the Indian Total Abstinence Society, which had petitioned the government to prohibit taverns from selling alcohol to women. The IWA considered it discriminatory to single out women. Members realised that they had 'unbounded work to perform in elevating the present position of women, therefore the support of all true sons and daughters of India is necessary'.<sup>71</sup>

## There for the taking?

Religion was integral to Indian lives. It was, in the main, a space outside the purview of 'white colonial gods' who tried to police every aspect of their lives, casting summary judgement and meeting out instant (in)justice. The approach of Indians to religious festivals was one of collective expression and excitement. This was not restricted to Hindu and Muslim celebrations, but also included codes of traditional Christian worship. Witness the words of Father Sabon to JA Febre on 28 March 1862 about Indians celebrating Christmas at St Joseph's Chapel:

Knowing that there was to be Midnight Mass, these dear children, without telling me, went and borrowed the biggest drum in town, and about midnight, to the astonishment of the Protestants, they wended their way to the chapel to the beating of the drum. They also brought an elaborately decorated shrine or crib with angels hanging on threads, to decorate the church. After mass they were joined by another band, together with two men playing violins, and all spent the night in the church, singing hymns. You will see that though Indians are not perfect – far from it – there are some among them who are more zealous than many other Christians elsewhere.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the 'zealousness' of some Indian Christians and the fervent efforts of missionaries, Indians did not embrace Christianity as hoped. Missions considered indentured Indians there 'for the taking'. In the words of the Reverend Thomas Goodwin, 'there is a splendid opening for the Church'.<sup>73</sup> There was no lack of effort on the part of many of the clergy. The Reverend Arthur James Pascoe French of the Anglican Mission, for example, would 'preach to the heathen and Mussulmans in front of the Grey Street Indian Market on Saturdays'.<sup>74</sup> Yet due to the shortage of evangelists, missions, in the words of Reverend French, did not 'touch the great Coolie barracks or Tea and Sugar Estates, and the Collieries in Dundee'. Reverend French, incidentally, died in 1920 trying to save an Indian boy from drowning.

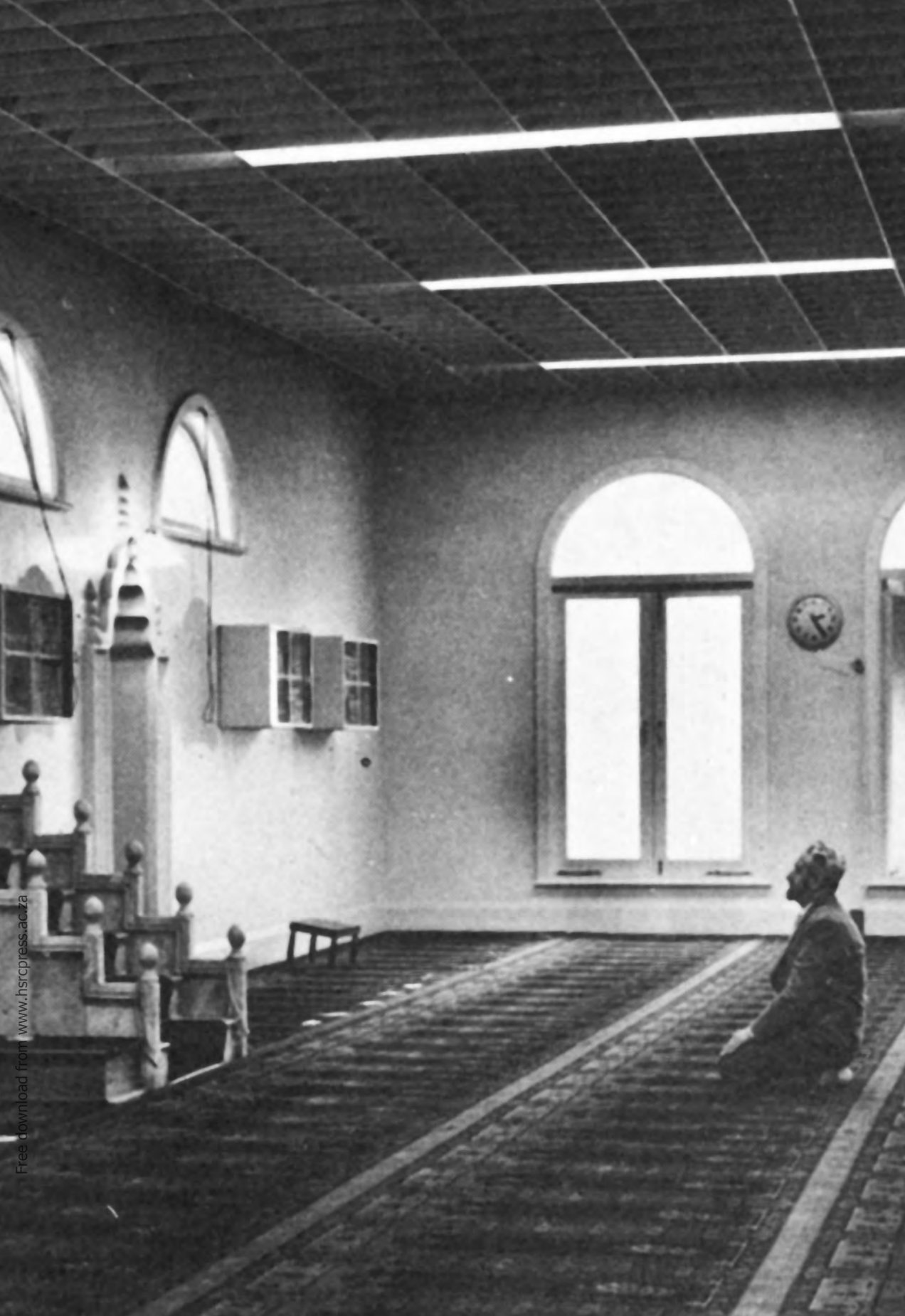
Missions were to find, alas, that the 'heathens' had their own beliefs and traditions and clung to versions of these in the new setting. In fact, it was an Indian Christian, no less an Anglican schoolmaster, JS Done, who took issue with the belief of people like Reverend Smith that mass evangelisation was necessary to prevent Indian degeneration. Done questioned whether Indians could be 'coerced into a new faith in a day and a night' in an article in the *Natal Mercury* in 1902. In fact, he wondered whether they should be. Indians 'as a race', he wrote, 'are a conservative people, and though removed from their Motherland, this conservatism, and their love of ancient tradition, if not interfered with, will alone protect them from moral deterioration'. For Done, 'unadulterated Hindu philosophy' was as useful as Christianity in uplifting Indians morally. Done insisted that Indians were 'not a race of savages'. Hinduism, he wrote, had 'an ethereal philosophy, which despite its austerity and asceticism, cannot be surpassed'. He objected to compulsory religious education in schools. 'In this age of religious tolerance,' he asked, 'is the national right to education of these children to be forfeited because they object to [Christian] religious instruction?'<sup>75</sup>

The problems faced by missions included language, the dispersed Indian Christian population, lack of resources, and the racism of whites. It would be many decades before Christianity took root among Indians in the way that the early missions anticipated, and it would not be of the kind they expected. Yet the work of missions was crucial in the field of education. Many Indians, including Hindus and Muslims, took advantage of these opportunities, and this explains why so many who were educated at the missions emerged as 'leaders' in various fields.

The life of the Reverend Bernard Sigamoney shows that some men of the cloth saw their role as much more than propagators of the faith. They were intimately involved in broader aspects of the 'community' and beyond. Indian Christians' access to language and education, and their 'civilised code', resulted in their influence in the community being out of proportion to their numbers. But try as they may, they found entry into white society blocked. David Vinden and Bernard Gabriel, as we saw earlier, despite their 'white masks' and the trappings of English Christian gentlemen, and the Lawrence sisters, with their classical European music and English 'class', found that no matter how hard they tried to graft English values onto themselves, they remained 'almost the same but not quite',<sup>76</sup> and were unable to breach the limitations imposed by the tag 'coolies with Bibles'.







# Bâdshâh Pîr meets Soofie Saheb

*Girmit*...was an oppressive contract. The impact on human lives of its brutality, its anguish and emotional scarring cannot be underestimated...The *girmityas*, whether Hindu or Muslim, possessed sufficient cultural resources of their own to overcome it, though some, given their individual frailty, succumbed. All the evils of plantation capitalism and colonial racism could not destroy the indomitable spirit of Hinduism and Islam...Five years was a small, albeit important, part of an individual's life, and the...period of indenture, [was] a mere passing phase, a transitory moment, in the long history of their faiths and traditions.<sup>1</sup>

The *Truro* had 22 Muslims on board. They included Sheik Ahmed (282) from Chittoor, North Arcot, who was posthumously hailed as a great saint. He was a Julaha by caste, a landless community whose traditional occupation was weaving and dyeing, and whose fascinating life we return to later in this chapter.

The flow of indentured Muslims continued throughout the period of indenture even though employers and the authorities felt that Muslims were not accustomed to plantation work and caused a 'considerable amount of trouble'.<sup>2</sup> In all, around 10 per cent of indentured migrants were Muslim. At the end of their term, Muslims, who came for the same reasons as Hindus, also chose from the same basket of options. Some remained in Natal and took up market gardening, opened businesses or accepted positions as labourers; others returned to India. Of those that remained, most married and had children, and in the process laid the foundation for what would evolve into a thriving Indian Muslim community in Natal. We start by narrating the story of one such family.

## 'Home-grown' Islam

Chengal Reddy was born Hindu and given a Telegu name. He became Muslim as a young man, changed his name to Chiniah Siethiah, married a Muslim woman, Jamal Bee Raj Mahomed, and changed his home language from Telegu (and Sanskrit in the temples) to Urdu (and Arabic in mosques). Chiniah (5494), born in 1838, and Jamal Bee (5495), born in 1845, were 'lured by the stories of easy riches in Natal',<sup>3</sup> and left their ancestral home in Chittoor to make a new life in Natal. They arrived on the *Porchester* in September 1865. After working for five years for Thomas Milner on Redcliffe Estate near Umhlanga, they took up market gardening, eventually purchasing 20 acres on Saunders' farm, Tongaati.

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OPPOSITE: Interior of the Grey Street Mosque, Durban.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Photographed at the airport in 1957, Sheriffa Bee, the daughter of indentured parents, fulfilled her lifelong ambition of making a trip to Makkah on Hajj at the age of 66.

Theirs is an important story as we seek to understand the survival of Islam and Muslim identity during indenture. While in some respects unique, it does at a general level represent the experiences of many Muslim migrants in different parts of Natal who faced similar ‘contradictions, opportunities or constraints’, and thus provides a useful window into indentured Islam.<sup>4</sup> A remarkable achievement of Muslim migrants was the survival of key aspects of their faith, despite the dreadful working and living conditions and alienating social and cultural environment. This is especially noteworthy because Muslim migrants were in the minority and often isolated across employers. Yet, they gradually established an Islamic ‘community’ with all the trappings that went with it, in particular mosques, festivals and *madrassahs* (Islamic schools).

The property that Chiniah and Jamal Bee acquired was situated on the main North Coast Road, above Fairbreeze Hotel and about two miles from Tongaat Railway Station. By the time Jamal Bee died in 1916 and Chiniah in 1921, at the ages of 71 and 83 respectively, they were successful sugar cane planters and community ‘leaders’. They had five children: two sons, whom they named Rajmahomed and Hussein Saib; and three daughters, Munnee Bee, Beeman and Hussein Bee.<sup>5</sup> Concerned that his Islam should be passed on to his children, Chiniah built a rudimentary place of communal worship.

Rajmahomed married Sheriffa Bee, whose family had emigrated as indentured workers. Her mother, Kassim Bee (6031), and grandmother, Hossein Bee (6030), arrived from Bangalore on the *Helen Wallace* in May 1866 and served their indenture on William Joyner’s Ellangowan Estate. The pattern of single-mother families was a fairly common occurrence. Kassim Bee was a classic example. She told her daughter Sheriffa Bee that they were lured by tales that ‘in Africa gold could be plucked from *brinjal* bushes’.<sup>6</sup> Sheriffa Bee and Rajmahomed purchased land which evolved into a 900-acre farm on which they opened Mzimuga Trading Co. for an African clientele. The couple worked in the business, cooked food and grew vegetables for sale, while bringing up seven children. Sheriffa Bee was widowed in 1929, a week prior to the birth of her seventh child, Ebrahim.

When the sons – Shaik Moideen, Shaik Adam, Shaik Abdul Rahim, Shaik Mohamed and Shaik Ebrahim – entered the business, they purchased additional farms at Frasers and Groutville, and started the Esenembe Bus Service, which operated between Stanger and Tongaat. The family was involved in all aspects of Indian society. For example, Moideen was secretary and vice-president of the Natal Indian Cane Growers’ Association, which he founded with the Bodasings; vice-president of the Natal Indian Congress, Tongaat branch; and president of the Lower Tugela and District Child Welfare Society. He is fondly remembered as a fiery public speaker who set the crowds alight during Congress rallies. He also donated land to the Tongaat Council for the H Ramrethan State-Aided School at Cranbrook, the Fairbreeze Government State School, as well as the sports stadium in Tongaat. He was also involved in administering and funding the Tongaat Habibiah Muslim Society.<sup>7</sup>

Moideen’s youngest brother, Shaik Ebrahim, thanks to the efforts of the rest of the family, matriculated at Sastri College, studied at Witwatersrand University, and qualified as a doctor in Dublin, before joining McCord’s Zulu Hospital in Durban in the 1950s.



Hussein Saib (1867–1933), Chiniah's second son, was born at Redcliffe in 1867. He married Ameda Bee (56706) in 1899. She had arrived in Natal at the age of nine with her 30-year-old mother Yasem Bee (56705) in December 1894, another single migrant woman. They served their indenture at Tongaat Sugar. The couple had eight sons. The eldest, Mahomed (1901–1956), helped establish and served as trustee of the Tongaat Habibiah Mosque, Fairbreeze Indian School Committee, Fairbreeze Sporting Club, Tongaat Habibiah Muslim Society, and Anjuman Islam, Tongaat.

The youngest son, Abbas (1926–1994), led an eventful life. The family sent him to Dublin to study medicine. Instead, he somehow – and nobody is quite sure how – secured a position with the Pakistan Embassy in France. There, he married a German woman and transferred to the Pakistan Embassy in Bonn, West Germany, where he lived for over three decades. Abbas' two sons, Karim and Iqbal, German citizens, periodically visit the extended family in Tongaat. The great-grandsons of Chiniah Siethiah, the Telegu-speaking Muslim convert who crossed the *kala pani* to serve the sugar barons in Tongaat, now arrived back in Tongaat with half-German blood! Identities and their multiple journeys are quite complex and can only frustrate the most zealous essentialists.

And the imam of the local mosque in Tongaat? His roots, too, were steeped in indenture. Ally Moideen Mahomed Yusuf (32757) arrived in September 1884 at the age of 19 on the *Laurel* from Madras, and served his indenture with the Natal Government Railways. He married Ameena Bee, the daughter of Coothiah Bux (4949) from Benares, and Kassim Bee (5048), who served her indenture on Thomas Milner's Redcliffe Estate. There they met Chiniah Siethiah and Jamal Bee, and forged a friendship that would continue through successive generations.

Ally and Ameena's son Mahomed Yusuf, born in 1891, worked in the family business in Maidstone, M Yusuf and Sons, and was a self-taught imam who played an important role in community affairs. Yusuf's wife, too, had indentured roots. She was Moideen Bee (b. 1896), granddaughter of Sumsha Alle (5104) and Janakee Moonsawmy (5105), who had 'married' on the *Ardburg* during their voyage from Madras to Natal in June 1865. Mohammed Yusuf and Moideen Bee had six children: Abdul Hamid, Ahmed Mahomed, Fathima, Mahomed Saleem, Amina and Omni Salma.<sup>8</sup> Ahmed, born in 1917, qualified as a teacher, taught at Victoria Primary State Indian School in Verulam, was secretary of the Fairbreeze Madrassah, trustee of the Tongaat Fairbreeze Ratepayers' Association, and teacher at the Fairbreeze Madrassah for seven years.<sup>9</sup>

As if to exemplify the family's contribution to Islam, in 1957 66-year-old Sheriffa Bee, the daughter of indentured parents, fulfilled her lifelong ambition of making a trip to Makkah on Hajj. A reporter who met her in 1960 wrote that 'no one can remain long in Tongaat without hearing the name Sheriffa Bee. Like Queen Victoria, she is diminutive in stature, but determined, if not imperious, in character.'<sup>10</sup>

## (De)constructing the *Ummah*

The Muslims who came to [Natal] already knew the vagaries of being a minority, even when kinsmen of faith ruled India for long periods until 1857...Strategies for survival were ingrained in their existence. They emigrated knowing the necessity of principled accommodation and reasoned flexibility for co-operation to maintain cultural conti-

nunity...The *narak*, or hell, of *girit* was certainly persecution, but it was not an unknown or insurmountable adversity.<sup>11</sup>

While indentured Muslims were bound by their common belief in Islam, they were drawn from different parts of India, with variations of culture, language, ethnicity and religious practices. One interesting difference between indentured Muslims and the general indentured population is that more Muslim migrants embarked from Calcutta (55.89 per cent) in the north than from Madras in the south. Those from the north were drawn predominantly from the United Provinces (62 per cent) and Bengal (18.6 per cent), while the main export areas in the south were Arcot (30.6 per cent), Malabar (14 per cent), Madras (11.4 per cent) and Mysore (6.5 per cent). Only a third of Muslim migrants were women. The challenges faced by Muslims included the absence of 'elders' and disparity in the male-to-female ratio. It would have been difficult to reproduce aspects of the Indian Muslim social system such as caste and the extended family. To speak of caste may seem anomalous, since its features – such as hierarchy, occupational specialisation, endogamy and pollution – are incompatible with Islam. In theory, the only division in Islam is that between believers, *ma'roof*, and unbelievers, *munkar*, with believers integrated into one community, the *ummah*.

The manifestation of Islam everywhere, however, has always been influenced by local customs and practices. Caste was part of Indian Islam, though it lacked the sacramental sanction and ideological justification provided by Hindu cosmology.<sup>12</sup> During the Indian census of 1901, for example, 133 castes were wholly or partially Muslim.<sup>13</sup> As Sikand explains, entire local Hindu caste groups usually underwent Islamisation, with Islamic practices gradually incorporated into Hindu cosmologies and ritual practice. Since conversion was a 'collective social process, the original endogamous circle prior to conversion was preserved', resulting in the existence of 'multiple endogamous caste-like groups'. In addition, for generations, Muslims 'remained within a largely Hindu cultural universe and retained many of its associated beliefs and practices'.<sup>14</sup>

Around half the indentured Muslims in Natal listed 'Muslim', 'Musalman', 'Mahomed' and 'Mahommedan', their religion, as their caste; Fakhir, Hajam, Julaha, Labbai, Mappila, Rawther, Pathan, Sayyid and Shaikh also featured. Most Muslim women had the name Bee, and males Shaikh ('princes') or Sayid ('chiefs'). Notice, for example, that Chiniah was married to Jamal Bee, and that their three daughters were Munnee Bee, Beeman and Hussein Bee. Rajmahomed's sons were named Shaik Moideen, Shaik Adam, Shaik Abdul Rahim, Shaik Mohamed and Shaik Ebrahim. In India, the name 'Bee' was adopted by lower-caste women who converted to Islam.<sup>15</sup> Shaiks trace their origin to Arabs. They do not speak Arabic or follow Arab customs, and whether any have actual genealogical links to the Prophet is open to question. The 1911 *Gazetteer for Bareilly* noted that the majority were 'descendants of Hindu converts, generally of low caste, who [were] mainly Sheikhs by courtesy'. They assumed 'the name of the qazi or mufti at whose hands they were admitted into Islam'.<sup>16</sup> Sayyids and Shaikhs performed most of the religious duties in India, but by the end of the nineteenth century their lot had declined, and many were working as messengers, servants and constables.<sup>17</sup>

Higher-caste Hindu converts like Rajputs (ruler/warrior caste of northern India) had the

surname Khan, while a common surname among Pathans (from north-western India) was Baccus.<sup>18</sup> Converts to Islam from South India, Tamil- and Telegu-speaking, were mainly Mappila and Labbais. The Labbai, distributed throughout Arcot, were described in the 1901 Madras Census as 'part-Arab, part-Tamil Muslims who were mainly traders and betel-vine growers in South Arcot, and fishermen, boatmen and smiths in North Arcot'.<sup>19</sup> The Mappilas were children of Arab traders and Dravidian women, whose numbers increased through the conversion of the slave castes of Malabar.

Very few indentured Indian Muslims would have spoken Urdu, the language of their descendants. Urdu was very much a language in the making in nineteenth-century India. Under the Moghuls (1526–1707), high-caste Hindus and Muslims learnt Persian to join the administration as scribes, clerks and administrators. The British facilitated the change from Persian to Urdu because it was easier for their administrators to master. Until late in the nineteenth century the British called Urdu 'Hindustani', meaning a mixed language, as it included Arabic, Turkic, Persian and Sanskrit.<sup>20</sup>

Urdu was confined to urban Muslims in North India, and only became significant with the growth of communal tension between Muslims and Hindus. It was not the lingua franca of the majority of Muslims in India. Broadly, indentured Muslims who came from the south spoke Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam or Kannada, with Tamil the language of the majority. North Indian migrants from the west spoke dialects of western Hindi, such as Braj, Kanauji, Standard Hindi and Bundeli, while those from the east spoke Awadhi and Bhojpuri, eastern dialects of Hindi.<sup>21</sup> In Natal, Urdu eventually replaced this basket of regional languages and became the lingua franca of working-class Muslims, and was pivotal in reconstituting Muslim society.

## Regrouping: crossing boundaries

Marriage was a crucial institution to establish Muslim community and perpetuate religious identity. As discussed elsewhere, it was a tenuous institution and one under constant threat, for reasons which ranged from the paucity of women to absence of regulation. This chapter briefly considers additional problems faced by Muslim migrants keen on finding Muslim spouses, and the compromises made, such as marriage across religious lines. In our discussion of family, we saw that Abdul Gaffoor (105716), a Muslim, married Angel (105829), a Christian, while Rungabee, a Muslim woman, married Veeramuthoo, a Hindu. Hoosen Backus (10999), a Muslim, registered his marriage with Goomamy, a Hindu (8071), in 1884.<sup>22</sup> When the Protector visited Raven Oaks Wattle Company in April 1884, he reported that Abdool had 'taken up' with Phumani.<sup>23</sup> Sheikh Ahmed was living with Karupai (101637), a Hindu, 'who is living with me as my wife'.<sup>24</sup> Ahmed did not have money to pay for her medical treatment and appealed to the Protector for assistance.

Secunder (2355) and Khoder Bee (2367) had a son Abdool, who married a Hindu woman called Parbatheer. They had a daughter, Fathima, who was born in 1890.<sup>25</sup> Emdad Khan (7640) married Pulliah (10344), who gave birth to Rhamin in 1893.<sup>26</sup> Abdul Karim (22411) married Nangama (47940) and they had a son, Shaikh Moideen, in 1894.<sup>27</sup> In 1894, Nanny Bee, daughter of Alla Bulesh and Asha Bee of Hartley Road, Overport, married Munian, who changed his

name to Mahomed.<sup>28</sup> When a Hindu woman, Sookia, who worked for Nabi Bacus (11252) and his wife Bachia (12372) of Estcourt, died in October 1907, leaving five children, Bacus took her 18-year-old daughter Dookia as his second wife.<sup>29</sup> Sheik Hyder (21485), a constable with the Natal Government Railways, married a Hindu woman, Omrah (7073), who changed her name to Cataja Bee. They had four children, Kadir Bee, Ismail, Koolsoom and Sheik Fareed. When Hyder was murdered in August 1901, Cataja Bee ran into legal problems over her name, and explained to the Protector that 'when I was married with Sheik Hyder the priest gave me the name Cataja Bee. Through the priest I am always using the same name when anybody asks me.'<sup>30</sup> She was eventually given the £10 from Hyder's estate.

There are many other such examples in the marriage registers. While passenger Indians were able to return to India to find spouses, the indentured and their descendants, with few exceptions, had to 'make' family in Natal. While they may not have had the same concerns as Hindus about caste, religion was an important issue for many Muslims, but as we see here, given the shortage of women, they had to make compromises. The descendants of these marriages would constitute the future *ummah*.

## Driving pigs and shaving beards

Employers were generally negative about Muslims. William Woods of Estcourt, for example, was very unhappy with Ismail Baksh. According to Woods, Baksh had been a 'beggar [*fakir*] by profession' in India. Of the five years that he was to have served, he was absent for three, 'living about the *kafir* kraals'. Woods opined that workers from Madras were the most 'industrious', followed by Calcutta Hindus and then 'Mahommedans', who were the 'least productive'.<sup>31</sup> The manager of Town Hill Wattle Company in Hilton complained to the Protector that his Muslim workers were not accustomed to plantation work, and requested that all five indentured Muslims be transferred.<sup>32</sup>

Occasionally, those indentured considered 'unsuitable' were returned to India. In March 1885, for example, the *Dunphaile Castle* was chartered to 'relieve employers of the worst of their men, who included jugglers, weavers, shopkeepers, barbers, and banglemakers'. According to the chairman of the Indian Immigration Trust Board, these men were 'useless for labour', and it cost their 'masters large sums in medicines and hospital treatment rendered necessary by their own vicious lives and obtain rations without doing more than a day's work a month'. Such men, concluded the Protector, did harm 'by their pernicious examples to the better intentioned among these fellows'. Returnees included Muslims such as Imam Saib (31929), shopkeeper; Fakeerudeen (32898), beggar; Moideen (33058), shopkeeper; Mahomed (32886), shopkeeper; Ahmed Khan (34014), shopkeeper; Mahomed Saib (33755), beggar; Abdool Razack (26484), shopkeeper; Sheik Ahmed (26708), shopkeeper's assistant; Sheik Abdool (30303), shopkeeper's assistant from Madras; Ahmad (30754), 'never worked'; and Par Khan (31207), soldier from Calcutta.<sup>33</sup>

In another case, the Protector complained to the recruiting agent in Calcutta about Shafy Mohammed and Abdul Wahab, numbers 320 and 324 respectively on the *Umlazi*:

They gave a considerable amount of trouble on the voyage out, the latter led a revolt against rations and had to be confined practically the whole way. It is said these men are Pathans and not likely to do much work. Pathans and Brahmins [Hindu priestly caste] should not be sent on any account, and Mahomedans should only be sent when they are actually of the working class.<sup>34</sup>

The Protector was pleased to report in 1909 that 'very few Mohammedans have been introduced in recent years'.<sup>35</sup> The changing attitude is reflected in the fact that in contrast to the large number of Muslims on the *Truro*, not a single Muslim was aboard the last ship to Natal, the *Umlazi*, which arrived on 21 July 1911.

Separated from the sanctuary of family and friends, and thrust into a strange environment with unfamiliar work rhythms, indentured Muslims experienced serious cultural and religious challenges. Of the major religious traditions, Islam probably has the greatest number of rules affecting every activity of an individual's existence. Muslim migrants would have found it difficult to conform to these from the time they left their villages until they got to their places of employment months later. The rigidity of plantation life and the antagonism of white employers, who were mostly Christian and who considered the practices of Muslims and Hindus heathenistic, were further handicaps. The paucity of women, absence of 'learned' individuals, absence of mosques, and the fact that indentured Muslims were spread across a large number of employers, making collective worship difficult, added to their problems.

To cite a couple of examples of hardship typical of indenture, Fareed Saib (100803) started as a 'kitchen boy' for the Summerhill Wattle Company in New Hanover. However, when 24-year-old Hornby became manager, Saib was transferred to fieldwork. When he failed to meet targets, he was made to do task work, assaulted, and not paid wages. Hornby admitted guilt, upon which the magistrate reminded the court that 'Mr Hornby is only 24 years of age. The Indians are not children.'<sup>36</sup> Ameer Khan complained in January 1881 that he was too ill to work. His pleas were ignored and he was sentenced to 14 days with hard labour for refusing to work. He became paralysed in prison and was returned to India as an invalid.<sup>37</sup>

In the absence of Islamic organisations and institutions, it was left to the Protector to take care of the estates of the dead in terms of Section 66 of Law 2 of 1870. For example, Ghazee Khan (8842), who had arrived in Natal in September 1874, died of lung disease on 14 October 1885. Khan owned 15 acres of land in Verulam. The Protector appointed RN Jones of the City Engineer's Department to collect the debts and settle the affairs. After the receipts and disbursements were balanced, £37.6 was handed to Khan's daughter Goolfun (8844), then 16. Jones provided money for maintaining Goolfun, who had been placed with a 'respectable Indian and his wife'.<sup>38</sup> This story illustrates the problems that Khan, as a Muslim, faced. He could not ensure that his estate would be distributed according to Islamic law or that his daughter would be placed with a Muslim family.

Islam emphasises charity as a way of bringing justice to society; one form of charity, *zakah*, is obligatory upon Muslims. Voluntary charity, called *sadaqah*, is also venerated. Many indentured Muslims in the early years were left destitute. Yet neither the state nor Muslim traders provided relief for sick and destitute Muslims. The medical officer of Stanger, for example, reported to the

Protector that Said Peer (20495) was found 'destitute and in a dying condition'.<sup>39</sup> Moideen (39761) was found by Constable Purtab 'lying down on the tennis court. He has no relations about here and just goes about begging.'<sup>40</sup> W Daugherty, Inspector of Nuisance, reported to the Protector that an 'old Indian man, Sheik Fareed is very infirm, suffering from senility and homelessness. He is generally somewhere in the vicinity of Grey Street, and crawls painfully from door to door begging. Please find a place where he can get food and shelter.'<sup>41</sup> Many of the destitute were returned to India. Muslim organisations would be formed for such exigencies in time.

There is some evidence that, on an individual level, Muslims displayed an Islamic consciousness. For example, when Goolam Moideen was jailed for two weeks in 1879 for leaving the estate without a pass, his beard and hair were shaved upon entering prison, as the law in Natal required. Moideen petitioned the Colonial Secretary in March 1880 that 'being a Mahomedan, the beard is sacred and should never be cut closer than what can be held by the hand. In my country people are severely punished if they cut any portion of a Mahomedan's beard. I am as it were, now outcasted.'<sup>42</sup> After referring the matter to India, the Colonial Secretary instructed magistrates in October 1880 that when Muslims were imprisoned, their beards should not be shaved but rather cut and left an inch long.<sup>43</sup>

Employers regarded Muslims as 'different' from other Indians. For example, when Syed Rajah Mian Khan wanted to go to India to arrange the marriage of his 15-year-old sister, who was indentured with him at Reynolds Brothers, the manager recommended permission because 'he is a Mussulman, and as you know, they are very clannish and keen on the welfare of their relations'. Khan had to sign an undertaking that he would return for a second period of indenture.<sup>44</sup> This story is also remarkable in highlighting the transnational links of the indentured. Some maintained 'family ties' in both India and Natal.

An incident involving Shaikh Moideen (132085) illustrates that while on one level employers might have regarded Muslims as different, on the other they would not allow this to trespass into the fact that they were all 'coolies', and had to carry out tasks at their behest, no matter the religious taboos. Moideen, who worked for Schram at Amatikulu, declined to handle a pig because Islamic law forbade this. He was charged for 'willfully disobeying orders without just cause' and imprisoned for a month. In this particular case, there was at least a voice of sympathy from a colonial authority. Inspector Waller agreed that Moideen had been treated unjustly and asked the Protector:

Is it reasonable to pick out a Mahomedan to drive this pig, and did this man disobey without just cause? The man is a Mahomedan and it is utterly against the Mahomedan religion to have anything to do with a pig, so what else could the man do but refuse to obey. In my opinion it was not a reasonable order and the man had just cause from his point of view to disobey. Mr Schram could surely have ordered one of his other Indians to drive the pig. It shows gross ignorance on the employer's part of the habits and customs of those Indians on whom they are so dependent for their labour.<sup>45</sup>

Disposal of the dead was another concern for Muslims, who bury their dead rather than cremate the body. Sergeant Thomas King told the Wragg Commission of the chaotic situation

at the Brook Street Cemetery in Durban: 'At present skeletons are repeatedly dug up, because after a short time no one can tell where a corpse has been buried. Cattle and pigs have the run of the place...The Arabs come here and quote Mohommedan law at 11:00 p.m., dig up the skeleton of another corpse and sling it all over the place...If I have made it [a grave] from north to south, then he wants it made from east to west.'<sup>46</sup> The Wragg Commission suggested that special areas be reserved for Muslim burials.

There are also references in the archival records to *purdah*, or the separation of men and women. For example, when Mohammed Ibrahim wanted to register his marriage to Beesha Bee, he sought to avoid the 'necessity of the woman going to court to register'. It was agreed that they could sign a declaration before Deputy Protector Dunning, who would register the marriage.<sup>47</sup> In another case, M Doomah explained to the Protector that he, an 'Arab store-keeper', had married Jumuni, daughter of an indentured Indian named Deo. Jumuni had embraced Islam and taken the name Coolsoom Bee. Doomah wanted permission to register his marriage without his wife being present 'as we are not accustomed to take our wife's [*sic*] with us to public officers on an errand of this kind'.<sup>48</sup>

Some Muslims expressed concern about the meat they ate. When Ghazee Khan (8842) died penniless, the Protector explained that this was because Muslims were in the 'habit' of using their money to buy 'special meat' sacrificed according to Islamic rites. This suggests that some Muslims practised dietary regulations that required the name of God to be invoked when an animal was slaughtered.<sup>49</sup> When Hoosen Meah (22038) deserted from the Verulam Central Mill, he met a non-Muslim Indian, Colen, who offered him food. According to Meah, 'I refused saying that I do not eat your caste's food.'<sup>50</sup> Caste and religious prohibitions came into play on this occasion.

## The legend of Bâdshâh Pîr

A Sufi's...presence is more to learn from than a book. A Sufi's book is not composed with ink and alphabet. A scholar loves, and lives on, the marks of a pen. A Sufi leaves footprints!<sup>51</sup>

Islamisation was 'a lengthy process of continuing interaction between the carriers of Islam and the local environment' in India, with remnants of former religious practices eradicated very slowly.<sup>52</sup> Large parts of rural India were converted to Islam through eclectic Sufis who tolerated syncretism. According to Alavi, rural Indian Islam was 'infused with superstition, and syncretism...[It] emphasised belief in miracles and powers of saints and pirs [holy men], worship at shrines and the dispensing of amulets and charms.'<sup>53</sup> Itinerant praise singers, amulet sellers and diviners were 'valued because of their capacity to cut through worldly constraints so as to make direct and immediate contact with the divine'.<sup>54</sup>

The Protector reported that Gafur (143400), who deserted from Town Hill Wattle Company in Hilton, had told him that he was a 'Mahomedan' who sold '*tikolo*' [religious charms] and 'bangles' in India, and was not accustomed to plantation work.<sup>55</sup> The medical officer reported that Syed Gulam Allie (17218) 'was a fakir in India and never did any work there. He states he has never been accustomed to work, and cannot work.'<sup>56</sup> Shaik Moidin (87033), indentured to

P Nicholson of Glendale, complained to the Protector in December 1901: 'I am a fakir by caste and unable to do labour of any kind...I ask the Protector to transfer me to someone of my caste.'<sup>57</sup> *Fakirs*, who trace their origins to the first and fourth caliphs of Islam, Abu Bakr and Ali, were a community of mendicants whose name is derived from the Arabic word *faqir*, meaning 'poverty' – begging historically being their main economic activity.<sup>58</sup> They had a reputation for being religious recluses and performing miracles. Sometimes, the term referred sarcastically to a beggar who chanted holy names. Deen Mohammud was typical of the latter class.

Deen Mohammud (23888) arrived from Calcutta in October 1880 and was assigned to G Thornhill of Ladysmith. He told Thornhill that he had not done any work in India, where he had no family and was a *fakir* who survived by begging. In Natal, he continually deserted but the magistrate did not punish him because he felt that Deen was insane, even though medical opinion stated that he was 'pretending'. Thornhill paid out his contract rather than put up with him.<sup>59</sup> Abdoolah (28433) was another who refused to work at the Hill Head Estate. Having completed a jail term of 14 days, he returned to Hill Head on 22 January 1884, but deserted two days later. His frustrated manager, Labistour, lamented:

I experience great miseries as manager having to make men work such as those the Government allots us. The fault is with those who send us those men who are the trash and the scum of the Indian population...It is not my fault if I receive as workmen venerous, lame, Brahmins, Goddagues, priests, fakirs, or Parsis, and as for a consolation, scum men like Abdoolah.<sup>60</sup>

The stereotype of a great *fakir* is that of a near-naked man effortlessly walking barefoot on hot coals, meditating intensely or 'living on air', refusing food and other worldly goods. This seems to apply to Sheik Ahmed, who was 30 when he came to Natal aboard the *Truro* in November 1860. Although it is claimed that he came alone and lived most of his life as a recluse on the streets of Durban, the name following his on the *Truro* is that of a woman, Ameenah Bee (283), also from Arni in North Arcot, and belonging to the same caste, Julaha (weavers). Both were assigned to RG Mack, and both transferred to F Salmon in December 1861. This suggests that they came together but this cannot be indisputably established.<sup>61</sup>

Sheik Ahmed was given the title Bâdshâh Pîr, 'king of the guides', and is credited with a number of miracles, including curing the physically and spiritually sick. For example, he is said to have meditated all day on the plantation, yet the work assigned to him was completed. When the authorities recognised 'him to be of spiritual mind' he was honourably discharged.<sup>62</sup>

According to tradition, he subsequently spent his time in the vicinity of the Grey Street Mosque, preaching to locals; he did not care for food, 'a sign of a typical saint who relies upon Allah for their *rizq* [food]'; and visited cane plantations, where he 'proved a source of inspiration' for those experiencing difficulties.<sup>63</sup>

On one occasion, tradition has it that he was on his way to Ladysmith to attend a wedding. The train conductor refused him a ticket because of his shabby dress. To the amazement of his friends, he was on the railway platform in Ladysmith by the time they got there. On another occasion, when a conductor refused Bâdshâh Pîr entry to a horse-drawn tram, he ordered the



horse to sit in the middle of the street. The animal refused to move until the conductor apologised.<sup>64</sup> These popular anecdotes were important in making Bâdshâh Pîr known as a saint. Symbolic tales about him resonated with the difficult voyages from India to Natal for indentured Indians, who regarded the crossing of the *kala pani* as a terrible ordeal; this was followed by the brutal social and work conditions in Natal, as well as the racist policies of the colonial government. Many sought solace in the *barakah* (blessing) of 'saints' to ease their suffering.

*Karâmât* stories (stories about shrines), according to Reeves, 'display beliefs about saints, their character, and their doings. Sainthood miracles attest to the superabundant supernatural powers of the *wâlî* [saint] and they explain why people are devoted to the saints.' Most *karâmât*, Reeves adds, 'have a discernible ideological content'. The saint is usually described as bringing judgements against 'those who occupy positions of authority, [and] are unjust in their dealings with subordinates and dependents'.<sup>65</sup> Hagiographies emphasise the special qualities of Bâdshâh Pîr, particularly his ability to know things that are concealed and which he could not have known through 'normal' means. They relate to healing the sick, assisting the weak, foreseeing accidents and protecting others. As such stories increased the repute and standing of the followers of a Shaikh through vicarious holiness, 'belief in miracles caught the imagination of the populace and led to extravagant and fantastic stories of the deeds of the Sufis'.<sup>66</sup>

Shortly before his death in 1894, Bâdshâh Pîr is said to have foretold the arrival of another saint from India, Soofie Saheb, when he warned local Muslims:

Too many people are on the wrong path. The time is near when a friend of Allah will come here and by the *barakat* of his footsteps, infidelity and darkness will disappear...If you want peace in this world and in the hereafter you must follow him.<sup>67</sup>

It is said that Bâdshâh Pîr died on Friday, a blessed day for Muslims.<sup>68</sup> Large crowds continue to visit his shrine annually. Gatherings are still held in his honour and the verse *Yeh dil aur yeh jân tere liyeh* (My heart and my soul are for you), by the great Urdu poet Ustad Nusruth Fateh Ali Khan, sends the crowd into raptures when it is sung on such occasions, an indication of his influence to the present day.

## Soofie Saheb

I'm the one with a helping hand  
Ready for those gone wild, astray.

YUNUS EMRE<sup>69</sup>

The religious void that existed in the lives of indentured Muslims and their descendants began to be filled with the arrival of Soofie Saheb in Natal in 1895. Soofie Saheb, full name Shah Goolam Mohamed Soofie, traced his genealogy to Abu Bakr, the first caliph of Islam. Soofie Saheb was born in 1850 in the town of Ibrahimpatan in Ratnagiri, about 200 kilometres from Bombay. He was the eldest son of Hazrath Ibrahim Siddiqui, imam of the *musjid* (mosque) and teacher at the *madrasah* at Ratnagiri, and appointed successor when his father passed away in 1872. Around 1894, he was instructed by his *pir* to go to South Africa to propagate the Chisti Sufi order.<sup>70</sup>

He arrived in Natal aboard the *Hoosen* in 1895. Soofie Saheb was a Konkani Muslim. The

predominant element of Konkani ancestry is Arab, and their ancestors settled in Bombay and surrounding areas from the eighth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, Konkanis had been displaced in the area by Memon traders, and large numbers began migrating to Rangoon (Burma), Mauritius, Zanzibar, Natal, the Transvaal and the Cape, with shaikhs and *pirs* following in their wake. The Islamic background of Konkani Muslims was one where *pirs*, shrines and festivals were central. At least 20 festivals were organised annually in Bombay, attracting crowds of up to 20 000.<sup>71</sup> It is against this background of outward migration and entrenched popular practices that the activities of Soofie Saheb must be viewed.

According to folklore, as soon as he arrived in Durban, Soofie Saheb asked for the grave of Sheik Ahmed. Since nobody knew where the latter had been buried, he proceeded to the Brook Street Cemetery where he meditated until he identified the grave, and gave Sheik Ahmed the title *Bâdshâh Pîr*, 'king of the guides'. Soofie Saheb placed his shawl on the grave until a proper shelter was built. Until his death in 1911, he was the *sajda khadim* (keeper of the tomb) of *Bâdshâh Pîr*, a position subsequently filled by his descendants.<sup>72</sup>

The link between Soofie Saheb and *Bâdshâh Pîr* is intriguing since their backgrounds were different. Soofie Saheb was from the 'elite' Ashraf caste (supposedly descendants of Muslim Arab immigrants), urban and well travelled, a speaker of Marathi, Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Konkani, a Sufi of the Chisti order from north-western India; Sheik Ahmed was from the 'convert' Ajlaf caste (Hindu convert to Islam), a Telegu-speaking, rural Muslim from south-eastern India who, if he belonged to a Sufi order, would most likely have been from the Qadiriyya order which predominated in that region. The urgency with which Soofie Saheb identified the grave and erected the shrine is consonant with the Sufi practice of building new shrines:

[They are] inspired by the belief that each new shrine was an equally potent repository of *barakat*...[The] result of increased mobility and wider horizons was a widening and intensification of the original cult tradition, and certainly not a turn towards a more 'universal' or transcendent faith devoid of shrines, magical intercessory power and all other features of the *pir* cult...It is therefore in the nature of the cult to grow, to widen its reach and appeal, and there is no logical reason why the domain of the cult saint should fall into disarray whenever his devotees make contact with new lands and new forms of enterprise.<sup>73</sup>

In April 1896, Soofie Saheb purchased land on the banks of the Umgeni River for £185 from a Hindu, Narainsamy, where he built a mosque, *khanqah* (teaching hospice), *madrassah* and cemetery.<sup>74</sup> Between 1898 and his death in 1911, he consolidated Islam among indentured Indians and their descendants by building mosques, *madrassahs*, cemeteries and orphanages in Springfield and Westville (1904), Overport (1905), Kenville and Sherwood (1906), Tongaat (1907), Ladysmith and Colenso (1908), and Verulam and Maritzburg (1909).<sup>75</sup> This provided places where working-class Muslims could pray and gain access to knowledge. This was important in raising the levels of knowledge about Islam. Soofie Saheb's work has been praised in many quarters, and not only by Muslims. For example, Dr MB Naidoo, a Hindu, pointed out that 'there were many Tamil-speaking Muslims who, but for the recitals of the Koran, were by

tradition and culture typically South Indian. Soofie Saheb's mystic personality had an overpowering influence on the Muslim community widely scattered.<sup>76</sup>

Many local Muslims believe that Bâdshâh Pîr and Soofie Saheb have special attributes of divinity, such as blessing the childless with children, curing diseases and preventing calamity. Individuals visiting shrines bring offerings in cash or kind, such as jewellery, food or money. Annual *urs*, which literally translates into 'weddings' from the Arabic, are held at the shrine of Bâdshâh Pîr to commemorate his death, along with the births or deaths of other great mystic saints, including the Prophet's. While such activities would be subject to intense criticism from the 1960s onwards, during the indenture period they were crucial in bringing Muslims together and sustaining their Islamic identity.

## May Street Mosque

To the outside eye,  
the blue-domed mosque marks  
a strange presence.  
To the hungry inside eye,  
its beauty grants a place in the world.

GEBEBA BADEROON<sup>77</sup>

The building of the May Street Mosque in Greyville, Durban, in the first decade of the twentieth century was an important breakthrough for descendants of indentured Muslims. While the mosque in Tongaat was established in a largely rural setting, the May Street Mosque was built in proximity to the two major mosques in Durban at the time, the Grey Street and West Street mosques, which were controlled by traders. The mosque was built at the corner of May and Fynn streets, while an organisation called the Anjuman Esha-A-Tul Islam was formed to coordinate the educational needs of Muslim children.

Officials of the mosque and the Anjuman in the decade 1910 to 1920 included traders like MA Motala, Roshendeen Rajab and MS Randaree, but most of the office-bearers were indentured and colonial-born Muslims who had settled in Greyville, an area that would later be known as Block AK. By the mid-twentieth century, Greyville was associated with prominent merchant families, but they only began to leave their overcrowded apartments in Grey Street from the 1920s to move into Mitchell Road, North Street and First Avenue. Who were these founding members of the May Street Mosque?

Deen Mahomed Fakir Yusuf was an interpreter at the Durban Court. His father, Syed Abdollah (279), and mother, Mariam Bee (238), landed on the shores of Natal on the *Truro*. Fakir Yusuf, born in 1879, was educated in Durban and joined his father at the Durban prison in a clerical position in 1899. After obtaining certificates in Hindustani and Tamil in 1905, he was appointed interpreter to the Durban Court in 1910. Captain Smith, governor of the prison, described him as 'reliable, honest, and conscientious in the discharge of his duties'.<sup>78</sup> Fakir Yusuf was an active sportsman and administrator, and involved in numerous religious activities. He was a founder member of the Anjuman Esha-A-Tul Islam, and represented colonial-born Muslims as trustee on the Grey Street Mosque Trust.

Mehendeally (Mahomed Ally) Thajmoon, one of the founder members of the Greyville Sporting Club, was born to indentured parents in Durban in 1877. He was educated at St Aidan's School and took over his father's general dealer's store. He was trustee of the Anjuman Esha-A-Tul Islam, founder member of the Muslim Burial Society in 1910, trustee of the May Street Mosque, and member of the Colonial Born and Indian Settlers Association.<sup>79</sup> Thajmoon opened the Victory Mineral Water Works, which manufactured cordials and squashes. When the Bux, Buckus and Emamally families became partners in the business, the name was changed to Mooncrush Products (Pty) Ltd. Based in Rossburgh, the company produced vinegar, pickles, sauces and chutneys.<sup>80</sup>

Noor Mahomed was born to indentured parents Chamroo Chand Khan (18336) and Alharia Bachun (18626) in Durban in 1889. Chamroo, from Azimghur, arrived in 1878 as a 'special servant' for FL Johnson's Royal Hotel in West Street, while Alharia, his shipmate, was from Ghazipur. Many single migrants like Chamroo and Alharia married on board the ship. Given the scarcity of women, such attachments were a boon for males; it also gave women protection against male predators. Noor Mahomed Chand Khan, known simply as CNM Khan, was well known in local business, entertainment and religious circles. Educated at St Aidan's, he was variously proprietor of the Orient Cinema, which brought the first Indian movies to South Africa in 1926, and the Radio Record Trading Co., which was the sole distributor of Columbia Indian records in South Africa. He played cricket and soccer for Greyville, and was a founding member of the Anjuman Esha-A-Tul Islam and the colonial-born trustee of the Grey Street Mosque. His eldest son, Hamid, taught at the May Street Madrassah School and eventually became its principal. Hamid was also president of the Anjuman Esha-A-Tul Islam and trustee of the May Street Mosque.<sup>81</sup>

Shaik Emamally (27890) arrived in Natal in 1882 at the age of four, with his parents Chamroo Roheeman (27888) and Nasiban Saira Alli (27889). They were part of a group of 13 from the village of Areela in Goruckpore, Uttar Pradesh, who came on the *Mechantman*. All were assigned to the Natal Government Railways. Social solidarity was an important buffer against the most alienating aspects of indenture. After completing his indenture, Chamroo opened a store in Greyville. He was a keen footballer and helped form the Greyville soccer and cricket clubs in 1894. Shaik Emamally was educated at St Aidan's and worked as a salesman at GH Miankhan & Co. He married the colonial-born Ameerun, daughter of Moonsawmy Moonian (15669) and Jalasoree Bheekie (17578). Shaik Emamally opened S Emamally in Queen Street, Durban, in 1921 in partnership with Thajmoon. He was a stalwart of Natal cricket and football; prominent in the Natal Indian Congress during and after Gandhi's stay in South Africa; a founding member of the Anjuman Esha-A-Tul Islam; and secretary, treasurer and life trustee of the May Street Mosque until his death at the Gandhi settlement in Phoenix in 1927.<sup>82</sup>

The role of Muslim traders in building mosques and *madrassahs* has been highlighted in the formal records they kept and the history books. Less known but equally vital to developing the institutions of Islam were the indentured and their descendants. This chapter has tried to redress this lacuna, for it is a story rich with sacrifice and commitment to ensure that Islamic values, beliefs and traditions took root and could grow.

## Conclusion

At critical moments in their history,

it is Islam that has saved Muslims and not vice versa.

ALAMA MOHAMMED IQBAL<sup>83</sup>

In journeying through the lives of some of the indentured Muslims and their immediate descendants, one gets more than a story of individual biographies; there is a deep sense of the texture of the times. We see marriages between Hindus and Muslims, partly because of the shortage of women, but also because the 'policing' of boundaries was not well established. The institutions of indentured Islam were built gradually, and indentured Muslims and their children were intimately involved in these processes. In many of the biographies, we see how involved they were in founding mosques and *madrassahs*. Like the descendants of indentured Muslims in Tongaat and those who were involved in establishing the May Street Mosque, Muslims in other parts of Natal also established 'community'.

In the absence of literacy and scriptural elites who represented 'high' Islam, rituals and tomb shrines became transmitters of an Islamic ethos. Saints played a major role in drawing Muslims into collectives and building a sense of community. Of interest is that while individual Muslims played prominent political roles, religious leaders like Soofie Saheb largely concentrated on building institutions to 'spread the word'. They were classical spiritual figures rather than the harbingers of 'political Islam', even though memories of the 1857 rebellion against the British in India would have been fresh in many minds.

In the process of reconstituting Muslim society, language and caste lost some of their relevance. Religious practice centred on a broadly 'popular' form of Islam, which came to be known as Barelwi by the mid-twentieth century. Barelwi was eventually mediated through the Urdu language, which gradually replaced a basket of regional languages. While this provided commonality among indentured Muslims and their descendants, the gap between them and Muslim traders was vast. Here, class and caste were still important markers of difference and this was reflected in practices of endogamy within linguistic groups, dress codes and attachment of the label 'Hydrebadee', which was used derogatively to refer to indentured Muslims and their descendants, even though few were from Hyderabad.

While the institutions of Islam took root, developing a distinct Indian Muslim identity was a slower process and took place in a context in which the experiences of Muslims and Hindus were closely intertwined. This was partly a legacy of syncretic and eclectic rural Indian Islam, and partly a consequence of the indentured experience. 'Muslim' identity was less important during the period under review than being Indian in relation to whites and Africans, being a passenger or indentured Indian among Indians, and being *Madrasi* or *Kalkatia* among indentured Indians.









# The many faces of leisure and pleasure: from China to ganja



Tie my hands up/Pierce my eyes  
 Haul my teeth out/So I'll not bite  
 Put chains around my neck/Lash my feet  
 Set your dogs to guard/Morning to night  
 Whip me till I bleed/Till I beg  
 But you can't stop my cock flooding in the goldmine  
 Can't stop my cock splashing in the sunshine!

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to conceptualise the idea of leisure in the context of indenture, a system which aimed at the control of almost every aspect of a worker's life. Muharram was the one time in which the indentured took to the streets in what became a 'carnival' that spread over three days. After the carnival they returned to their routinised lives, which had at their core a strict regimen of labour that for many included Sunday work.

But as the indentured settled into their new environment, they created spaces for religion, culture and sport. Employers and colonial authorities encouraged some activities, the 'respectable' ones that helped to stabilise the workforce and provide some relief from the labour routine. While finding it difficult to come to terms with 'heathen' religions, employers ignored and sometimes encouraged religious practices if this meant ensuring a compliant workforce. Sports like wrestling (*kushti*), which kept the men occupied, were, if not encouraged, given tacit approval. However, when Indians 'crossed the line', when they drank alcohol, smoked ganja, or when their recreational pursuits challenged authority and affected output, the authorities and employers made every effort to stamp out such behaviour.

The attempt to create an all-encompassing disciplinary apparatus was never to be fully realised. We have seen repeatedly that while employers were obsessed with control, they were challenged in both overt and less visible ways. The indentured sought independent spaces in which to spend their free time and organise their activities, some of which could be defined as forms of 'cultural resistance'.<sup>2</sup> Hegemony, as Clarke and Critcher point out, 'contains the idea that cultural domination – the creation of hegemony itself – is always in a state of

OPPOSITE: Officials and members of the Pietermaritzburg Indian Football Club, 1916.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Sandiah's Christy Minstrel Band, photographed on 24 December 1903 at Rembrandt Studio in West Street.

BACK: C Nathaniel, A David, V Nayanah, Xavier David. FRONT: Billy Subban, L Nayahana, Francis D Sandiah, HL Paul, D Isaac, A Essex.

tension...[because] divergent interests and perspectives always threaten to outrun the ability of the dominant culture to contain and incorporate them'.<sup>3</sup>

While worn down by the grind and routine of labour, many of the indentured took advantage of their 'free time' to dance, make music, drink and play sport. When the employers, sometimes joined by middle-class Indians, tried to reel in these pursuits, the indentured did not cede the spaces that they had carved for themselves without a fight. This chapter is really a story of two halves. In the second half, we trace the issues surrounding the death of one indentured migrant, Andee Tandroyan, and through this get a sense of the life of an ordinary indentured labourer, insights both fascinating and tragic. In the first half, we look at the range of sports and cultural activities that workers participated in, starting with the life of a quite exceptional figure whose name would become synonymous with soccer.

## Sam China

An astonishing void: official history ignores football...

EDUARDO GALEANO<sup>4</sup>

The name Sam China was inscribed in the memory of many generations as the name of the premier soccer competition in which Indians competed nationally until the 1960s. As the 1960 tournament brochure described it, the 'nameless, magic quality of the Sam China Cup kept pulling them in, in their usual thousands'.<sup>5</sup>

'Mr Soccer' arrived in Natal as Camatchee Seeneevassen (1856) on the *Earl of Hardinch* from the French colony of Cuddalore, Pondicherry, in September 1863. Born in 1857, he arrived with his parents, Seeneevassen Maurimutoo (1853) and Anundoyee (1854), and siblings, Peraman (1855), Arjoonenv (1859), and twins Rungasawmy (1857) and Veramah (1858). After the family completed its indenture, Sam China worked for William Hartley on the latter's Overport Sugar and Coffee Estate, which covered the greater part of present-day Overport. Sam China was one of 40 Indians employed by Hartley in the early 1870s. While many Indians purchased plots of ground from Hartley for market gardening, Sam China joined Mr Smith, manager of Standard Bank at Overport, as 'stable boy' after his indenture.

He voluntarily abandoned his right to a free return passage to India when he obtained a licence on 31 March 1875 to leave Natal. Together with five friends, he went to Kimberley by foot in 21 days, suffering great hardship in the process. Sam China was part of a stream of Indians who moved to Kimberley where 131 diamond companies were formed between 1876 and 1888. *Diamond Fields* published an article in 1874 on Indian life in Kimberley:

Our Coolie friends are on the rampage just now. Generally speaking, the mild Hindu on the diamond fields takes life and its cares more easily than other exotics. At all hours of the day, let alone the night, they may be found in their odorous quarters, some playing pitch and toss for shillings and half crowns, some chanting their devotions in the whine of primitive piety, some professing to sell stale cucumbers, and other green and yellow impositions; all enjoying an enviable immunity from solicitude.<sup>6</sup>

Another report in *Diamond Fields* in 1880 observed that Indians earned a living as 'itinerant purveyors of fruit and vegetables', barbers, proprietors of hot and cold baths and 'Kafir eating-

houses', and waiters. By 1899 there were approximately 1 500 Indians in Kimberley out of a population of around 35 000.<sup>7</sup> While the second report is important for the economic activities of Indians, the first provides a window into the range of leisure-time pursuits of Indians, many of whom would have been just out of indenture.

Sam China worked for Rogers Bros. for several years before opening his own general dealer's and fruit business in the mid-1880s. He returned to Natal in the early 1890s to buy land from William Hartley for his parents. In Kimberley, he was well known to influential white figures in the city, including mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes. Several members of his extended family followed him. One was Coopersamy, son of his brother Peraman, who was a groom in the Colonial Secretary's Office. Coopersamy went to Kimberley in 1881 and worked for Rogers Bros. before joining De Beers Consolidated Mines as a blacksmith, where he remained for 20 years.

Sam China had two daughters: Patty, who married boxing promoter Nat Moodley, and Valliamah, who married Leo Gopaul. Nat Moodley was president of the Natal Indian Football Association, executive member and treasurer of the Durban Indian Sports Ground Association and manager of Natal teams at the Sam China Cup. Nat Moodley's only son, named Sam China after his grandfather but popularly known as 'Booysie', is a well-known accountant in Durban; he was associated with the Young Aces soccer club for many years. Valliamah was the first Indian woman councillor in the Cape.

A contemporary stated that Sam China was 'at heart, a great philanthropist whose hands itched to give generously to any cause that required his support'.<sup>8</sup> He is most famous for donating a trophy for which Indian teams from all provinces competed. He saw the national competition as an opportunity to bring Indians together from all over South Africa. The Sam China Cup was designed and manufactured in London by Lezard and Robins at a cost of £105, a monumental sum for the time. The tournament, held under the auspices of the South African Indian Football Association, was anticipated with great excitement and the games were followed avidly. One official reflected in 1960 that 'not even Sam China, however much he may have stretched his imagination, could have visualised the impact his munificence in the presentation of the Cup would have on Indian soccer in particular and non-white soccer in South Africa in general, thirty years after his death'. The magic ended when the final whistle of the series was blown in Chatsworth in 1973. His contemporaries' wonderful memories were recorded in tributes such as the following:

Those who have had the privilege of knowing him attest to the fact that Sam China was a man of unimpeachable trustworthiness, possessed of a driving force, and a shrewd business brain that gave him the Midas touch...He was a martinet who carried himself with an old world dignity. His ability to analyse a given situation, his clarity of thought, and the gift of galvanising those around him into immediate action to meet any problem, lifted him above mediocrity...His was not the good fortune to receive formal education but he was one of the best informed men of his day...But of all his attributes his greatest was his ability to make and keep friends. He never forgot his beginnings, however much he rose as an amazingly successful businessman and outstanding public figure.

Sam China died in Kimberley on 9 September 1930, appropriately when footballers from all over South Africa had gathered in Kimberley to participate in the Sam China Cup. The captains of the participating teams acted as pall-bearers while all the players wore black armbands throughout the tournament. It was a fitting farewell for one who rose from indenture to become a great sports benefactor, and whose name and legend lives on.

## The meaning of Sam China

Shared words spiced the mash of root crops  
Spread across plantain leaves on Saturday  
Evening much welcomed for some respite.  
Slow clapping of palms chaffed on sandy  
Husks gripped and ripped for white core.

MOHIT PRASAD<sup>9</sup>

How the indentured spent their 'time out of time' was of great concern to the authorities and employers. The development of space for recreation must be viewed in its historical context. Having survived the journey from their villages to Calcutta or Madras, and made new acquaintances aboard the ship as they crossed the *kala pani*, the indentured faced five years of labour. Here in this new land, age-old controls and customs that structured social relations were absent while new patterns of living struggled to be born.

The colonial masters had their own ideas about what those patterns should be, as they sought to turn the indentured into cogs in a machine of production and service. But as we have seen, the indentured did not present themselves as passive objects to be transformed willy-nilly by white masters. As much as they were shaped, they shaped the environment in which they found themselves. This was literally seen in the landscape that saw places of worship, Hindu gods and Muslim minarets jostling for space with social conditions that sought to render people into numbers, and that regarded them as having no more needs than the cane they were brought to cultivate.

The indentured spent most of their leisure time with other indentured due to the racialised structure of the political economy in Natal. They rarely associated or socialised with Africans or whites, which meant that leisure time was not an opportunity to rise above racial barriers. We know that Indian workers passed some of their free time drinking, singing and dancing, and smoking ganja. The rigorous work schedule would have left little time for much else. Sunday, the one free day that they were entitled to by law and which some were denied, would have largely been spent buying provisions or taking care of household needs.

Yet they must have played some sport for we find that as soon as they completed their indentures, they participated in formally organised soccer, cricket, athletics, cycling, boxing and wrestling. Wrestling, especially, was very popular and an integral part of the annual Muharram festivities. Wrestlers would have had to participate in contests to select the champion to represent each plantation. We have come across other festivities that included wrestling on the programme. Some of the indentured also indulged in swimming and fishing.

Boxing, too, was popular, and one who became a household name a short while after completing his indenture was Jack Moodley. The other prominent Indian boxer at the turn of the twentieth century was Valoo. Boxing drew large crowds and one night in December 1907 would remain etched in the memories of those who attended. It was a night in which the Indian Victoria Theatre was crowded 'from floor to ceiling'. The audience was not disappointed as they witnessed 'as good an all-round exposition of the fistic art as the most exacting could demand'. The first bout, a wrestling match between white wrestler Leopold and Jim Pillay, consisted of three five-minute rounds, catch-as-catch-can. The bout ended in a draw. This was followed by a fight between two unnamed Indians. Controversy followed soon after in the titanic struggle between Valoo and Jim O'Connor, which referee Dick Wade awarded to O'Connor. The crowd booed the overtly racist decision, and even the white reporter could 'not see that O'Connor won this fight'. There was 'much discussion' about the decision.

The highlight was a fight between Jack Moodley and Black American Kid, 'the Demon' Walcot. Moodley was the unchallenged 'Indian champion' who took his first name from Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion of the world. Walcot had won over the Durban public with his 'unfailing good temper and scientific ringcraft'. Moodley brought the house down in the fourth round when he trapped Walcot against the ropes and dropped him. This was a mistake. Walcot got up at the count of nine:

He rose from mother earth refreshed, like the hero of classic story, and rushed at Moodley like a veritable tornado, forced him against the ropes, and, getting in a terrific left hook on the point of his jaw, Moodley sank to the ground, his head resting on the lower rope. He made several attempts to rise, but was unable, and was counted out.

The crowd got its money's worth. 'It was a great fight...a faked fight can always be spun out to twenty rounds.'<sup>10</sup>

Many of the officials of the earliest associations were those who had just completed their indentures. They included the likes of Bernard Sigamoney, Shaik Emamally and R Bughwan. It did not take long for sport to become an important social institution. Aside from soccer, cricket, tennis, athletics, boxing and wrestling, 'physical culture' (weightlifting) was a major pastime. It was soccer, however, that captured the imagination. The Natal Indian Football Association was formed by 1886, consisting of four Durban teams: Union Jacks, Eastern Stars, Yorkshire, and Western Stars. By 1890, there were teams in Maritzburg and Ladysmith as well.<sup>11</sup> Indian-owned newspapers like *Indian Opinion* and *Indian Views* were filled with sports stories and reports. Matches were arranged between Durban, Greytown, Maritzburg, Dundee, Stanger and Ladysmith. They competed for the Gandhi Memorial Cup, donated by Parsee Rustomjee, 'which, intrinsically and otherwise, is the best cup in the possession of any provincial Indian Association in South Africa'.<sup>12</sup>

Cricket was also popular in Natal. There are reports of matches being played by 1889. In 1892, during a tour by an English team, several Indian cricket clubs were formed. Bluebells included M Royeppen, AH Peters, S Joshua, Joe Lazarus and Joe Royeppen; Union Jacks was formed by workers indentured to the Natal Government Railways, like JC Sankaran, M Rangan,

T Doorooghan, AR Rajkoomar and JMB Mohanlal; Western Stars was formed by SE Joshua, M Pakkianathan, SV Billie, JL Francis and J Christopher.<sup>13</sup> Formally organised cricket really began with the formation of the Durban District Indian Cricket Union (DDICU) in 1901.

The Standard Cricket Club was formed in September 1901 at a meeting at the St Aidan's School, while the City Players Indian Cricket Club was formed in October 1901 by the Reverend John Thomas, headmaster of the Wesleyan School. These teams represented Anglican and Methodist Christians respectively. The chairman of DDICU was interpreter AH Peters and the secretary was Frank B Ernest.<sup>14</sup> Teams competed for the Pandays Shield and the Peters Bowl, the former sponsored by Lutchman Panday and the latter by AH Peters.

Many middle-class Indians saw a link between sports, politics and social class. Sport was seen as an excellent means of ensuring that the free time of Indians would be spent 'productively', and not be channelled into 'vices' like drinking and visiting brothels. Sport, it was felt, entrenched a healthy value system, such as teamwork, allegiance to fellow players, respect for rules and authority, and fortitude when faced with adversity. The Reverend Sigamoney, for example, wrote that cricket and soccer 'ought to be pushed vigorously in the schools, and the masters must take an interest in the game. Generally speaking, there are few teachers in Indian schools who play cricket and football. It may be that nature has moulded them that way and they do not feel the call of Mother Sport, yet in the interest of the coming generations, sport generally should be encouraged for all it is worth, and should have the same prominence as any other subject in the curriculum.'<sup>15</sup> Joseph Royeppen, Durban born and Cambridge educated, wrote that it would be tragic if sport was played for 'runs' and 'goals' only:

Such a day will see its final death and burial...So long as young men follow sports without eye or ear to their final value for us in this our adopted land of one continued struggle for honourable existence, but merely for the passing excitement and intoxication of the thing, our playing fields must continue to be, not the school and the training ground to higher calls of life and duty, but scenes of our sure damage and loss.<sup>16</sup>

Sport was seen to serve as an instrument of 'improvement' and assimilation. It was through sport that Indians could honour Victorian ideas of 'civilisation' and 'fair play'.



Joseph Royeppen, Durban born and Cambridge educated, was passionate about the importance of sport as an instrument of improvement and assimilation.

## Drama, song and dance

Wherever the indentured went, they established religiously oriented theatre, especially what became known as the 'Ramayana' tradition – an important part of the Hindu canon which was acted out regularly. The Ramayana, the story of Rama, prince of Ayodha, has been told in many different ways over the centuries. The mainstream version in North India portrays it as the victory of good over evil. Lord Rama freed Sita from Lanka, where she had been taken by the demon king Ravana. The Ramayana is not an ordinary story. It contains the teachings of ancient Hindu sages and presents them through allegory in narrative, intermingled with the philosophical and devotional. The significance of this story for the indentured is that they, too, saw themselves exiled like Rama: 'Bereft of goods, a mendicant, as slave,/Rama to spend fourteen years in the woods...'<sup>17</sup>

Sita was portrayed as a docile and faithful wife, Rama as a brave warrior and Ravana as evil. In Sita, the indentured men saw the model of the 'faithful wife', which would have resonated with many who had left their wives in India or faced uncertain relationships in Natal. In the figure of the evil Ravana, they saw a 'model of the delusions of powerful evil', not unlike the overseers, Sirdars and employers they confronted daily. The play provided a 'paradigm for the struggle of the good in an evil world'.<sup>18</sup>

Several people interviewed in the early 1990s recalled that theatre was an intrinsic part of their lives, and even more so of their parents' lives. In the evenings and on weekends, groups would gather to communally sing verses of Hindu epics while musical instruments such as the *tabla* (drums), accordion and harmonium were played, or they would sit up all night to watch abridged versions of these plays enacted as drama. Religion, entertainment and theatre were intimately linked in these activities. Drama was a leisure outlet as well as a forum for social bonding.

Dr Goonam – the first Indian woman medical doctor in Durban, who qualified in 1934 and whose patients were mostly of indentured stock – stressed that Indians 'were very alive to their need for theatre, sing-songs, and so on. They were especially fond of singing, particularly the Tamil section, and they sang religious songs that were taught by the older people, they sat and in unison sang and entertained themselves.'<sup>19</sup> Baiju Ramdeen, whose parents had arrived as indentured migrants and who grew up at the Magazine Barracks in Durban, stated that 'all Saturday and Sunday the whole community sat and enjoyed music. They played the *sorangi* [fiddle], *tabla* and *nagara* [high and wide drums]. The music we played was "Bajan" and "kirtal", about Rama and Hanuman. The wives cooked and we had a big feast.'<sup>20</sup> There are references to such practices during indenture. Take, for example, a complaint from WE Bale in



Maritzburg to the Protector in 1889 about the 'bad conduct' of Santhanam Pillay (33900) and Karupan Asari (33896), who arrived on the *Umvoti* in January 1885. At the time of the complaint, the men were 29 and 18 respectively. They had, according to Bale, become 'unbearable'.

I cannot keep them at their work, for as soon as their mistress' back is turned one or both go off to their room, and make all sorts of excuses to get away. When sent upon an errand which would easily be accomplished in ten minutes they will stay away for perhaps half an hour and sometimes even an hour...On Sundays one stays at home to look after the house, while the other is free for the whole day – alternately. When the weather is fine we attend church morning and evening. I have been informed that the Coolies did not stay when we had been to Church in the evening. Yesterday week after starting for church I returned in say about half an hour and discovered that Karupan who had been left in charge, was gone – he did not return until 8:15p.m. Both Coolies returned together and when I spoke to them they gave me abuse, and said what were they wanted for when there was nothing to do. A short time later they asked to be allowed to stay away from Saturday nights – at nine o'clock until Sunday morning, which however I refused, upon which both worked themselves into a passion, and fearing they might take French leave, I got up on Saturday morning at daybreak and found Santhanam's door padlocked, and he himself gone. Karupan had apparently just returned and he was getting some wood to make a fire for his food. I have found out that they are engaged at some kind of theatrical work, and every moment they can steal is occupied in reading and making up costumes. It has come to such a pitch fever that they take no notice of either their mistress or me and just do as they please...I am of the opinion that their change of conduct is attributable to their strong desire for joining in the theatrical work above referred to.<sup>21</sup>

It is striking how Bale saw no reason for his employees to have any form of entertainment or any independence in deciding how to use their spare time. However, the correspondence suggests that early in the indentured period, theatre was a feature of Indian life. Another example of the kinds of leisure activities Indians engaged in is provided by Durga (84560), who was indentured to WB Turner of Howick. Though he complained of assault, for our purposes what is of significance is what he was doing when Turner was alleged to have assaulted them. Durga told the Protector in 1903 that at around 7:00 p.m., he and 'the other Indians were sitting in my house and passing our time by singing songs. My master came to the house and took the drum from me and dropped it on the ground. When it didn't break he went and brought an axe and chopped it into four pieces.' Turner acknowledged breaking the drum 'because they would not stop playing and singing all night after repeated warnings'.<sup>22</sup>

Don't worry about saving those songs!  
And if one of our instruments breaks,  
It doesn't matter.  
We have fallen into place  
where everything is music.

RUMI<sup>23</sup>



The tiger dance was a popular form of entertainment. In temples, *tevaram* singing was established from the earliest days.<sup>24</sup> We have seen that the Lawrence and Gabriel families embraced Western classical music, while the Anglican and Catholic churches established a choral tradition.<sup>25</sup> A popular form of song was the *natchania*, sung in Hindi and accompanied by the kettle drum and harmonium. These songs usually provided social commentary on daily life. They were popular by the early twentieth century. While there is no clear evidence of *natchania* songs being composed on plantations, we can assume that some indentured workers did participate, especially those who worked close to the city or who lived in settled Indian communities in the vicinity of plantations. One song recorded by Rajend Mesthrie alluded to changing attitudes to sexuality. It was known as the 'Riverside song' as it was popularised by the residents of Riverside, an area just to the north of the Durban CBD:

From an old lady, you've become young  
Why, O wife?  
You've painted your lips red  
And made your hair curly  
Why, O wife?  
  
You go out walking down the roads  
You dab powder on your face  
and wear your sari back-to-front  
you've abandoned family traditions.<sup>26</sup>

The South Indian equivalent of the *natchania* was the 'six-foot' dance, or *terukuttu*, which literally translated into 'street-dance'.<sup>27</sup> It derived its name from the intricate foot patterns used in its execution. Annamalai suggests that the dance originated in storytelling among rural South Indians after the April harvests, the period known as Thai Poosam in the Hindu calendar.<sup>28</sup> As this was the hottest part of the year, individuals spent their evenings in entertainment. There are reports of Thai Poosam being celebrated at the Umgeni Road Hindu Temple, while the Umbilo Siva Subramoneya Temple was 'thronged with hundreds of Hindus' when the festival was celebrated in January 1907. At both venues, the gathering prayed for the 'long life and health of the King and Queen'.<sup>29</sup> One interviewee, Mr Poosamy, recalled the important role of dance and song in the lives of Indians:

We worked hard all week and looked forward to weekends. Music was very popular. We did the six-foot dance and acted the religious stories the whole night. We didn't let the actors leave until the next morning. People also sang about other things, about the caste system, about how the rich abused the poor, about men and women, there was a lot of swearing and rude words. But people took a liking to the ancient stories because it gave them hope that their suffering will disappear. Small groups danced everywhere.<sup>30</sup>

Though he was referring to the 1920s and 1930s, his parents told him that this had been a feature of their lives as well. *Terukuttu* was associated with the 'low-caste' Mariamman festival, which involved ritual sacrifice. It was criticised by many middle-class Indians and seems to

have died out around the 1930s. Where *terukuttu* was performed, indentured migrants from several estates would usually meet to perform in the open air. Only men acted, even playing the roles of women. Annamalai describes the performances as ‘extremely complex, the cast very big and the total effect visually exciting’.<sup>31</sup> The most popular figure in the dance was the clown, or *komali*, who provided comic relief, but also focused on social issues, local politicians and community affairs. *Terukuttu* contained music, dance and poetry. While conforming to western theatrical conventions, such as the use of suspense, conflict and climax, it was based on religious literature and had strong religious connotations.

## Life’s a lottery

Today’s a day when those who work  
are idling. Those who played must work  
and hurry, too, to get it down,  
with little dignity or none.

ELIZABETH BISHOP<sup>32</sup>

Andee Tandroyan (26194), aged 26, of caste Pariah (untouchable) from Chingleput, arrived in Natal on 16 March 1881. He was assigned to C Coleman in Greenwood Park Estate, where, just over four years later, he was found dead. Interpreter Abdul Latiff compiled a report on his death, which was presented to the Protector on 22 September 1885. The report stated that on Saturday 19 September 1885, Latchmi, who lived in the same line of huts as Andee, got up at 4:00 a.m. to cook. As was the arrangement, she called out several times for Andee to get up for work. He did not reply so she knocked at his door. As there was no response, she forced the door open and took a peek into the room. Not seeing Andee on the bed, she called another neighbour, Chinama. Together, they went into the hut and lit a match to get a better view, and were shocked to find Andee hanging from the ceiling in the corner of the room.

Frightened, they rushed out. They saw a fellow worker, Ismail Khan, and told him to inform Coleman. Coleman and Khan arrived shortly after with a lantern. They cut the rope and lowered the body, which was described as being ‘cold’. According to Latchmi, Andee did not drink but was a heavy smoker of ganja. He was one of 20 employees who were members of a *chitti* (lottery); each member paid 10 shillings to a communal pool and took turns to draw the money. He had three instalments to pay.

Andee did not go to work on the Friday preceding his death. During the day, Ismail Khan’s wife, on passing the house, heard him scream. Coleman, hearing of this, visited with Andee’s friend Parsuramen to find out why Andee had screamed. Andee did not answer Coleman and Parsuramen’s questions as to how he was doing but made a ‘noise as if he were stupid and could not speak. He was then helped to the door by Coleman and Parsuramen and laid down there.’ Dr John McIntyre confirmed that Andee was in the ‘habit of smoking Indian Hemp (*ganja*)...He is also reported to have been in monetary difficulties.’ He was wearing earrings and a bracelet of ‘religious significance’ at the time of his death. Aside from *chitti* claims, Seeurutun & Co., a retail store with branches in Umgeni, Isipingo, Greenwood Park, Verulam, Tongaat and Chaka’s Kraal, submitted a claim for £2.26 for the purchase of items like tamarind,

masala, soap, a coat, some calico, dholl, ghee, sugar, oil, coffee and bread. The Protector did not entertain the claim for *chitti* because the authorities did not recognise this informal savings club.<sup>33</sup>

We digress for a moment to reflect on the importance of *chitti* as one of the ways in which the indentured adjusted to life in Natal. The *chitti* was not gambling. *Chit* literally refers to a statement of an amount owed, usually for food and drink, and in this context involved a number of individuals getting together and contributing a set amount every month. A typical example would be that of 10 individuals agreeing to pay £1 per month. Each month one person would collect £10. Trust was crucial because contributors could be short-changed if an individual, after collecting his or her money, was unable to continue paying. This breaking of trust did occur. For example, Venkadu (134892) and his wife Konalagangi (135019), who worked at Elandslaagte Collieries, went to the magistrate in Ladysmith in May 1911 to complain that Sirdar Latchmia refused to pay *chitti* of £9 due to them.<sup>34</sup> The magistrate could not do anything as this was an informal arrangement.

This practice instituted itself early in the life of the indentured and some *chittis*, like the Indian Mutual Association Fund, showed signs of greater formality. This *chit* had 16 members who each paid £1 per month. Goroosamy (26464) was appointed secretary of the Fund. Moorgun (15483), one of the members, died in July 1884 after eight months, and was owed £8. His father in India claimed the money, but Goroosamy claimed that Moorgun had not paid his instalments and that he, Goroosamy, had paid on behalf of Moorgun and was entitled to keep the money. The father turned to the Protector, who refused to intervene.<sup>35</sup> Also amazing in this story is the father's awareness of the *chitti*, an indication that the indentured were still communicating with family 'back home'.

An astonishing story of the resourcefulness of the indentured is provided by WA Gilbert of Barnesdale Estate in Ifafa, who wrote to the Protector on 28 December 1907 that the Sirdar had organised a lottery. When they received their money, workers invested in jewellery. The problem for Gilbert was that some workers were selling their rations to pay the lottery, and thus going hungry. As a result, they were becoming weak and medical costs went up. 'When illiterate coolies,' according to Gilbert, 'are encouraged in a fondness for jewellery that is at least on this place quite abnormal and beyond their means altogether, they will go to any extreme to satisfy that craving.' Gilbert felt that his workers were not 'intelligent enough' to know the value of the jewellery, and was certain that the Sirdar was cheating them. Gilbert stated that he was an Anglo-Indian, and although he understood 'the coolie better than most people, I must admit never having experienced this state of affairs anywhere else'. Gilbert requested and received a notice in English and then Tamil from the Protector prohibiting the Sirdar from having monetary dealings with workers. The Protector had to send a Tamil version because workers did not understand Gilbert when he read out the English notice and refused to believe its import.<sup>36</sup> Andee's life, seemingly mundane and ordinary, was one experienced by many of the indentured, though most did not come to the same tragic end.

In a recent study, Julie Parle points out that such individuals may have been mentally ill or depressed, and would have required medical intervention; this was not forthcoming

because of factors such as the belief that workers were shirking, employer reluctance to pay for hospitalisation, employers' fear of losing productive labour, and government policy of returning unproductive individuals to India. The result was an extremely high suicide rate, especially among males in their twenties and thirties. Suicide, Parle suggests, was not yet 'understood as a phenomenon that could be explained or predicted in either sociological or psychological terms, and instead was still primarily attributed to...the very character of the "Indian" himself'.<sup>37</sup>

In a largely male milieu, where workers like Andee were alienated and humiliated, where they lacked networks of support, they sought to carve spaces independent of employers' control. They alternated dull work with 'mind-altering substances', often transgressing the laws of the state as they engaged in leisure-time activities such as drinking, gambling and smoking ganja. This permeated not just leisure time, but all aspects of indentured lives, including work and family life.

## The toddy: 'one of their few comforts'

Dirt in his nostrils, in his ears/Dirt in his soul, in his anus  
All day/sun burns/tongue/burns/All day/throat cut/heart hurt  
work's never done, never done, never done  
Hack! Hack! Hack! Hack!  
Cutlass slips and cuts your cock.  
Thank God for six o'clock  
I go home/And I'll bathe/And I'll comb/And I'll rock/In hammock  
Cassava, pepperpot/drink some rum and coconut.

DAVID DABYDEEN<sup>38</sup>

The indentured used leisure time to escape the totalising gaze of the employer and, often, their physical and even mental suffering. Such arenas also constituted a largely all-male milieu in which modes of decorum were transgressed. Alongside the religious and ethnic festivals, at the centre of (mainly) male life was a culture of drinking and gambling. This arena of indentured life was crucial in mitigating the attempts of white bosses to treat the indentured as empty slates on which they could inscribe what they wanted.

There were canteens in the vicinity of most estates. It was estimated in 1894 that Natal derived £20 000 per annum from the sale of rum to Indian workers. Explaining why he had opened a general store on his estate, G Wilkinson of Ottawa told the Protector that 'the men are always asking for a pass to go to the canteen and get drunk, lose what they had bought from the stores and be useless the next day'.<sup>39</sup> For employers like Wilkinson, selling drink on the estate meant revenue and ensured the worker was more likely to remain on the plantation.

Drunkness sometimes led to violence. In December 1900, Munien (63281), who 'indulged too much' one Sunday, assaulted fellow worker Naickern (66785) with a stick, breaking his arm.<sup>40</sup> Arumugam (43372), Kuppan (47373), Malmapersad (48539) and Goyasen (52050) were imprisoned for three days each with hard labour for fighting and creating a disturbance while drunk at the Municipal Barracks in Durban in 1896.<sup>41</sup> Lang, of Amajub, complained to the

Protector in April 1892 that Camptha 'has often beaten his wife. He goes away nearly every Sunday and returns drunk from *kafir* beer. He is always fighting with *kafirs*.'<sup>42</sup> The files of magistrates are littered with such examples. In a report to the mayor in 1892, police chief Richard Alexander noted that 'out of a population of 5,000 Indians [in Durban], half of which are women and children, last year's return shows 3,113 arrests; of this 2,152 for drunkenness'.<sup>43</sup>

Colonial reports stereotyped the use of palliatives by indentured workers according to region. Those from Madras were considered 'heavy drinkers'. The Deputy Protector wrote in 1883 that 'drunkenness is a vice which prevails only amongst the Madras people. The Calcutta people seldom form the habit of drinking spirits though they are more liable to excess in the use of opium...The toddy was a necessity of life to Madrasis.'<sup>44</sup>

In August 1883, there was debate about prohibiting the sale of liquor to Indians. Protector Mason argued that it could only be applied to new immigrants, and he feared that it would deter Indians from coming to Natal. George Hope Ross, Emigration Agent for Natal, advised him on 20 October 1883 that restrictions 'on the sale of intoxicating liquors would stop emigration, for it is a well known fact that all class of labourers are used to some kind of stimulant drink on their return from labour'.<sup>45</sup>

Instances like the following gave employers the justification to push for legislation to control the leisure-time habits of the indentured. Durmah and her husband, Kaysaven, lived at Springvale. On 28 August 1883, they visited Verulam. On the way home they stopped to catch a train at Mount Edgecombe station at around 5:00 p.m. As the next train was only due at 6:00 p.m., Durmah suggested that they walk home. Kaysaven told her to go home, and that he would follow on the train. He did not return, so she went the following morning to look for him. She was told by a friend, Voonamally, that an Indian had been killed and that his body was 'in a *kafir* hut near the station'. She went to the 'old *kafir* huts and found inside my husband lying on the ground dead. His face was placid, the eyes were open.' There were no marks on him. When she left Kaysaven, he 'was slightly drunk. He had £2, a bundle of clothing, and two earthenware bowls.' She alleged that his possessions were missing.

William Beavon, the stationmaster, told the Inanda magistrate on 7 September 1883 that the couple had arrived at the station at around 5:30 p.m. on Monday 28 August. His clerk, Robert Blyth, refused them tickets because both 'had been into too great a state of intoxication to allow them to travel'. Mr Dubois of Sacharine Estate advised that they be sent to the huts to prevent them being injured by the cane carts going to and from the mill. The African constable, Tom, carried them to the huts. He told the magistrate that when he returned to Mount Edgecombe, he noticed 'a coolie woman lying drunk on the ground between the ticket office and the line and a coolie man coming staggering behind very drunk. They were dead drunk. They could not see or hear or understand anything.' Acting on the orders of Alfred Dumat, general manager of the Natal Central Sugar Co., Tom, with the help of fellow worker Tiyasha, put them in the huts, 'out of harm's way...We did not drag them and put them down very gently on the floor of the hut.' Dr Momson, the district surgeon, carried out a post-mortem two days later. He reported on 30 August 1883 that Kaysaven had died of alcoholism and was not murdered as Durmah alleged:

On opening the thoracic and abdominal cavities a strong smell of alcohol was observed. The abdominal organs were congealed and the liver enlarged. The body was emaciated. There was no food in the stomach, only fluid smelling strongly of alcohol. To the best of my knowledge and belief death was not caused by violence but was the result of excessive drinking and insufficient nourishment.<sup>46</sup>

A law was passed in 1891 requiring Indians to drink at canteens. Protector Mason opposed it, pointing out to the Colonial Secretary that 'the labouring class of the Hindoos and common Madrassesees look upon the toddy as one of the few comforts they possess' and in their 'religious ceremonies and feasts at marriages, births, and deaths, offerings of spirits are made to their deities'.<sup>47</sup> And, as the Umzinto medical officer pointed out, the law had the converse effect:

Now, a man goes into the bar and drinks as many 'tots' as he can pay for, one after the other. He then goes away, but has not got far before it takes effect upon him and he is compelled to lie down on the road. On Sundays, I have seen as many as six such cases in less than half a mile. This is very objectionable where European women who pass along the same roads see these disgusting sights, nor is it much improved when two or three Native police are seen pushing one of these drunken men in a wheel barrow to the gaol. The poor brute is seen with his legs hanging over in front and his head hanging over between the handles. It is a wonder they don't break their necks or get apoplexy.<sup>48</sup>

*Indian Opinion* also pointed to the anomaly whereby Indians were fined if caught with a bottle of rum, while the owners of bottle stores who 'grow fat upon the earning of these wretched people go unmolested'.<sup>49</sup> *Indian Opinion* had a point. The law allowed the production of alcohol but penalised those who were drunk on public roads, while preventing them from drinking in private spaces.

The culture of drink and ganja smoking was a marker of masculinity in a largely male space. Female drinking was judged even more harshly, and abstinence was regarded as proper behaviour for women. Indian males, particularly the middle class, were at the centre of a drive to restore Indian womanhood to its 'proper' place. *Indian Opinion* regarded an Indian who drank alcohol as 'a traitor to the race from which he springs':

Much of the opprobrium attaching to the Indian community in this regard must be borne by a section of the colonial-born Indians. Many of these young men imagine that their highest aim in life is to ape the manners and habits of the people whose language they speak to the neglect of their own tongue, and this indiscriminate attachment to all sorts of unpleasant and disreputable vices can only have the worst consequences upon constitutions utterly unaccustomed to dissipations of the kind...Every son of India who falls into the sin of intemperance is a traitor to the race from which he springs. India is the home of abstinence and self-restraint, and pity were it that a few of her representatives in South Africa should forget their heritage and be neglectful of their manhood and their origin.<sup>50</sup>

We see here a congruence of the interests of white employers, middle-class Indians and state officials. And yet when the Empress Bar at the corner of Grey and Victoria streets (now Victory Lounge) in Durban applied to sell alcohol, 10 000 Indians signed a petition in favour of the licence. *Indian Opinion*, however, was glad that the application was refused, 'because a multiplication of bars means greater temptation to drink. Instead of opening new bars, let the present Indian bars be made decent enough for better class Indians.'<sup>51</sup>

Goat hide stretched tight on cored wood  
burnt at edges for thudding of the rhythm  
that washed up a jungle and dried ravine  
into ember punkah awoken in a corner  
where three men from four places drank slowly kava and sang sadly  
loss of liberty, homeland and women.

MOHIT PRASAD<sup>52</sup>

'Concerned' Indians formed the Indian Total Abstinence Society of Durban on 10 January 1909. Office-bearers included the Reverend Theo Subrahmunyan (president), A Gurusamy Naidoo and C Stephens (vice-presidents), and A Royeppen (secretary). At the first public meeting at the Union Theatre, Reverend Subrahmunyan called for legislation to prohibit Indian women from entering bars. He was supported by HSL Polak, Dada Abdullah, CV Pillay and C Stephens. A number of colonial-born and ex-indentured Indians were present and the meeting ended in 'chaos' as they objected to the proposal.<sup>53</sup> The Indian Women's Association, under secretary Cecilia Sigamony, also criticised the proposal because it discriminated against women.

The meetings of the Abstinence Society were heavily contested. There was bedlam, for example, in January 1911 when a faction led by John L Roberts and KR Nyanah of the Durban Indian Society threatened to assault committee members. *African Chronicle* reported that 'hooliganism was the order of the day as the chairman was insulted and swearing rife'.<sup>54</sup> *Indian Opinion* could not excuse the 'boorishness and disorderly conduct' which resulted in an 'unpleasant impression [being] carried away by the European well-wishers who were present'.<sup>55</sup> An unrepentant Roberts considered their 'disorderly conduct' as appropriate in the 'face of [the] wanton attack on the honour of our women. If it was not for the presence of Mr. Polak on the platform, the said platform would have been rushed and the leaders tarred and feathered, as a deterrent in future not to insult Indian womanhood'.<sup>56</sup> Roberts opposed the move to single out women for special attention. The middle-class crusade would continue. 'Freelance' reflected in 1917 that 'women, drink and gambling have been the ruination of our boys'.<sup>57</sup> The writer was particularly distressed to see women in bars.

In 1918, the magistrate of Durban was persuaded by middle-class Indians to prohibit the supply of liquor to women in public bars.<sup>58</sup> RB Chetty, PS Aiyar, ML Sultan, PS Chetty, EM Paruk and MC Anglia thanked him for his 'meritorious' action, which was necessary 'for the maintenance of the ideal of the purity of the European race...[which] the supply of liquor to womenfolk is likely to impede'. Total prohibition would raise the 'moral tone' of Indian women and save 'many a poor family from squalor, degradation, and chronic poverty'.<sup>59</sup>

Drinking, especially among women, remained an important concern. In 1921, for example, the Isipingo Indian Society wrote to the Minister of Justice to implement legislation to curb women 'staggering' along the road using abusive language and behaving generally in an 'immodest and disreputable manner'.<sup>60</sup> Males saw themselves as guardians who had to protect the honour of women, which in turn would protect the honour of the Indian 'community'.

## The 'bengal weed'

Muttai, a 'kitchen boy', was charged with assaulting his mistress, Elizabeth Fotheringham of Fox Hill. According to Muttai, on 15 March 1884, he had been smoking dagga and was highly intoxicated. Mrs Fotheringham was drinking coffee and when collecting her cup his shoulder inadvertently touched her, whereupon she pushed him and screamed for help. In her deposition, she stated that Muttai 'rudely pushed' her, followed her into the pantry, shut the door, grabbed her around the waist and tried to force her to the floor. She managed to resist and yelled for help.

Umakubalo and Parboo ran into the pantry, where they saw Muttai holding on to Mrs Fotheringham's legs. Parboo pushed Muttai aside and freed her. Muttai went to the kitchen and started washing the plates and cups as if nothing had happened. Mrs Fotheringham instructed Parboo to lock Muttai in the stable, but Muttai warned him, 'If you touch me I will kill you.' Muttai then left.

When Mr Fotheringham and his father-in-law, W Mileman, returned, Mrs Fotheringham related the events. They went after Muttai, arrested him at Fox Hill station and handed him over to the police.<sup>61</sup> The evidence was conflicting as to whether Muttai was trying to rape Mrs Fotheringham, but he was found guilty of assault and sentenced to 30 lashes and six years with hard labour.

Medical officers and the Protector complained repeatedly that the 'immoderate and pernicious' use of ganja by Indians resulted in assaults, suicides and homicides; 'unsteadiness of work'; 'incapacity for exertion'; 'inability to fulfill the contract' and was wrecking their 'strength and manhood'.

Women, too, smoked ganja. Thus, for example, CB Lowe of Illovo complained to the Protector in 1904 that there was ongoing tension between his wife and their indentured servant Mohesia on account of her 'dirty, thieving habits. She smokes some filthy mixture which had the effect of making her intoxicated and unfit for work. How we know for certain her stupidity arises from smoking is that first thing in the morning she is as silly as possible and looks bad, then as the former advances she gets as right as possible.'<sup>62</sup> While allowing for Lowe's prejudices, there is much anecdotal evidence of women smoking and drinking.

The Wragg Commission reported that the smoking of a mixture of tobacco, opium, hemp (*ganja* in Bengal) and brown sugar was widespread among indentured men. More dangerous was the smoking of ganja in its green state around May/June, when it was most potent. According to one estimate, at least 20 per cent of Indians smoked ganja in Maritzburg, which was mainly purchased from Africans.<sup>63</sup> The Wragg commissioners described a typical incident they had witnessed:



When visiting an estate in the Umzinto circle we came across an Indian, an absentee from work, sitting outside a hut, with his dakkha pipe on the ground by his side. He muttered to himself, then yelled, spoke rapidly and incoherently, lapsed into silence, then yelled again, and it was impossible to make him understand anything. He was, manifestly, in a state of dementia induced by dakkha smoking; he was decidedly dangerous, and the manager was uncertain how to deal with him; finally, the man was left to do as he pleased.<sup>64</sup>

The Wragg Commission reflected that Indians should be 'content to consume tobacco'. The medical officer in Lower Umzimkulu reported in 1888 that 'Indians as a rule go in for cultivating the Indian hemp plant (*Cannabis Sativas*) around their camps'.<sup>65</sup> In Maritzburg, Dr Richard Allen reported in 1886 that the use of ganja 'still continues to breed discord between the Indian and his employer. No less than ten men have suffered from hallucinations, two men became so violently delirious that the police had to be called upon for protection, while one man had to be confined as a lunatic to the asylum.'<sup>66</sup> Dr AA Rouillard of Umzinto reported in 1911 that there was a 'great deal of Indian hemp grown in the neighbourhood of different barracks':

Indians are very fond of smoking this stuff and with very injurious effects, as it makes them slothful and weak-minded after a time. At the same time their appetite gets bad and their digestion goes all wrong through indulging in the drug. I think some penalty should be enforced if a man is found smoking the stuff or if the plant is found growing round the barracks. Indians are also fond of the Croton oil seed and I notice some growing round some barracks. Croton oil is a very powerful purgative and they should not be allowed to use it, or to grow the plant.<sup>67</sup>

Croton oil seeds, obtained from the tree Croton Tiglium, could lead to hypercatharsis when taken in large doses. The problem for the authorities was that there were no laws to prohibit the growing of ganja and Dr Rouillard asked the Protector to request government to introduce such laws, but this did not happen during indenture.

## Gambling

Gambling was an accepted part of manly behaviour. For example, Subbiah (130903) 'was a gambler', according to his manager McLeod, who found him 'late on Sunday night gambling in Soyin's barracks'. Despite warning him 'of the consequence of gambling instead of sleeping', Subbiah did not turn up for work and was given some 'cuts with a stick'.<sup>68</sup> Many Indians were indebted as a result of gambling. For example, Pauloo (£6), Sabapathy (£1), Narsimulu (£2), Kistadu (£2) and Ramsamy (£2) were in debt to Guruvadu (195694).<sup>69</sup> Inspector Chas Waller warned the Protector in 1912 that 'there is far too much gambling amongst the Indians – it should be put a stop to'.<sup>70</sup> Later, Indians took to horse racing. Middle-class Indians frowned upon gambling, especially betting on horse races. 'Freelance' complained in *Indian Opinion* that:

The gambling fever has rooted itself into our people, shopkeepers, humble hawkers, domestic servants...If this is not stopped soon, the best of our youth will become invet-

erate gamblers. Boys from thirteen upwards are to be seen on the course staking their or their parents' money on the 'favourite'. This is serious. Women, drink and gambling have been the ruination of our boys. Look at the rising generation; they lack the vitality and sustaining power to make them successful.<sup>71</sup>

Indians were initially allowed to mingle with whites at race meetings, but from November 1917, the Natal Tattersalls barred 'Coloured' persons from its premises. Though racist, *Indian Opinion* considered this a 'step in the right direction'.<sup>72</sup> Many Indians gave evidence to the 1918 Horse Racing and Betting Commission on the destructive influence of gambling on Indian family life. The Reverend Reuben Choonoo told the Commission:

This betting on the racecourse has spread in an alarming manner just lately. The Indian youth is not today found on the football ground as he was years ago. Today the chief attraction is the racecourse. This betting is not confined to any particular class of our Indian community. The Indian labourer, the shop worker, the office clerk, down to the small newspaper boy, can be seen on the racecourse in the betting ring...I have come across some sad cases of evil effects. I certainly think it would be a very good thing if some restrictions could be placed on Indians attending racecourses. I am able to say from my knowledge of the Indian population that the moral tone of the Indian population is deteriorating in consequence of betting.<sup>73</sup>

Despite legislation and the best efforts of middle-class Indians, gambling, drinking and ganja continued to provide an escape for many from the drudgery of working-class life.

## Of dance and games of chance

The history of every working class is tied up with the history of its location. Workers reconstitute the spaces they inhabit, they reinscribe them with their actions, they reshape them with the rhythms of their everyday lives.<sup>74</sup>

In many ways, the cultural and religious life and leisure pursuits of the indentured created a space that was set apart from the direct surveillance of the authorities and employers. As Steve Pile, drawing on the work of De Certeau, points out, 'the central strategy of authority is to force people to play its own game, to make sure that the game is played by its rules, then people find innumerable ways round this...They continually seek to find their own places...Resistance is less about particular acts, than about the desire to find a place in a power geography where space is denied, circumscribed and/or totally administered.'<sup>75</sup> The leisure pursuits of the indentured were diverse with drinking, gambling and other palliatives providing a crucial escape from the rigours of plantation life.

The indentured, in pursuit of 'leisure', be it sport, wrestling, music or theatre, often refused to 'obey the rules'. They challenged the status quo set down by both the colonial authorities and their own self-appointed community leaders. While leisure activities might, at one level, have helped forge 'Indianness', they also exposed the class differences within this broader

rubric. So while the 'Lawrence Trinity' embraced classical European music, the working classes engaged in *terukuttu* or had their drums violently broken by employers unwilling to grant them those small spaces. While the likes of Sam China could rise economically and achieve 'respectability', something reflected in the legacy they left behind, others like Andee sought solace in ganja, while many others found outlets that wove together alcohol, music and dance. Whites accepted this as long as it did not affect the ability of the indentured to labour or turn into a belligerence directed against the 'system'. When this showed signs of happening, the colonists sought to moralise the leisure time of working-class Indians, and in this quest found willing allies in the aspirant Indian middle class.<sup>76</sup>

But many of the indentured refused to listen to their employers and middle-class cousins and pursued with vigour and enthusiasm leisure-time activities ranging from wrestling to music and alcohol.







# The bodysnatchers (1899–1902)

With hindsight, it is noteworthy that around 100,000 Black, Indian and Coloured people participated in the war on the British and Boer sides – a greater number than the total of Boers in the field. Most worked as drivers, scouts, stretcher-bearers and labourers and were to suffer heavy losses during the war – a fact also underplayed by apartheid historians.<sup>1</sup>

Muthan Narrainen (74272) was 19 when he arrived on the *Pongola* in September 1898. Of the Pariah (untouchable) caste from North Arcot, Muthan was assigned to Natal Navigation Collieries. Amachellan, Muthan's shipmate and a fellow indentured coal miner, told investigating officer HJ Colebrander that when the Boers invaded Dundee, indentured Indians were detained for about two weeks, and then sent to Ladysmith because the Boers did not want to squander scarce resources on Indian prisoners. In Ladysmith, the British were under siege from the Boers and used Indian coal miners to cut grass for the horses in their cavalry. Indians came under Boer fire while cutting grass on 26 December 1899, and Muthan received multiple shrapnel wounds. The lower half of his body was 'torn. Some of the indentured [Sirdar Raghunath Sing and Valan] carried him away to the hospital where he died a few minutes after.'<sup>2</sup>

Latchmin Alarak (66607) was 30 when he arrived in Natal on the *Umlazi* in April 1897. He was assigned to the Dundee Coal Company, and was also killed by a shell in January 1900. His outstanding wages (£2) were handed to his brother Bhola (66340), who had arrived on the same ship and was assigned to the same employer.<sup>3</sup>

The most famous Indian refugee in Ladysmith during the siege from 2 November 1899 to 28 February 1900 was Parbhoo Singh of the Dundee Coal Mine, a signalman in the camp of the Gordon Highlanders.

The Boers had three 155 mm French-manufactured Creosot guns, better known as 'Long Toms' due to their long barrel and firing range. When the 7 ton gun was elevated, each 42 kilogram shell fired a distance of 10 kilometres. Singh's task was to climb up a tree and look out for Boer cannons being fired from Mbulwane towards Ladysmith. The 'Long Toms' used black powder and a cloud of white smoke was visible after each shot. It took 30 seconds from the time the white puff was sighted to the projectile slamming into the camp. When Singh saw the puff of smoke, he would give an alarm by ringing a bell and shouting, 'Long Tom!' For this, he was given a set of Kashmiri garments by the mayor of Durban, while the viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, showered him with praise.<sup>4</sup>

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OPPOSITE: Scenes from the battlefields of the South African War.

PREVIOUS PAGE: The Indian Ambulance Corps, with Mahatma Gandhi seated in the centre. Gandhi played a key role in encouraging Indians to volunteer their services to the British.

The South African War was historically referred to as the Anglo-Boer War. Its renaming may be seen as 'political correctness' but it is far more than that. It is an acknowledgement of the involvement and suffering of 'non-whites' in a white man's war that pitted Afrikaner nationalism against British imperialism.

The latter's renewed interest in the country's hinterland was fuelled by the discovery of diamonds and gold. Some in Britain were against the war, mainly because the Transvaal, as an independent country, was making concessions around the franchise for the *Uitlanders* (English settlers). But the man in charge of British interests in South Africa, Lord Alfred Milner, was in cahoots with the huge mining house, the Werhner-Beit group, and was determined to provoke the leader of the Transvaal, Paul Kruger. Troops were shipped in from India, and massed on the Transvaal border. This was the 'spark' for war.

In Thomas Pakenham's magisterial study of the conflict, Indians make cameo appearances. At Talana Hill, 'casualties were scooped up by the Indian stretcher-bearers of Major Donegan's field hospital, and carried back in green *doolies* (four per *doolie*) to the dressing room station by the post office'.<sup>5</sup>

At Elandslaagte, 'Indian stretch-bearers tramped backward and forward collecting up the wounded in *doolies*'. At Colenso, the British wounded were sent back 'in the care of Indian "bodysnatchers," the Indian and British ambulance men, who now reached the donga':

At sunset, three days earlier, a wild-looking procession had stumbled into Frere. They were nearly two thousand strong, dressed in tattered khaki tunics, and a strange assortment of hats: helmets, bowlers and tam-o'shanter [Scottish bonnets]. They were the 'body-snatchers': Uitlander refugees and Gandhi Indians, recruited as stretcher-bearers.

## Who were these Indian bodysnatchers?

We do not know how to handle arms...but it may be there are other duties no less important to be performed on the battlefield.<sup>6</sup>

With these words to the Colonial Secretary of Natal on 19 October 1899, Gandhi signalled his intention to encourage Indians to participate in the war that broke out in that month.

Gandhi felt that because Indians were 'British subjects, and as such demanded rights, they ought to forget their domestic differences, and...render some service'.<sup>7</sup> On 17 October 1899, about 100 Indians met in Durban and resolved to 'unreservedly and unconditionally' offer their services 'without pay'. Shortly after, Gandhi informed the Colonial Secretary that Indians wanted to 'prove that in common with other subjects of the Queen Empress, Indians too are ready to do duty for their Sovereign on the battlefield. The offer is meant to be an earnest of the Indian loyalty.' Gandhi hoped that this would 'bind closer still the different parts of the mighty empire of which we are all so proud'.<sup>8</sup> It is paradoxical that Gandhi's offer was made at the very time that the Durban Relief Committee was canvassing local hotelkeepers 'to employ White men in preference to coolies'.<sup>9</sup> Pakenham wrote:



Years later, men might wonder why Mahatma Gandhi, the anti-imperialist and the arch-pacifist, had served as a non-combatant in an imperial war. At the time, it seemed natural enough to the British. Here was one of the 'subject peoples' showing the solidarity of the coloured races in the 'White man's war'.<sup>10</sup>

The war began within a few years of the Natal government introducing a range of anti-Indian legislation. Gandhi and the Indian elites who had arrived outside of the indentured system saw themselves as British subjects governed by the laws of the colony, and tried to obtain parity on the basis of Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation asserting the equality of British subjects. Gandhi had written in 1895 that without the 'British subject idea...the Indian would have been an impossibility in Natal...I therefore, appeal to every Briton in South Africa not to lightly dismiss the British subject idea from his mind.'<sup>11</sup> The war was an opportunity for Indians to prove that they were deserving of equal treatment. Datta, echoing Gandhi, argues that being 'imperial subjects' was the only claim Indians had to residence in Natal; Africans could claim 'prior occupation', Boers could claim to have made the land 'productive', and the British could claim 'mastery'. Imperial subjecthood 'allowed a placeless loyalty [bounded only by Empire] through which [Indians] could claim a purchase on the land of their new habitation'.<sup>12</sup> It was their only promise of citizenship.

The offer to participate in the war was made by the educated and trader elites and had nothing to do with the vast majority of indentured and free Indians. The 33 Indian volunteers represented 25 per cent of the adult Indian males in Durban with a 'tolerably good English education'. On 18 and 19 October, Dr Prince, a local medical doctor, examined 25 volunteers for the Ambulance Corps. MH Nazar, who would become editor of *Indian Opinion*, failed the initial examination but subsequently passed and served as a volunteer.<sup>13</sup> Most volunteers were young, colonial-born and educated, and would become important political, sporting and community leaders over the next three to four decades.<sup>14</sup> Gandhi himself noted that the 'plucky youths are clerks, and well brought up, and by no means inured to a hard life'.<sup>15</sup> Two whites joined the Corps, Canon Booth and Herbert Kitchin.<sup>16</sup>

The 'plucky youths' included HL Paul (interpreter), AH Peters (interpreter), James Godfrey (clerk), R Bughwan (photographer), Vincent Lawrence (clerk), Lazarus Gabriel (photographer), PK Naidoo (clerk), Emmanuel Peters (clerk), GD Harry (clerk), Stephen S Shadrack (clerk), Arjoon Singh (clerk), Shaynee N Richards (clerk), David Vinden (interpreter), Lutchman Panday (clerk), Joseph Royeppen (clerk), William Jonathan (teacher), Babu Talawantsingh (merchant) and James Christopher (clerk). Muslim merchants did not serve on the battlefield but provided financially for the maintenance of the dependants of volunteers.<sup>17</sup>

Of these 'plucky youth', William Jonathan was born to indentured parents in Umzinto in 1879. On leaving school, he became a printer in Durban and then a teacher in Ladysmith. He left Ladysmith shortly before the siege in 1899 and returned to Durban. He was one of the first volunteers. After the war he returned to Umzinto and took a keen interest in organising sport and education. He was president of bodies such as the Umzinto Voluntary Anti-Malarial Committee, the Rangit Sporting Association and the Umzinto Indian Society.<sup>18</sup>

Ajoodha Jeeawon, who was not on the initial list but subsequently enlisted, received the Queen's Medal for his services in the war. He was born in Durban in 1879, attended the Wesleyan Indian School, and was appointed principal of Fairbreeze Indian School after completing the Senior Indian Teacher's Examination Certificate. After the war, he was chairman of the Vishnu Roop Temple, trustee of Gokhale Hall and Temple in Tongaat, chairman of the Indian Influenza Relief Committee (1917) and member of the Natal Indian Teachers' Society.<sup>19</sup>

Lutchman Panday was a typical colonial-born Indian who considered himself a 'citizen' of the British Empire. For him to serve during the war was to serve his queen, Her Majesty Victoria. Lutchman was born on the Berea in Durban on 21 April 1874. He was the second son of Seebaluk Panday (3628), a Brahmin (Hindu priestly class) from Azimghurh who arrived on the *Ocean Chief* in October 1864. Twenty-two-year-old Seebaluk was indentured to Henry Stainbank of Maritzburg. Within a short time he was made Sirdar, and throughout his life was addressed as 'Sirdar'. On 16 April 1873, Seebaluk married Shanee Sambay (2042), who arrived with her parents, Bagoo and Davoojee, in October 1863. They had four children: Gareeb, Lutchman, Khusal and Parbati. Shanee died in 1920 and Seebaluk in 1927.

Lutchman was educated at the Albert Street and Boys Model School in Durban, and joined the firm of advocates Wynne and Wynne in Chancery Lane. After a few years he joined W Burne, also a firm of advocates, with whom he remained for 30 years. Lutchman married Koseelee (42374), who had come with her mother, Dhanwathea Mahabeer Sing, in July 1890. Koseelee was eight and her mother 27. They were from Shahabad. Mother and daughter, probably escaping an unhappy marriage or oppressive village network, were assigned as indentured workers to Seebaluk Panday, the one-time indentured worker, now employer, who purchased five acres of land in Brickfield Road in Overport, a suburb about five miles from central Durban, for £225 in November 1889 for market gardening.

Lutchman was involved in virtually every aspect of Indian life in Natal. He was an executive member of the Natal Indian Congress from the 1920s, chairman of the Sydenham Indian Ratepayers' Association, gave evidence before the Durban Boundaries Commission of 1932 which extended the boundary of Durban, represented Natal at South African Indian Congress conferences and at the All-India National Congress at Lahore in 1909/10. He was a keen sportsman who played both football and cricket for Yorkshire, organised the Natal football team that toured the Transvaal in 1899, and arranged inter-town matches between Durban and Maritzburg. He donated the Panday Bros. Shield for Natal cricket, as well as a trophy for the Natal tennis championship. Lutchman died in August 1939 at the age of 65, having made an important contribution to many aspects of Indian life in Durban.<sup>20</sup>

While the educated descendants of indentured Indians, such as Lutchman Panday, received much publicity, and the traders tried to gain political capital out of the participation of Indians in the war, less advertised and publicised was the fact that indentured labourers carried the burden of wounded British soldiers, often under fire from the Boers. Dragooned from the sugar estates and given no choice but to act as stretcher-bearers, their history remains invisible. They participated under the leadership of Gandhi's volunteers in the face of horrible conditions and bore great suffering.

## Do we need 'black and savage' allies?

Some whites were reluctant to use blacks in any capacity. Two reasons were advanced: one was that a 'civilised Power should not employ Black and savage allies against White and civilised foes'; the other was that England would lose prestige among the natives of India if the impression was created that the country was incapable of fighting its own battles.<sup>21</sup> For the *Natal Mercury*, while the Sikhs and *Gurkhas*<sup>22</sup> would be excellent, 'there is a natural disinclination to use Coloured soldiers to fight the Boers. The conditions of the present war practically preclude all idea of using *Gurkhas*.'<sup>23</sup> The war had to remain a 'white man's war' so that the victorious British could impose order.<sup>24</sup>

Although the government had reservations about using Indians, it was forced to do so. The Boers invaded Natal on 12 October with around 25 000 troops. They captured Newcastle, Dundee, Colenso and Elandslaagte, forcing the British to retire to Ladysmith. From 2 November 1899, Ladysmith was isolated. The focus of General Buller, commander of the British forces, was to relieve the besieged town. With Kimberley and Mafeking also beleaguered, Buller's forces were stretched and needed as much assistance as possible. He wrote to the Natal government at the end of November to recruit Indian bearers.<sup>25</sup>

On 4 December 1899, Gandhi informed the Colonial Secretary that volunteers were 'in a state of readiness'. They had received lessons in hospital work from Dr Lancelot P Booth and 'it would be great disappointment if after all arrangements government would not accept us'.<sup>26</sup> Shortly thereafter, volunteers received word that their services were required.

Ironically, at the very time that Gandhi was 'proving' Indian loyalty, the 'Indian Question' was crucial for candidates contesting a seat for the Natal Legislative Assembly on 16 December 1899. 'A Working Man' complained that whites did not object to Indians as long as they 'keep to their place' for Natal was a 'White man's country'.<sup>27</sup> CH Hoggard of the Natal Progressive League told a public meeting that Indian immigration 'was a social crime', and called for the immediate stoppage of indentured labour and deportation of time-expired Indians. As far as he was concerned, 'if an industry did not pay a White man a wage fit for a White man to receive, it was not fit for a White man's country'.<sup>28</sup> Poynton of the Natal Progressive Association wanted the indentured to be compelled to return to India.<sup>29</sup> Although the election was won by BW Greenacre with 1 220 votes, Hoggard and Poynton obtained 934 votes between them.<sup>30</sup>

Gandhi also started a Patriotic League Fund to collect funds from Indian merchants. Contributors included wealthy merchants such as GH Miankhan, Musa Haji Cassim, Amod Jeewa, MH Joosab and Aboobaker Amod. Funds were used to support the families of 'such leaders as needed it' and to equip volunteers.<sup>31</sup>

Merchants also supplied cigarettes, cigars, pipes and tobacco for the wounded. This was appreciated as 'no cigarettes, etc. could be had in or near the camp'. Indian women prepared pillowcases and handkerchiefs from cloth provided by merchants for the Ambulance Corps and the Women's Patriotic League.<sup>32</sup>

## Enter the 'bodysnatchers'

In response to demands for Indian labourers, FL Barnes, Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department, appointed Percy Clarence as superintendent of the Indian Ambulance Corps. Together with Donnolly, a district engineer in Durban, he procured 543 men: 105 from Reynolds Brothers (Umzinto), 67 from Shires, 68 from Elandslaagte Colliery, 37 from Saville Bros., 45 free Indians, 80 from Cornubia, 25 from Milkwood Kraal, 18 from Sutton, 31 from Sacharine Hill Estate, 41 from Mount Edgcombe and 26 from Blackburn.<sup>33</sup> For Barnes, the cooperation of sugar owners 'is to be the more appreciated seeing that this is the busy season of the year, cane crushing being in full swing'.<sup>34</sup>

A further 60 men were employed for hospital conservancy work in Maritzburg. Hired workers at times tried to enforce their rights. On 10 December 1899, 14 of the men left the hospital because their indentured contract did not stipulate Sunday work, and they refused to do so at the hospital.<sup>35</sup> Most of the men were employed between 10 and 20 December 1899. Indians were paid 20 shillings per week against the 35 paid to whites.<sup>36</sup>

The contribution of planters surprised even the Protector, given their thirst for labour. He reported that in 38 years he had 'never known the demand for indentured Indian labour to have been so great. Almost every post brought letters from farmers begging for Indians'.<sup>37</sup>

Prior to their departure, Indian leaders were invited to the residence of Harry Escombe, the premier of Natal, where Escombe, together with the mayor of Durban, J Ellis Brown, and other prominent whites 'gave words of encouragement' and served tea and cake. Escombe said that while the outcome of any war was uncertain, this was not the case where the British Empire was concerned. The war would pave the way for the unification of South Africa into one federation under the British flag. He was glad that Indians, 'who had been treated with more or less justice...claimed to be part of the Empire and share its responsibilities'. When it was his turn to speak, Gandhi mentioned that Indians would have been able to show their worth as fighters if the '*Gurkhas* or Sikhs' had been in Natal. He hoped that stretcher-bearers would 'discharge their duties well' and 'prove their loyalty'.<sup>38</sup>

Tea was followed by dinner at the home of Parsee Rustomjee and departure to Frere at 2:10 a.m. on 14 December 1899. Gandhi was supplied with five first-class, 20 second-class and 20 third-class train tickets. Eleven tickets were unused and returned, thus a total of 33 leaders left with Gandhi, including three who joined in Maritzburg.<sup>39</sup> The class divide is apparent in the manner in which volunteer leaders and paid bearers left for the front. Gandhi and his leaders received first- and second-class tickets, while free Indians engaged as policemen by Gandhi travelled third class.<sup>40</sup> The men reached Estcourt at 3:00 p.m. on 14 December. They were met by Clarence and left immediately for Chieveley.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike the leaders who left amidst much fanfare, bearers experienced a long and tiring journey to Estcourt.<sup>42</sup> Famished after having nothing to eat for many hours, they were 'comforted' with a loaf of bread each.<sup>43</sup> The contribution of bearers was well received. Colonel Gallwey was pleased with their work, and wrote that 'this corps performed excellent service, carrying wounded to the hospitals and from hospitals to ambulance trains'.<sup>44</sup> Barnes was also pleased with leaders

who, 'at but trifling expense, took the place of, and to us are more useful than White officers. I presume therefore that I have your full approval to again make use of their services.'<sup>45</sup> Clarence agreed that Gandhi and the leaders 'are just the men required to take charge of the bearers as they speak English and are teetotalers. In the event of the wounded having to be carried twelve to fifteen miles these officers take brandy and milk and water mixed for their use.' A further advantage was that each bearer's small tin of food lasted the whole day, making 'the coolie the most useful carrier to be obtained'.<sup>46</sup>

Gandhi wrote extensively on his experiences. He and the volunteers reached Chieveley on the afternoon of 15 December. They were handed Red Cross badges and marched six miles to the field hospital, which they reached during the Battle of Colenso, the first British attempt to relieve Ladysmith.<sup>47</sup> They assisted in carrying over 50 wounded men to Chieveley station, and only ate at 11:00 p.m. There was no rest as they had to begin work again at 6:00 a.m. The next morning they carried over 100 stretcher cases. The British attack ended in failure and by noon they were retreating to Chieveley.

Gandhi described the day as 'extremely hot for marching – this portion of Natal is treeless as well as waterless'. They reached the railway station at 3:00 p.m. The only train available was reserved for whites, so Indians spent the night at the station, sleeping in the open field. They were 'tired, hungry, and thirsty' and used dirty water from a nearby pool to cook rice. The following morning they were crammed into the 'carriages – I mean open trucks in which the men were packed like sardines'. They waited in the train for five hours before departing for Estcourt, where they remained for two days in the open, exposed to the 'storm, sun and wind'. The Corps was disbanded on 19 December.<sup>48</sup>

Barnes reported to Colonel Johnstone that bearers experienced awful conditions. The army did not provide tents and the men were forced to sleep in the open. There were few blankets: 600 Indians shared 137 blankets, four bearers per blanket. Ten tents were provided for the superintendent and Indian leaders. Shortage of water was a major problem as there was no water cart.<sup>49</sup> Gandhi recorded that 'the Chieveley district is extremely dry, and there is hardly any water to be found within easy distances'.<sup>50</sup> The men were given rice, dhol, ghee, oil and fish to last a week, and supplied with one pot for every 20 men. At dawn, they prepared a 'pot of rice and each man had his breakfast and filled a small tin with food for the day'.<sup>51</sup> Barnes suggested that the next Corps have a wagon to convey utensils and food, a water cart, and that each man should be given a loaf of bread for the railway journey.<sup>52</sup>

## The 'chocolate men'

On 25 December, Gallwey instructed Clarence to organise another Corps comprising a superintendent, four overseers, 48 Sirdars and 1 152 bearers.<sup>53</sup> The men were handed a loaf of bread and some sugar to 'carry them to their destination'.<sup>54</sup> Over 1 000 men were at the front by the second week of January 1900 to assist General Buller's second attempt to force his way to Ladysmith.<sup>55</sup> It would be a fortnight before battle commenced.

On 12 January 1900, Clarence wrote to the Protector that three men, Ramsamy, Munsamy and Arunachellan, had returned home as they were 'missing their families'. He urged the Protector

to explain the functions of the Corps to the new men and to emphasise that recruits had to remain until it was disbanded, 'as just when they are becoming efficient and begin to know their stretcher drill they leave'. Another bearer, Firman, insisted on leaving because he had been promised higher pay. This suggests that some bearers did not know why they were being recruited. They were also used to bake bread, grow seasonal vegetables and cut grass for horses.<sup>56</sup>

The Corps received orders at 2:00 a.m. on 24 January to leave for Frere. They broke camp, loaded two wagons, and marched to the station within three hours. From Frere, they walked 25 miles to the military headquarters at Spearman's Camp. Describing their work, General Sir William Olpherts wrote that 'under the heaviest fire they seek the wounded, fearing nothing, although without means of defence'.<sup>57</sup> The British captured the highest hill in the area, Spionkop, on 24 January. However, the Boers counter-attacked and forced the British back across the river. By the evening of 24 January, almost all the wounded had been brought to the hospital about five kilometres from Spearman's Camp, the bearers often having to make three or four journeys from the hospital to the base.

Some bearers and leaders served for another three weeks and were involved in the Battle of Vaalkrans (5–7 February 1900), the third attempt to relieve Ladysmith, which also ended in failure. The work was continuous and unremitting. Five journeys were made to Frere. On three occasions the bearers carried the wounded the whole distance of 25 miles in a single day.<sup>58</sup> Gandhi, quoting a reporter of *The Natal Witness*, wrote:

One hundred miles in five days may be accounted fairly good walking for a man unburdened with any weight but that of his own carcass and clothes. When the wounded have to be carried on stretchers for nearly half that distance, and the greater portion of the remainder is traversed by men laden with heavy kit, such marching, I think, will be acknowledged as very creditable work. Such is the feat lately performed by the Indian Ambulance Corps, and one that any body of men may be proud of.<sup>59</sup>

Such sentiments did not mitigate the violence meted out to stretcher-bearers. At Dundee, in the aftermath of being overrun by the Boers:

(F)our of the Indian medical orderlies had been found to have left the tents without permission and were accused of looting stuff from the Boers. Donegan, a senior British officer, sentenced one of them to death [it was later commuted] and had the other three publicly flogged. The public flogging, he found, had an 'excellent moral effect' on the rest of the natives. It was a relief for Donegan, among all the bewildering scenes, to be able to keep up British standards in such exemplary fashion.<sup>60</sup>

Africans caught up in the war faced extreme forms of barbarism, from both British and Boer. Some who sided with the British and were captured by the Boers were summarily shot. Their stock was looted. In places like Kimberley, Rhodes' policies did not allow Africans 'to buy meat or vegetables even if they could afford to. Infant mortality...was catastrophic among the black and brown populations.' Scurvy ravaged African mine workers, 10 000 being confined under a roof of wire netting.

Between December 1899 and 14 February 1900, when the Corps was finally disbanded, 29 Indians volunteered as leaders.<sup>61</sup> An issue arose when the 'Queen's Chocolate' was given as a gift to (white) soldiers. Gandhi wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 22 February for a similar 'gift' to his leaders who had 'volunteered without pay', and would 'prize it as a treasure'.<sup>62</sup> The Colonial Secretary turned down his request because the chocolate was for non-commissioned officers.<sup>63</sup> Gandhi should have seen this as an omen for the treatment of Indians after the war.

## Indian refugees

The war had a severe impact on Indians in northern Natal, where the republican commandos had laid siege to Newcastle, Charlestown, Elandslaagte and Dundee before the end of October. Ladysmith was only relieved on 28 February 1900. Indians north of Colenso were 'scattered in all directions'.<sup>64</sup> Gandhi reported in December 1899 that 'the British Indians, merchants and others, leaving all their belongings, vacated those places with quiet resignation. All this shows intense attachment to the Throne.'<sup>65</sup> On 18 October, the *Natal Mercury* reported that 'two trains crowded with Natives and Indians' had arrived from Dundee.<sup>66</sup> Some Indian refugees went to Durban, while others sent their families to Durban but worked for the British in Ladysmith.

The reaction of the Boers towards Indians was not uniform. Initially they left Indians alone, but after a few weeks began looting their stores. Some Indians were imprisoned, others were allowed to leave immediately, and some were imprisoned for a short while and released when supplies ran out. The Boers also kept Indians to do their chores without pay. In some cases, white employers left Indian workers in charge of 'their farms and property in the hope that the invading armies would respect the occupation of the farms by these people'.<sup>67</sup> For example, Lutchman Singh, a cook for Mr Grant near Newcastle, took charge of the property when his employer fled to Durban. When the Boers reached Newcastle, they destroyed the property and let Singh go to Ladysmith.<sup>68</sup> It was reported that four Indians were shot by the Boers and a number were missing, allegedly taken to Pretoria.<sup>69</sup> Sometimes, Indians had to flee even if they wished to remain under Boer occupation. According to Ramatar, Indians who remained in Dundee after the Boer occupation were told to leave as it had become 'Transvaal territory'. Ramatar moved to Durban, where he remained until the British reoccupied Dundee.<sup>70</sup>

Boers used Indians for their chores as well. Kadir Adam, who worked for the Central Hotel in Harrismith, sent his family to Ladysmith, from whence they were ordered to Intombi Camp. When Kadir tried to join them, he was arrested at Albertina and made to work at the hotel without pay.<sup>71</sup> Cuthvaroolala, who was employed by the Natal Government Railways at Glencoe, was sent to Dundee when war broke out. He was captured by the Boers during the Battle of Talana and made to work as a herd boy.<sup>72</sup> L Singh was captured in Dundee and taken to Volksrust, where he and his wife were made to cook for Boers.<sup>73</sup> According to Birogi (45066), after the Battle of Talana, Indians were allowed to return to their homes in Dundee and carry on normally for about a month. Thereafter the Boers wanted Indians to work for them. When

they refused, they were imprisoned for nine days and then released. Birogi went to Durban and returned to Glencoe in March 1900.<sup>74</sup> Narainsamy, a Sirdar at Campbell Colliery, was arrested with the rest of the men and their families and imprisoned in Dundee for a week. According to Narainsamy, his wife was 'indecently assaulted while in gaol by the Boers'.<sup>75</sup>

Refugees left under trying circumstances, often leaving behind all their possessions, including their documents. For example, Ghorahoo (13320) did not leave Dundee when the Boers arrived. However, they 'tore up my papers. When I asked them not to do this they thrashed me with a wagon whip.' He was then told to go.<sup>76</sup> When it became possible to return, the authorities were unsympathetic and made it difficult to obtain passes. Bandhu (52370) evacuated Dundee with the British. When the siege of Ladysmith was over and he wanted to return, there was a delay of two months as he 'had great difficulty in getting a pass'.<sup>77</sup> A number of witnesses testified to this effect. According to Indian refugees, after a few weeks the Boers took their cows, donkeys, oxen, goats, fowls, vegetables, blankets, jewellery and other household goods.<sup>78</sup>

## The unwanted coal miners

A well-chronicled story is that of 230 Indian coal miners who were instructed by Boer Commandant Erasmus to leave for British territory. They were from Elandslaagte, Natal Navigation Collieries, Dundee Coal Company and Vanderplank Colliery in Newcastle.<sup>79</sup> According to Lutchman (41571), a Sirdar at Elandslaagte, he and the other Indians were detained by Boers for about a month. They were then released and told to go to Ladysmith.<sup>80</sup> They tried to enter Ladysmith at the end of November 1899 from the Boer camp at Bulwana, but were refused permission by British officer Sir George White. A second attempt two days later was also repulsed.<sup>81</sup> The Boers kept them in camp for two weeks but only gave them one bag of rice and 10 bags of bread. They also took all the money that the Indians had. One Indian had secured 20 pounds in gold in a belt around his waist. That too was taken. After two weeks, the Boers took them to Colenso and told them to make their way to Frere, threatening to shoot them if they returned. The semi-starved Indians reached Frere on 9 December.<sup>82</sup>

The group, which included 'many women in a delicate condition and little children of tender years', reached Durban on 11 December, 'having suffered severely through lack of food and hardships, and were footsore and weary after the continuous march'.<sup>83</sup> They had been on the march for almost three weeks. D Morgan, one of the 'rejected' Indians, told a *Natal Mercury* reporter that at Frere, Buller gave them six boxes of biscuits as they had not eaten for 'some days', while D Hunter of the Natal Government Railways conveyed the group to Durban free of charge. According to Morgan, at least 100 Indians were held captive by the Boers as servants. Tension between Boer farmers and commandants were also reported, as the former wanted Indians to work for them but the commandants refused.<sup>84</sup>

Of the group from the mines, 63 single men volunteered as stretcher-bearers while the rest were put to work on Tongaat Sugar Estate.<sup>85</sup> By April 1900, most of the miners returned to northern Natal. Many were in poor health and medical assistance was requested from the



Protector. Ten Indians from Elandsplaagte died during the Boer occupation while a further 23 could not be traced. They probably deserted. All had been in the employ of the mine for over two years.<sup>86</sup> A further 126 displaced indentured Indians were assigned temporary employment elsewhere in Natal between October and December 1899.<sup>87</sup>

Many refugees worked for the British in Ladysmith in a variety of occupations. Some worked in the hospital, others were commissioned by Major Wickham to cut grass for the livestock, some baked bread, and one was a signalman. Shortly after Ladysmith was besieged, the Town Council requested permission from the Boers to remove non-combatants and injured soldiers.

When Boer leader Piet Joubert refused, a camp for non-combatants and a field hospital for soldiers were established six kilometres from town. Around 250 Indians were employed at the hospital, which had 1 900 beds. They were kept busy by the unhygienic conditions, which they had to spend time cleaning, and suffered from a lack of nutrition. By early February, the death rate was 15 per day. Between November 1899 and March 1900, 11 135 soldiers and civilians were admitted to hospital.<sup>88</sup> Some work, especially cutting grass, was dangerous. Lieutenant Colonel H Hurst described one incident as follows:

One day about thirty Indian grooms of the Military Officers of the garrison were sent to cut mealie stalks and grass for the Officers' chargers. I was after the same on this day. I had crossed the Klip River and made my way to the wagon, standing about fifty yards from the bank. I saw all the coolies away ahead of me. They did not seem to have any fear, and went on with their cutting and talking as though no enemy was near. Suddenly, and just as I was about to join the party of cutters, several boers stood up in the long grass and opened fire on the Coolies. This is what I overheard: 'Nihi, Sahib; No shootee me! Me no make fighting! Me Indian Coolie man! Me no say "Helbagari!" Dutchman, me say "Helbagari" Englishman! "Helbagari Skoshman! Nihi Sahib! Nihi! Ahrrrrr...!' A couple were wounded and captured, while the remainder bolted for it. The line of fire was straight for the wagon I was standing behind, and of course all the Coolies made a bee line for it.<sup>89</sup>

This recollection, most likely hyperbole, shows the derisive terms in which the British referred to Indians, their lack of respect for Indian lives and their need to show them up as cowards.

## Racist Durban and its refugees

Refugees, Indian and white, poured into Durban, many in a state of destitution. The Town Council formed a Refugee Committee under Deputy Mayor J Ellis Brown to arrange accommodation, clothing and food for the refugees. Twelve thousand white refugees stayed at the grounds of the Durban Society of Agriculture and Industry, and another 4 000 at the Drill Hall from October 1899. Companies like African Boating Company and S Butcher and Sons, and private individuals like councillors Acutt and Evans, housed refugees.<sup>90</sup> The Durban Corporation also started relief works to provide employment for the refugees. Between October

1899 and July 1900, the Relief Committee spent around £50 000 to feed and clothe white refugees.<sup>91</sup>

While the authorities went out of their way for white refugees, they ignored the plight of the approximately 4 000 Indian refugees.<sup>92</sup> In fact, when Indian Muslim traders expressed their loyalty to the High Commissioner, he replied that the best way for them to assist was to provide 'for distressed British subjects of their own faith who have been compelled to leave the South African Republic [Transvaal]'.<sup>93</sup> Durban's Indians took on entirely the responsibility of maintaining thousands of Indian refugees from the Transvaal and northern Natal.

The list of refugees included prominent individuals like the Reverend Bernard Sigamoney's father Emanuel, as well as sportsmen Ernest and Willie Solomon. Their journey as refugees was arduous. Moonsamy Perumal Maistry, proprietor of Verulam Hygienic Steam Laundry and Ajanta Cinema in the 1950s, recalled that his father Moonsamy Maistry, after completing his indenture in 1887, moved to the Transvaal, where he purchased a horse and cart and worked as a *dhobi* (washerman). The Boers stole his horses and destroyed the laundry, forcing him to flee to Natal. He was part of a group of 11 who walked to Natal. 'They came through Zululand, and of the eleven only four survived. They ran out of food and seven died from eating poisonous plants!'<sup>94</sup>

At a meeting in March 1900, John Nicol, the mayor of Durban, thanked Indians for their loyalty, as 'many of their people had been compelled to leave their abodes in the upper parts of the Colony and to come to Durban for refuge. These they had taken amongst themselves, and borne the burden of maintenance at their own expense.'<sup>95</sup> Some refugees went to East London. The Mayor's Minutes for 1899–1900 noted that about a thousand 'coolies and natives were located near the East Bank Location'. Even when the bulk of the refugees returned to the Transvaal after the war, several hundred remained in East London, with a camp used by Boer refugees converted into an 'Asiatic Location'.<sup>96</sup>

## No 'relief' for Indians

When Buller ended the siege of Ladysmith on 28 February 1900, Gandhi offered his 'respectful congratulations' on the 'brilliant victory'.<sup>97</sup> There was much celebration in Durban, where Indians 'vied with the Europeans in their patriotic zeal to celebrate the occasion by decorating their stores, etc.'.<sup>98</sup> A mass meeting was organised by Deputy Mayor Ellis Brown in front of the City Hall, at which 30 white dignitaries sat on the podium. Despite their loyal service, Indians were excluded.<sup>99</sup>

Not to be denied, the Natal Indian Congress arranged a public meeting at Congress Hall in Grey Street on 14 March 1900 to 'demonstrate loyalty to the Crown'. Sir John Robinson, former prime minister of Natal, presided. Guests included Mayor J Nicol, Magistrate W Broome, and J Mayston, the Collector of Customs. The building and vicinity were decorated with 'bunting and national colours', and over the entrance was a banner bearing the word 'WELCOME'. The national anthem was played when Sir John and Lady Robinson entered. Robinson said, to much applause, that Indians took pride from the fact that Lord Roberts and Sir George White

had commanded the army of the Indian Empire and learnt their 'craft' in defending India. There was special praise for General Redvers Buller for liberating Ladysmith. BW Greenacre thanked Indians for the opportunity to 'witness such a scene of loyalty and enthusiasm'.

Advocate RK Khan felt a 'peculiar pleasure' that 'such distinguished representatives of the West assembled on a common platform with the sons of the East'. Abdul Kadir, president of the Natal Indian Congress, proposed a resolution congratulating the British generals on their success and 'praying that the British flag would be raised from the Cape to the Zambesi'. It was seconded by HL Paul and adopted. The meeting also adopted MC Anglia's resolution, seconded by S Doorasamy Pillay, thanking the generals for their 'brilliant victory in the face of insurmountable difficulties, thus vindicating the might of the British Empire and valour of the British soldier'.<sup>100</sup> But if Indians harboured hopes of securing 'relief' after the war, this was soon to be dashed. When the Ambulance Corps was disbanded for a second time, Gandhi thanked each volunteer for serving 'your Motherland at a critical juncture'.<sup>101</sup> For Gandhi, 'it was rightly considered a privilege to be able to succour the wounded'.<sup>102</sup> On 11 June 1900, he wrote to Barnes that Indians had requested 'discharges' similar to those given to whites because they wanted something in writing 'to show that they had the privilege of serving the Queen during the war. It will be to the men a happy momento.'<sup>103</sup> Gandhi attached a specimen of the 'Discharge Certificate' he thought appropriate. It read:

This is to certify that Mr. . . . . was a member of the Indian Ambulance Corps and acted in the capacity of Leader from 10 December 1899 to 14 February 1900, and was duly discharged on the Corps being disbanded.

Gandhi wanted the certificates printed with a red cross in the left-hand top corner and a heading 'Indian Ambulance Stretcher Bearers'. Similar certificates were to be given to bearers with the word 'leader' omitted. Donnolly feared that Gandhi 'may make political capital out of this, and point out how the Indians volunteered for service whereas I distinctly state that they never did; they could not possibly avoid going according to their terms of indentureship; they had to go where they were told'.<sup>104</sup> Clarence considered the request 'absurd, the indentured Indians were not volunteers but were sent by their masters'. Clarence also felt that 'political capital will be made of it...I am sure of one thing: it will be used as a lever'.<sup>105</sup>

Barnes advised Gandhi that the government was not obliged to provide certificates to bearers who were 'indentured Indians lent' by sugar estates, and they feared Africans would make similar demands; however, Gandhi and educated Indians who volunteered as Sirdars would receive a certificate.<sup>106</sup> On 4 August 1900, Gandhi suggested that bearers at least be given a 'statement that they served', similar to that given to white bearers.<sup>107</sup> This too was refused.<sup>108</sup> Only volunteer leaders were belatedly given silver medals. The idea that Indians would make political capital of their involvement extended to many whites, and was a source of vigorous debate in the local press. 'Perambulator' felt that 'should we employ Indians, there would never be an end of writers pointing out that the Indians conquered the Boers and saved Natal from extermination'.<sup>109</sup> 'Colonist' felt that Indians volunteered 'purely from mercenary motive' and that Africans would have gone for half the pay.<sup>110</sup>

At the end of August 1900, while the war was still in progress, the *Natal Witness* warned that services rendered by Indians should not 'be allowed to blind the Colonists to the necessity of keeping an ever-vigilant eye on the Indian question'.<sup>111</sup> The editor of the *Natal Mercury*, commenting on the departure of Indian volunteers for Estcourt in December 1899, wrote that after the war 'it is to be hoped that for that portion that will hereafter become unnecessary, means will be found to relieve the country of their presence', because Indians 'are not all that is desirable as inhabitants of Natal'.<sup>112</sup>

## Unrequited love (of the queen)

But my eyes shall burn again,  
A resurrection of Brown pride  
For I see you now, my father,  
Fling the Victoria Cross  
Into the dung-heap of the British Empire.

KHAL TORABULLY<sup>113</sup>

After the war, indentured labourers returned to their brutal working conditions. The war made stark the class differences within the rubric of 'the Indian'. The fact that volunteers accepted medals while the indentured were denied even certificates speaks volumes. As far as the majority of indentured Indians were concerned, there is little evidence to suggest that they particularly cared to be loyal to the British. In fact, the evidence suggests that they were not even certain where they were going, or what their duties would be. Some free Indians joined because the Bearer Corps was a source of employment. The situation was different for elites, who had largely fought against anti-Indian legislation on the grounds that they were British subjects. Gandhi hoped that participation would 'bind closer still the different parts of the mighty empire of which we are so proud'.<sup>114</sup>

But for whites, 'uncivilised' Indians could not be woven into the imperial or national fabric. Without waiting for the war to end, the Natal government continued to introduce discriminatory legislation. Thomas Pakenham cogently sums up the effects of the war for black and brown: 'Bringing two new states into the Empire made urgent the need to reconcile the White communities...The price of trying to reconcile the Whites was paid by the Blacks and the Browns.'<sup>115</sup>

Indians remained loyal, though. When Queen Victoria died on 21 January 1901, the Natal Indian Congress tendered 'humble condolences...in bewailing the Empire's loss in the death of the Greatest and Most Loved Sovereign on Earth'.<sup>116</sup> The Congress organised a march on 1 February 1901 from Congress Hall in Grey Street to the queen's statue, where a wreath was laid. The flowers were carried by Gandhi and MH Nazar on their shoulders, and Indian businesses were closed throughout Natal. According to Gandhi, 'what we want in South Africa was not a White man's country; not a White brotherhood, but an Imperial brotherhood'<sup>117</sup> in which 'British subjects of all nationalities will be allowed...to remain in harmony and peace'.<sup>118</sup>

Loyalty to Empire was important. The ‘imperial subject’, Datta tells us, involved ‘ambivalence and paradox. It allowed a sense of anchorage in the dominion of the Empire, but nothing prevented it from aspiring to a status on a par with that of British subjects living under a constitutional monarchy; it presented the promise of citizenship for the colonized subject.’<sup>119</sup> But as Indians were to learn in South Africa, while they could be imperial subjects in terms of Queen Victoria’s 1858 Proclamation, there was no constitution guaranteeing citizenship rights.

During Gandhi’s stay in South Africa, Indians continued to believe that their status as British subjects and India’s position within the British Empire gave them leverage. However, the British government was averse to prescribing policy to self-governing colonies, or preventing discrimination. Gandhi’s position was not out of synch with the Zulu Royal House and an emergent African nationalist movement, which looked to London and the Queen Mother as ‘protector’ against the excesses of British settlers. In 1885, Elijah Makiwane, president of the Native National Education Association, had this to say about Queen Victoria: ‘Long may she live. Oh, Queen Victoria, thou shall never know how many hearts even in this far off Africa thou hast cheered in their passage through the wilderness of this world. Thou art not only a Queen, but a mother. Prosper thou in all places; prosper thou in South Africa.’<sup>120</sup>

A document from the South African Native Congress to Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, in 1903 reinforced this ‘loyalty’ to the ‘mother country’, and referred specifically to how the ‘Gospel of Salvation’ had been given to people who ‘sit in darkness and the shadow of death’. The document also commented on the ‘necessity of British rule’.<sup>121</sup> Such sentiments should not be read simply as complicity. The colonised drew a distinction between white settlers and the Colonial Office, and hoped for justice from the latter. The ‘imperial subject’ project aimed to expose the language of Empire, which stated that all were equal under its rule, as well as the racism and exclusionary policies of colonists.

The limitations of this tactic were exposed as the system rendered all non-whites or blacks as ‘uncivilised’ and unworthy of inclusion in the decision-making body politic. For Datta, the South African War was the point where the “‘imperial subject” begins to disintegrate...The imperial order...became globally divided...[as] the White “achievers” invoke[d] the simple world of White versus non-White to fix and immobilise the prospect of internal mobility within the scale of civilisation.’<sup>122</sup> For some, this would mark a turn from complicity to confrontation.







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A COOLIE GIRL, NATAL



# The Virgin Mary and the three-pound cross

Hast thou not enough of kindness  
That thou treats me with blindness?  
Is my wife a Coolie Mary  
And thou a blessed fairy?

Is my wife a Sammy Mary?  
Is she in any way contrary?  
Why is there a hated difference?  
Why is there this racial preference?

To thy door each bitter morning  
Cold or hot or wind a-storming  
Comes she with her breath a-panting-  
'Nice fruits missus and greens' a-chanting.

Is she not a blessed fairy  
Dubbed as a Coolie Mary?  
If you choose to call her Mary  
Think of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

BD LALLA<sup>1</sup>

Indian hawkers, just out of indenture, were a ubiquitous feature of economic life in Natal well into the twentieth century. Commonly referred to as 'Vegetable Sammy' and 'Coolie Mary' by whites, they piled their fruits and vegetables in baskets, which they carried on their heads from house to house in 'rain or sunshine, spring or winter'.<sup>2</sup>

While five years may have seemed an eternity to most, indenture did run its course. What lay beyond was less certain. The ex-indentured faced a stark choice: re-indenture, return to India, or seek a living in Africa as a category of people that came to be referred to as 'free' Indians. Returning 'home' was a path riddled with pitfalls. The years of indenture fundamentally altered the lives of migrants. The plantation became the 'village', and in this village traditions, from leisure to religious practices and eating habits, while relying on myth and memory from 'back home', were just as often transformed as replicated. Concerns about being 'outcast(e)' may also have weighed heavily on Indian minds. Perhaps stories also circulated about those who returned to India and the difficulties they encountered, a theme we take up in the last chapter.

PREVIOUS PAGE: After their contracts expired, hawking helped many Indians to make ends meet. Carrying fresh fruit and vegetables, the men were known as 'Vegetable Sammys' and the women as 'Coolie Marys'.

Many of the indentured chose to make their lives in Africa. This was a major decision as many had arrived as single migrants, leaving family and familiarity behind. The decision to remain in Natal contained the possibility that separation would become permanent, as we saw with Maistry at the beginning of the book.

Hawking was a practical option for those who sought an alternative to indenture but had little capital, virtually no education or skills other than agricultural, and few meaningful kinship ties. The Wragg Commission emphasised the positive economic role of hawkers: 'From an early hour in the morning Indian hawkers, male and female, adults and children, go busily with heavy baskets on their heads from house to house, and thus citizens can now daily, at their own doors, and at low rates, purchase wholesome vegetables and fruit.'<sup>3</sup> This sentiment was shared by many ordinary whites:

The Indian hawker is a great convenience especially to the poor White. A rich lady can bowl down to the market in her carriage and purchase all her requirements in the vegetable line for the day, but where does the poor woman come in who perhaps has a child or two to nurse at home, besides having to go through the drudgery of her household duties? To her 'Sammy' is a very welcome sight and a saving of time and trouble. Her marketing is done at the door and she hasn't to hurry and scurry away to make purchases. You can really imagine what the abolishing of the Indian hawker would mean to poor people living on the outskirts of the city. AN AUSTRALIAN<sup>4</sup>

Hawkers bought fruits and vegetables very early in the morning from the Indian Market for resale in the streets of Durban and neighbouring suburbs. They formed an important link between the market and the public, and helped deliver produce to customers. A visitor from Johannesburg described his encounter with Durban's hawkers:

Those Oriental hawkers! I might have been coated with molasses. They might have been famished flies. They swarmed around me. They all talked at once. They jostled one another. They gesticulated. They chewed garlic. Inside the bazaar each one declared the prices of his wares cheaper than those of all the others...They implored me to buy. 'How much?' 'Half Crown-very cheep.' 'Good Heavens, you can get beads cheaper than that in Johannesburg.' It was a fatal retort to make. There was a chorus at once, 'Phew, Johannesburg - o-o-oh-you Johannesburg, eh! Plentie money, eh, plentie?'<sup>5</sup>

While many whites recognised the value of hawking, this did not translate into unqualified support. William Woods of Estcourt told the Wragg Commission that hawkers had 'opened up a trade which was quite dormant before they came; for instance buying skins, fowls and other articles'. But Woods feared that if Indians settled in Natal, 'our towns will become Eastern cities and the White man will become the same as he has become in all sub-tropical countries...where no grade of White man exists between the officials and the Natives'.<sup>6</sup>

Hawking also brought Indians into conflict with organised business, both Indian and white, for undercutting prices, as well as with the local state, which saw them as obstructing pedestrian and vehicular traffic and constituting a public health nuisance.

Indian hawkers' activities did not tie in with white ideas of a 'civilised' city, and every effort was made to eliminate or restrict their activities. They were carefully monitored through things like licensing and the wearing of registration badges.<sup>7</sup>

Like 'coolie', the nomenclature 'Sammy' was derogatory. Its origins are unclear. One explanation is that many Indian surnames ended with a suffix similar to 'sammy', such as Ramsamy, Appalsamy, Munsamy and Coopoosamy. 'Sawmy' complained to the *Natal Mercury* in 1905 that 'one hears frequently the term "Sammy" applied to an Indian, evidently hurled as a taunt and a provocation'. Sawmy explained that in the Tamil language it meant 'God' and was in general usage applied as a term of 'deep reverence' by 'low caste Sudras [labourers and craftsmen] to high caste Brahmins [Hindu priests], by the employee addressing his employer, by the pupil to his tutor, by the female to her husband... The term is quoted to express the respect from a lower to a higher personage.'<sup>8</sup> These explanations had no effect on whites, and probably even evoked responses of a 'smart' Sammy, but a Sammy nonetheless. It is not clear why Indian women were referred to as 'Coolie Mary', but this disparaging term remained in use.

Writing about her childhood on the north coast of Natal during the 1920s and 1930s, Daphne Rooke recalled that 'the Drew boys used to chase the Indian women, yelling, "Coolie Mary *yama karya purya*" [loosely translated, 'old black bitch']'.<sup>9</sup>

## Ram(samy)

Farming was crucial for large numbers of Indians in the post-indenture period. There were two strata of Indian farmers, market gardeners and peasant cane farmers.<sup>10</sup> The former sought land in the vicinity of a market on which to grow fruits and vegetables; the land was rented or purchased from absentee landlords and land companies.<sup>11</sup> The Protector reported in 1877 that 'all the fishing and nearly all the market-gardening and hawking of fruit and vegetables are in the hands of Indians'.<sup>12</sup> There were 2 000 market gardeners in and around Durban by 1885.<sup>13</sup>

Ramsamy, a free Indian farmer at Cato Manor, explained why Indians took to farming: 'Speaking to himself he says: I have no capital, nor have I a trade, the hoe and I have been friends for the last five years, I have strength; if I put thrift on my side I will make one strong effort and see if I cannot succeed.' White landlords were 'ever willing to receive the Indian with open hands'. With the assistance of family, the beechwood and grass was cut, a wattle and daub house constructed, and a life of 'endless work' began. The Indian farmer, Ramsamy added, paid his taxes, obeyed the law, made his white landlord rich and became a 'useful citizen'. He wondered why whites took umbrage with this.<sup>14</sup>

By 1910, Indians owned approximately 10 000 acres of land in Natal.<sup>15</sup> The acreage held by Indian tenant farmers and landowners increased from 11 722 acres in 1896 to 42 000 acres in 1909.<sup>16</sup> They grew beans, tobacco, potatoes, maize, betelnut, pumpkins, fruits, garlic, brinjal (eggplant), chillies and coriander.

Market gardeners existed on the margins of society. The Protector remarked in 1907 that the £3 tax (see Chapter 18) and crop diseases left 'little margin for licence and keep of wife and children. With a bad season it is impossible for him to make even a scant living.'<sup>17</sup> Market

gardening was an option because it was possible to lease land, did not require much capital to start, yielded cash promptly and allowed Indians to create a diverse household economy. Market gardeners utilised the labour of the entire family. Hoeing and watering was done by women, while children did the weeding, gathering, washing and preparing of crops.<sup>18</sup> Market gardeners supplied local markets. In Durban, for example, they sold their produce at the Grey Street Mosque from the 1890s until 1910, as the Town Council restricted access to the (white) municipal market.

After 1910, market gardeners sold their produce at the early morning or 'Squatters' market in Victoria Street. Farmers arrived from 2:00 a.m. They lined both sides of the street with their carts and animals. Those without carts brought their produce in baskets, boxes and sacks. In the middle of the road, 'under the wheels and surrounding the vehicles were hundreds of women and children vendors of vegetables'. Sellers squatted cross-legged on the street, hence the name 'Squatters' market. Women also sold cooked meat, beans and mealies. Several thousand farmers and squatters attended daily. They had to evacuate the street by 9:00 a.m. or be hosed by a fire engine.<sup>19</sup> As Freund has pointed out, life was tough for market gardeners:

Gardeners lived in wood-and-iron shacks, sometimes quite sprawling, with little in the way of amenities or sanitation, a poor water supply and no electricity. What little cash was accumulated was placed under the mattress or buried in the ground, perhaps to be invested in a child's education or the purchase of a small piece of land on which to build a shack...Their diet was poor. Consumption of butter or fruit was a luxury. The peripheral Indians of Durban lived on beans, cheap bread and poor cuts of meat.<sup>20</sup>

Many of those we met at the beginning of this book took the market-gardening route. Remember the correspondence of Syed Cassim, a Madras-based recruiter for Natal, to the Madras Protector of Emigrants enquiring after the whereabouts of Kristnappa Naik (86167) (Chapter 3)? Through the few surviving archival records, we can sketch the outlines of Naik's journey out of indenture. He was 25 when he arrived from the village of Kanuthur in North Arcot, and served his indenture with the Avoca Brick Company. Thereafter he took up market gardening, accumulated capital and purchased land in Cato Manor. When African urbanisation gathered pace in the late 1930s, Naik, like many Indian landowners in Cato Manor, rented his property to African tenants and purchased land in Stella Hill for market gardening. Naik married Velliama, granddaughter of early migrants Venkatanarasoo (6331) and Rowthin Lutchmiah (3329). They had two children, Panchakasava and Govindamma.<sup>21</sup> There is no record of Naik ever visiting India in response to his family's pleas, or remitting money.

## The successful few

The route from indenture to leasing or buying land and farming on a large scale was taken by many. Prominent examples are Hussein Saib in Tongaat, Seebaluk Panday in Overport, Boodha Sing on the north coast, Vagiraju Appalraju and Pungavanam Moodley in Port Shepstone, banana farmer ML Sultan in Escombe, RD Chowtee in Sawoti on the south coast, Moothoosamy Moonsamy Govender in Umkomaas, Aheer Goordeen in northern Natal, Charlie

Nulliah in Maritzburg, Periasamy Govender in Inanda and Sewthal Mohangi in Ensembe, to name only a few. All came as indentured workers, served their term and took up farming, mainly cane but also tobacco and bananas.

Verulam was a hub of farming. These landowners, as we shall see, would provide crucial support to Gandhi. Sheochand Ragoo (49776) of Shahabad, who arrived in Natal as a 20-year-old on the *Pongola* in May 1892, served his indenture with John Swales of Verulam. He married Janki, became a farmer in Verulam and was a strong supporter of Gandhi. His son Ramgobin was educated at the Phoenix Settlement, worked on the farm and at the family's general dealer's business, and at the Phoenix Settlement during the 1913 strike. In later years he ran a bus service, was chairman of the Indian Bus Owners' Association and started the Inanda Indian Vernacular School, which later became the Inanda Government Aided School.<sup>22</sup>

We have already discussed Babu Talawantsingh's role in temple-building. This successful cane farmer was involved in most aspects of Indian life in Verulam. He was a member of the Natal Indian Congress and chairman of its Verulam branch; served in the South African War (1899–1902); was an important organiser during the 1913 strike; and was Natal's delegate to several South African Indian Congress conferences. His son Ravikrishna, born in Verulam in 1888, studied at St Aidan's College and was heavily committed to Gandhi's passive resistance movement. He served two terms of imprisonment, one of six weeks and another of six months. He took over Talawantsingh's businesses and, as a successful sugar farmer, was involved in many aspects of Indian life in Verulam: he was chairman of the Shree Gopallal Temple; treasurer of the Hindu Mintra Mundal; founder member and chairman of the Hindu Dramatic Society; president of the Natal Indian Congress, Verulam; president of Maidstone Mill Group; vice-president of the Natal Indian Cane Growers' Association; and involved in several football and cricket bodies. He visited Gandhi in India in 1936.<sup>23</sup>

The most successful of those who took to farming was arguably the family of Boodha Sing (the family took on the surname Bodasing by combining Boodha and Sing), whom we met in our discussion on caste. Boodha Sing died on 15 November 1919. He left his land to his five sons so that each could manage an independent enterprise. It is worth remembering that only Boodha's male offspring inherited.

Bodasing's eldest son, Woodrajh, was born in 1883. Also known as Codaryrajsing and sometimes as 'Walter Ritchie' in correspondence with the government, he was the first Indian to be educated at the White Boy's Model School in Stanger. In 1907, he married the colonial-born Parbathee, daughter of Kasi Singh (31433) and Janki (31670) of Kearsney, who served their indentures at Kearsney Sugar



Babu and Lukhia Bodasing, with their five sons, were arguably the most successful of the ex-indentured families who took to farming. They owned large amounts of land in northern Natal.

Estate. Woodrajh and Parbathee had three children, Jhaman, Koowar and Lilamani. Woodrajh was one of the first descendants of indentured Indians to travel abroad when he toured North Africa and Europe in 1905. He owned land in Stanger, Blythedale and Durban, including a house in Stamford Hill in Durban, as well as land in Maritzburg. He also owned a laundry in Gale Street in Durban and ran a bus service.

While he made tremendous material progress, Woodrajh's mental health, it seems, declined largely as a result of living the 'fast' life and excessive drinking. Sergeant J Kane of Stanger reported on 14 September 1927 that Woodrajh was 'mentally deranged from his speech and actions. He had three motor accidents in a space of three miles on 14 September. He drives his cars about the township and surrounding district in a manner and at a speed which is a menace to the community.'<sup>24</sup> Dr Arthur Henry described Woodrajh as 'very excitable with grandiose ideas, and he cannot rest in one place for long. He came here on his own but from what I saw personally is quite unfit to drive and liable to be a danger to the public.' The physician at the Maritzburg Mental Hospital, Alfred Cheiyue, reported on 15 September 1927 that Woodrajh had a 'rather facile expression. His speech is garrulous...He says he is eventually proceeding to Cape Town to find a girl. He states he is the world's best cricketer and is about to take a team to India and England.'

Another physician, Dr Henry Goldberg, reported that Woodrajh 'speaks of going to Cape Town on a motor trip with numerous friends. Says that he requires no advice and does what he likes.' He was diagnosed as 'agitative melancholic' and admitted to the Town Hill Hospital (for patients with mental problems) in September 1927, where he died of cardiac failure in May 1929. Was this a case of institutionalising a 'coolie' for breaking through the racial barriers constructed by whites? After all, it would have been dangerous to have 'coolies' travelling overseas, owning cars and dreaming of playing test cricket for 'their' country! The trustees of his will included the famous Babu Talawantsingh of Frasers. Woodrajh lived extravagantly. An inventory of his house revealed the trappings of wealth: oak bed and wardrobe, rocking chair, toilet set, dressing chest, Singer sewing machine, carpets, hat stand, flower stands with brass pots, a dining table with a green velvet cover, a gramophone with records, a stereoscope with pictures, a concertina, paintings, buffalo horns, bookcase, piano and many other items. The inventory ran into many pages, suggesting a man who was fabulously wealthy.

Lutchmansing, born in 1887, was the second son. Short and stockily built like his brothers, he studied at the Higher Grade Indian School in Durban before joining the business. After his father's death he became the largest Indian sugar farmer in the country, and owned a herd of 300 cattle and an orange farm in Raisethorpe. He married Parbathee's younger sister, Rajathee (1888–1918), who died during the influenza epidemic. Lutchmansing also bought a farm in Kearsney which became his base, opened a trading store at Doringkop, and owned properties in Umbilo Road, Gale Street and Durban North. He opened the Cato Manor Indian School and L Bodasing School in Fawsley Park, Kearsney. He was vice-president of the North Coast Indian Football Association and involved in numerous other organisations. In 1934, he undertook a car tour around South Africa. A motor enthusiast, he crashed his 'La Salle' with its powerful V8 motor in 1939. He never fully recovered from the accident and died in 1942.<sup>25</sup>

Basdaw (1893–1939), also educated in Durban, married Sonmathee Naraindas, granddaughter of indentured migrants. Her paternal grandparents were Naraindas Bihari Doss (2658) from Chittoor, who arrived on the *Fairlie* in 1864, and Lauder Baboo (2044) from Palamcottah, who arrived on the *Scindian* in 1863. Her maternal grandparents were Man Sing (25685) and Jhania Kurhi (25686). They were both Chutrees (*dhobis*/fishermen) by caste, from Muthra, and arrived in 1881. They worked for C Walker. Man Sing committed suicide by hanging himself in January 1903. Basdaw was vice-president of the North Coast Indian Football Association and the Stanger Hindi School, president of the Arya Samaj and founder of the Bodasing Hospital Trust. He owned property in Stanger, New Guelderland and Durban. His home in Essenwood Road in Durban was described by appraiser Lewis Arthus Fletch in 1939 as being ‘situated in a select European residential area on the Berea. It commands magnificent views. The grounds are well laid out, and there is a nice tennis court. The property has right of way to Musgrave Road.’ Basdaw’s properties were valued at a considerable £104 383 in 1939.<sup>26</sup>

Born in 1895, Rajadhaysing married four times. When his first wife, Lukpathi, died in childbirth, he married her sister Bhirthie, who also died in childbirth. He subsequently married Gangadevi Bramdaw (1905–1956), daughter of Dhanee Bramdaw. She died in September 1956 at the newly opened Shah Jehan Theatre. Rajadhaysing also married Lilawathy (1921–1966), daughter of Sukdeo and Jussodhia, with whom he had five children. In addition to sugar farming at New Guelderland, he purchased farms in the Midlands, where he reared cattle and sheep and produced maize, wattle bark for tanning, and potatoes. He opened the Atlas Brick Co.; his National Fuel Supply in Umgeni Road distributed wood and coal; and he opened the famous Raj Cinema in Prince Edward Street and the Raj Mahal Cinema in Stanger. He owned properties in Durban, Maritzburg, India and Scotland. While generally content to remain in the background, Rajadhaysing was involved in community affairs. He converted his first home in New Guelderland to a Government Indian Aided School; was founder member of the Natal Indian Cane Growers’ Association and the Lower Tugela Dharma Sabha; and contributed to the Arya Prithinda Sabha. He was also an Honorary Life Member of the Curries Fountain Ground’s Association.<sup>27</sup>

Narainsing (also Ramnarainsing), Babu’s youngest son, attended the Higher Grade Indian School and Technical Institute in Durban before engaging in sugar farming. He married Mohankori (1908–1961), daughter of indentured migrants Gowri and Makkan Singh, and later her sister Neeldevi. Narainsing was vice-president of the North Coast Indian Football Association and owned seven farms worth £119 380 at the time of his death in 1942. He was deeply religious and this is reflected in his will, which stipulated that his body was to be kept for 24 hours after his death and cremated in accordance with Vedic rites:

All the death ceremonies proper and requisite by Vedic rites shall be observed and performed by Brahmin priests at the appointed time. My trustees shall give the fullest publicity forthwith to the fact of my death and the time and place of my funeral so that all persons wishing to attend may do so. It is my earnest wish and desire that all work on my properties other than the most essential services shall cease forthwith upon my death and shall not be resumed until after my funeral.<sup>28</sup>

The Bodasings were the largest single contributors to Sastri College, the first high school for Indians in South Africa. They also donated the Bodasing Memorial Cup, the premier soccer trophy under the banner of the north coast. The Bodasing Hospital Trust was formed in 1940 to build a hospital in Stanger for 'the benefit of the indigent members of the Indian community'. It donated land for this purpose and built a two-roomed structure for the Stanger and District Indian Child Welfare Society to use as a clinic during the 1940s and 1950s. The Bodasings were keen horsemen. Denied by white racism from displaying their equestrian skills at Umhlali, they built their own gymkhana at New Guelderland. A race track was also built at their farm Hyde Park, where an annual event was organised. By the 1940s, residents of Stanger were even betting on races. The white authorities eventually forced them to shut down the tracks.<sup>29</sup>

These few examples of 'success' reflect only the trajectory of the few visible peasant farmers. They were not typical of Indian farmers in the post-indenture period. The base of successful farmers was small. The successes are highlighted here because many were instrumental in the protest actions of 1913 and after. They were also actively involved in social, welfare, sport, religious and political organisations. Some peasant farmers depended on traders for security. Traders would speculate by purchasing an option on a crop, and pay the farmer in advance. Both peasant farmers and market gardeners continued to expand until around 1920; thereafter, peasant farming stagnated, while market gardeners gradually moved into urban employment.<sup>30</sup>

Before moving on, we should mention one important consequence of the racially exclusive settlement of Indians on land as peasants or market gardeners. It provided a means for reconstructing aspects of their religious and cultural heritage. Indians were able to build mosques and temples, (re-)institute extended family, and perhaps introduce things like the *panchayat* (assembly of five [*panch*] elders chosen to resolve disputes) system for resolving disputes, as we saw in the case of Charlie Nulliah.

## The 'threat' of the Bombay trader

As the urban centres of Durban and Maritzburg grew, so did the range of occupational options. This diversity is reflected in the list of occupations of Indian males according to the 1904 census. It included accountants, shoemakers, cigar makers, clerks, cooks, domestics, firemen, laundry workers, goldsmiths, mineral water manufacturers, plumbers, fishermen, rickshaw-pullers, domestics, porters or boatmen, shopkeepers and tailors.<sup>31</sup>

In various ways, Indians tried to carve economic spaces for themselves. Most of the ex-indentured chose to settle on small plots of land and, with the involvement of families, marketed produce for the local market and engaged in rudimentary forms of bartering. 'Successes' in the aftermath of indenture were small. They were handicapped by difficult economic conditions, as well as constraints resulting from the racist policies of the state, which excluded the ex-indentured and their descendants from citizenship.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, an emergent Indian merchant class also took its toll. A number of small shops opened by free Indians were unable to compete with traders who came as 'passenger' Indians at their own



expense, and who had the wherewithal to extend credit, expand their businesses, and source goods from contacts in India.

But these developments were overshadowed by the 'threat' purportedly posed by Indians to the white population, which hung over the ex-indentured like the proverbial sword of Damocles. The kind of success enjoyed by Bodasing and Nulliah was anathema to whites who, fuelled by envy, fear of competition or just naked racism, wanted Indians as labourers only. They became increasingly hostile as Indian farmers and traders challenged them economically, and they put forward stereotypes previously advanced against Africans. A petition by 53 farmers from Bellair and Malvern, for example, complained that the 'universal tendency' of Indians settled on their own small plots of land resulted in 'petty thefts', 'immorality', 'drunkenness' and 'a greater probability of some fatal epidemic breaking out owing to their unclean habits'. Indians with access to land were 'daily becoming more averse to labour, preferring the mischievous mode of life mentioned above'. Shortage of labour was 'an obstacle almost impossible to surmount'. The problem would be 'checked by the imposition of a heavy hut tax on all free Indians living on their land'.<sup>33</sup> JR Blamey, manager of Milkwood Kraal Estate, told the Wragg Commission:

On the termination of a coolie's five years indenture, he should be compelled to re-indenture for a further period or else leave the colony. I think that the present state of affairs, which allows free Indians to remain in the colony, would in time swamp the struggling White man, and would make this an Asiatic colony. If the Indian Government should object or refuse to sanction such a provision in a law to compel the re-indenture or return to India, I would not stop coolie immigration.<sup>34</sup>

Indians pursuing an alternative vision of post-indenture economic life from that mapped out by whites were seen to be living in 'savage sloth'.<sup>35</sup> Free Indians, especially those with wealth, or the educated ones who embraced the values of whites, upset the racial stereotype at the core of colonial society. William Palmer of Waterloo Estate Company told the Wragg Commission that Indians were, 'as a rule, a race of thieves; they plunder the gardens of the White man and bring the produce to the sale as their own...If free Indians are allowed...to reside in Natal, it will be a great disadvantage to the colony generally. The moral influence of the Coolies over the *Kafirs* already has done considerable mischief, and this will be increased.'<sup>36</sup>

The problem, from the perspective of whites, was compounded by the arrival of Indian traders. Although free Indians were first to exploit business opportunities, Indian trade was soon dominated by merchants, the first of whom, Aboobaker Amod, arrived in the early 1870s. Traders were termed 'passengers' because they came voluntarily and paid their own passage, and were subject to the ordinary laws of the colony. The numbers of passengers averaged around 2 000 between 1880 and 1910.<sup>37</sup>

White settlers and the authorities referred to passengers as 'Arabs' rather than Indian because most were Muslim. According to the Wragg Commission, the words 'Indian Immigrants' did not mean or include those persons who in Natal are designated 'Arab Traders'.<sup>38</sup> In her study, Maureen Swan estimated from the 1904 census that the average

income of ex-indentured Indians was £12 to £18 per annum, while that of 1 800 traders was £300.<sup>39</sup>

Abdoolla Hajee Adam Jhaveri of the well-known firm of Dada Abdoolla and Co., who brought Gandhi to Natal, owned two ships, *Courland* and *Khedive*, and 15 stores throughout southern Africa. Passenger traders imported rice, spices, cheap jewellery, apparel and sandals, perfumed spirits, silks, brassware and cotton goods from India for their low-income clientele.<sup>40</sup> Ethnic networks that involved strong kinship ties and family labour, and class factors, such as the availability of capital and skills, played a part in the ability of Indian traders to be competitive. Merchants were linked to one another and to smaller traders in an extensive network of trade, credit extension and money lending. Large merchants rented property to small traders and provided loans. For example, about 400 Natal storekeepers owed over £25 000 to MC Camroodeen in 1898.<sup>41</sup>

A virulent antagonism developed among whites towards non-indentured Indians. The city of Durban was preoccupied with segregating Indians from the earliest days. The mayor wrote in 1871 that 'legislation will doubtless have to be resorted to, to prevent these people thus locating themselves in our midst, their very habits and customs being so totally at variance with and repugnant to those of the Europeans'.<sup>42</sup> In 1873, the mayor complained of the disastrous effects of selling or leasing land to Indians. In 1874, he disapproved of the 'further erection and habitation of Coolie shops in our very midst, with their belongings of dirt and other objectionable things'.<sup>43</sup>

An anonymous correspondent to the *Natal Witness* in 1886 attributed the depression 'in great measure to Indian traders who compete against the White man everywhere. Eventually there can be nothing but the extinction of the White trading classes. These Asiatics prosper on a profit that would not find a White man in food'.<sup>44</sup> A Natal government commission reported in 1887 that white resentment against Indians could be traced to the ability of traders 'to compete with European merchants, and especially with those who have chiefly directed their attention to the supply of articles, notably rice, largely consumed by the Indian Immigrant population'.<sup>45</sup> Indians had become 'formidable rivals' of white traders who sold cheap goods to the colony's African population and in large settlements such as Durban. '[W]hite storekeepers of small capital' had difficulty in withstanding the competition of Indian merchants. The mass demonstration against Gandhi's landing in September 1896 was an example of rising xenophobia. A month earlier, in August 1896, the Tongaat Sugar Company requested indentured artisans. This led to a wave of protest action among whites, and meetings in both Durban and Maritzburg. Tongaat withdrew its request and the Natal government decreed that only unskilled indentured labourers would be permitted, except for 'special servants'.<sup>46</sup>

A correspondent to the *Natal Mercury* captured the depth of animosity by calling on whites to boycott Indian traders: 'You realise that the goods you are buying cheaply today will be paid for by your children dearly to-morrow? What false economy is this! Through your wanton indiscretion you have been helping to break your Nation'.<sup>47</sup> Advocate Edward Nandy of Maritzburg wrote to the Colonial Secretary in 1905 that the 'Bombay Trader' was the cause 'of all mischief which has resulted in the strong antipathy of the European towards the Indian in

South Africa'. Free Indians, he said, had 'a stronger claim to obtain trading facilities than the so-called Arab. The Free Indian has made this colony his home, where he spends his evening freely, even it be in drink. He cannot be accused of having come to this country simply to drain it, whether by fair or foul means, although he may be considered by many an undesirable colonist, yet in an economic point of view he is preferable to the Bombay trader.'<sup>48</sup>

A few, very few, of the indentured did thrive in business, and we discuss one rare example, a man that we have met in several contexts already.

## Charlie Nulliah: the building blocks of business

Charlie Nulliah was one of the most prominent Indian figures in the early twentieth century. He was born to indentured parents who successfully carved a life outside the plantation. Nulliah's parents, Mooneesawmy Narrainsawmy (2725) and Rangamah Ramasawmy (2726) from Chittoor in North Arcot (Andhra Pradesh), arrived in Durban on the *Fairlie* in June 1864 with seven-year-old Kinasawmy Narrainsawmy. They were assigned to Aling Osborn's Umtata Sugar Estate. Charlie was born on the plantation within a few months of his parents' arrival. After completing his indenture, Narrainsawmy opened a retail store in Umgeni, where he and his family lived before moving to Maritzburg.

By the early 1890s, Charlie Nulliah was making his mark. Given his roots in indenture, he was exceptional in how he quickly built a myriad of business interests. His is an incredible story for a man who could not read or write English, but in many senses exhibited the characteristics of the Indian middle class. He employed indentured labour, and was keen to make an impression in institutions like horse racing that whites dominated, while also balking at white racism. He was conscious of caste boundaries while an active member of the Natal Indian Congress. He served on organisations mandated with maintaining the norms and values of the 'community' and dispensing justice, while taking three wives and ruling the home like a despot.

In tracing the life of Charlie Nulliah, one is reminded not to compartmentalise 'the Indian' in a singular manner. There is a sense of caste and class running through Nulliah's life. There is also a sense of his deep religious beliefs, coupled with an abiding commitment to organisations and activities, such as sport, which served the broader community.

Nulliah's 'empire' took off when, on 1 June 1895, he purchased a fruit store from W Ramsamy Pillay at 295 Longmarket Street. Pillay, at the time, was the Indian Postmaster General of Maritzburg. It was his job to receive and distribute letters for Indians. The (white) Postmaster General explained that the post had been created because many letters were in 'Indian character', which whites could not understand; further, 'it was not moreover desirable that we should have more Indians coming to the counter to fetch letters than can be helped!'<sup>49</sup> When Nulliah purchased the business, the Indian Post Office was transferred to him. He handled around 50 letters per week and was paid £6 per annum, raised to £12 in 1897. By this time he was delivering around 200 letters weekly.

Nulliah subsequently bought Brookside Brick & Tile Yards and secured large government contracts to supply bricks. He joined prominent Indian traders to form The Mutual Benefit

Loan Syndicate on 19 May 1918. Formed with 77 shares to which members contributed £2 per week per share, this was a communal effort to raise members economically.<sup>50</sup>

During a court case in 1895, Justice Hathorn described Nulliah as 'unable to read or write English, is a farmer, storekeeper, and speculator of many years experience, doing an extensive business, involved in numerous speculations and quite capable of requiring and understanding accounts in all transactions in which he is engaged...He shows astuteness in monetary matters.'<sup>51</sup> By the time of his death in 1943, Nulliah owned four properties in central Maritzburg, about 40 acres of land, several cars and trucks, guns, machinery and stock.

Nulliah was involved in a myriad of activities. He was, at different times, a member, vice-president and president of the Natal Indian Congress, Maritzburg branch; he was chairman of the Reception Committee to welcome GK Gokhale in 1912; and he accompanied deputations to the government on Indian grievances until the 1930s. He was a member of the Maritzburg Indo-European Council, founded in 1930 by RJ Rheinalt Jones.<sup>52</sup> Passionate about education, Nulliah was involved in the Higher Grade Government Indian School in York Road, Maritzburg. He exhibited at the Royal Agricultural Show; presented the junior inter-town trophy to Indian football; was life vice-president of the Maritzburg Indian Football Association; and founding member of organised cricket in Maritzburg.

## The 'dog badge'

The irony of white agitation is that the arrival of Indian merchants had a greater impact on free Indians than on whites. Merchants rapidly came to dominate 'Indian' commerce at the expense of free Indians. Whereas in 1875, 10 free Indians and one passenger held trading licences, by 1885 the figures were 26 and 40 respectively.<sup>53</sup> Whites tried to segregate Indians through sanitary and vagrancy laws.<sup>54</sup> After Natal attained Responsible (Self) Government in 1893, state power was used to curb trade competition.

Even before the passing of restrictive legislation, free Indians felt slighted by Act 21 of 1888, passed in reaction to a rape scare, which gave Durban and Maritzburg the authority to 'establish a system of registration of Natives, or persons belonging to uncivilised races, resident and employed by the day or month, or any longer period, or seeking employment'.<sup>55</sup> This applied to free Indians as well. Henry Bale wrote to the Protector on 10 February 1893 that Karupen Asari (33896) was 'very anxious to avoid registration and the wearing of the badge'. Karupen had arrived in 1885, aged 14. After completing his indenture he remained with Bale, who thus knew him for eight years and regarded him as a 'superior man and a good servant'. Karupen regarded as an 'indignity, as he expresses it, the wearing of a Dog Badge'.<sup>56</sup> More comprehensive opposition came from a group of Indians (unnamed) from Maritzburg. They petitioned the Protector on 30 January 1893 through their attorneys Laughton and Tatham for free Indians to be excluded from the law.

Petitioners object to being described as members of an uncivilised race, and also being compelled to wear a badge proclaiming them as such to the whole world whereby they and the race to which they belong are degraded and reduced to the level of barbarians

who cannot be allowed to live amongst civilised people without proclaiming their degradation. They also complain of the unfairness of being placed on a different and inferior footing to the Chinese, St Helena, and Creole immigrants merely on the ground that they have been introduced into this Colony as indentured Indians. Amongst the Indians introduced into this Colony there are a large number of educated, respectable, and trustworthy people, and also many professing Christians, and on the whole, the Indian as introduced undoubtedly forms an orderly and enterprising element. By this system of registration, many of them are actually degraded through this in the eyes of their own descendants not subject to the registration referred to, and even in the eyes of their own countrymen who have come to this Colony of their own accord and possibly from the same villages in India. They are also placed by this system of registration in a different and inferior position to the 'Arabs,' many of whom are nothing more or less than ordinary daily and monthly servants yet free from registration.<sup>57</sup>

The petition was the subject of correspondence between the Colonial Secretary and the Attorney-General, and was debated in the Executive Council on 23 February 1893. The official position was that the law applied to free Indians and should not be tampered with as it 'worked satisfactorily'. Executive Council members opined that free Indians should not feel upset at being classified as 'uncivilised' since this classification was 'purely local in character, and merely for the purposes of municipal administration'.

The fight over the wearing of badges was soon overtaken by an issue that was seen as an immediate and direct threat to those who had faithfully served their indentures and were seeking to build lives as 'free Indians'. White hostility became acute as the numbers of free Indians, made up of both those who had completed their indentures as well as those who had arrived as passengers, increased. New restrictive laws would affect the very existence of Indians in their new country, and were of far greater importance than the 'dog badge', as insulting and humiliating as that was.

N  
**POLL TAX, 1**

Received from M. J. ...  
(Name in full)

Residing at ...

In the Magisterial Division of ...

the sum of One Pound Sterling, being Poll Tax  
If Indian Immigrant add the following:

Colonial No. ...

Father's Name ...

Height ... feet

£1 0 0

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*Albin*

Date *June 27* 1908.

*Palmer*  
*Albin*

Tax for the year 1908.

Age

inches.

*Albin*  
*Palmer* Collec

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# 'Drawing blood from a stone'

The average wage of [working-class] Indians is less than two pounds per month. At what time of the year is an Indian in this position to be considered in a position to spare tax for the revenue of the colony? He is a toiler and he sweats for others, and it is only those for whom he sweats who could be expected to pay. This class simply cannot pay, and the sooner the Government recognises the fact, the better. You cannot draw blood from a stone.

'AN INDIAN'<sup>1</sup>

Whites acted decisively after Natal achieved self-government in 1893. Britain was determined to end its financial responsibility for the region and approved a Constitution with few safeguards for Africans and Indians. The new government increasingly came to view town planning, health, trade arrangements and other public issues in terms of racial distinctions.<sup>2</sup> As far as Indians were concerned, the objective was to force them to re-indenture or return to India after completing their indentures, and to legally subordinate non-indentured Indians so that whites would feel secure against the 'Asiatic menace'.

Act 8 of 1896 stipulated that in the case of non-Europeans, the franchise was limited to immigrants from countries with a tradition of parliamentary elections. Since India lacked such a tradition, Indians were denied the vote. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1897 gave the state power to control Indian entry. Disembarking immigrants had to pass a literacy test in a European language. While the Act did not refer to race, its aim was to target Asians. In fact, Prime Minister Harry Escombe told the legislature that 'it never occurred to him "for a single minute" that the bill should apply to white settlers: "Can you imagine anything more mad for a Government than that it should ever be applied to English immigrants? The object of the bill is to deal with Asiatic immigrants."' <sup>3</sup> As a result, 5 500 Indians were refused entry between 1897 and 1901.<sup>4</sup> The Dealers Licences Act gave town councils the power to deny business licences on grounds of 'sanitation' or failure to keep books of account in English.<sup>5</sup> Cumulatively, these laws affected the legal status of Indians, and impeded their economic development.

One of the most effective measures against Indians was the £3 tax. The Indian Immigration Law of 1895 decreed that Indians who did not re-indenture had to pay a tax of £3 per annum. It came into effect in 1901, and in 1903 was extended to girls aged 13 and older and boys aged

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OPPOSITE ABOVE & BELOW: Desperate for income and in debt because of taxes, over 2 000 Indians signed up to work on the Benguela Railway at Lobito Bay in Angola, many effectively forfeiting their right to return to Natal as well as their free passage to India. Conditions were so dire in Angola that a quarter of the recruits died there.

PREVIOUS PAGE: A receipt recording a poll-tax payment made in 1908. The imposition of the tax in 1895 created a potentially crippling burden that gave the ex-indentured the stark choice of re-indenturing or going back to India, and made being a 'free' Indian in Natal almost impossible.

16 and older. The idea of the tax came to Natal officials during a visit to India in January 1894 by Henry Binns and Protector Louis H Mason. They told Sir Edward Buck, who was in charge of emigration, that Natal expected Indians to re-indenture for a second term and then return to India. Whites had 'strong feelings' about Indians, and would not permit Indian settlement until the 'Native question' had been settled. Binns and Mason proposed that Indians should be compelled to re-indenture for a second term of three years with an employer of their choice, and then return to India. Buck ruled out a mandatory second term or compulsory return. It was then that Binns and Mason got the idea that the most effective way to force Indians to return to India would be a 'residence tax', which they proposed in their report dated 23 March 1894.<sup>6</sup>

Influential public figures supported the tax. Escombe, once an advocate of Indian settlement, felt by the 1890s that Indians had been brought to Natal 'for the purpose of supplying labour which is necessary for the development of local industries and enterprises, and they are not intended to form part and parcel of the South African nation. The Indians are to come here appreciated as labourers, but not welcomed as settlers and competitors.'<sup>7</sup> Increasing anti-Indian agitation must be seen in the context of the reality of a 'settled' Indian population. In 1901, the population of Natal was approximately 900 000. There were around 750 000 Africans, 64 000 whites and 81 965 Indians. More worrying than the numerical supremacy of Indians was the composition of the Indian population: 47 599 free, 9 000 passenger and 25 366 indentured Indians.<sup>8</sup> That such a small proportion of Indians was indentured was anathema to whites, who were determined to reverse the situation.

The tax sought to end the independent economic activity of Indians by thwarting the emergence of an independent Indian peasantry and market gardeners, making it virtually impossible for workers to sell their labour in the urban centres of Durban and Maritzburg. It was estimated that the average Indian male with a wife and two children was compelled to pay £12 in tax when his income averaged £15 per annum.<sup>9</sup> The merchant-dominated Natal Indian Congress complained that the tax was intended to force Indians to return to India after they had completed their indenture. But 'to go back [to India] and hope to earn a livelihood is almost an utter impossibility. Indentured Indians, who so materially help forward the prosperity of the Colony, are entitled to better consideration.'<sup>10</sup>

The logic underpinning the tax was similar to the predicament faced by slave owners. When slavery was coming to an end, slave owners had to effect a 'transition from the brutal to the rational predicament'. Likewise, it was hoped that the 'dread of starvation' rather than the 'dread of being flogged' would force Indians to re-indenture (or return to India) instead of opting for market gardening.<sup>11</sup> The tax made re-indenture virtually mandatory. Between 1860 and 1886, of 11 438 Indians who completed their indentures, none re-indentured and 2 004 (17.5 per cent) returned to India.<sup>12</sup> This changed spectacularly when the tax was introduced. In 1904, 21.23 per cent of Indians either re-indentured or returned to India after completing their indenture; this increased to 77.14 per cent in 1907; and 80.81 per cent in 1910 as the tax took its toll.<sup>13</sup>

In numerical terms, 1 853 migrants returned to India in the five years from 1896 to 1900; 7 720 returned during the five years after the tax came into effect (1901–1905); and 18 913 time-expired Indians returned between 1906 and 1910. The 1914 Solomon Commission would

comment that the tax had a 'demoralising effect'; it 'penalised the industrious Indian' while others 'degenerated into loafers and vagrants'.<sup>14</sup> According to Swan:

Previously indentured workers had suffered the extreme privations of contract work with the sure knowledge that they would be able to...pursue one of the variety of opportunities which offered the possibility of a modestly successful living in Natal. The tax, in conjunction with the depressed economy, fundamentally altered the terms of this exchange by removing the time limit from indentured labour. Workers forced back under contract by tax debts and unemployment, faced, for all they knew, a lifetime on the plantations or mines.<sup>15</sup>

The tax, arbitrary fines by employers and lack of intervention by the Protector had a devastating effect. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that of 625 Indians who returned to India in 1916, 620 did not have any savings.<sup>16</sup> There were many individual examples of crippling hardship. Badhloo Khan (114183) was 25 when he arrived in June 1905 on the *Congella*. He worked for five years for Alfred Pearse of Howick. Shortly before his indenture was concluded, he was informed by Pearse that he could only 'escape payment' of the tax by re-indenturing. Khan was forced by dire financial circumstances to engage for a second term. Pearse failed to submit the re-indenture documents, and Khan was informed in 1912 that he owed £9 in back taxes. A distraught Khan appealed to the Immigration Officer in Durban, 'Now Sir, I do not understand how I am made to pay this amount. I was told that on re-indenturing, I will have nothing to pay and for this reason I was indentured. I didn't know what kind of agreement to make. I cannot read and write. I simply know that by re-indenturing I will be exempted from paying the tax. I pray for justice.'<sup>17</sup> The appeal was in vain. Khan was ordered to pay 10 shillings per month as it had been his responsibility to submit the documentation.

Edward Saunders related the story of Beebi, the daughter of Chandoo and Saler Khan (359), who arrived on the *Belvedere*. Beebi's husband abandoned her and left the estate. She had to take care of five children. Saunders noticed that two of the girls were no longer at work, and enquired as to their whereabouts. 'They are gone, sahib.' 'What do you mean, gone? Where to?' 'A man took them away, sahib.' 'Who took them away?' 'A European, but a different kind of European. A trader. From Beira. They were pretty girls, sahib.' 'Do you mean to say you've sold them?' 'Sahib, what could I do? They were pretty girls. I have no husband. I have no money. How could I pay the tax?'<sup>18</sup>

Whether this story is true or whether Saunders was using it to underscore the suffering caused by the tax, we cannot be sure; either way, it illustrates the terrible consequences of the tax for ordinary Indians.

Poonamah Ponusamy (71697) was another who was unable to pay her tax. She was 18 when she arrived from Pondicherry in March 1898, and was assigned to Umzimkulu Sugar Company in Port Shepstone. She completed her indenture in 1903, and struggled to make a living. On 14 February 1906, she received an order to pay an outstanding £6 in two instalments, on 28 March and 14 May. She was unable to pay and appeared before the magistrate at Lower Umzimkulu. He established that she was indigent, and advised the Protector on 19 April 1906 that she should be returned to India as 'destitute' since he could not think of any other

punishment. Although the budget for returning 'destitute Indians' had been exceeded, the Protector agreed.<sup>19</sup> Poonamah was dumped in India, aged 26, to face an uncertain future.

Those who re-indentured were not absolved of their debts. Employers were requested to deduct outstanding amounts on behalf of the government. Velliah Rawth (72814), who re-indentured to SA Sugar Refineries at South Coast Junction, owed £10. His manager, Charles Hickman, was instructed by the Umlazi court to deduct the debt monthly from May 1910. Rawth had arrived in June 1898, and served one term of indenture with Elandslaagte Collieries. He had re-indentured with SA Sugar Refineries and was serving his third term.<sup>20</sup>

The tax crippled working-class Indians. Many were left destitute, families were destroyed and opportunities outside of indenture increasingly became an unattainable dream. The effect of the tax has to be read in the context of the economic depression in the aftermath of the South African War. It was so severe that the Durban Municipality decided to dismiss Indian workers in 1906, some of whom had been in its employ for several decades. *Indian Opinion*, reflecting on the decision, wrote that 'colour feelings run too high in Durban and all sympathy is, as a matter of course, given to the White unemployed. But what about these unemployed Indians? The Council's ingratitude is pronounced. We can only hope that the public heart will be moved by a sense of compassion for these unfortunate but highly deserving men.'<sup>21</sup>

The economic environment was overlaid with a virulent anti-Indianism, which moved even the *Rand Daily Mail* to opine in January 1907 that Indians had come at 'the request of the White men, and if the White men now find that a great mistake has been made, they cannot justly punish the Asiatics for their own error of judgement or lack of foresight'.<sup>22</sup> A letter to *Indian Opinion* in 1905, signed Lois, which could have been the Indian interpreter and educationist Henry Lois Paul, pointed to the suffering of ordinary Indians who were forced to pay the £3 tax as well as the poll tax of £1, and called on the Natal Indian Congress to take action: 'Will it ever be more than a name? I think it will, if it would only interest itself in the people whom it presumes to represent, and by allowing all Indians to participate in its deliberations.' If the Congress was unable to 'shake off its lethargy', Indians should 'organise themselves into a Society for their protection and improvement'.<sup>23</sup>

Hounded by the tax, open to blatant racist attacks, and living through an economic downturn, working-class Indians looked for opportunities to escape what was becoming a life of degradation and misery. For some, a way out presented itself in the form of employment in Angola.

## Lobito Bay: 'a dismal tale'

Racial and economic exploitation in Natal made the idea of working on the Benguela Railway in Lobito Bay in the Portuguese colony of Angola highly desirable. It promised respite to many. The Benguela Railway was a massive scheme whose origins are to be found in the discovery of mineral resources in Katanga in the Congo. The most powerful capitalist in southern Africa around this time was Cecil John Rhodes, whose British South Africa Company received a Royal Charter from Queen Victoria in October 1889 to occupy all territory north of the Zambezi. This was the first step of Rhodes' Cape-to-Cairo dream. Rhodes had designs on Katanga and tasked Robert Williams, a Scottish engineer, with prospecting the Zambezi-Congo region. London financiers

became interested, and Williams formed Tanganyika Concessions Ltd in 1899. The company found copper deposits in September 1899, which would prove to be the richest copper mines in the world. But it meant little without a railway line westward to Lobito Bay. Starting in 1903, the 1 343-kilometre line would take a quarter of a century to complete.

Finance and political competition were two obvious hurdles. Equally serious was the issue of labour. Disease and the slave trade had depleted the local African population. Norton Griffiths and Company, contracted to build the railway, failed to recruit labour from West Africa and Mozambique. One obvious source was Natal's working-class Indians, who were finding it increasingly difficult to survive in the harsh economic climate, exacerbated by the £3 tax. Indians were also seen as a viable labour source because many had worked on the railways and had gained a favourable reputation. DH Heydenrych, for example, wrote that 'without Indian labour, the Natal railways could hardly have been built and operated'.<sup>24</sup> The Portuguese also seemed to have a more favourable reputation than the British among Indians in Natal.

Griffiths approached John Stone, a contractor involved in the construction of the railways in Natal, to negotiate with the Natal government for 2 000 workers. Stone placed adverts in local papers and by the end of February 1907, 1 200 Indians with experience in railway construction had signed up. They were to be contracted for two years at £2 per month, and given food, accommodation and medical care. Recruits, however, had to pay £2 for transport to Lobito Bay and settle their tax debt to the Natal government. Stone was only willing to recover tax arrears up to £6 on behalf of the government as he felt that potential recruits would not sign up if most of their earnings went towards their tax debt. Together with their transport costs, they would have had to work for four months before earning any money. Impoverished Indian workers had no option but to sign up.

The recruits were ready to leave on the *Cluny Castle* in late February 1907, but were delayed because the government wanted to clear the scheme with the Indian government. Permission was granted when Natal authorities explained that the alternative was unemployment and repatriation, and assured the Indian government that because of Stone's reputation, they could guarantee good working conditions. The Natal government also indicated that the Protector would oversee the interests of workers in Angola. The government of India gave permission on 25 March 1907.

This was timely, as the 2 000 Indians waiting to go to Lobito Bay, many desperate and unemployed, participated in a public demonstration on the streets of Durban on 21 March to vent their frustrations. They had been maintained by Stone in Brickhill Road in Durban from early February, in what a report in the *Indian Opinion* described as 'overcrowded, dilapidated, and filthy conditions'.<sup>25</sup> Up to 10 persons were housed in rooms built for three. News that the Indian government had agreed to the scheme was greeted with a roar of approval when it was announced to a mass meeting in Brickhill Road. The men eventually departed on the *Berwick Castle* on 12 April 1907. Griffith undertook to deduct 10 shillings per month from the wages of those in tax arrears.

In all, 2 274 Indians went to Lobito Bay: 1 212 men, 423 women and 639 children. Of these, 823 had arrived in Natal under Law 25 of 1891, which meant that they could return to the colony

after completing their contract; the remainder were subject to the immigration law of 1895 – by leaving Natal, they effectively forfeited their right to return, as well as their free passage to India. Workers had been told by Stone that they would work 200 kilometres inland from Lobito Bay, where the weather was ‘similar to Madras’ from whence the majority originated. They were in for a shock. The climate was terribly dry and the terrain hazardous. The country was mountainous and virtually waterless as the annual rainfall was a mere 250 millimetres. A headline in a *Natal Advertiser* report summed up the plight of Indians: ‘A dismal tale.’

P Moonsamy, a free Indian, had travelled to Lobito Bay to open a store, returned to Natal in early July and told the Protector about the horrible conditions experienced by Indians. They were used mainly to clear the land. This meant that they were ahead of the railhead and received water supplies last. They had to make do with a little tin of ‘oily, sticky water’ for a whole day. For the two months that he had been there, Moonsamy reported that many were not able to bath and were ‘covered in dirt and infested with flies’.<sup>26</sup> Some died and others deserted to Damaraland in present-day Namibia. There were no medical facilities and correspondence to family in Natal was intercepted and destroyed. Only around 700 Indians remained in Lobito Bay when Moonsamy left. Stone responded that Moonsamy was exaggerating and that the charges were ‘without foundation’.<sup>27</sup> Moonsamy’s assertions were supported by a report from the British consul at Luanda, HA Mackie, who confirmed in July 1907 that large numbers of Indians were deserting. Captured deserters were usually found in an ‘emaciated condition’.<sup>28</sup>

The Natal government refused to get involved. Its view was that Moonsamy had conjured up the stories because he was upset at not being allowed to trade in Lobito Bay. However, when such reports continued to filter through to Natal, Governor Nathan asked Mackie to investigate in January 1908. He reported that desertions were continuing and that many suicides had been reported. In one incident, several bodies were found hanging from a tree. Diseases like malaria, sleeping sickness and jigger flea were rife. Many were also victims of scorpion bites.<sup>29</sup>

In March 1908, just 11 months after they had left Natal, the first group of 540 Indians departed from Lobito Bay on the *Newark Castle*. They reached Durban on 6 April. There were 80 cases of malaria, 20 of dysentery, 150 of jigger flea and several instances of enteric fever and beriberi, a disease of the nervous system that resulted in partial paralysis of the limbs. Four died during the voyage and five had their legs amputated because of gangrene.

Another 615 Indians returned on the *Alnwick Castle* in May 1908. When the ship reached Durban, there were 50 cases of malaria and 400 cases of jigger flea, while others suffered from phthisis, dysentery and acute lung diseases like bronchitis and pneumonia. Dr Fernandez described ‘the general condition of practically the whole of the Indians constituting this shipment as one of extreme debility’. The ‘serious’ medical cases requiring hospital care averaged between 30 and 40. Four amputations of legs were performed at Addington, while nine died. Two more died on the *Umkuzi* which took them to India.<sup>30</sup> An estimated 600 Indians (25 per cent) died in Angola.<sup>31</sup>

*Indian Opinion* described the returnees as most ‘repulsive looking’. Their clothes were ‘appalling’ even in ‘comparison to indentured Indians’. The ‘dirt rags were barely sufficient to hide their nakedness, while their long tangled hair presented a picture of barbarism’.<sup>32</sup> The

large number who never made it back, and the horrible conditions of those who returned, confirmed that the venture was a nightmare. For some, the nightmare was not over.

Despite their terrible ordeal, the government did not relent on the condition that by leaving the colony they had forfeited the right to remain in Natal. Of the 1 606 Indians who returned, 658 were allowed to remain but the remainder had to go to India. Those who remained had to purchase domicile certificates at a cost of £1 each. These had to be purchased in Lobito Bay, and several were repatriated because they had either lost the certificates or, as they hurried onto the ships, there had been no time to secure their thumb prints.

The Natal Indian Congress took up the issue of repatriation with the government, as many did not want to return to India. They had gone to Lobito Bay in the first instance because of desperation resulting from the burdens of the £3 tax. The government refused to entertain the Congress. After visiting Lobito returnees at the Bluff in Durban, Congress president Dawood Mahomed told *Indian Opinion* that the men complained bitterly that although many were of 10 years' standing in the colony, they were being sent to India against their will. They told him that they would starve in India as they had little or no cash. They 'knew Natal more than India. It is to be hoped that the men's worst fear will not be realised and that they will find some occupation on reaching India.'<sup>33</sup> The Congress communicated its concerns to the government on 27 April 1908:

Committee met Indians returned from Lobito Bay. They did not want to go to India and claimed domicile rights. Request information as to why men who were in the colony in the first instance have been sent to India. Respectfully enquire whether any arrangement has been made regarding looking after these men in India.

This was to no avail. The government was adamant that the men had signed contracts to return to their 'own country' and were bound to go, irrespective of their wishes. Protector Polkinghorne informed the Colonial Secretary on 27 April 1908 that 'although some of the Indians would, no doubt, have remained in the colony if they had been allowed to do so...[t]he contract entered into before going to Lobito Bay expressly stated that they were not allowed to return to Natal again'.<sup>34</sup>

The government remained intractable. Dawood Mahomed was refused permission to visit the returnees at the Bluff for a second time. He complained to Polkinghorne, who enquired from Harry Smith, the immigration officer, why Mahomed had been barred. Smith replied on 11 May 1908 that 'in the interest of the people themselves it was considered inexpedient to open the compound to visitors'. Asked to explain, Smith wrote on 21 May that an 'invasion of the camp by Congressmen with a mission [would be] a very probable cause of discontent among Indians who understand their obligations and are at present content to fulfill them'.<sup>35</sup> The repatriation went ahead. By June 1908, virtually all had left. Despite all they had been through, HF Varian, chief engineer of the Benguela Railway, considered the Indian workers 'more of a nuisance than a help'.

Three women were 'saved' from deportation. Their husbands died at Lobito and, having friends in Natal and none in India, they refused to go back. Protector Polkinghorne was moved by their plight and persuaded the government to allow them to stay provided, of course, that they paid their outstanding tax debts or re-indentured.

One of the women was Adiamma Venketramadu (71173), who had arrived on 6 February 1898 from Chingleput, aged 33, with her husband, Nagadu Ramadu (71172). Ramadu died, leaving Adiamma with three children, Mahalutchmi (71174), Kotich (71176) and Ramanna (71175). Mahalutchmi was 16, Kotich 12 and Ramanna 15. Adiamma lived for almost half a century until her death in Overport in 1953.

Ragi Nagadu (71178) was a 'Lobito widow' at 32 as her husband, Veersamy Ramdu (71177), had died there. If Ragi had left her village in search of a better life, her story was especially tragic. She lost her eight-year-old daughter, Ankammah, in 1901, and her son Nagadu, aged 14, also died in Lobito Bay, leaving her all alone. Her brother-in-law Parasamder, who was employed at Battery's Place in Natal, promised to take care of her. We were unable to trace what happened to Ragi. Did she remarry? Did she return to India? Does she have descendants? The archives are silent on this.

Muniamma Annappa (71182) was also allowed to remain with her children Arkadu (71184), Muniamma (71185), Muni (71186) and Gungadu (colonial born). The family had arrived on 6 February 1898 from Chingleput when Muniamma and her husband, Chengadu, were in their late twenties and seeking to make a fresh start in Natal. After serving their indentures in Mount Edgecombe, they struggled under the weight of tax – they would have had to pay £15 per annum. They in all likelihood saw the Lobito option as a stroke of good fortune. Sadly, Chengadu died in February 1908. Muniamma continued to live in Natal until her death in 1940 at the age of 70. She was a hawker of fruits and vegetables, and at the time of her death was living in Sydenham.

We are able to trace the lives of three of the four children. Muni (71186) married Chelladu (40478), who had arrived on the *Pongola* in 1890 from Chingleput. Both families worked for Natal Estates in Mount Edgecombe, and it was probably here that they met. As was the case with many Indians, urbanisation resulted in their movement away from plantations. They acquired a council home in the early 1940s in Pastoral Road, Asherville, where Chelladu died in 1946 and Muni in 1961. They had eight children: Perimunsamy, Chinna Munsamy, Lutchmee, Adiammah, Veran, Venketesan, Gengamma and Parvathy.<sup>36</sup>

Arkadu (71184) married Muniamma, the colonial-born daughter of Chengadu (20986) and Anki (24759). They had six children: Muniamma (1920), Athiamma (1922), Munsami (1925), Rajagopal (1927), Annaya (1928) and Kista (1933). Arkadu died in 1941 at the age of 49 at her home in Calgary Avenue, Sydenham.<sup>37</sup> The third child, Muniamma (71185), died in 1947 at her home in Waterfall Road, Cato Manor. She too had married a colonial born, Narsimulu, the son of Venketasawmy (26274) and Chinnapilla (26274) of North Arcot who arrived in 1881 and worked for the Natal Plantation Company. They had five children: Govindamma, Ragamma, Ganesh, Venkatsamy and Chinsamy.<sup>38</sup>

The details of the lives of the three women, albeit routine on the one hand, are revealing because they give us a window into the trajectory of the generations that came after indenture. But it is more than that. It shows the depth of this idea of Natal as 'home', irrespective of the harsh conditions. Muniamma, for example, could very well have succumbed to the pressures and left for India. But she chose to make Natal home, and by the time of her death had 19 grandchildren and a legacy that continues to the present.



## We are 'treated like pariah dogs'

On 3 January 1911, the Secretary for Commerce announced in the Indian Legislative Council that indenture to Natal would be terminated from 1 July 1911. This decision was relayed to Lord Gladstone, Governor General of South Africa, by Lord Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, London, on 4 January. According to Harcourt, the decision had been taken because the 'divergence between the standpoint of the colonists and that of the Indians has created an unsatisfactory position and that Indians have no guarantee after expiration of their indenture they will be accepted by the Union as permanent citizens'.<sup>39</sup>

When news reached Natal, 'agitators' were blamed. Sir Liege Hulett, one of the largest employers of Indian labour, felt that the agitators had 'purposely' mixed the indentured question with the trading question. These were distinct entities, but in order to get 'what is wanted for the trading class, a dead set is made against indentured labour. The agitators go about trying to make trouble on the estates for the purpose of stopping coolie immigration.' Hulett called for action to make sure that 'our interests are not sacrificed to political agitation'.<sup>40</sup>

Aside from the sugar industry, the Clayton Commission of 1909 reported that the tea industry employed 1 722 Indians, 6 149 were indentured in general farming (non-sugar), 606 on wattle plantations and 3 239 on the coal mines. They could not be easily replaced.<sup>41</sup> A number of employer organisations in Natal complained to the government that six months' notice of the termination of indenture was insufficient. Assured of a regular labour supply, they had made 'enormous investments of capital...[which] would not have taken place if Petitioners had felt uncertain about labour'. Petitioners 'respectfully urge that fifty years permission to import this labour should not cease suddenly at six months notice'.

At the very least, employers wanted the Indian government to complete the indenture of 15 000 workers for whom deposit had been paid, to 'remove from the minds of Petitioners the present feeling that they are being treated without fair consideration and are being punished for acts over which they have no control, and will certainly be considered a gracious termination of a long and valuable period of permission to introduce indentured labour'. The petition was signed by the Natal Coal Owners' Association, Natal Cooperative Mealie Growers' Union, Natal Wattle Growers' Union, Natal Sugar Growers' Association and Natal Tea Planters.<sup>42</sup>

The Indian government did not relent. Anxious employers sent Sirdars to India under the auspices of the Indian Immigration Trust Board to recruit labour. The terrible reputation of Sirdars and the problems experienced by Indians in South Africa were common knowledge in villages, and Sirdars were given a 'torrid' time. According to Sirdar Muthusamy, 'God' helped him recruit seven workers. He claimed that he would have recruited more had it not been for Venkatachalam, who had served his indenture with the African Boating Company and had returned to India a few months prior to Muthusamy's return. Venkatachalam told villagers that there was much 'agitation' in Natal and warned them 'to take care of their children, chiefly young women. He made the people believe that some Sirdars purposely come to India to take away their kith and kin, some young women of fair complexion to get rich husbands in Natal, and thereby get some large amount.' The village magistrate warned Muthusamy against

speaking to women and that he would be liable if villagers were missing. 'All this discouraged me and I resolved to abandon the idea of recruitment.'<sup>43</sup>

Sirdar Munusamy Naidu was 'sorry' for having gone to India. While the 'name "Sirdar"...may have some weight in Natal, in India...Sirdars are treated like pariah dogs...I am not a young man to stand all abuses...I come from a respectable family.' Naidu waited in his village 'patiently' and managed to recruit a few workers, even though notices in Tamil were distributed in the village warning people not to emigrate.

The story of Sirdar V Sampson is especially illuminating. He was a 'God-fearing' Christian who was respected by 'Brahmins and high-caste Hindus' before he emigrated to Natal. He felt 'really proud' when he was nominated Sirdar by his employer, and volunteered to recruit in India as it would give him an opportunity to 'supersede Markapur Lazarus, who is now in Natal a Compounder'. He went to his home in Nandavanam, where villagers were initially good to him. He 'had several invitations. I enjoyed myself well.' Once word got out that he was recruiting, however, villagers began to 'look down upon me'. When Sampson was caught explaining what life was like in Natal, he was twice imprisoned by police who demanded a bribe. He gave up on the idea of recruiting; instead, he convinced his wife, her sister, and two others to return to Natal with him.

These narratives are important in providing a window into the life of indenture: Indians migrating without wives, the terrible reputation of Sirdars, the personal aspirations of some, how news of struggles in Natal travelled to village level and, above all, the fear of employers about life after indenture.

## First solution of the Asiatic problem?

The termination of indenture was generally welcomed by white South Africa. The *Cape Times* saw it 'as the first solution of the Asiatic problem. If anything were needed to stimulate this frame of mind it has been General Smuts' patriotic declaration...that South Africa as a young country should be thrown open to White immigrants, regardless of education or language...'<sup>44</sup> The South African government formally welcomed the decision to end indenture.<sup>45</sup>

In reality, however, it was African labour that whites were keen to lay their hands on. In Natal, as Jeff Guy has pointed out, the British wanted to end the political independence of the Zulu, and 'free Zulu labour by means of a decisive military victory. The Zulu army thwarted this [in 1879], and as a result the war became merely a first stage in a prolonged process...[to bring] the country and its people to political subjugation and economic exploitation.'<sup>46</sup> It was in this period of dispossession that the future contours of twentieth-century South African political economy can be glimpsed. Rosa Luxemburg provided a powerful analysis of this process:

The European conquerors are the first who are not merely after subjugation and economic exploitation, but the means of production itself, by ripping the land from underneath the feet of the native population...European capitalism deprives the primitive social order of its foundation. What emerges is something worse than all oppression and exploitation, total anarchy and a specifically European phenomenon, the uncertainty of social

existence...Before the advance of capitalism, the primitive social order, which outlasted all primitive historical phases, capitulates. Its last remnants are eradicated from the earth and its elements – labor power and means of production – are absorbed by capitalism.<sup>47</sup>

After the sacking of Ulundi, the Zulu Kingdom was in steady retreat. Slowly at first, and then with greater intensity after the defeat of the Bambatha Rebellion of 1906, the African dispossessed were turned into cheap labour that began to replace Indians in the colonial workforce. Although an African free peasantry thrived in many parts of southern Africa in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it declined because of heavy taxation, unfavourable market prices for raw commodities, natural disasters between 1890 and 1910 and land appropriation by whites. The crowning moment was the Land Act of 1913, which reserved just 13 per cent of South Africa's land for Africans.<sup>48</sup>

The availability of African labour rendered Indians superfluous in farming, mining and the public sector. For employers, African labour was cheaper because wives and families did not have to be accommodated and fed, they were spared importing expensive food staples, and Africans could be employed seasonally.<sup>49</sup> When there was a shortage of local labour, migrants were imported from Transkei.<sup>50</sup>

As the 'cheap bodies' of indenture left the plantation, so the 'cheapened bodies' of the Zulu took their places in most economic sectors: on Natal's mines, the number of Indians dropped from 3 739 in 1911 to 488 in 1945;<sup>51</sup> on the railways, their numbers decreased from 6 000 in 1910 to 400 by the mid-1930s;<sup>52</sup> in general farming, the percentage of Indians in the labour force fell from 32 in 1911 to 11 in 1936; and on sugar estates, the percentage of Indian labour dropped dramatically from 88 in 1910 to just 7 in 1945.<sup>53</sup>

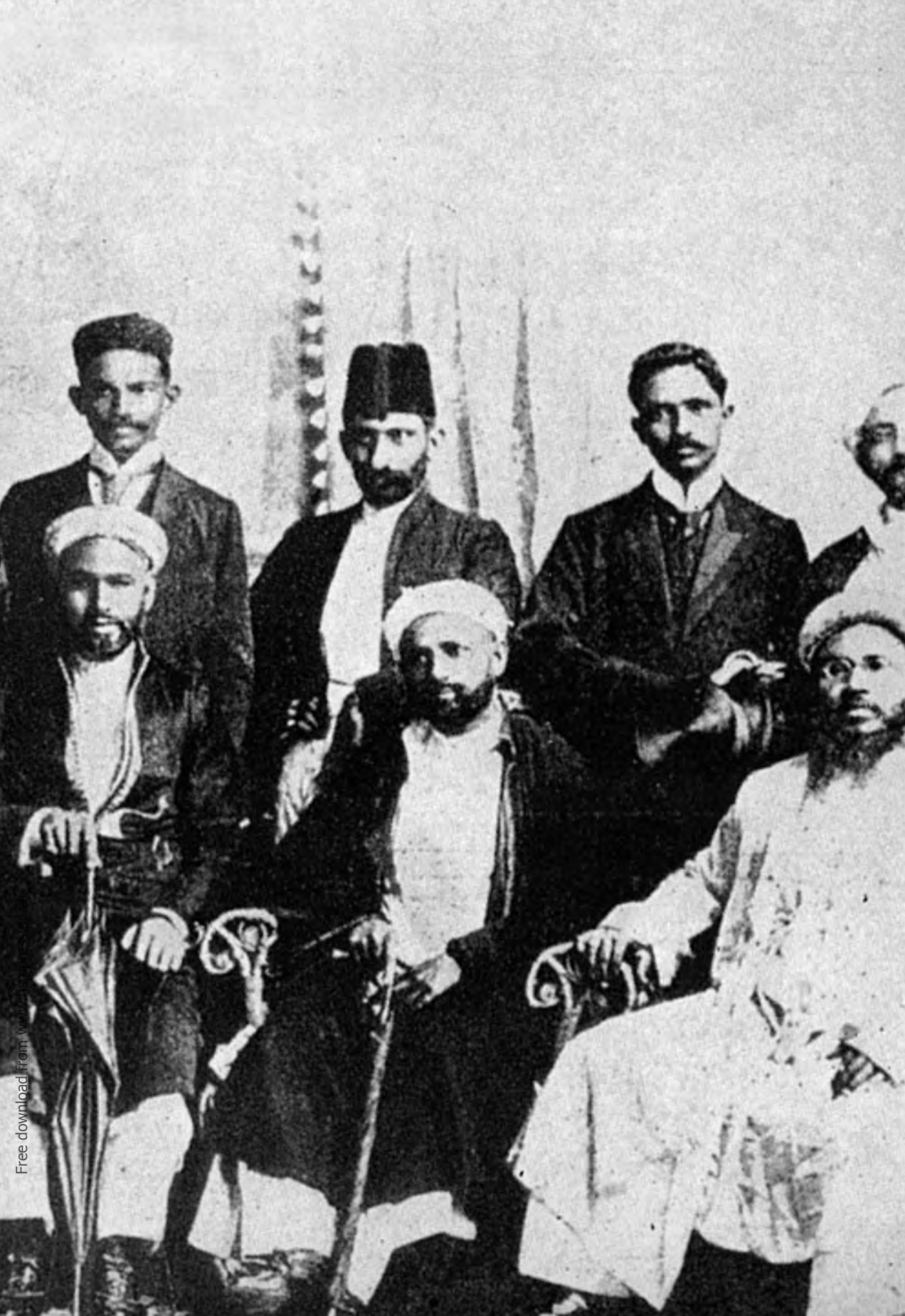
## Between the £3 tax and repatriation

The imposition of the tax was not just another burden, but a potentially crippling one that placed before the ex-indentured the stark choice of re-indenturing or going back to India, and made the option of being a 'free' Indian in Natal incredibly difficult. At the same time, as the tax took its toll it also created the potential for a collective response, reinforcing the volatile mix of deprivation and desperation. The murmurings of dissent were already palpable. In 1913, less than a third of 10 800 Indian males required to pay the tax had done so.<sup>54</sup>

Crucial in this context would be the response of the most visible political leadership among Indians, the Gandhi-led Natal Indian Congress. Hitherto, the Congress, formed in 1894, had not spent any significant time on the travails of the indentured and the Indian poor. The Indian working class, on the other hand, with a few minor exceptions and for all-too-brief periods, had not developed an independent platform to give voice to their struggles. As history would have it, in late 1912 an opportunity presented itself that had the potential to be either the lightning rod to spark the fire, or the fire brigade to douse the flame.

But, lest we dampen curiosity and interest, as events played themselves out the complex nature of history becomes apparent. In the following chapter we come across this ostensible fire brigade, sparking a fire that for a moment seemed to burn out of control.







## Resistance goes underground



Kneel to your load, then balance your staggering feet  
and walk up that coal ladder as they do in time,  
one bare foot after another in ancestral rhyme.

DEREK WALCOTT<sup>1</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, black South Africans participated in large numbers in the South African War, which witnessed a British victory. Any anticipated benefits for the 'non-whites' were to be quickly dispelled. There were severe limits, too, on the leverage Indians could gain from being British subjects. Whites moved inexorably towards the Union of South Africa, which came into being in 1910. It was a Union based on racist and exclusionary policies that denied citizenship rights to black South Africans, and built on the perpetuation of existing regimes of exclusion.

As taxes ate into the last remnants of independent African life, there was a brief but violent upsurge in Natal in 1906 that came to be known as the Bambatha Rebellion. Put down with brutal force, the might of the Zulu, which reached its acme at Isandlwana in 1879, was in retreat. In September of the same year, Gandhi launched a passive resistance campaign in the Transvaal against the 'Black Act', which made registration compulsory for Indians and was seen as the first step in forcing them out of the country. By the beginning of 1909, the campaign had only flattered to deceive. The early excitement and buoyancy faded away as many traders – the spine of the campaign – withdrew their support as they feared financial loss.

Despite the hopes generated by the British victory in the South African War, and the sacrifices made in various resistances, by the end of the decade white power was more omnipotent than ever.

Meanwhile, in Natal the £3 tax was starting to take its toll. Gandhi, who had come to Natal in 1893 at the call of a local merchant, Dada Abdullah, persuaded merchants to form the Natal Indian Congress in August 1894 in response to impending anti-Indian legislation.<sup>2</sup> The Congress remained largely an elite organisation, relying on petitions and letters to newspapers to effect change. Few Indians could afford the annual membership fee of £3, and the Congress, on the whole, sought, with limited success, to protect the trade, franchise and residence rights of merchants.<sup>3</sup>

With Gandhi consumed by events in the Transvaal for much of the first decade of the twentieth century, the tax did not occupy his attention in any sustained way. In fact, when he was

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OPPOSITE: Distinguished politician Gopal Krishna Gokhale played a key role in persuading the Indian government to abolish indenture in 1912. He toured South Africa in that year calling on the colonial government to improve conditions for Indians. When this failed, support for passive resistance campaigns increased dramatically.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Founders of the Natal Indian Congress.

asked by a group of ex-indentured labourers in Verulam in 1906 about the possibility of the tax being repealed, he adopted a fatalistic approach that cut off any prospect of resistance: 'We did put up a stiff fight when the tax was imposed...It is very difficult now to get any redress.'<sup>4</sup>

There was more, however, to Gandhi's apparent fatalism, and that stemmed from the distinction he drew between indentured labour and free Indian immigration. For Gandhi, 'the question of free Indian immigration...is a matter of Imperial policy, whereas the question of indentured labour is a matter of contract and bargain'.<sup>5</sup> And flowing from this, the tax was not something to mobilise around 'because the issue of indentured labourers, the ex-indentured labourers and the Tax did not affect a vital principle in India's relations with Britain. The tax, as far as Gandhi was concerned was not an Empire issue.'<sup>6</sup>

In the absence of 'leadership' in Natal, PS Aiyar formed the Natal Indian Patriotic Union in 1908, whose primary achievement lay in highlighting the poll tax as a terrible burden. Poor organisation and lack of finance resulted in its collapse within a year. The Union's members included the likes of Vincent Lawrence, Lazarus Gabriel, M Beethasee Maharaj, AD Pillay, Lutchman Panday, Albert Christopher and D Stephens.<sup>7</sup> The Colonial Born Indian Association was formed in March 1911 to protest against restrictions on interprovincial migration. The Association, led by educated colonial-born Indians under the leadership of Albert Christopher, was concerned about economic opportunities, as many members found conditions difficult post-1903 because of the depression and an increasingly racist state.<sup>8</sup> Aiyar continued to highlight the devastating effect of the £3 tax through the *African Chronicle*, and formed the Three-Pound Tax League at a public meeting in October 1911 with Vincent Lawrence as secretary. Traders like Dada Abdullah and MC Anglia were also present at this meeting.<sup>9</sup> These organisations broadened the social base of Indian politics but it would be hard to argue that they were necessarily anti-Gandhi, as the likes of Vincent Lawrence and Dada Abdullah remained loyal to Gandhi throughout his stay in South Africa and beyond.

Without any strong collective organisation or history of sustained mobilisation, the ex-indentured faced the possibility of the tax picking them off individually. Their options were to either seek employment at wages that would scarcely allow them to survive, re-indenture or return to India.

## Enter Gopal Krishna Gokhale

The visit is an endeavour to plant the yoke of *cooliedom* more firmly in South Africa. The fact that he is the guest of the Government, that special and elaborate arrangements have been made for his comfort and convenience on the Government railways, and that Mayors banquet him should not be allowed to hide the real object of his presence here. The future of this country depends on the maintenance of the white ideal. Mr. Gokhale comes to prejudice that ideal.<sup>10</sup>

Born on 9 May 1866, Gopal Krishna Gokhale was one of the leading members of the Indian National Congress. After completing his education in Bombay in 1888, he held a position at the New English School in Pune. He was an active educationist, participating in the Deccan



Education Society and a founding member of Ferguson College. He was moderate in his views, had the ear of Viceroy Lord Hardinge and participated in the structures of governance set up by the British. It was not until after the First World War that he envisaged independence for India.

By 1906, the Indian National Congress, of which Gokhale was president, had split into two factions, a moderate one led by Gokhale and a 'radical' group led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who advocated civil agitation to overthrow the British Empire. They were called the *Garam Dal* (literally 'hot faction') and *Naram Dal* (literally 'soft faction'). The Companion of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire was offered to Gokhale by the British, which he accepted. The Order was founded by Queen Victoria in 1878 to reward British and native officials who served in India.

Gokhale landed at Cape Town on 22 October 1912 for a three-week tour of South Africa. According to the *Cape Argus*, 'though the *Saxon* arrived an hour early, some hundreds of Indians were gathered on the quay'. A Reception Committee, headed by Gandhi and the chairman of the Transvaal British Indians, boarded the vessel to formally welcome Gokhale who was 'warmly cheered by the gathering on the pier'. Gokhale was visiting, Gandhi told a reporter, 'to study the Indian question more fully...for himself [so that] he can speak with greater force and greater confidence on the South African Indian question'.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever his conclusions, Gokhale told the gathering, he would 'endeavour to state with due restraint and with such regard as may be expected from me in my position in India and with due regard to the interests of the Empire of which we are all members'.<sup>12</sup> The *Cape Times* described Gokhale as 'one of the most eminent British Indians of today...one of the most cultured and high bred of Indian gentlemen, who is at the same time one of the most forceful personalities in Indian public life'.

Visiting South Africa to see first-hand the plight of his countrymen and -women, Gokhale was feted by the government. As Chada points out:

On the advice of the wily Smuts, the Union government made Gokhale a state guest, and showered him with flattery and adulation with a view to dulling the edge of his resentment. From the time of his arrival in Cape Town on 22 October, a private state railroad car was placed at his disposal, and for the whole of the month-long tour red carpets and illuminations greeted him at every stop. Decorations by Indians at the principal railroad stations added to the glitter.<sup>13</sup>

But there was a countervailing force at Gokhale's side. Gandhi, together with his friend Hermann Kallenbach, acted as Gokhale's secretaries. Diplomatically, they presented him with the afflictions affecting the 'community' as they journeyed through South Africa.

## Masculinity meets Empire

Gokhale's visit was crucial, coming at a time when Gandhi's movement was in a lull. By 1909, only Gandhi and a few loyal supporters were engaged in the passive resistance campaign.

Gokhale arrived in a context where the end of indenture had already been decreed. The final batch of indentured workers from Madras arrived on the *Umlazi* on 21 July 1911. He had played

an important role in ending indenture, and the language he used provides a crucial glimpse into the 'thinking' within nationalist leadership in India. Gokhale brought a motion in the Legislative Council in India in 1912 for the complete abolition of indenture. The 'victims of the system', he pointed out, were 'generally simple, ignorant, illiterate, resourceless people belonging to the poorest classes of this country [who] are entrapped into entering into these agreements by the unscrupulous representations of wily recruiters, whose interest in them ceases the moment they are handed to the emigration agents'.<sup>14</sup> Gokhale presented indentured Indians, as Kale points out, as 'helpless victims, first of their environment, and then of greedy compatriots'.

Gokhale also opposed indenture on the grounds that moral problems arose from the paucity of women, and that Indian women in the colonies were of 'loose morals'. The result, he said, he 'preferred to leave to the imagination than describe. It is a shocking affair altogether, a considerable part of the population in some of these colonies being practically illegitimate.' Women were a symbol of Indian shame! A final reason advanced by Gokhale to terminate indenture was that it was 'degrading to the people of India from a national point of view'. In colonies where indenture existed, Indians were 'only known as *coolies*, no matter what their position might be...There are disabilities enough in all conscience attaching to our position in this country...Why must this additional brand be put upon our brow before the rest of the civilized world?'

Others who supported Gokhale's resolution for the termination of indenture similarly argued that it gave Indians a negative reputation. Subha Rao told the Legislative Council that 'in Natal, the best and most cultured of Indians are treated as *coolies* [because] South Africa has come into contact with India in the shape of *coolie* labour, and she only knows India as a vast recruiting ground of menial labour'. For Rao, indenture affected 'our national honour, our national self-respect, in fact our national existence as an integral part of the British Empire'. In response to proponents of indenture who said that it was an outlet for the 'poors of India', Madan Mohan Malaviya asked:

What would the whole world avail the emigrant if he lost his soul by going to these lands? He is subjected to moral degradation; he is subjected to national degradation; he is utterly demoralized; placed under conditions in which he has to live a life of sin and shame; in which he ceases to be a free man and virtually becomes a slave – a slave of the worst kind...Let him starve if he must, in his own country, a free man, but not be subjected to these servile restraints and inhuman indignities.

Migrants and their ilk were portrayed as 'simple village people' by Gokhale, Malaviya and Rao, just like India's millions who needed 'protection and supervision'. This explains their exclusion from the 'masculine activities of self-government in India itself...This nationalism was a critically gendered and hierarchical ideology.' But, as this book has shown, far from simply living a life of 'moral degradation' and of 'sin' and 'shame', the indentured built a life that involved religious endeavours, fought valiantly to create the conditions for family, saw women like Votti confront the 'internal' chauvinism and their employers using a myriad of 'weapons', and in the process ensuring that they were not just numbers, but people. Single

women, mainly widows and divorcees, symbols of shame in India, found a new life in Natal, earning their keep, (re)marrying and (re)building family life. The language used to oppose indenture reveals the chauvinism of the likes of Gokhale and the masculinity that lay at the heart of the Indian freedom movement.

## Journeying on

In Cape Town, a formal reception was held for Gokhale at the home of a prominent Indian merchant, HG Mahomed, on 22 October 1912. He was met by Deputy Mayor Sir Frederick Smith and JD Cartwright, a member of the Provincial Council. The following evening, Mayor Harry Hands presided at a public meeting in his honour at the City Hall. Hands told the gathering that Gokhale had come to South Africa with 'the full consent of the government'. Senator Schreiner said that Gokhale knew 'how to combine the highest ideals of the purest patriotism with the most unswerving loyalty to the Empire-King'. He was a man dedicated to 'educating and civilising his people'. While Gokhale had made clear his opposition to indenture, whites were sure that after the tour he would 'appreciate the political, economic, and administrative difficulties of the government...They did not believe he had come to light any fires.'<sup>15</sup>

Gandhi feared that South African Indians had 'false expectations that the visit would act as a charm, and that all their disabilities would disappear'. Gokhale promised that while India 'may have been indifferent in the past to the sufferings of her children, there will be more self-respect in the future in her dealings with her children'. But he echoed Schreiner's statement that he had not come 'to light a flame, because flames have a knack of burning those who light them'. He wanted Indians to remember that they were 'members of the Empire and must do nothing to jeopardise the real interests of the Empire'. Gokhale was accompanied by Gandhi and GH Runciman of the Department of Interior throughout the tour.

From Cape Town, Gokhale's entourage left for Kimberley. En route, they were met by a deputation of Indians at Wellington. At De Aar, they met Olive Schreiner and another deputation of Indians. A special train from Kimberley, with 200 Indians aboard, met Gokhale's train at Modder River. Following a reception by the mayor of Beaconsfield, Gokhale made his way to Kimberley, where the 'railway stations and environs were the scene of considerable excitement'. The area was packed with Indians, while carriages lined Florence Road from end to end. The engines of the train were 'decorated with flowers'. When the train steamed in just before 7:00 p.m., 'pink-turbaned Indians in great numbers wearing similarly tinted sashes lined a carpeted aisle in the station'. As Gokhale stepped out of his carriage, 'amid deafening cheers, [he] had a garland placed on his shoulders by Mr. V. Sammy'. Mayor W Gasson accompanied Gokhale to Sammy's residence in Upper Jones Street, followed by a long procession. Observers remarked that 'never in the history of Kimberley has a congregation of so many of His Majesty's Indian subjects been seen'. The official banquet was attended by the mayors of Beaconsfield and Kimberley, chairman Francis Oats and other members of the Board of De Beers, the Commissioner of Police, and other 'distinguished' white members of Kimberley society.<sup>16</sup>

Even while Gokhale was impressing audiences with his intelligence, articulate speeches, command of English and moderate approach, there were doubters. Senator GG Munnik

warned his 'fellow Colonists' not to be 'led away by Mr. Gokhale's admittedly charming personality or his outstanding eloquence and persuasive powers...We must, as a first duty, promote contentment among our own people, and the European community must be allowed to decide how best to do this.'<sup>17</sup>

Gokhale reached Johannesburg on the afternoon of 29 October. The railway station was brought to a close. Hours before his scheduled arrival 'little bands of Indians in gala attire could be seen hurrying towards Park Station, the approaches to which were thronged by a dense crowd, while the police lined the entire route'.<sup>18</sup> At the Eloff Street entrance, a large white arched passageway was erected, containing an inscription in Hindi that read 'Welcome'. Only well-wishers with specially issued tickets could enter the station to witness the presenting of addresses on the platform, which was decorated with an array of flags that covered the entire roof. 'The pink turbans of the Indians was [*sic*] very much in evidence, and against the rail fence bordering the platform was a phalanx of Indian women without headgear of any kind, their jet hair being brushed well back from their foreheads. Most of them were carrying children.'

When the train, 'decorated with twisted ropes of pink and white silk' and bursting with Indians 'wearing handkerchiefs of pink and white silk', arrived promptly at 4:00 p.m., it was met by a 'tremendous outburst of cheering'. An oriental carpet was laid on the platform, where 'the palpitating throng of clergy' gathered. Gokhale was described by a reporter as 'wearing an Indian headgear, and gold-rimmed glasses, a man of about fifty with a very self-contained manner'. The crowd flung rose petals and carnations at him. Johannesburg's mayor, Dowell Ellis, and the mayoress welcomed him.

A European Reception Committee, chaired by Patrick Duncan, organised dinner at the prestigious Carlton Hotel. Gokhale told the all-white guests that one could adopt a 'South African', 'Indian' or 'imperial' view of the clash between Indians and whites in South Africa. The 'extreme' South African view was that the country was for whites only, while the Indian view was that they had the right to equality in all parts of the Empire. 'Cultured' Indians grasped the complexities of the problem and took an 'imperial' view. They saw that the fate of the Empire and that of India were linked. India was an essential factor in the Empire's greatness, and all who were 'genuinely interested in the Empire had to ensure the wellbeing of all of its component parts'.

Gokhale separated the question of future Indian immigration from the treatment of Indians already living in South Africa. While he was trying to speak 'with utmost restraint', he wanted them to know that 'the very worst feelings are aroused' by 'tales that come from South Africa and are spread all over the land', that Indians 'are being treated in the most unsatisfactory manner. It is not only educated Indians who have this feeling, but the mass of the Indians as well, because it is from the masses that the Indians in this country are largely drawn...The feeling which unites India with the Empire will be seriously impaired.'

The Transvaal leg of his tour included visits to Klerksdorp, Krugersdorp and Potchefstroom. Everywhere, Gokhale was toasted by mayors and met by boisterous crowds.<sup>19</sup> He told one of his white audiences that he had 'never expected to carry back to India such happy recollections of his visit'. The possibility of being treated like other Indians in South

Africa 'had not been wholly absent from his mind', but he was glad to report that he 'had been received with the utmost courtesy by the Government and the people of the country'.<sup>20</sup>

The Chinese Association hosted a breakfast at the Grand National Hotel in Johannesburg on 1 November. Chairman Gonzalez, the Acting Chinese Consul-General in South Africa, said that the interests of Indians and Chinese were 'intimately linked', a sentiment echoed by Mr Quinn of the Cantonese Club, who led a prayer of hope that they had seen 'the last of the antagonism which had made the life of the Asiatics of South Africa full of misery'.<sup>21</sup>

The Transvaal Indian Women's Association hosted Gokhale at the Main Street School in Johannesburg. He regarded the way that Indian women had come 'forward courageously to take part in the passive resistance movement' as an 'object lesson to their sisters in India'. When Henry Polak, one of Gandhi's closest associates, had described the sacrifices of Indian women at a meeting in Bombay, 'hardly an eye was dry or a heart untouched by their sacrifice'.<sup>22</sup>

Gokhale was the consummate diplomat and, given his 'friends' high in the colonial administration, had his own class prejudices and antipathy to mass agitation. Negotiations with similarly qualified whites over tea was the way to conduct political life. Gokhale met General Jan Smuts privately for two hours and the latter left the impression that the £3 tax would be repealed. Claiming victory, Gokhale left the shores of South Africa.

But he had completely misread the situation. He underestimated the rabid racism and determination of whites to keep the 'coolie' in his place. Gokhale probably felt that his ability to present a sound case would ensure that rationality prevailed. He was wrong, but in his error he unconsciously let loose social forces that he would probably not have approved of. Gokhale galvanised Indians in a way previously unmatched. He addressed large mass meetings everywhere he went. The trip from Johannesburg to Durban from 6 November included stops at Newcastle, Dundee and Ladysmith, where large crowds met him. In Maritzburg, he was given a reception in the City Hall by the mayor on 7 November. He met the licensing officer the following day to discuss the grievances of Indians before leaving for Durban.

The mayor and chief magistrate of Durban were among those who met Gokhale at the railway station in Pine Street. A banquet was held in his honour at the City Hall. Reception committees were formed everywhere to plan his visit. Many of these were planned months in advance. The Durban Reception Committee, for example, had 96 members, with all 'sections' of the community represented. Gokhale was also presented with official addresses at every stop. These, too, represented the diversity of the Indian population as everyone clamoured to ensure representation.

The myriad of organisations attaching their names to the official address in Durban, for example, included the Indian Reception Committee, the Indian Women's Association, the Colonial Born Indian Association, the Mohammedan Committee, Brahman Mandal, Zoroastrian Anjumna, the Ottoman Cricket Club, Hindi Sabha, New Guelderland Indians, and Maharashtrians.<sup>23</sup> There was some form of organisation around the visit in every part of the province: Maritzburg, Isipingo, Tongaat, Verulam, Dundee, Newcastle and elsewhere. Gokhale's visit brought a host of organisations into a working relationship with each other. A special sports event at the Albert Park oval on the Victoria Embankment in Durban was attended by over 10 000 adults and

children. He met a deputation of traders and heard the grievances of £3 taxpayers at the Lord's cricket ground in Durban. Ten thousand indentured workers attended his address on the Mount Edgecombe Sugar Estate, about 20 miles north of Durban; a similarly large crowd of mainly market gardeners and indentured workers was present at an 'electrifying speech' in Isipingo, about 15 miles to the south of Durban; 3 000 Indians attended a meeting in central Durban. They came from all parts of Durban: Cato Manor, Springfield, Newlands and Overport. Gokhale also visited the Ohlange Institute in Inanda, a short distance from Gandhi's Phoenix Settlement north of Durban, where he met John Dube, who had studied at Oberlin College in the United States and established the industrial school along the lines of African American leader Booker T Washington's Tuskegee Institute.<sup>24</sup> Gokhale left Durban on 12 November.

In Pretoria, Gokhale met Botha, General Smuts and the Governor General before leaving South Africa. Gandhi went with him to Mozambique and Zanzibar, and was clear in his mind that the tax was to be repealed.<sup>25</sup> Significantly, too, when Gandhi said farewell to Gokhale at Dar-es-Salaam on 1 December 1912, he (Gandhi) wore Indian dress for the first time as an adult.<sup>26</sup>

Sugata Bose poignantly captures the historical significance of Gokhale's visit for the Indian struggle in South Africa:

It required a visit from an Indian leader of a very different outlook to breathe new life into Indian politics in South Africa. The arrival of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, one of the leading lights of the Indian National Congress, reenergized the mercantile and colonial-born elites worried about issues of immigration and movement across provincial boundaries, and infused new hope in indentured workers suffering under the three-pound poll tax. The event also brought Gandhi out of temporary semi-retirement...He had inadvertently served as a significant step towards mass Indian mobilization.<sup>27</sup>

With the Gokhale celebratory toast barely swallowed, Smuts announced that the tax was not going to be repealed.

## Marrying the £3 tax

If the Government intends to keep the promise [to Gokhale] they have to say so and there will be no struggle on that point. If they do not intend to keep it, Indians would have no right to exist side-by-side with a free and self-respecting community if they have not the decency and moral strength to suffer imprisonment or worse in order that a promise given to their distinguished countryman may be fulfilled and their poor helpless countrymen freed from a burden which ought never to have been imposed on them, and for which the sin must, I fear, be shared by the free Indian population of South Africa almost equally with the Europeans. MK GANDHI<sup>28</sup>

With indenture at an end, Indian elites could argue for enhanced rights for those who were resident in South Africa because whites could no longer claim that the country would be overwhelmed by Indians. In fact, the Natal Indian Congress sent a memorial to the Secretary of State for Colonies welcoming the Indian government's decision to end indenture.

Memorialists were 'sure that most of the troubles that British Indians throughout South Africa have had to undergo have been largely due to an artificial increase in the Indian population of South Africa, brought about by the introduction of this class of labour'.<sup>29</sup> In other words, with a reduction in the number of Indian workers in Natal, merchants expected that restrictions on the 'respectable class' would ease. Events, however, were overtaken by what was portrayed as a reneging on the 'agreement' between Gokhale and Smuts that the tax would be repealed.

On 25 January 1913, there was a report in the *Times of Natal* that the government would abolish the £3 tax. Gandhi, in *Indian Opinion*, welcomed the decision. The Natal Indian Congress addressed a memorandum to the Secretary of State for Colonies on 15 May 1913 on a range of issues, including the tax. Instead, the government introduced legislation exempting only women from the tax. Gandhi took centre stage.

In exhorting Indians to passive resistance, Gandhi wrote of the broken promise to Gokhale, and argued that it was the 'primary duty every Indian in South Africa owes to his country, to Mr. Gokhale and to the poor men who are victims of the gold hunger on the part of employers of indentured Indian labour'.<sup>30</sup> The tax was now an Empire issue 'because non-repeal was a breaking of faith with Gokhale and, therefore, an insult to India'.<sup>31</sup> If Gokhale's status as state guest had been meant to seduce him into a more 'sensitive' understanding of the issues and placate the growing anger of Indians, this was not to be. Gokhale, who thought he had resolved the immediate problems through his diplomacy, now became the banner under which resistance marched, employing methods of struggle which, in many cases, would have made him cringe in his 'British' suit.

On 28 September 1913, Gandhi wrote to the Secretary of Interior, 'I know what responsibility lies on my shoulders in advising such a momentous step, but I feel that it is not possible for me to refrain advising such a step.' What was this step? It 'consists in actively, persistently, and continuously asking those who are liable to pay the £3 to decline to do so and to suffer the penalties for non-payment'. More important, in 'asking those who are now serving their indenture, and who will be liable to pay the £3 tax upon the completion of their indenture, to strike work until the tax is withdrawn'.<sup>32</sup>

## An indigenous voice: 'dangerous doctrines'

A remarkable letter published in the *Natal Mercury* on 23 September 1913 brings to bear all the impending issues that gave impetus to rebellion. The writer, who signs off as 'D', was Doolarkhan, a schoolteacher who published several poems in *Indian Views* and *Indian Opinion*, a contributor to the *Natal Mercury* and editor of *Indian Views* in the 1920s. Doolarkhan was of indentured stock. His parents, Doolar Khan Madarun (8763) and Peerun, had arrived from Gorakhpur in September 1874 on the *Enmore*. After serving their indentures for B Clarence at Clare Estate, they took up market gardening and opened a small store in Isipingo. They had four sons.<sup>33</sup> The letter read:

We ask for very little, though we might legitimately ask for much more. It is because the European has political power that he is able to paternally exercise his exclusive

powers in turning the Indian into a milch cow, taxing him heavily directly and indirectly; and as if all those were not enough, subjecting him to unnecessary harassment and humiliations. I say this is intolerable. When we have turned deserts into smiling and fruitful fields, the European begins talking loudly about 'dangerous doctrines,' that the coolie will take the bread out of his children's mouth, that of all the scourges that have visited the land – the rinderpest, tick fever, and the plague – he has been more ruinous to the country than all combined; and the rest of the sorry lingo with which we are only too familiar.

We wish to know what is to be our political status in the Empire. Telling us that India is the pivot of the Empire won't satisfy us. That she is the brightest jewel in the British crown will neither. We would sooner prefer drowning ourselves in a spoon of water to remaining a lifeless, brilliant jewel. The only means that lies ready to our hands and is agreeable to our conscience for the attainment of our objects is that most effective instrument 'passive resistance' which has already proven its potency. It might interest our rulers to learn that the Indian revolutionary movement is going on apace; and its tide cannot be stemmed, as the whole underground movement is engineered from Europe by the gentlemen safely ensconced in Europe. What advice these gentlemen, you fancy, offer us? Something like this: 'You cowards, you deserve to be badly treated. Gokhale, that milksop, knows only how to lick the shoestrings of those who kick him. Our spiritual friends take our advice. Go to the root of the matter. If India were free you wouldn't be treated as helots. If little Japan can do much, think you we couldn't polish our cannons with as much, if not more, vigour?'

There are none, I believe, among us, who scout milk and water principles, and do not believe in moral suasion...At a wave of the Royal hand of our uncrowned king, Mr Gandhi, who 'clouts his own shoes and mends a hole in his coat himself,' thousands will don voluntarily public service uniforms...We have exercised patience and moderation for ten long, weary years, and the inevitable reaction has come. Our weak voices may not be heard or heeded: but when India begins fulminating and thundering, British statesmen will begin shivering in their shoes.<sup>34</sup>

The letter ranges over a number of pertinent issues: the poverty of the Empire argument; the importance of resistance in India; the validation of a form of passive resistance, not linked to moderation but rather to challenge. Above all, here we have a colonial-born voice filled with anger, revealing an acute political analysis that linked local struggles with global developments.

Gandhi, meanwhile, skilfully linked the £3 tax with other grievances faced by Indians, such as the assault on what constituted a legal marriage. The 1913 Searle Judgment had the effect of nullifying all marriages adjudicated according to Muslim and Hindu rites. Concerns were raised around the implications of the legal status of Indian women within a marriage, the legitimacy of children born of that union, and the right of ownership and inheritance. Other Indian demands included the removal of residential barriers in the Transvaal, the right to inter-



provincial migration, the right to enter the Orange Free State, just trade licensing laws, removal of restrictions on the entry of wives and children from India, and the right to domicile (return) after three years of absence from South Africa.<sup>35</sup>

The linking of the tax to the other grievances was a masterstroke, as it resonated with the many Indians forced into a cycle of indenture. As Tinker points out, Gandhi's taking up of 'the cudgels of the indentured' was not a 'speedy Damascus turn'. His earlier passive resistance campaign had shown him the 'need for mass action and mass resistance. As any astute politician, he had made moves to identify with the indentured, at least symbolically.'<sup>36</sup> Some among the colonial-born regarded Gandhi's embracing of the tax as hypocritical. KR Nayanah, an interpreter and founder member of the Natal Indian Patriotic Union, for example, complained:

When the Natal Indian Patriotic Union espoused for the abolition of the tax, Mr. Gandhi did not manifest his outrage by supporting our agitation in a substantial manner. Mr. Gandhi had no inclination whatsoever to help these poor people...Mr. Gandhi's dictum that Indians would 'have no right to exist side by side with a free and self-respecting community if they have no decency and moral strength to suffer' would have been a welcome pronouncement at the time when the agitation on this subject was in full swing, but now it falls flat on us, because we cannot believe that the same man who was like a 'stoic,' though not intriguing at the time, could be sincere in what he says now.<sup>37</sup>

## Mining resistance

The reporter in Ladysmith asked the strikers who their leader was and they replied that they had none. They were individually and collectively leaders. They insisted that they were striking against the tax, which they would have to pay when they completed their indentures. They were in sympathy with their 'brothers' already paying the tax.<sup>38</sup>

The government did not yield on any of the demands, and passive resistance was resumed on 12 September 1913. The decision split the Natal Indian Congress. While there had been differences within the Congress over several years, the formal break eventually came at a public meeting on 19 October 1913.<sup>39</sup> While the split has been portrayed as one between Muslim traders and Hindu and Christian colonial-born Indians, this is not entirely accurate. Gandhi's supporters included some of the richest traders in Natal, like Omar Haji Amod Jhaveri, Dawad Mahomed, AM Paruk, GH Miankhan, AG Timol and JAH Moosa. They formed the Natal Indian Association on 19 October 1914 at the home of Parsee Rustomjee, with Dawad Mahomed as president and Jhaveri as secretary. The Congress, on the other hand, was controlled by Muslim traders like MC Anglia and Dada Osman, supported by colonial-born Indians like JL Roberts, KR Nayanah and SR Pather. The break was more complex than that of trader and worker, Muslim and Hindu.

Gandhi's strategy involved passive resisters (*satyagrahis*) crossing illegally from the Transvaal and going to the coal-mining areas of Newcastle.<sup>40</sup>



Women and children passive resisters. BACK: Mrs M Tommy, Mrs K Murugasa Pillay, Miss Baikum Murugasa Pillay, Mrs PK Naidoo. FRONT: Mrs Perumal Naidoo, Mrs Chinsamy Pillay, Mrs Thumbi Naidoo, Mrs N Pillay, Mrs NS Pillay, Mrs Bhawani Dayal.

The head of the Johannesburg Benefit Society, Thambi Naidoo, was joined by HSL Polak and Hermann Kallenbach, as well as a number of women: Mrs Thumbi Naidoo, Mrs NS Pillay, Mrs RA Mudalingam, Mrs Bhawani Dayal, Miss Minachi K Chinsamy Pillay, Miss Baikum Murugasa Pillay, Mrs T Pillay, Mrs K Murugasa Pillay, Mrs A Peruamal Naidoo, Mrs N Pillay and Mrs PK Naidoo. They set off to Viljoen's Drift in the Orange Free State in clear defiance of the law.

Six of the women carried babies in arms as they had not been weaned. They were not arrested, so proceeded to Vereeniging to illegally hawk fruits and vegetables, but were again ignored. They made their way to northern Natal, where they were arrested for a few hours at Volksrust, before heading to Newcastle.<sup>41</sup> They thus found themselves in Natal by default but were to play a crucial role. Gandhi was to later reflect that 'if the women had been arrested in Vereeniging itself, the strike might not have taken place; at any rate it would never have reached the proportions it finally did'.<sup>42</sup> In Newcastle, the women asked Magistrate Lyle to imprison them as they had broken the law but, in the words of the *Natal Witness*, 'that canny officer refused'.<sup>43</sup>

The women linked up with Thambi Naidoo, AD Pillay and Albert Christopher. By the time they reached Newcastle, one of the women had lost her baby. Christopher told a reporter that

'a mother who lost her child on the march from natural causes bore her irreparable loss most bravely, simply remarking: "let the dead past bury its own dead, the living to work for the living," and resumed her journey with the marchers'.<sup>44</sup> The women stayed at the home of Dossen Lazarus. His wife, Mrs SD Lazarus, and her sister, Miss Thomas, took care of the *satyagrahis*. The house became a *dharmshala* (in North India the noun *dharmshala* means 'free shelter') for *satyagrahis*. Food was cooked for hundreds of indentured labourers. The Lazaruses were the parents of Arthur Dawson Lazarus, the first Indian to be awarded the Carnegie Fellowship in 1937 to undertake postgraduate studies at Yale University. He made his mark as a distinguished educationist.

The women went from mine to mine to speak to workers and their families. They spoke to the wives of miners, focusing in particular on the tax. Several mass meetings were held. At Farleigh Colliery, for example, Mrs T Naidoo, Mrs PK Naidoo and Mrs T Pillay addressed the meeting on the reasons for the strike and appealed to workers to participate until the tax was repealed. Gandhi later wrote that the 'mere presence of these women was like a lighted matchstick to dry fuel. Women who had never before slept except on soft beds and had seldom so much as opened their mouths, now delivered public speeches among the indentured labourers. The latter were roused and...by the time I reached there, Indians in two coal mines had already stopped work.'<sup>45</sup> The women also recruited Indian Railway employees.<sup>46</sup> Millie Graham Polak noted that 'the Transvaal women travelled down the line, taking in the mines on their way, holding meetings and calling upon the men to refuse to work and to die as slaves, and at the call of these women, thousands laid down their lives and went on strike'.<sup>47</sup>

Any evaluation of the strike in northern Natal must take into account the conditions faced by coal miners. The coal-mining industry was faced with falling prices and profits from 1903 onwards due to the depression in Natal and labour competition from mines in the Transvaal. There was pressure to minimise production costs. From 1903 to 1909, Indians represented an average of 37.3 per cent of the labour force in mines. African wages were higher and mine owners would have employed more Indians were it not for their reluctance to engage in this gruelling work. From 1910 to 1913, the Indian labour force declined from 4 939 to 3 783, while the number of Africans increased from 5 755 to 6 755. Coal miners also suffered very high incidences of occupationally and environmentally related bronchial diseases, like phthisis and pulmonary tuberculosis.<sup>48</sup>

AM Ephraim, an Indian Christian schoolteacher, organised a mass meeting at St Oswald's School in Newcastle on Monday evening, 13 October 1913. The meeting, chaired by Ismail Seedat, lasted three hours. Speakers included Gandhi, Thambi Naidoo and Bhawani Dayal, who spoke in English, Tamil and Hindi respectively. Women speakers included Mrs C Pillay, Mrs Moorgan, Mrs T Naidoo and Mrs PK Naidoo, 'each of whom openly confessed that they had left their homes and children for the sake of their fellow countrymen and would not return till the struggle was finally over'. The meeting ended with 'loud and continued cheers for the brave sons of the Motherland'.<sup>49</sup> Gandhi and the Passive Resistance Committee made sure that strikers would not starve, sending rice, dhol and other items by rail to northern Natal.<sup>50</sup>

As one group of mine workers emerged from underground after listening to the exhortations of *satyagrahis*, others spontaneously joined the mass movement. Coal miners, led by about 20 'agitators', went on strike at Fairleigh and Ballengeich on 15 October. Magistrate Lyle 'rushed' to Fairleigh and ordered the men to return, but they refused. The 'ringleader' was identified as Bhandoo. Strikers who appeared in court included 11 women. PK Naidoo, Bhawani Dayal and Narryn were charged with 'inciting' workers. Miners were followed by Corporation workers, whose objective was to 'disorganise public services'. Waiters went on strike on Friday 19 October 1913. This put the hotels in an 'awkward' position because Prime Minister General Botha was visiting the area.<sup>51</sup>

Borough police arrested 'ringleaders' on the 'charge of being idle, disorderly, and suspicious persons, which the prosecution had little trouble in proving'. Judge RD Lyle 'administered a severe castigation to the defendants for bringing untold misery on their more ignorant compatriots, sentenced them to pay a fine of five pounds or, in default, to go to jail for three months with hard labour'.<sup>52</sup> Prisoners were charged under the Masters and Servants Act for refusing duty at mines and hotels. This had no effect. On 18 October, the Attorney-General reported that Indians were demanding repeal of the tax, free movement and recognition of marriages: 'Almost all free Indians on strike but movement spreading amongst indentured men. Attitude is to force government by passive resistance. They are courting resistance. A Jew Kallenbach passed through Newcastle yesterday [17 October] from Durban and appears to be agitating on their behalf.'<sup>53</sup>

The Minister of Justice queried from the Attorney-General, Natal, on 20 October: 'Gandhi interfering with Indian labour. Do laws provide means for putting stop to his action?' The Attorney-General wired magistrates on 21 October: 'Please inform me whether Gandhi has contravened any law during the last few days. Justice Minister in Pretoria anxious to know.' The Attorney-General advised the Ministry on 22 October that none of the magistrates provided information beyond what was in the newspaper: 'impossible therefore to take action against Gandhi at present. According to newspaper reports of meeting at Durban Gandhi is not being supported now but if prosecuted might have disastrous effect of turning Indian opinion and increasing his support.'<sup>54</sup>

The magistrate of Newcastle reported to the Attorney-General on 22 October that Gandhi held a meeting in the town and from there proceeded to Dannhauser, where he addressed Indians on the same day. 'No evidence of any crime committed by him.'<sup>55</sup> Individual Indian workers of the Natal Government Railways and Fairleigh Colliery had been arrested for trespassing, vagrancy and neglect of duty. 'No violence so far. Deputy-Protector is here making enquiries and he anticipates that strikers will return to work.' By 23 October 1913, 1 700 workers were on strike at nine mines – Ballengeich, Fairleigh, Durban Navigation, Hattingspruit, Ramsey, St George's, Newcastle, Cambrian and Glencoe<sup>56</sup> – and by the end of October, around 4 000 miners were on strike.<sup>57</sup> The Minister of Justice instructed the Attorney-General not to act with haste but to investigate the 'cause and possible attitude the Indians wish to take' in view of the 'possible far reaching effect of present movement'.<sup>58</sup>

Gandhi did not envisage that miners would join in such numbers. Deputy Protector

Dunning met with him on 22 October and reported that 'further strike not intended at present. It is his wish to see things normal again as far as I could gather.'<sup>59</sup> Gandhi told Dunning on Wednesday 23 October that 'he hoped to stop the strike shortly if promise is made to cancel the three-pound tax'.<sup>60</sup> On 24 October, according to Dunning, Gandhi 'accepted offer of batches of Indians from Newcastle to Hattingspruit totalling two thousand men to come to Newcastle and be headed by him to court arrest, failing which to proceed to Volksrust and cross border and be arrested'. The 'offer from Indians' did not suit the Attorney-General, who wanted to know from the magistrate in Newcastle whether Gandhi 'was doing or saying anything' for which he could be prosecuted.<sup>61</sup>

Gandhi reassured mine owners on 25 October that the strike was not against working conditions on mines: 'We had no quarrel with the mine-owners. The object was not to hurt them but to invite suffering on ourselves.'<sup>62</sup> For employers, the strike was of concern for two reasons. First, Indians performed the more skilled jobs, attending to coal-cutters and packing of belts which required, according to a *Natal Witness* report, 'more intelligence than is usually possessed by the average native'. Also of concern was whether Gandhi would try to recruit African workers to join the strike. Employers sent a telegram to the government on 24 October 1913 for 'adequate police reinforcements'.<sup>63</sup> Asked whether the strike was off, Gandhi told employers that miners in Dannhauser, Newcastle and Dundee would 'court arrest and imprisonment in Natal, or, failing that, cross the border to the Transvaal and be arrested there'. He assured employers that it was not his intention to ask Africans to join as the main grievance was the tax. Miners would resume work as soon as the tax was repealed even though passive resistance would continue against other grievances. He emphasised that there was no intimidation; it was 'voluntary and spontaneous. The men only needed the situation to be placed before them to strike.'<sup>64</sup> Mine owners suggested that if workers returned to work, they would write to the government to repeal the tax. Gandhi refused: 'This, the *satyagrahis* could not agree to.'<sup>65</sup>

The government, in any event, would not have agreed to repeal the tax. The Minister of Justice explained to the magistrate in Ladysmith on 28 October 1913 that after Gokhale's departure, the government consulted with Natal members of Parliament, who 'objected to repeal of tax other than as affecting women and children'. A repeal of the tax while the strike was on 'would be a public disaster with consequences of which none can foresee'. The Justice Ministry added that the tax had not been on Gandhi's original demands but only added 'to influence Natal Indians'.<sup>66</sup> The government's reply was translated into Tamil and distributed on the coal mines.

Sergeant W Mann of the South African Mounted Rifles, Newcastle, spoke to strikers and reported to the Attorney-General on 25 October that the 'grievance appears to be that certain promises were made by the government to Mr. Gokhale in regard to the repealing of the Annual Licence of £3'. Striking workers told Mann that the situation was especially difficult for women, and were resolute that free Indians and their descendants should be exempt from the tax. Aside from the mines, railway workers were on strike in Newcastle and Dannhauser. Three 'agitators' at the Railway Barracks were arrested but freed because 'counselling to strike' was not an offence under the law. They were prosecuted for 'trespassing' on Railway premises and fined £2 each.<sup>67</sup>



From late October 1913, thousands of marchers walked from Newcastle to Volksrust, illegally crossing the border from Natal to the Transvaal, courting arrest and imprisonment.

The authorities, too, were prepared for any eventuality. On 6 October, the Justice Ministry authorised magistrates in northern Natal to 'swear in sufficient number of European employees on collieries as special constables...in order to preserve order in connection with the Indian strike'.<sup>68</sup> Special constables were appointed, as it was the duty 'of all citizens to maintain public order at whatever cost and to take their part in the suppression of disturbances'.<sup>69</sup> They were to be armed.

Gandhi and CR Naidoo addressed a mass meeting of 3 000 men, women and children at Hattingspruit at 11:30 a.m. on 28 October. They 'patiently and eagerly listened to the speeches and sincerely promised to carry out the strike to the bitter end', that is, until the tax was repealed. At 12:30 p.m. they spoke to 8 000, 'irrespective of caste and sex, from Burnside, White Gates, and other places congregated on the Hindu Temple Ground' in Dundee. Thambi Naidoo joined them. The crowd agreed that 'jail was preferable to the tax and indenture'.<sup>70</sup> Large numbers contributed financially to the families of resisters. At Glencoe, a meeting was held on 29 October. Two of the 'chief agitators', SB Medh and Pragji Desai, were arrested, the latter for 'threatening the manager at Durban Navigation Colliery to issue full weeks rations'. Thambi Naidoo addressed a meeting at Ballengeich, following which 'a large number of Indians left for Newcastle'. They were estimated to number 300.<sup>71</sup> The Attorney-General was careful not to arrest Gandhi without clear evidence. The best he had was Gandhi's circular advising indentured Indians to court imprisonment until the government fulfilled its promise to repeal the tax, and calling on (white) employers to insist on the repeal. This was insufficient to prosecute Gandhi.<sup>72</sup>

After what the *Natal Advertiser* described as the 'frothy oratory of the Indian agitators',<sup>73</sup> Gandhi headed a march of 200 from Newcastle to Volksrust at 3:00 p.m. on 29 October 1913.

Over the next few days, Thambi Naidoo led a second column of 300 workers and their families, while Albert Christopher followed with a group of around 250. Gandhi wanted to force Smuts' hand by crossing illegally into the Transvaal, so courting arrest and imprisonment. Eventually, 3 000 marchers moved with determination across the expanse of 35 miles. The decision to march was the only practical option:

It was not possible to keep thousands of Indians permanently in Newcastle. The Mayor became apprehensive. The normal population of Newcastle is about three thousand. An additional ten thousand could not be accommodated in such a town. Labourers stopped work in other mines also. And so the question arose: what should be done? The intention behind the strike was to court imprisonment. The Government could have arrested the workers if it had so wished, but there were not enough prisons to house those thousands. Hence, they had not so far touched the strikers. The one simple way left to us now was to cross the Transvaal border and get arrested. We thought that the congestion in Newcastle would thereby be relieved and the strikers could also be put to the test. In Newcastle, the agents of the mine owners were trying to lure away the workers. Not a single person had yielded; even so, it was the duty of the Council of Action to keep them away from all temptation.<sup>74</sup>

For Gandhi, the strikers did not come out 'as indentured labourers, but as servants of India. They were taking part in a religious war...The company walked along, raising cries of "Victory to Dwarkanath", "Victory to Ramachandra", and "Vande Mataram" [Hail to the Mother(land)]!'<sup>75</sup> These were significant in what they conveyed. Dwarkanath Tagore (1794–1846) was from the great Tagore family, which included Rabindranath Tagore and was seen as central to the Bengal Renaissance. Ramachandra was a Hindu god considered to be the seventh incarnation of Vishnu, who appeared at the end of the Treta Yuga (Second Age) to destroy demons infesting the earth. 'Vande Mataram' was the national song of India composed by Bankim Chatterjee in 1876, in response to the British making the singing of 'God Save the Queen' mandatory in 1870. The song became the national cry for freedom from British oppression and many Indian freedom fighters were jailed for singing it. The third stanza from 'Vande Mataram' speaks volumes about its 'passive' intention:

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands  
When swords flash out in seventy million hands  
And seventy million voices roar  
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?  
With many strengths who art mighty and stored,  
To thee I call Mother and Lord!  
Thou who saves, arise and save!  
To her I cry who ever her foe drove  
Back from plain and sea  
And shook herself free.<sup>76</sup>

## The intrigues of Dasrath

A desperate prosecutor in Newcastle sought the advice of the Attorney-General as to whether Gandhi and his associates could be prosecuted for 'inducing' Indians to leave their places of employment. The latter replied on 31 October 1913 that this could be done 'but clear evidence should be first obtained establishing the contravention and should be on affidavit'.<sup>77</sup> The authorities infiltrated the movement to get the necessary 'proofs'. Deputy Protector Dunning informed the Attorney-General that Budhoo Dasrath (64559), employed at Glencoe Junction, was 'an important witness re. Indian strike movement. Police anxious he should be moved immediately as they fear intimidation otherwise. Will you please arrange?'.<sup>78</sup> Dasrath provided the following intelligence: 'I was on strike. I went to Railway carriage to speak to Gandhi about food. Gandhi replied, "All those who go to Volksrust will be fed." Station master saw me speak to Gandhi but could not have understood as we spoke in Hindustani.' Dasrath was moved from Glencoe to Maritzburg on 10 November to be under the protection of the magistrate. John Ramsamy, another infiltrator, stated on 31 October: 'I was at meeting. Saw Mohideen Sahib, and Narrainsamy. Then Gandhi said all Indians should go to Newcastle and Volksrust. Promised food. Mohideen Sahib is indentured at Ballengeich'.<sup>79</sup>

Subbiah (53597) testified on 31 October that Gandhi told strikers to go to Newcastle and then to Volksrust. Another of Dunning's infiltrators, Burmode, informed him on 30 October that marchers 'bought number of sheep and making biltong. Rumour and talk, Gokhale expected and all would enter the Transvaal with him. Inadvisable to allow advance of Indians from any parts down country'.<sup>80</sup> Dunning followed this with a cable to the Attorney-General of Natal and the Ministry of Justice in Pretoria stating that Indians 'still proceeding, it is said, under K. Naidoo, a farm owner in the Transvaal. Many Indians will give information re. agitators and ringleaders but, when asked to make sworn declarations, refuse through fear of consequences in connection with their workmates. Many other agitators ready to lead Indians to Tolstoy [a farm in the Transvaal]'.<sup>81</sup>

Strikers marched to Charlestown. En route, police were advised by the Attorney-General not to 'arrest or charge him [Gandhi] unless they have strong case and then only after referring to me'. Acting on an appeal from the Natal Coal Owners' Association that they were not able to 'exercise any supervision over agitators not on property belonging to various collieries,' the Attorney-General issued instructions to police on 4 November urging 'prompt steps' for the arrest of 'agitators'. The marchers reached Charlestown on 3 November. According to one report, the town 'represented an Indian bazaar'.<sup>82</sup>

Many arrived on foot, while women came mostly by train. These were put up wherever there was space in the houses of Indian merchants of Charlestown...Our food was cooked in the mosque premises. The fire had to remain lit all the twenty-four hours. The cooks came from among the strikers. During the final days, four to five thousand persons were being fed. In the morning, the meal consisted of mealie pap with sugar and some bread. In the evening they had rice, *dal* and vegetables. Most people in South



Africa eat thrice a day. The indentured labourers always have three meals, but during the struggle they remained content with only two. They like to have small delicacies with their meals, but these, too, they gave up at this time.<sup>83</sup>

From Charlestown, they headed to Volksrust to cross illegally into the Transvaal and proceed to Tolstoy Farm. Gandhi informed Smuts that if the tax was repealed, the workers would return to work. Smuts was 'in no mood' to compromise. He was, in Gandhi's words, 'misled by informants who assured [him] that the strikers would soon be exhausted. The Government had a notice printed in all languages and distributed among the strikers.'<sup>84</sup> Deputy Protector Dunning reported on 5 November that 'Indians are footsore and worn out'.<sup>85</sup> It was clear that Gandhi would be crossing the border the following day. The Attorney-General instructed the police chief in Charlestown to 'keep strict observation on movement and especially on what Gandhi says and does, also any other ringleaders. Am sending Detective [Elton] up tomorrow to cooperate with police.'<sup>86</sup> Dunning was a bit more dramatic. He described strikers as 'boisterous and inclined to defy police'. He also described that 'last batch of Indian women from Transvaal as agitators using vilest abuse in English about the streets [of Newcastle]'. Around 150 of the 600 strikers from Burnside were arrested and sent to Dundee. The remainder had 'got away' to cross the border with Gandhi. However, the indentured men had left their wives, 'also indentured, behind. This will of course draw the men back.' According to Dunning, Gandhi was charged in Charlestown but paid bail of £50 and was remanded until 14 November. Dunning reported that Gandhi 'left by motor for advance column...Nothing short of arrest of all agitators will relieve the position.'<sup>87</sup>

On 6 November 1913 the marchers left Charlestown between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. Around 2 000 men, 127 women and 57 children crossed the border at approximately 11:45 a.m. Conditions were difficult, Gandhi recalling that 'some of the women were thoroughly exhausted by the march. They had dared to carry their children in their arms, but it was impossible for them to proceed further' at Palm Ford, eight miles from Volksrust.<sup>88</sup> Exhausted women stayed with Indian families in Charlestown until the end of the march. The crossing of the Natal border into the Transvaal was an epic moment in South African history. Mounted police massed to block the way. Without any apparent coordination, miners, women with children in their arms, and old men weakened by a meagre diet were seized by a collective effort. They 'rushed past the startled police' and cheered themselves on. The mounted police took a while to get ahead of the march and watched as the 'criminals' casually sat down on the Standerton Road and shared their limited rations.<sup>89</sup> The *Sunday Post* described the marchers thus:

To the eye, they appear most meagre – indeed, emaciated; their legs are mere sticks, but the way they are marching on the starvation rations provided shows them to be particularly hardy, as indeed does the kind of work they performed in the collieries.<sup>90</sup>

The Attorney-General sent Detective AE Elton and Inspector Waller to northern Natal on 7 November to gather 'evidence against Gandhi'. They visited Dundee, Newcastle, Charlestown and Volksrust. They wanted to arrest Gandhi, but were unable to get definite information on

oath as to any offence committed. Deputy Protector Manning reported: 'Destination of Gandhi and crowd...Tolstoy farm owned by Kallenbach. Kallenbach is in charge of Charlestown women and children with K. Naidoo, a farm owner in the Transvaal. At Newcastle Thambi Naidoo and others are in charge. Thousands more said to be coming from lower down.'<sup>91</sup> The Natal Coal Owners' Association urged magistrates to arrest strikers. The Attorney-General replied that they should 'themselves represent their views to government as I cannot interfere in matter of prosecution in Transvaal'.<sup>92</sup> Deputy Protector Dunning also urged that 'if two or more of the chief leaders are arrested it may break the strike'.<sup>93</sup>

The state eventually responded with arrests, including that of Gandhi, while the strikers were bulldozed back to the mines. On 7 November, the government issued instructions to 'arrest Gandhi and a few ringleaders' for unlawfully assisting prohibited persons to enter the Transvaal. A warrant for Gandhi's arrest was issued by the Dundee magistrate on 8 November. Detectives Elton and Waller took additional depositions in Charlestown against Gandhi. SM Curtis of the South African Mounted Rifles in Dundee told Elton that when he (Curtis) asked Gandhi whether he was aware that among the marchers were indentured workers, Gandhi replied: 'That may or may not be so. In either case they are all going over the border with me on Thursday.' For Elton, 'This adds considerably to the case against Gandhi.' They had already collected testimonies in Dundee, Glencoe and Hattingspruit from the likes of Dasrath, Bermode, Ramsamy and Subbiah. Of concern to Elton, Waller and whites in general was 'the persistent rumour that four or five thousand [Indians] are soon coming up from the coast'.<sup>94</sup>

On 8 November, Gandhi was arrested with five 'ringleaders'. Dunning reported that 'the whole crowd now in court grounds. Say they cannot proceed without their leader.'<sup>95</sup> Gandhi was released on bail of £50 and left with his column of marchers. Gandhi was arrested again on 10 November at Balfour and sentenced to nine months in jail with hard labour. Henry Polak and Hermann Kallenbach were also found guilty.<sup>96</sup> Women arrested during the crossing did not escape imprisonment. Given the option of imprisonment or a fine of £5, they chose imprisonment and were released from prison at the end of January. Two gave birth shortly after being released, while another died.<sup>97</sup>

The name of the dead woman, in reality no more than a girl, was Valliamma Munusamy Mudaliar, barely 15 years old. On 22 December 1913, almost two months after setting out from Tolstoy Farm, Valliamma re-entered the Transvaal. Along with her mother and the other women, she was arrested at Volksrust and sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour. Extremely ill on her arrest, her condition deteriorated further in prison. Such was her tenacity that when prison authorities offered to release her on medical grounds, she refused. She was only released on 11 February 1914, after Gandhi and Smuts had reached a provisional agreement. Warrants of arrest were issued for striking workers. Most had been arrested for neglect of duty and were remanded in Newcastle. When they failed to appear in court on 7 November, magistrates issued warrants to start effecting arrests. Coal miners were stopped at Balfour on 10 November and returned to northern Natal by train over the next fortnight. The government ordered that mines be considered 'branches' of the Newcastle prison and mine foremen as 'prison wardens'. Strikers were forced underground at the point of a gun and lashings of the whip.

## 'Fenced in the same way as the Bambata natives'

All the strikers were put into four special trains and taken to mines in Dundee and Newcastle. They were subjected to much cruelty and they suffered terribly. But they had come forward to suffer. They were their own leaders. They had to demonstrate their strength, left as they were without any leaders, so-called; and they did so. How well they did is known to all the world...

MK GANDHI<sup>98</sup>

On 11 November, arrested miners were taken to Ballengeich. They assembled outside the office of the mine manager, Hutt, who asked those who were prepared to work to move to one side. No one moved. James Cochran, an engineer at the mine, testified during the subsequent enquiry that 'two women were amongst them, and excited them, and got them to begin pushing back the *kaffir* police'.<sup>99</sup> The miners said that they would rather go to prison. Hutt showed them some wire, poles and five bags of rice, and told them that he was constructing a prison. They were to be jailed for six months and would spend this time working in the mines.

The miners, however, wanted to be imprisoned in Newcastle and started to walk in that direction. This sparked a confrontation between workers and management. Hutt was accompanied by Secretary Harrison; compound manager Edward Roberts; white and African miners; as well as Cunningham, the local butcher, and Indian policeman Puckree Pillay, who were on horseback. One of the miners threw a bone which hit the foot of an African policeman, Mtshali, while another hit Hutt with a stick. The police and managers 'rushed in and went for the Indians with our *sjamboks* and sticks. The Indians also fought with us, and in the end we overpowered them and drove them back to the compound where we made them sit down and took away their sticks. Those who refused to give up their sticks we gave a cut or two until they gave them up. Seven men and one woman were locked in a room by the manager who picked them out.'

Dr JA Nola was witness to the events of 11 November. He told the enquiry that 'the police tried to keep them back by pushing them with their hands. One woman was evidently urging them [Indians] on, and they raised their sticks and rushed towards the police'. Who this woman was is a mystery. Indian workers gave a different story. Sayed Basha told the magistrate in Newcastle on 6 December 1913:

I am in the employ of Ballengeich Colliery. I went away with the strikers to the Transvaal and was brought back to Hattingspruit and then taken back to the Ballengeich Colliery. This was on Tuesday about four weeks ago. On arrival at the mine, the manager and Compound Manager came and asked us if we would go back to work. We said we would not go to work then, but if he gave us rations we would go to work the next day. They then left and went away. Posts and wire were then brought up by Natives and Europeans. We asked what this was for and we were told we were to be fenced in the same as the Bambata Natives were fenced in, and be brought to work in the morning and locked up in it in the evening. We told the manager and Compound Manager that we were not going to be locked up there, and all got up and started to walk off. Then the Manager

and Compound Manager and Natives and Europeans at the mine got in front of us with sticks and *sjamboks*, and the Manager said strike, strike, strike. Then we were struck because we would not turn back and when we saw two or three men fall we turned and ran back. Two or three shots were fired in the air. We then sat near the office at the Native Compound. The White men came up and told us to take our hats off and they took away all the sticks we had with us. After this the Manager, Compound Managers and a Native Induna started to strike all the men with *sjamboks* and sticks on the head and allowed no one to speak. After they had struck all the men, the Manager, Compound Manager, Cunningham, the Engineer, Sibiya and men who work at the Jew's butcher shop, stood. The Compound Manager caught me by the right arm and manager struck me with a *sjambok* on the same side whilst he held my right arm. Then I was handed over to the Engineer who had a short stick and struck me two blows or three blows on my head. Then he handed me over to the man who works at the Butcher's shop and he kicked me on the buttocks and slapped my head. He handed me over to Sibiya who stuck me on the head with a *sjambok* and caught me by the shirt collar and pushed me into the police room and locked me in. I was put into a room with another five men. I saw wounds on Abdool and Pamutal. Three men, two of whom were Govinden and Yuseph, were knocked to the ground. We were brought to the Court next day.<sup>100</sup>

Ritchie, manager of the compound, picked out eight 'ringleaders': Kaka, Sayed Basha, Babhoo, Abdool, Saiboo, Manickum, Mahomed Nabbi and Ramantak. Targeting 'ringleaders' was official policy. The Attorney-General instructed public prosecutors throughout Natal that 'in the event of any Indian strikers giving trouble in your district will you please take steps to ascertain who the ringleaders are and have them arrested for any offence which may be committed'.<sup>101</sup>

'Ringleaders' claimed they were flogged in front of other Indians with a stick, while Sibiya hit them with bare fists. The watching whites and Africans taunted them for following Gandhi as they were locked in Hutt's office. To rub salt into their wounds, the men had to assist in building their prison! While they were doing so, Giles, the Newcastle magistrate, visited and warned them through an interpreter that they would be imprisoned for six months for leaving the mine without authority and that he had authorised the manager to flog them to maintain control. Giles explained that as a result of the melee, they were not regarded as passive resisters but as rioters. Each prisoner was given a can of raw rice, but had to go hungry in the absence of cooking facilities. Over the next two days, 12 and 13 November, miners were taken to Newcastle where Giles formally sentenced them and they returned to the mine prison. Punishment ranged from lashes and fines of £5, to the option of a fine or imprisonment for either three or six months. Ballengeich Colliery was declared a branch prison and Warder Stonebanks placed in charge.

Dr Charles Cooper, district surgeon of Newcastle, visited the 'outprison' at Ballengeich Colliery, and inspected 134 prisoners on 14 November 1913. He verified the injuries that many of the workers complained of. Manickum had bruises on the left side of his back, a cut over his left eye and a scalp wound on the right side. Sayed Basha had bruises on his back caused by a *sjambok* and a bruised left thumb. Abdool had an abrasion across his face, a swollen left jaw, and

bruises on the left side of his back. Ramantak had bruises across his back and in the left and right scapular regions. Nabbi had bruises on his back left scapular and lash marks. Jay Mangal Sing had bruises across his back. They were taken to Newcastle under police escort, jailed for seven days' hard labour and made to serve their term without blankets.

Madhar Saib (150686) was a typical 'ringleader'. He testified to Deputy Protector Dunning on 19 November 1913:

I have been nearly two and half years on this mine. I left the mine on the 27th October with all the others and returned on Tuesday (11th instant) eight days ago. On Wednesday I did not go to work and on Thursday morning the mine captain Robert Johnston came to my room in the barracks with a Kaffir policeman. He called out and I went, whereupon he gave me strokes with a *sjambok* on the posterior, the Kaffir policeman holding me by one of my hands. He then told me to go to work and when I got behind my block of barracks he tripped me with his foot and I fell down, whereupon he placed his foot on my throat and gave me another stroke which caught me on the penis. When I urine it hurts me. This assault took place at 6:00 a.m. At 8:00 a.m. when in the mine captain's kitchen, the manager gave me cuts on the posterior with a cane.

Johnston and Isikop, the African policeman, denied assaulting Saib. They were supported by Benjam Lowe, a warder from the Transvaal seconded to South African Colliery in Glencoe during the unrest. Saib, according to their version, did not report to work. At 6:00 a.m. Isikop and Johnston went to check on him as all the other men had reported for duty. Isikop did not know Saib by name, but was aware that 'he is Mussulman'. Saib's door was locked. They had seen a woman leave the room, and retrieved the key from her. Johnston 'burst the door open' and Isikop found Saib hiding in a box. He was handed over to another African, Charly, who forcibly took him to work. Johnston denied deliberately assaulting him but 'took him by the neck and pushed him along to his work. He tripped over a stone and fell.' Saib was identified as a 'ringleader'. Accused of 'intimidating Indians on the mine', he was returned to India in January 1914, though he had over two years left on his contract.

If Gokhale and the like expected sympathy from officials of 'their' Empire, they were to be disappointed. Lord Gladstone from the Colonial Office published telegrams on 19 and 20 November in response to a complaint from Dossen Lazarus, chairman of the Newcastle Indian Passive Resistance Committee, regarding the use of mine compounds as prisons. Gladstone ruled that mines could be used as prisons, although prison officials could use force for self-defence only, and not to coerce prisoners to work.<sup>102</sup>

The severity of the response was in part motivated by rumours that Africans would join in the strike. Tension was high because African miners at Ballengeich took advantage of the strike to demand an increase in wages from £3 to £4.<sup>103</sup> According to Swan:

These rumours were submitted to Pretoria...Indians and Africans had not cooperated politically before, but, with the Zulu rebellion only seven years past, it is reasonable to suppose that there was some apprehension about the possibility of Africans being drawn into another-possibly-violent resistance.<sup>104</sup>

This was why General Smuts, who was Minister of Defence, provided armed protection for every colliery, reinforcements were brought in for local South African Mounted Riflemen, and special constables were enrolled from white colliery staff.<sup>105</sup>

Prisoners were given hard labour, which meant working in the mines without pay. On Saturday 15 November, Indians were called out of their rooms at 6:00 a.m. and, at the point of being whipped by the police and manager, forced into the cage and sent underground. They remained there until 1:00 p.m. The men were forced underground to work daily. Lellie Chennie summed up their feelings when testifying under oath before Lyle: 'All the men are simply terrorised by daily threats or further floggings.'<sup>106</sup> Hutt denied these charges. He said that the men had gone underground voluntarily.

The use of force was deliberate. Magistrate Lyle informed the Attorney-General on 19 November 1913 that the 'position in Ladysmith [was] much improved by reason of show of force on part of police...Also of opinion that summary trials have greater moral effect.'<sup>107</sup> This was a reaction to instructions from the Attorney-General not to prosecute cases until papers had been submitted to him. The chief magistrate of Durban wrote to him on 18 November that delays would 'seriously hamper us in dealing with this strike and particularly in cases of intimidation and ask that you will see your way to relax these instructions. Many cases of intimidation are going on and it is [of] utmost importance to make a lesson.'<sup>108</sup>

## The 'prison escape' of Peter Jackson

When a group of 26 Indians employed on George's Colliery appeared before the Dundee magistrate, JW Cross, on 6 November 1913, charged with absence from work, he fined five 'ringleaders' £5 each and spoke at length to the others about the futility of the strike. They refused to return to work until the tax was repealed. 'You may do what you like,' they told Cross, 'we have not had anything to eat for the past three days, and we can only die once.' A frustrated Cross sentenced them to seven days' imprisonment with hard labour. When the sentence was pronounced, a chorus of prisoners shouted, 'What's the use of seven days? Why don't you give us five or six months?'<sup>109</sup>

The repression of the strike continued unabated. On 14 November, 73 passive resisters were jailed in Ladysmith. There were over 200 Indians in a prison built to accommodate 50. On 15 November, the 'hungry and tired collection of Indians' appeared in court, where they were greeted by 'wives and families, all of whom wore gaily coloured dresses as if attending a festival. There was considerable chatter and occasional cheers.' Twenty-three strikers were fined 30 shillings or imprisonment of one month each. All opted for the latter. 'The women,' according to one report, 'frantically held their husbands and had to be removed by the police.'

Another 48 strikers, who were indentured to the South African Railways, were charged with desertion. They too chose imprisonment. When they were being put into jail, around 50 women 'rushed into the small escort and endeavoured to rescue their men. Warders Delvin and Manning were held by their throats, and the women commenced to throw rocks at the gates and the escort.' The behaviour of the male prisoners was described as 'somewhat praiseworthy in face of determined demonstration'.<sup>110</sup>

Strikers did not accept their status of 'passive victims' and showed the capacity to make tactical decisions. On 17 November, the magistrate of Ladysmith wrote to the Attorney-General that Indians in 'large force in Ladysmith have been very disorderly and threatening serious damage. Bloodshed only just averted. Agreed to disband if charge of inciting to leave Natal against one Indian Peter Jackson is withdrawn.' The authorities were forced to relent. Sergeant GL Graham advised the Attorney-General that 1 300 Indians at Elandslaagte had returned to work on the undertaking that the charge against Jackson would be withdrawn. 'If the charge is brought on now it will most likely lead to bloodshed.'<sup>111</sup> Despite protests from local whites that Jackson should be rearrested, the Attorney-General concurred that this would inflame the situation and withdrew the case.<sup>112</sup> Jackson 'escaped' prison because of mass support.

## The struggle continues...

While the *satyagrahis* played a role in 'provoking' workers, the extent of the response was a surprise to Gandhi. The thrust and rhythm of 'passive resistance' in northern Natal was undoubtedly determined by the pace and extent of defiance of the workers. This is borne out by the rapid response of the miners, who would not have sacrificed wages and endured such hardship were it not for the fact that the £3 tax meant that they would be 'trapped' underground for a long time. By forcing the miners underground, and imprisoning Gandhi and other prominent passive resisters, the authorities hoped to crush resistance in northern Natal, which they saw as the epicentre of the strike. But the strategy was to go horribly wrong. The coastal sugar plantations, ruled by the iron hand of white employers, slowly at first and then with increasing vigour and courage broadened the ambit of the strike.

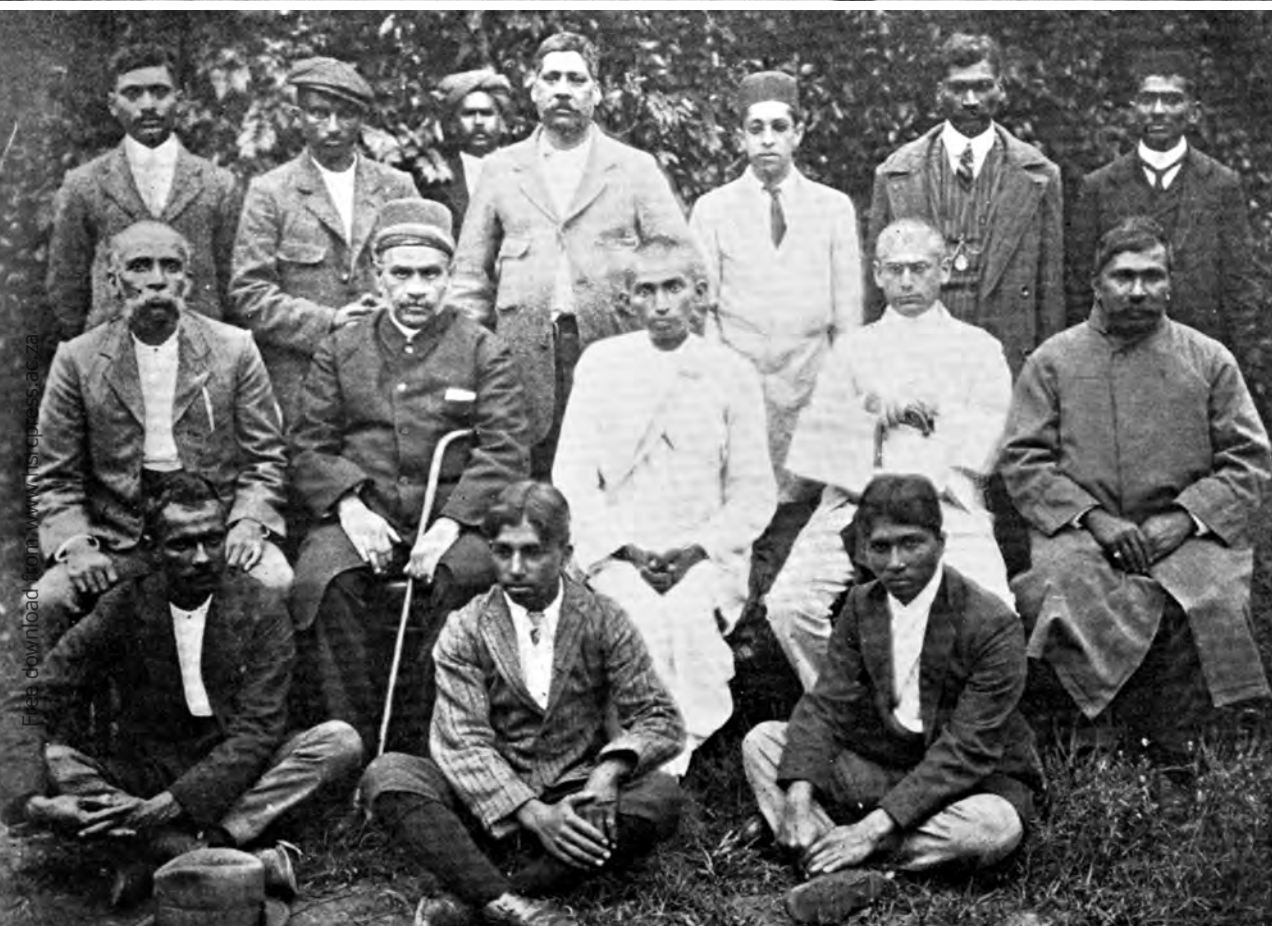
Seemingly hydra-headed, the strike spiralled from coal mines in the north to plantations that hugged the south and north coasts of the Indian Ocean, and even affected the main cities of Durban and Maritzburg. Just as the coal miners were being rounded up and caged, the Minister of Justice issued the following instruction on 10 November: 'Steps should be taken to arrest any ringleaders who are instigating Indians on Sugar Estates or Plantations and wishes you instruct Public Prosecutor accordingly. Chief centres appear to be Verulam, Stanger, Umzinto, Port Shepstone, Greytown, Camperdown, New Hanover, Maritzburg, Mtunzini, and Empangeni.'<sup>113</sup> The Attorney-General immediately conveyed a directive to public prosecutors throughout Natal to 'ascertain who are ringleaders and arrest any Indian strikers who are giving trouble in your district'.

As the strike stretched across the province, so it increasingly fell outside the gaze of the most public advocates of passive resistance and the strict boundaries of action countenanced by them. As resistance spread down and across the coast, events became increasingly compelling, and the picture that emerges challenges the prevailing wisdom about the strike.









# The moral persuaders?

There were silent and hidden acts of resistance and spectacular and demonstrative ones...<sup>1</sup>

This chapter sets forth those aspects of the 1913 strike that have been underplayed in previous accounts.<sup>2</sup> It provides a 'diary' of events that illustrates vividly how widespread the strike was, exposes the violence of state repression and shows that the strike was not simply dominated by Gandhi's notion of passive non-violent resistance. The combative spirit of plantation workers in coastal areas was important in forcing Smuts to the negotiation table.

In so doing, we take up the challenge of Bhana and Dhupelia that 'the role of the masses' be made 'less silent and less ignored in Indian South African history'.<sup>3</sup> The events surrounding the strike do suggest that we give greater agency to rank-and-file workers, and provide a more nuanced history of resistance than that assigned to Indian South Africans as passive persuaders. The often violent response on plantations was due to a number of factors: the larger concentration of Indians, heavy dependency on Indian labour, rumours that Africans were going to join the strike, the year's crop was due to be cut, and the memories of decades of both overt and covert forms of resistance.<sup>4</sup>

With the end of indenture in 1911, there was increasing use of African labour. However, in 1913 Indians still made up around three-quarters of the workforce.<sup>5</sup> The strike took place at the height of the harvesting season, which ran from September to December, making the situation more serious from the point of view of employers. It spread to the main cities in Natal, Durban and Maritzburg, while workers in remote parts of the colony also got wind of the protest action and joined in. The staggered response of workers suggests that they were acting on their own accord, had localised leadership, and often used methods contrary to the wishes of Gandhi and his 'leadership'.

## The strike spreads south

On the south coast, Dev Narain and Venketepah were charged with 'inciting' and 'endeavouring' to get Ramdas, Bachin and other employees of the South African Sugar Refineries to go on strike on 8 November.<sup>6</sup> This was the spark for the spread of the strike on the south coast.

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OPPOSITE ABOVE: The strike committee. BELOW: Prominent passive resisters in Maritzburg. Gandhi is seated in the centre with Henry Polak on his left and Parsee Rustomjee on his right. Charlie Nulliah is seated on Polak's left. Sirdar Gunpat Singh of the Maritzburg Corporation is standing behind Gandhi.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Families detained at Ingogo on their way to Volksrust in northern Natal. Passive resisters were called upon by Gandhi and other local leaders to 'actively, persistently, and continuously' decline to pay the £3 tax and to suffer the penalties for non-payment, among a host of other grievances.

By 16 November, all the industries were on strike. This included 566 men in the iron, candle, soap and glue factories, and 688 workers at the South African Refineries, Hulett's Refineries, the Chemical Works, Wright's Cement Works, and Pottery Works. A contingent of 62 policemen under Major Trew of Pretoria arrived at South Coast Junction and encamped on the football ground opposite the police station, mounted and armed, ready for trouble. The strikers who were marching between Umbilo Road and South Coast Junction told reporters that they were not afraid because Gokhale was sending an 'even bigger' regiment to defend them.<sup>7</sup>

Pearse's Illovo Estate also came to a standstill. There was a skirmish when workers tried to access the railway platform. They were turned away by police and told to return to their barracks. They did so, but a short while later 200 men returned. The police were not sure why they wanted to get to the railway platform armed with sticks and poles and, under Lieutenant Kemhardt, instructed them to go back to the estate. Indians became agitated and began brandishing their sticks. The police attacked workers who 'scattered in all directions, many jumping into Illovo River, while others took refuge in the cane'.<sup>8</sup>

On Saturday 23 November, Magistrate P Binns went to Illovo to speak to the strikers. He relayed the same message that he had been conveying all along the coast. According to one report, Binns was given an 'attentive and respectful hearing and at the end of the address they cheered him. On Monday morning, the workers were back at work. Employers produced large placards bearing the news and circulated these to all estates in an attempt to end the strike elsewhere.'<sup>9</sup>

There was trouble at Reynolds Bros. too, where workers went on strike on 21 November. Owners tried to meet Indian demands. Workers first objected to a white overseer, so Reynolds removed him to another part of the estate. This did not satisfy the strikers, who refused to work and were arrested for desertion. They then demanded to see Wheelwright, the magistrate. He agreed to meet a 'small delegation' and was surprised when 130 Indians marched to the courthouse to demand that prisoners be released. Wheelwright refused and warned that more strikers would be arrested if they did not return to work. They remained defiant and were arrested. The cells could not hold such large numbers so they were marched to confinement in their barracks. En route they attacked the police with stones. Fortunately for the police, they had been disarmed of their sticks and cane knives at the courthouse. The attack continued until the strikers ran out of stones.<sup>10</sup> At Crookes Estate, Indians burnt eight acres of cane on 26 November. Heavy rains spared planters further damage. They were also confident that stopping rations would result in the men returning to work. Crookes' men returned on 27 November.<sup>11</sup>

## The instigators at Isipingo: only following instructions

The police regarded Isipingo as the 'hotbed' of disaffection. Workers gathered there and carried out what the authorities called 'campaigns of intimidation'. Durban magistrate Hodson went to Isipingo on 24 November with the police to identify 'instigators' and urge strikers to return to work. When they refused, he granted warrants of arrest for the leaders, some for refusing to work and others for 'intimidation'.<sup>12</sup> Captain Frank Maxwell King, Corporal Gordon and Lieutenant Kemhardt went to Reunion Estate on 24 November 1913 to arrest 11 'leaders': Vallai Gounden, Lachmon, Ramai, Jogyram, Parabhu, Ramdu, Coopoosamy, Muthu Goinden,

Abbu, Chinnabu and Chinnappa. They met with strong resistance. Male workers were marched to the office and leaders identified. Captain King asked Corporal Gordon to arrest them. Gordon tried to handcuff Gounden, who freed one arm, waved at the crowd of Indians and shouted 'Come on, come on' in English. The 250 'excited' Indians attacked the police with sticks, stones and bricks. A hand-to-hand struggle ensued in which several policemen were injured. Gounden broke free, lifted a thick iron bar about four feet long and attempted to strike Gordon. But it was too heavy. He dropped it and was recaptured.

Indians returned to work on 27 November. 'Leaders' were charged with 'unlawfully gathering and inciting...public violence' before Magistrate AT Roberts on 10 December 1913. AR Michel, for the defence, cleverly argued that they had not gathered unlawfully since the employer had asked them to do so, and actions in the police indictment were committed after they had assembled lawfully. The police argued that the actions of strikers were premeditated because 'arms' had been hidden in the bushes and cane. Magistrate Roberts agreed with Michel's defence and dismissed the charge on the ground that the men 'assembled upon the instruction of their employer'. The police wanted to re-indict the men, but the public prosecutor declined because their employer needed their labour.<sup>13</sup>

## The Battle of Beneva: 'come and cut our throats'

Violence broke out at RW Hawksworth's Beneva Estate near Esperanza on 23 November. Major Trew sent police under Sergeant Major James Rorke of Umzinto to restore order. An Indian constable accompanied the force to 'reason' with strikers. Hawksworth told Rorke that 260 Indians remained in their barracks. He wanted them to resume work or be imprisoned. Rorke spoke to the workers, who declined to work but agreed to march to the magistrate in Umzinto. As they were proceeding, a male Indian worker dressed in blue, Nakka Candiah, called out to strikers not to proceed to Umzinto. Rorke advised them through an interpreter that going to Umzinto was their best option. They replied that they would only go if their wives and children accompanied them. Rorke agreed in order to avoid trouble. When they came out of their barracks, however, Samuel, one of the workers who appeared to be a 'leader', told police in English that workers would not go to Umzinto because they would be assaulted by police. Sergeant Davidson assured them that this would not happen. Despite this, women and children began making their way back to the barracks.

Suddenly, one of the strikers, Sheik Peer Shaik, started praying aloud. He sat on the ground and struck it several times with his open hands. He then jumped up and fell on his back and lay there. Most of the indentured followed his example. Shaik then began chanting in broken Zulu and drew his finger across his throat. He said, '*Fika, fika, sika, sonki*', which the police understood to be an invitation to come and cut their throats. Rorke's men proceeded slowly towards the strikers on horseback. There was a scream in English, 'A horse is killed!' Constable Coetzee's horse was struck with a stick by Veerasamy, one of the strikers. It staggered and fell to the ground, where it lay motionless for almost five minutes. Veerasamy started making his way towards the huts, walking backwards while staring at the police. Sergeant Davidson dismounted and followed Veerasamy, who struck at him with a stick. Veerasamy entered his room and

locked the door. Davidson pushed the door open and was struck with a stick. Davidson called for Veerasamy to come out but got no response, so he drew his revolver and entered the room. This did not deter Veerasamy, who continued to strike at him. Davidson did not fire as there were two women in the room. He was joined by constables Gage and Morley, who held the door open with fixed bayonets. Davidson eventually grabbed hold of Veerasamy and brought him out of the room. As they exited, Veerasamy caught hold of Davidson's shirt at the chest with his teeth. Gage and Morley, who were on horseback, grabbed Veerasamy by the throat to free Davidson. Veerasamy grabbed Morley's bayonet as the other Indians gathered around him.

Without any apparent signal, Indians who had been lying on the ground sprung up and attacked the police with sticks, stones and bottles. Gage was pulled off his horse and the strikers attempted to take his rifle. Two of them grabbed the muzzle and butt of the rifle, while a third tugged at the bayonet. Another lunged at Gage's stomach with a knife, but missed and stabbed him in the thigh. The police withdrew as they were hopelessly outnumbered. Gage managed to get back on the horse but Davidson was forced to flee on foot as he was unable to mount his horse. He was hit on the head, left elbow and left leg.

The police regrouped at the engineer's shop and from there fired at the advancing strikers. This angered them further and they rushed towards the shop where the police and white staff were barricaded. The Indians divided themselves into two groups and attacked the shop from the front and rear, stretching the limited resources of the police. The (unnamed) 'ringleader' was slightly apart from the crowd, and in front, as if leading them in battle. The police shot him dead in cold blood in the hope that this would quieten the crowd. Two more strikers were shot dead before the remaining Indians fled to their barracks. At the end of the 'battle', three Indians had been killed, 10 seriously injured, and many policemen had sustained injuries of one kind or another. Even though the bars were closed, the only explanation the authorities offered was that strikers must have got hold of rum 'surreptitiously'. When Magistrate Wheelwright visited the estate the following morning, defiant strikers told him that they would not carry the dead; that those who shot them should do so. Wheelwright eventually persuaded them to take care of the bodies out of respect. They warned him that they intended killing whites, but the police were less anxious because the strikers had been disarmed and 'leaders' arrested.<sup>14</sup>

The clerk of the Umzinto court, Harold Archibald, provided an eyewitness recollection, overlaid by a colonial mindset:

For some reason or other, there was great unrest among the Indians, something to do with their annual licenses. Anyway, in the middle of November all the Indians on the Estates from North to South went on strike. At Umzinto, we had a party of police down from the Transvaal. Things used to be very exciting round the Court House yard; all of a sudden a party of police would dash up and then a body of Indians would arrive. The police would chase them off again. The police were armed with pick handles and I remember Major Trew telling them... 'for God's sake don't hit them on the head but hit them like hell anywhere else,' and they did. One day there was a regular battle at Beneva. The Indians threatened the young Hawksworths, and in fact kept them prisoners in the office till Mr. Hawksworth got word and dashed up to the Court in his

old Ford car shouting 'Police! Reinforcements!' In no time, away the thirty went at a gallop and on arrival they had to fire, and killed three, after they attacked.<sup>15</sup>

The leader of the 'mob' at Beneva was described as 'an absolute fanatic, [who] had worked his crowd up to a state bordering upon red anarchy, to which must be added an indifference to death'. Magistrate Wheelwright said that police were daily attacked by stones and sticks and many had bruises and contusions to show. The authorities in Natal were shaken by the deaths. Magistrates were 'too busy' to conduct an inquiry, so George Edgecombe Robinson, prosecutor in the Native High Court, 'inquired' into the events.<sup>16</sup>

## The north catches fire: taking the 'passive' out of resistance

The north coast was also enveloped in conflict. The strike began on RJ Harrison's sugar estate at Avoca on 5 November 1913, when 200 Indians 'marched into town, carrying with them their hoes, cane knives, poles, etc.' and complained to the Protector of overwork and ill-treatment. From there, they marched to the offices of Gandhi's Natal Indian Association (NIA) in Field Street, Durban, where Gandhi's associate Henry Polak recorded their complaints, provided them with food and told them to return to the estate. Harrison denied the charges and blamed their anger on the arrest of two Indians by African policemen.<sup>17</sup> The Sugar Growers Association met urgently with General Lukin, who obtained permission from the government to put his 'operations into effect'. Police reinforcements were called in. Colonel Clarke left Maritzburg for Verulam on 8 November with troops of the Second Regiment. Another 100 troops at King Williams Town were rushed to Verulam. Detachments from Griqualand and Pondoland arrived in Verulam on 15 November.<sup>18</sup>

There was a lull of about a week before workers became restive again. On 12 November, Indians at Blackburn, Ottawa and Trenance went on strike. Those at La Mercy also stopped work and tried to join their comrades who had gathered at Umhloti River. The police forcefully prevented them from linking up with other strikers. Skirmishes at Drummond Hotel led to eight Indians being wounded, 'not very seriously, but three were removed to the hospital'.

The officer at Verulam was instructed to 'drive' them back to their estates. The events of 12 November led the *Natal Advertiser* to comment that 'not since the Native Rebellion [1906] was Durban so disturbed and agitated than yesterday, when reports commenced of acts of violence by Indian strikers in continuance of what their leaders proudly proclaimed "passive resistance" with special emphasis on "passive"'.<sup>19</sup>

Around 1 500 workers went on strike in Tongaat on 13 November. They were prevented from going to La Mercy where strikers from various plantations had gathered. Employers A Bouille, Acutt and Sterling warned the strikers to return to work, but they refused to do so until Gandhi was released from prison and the tax repealed. Addison, an employer in Stanger, complained to the magistrate on 15 November that Indians from Tongaat were trying to 'induce' his men to strike. At Avoca, unrest among Indians was described as 'very marked'. Planters and white residents were tense and wanted the defence force out in full because Indians were moving around with cane knives.<sup>20</sup>

## The Battle of Fuller's Flats

A major part of the violent confrontations occurred in the La Mercy area, where the police and army were swiftly called into action. General Lukin's plan was to prevent Indians from leaving estates and joining the strikers assembled at the Umhloti River and to drive back those already there.

When the first group of strikers came into conflict with police, the Battle of Fuller's Flats ensued.<sup>21</sup> Around a thousand Indians at La Mercy, who worked mainly for De Gersigny, managed to evade the police and make their way to Umhloti on 13 November. Police at Verulam got wind of this and a large contingent armed with revolvers and sticks set out to prevent them from linking up with their 'comrades who had already experienced the delights of striking'.<sup>22</sup> They were stopped by the army and police detachments. The strikers and police clashed on a flat piece of ground called Fuller's Flats, just outside Verulam. According to the correspondent of the *Natal Mercury*:

A clash of arms was soon heard, moral persuasion being of no avail, and as the malcontents assumed a threatening disposition, the police charged the crowd, using their sticks very forcibly, and needless to say, the native constables butted in manfully. The Indians soon broke and fled amongst the bushes, and the police had a very busy time routing them from their hiding place.

Seven strikers were injured. At 2:00 p.m., police received an order to clear Indians assembled at Umhloti. There was a second confrontation as strikers retreated to La Mercy. The articles of clothing strewn at Fuller's Flats, including 'a loin cloth found hanging on the branches of a small tree', suggested that the strikers left in disarray. Observers noticed that one striker left behind 30 shillings in his coat pocket, and 'the loot was promptly confiscated by a fortunate Native policeman. It may have been the poor Indian's lifesavings'.<sup>23</sup>

The second clash was more serious and suggested careful planning by strikers, who were marching in a line about two miles long and had an 'ugly temper'. To avoid violence, the army had disarmed the strikers, while the police were armed with revolvers and sticks. As the Indians were marching to La Mercy, the women, who were in front, gradually fell behind. Suddenly large stones and 'clods of earth' were hurled at the police. The striking men grabbed sticks which had been hidden in the bush and attempted to pull the police off their horses. The police fired at the strikers to keep them at bay, while an African policeman was sent to Verulam for reinforcements. He was met by a well-known citizen, Mr Hourquobie, who took him to General Lukin by car. Armed police on horseback galloped to the scene.

The *Natal Advertiser* reported that the 'marchers were sullen but immediately they reached the top of the hill leading to their quarters, they broke away shouting their determination to get their cane knives and wipe out as many Europeans [as they could]'. The police borrowed arms, including a double-barrel gun, from locals like Mr Glenrigby, who arrived to lend a hand. As soon as the Indians appeared on the ridge with their cane knives, shots were fired over their heads, forcing them to retreat to their huts. Some policemen were injured, while the arm of one striker was broken. White overseers at La Mercy were armed with



revolvers, 'determined to protect themselves at all costs...A good deal of uneasiness existed amongst the Europeans.'<sup>24</sup> Indians declared they would not work; the employers responded that they would not provide rations.

## The Rajah of the north

Planters and police became concerned when 2 200 workers of Natal Estates Ltd. in Mount Edgecombe joined the strike on 14 November, after receiving their week's rations. The mill was closed at midnight. WA Campbell, Managing Director of Natal Estates, called for a 'strong force of militia to show the Indians that the Government is determined to use force to put down the strike'. Otherwise, he feared, it would spread to Zululand. From Mount Edgecombe, workers tried to make their way to Verulam. At nearby Trenance, Indians had joined the strike for a day and then returned to work. Fighting broke out when workers from Mount Edgecombe tried to get them to rejoin the strike.<sup>25</sup> There was 'great uneasiness' and 'pessimism among Whites', who called for more force. Harrison in Avoca reported that only 30 of his 250 men were at work. Many of his 'idle' Indians were playing five-a-side football. He stopped their rations but they were receiving food from 'sympathisers' in Durban.<sup>26</sup>

Campbell stated that his workers went on strike because they were persuaded to do so by 'agitators' from Umhlali and did not want to be regarded as 'blacklegs'. Indians at Blackburn, in turn, were 'intimidated' by strikers from Tongaat. He did not say who the Tongaat workers were intimidated by. Some Indians told Campbell that if they continued working, a 'Rajah' would throw them and their relatives into the sea. They did not know who the Rajah was. According to a white journalist, this 'story shows the childish nature of the Indian mind'.<sup>27</sup> Campbell called for the 'strongest force of militia and police possible in order to make a demonstration so that the strikers can see that it is useless fighting the government any further'. He was confident that the cost of feeding the workers would see the strike fizzle out. It cost his company £1 300 per week to feed Indians, and he could not see them sustaining a prolonged strike. Some employers feared that if they stopped rations, Indians would pillage the area.<sup>28</sup>

Despite Campbell's tough talk, there was trouble at Trenance, situated between Ottawa and Mount Edgecombe, which was owned by Sykes. Sykes said that he would not 'tolerate intimidation' and the police 'promptly' drove the strikers 'back to their quarters'. This 'alarmed the [Indian] women who gathered huddled together on top of a hut, watching the events'. Tongaat workers tried to make their way to Verulam. Bars were closed for fear that alcohol would aggravate the situation.<sup>29</sup>

## 'Europeans and loyal Indians savagely assaulted'

So ran the *Natal Advertiser's* headline of 17 November. In Mount Edgecombe, white women took refuge in factories until police reinforcements arrived. They panicked because 'bands of strikers, armed with bludgeons, visited all the houses in the district, and commanded Indian domestics to come out'. The local police and army were unable to control the situation. Lieutenant Selby and a strong force of police from Verulam, 'both European and Native,

galloped to Mount Edgecombe'. As soon as they confronted Indian strikers, the 'Native police dismounted from their horses and quickly got in amongst their natural enemies, using one stick as a guard and the other as a weapon. They did considerable execution, so much so that they had to be restrained. The Indians were quickly driven back to their quarters.'<sup>30</sup>

One white policeman was hospitalised. Employers became concerned when strikers began doing what they feared most, burning cane, in reaction to rations being stopped. The situation was so 'acute' that most white residents of Mount Edgecombe sent their wives and children to Durban. Mount Edgecombe was described as an 'armed camp'.<sup>31</sup> Approximately 150 acres of cane were burnt at Umhloti Estate. Indian employees from nearby Wilkinson's Estate helped to douse the fire, but those from Mount Edgecombe 'sat down and laughingly watched the progress of the fire'.<sup>32</sup>

At Blackburn, strikers attacked the police with bludgeons and tree trunks. In the ensuing struggle, three Indians were hospitalised. The situation threatened to get out of hand and the NIA sent representatives to urge strikers to restrain themselves. Railway workers on the north coast also joined the strike, forcing stationmasters to perform their work. White residents wanted the government to declare martial law.<sup>33</sup> NIA leaders like CR Naidoo and Omar Haji Jhaveri maintained that they were not responsible 'for initiating the strike, or for intimidation, or for pickets, or for advising the strikers to stay out. The men have come out on their own and are staying out on their own'; however, they found it 'impossible' to tell the strikers to return to work as they would not heed their instruction.<sup>34</sup>

There was more trouble at Avoca on 21 November when Lieutenant Clarke, with a force of 30 white riflemen and African policemen, tried to arrest strike 'leaders'. They were confronted by 900 strikers armed with cane knives. Three prisoners held by African policemen were 'liberated' by strikers. Nine leaders were eventually arrested and imprisoned in Verulam, while numerous strikers were injured as the authorities sought to disarm them.<sup>35</sup>

Employers were confident that as rations ran out, strikers at Mount Edgecombe would return to work. However, the NIA sent a large consignment of food on 24 November. Workers had indicated that they would return to work on Monday 25 November, but as soon as the supplies arrived they informed the manager that the strike would continue. The strike also continued at La Mercy, Umhloti Valley and Tongaat, where many arrests were made for 'desertion'. Hulett's crushing mills at Amatikulu and Umhlatuzana were closed. The most worrying aspect for employers was that around 600 Indians from Mount Edgecombe had left the estate and made their way to Durban. Fearing they would incite locals, police patrolled Sydenham, Mayville, Overport and Umgeni, with orders to request passes from all Indians.<sup>36</sup> After the skirmish at Avoca, strikers began returning to work under police protection. By 28 November, almost all the Indians were back at work.

## Dismounting Campbell

The threat of violence remained present. On 27 November, General Lukin and Captain Kennedy had to 'rush out' to Mount Edgecombe when they received a call from Colin Campbell, estate manager, that there was trouble at Blackburn Estate and Ottawa (Wilkinson). Campbell accom-

panied the police to the Hill Head section of the estate, known as the Top Barracks, to check whether the men intended returning to work and to arrest those who refused. Around 150 Indians attacked the police with cane knives, shouting, 'Here's the White men, kill them'.<sup>37</sup>

The police fired into the crowd. Instead of stopping protesters, about 400 men from the Lower Barracks of Blackburn joined the fray and attacked the police even though they were shot at. Campbell was knocked off his horse and struck unconscious. The police were sandwiched between Indians attacking from the top and bottom barracks. A horse ridden by Sergeant Newmann was stabbed to death.<sup>38</sup>

Lieutenant Clarke, who was in command of the police, was injured during the melee when he was knocked off his horse and cut on the head with a knife. Blood flowed onto his tunic. Corporal Sparks managed to rescue him, but was himself stabbed. Gunner Urwin and Corporal Brydges were also slashed.<sup>39</sup> At this, the police drew their firearms and emptied their revolvers into the strikers, who were forced back to their barracks. The police pursued them, arrested 30 'ringleaders' and seized their weapons. Five strikers were killed, four injured, four others were not expected to live, 12 were seriously injured but expected to survive, and over 50 were treated for injuries. The dead 'rebels' were Selvan Methi, Subraya Gounden, Guruvadu, Ragavan and Patchappan. Twelve Indian witnesses would later testify that Selvan's death was from an assegai stab from an African constable of Blackburn Estate, known to Indians as Marimuthu. They also alleged that Colin Campbell shot Patchappan and Ragavan dead with his Browning pistol. The inquiry of the Verulam magistrate in January 1914, perhaps unsurprisingly, cleared Campbell, finding that all five deaths were caused by police fire.<sup>40</sup> In segregationist South Africa, what counted as 'truth' depended to a great deal on who was speaking.

By 3 December, the 600 Indians at Tongaat were back at work; things also settled down at Mount Edgecombe, Ottawa, Chicks, Bishops and Avoca. Workers at La Mercy only returned to work on 10 December, making them the first to strike and the last to return to work.

## Ramsamy of Noordsberg: suffering from 'strike fever'

The picture that emerges suggests an absence of central organisation; rather, local networks sprung into action and set their own agendas. The workers did not all strike at once. While most began returning to work, others were still going on strike. On Saturday 29 November, 30 men, eight women and several children from Jackson's One-House Wattle Company in Noordsberg were stopped by police at Tongaat, who demanded their passes. Ramsamy Narainsamy (145954) told policeman IC Gopaul that Jackson had told them that they did not require passes because they were going in a large group. A Boulle of the South African Mounted Rifles, Tongaat, lined them up against a wall, counted them and told them to return to the estate. They refused, as they had wanted to lodge complaints with the Protector and see 'Gandhi, their leader'.<sup>41</sup>

Ramsamy told Boulle that they were willing to go handcuffed to the Protector but would not return without seeing him. Sergeant Moroney, who was in charge of a 'strike party', arrived shortly after. He asked Ramsamy's group to hand over their sticks but they refused. According to Boulle, they were 'rowdy' and would 'not listen to any advice we had to give them'. The police failed to drive them back on horseback because the women placed their babies in front

of the horses and lay down themselves. Moroney instructed the African constables to disarm the men. This is when 'the Coolies were laid out by the Natives'. The male strikers lined up back to back and fought with their wattle sticks. They were outnumbered and overpowered and eventually disarmed. Dr G Bonfa, the medical officer in Tongaat, treated Moonsamy (145931), Ramsamy, Govindan (145980), Telligadu (135336), Venkatigadu (138069), Sukroo (129795), Anganay (147993), Gunpathy and Manny (139373) for head, thigh and shoulder injuries. Ramsamy, for example, was hit on the forehead, left leg and both arms, and taken to hospital unconscious. When they appeared in court, the magistrate cautioned and discharged them. He felt that they were 'all more or less suffering from the strike fever and were determined under any pretext to reach Durban'.<sup>42</sup> Ramsamy is one of the few 'leaders' that we have been able to identify. He was 23 when he arrived from North Arcot in August 1910, and 26 when the strike took place. He was young and in his first term of indenture. Unfortunately, we don't know what became of him after indenture.

The strike on the north coast increased the feeling among whites that African labour would be less militant and more reliable, a remarkable change from the mid-1850s. According to an editorial in the *Natal Advertiser*, there was a 'growing feeling' among employers that full use had not been made of African labour; in view of the strike, it 'will not be surprising if the sugar growers take the bull by the horns and make the first move towards dispensing with this form of labour. As a matter of fact, it is now felt that no reliance can be placed upon promises of good behaviour on the part of Indians.'<sup>43</sup>

The Natal Sugar Association worked through RH Addison, the Native Commissioner, to recruit African labour. Addison sent a letter to the Association on 28 November offering African labour. Planters replied on 5 December that there was a 'general disposition among members to take advantage of your offer but owing to the crushing season being so near its end, very few planters are in immediate need'. However, they would establish 'a properly equipped Bureau to be in readiness for next season'. The Association did, however, request 180 workers for La Mercy and Tongaat. If procured quickly for the 'main centres of disaffection, the moral effect upon the Indians would be enormous and would do much towards breaking the present strike'.<sup>44</sup>

## 'Sammy of No. 7 water cart' and the strike in Durban

Durban was not spared from the strike. Here, Gandhi's emissaries were much more prominent. The Durban Corporation, Railway, boatmen and other Indians joined the strike on 16 November. The Corporation employed white scabs to drive the water-sprinkling carts. However, no one showed them how to fill the carts. While a white scab was vainly trying to fill his cart in Grey Street, a large crowd of Indians gathered around him and jeered as he struggled with the pipes. One Indian 'claimed that No. 7 was his cart, and no European loafer should be entitled to drive it. "It is my work," the coolie kept on reiterating, and his feelings would have overcome his wisdom but for the restraint put upon him by those around. The White man's departure was greeted with boing and cheering by the Indians, particularly of the ex-driver, Sammy of No. 7 water cart.'<sup>45</sup>

Indian employees of the African Boating Company and Chiazzari and Co. at the Point joined on 16 November. Percy Binns, chief magistrate of Durban, with WP Curry, managing director of African Boating, addressed workers at their compound on 19 November. Binns told them that striking would not lead to a repeal of the tax, and that Curry would 'overlook' their participation if they returned to work because he knew that they were 'faithful servants who had been misled and deluded'.<sup>46</sup> Strikers, however, resolved to continue their action. Binns arrived with the army and African policemen the following day and arrested 140 men at African Boating and 110 at Chiazzari. They were charged with illegally absenting themselves and imprisoned for seven days with hard labour.<sup>47</sup>

Thirty-five workers at Mary Maples Factory in Prince Edward Street went on strike 'on behalf of the "Rajah", whose name they could not give. The strikers were wearing red rosettes as the emblem of passive resistance'.<sup>48</sup> Laundrymen, hospital workers and bakery workers joined on 17 November. According to the *Natal Advertiser*, 'crowds of Indians' were 'prowling the streets with sticks and *sjamboks* and it is easy to see that the greatest tact, withal, and determination will be required to keep them under control'. The Market Master reported that gardeners brought produce, but hawkers boycotted them and 'boys and young Indian men swept along the street, tossing what produce remained into the street and gutters and threatening the farmers if they did not go home'. They also 'rushed' the market several times; a strong police presence maintained order.<sup>49</sup>

White citizens of Durban became very concerned when around 150 Indians on Chick's Estate in Umgeni joined the strike on 17 November. There was anxiety that workers from Coronation Brick Works and Bishop's Estate would join next. Chick's men marched to Queens Bridge, where they encountered the army. They demanded to be allowed to go to the Protector. The officer called the Protector on the phone, who agreed to meet with workers on the estate. White and African policemen were stationed at Chick's Estate in anticipation of violence.<sup>50</sup> That afternoon, strikers participated in a mass meeting. A 'platform' was hastily erected, and the crowd of 2 500 'huddled together seven or eight deep':

There they remained, with hardly a sound or a movement, for over an hour. It was a roundly picturesque event. Every class, race and calling of Indian was represented. Their eager swarthy form and bright intense eyes never turned from the speakers. The voices of those addressing them could be heard distinctly to the very edge of the group. The atmosphere was one of strained attention. The sharp and spontaneous outbursts of applause seemed to show the mood of the meeting was with the speakers. First, Mr. Albert Christopher spoke to the meeting in English. Speaking with a rapid fluent delivery, full of spirit and sometime of emotion, he stirred the audience to considerable enthusiasm. Almost every period was punctuated by clapping, and when he asked if the audience intended to sit down and suffer their grievances there was a vigorous response of 'No, no!' Next, Sheik Emamally addressed the attendance at some length in Hindustan. As he rose he held up a sheaf of telegrams and cables, these including a cable from the Hon. G.R. Gokhale, India, as follows: 'India chilling with indignation, protests pouring upon



Mass meeting held at the Durban Indian Sports Ground c. September 1913.

government for forwarding Imperial Government! Every endeavour being made.' He also read messages of support from Mr. G. Nateson of Madras and Methilal Nehra, chairman of the Allahabad Committee South Africa League, conveying 'sympathy,' 'admiration,' and support after the holding of mass meetings. Next, J.M. Lazarus addressed the meeting. He emphasised 'brethren' and 'unity' in the passive resistance movement.<sup>51</sup>

Workers from Addington Hospital and Durban Corporation were urged to return to work so that 'humanitarian work would not be disrupted'. Gandhi had personally sent this message to Christopher.<sup>52</sup> Despite the pleas of Emamally and Christopher, strikers attacked two Indian employees of the Corporation working on a cart in Grey Street. About 60 mounted police arrived in Durban to prevent 'intimidation'. On 18 November, a mass meeting at the Greyville Racecourse was addressed by Lutchman Panday, Thambi Naidoo and two Indian women (names not given).<sup>53</sup>

On the afternoon of 18 November, Magistrate Binns went with the police and army reinforcements to the Railway Barracks in Umgeni and arrested 133 workers for 'refusal to work' and, in some cases, assault. They appeared in court the next morning. Strikers were represented by Mr Michel, who was taken aback when they pleaded 'not guilty' as the NIA was on hand to pay guilty fines. Michel asked for an adjournment to consult with strikers. V Fernon, representing the Railways, testified that the men had told him that they were instructed to strike by their 'king' who was in prison, and that they would not return to work until he was released. They also wanted the tax repealed. When the case resumed, Michel changed the plea

to guilty and complained of illegal use of force by police. The judge sentenced the strikers to seven days with hard labour. He could not understand why they went on strike when the tax did not apply to them.<sup>54</sup>

In Durban, strikers congregated at the 'flats' near the racecourse, where a mass meeting was held on 19 November. Strikers made it clear they would not return to work until the tax had been repealed. One striker told the meeting that his parents, brother and sister, who were born in India, looked to him, a colonial-born, 'to fight their battles and he saw it as a sacred trust'. Strikers told a reporter that Gandhi was coming to Durban to tell them what to do. If he could not end the strike, it would be ended by Gokhale 'who was on his way to Natal to confer with the Union Government'.<sup>55</sup>

Food prices skyrocketed as market gardeners withheld their produce, flower sellers were absent from the streets and trade was at a standstill at the Indian Market. Employers used the opportunity to replace Indian workers. The Model Dairy, owned by Mr Wayne, announced that it would retain white scab labour and only reinstate Indians where whites were not available. According to one report, there was a 'general inclination to sift the wheat from the chaff. The remainder have been told to look for work elsewhere. There is a general tendency, as far as possible, to replace Indians with White labour.'<sup>56</sup>

There was trouble at Bishop's and Effingham estates, where police used sticks to disperse strikers. The magistrate gave permits to Indians 'opposed to the strike' to visit these estates to persuade Indians to return to work. The permits were withdrawn on 24 November when it emerged that some of them were actually encouraging the strikers. The government decided to work through its own officials or through Indians 'actively' opposed to the strike.<sup>57</sup> By 25 November the strike was over in Durban, due in part to the intervention of the police and army, and partly because the NIA was unable to feed strikers and their families. As one reporter wryly observed, 'It is often said that an Indian can subsist upon the "smell of an oil rag", but that appears more of a joke than a reality as far as the colonial-born is concerned.'<sup>58</sup>

## The capital stirs...and the hovering African threat

At a mass meeting of Indians in Maritzburg on 5 October 1913, RM Moorgass proposed and NB Naik seconded a motion that 'this mass meeting of Maritzburg Indian entirely associates itself with the letter of 12 September from Mr. Cachalia to the government and resolves to take up a firm stand in the passive resistance movement until the government concedes to the provisions of the said letter'. The meeting also adopted a second resolution, proposed by NB Naik and seconded by DP Desai, congratulating the 'sixteen pioneers of passive resistance, consisting of men and women, and also the five men of Maritzburg incarcerated in His Majesty's prisons to defend the national honour'. These resolutions were forwarded to the prime minister and Governor General.<sup>59</sup> The 'men of Maritzburg' were Shipujan Badri, V Govindrajulu, Cooposamy Moonlight Mudaliar, Gokuldas Hansrajh and Revashanker R Sodha.

There seems to have been little strike activity in Maritzburg until Thambi Naidoo addressed a meeting at the Hindu Temple on 22 November 1913. They resolved that Corporation, Grey's

Hospital and Asylum workers would not strike, and that rations comprising of rice, dhal, vegetables and salt would be provided to strikers at the temple every three days. There was a large police presence and Naidoo was arrested for 'incitement to violence' by Mr Brandon of the Central Investigation Department after his speech.

The strike began in earnest on Monday 24 November 1913. There was much tension among whites. 'Would the Indian strike be a fait accompli, and if so, would it make any particular difference?' The streets were quiet, though the police received numerous calls to quell strikes or attend to alleged 'intimidation'. Mounted police waited in readiness in Retief Street. They were called into action at Armitage's brickfields, where several indentured workers were charged with 'refusal to work'. The city centre soon became abuzz with activity as 'roving' Indian pickets moved through the town.<sup>60</sup>

Chief Magistrate BC Clarence swore in a number of white employees as 'Special Constables', for duty at the railway station in case strikers disrupted services. Permission was only received at 1:00 p.m., too late to prevent 'a gang of Indians from the Railway works and station deserting'. Twenty-five men were rushed by General Lukin to Martizburg under Captain Roy's command to restore order. Clarence also requested permission to shut down Indian bars, but the law did not provide for this.<sup>61</sup> Thirty employees of the Corporation locked themselves into their quarters and refused to work. White and African police forcibly took them to Retief Street police station. A large crowd gathered to protest. The strikers were taken to court, where they were addressed by Chief Magistrate BC Clarence. When they refused to return to work, some were fined while others chose prison. Clarence told them that he was speaking 'as a friend and not a magistrate'. They were bound by the contract, approved by the Indian government, to whom they had to apply for repeal. Many whites, he told them, sympathised with Indians over the tax, but they were losing this support because of the strike:

Legislation is the only remedy...Any insolent outbursts of temper will only bring the law against you...If the Indians disturb the city they will not achieve what they set out for. By an Act of Parliament, you stand in danger of all being sent back to India. The effect on our Native population of the Indian disaffection would have to be considered. The Natives are very jealous of the Indians' position in the Colony. They, at one time, did our laundry and our garden work, and if the Natives suddenly decided to exterminate the Indians, the position of the latter would be deplorable in the extreme. There was no country in the Empire that gave such a magnificent field for Indian labour as South Africa.<sup>62</sup>

Clarence assured them of police protection if they returned to work. Gunpat Singh, headman at the Corporation, was identified as the chief instigator. Clarence told the Town Clerk he was trying to obtain the 'deposition of two or three of the most intelligent amongst the prisoners' to prosecute Singh.<sup>63</sup> The threat to deport Indians was put into action. For example, two indentured strikers, Preddy and Canni, were charged with refusing to work. Sergeant Mallinson withdrew charges and handed them over to the Protector to be returned to India for breaking their contracts.<sup>64</sup>



The town council of Maritzburg took the 'ingenious' decision of putting Indian strikers into prison gangs and forcing them to clean the streets under armed guard without pay. Market gardens were attacked and crops destroyed to disrupt the supply of vegetables. Two strikers, Anthony and Tabhia, were fined for stealing vegetables to feed strikers.<sup>65</sup> One of the main criticisms of the organisers was that nothing had been arranged to occupy strikers, such as Gandhi's march to the Transvaal or even marches within the city. Strikers, particularly those who came from outlying areas, had nothing to do and nowhere to go. Organisers also lacked the capacity to cope with the influx of strikers. The suggestion of a march to the Transvaal was rejected because many had already marched in the northern districts and lacked 'enthusiasm'.<sup>66</sup>

By 27 November, the strike was 'on its last legs'. The market was full of Indian sellers and suppliers, hawkers were 'to be seen everywhere', shops were open and servicemen were back at work. Police patrols remained visible, however.<sup>67</sup> The police reported that large numbers of Indians were 'on the road', heading back to their plantations. At the very time that the strike was virtually over in Maritzburg, about a hundred Indians were seen marching from Wartburg and New Hanover to the city. When interviewed, they said that a 'great leader' was waiting in Maritzburg to tell them what to do.<sup>68</sup> Forty Indians appeared before Magistrate Hime on 28 November. Seventeen were fined 10 shillings each and returned to work, but 23 refused despite a 'lengthy' discussion with Hime. One striker told him that Indians were 'dogs and fools' – dogs because that was their condition under indenture, and fools for being made 'catpaws' of the leaders of the movement. One striker was identified as the 'ringleader'. When Hime ran out of patience, he gave them the option of a fine and returning to work, or imprisonment. Only the unidentified 'ringleader' opted for prison.<sup>69</sup>

The strike was riddled with problems in Maritzburg, at the root of which were two factions. It seems that divisions were along age and class lines. Younger, colonial-born Indians favoured a strike, while the older merchant class opposed it. One trader complained that younger Indians were in favour of the strike because it gave them 'self-importance'.<sup>70</sup> Leo R Gopaul, secretary of the Strike Committee in Maritzburg, angrily replied that 'elders' had initiated the strike but backed out 'in a cowardly manner' because they were afraid of prison. He accused them of playing a 'double game' and passing information to the authorities. Gopaul said that a new committee had been elected to revive protest. Its members were willing to 'accept the consequences of their actions'. The new committee was not interested in the merits of the strike but in carrying out pledges taken at the temple. Gopaul said that 'City Mahommedans' were not actively taking part in the strike but providing material support.<sup>71</sup> On 27 November, police had to quell violence when a striker swore at Charlie Nulliah who, it seems, opposed the strike.<sup>72</sup>

Around 50 Maritzburg prisoners were transferred to Durban. They went on a hunger strike because they had not been supplied with sandals and socks, were only provided with one blanket and dirty clothes, the ghee was of poor quality, and the food was prepared by African rather than Indian cooks. Strikers might have been confronting injustice but this did not necessarily mean they jettisoned their own prejudices. The NIA, Surat Hindu Association and

Zoroastrian Anjuman sent telegrams of protest to the Minister of Justice. The NIA also protested that prison authorities confiscated food destined for prisoners.<sup>73</sup>

The hub of activity in Maritzburg was the Hindu temple. A final meeting was held there on 6 December. Fiery speeches were delivered by LH Greene, a well-known socialist, PK Naidoo, NB Naik and Dookie. They were on bail of £300 each after their arrest on 29 November. Greene said that leaders, whom he referred to as 'teachers' and 'advisers', were magnanimous in allowing sanitary department workers to remain at work. The mayor and town councillors repaid that magnanimity by putting the 'advisers' in jail. Indians and whites had to unite to fight the common enemy, capitalism.<sup>74</sup>

The government was determined to break resistance and tried the strategy of identifying 'ringleaders'. On 20 November, 11 NIA members were charged with 'inciting or soliciting public violence'. Thambi Naidoo was imprisoned but the others were released on bail of £100 each and warned not to participate in public demonstrations.<sup>75</sup> The NIA appointed FA Laughton to represent them. Despite numerous requests, the police refused to allow them to see the affidavits on which the warrants were issued. They wrote to the Attorney-General on 25 November to view the documents 'without which we are quite unable to prepare a defence'. Permission was declined.<sup>76</sup> The public prosecutor, who had seized the Minute Book of the NIA, reported to the Attorney-General that around 100 members' names were in the book:

It is evident from the minutes and from the acts of the agents of the committee, above-named persons, that all members of the committee are equally liable to prosecutions. You will observe from the minutes that violence was no part of the policy of the Association. There are a few cases of intimidation but the evidence is not strong. In view of the release of Gandhi and Polak do you think that prosecutions should be persisted where there was no intimidation?...It will not be easy to exclude Gandhi and Polak from responsibility for the acts of the Association.<sup>77</sup>

The Attorney-General agreed and on 20 December advised the public prosecutor to withdraw the charges since Gandhi, Polak and Kallenbach, the most 'visible' faces of the movement, had been released.<sup>78</sup>

## From passive resistance to 'rebellion'

The overriding aim of satyagraha was to occupy the moral high ground and to unsettle and win over one's opponents, not through acts of physical aggression, but through restraint and passivity, and above all by setting them an example which would eventually convince them of the righteousness of those they confronted and attacked.<sup>79</sup>

The strike that spread across the province halted coal production, brought the main cities to a standstill, resulted in cane being burnt illegally, heightened tensions on sugar plantations, gave rise to running battles between strikers and police, and deprived many hotels, private residences and businesses of labour. The strike was a powerful collective resistance, borne –

especially on the plantations – on the backs of decades of individual challenges and ‘less visible’ forms of resistance, like malingering, feigning illness, taking advantage of court processes, deserting, and trying to build a life outside the surveillance of employers. Most accounts of the strike reinforce the Gandhi-centric story by focusing on the ‘epic’ march across the border of Natal and the Transvaal. But the strike spread across class, caste and gender lines; engulfed large parts of the province; and was often outside the control of Gandhi and his coterie of leaders.

The methods of strikers in coastal areas were frequently far removed from the notion of passive resistance, the dominant discourse in which the strike is narrated. Whatever Gandhi’s original intentions, phases of the strike were anything but passive. This part of the story has not been given sufficient prominence in the historiography. This may partly be a result of basing the narrative around Gandhi, which is understandable given the reliance on his autobiographical writings and the works of his associates. The focus on Gandhi may also have been prompted by his subsequent role in the anti-colonial struggle in India, or the power of *satyagraha* (passive resistance) as a moral force in ‘our times’. As our narrative reveals, strikers were not necessarily imbued with the spirit of *satyagraha*. This is not to discount the massive influence of Gandhi, but rather to write back into history the fertile texture of the historical experience of the indentured, who dug deep into memories of past collective and individual resistances and ‘invisible’ networks to mount a serious challenge to authority and, for a short while, caused panic in the ranks of employers. The strike spread to the coastal areas in spite of, not because of, Gandhi, who wanted to contain it.<sup>80</sup>

There were experiments with armed struggle. Sticks and knife caches were hidden along roads, cane fields were torched, policemen ambushed, white farmers besieged and taken hostage. So threatening did these attacks become that reinforcements were sent from as far afield as the Eastern Cape. While organisation and coordination was poor, and repression brutal, the passive resistance campaign was, in large swathes of the former Natal, an uprising, and a fairly militant one at that. Kaiwar wonders whether Gandhi co-opted the ‘energies of the strikers to push through an agenda that, while benefiting workers, also benefited middle class immigrants. Or was it designed to activate Indians at home on behalf of their émigré compatriots?’ Kaiwar cannot avoid the ‘suspicion’ that 1913 was part of Gandhi’s ‘strategy of containment and redirection’, with Gandhi seeking to channel strikers’ energy into line with ‘the rather more conservative agenda’ of organised Indian politics.<sup>81</sup>

Shortly before he left South Africa for the last time, Gandhi addressed workers in Verulam on the implications of the Relief Act:

Many causes led to that relief, and one of them was certainly also the most valuable and unstinted assistance rendered by Mr. Marshall Campbell of Mount Edgecombe...Victoria County, as also other Districts of Natal, were not so free from violence on their own as Newcastle District had been. He did not care that provocation had been offered to them or how much they had retaliated with their sticks or with stones, or had burned the sugar cane – that was not Passive Resistance, and if he had

been in their midst, he would have repudiated them entirely and allowed his head to be broken rather than permit them to use a single stick against their opponents. Passive Resistance pure and simple was an infinitely finer weapon than all the sticks and gunpowder put together...If he [Gandhi] was indentured to Mr. Marshall Campbell, or Mr. Saunders, and if he found that he was being persecuted or not receiving justice, he would not even go to the Protector. He would sit tight and say, 'My Master, I want justice or I won't work.' He assured them that the hardest, stoniest heart would be melted.<sup>82</sup>

Marshall Campbell's father, Sam, strongly opposed the introduction of coolie labour. Marshall held fast to these views and told the Commission on Indian Immigration that he always had the same views 'propounded by my father, that there was sufficient black labour in the country if the natives had been treated rightly and taught habits of work...It is a pity the Coolies were ever introduced.' Marshall supported the Indian Relief Bill that recommended the ending of the tax only because there was to be no more Indian immigration. He told Senate, approvingly quoting Justice Tatham:

Since the establishment of Union, Indian Immigration ceased, thanks to General Botha, and therefore there is no need for the tax. It is now pressed for by the very men who first opposed it, on the grounds that it compels Indians remaining in the country to re-indenture. This was not the object of the tax. Its object was to induce Indians to return to India...The occasion for the tax having ceased to exist, the tax should be repealed.<sup>83</sup>

Marshall's 'support' was a poisoned chalice but fitted with Gandhi's philosophy that Indians in South Africa would always be part of Mother India.

When Gandhi headed the march from Newcastle to Volksrust on 29 October, he pronounced that the strikers did not come out 'as indentured labourers, but as servants of India. They were taking part in a religious war.'<sup>84</sup> India's pride was at stake, and the dignity of Indians had to be restored. Yet the government feared the possibility of a more general rebellion. The severity of the response was in part motivated by rumours that Africans would join Indians. Gandhi, though, was adamant that he would not countenance this. Although mines continued to run because of African labour, he assured mine owners: 'Such is not our intention at all. We do not believe in such methods.'<sup>85</sup>

Smuts had, through the course of the strike, refused to negotiate. Faced with the added challenge of a white railroad workers strike, militancy on the plantations and international criticism, he conceded to some of the demands. Gandhi responded by declaring that he would not exploit the government's difficulty over the railroad strike. There was a general gratitude from government, with one of Smuts' secretaries responding:

I do not like your people, and do not care to assist them at all. But what am I to do? You help us in our days of need. How can we lay hands on you? I often wish you took to violence like the English strikers, and then we would know at once how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering

alone and never transgress your self-imposed limit of courtesy and chivalry. And that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness.<sup>86</sup>

## 'The specificity of rebel consciousness'

How do we explain the widespread support for the 1913 campaign? While the position of the Solomon Commission was that 'it is needless to speculate on the subject', we concur with subaltern studies historian, Ranajit Guha, that it was necessary to 'acknowledge the insurgent as the subject of his own history' and find 'the specificity of rebel consciousness'.<sup>87</sup> There is no doubt that the £3 tax and the economic misery it caused were central in the calculations of many Indians. Seventy-five-year-old Harbat Singh was an ex-indentured Indian who participated in the strike and died in jail. When asked why he was risking his life, he replied to Gandhi: 'What does it matter? I know what you are fighting for. You have not to pay the £3 tax, but my fellow ex-indentured Indians have to pay that tax, and what more glorious death could I meet?'<sup>88</sup>

The £3 tax ensured a continued labour supply and addressed white racism by limiting the number of free Indians. It was both a re-indenturing and a repatriation device.<sup>89</sup> According to *African Chronicle*:

Many Indians are [in a] hopeless state of chronic poverty and impotence, and sooner or later the law itself would break down and it would be rendered worthless should no steps be taken to repeal it. There is a limit for human endurance and patience and we can assure the authorities that this abominable tax is simply grinding them down. The people feel it, and they are not likely to suffer the iniquity of this tax any longer.<sup>90</sup>

Re-indenture reached its peak in 1912, when the rate was just over 95 per cent. The Protector remarked that 'even an optimist would hardly have anticipated such a large percentage of reindentures, seventy percent being the highest even looked for. This result has greatly helped in maintaining the labour supply of the Province, especially in certain favoured portions of the coast district.'<sup>91</sup> The protest of workers was clearly directed against the capitalists of Natal, even if there was no overall vision of overthrowing capitalism. As Beall and North-Coombes point out, 'whilst sophisticated articulation of grievances and demands may have been denied indentured labourers, shared misery borne in close proximity was a certain ingredient for solidarity'.

Various authors (Swan, Beall and North-Coombes), as well as contemporary newspaper reports, point to workers referring to Gokhale or Gandhi or a 'Rajah' assisting them. In the previous chapter, we deliberately described in great detail Gokhale's whistle-stop tour. His addressing of white officials and business leaders, and the fact that he was treated as a dignitary with 'state honours', facilitated huge interest in his visit. Indian organisations that would normally not have crossed paths worked together. Large crowds attended a variety of activities. The visit stimulated newly found pride and optimism that all would turn out for the best. And when this optimism was deemed to be misplaced, when Gokhale was betrayed and Indian dignity slighted, these organisations, albeit with a recent history of working together, swung into independent action once again. However, the promises made in the heady atmosphere of

Gokhale's visit and the networks formed in getting people to the rallies were remembered. For many, it became a matter of seeking *swaraj*, 'self-rule', in the individual sense of self-respect.<sup>92</sup>

Thus we find the Colonial Born Indian Association held a meeting on 18 October 1913 and offered its 'general approval of Mr. Gandhi's policy, the appreciation of his patriotic leadership, and its sympathy with the passive resistance movement'; the Hindoostani Association of Durban met on 17 October to pass a resolution supporting Gandhi and the passive resistance campaign; over 3 000 Indians met at the Union Bioscope in Victoria Street to offer their support.<sup>93</sup> The impact of Gokhale's visit on subsequent events is hard to quantify, but should be kept in mind in seeking to understand the response of Indians so that we can go beyond the Protector who wrote in 1913 that it was 'not easy to get at the mind of the Indians',<sup>94</sup> or the magistrates who attributed protest to 'strike fever' and reference to the Rajah as an indication of the vagaries of the 'Eastern mind'.

Many magistrates were called upon to intervene directly in the strike. Throughout, we have seen that magistrates were pivotal in enforcing the 'contract'. They loomed large in the lives of the indentured, and it is not surprising that they were the ones trying to persuade strikers to return to work with their 'carrot-and-stick' approach. This flagrant act exposed in the most transparent way the lie of the rule of law, for here we had the conflation of prosecutor, judge and jury.

## The wisdom in Solomon?

The passive resistance campaign and strike had an echo in India. Gokhale organised meetings and collected money for passive resisters. He also sent Charles Andrews and WW Pearson to South Africa. They spoke at public meetings and churches, mainly to prominent whites. The Indian National Congress, at its meeting in Karachi on December 26 1913, protested at the treatment of Indians in South Africa, while newspapers in London reported that the South African government's inept policies had put the Empire at risk. Smuts responded by appointing the Solomon Commission in early December. Gandhi, who was in jail, was opposed to two of the three commissioners because of their established anti-Indian bias and he boycotted the Commission. However, Gandhi continued private correspondence with Smuts, which resulted in an agreement that passive resistance would be suspended until the Commission published its findings and government introduced legislation. The Commission sat in Durban from 26 January 1913 to 7 February 1913, and in Cape Town from 23 to 27 February 1913.<sup>95</sup>

The findings of the Solomon Commission and subsequent communication between Smuts and Gandhi resulted in the Smuts–Gandhi Agreement and the Indian Relief Act of 1914, which abolished the tax, facilitated the entry of wives and children of Indians domiciled in South Africa, ensured marriages would be legal once solemnised by government officials, and granted free passages to those who gave up their right to domicile in South Africa.<sup>96</sup> Indians were still banned from entering the Orange Free State, only Indians born in South Africa before August 1913 were allowed to enter the Cape, and restrictions against Indian immigration remained.<sup>97</sup> While the Act 'constituted a complete and final settlement of the controversy' for

Smuts, Gandhi considered it the 'Magna Carta' of Indians, providing them with breathing space to resolve their outstanding grievances.<sup>98</sup>

The Agreement left many issues unresolved and was criticised strongly by many Indians. In Natal, PS Aiyar declared:

The Indian community has materially gained nothing. On the whole, we strongly protest against the assumption that the 'Indian Relief Act' closes the chapter of the final settlement of the Indian question, and in fact, the community believes it is just the beginning of the first chapter towards a settlement...The whole of this so-called settlement presents the ugly look of a farce.<sup>99</sup>

Kaiwar echoes this when he 'wonder[s] to what extent the success of *satyagraha* in having the tax repealed and the Searle decision reversed also, ironically, institutionalised Indians in a subordinate position'.<sup>100</sup> It was in this context that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi left South Africa for the last time on 18 July 1914. The strike marked, in many senses, the end of an era as the next few decades would witness the rapid urbanisation of Indians, bringing with it a new set of challenges and throwing to the fore a new cast of characters.

The simple writing of the 1914 Agreement as a 'victory' erases from history the effects of the strike on those who still laboured on the plantations. They might have wondered about the word 'relief' in the Act, as Aiyar points out. For many, conditions on plantations and mines worsened. According to Henning, after 1914 'there was complete indifference on the part of the Protector to protect the weak and seek justice'.<sup>101</sup> Reverend Pearson, writing a year after the strike, remarked on the 'artificial and inhuman relationship between the planter and the indentured labourers...Cattle and dogs may well be housed and well fed and even kindly treated as animals, but for men and women we require something more than conditions such as are satisfactory for cattle.'<sup>102</sup>

The Smuts–Gandhi Agreement cut off other possible impulses, especially the idea of Indians linking up with Africans, by institutionalising Indianness. Built into the Agreement was also the gradual 'upliftment' of Indians. Politics in the aftermath of the strike reverted to petitions and memoranda, as accommodation rather than resistance became the watchword. And then there was the question of repatriation. This allowed any Indian, indentured or free, to return to India at the South African government's expense on condition they would never be allowed to return. The government was keen on this provision, to reduce the Indian population. Gandhi and CF Andrews supported it. As we move into the final chapter, we pick up the threads of those who took advantage of the 'gains' of the 1914 settlement, to their detriment as they were to discover.









# Africa calling

I travelled to a distant town  
 I could not find my mother  
 I could not find my father  
 I could not hear the drum  
 Whose ancestor am I?

KAMAU BRATHWAITE<sup>1</sup>

Moonsamy Perumal Maistry, described as ‘veteran laundryman of Tongaat’, was interviewed by CGT Watson in 1960, shortly before visiting India after almost 50 years in South Africa:

And now, Mr. Maistry, you are on the point of leaving for India. Will this be your first visit?

Yes. I sail with my wife and daughter tomorrow in the *Karanja*.

To visit relatives?

No. We have no relatives in India that I know of. Just to visit the famous places. I am taking my car with me.<sup>2</sup>

Running through this stark conversation and the tales that we narrate below is a sense that Africa had become ‘home’ for many indentured migrants, and the deep desire to make their futures ‘here’ rather than ‘there’. Maistry had no family; he was only going to see ‘famous places’. His alienation from his homeland was so complete that he planned on touring India with his ‘African’ car. India, it seems, had become unfamiliar to Maistry. Time and indenture had weakened his emotional and physical links to his village. He was returning as an outsider, a stranger in his own ‘home’.

The unexpressed, subliminal backdrop to Maistry’s sentiments is that Indians had forged new lives that often transcended the caste system, made their religious practices more flexible, led them to adopt new social customs, opened new avenues for entertainment and socialising, and, most importantly, their children only knew Africa and its call. Dawood Khan, passenger 43 on the *Truro*, the first ship to transport the indentured to Natal, listed his caste as ‘African’. Labelled a ‘madman’, he was cast back to India. Like many far-sighted persons too readily labelled ‘mad’, perhaps he may just have known more about the future! Quite apart from economic considerations in India, the social transformation fashioned by indenture made it difficult for migrants to reintegrate into village society. In Lal’s words, indenture marked ‘the

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OPPOSITE: Munigadu Rangadoo and his family walked from Dar-es-Salaam through Mozambique into northern Zululand in an effort to return to South Africa after being repatriated to India. The South African authorities subsequently deported them back to India.

PREVIOUS PAGE: African workers at Reynolds Brothers Ltd. The 1913 strike convinced sugar planters to switch to African labour. In 1910, 88 per cent of the workforce was Indian and 12 per cent African; by 1925, 71 per cent was African.

death of one world and the beginning of another...[It was] the crucible which forged a new, distinctive identity'.<sup>3</sup>

[This identity] is characterised by an enduring dissociation from its territorial homeland...The shared experience of recruitment and documentation, the gruelling journey aboard sailing and [later] steam ships, the caste-violating cohabitation and commensality, the collective drama of the passage itself, the repetitive nature of quarantine and disembarkation, the treatment at the hands of overseers and the intensely regulated conditions of plantation life led to the creation of self-contained or exclusivist communities. In effect, then, the motley crowd...was changed by the rigours of indenture into a self-referential enclave.<sup>4</sup>

While travel across the *kala pani*, indenture and new experiences in Natal re-formed migrants, their sense of origin had not completely vanished. Unlike Maistry, for most this was a period of transition, ambiguity, fluidity, confusion and contradictory pulls. The pull of the familiar never disappeared. The new rarely seemed to completely satisfy longing for the old. There was a quest to build religious buildings and symbols like those back in India. Yet, we see in the narratives of many ex-indentured that return was followed by a yearning for Africa. It is only in the depths of the most essentialist minds that one identity is accepted at the expense of all others. Or, as Amartya Sen would have it, 'identities are robustly plural' and 'the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others'.<sup>5</sup> This is the thread running through these narratives.

Many of the indentured constructed an 'imaginary' homeland 'from the space of distance to compensate for a loss occasioned by the unspeakable trauma' of the break with India.<sup>6</sup> This imaginary world was often at odds with the reality of village life in India itself. Reconstruction of an 'imaginary' homeland, inscribed in which was a larger-than-life image of home, and the ambiguous identity constructions that resulted, was, we contend, of great strategic value in allowing many of the ex-indentured to not simply become victims of race and class oppression, but to use the link with India to build cultural and religious organisations in South Africa. These were an important refuge for Indians as they continued the struggle against the worst excesses of white rule.

Progressive changes in the law after 1897 which, in their most basic form, sought to send 'Indians' back home, and other more personal reasons, saw many of the migrants return to India. On their return, the space that allowed for a sense of in-betweenness was no more and, more importantly, the imaginary homeland became all too real for many, and perhaps also brought home the reason why indentured labour was something that they or their fathers or mothers had engaged with in the first place (economic, social or cultural degradation). The 'comfort zone' of limbo was over and the ex-indentured had to choose between staying in India or returning to South Africa, and then act upon that decision. This was the moment when identities in effect became dichotomised: either they were 'Indian' of whatever background who returned to India, or 'Indian' of whatever background who would remain in South Africa and establish their status and identity in the limited and limiting ways accessible to the ex-indentured.

The examples of those who returned to India only to realise that they had chosen the wrong option exposed the limits of in-betweenness: the image of the loving and caring homeland proved to be precisely that, an image only, and so they sought a return to Africa.

## Strangers among their 'own'

Like the characters in VS Naipaul's 'Arcade of Hanuman House', many indentured may have 'come for a short time and stayed longer than expected'. While they may have 'continually talked of going back to India', most did not because they were 'afraid of the unknown, afraid to leave the familiar temporariness'.<sup>7</sup> The archives, however, are littered with examples of people who, out of desperation, returned to India. Subriah Pillay was experiencing a difficult time in the aftermath of the First World War. Depressed economic conditions, compounded by the government's racist policies, left him with few options. The Immigration Office reported that he was 'in very poor financial circumstances and does not appear to be able to earn a living. His wife furthermore has been an invalid for many years and can do little or nothing to help in household duties. Being an agriculturalist he hopes to be able to make a living in India.'<sup>8</sup> Subriah returned with his wife, Manomini, and children, Narainsamy, Moothoosamy, Yallama and Gopalsamy, in June 1919. This option was made all the more attractive by the offer of free passages.<sup>9</sup> There were many like Subriah.

Most returnees found it difficult to adjust to life in India because of cultural, psychological, religious or economic factors, or a combination of these. Sirdar Sheosaran's story (Chapter 6) underscored the panoptic gaze to which returnees were subject, and the suspicion and envy with which they were viewed. We are reminded here of Gmelch's observation, 'If you come back with money, they are jealous. If you come back with nothing they ridicule you.'<sup>10</sup> We have come across a few anecdotal recollections of the experiences of returned migrants desiring to come back to Africa. Their nostalgic images of 'home' were immediately confronted with the harsh reality that 'home' had changed and, more crucially, they themselves had been transformed. Remember Maistry's story of how upon his return to India he found that 'all his friends were dead, his daughter married, and only a few distant kin remained'. So he 'came back...'

The experience of returnee Totaram Sanadhya of Fiji (highlighted in Chapter 9) – in which villagers asked him 'constantly...to declare that he remained true to his caste, that his Brahminhood had remained inviolate, that his marriage had been conducted within the strictures of caste and religion'<sup>11</sup> – which forced him to take flight to the city, is symptomatic of so many others who found, upon returning, that India was foreign to them and that they were strangers among their 'own' people. Fiction provides additional insight into the pitfalls of return. In Ramabai Espinet's *Swinging Bridge*, the narrator's Uncle Peter returns to India to trace his family roots. He is disillusioned by the cold reception: 'No one moved to hold him or touch him. Nor did they ask questions about his home or his family...no invitation to return was offered, nor did they ask to see his children. They were satisfied. The circle has been closed.'<sup>12</sup> Crossing the *kala pani* nullified the 'emotional intensity of prodigal returns'. There would be no 'feasts of welcome or transatlantic embraces for members of an extended family':

[Uncle Peter's] return did not represent the cyclical departures and arrivals that characterise diasporic movement, a going back and forth between two 'home' spaces to realise a transnational plenitude that incorporates diaspora and ancestral land in an undifferentiated territoriality. Instead, the completed circle indicates a point of finality, a closed chapter that maintains the sanctity of Indian history without the 'contaminating' stains of indenture. In this way, India can absolve itself of any claims of accountability or complicity...while simultaneously defending the purity of its nationalist origins. The unilateral relationship with the motherland reduces India to a mnemonic artifact commemorated in a museum of Indian heritage, where a series of still life objects and images represent frozen impressions of a distant memory.<sup>13</sup>

To exemplify the notion of 'return', we relate two powerful stories, beginning with one family's incredible walk across Africa in a quest that did not result in freedom but in repatriation.

## The long walk to repatriation

Industrial conditions in India, following the famine of 1920, have been unfavourable, and the returned migrants have experienced great difficulty in obtaining suitable employment. Many of them are colonial-born and find themselves utter strangers in the country. The India-born have found their long residence in the colonies has rendered them unfit for the old social conditions. These repatriates, after spending all their savings, have drifted back to Calcutta in the hope of finding ships to take them to their home in the colonies.<sup>14</sup>

The above sentiments of J Hullah, Secretary to the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, India, were to prove apposite in many instances.

Staring intently at the photographer in the image on page 422 is a family of four, Munigadu Rangadoo (57684) with his children Narainsamy, Amasigadu and Muthialu. They made contact with the South African government from Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania) on 14 April 1922 when Munigadu wrote to the Minister of Justice seeking re-entry into South Africa.<sup>15</sup> Their 'contact' with South Africa, though, had begun much earlier. Munigadu was 21 when he first arrived in Natal from North Arcot on the *Congella* in March 1895. He was assigned to the Natal Central Sugar Company in Mount Edgecombe. A shipmate, Mangai (57890), was assigned to the same employer and they married shortly after. She was five years his senior. Both were of the Tamil agricultural caste, Odda. Though marrying an older woman may not have happened 'back home', because of gender imbalances this was not unusual in the 'indentured home'.

Munigadu and Mangai had two sons, Narainsamy, who was born in 1901, and Amasigadu, who was born in 1904. Mangai, it appears, died shortly after, as there is no trace of her in the official records. Munigadu subsequently married Thaiy Chinna Kistadoo (56433), who had arrived with her parents and three siblings on the *Pongola* in October 1894. Thaiy, though just 12 when she arrived, was immediately put to work at Kearsney Estate. The family was also of the Odda caste and from the village of Wandiwash, the same as Munigadu. This in itself is

revealing. Despite a system that spread the indentured far and wide and separated kith and kin, as the indentured settled, networks developed with tentacles that apparently stretched from the village onto the plantation. Munigadu and Thayi had a daughter, Muthialu.

Narainsamy, Amasigadu and Muthialu, who were born in Durban, returned to India with their father on the *Umhloti* on 26 August 1920 under the Indian Relief Act of 1914, which provided financial inducements to Indians to repatriate. Munigadu, it seems, acted hastily in leaving Durban because he was depressed after Thayi's death. He needed 'consoling' and sought solace from his extended family in India.<sup>16</sup> In one of their letters, the children intimate that Munigadu became 'insane' after Thayi's death and this, coupled with ignorance of the law, resulted in his return. They found India 'almost a foreign country' and wanted to return to 'the land of birth' but could not do so because Munigadu had abandoned his and his family's right to domicile in South Africa in return for free passage. Thus, Amasigadu and Muthialu, 16 and 12 respectively when their father decided to return, and thus under age, also lost their right to domicile in South Africa, even though they had no say in the decision.

Munigadu and his family were unable to reconcile with 'home'. For one thing, the compromises they would have made laid bare their claims to have maintained 'traditional' ways of doing things. They were desperate to escape India and undertook an innovative journey to circumvent legal barriers. They made their way to Dar-es-Salaam and from there sought permission to enter South Africa. When this was refused, they walked from Dar-es-Salaam, through present-day Mozambique (then Lourenço Marques), to northern Zululand, where they were apprehended in Mkuzi.

I ran; on the thornfields of Dar es Salaam...I ran; and the mosquitoes did not harm me; the Umfolozi crocodiles and eagles smiled on me; the valley of Phongola shrieked through their cicadas...the Shangaan giraffe with its beady eyes showed me the way; the wild cats bowed their heads in shame. And I ran...the sun, with a red scar on its chin, laughed and said lift your head above your shoulders, decorate it with garlands...you will be home tonight...And I ran, my head high up above the shoulders to start again the rounds of sorrow, homecomings, exile...  
ARI SITAS<sup>17</sup>

Munigadu's family walked well over 2 000 miles in what was described as 'some of the most difficult country in the world with no little danger from wild animals'.<sup>18</sup> They were held in Mkuzi for three weeks, then transferred to Durban as 'prohibited immigrants'. The Principal Immigration Officer in Durban, GW Dick, declined their request to remain in South Africa. Advocate Leon Renaud wrote on their behalf to Dick on 15 May 1923:

The Appellants were born in this country. Under the influence of their father they consented to undertake not to return again to Natal. Being innocent and uneducated labourers accustomed to work in the fields, the appellants never realised that having been born in this country this was their home and that any other would be alien to them. They went to India and found that their father's relations had died or disappeared and the country was a place distant and foreign to them in every way. They had

lost all associations, the land was new, even the air that they breathed was foreign to them. Under the circumstances, and the misery attending their endeavours to form a home in that land, they lost heart and endeavoured to trace their steps to this country. They have walked from Dar-es-Salaam and suffered innumerable hardships.

Dick advised Patrick Duncan, Minister for the Interior, on 18 May 1923 that while he could not deny 'hardship if these people [were] sent back to India', they should be deported 'on principle'. He had received information 'from time to time from various sources' that a large number of Indians repatriated after 1914 'found that conditions in India [were] not agreeable to them and [were] extremely anxious to return to Natal'. Dick feared that if it became known that the government complied with a request for readmission, they would be 'inundated with applications and I am sure each applicant will be able to tell a tale of hardship quite as great as that of the present applicants'.

The government heeded Dick's advice, and on 23 May 1922 declined Munigadu's application. To complicate matters for Dick, Renaud informed him on 19 June that Muthialu had married a Natal-born Indian, Marimuthu, in Zanzibar. Since Marimuthu had the right to domicile in South Africa, as much as Dick hated the idea, he could not deport Muthialu. Munigadu challenged the decision in the Appellate Court in Bloemfontein before the full bench, comprising Chief Justice Sir J Rose Innes, Sir J Wessels, Sir William Solomon and Justice J de Villiers. His attorney asked the court to cancel the warrant of deportation because Munigadu, as an indentured immigrant, was entitled to a free passage without giving up his right to domicile. The court ruled that Dick was acting within his jurisdiction and dismissed the application with costs on 27 September 1923.<sup>19</sup>

Munigadu was deported in early October but Narainsamy and Amasigadu appealed the decision on 6 October 1923. Amod Bayat and Sorabjee Rustomjee, president and vice-president respectively of the Natal Indian Congress, submitted a petition on their behalf. In the covering letter, Solicitor Harold J Stuart reminded Dick that the applicants were '[market] gardeners and as such are an asset to the country and their being forced to go to what, for them is quite a foreign land, would work such an injustice that I feel some word from you would put matters right, and thereby earn the lasting gratitude of these poor uneducated deluded fools whose only wrong warranting their deportation as criminals appears to be their ignorance'.<sup>20</sup>

Dick considered the involvement of the Congress 'sinister'. He told Duncan that this was 'part of a programme to stir up all matters in connection with the Asiatic question by all possible means especially at the present juncture. You may rest assured no avenue will be left unexplored by the organisation to grasp any occasion or opportunity whatever of keeping their cause in the limelight and whenever possible of making an exposé of instances whether the points involved are technical or otherwise.' Duncan declined the appeal on 31 October 1923.

Narainsamy and Amasigadu had to lodge a deposit of £60 for their appeal. As they did not have money, Congress members CM Naidoo, VSC Pather and CG Chetty provided the funds. The court denied them the right of appeal.

The deposit should have been returned, but Dick wanted to retain the money until the men were physically deported because he 'strongly suspected that when the decision [of depor-



tation] is conveyed to the men they will not be thereafter available for deportation, but will seek to elude the Department's instructions by disappearing. I hope, however, that my proposed course of action will be successful in circumventing what I anticipate in the way of skilled evasion or slippery subterfuge.' Duncan agreed to retain the deposit 'until all expenditure in connection with their deportation is met, and after that whatever balance is available must be transferred towards government costs'.

Narainsamy and Amasigadu failed to get the decision overturned and were set to be deported on 26 November, but the Congress got a reprieve until 12 December from the Interior Ministry because they were unable to contact their father in India. According to Stuart, 'it was necessary that they should know where he [Munigadu] was in order that no trouble would be experienced by them when they arrive in India'. Dick was angry that the Ministry had not discussed this with him. He wrote to Duncan on 30 November 1923 that if there was another application for extension he should 'be at once advised so that I may adjust arrangements accordingly and not be made to appear foolish, and be talked of as such, by the Indians concerned and others'.

The Congress requested another extension to 24 December for Narainsamy and Amasigadu. This was declined and the brothers were deported on the *Karagola* on 10 December 1923. The cost of the voyage (£20) was deducted from the deposit paid by Congress members. Dick's attempt to keep the balance of the deposit to defray other expenses was deemed illegal by the court and he was forced to return the money to Naidoo, Pather and Chetty. Narainsamy and Amasigadu, denied the opportunity to live in the land of their birth, were shipped back to India, in their words a 'foreign country', something that Uncle Peter could relate to.

While we know little about Munigadu's family, we do know, in part, what became of another family desperate to return from India. They signed themselves as 'The African Family' and pleaded to be returned from the 'dreaded foreign land' to our 'Longing Land, the Dark Continent. There we will find happiness and peace.'

## The African family: 'perishing like beasts'

Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the [India] I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?  
How can I turn from Africa and live?

DEREK WALCOTT<sup>21</sup>

The Munshis were more fortunate than Munigadu's family, though it did not seem so for a long time. On 13 May 1927, 17-year-old AM Munshi wrote to the Governor General of South Africa from Bombay for a 'free pass' to return to South Africa. The family, made up of his father, mother, three brothers and a sister, had returned to India in 1924. All the children were born in South Africa. Between 1924 and 1927, two brothers died of poverty:

We are born under the British flag and we claim our British right. For the last three years had we been in starvation in this wild desolate veld [field] – never had we a change at our dress – nor do we eat sufficient. Here we have lost two of our brothers and the rest are daily sick. My parents are very old. Here we have nobody to our care – they are all in different parts of South Africa. We are asking in the name of God for a pass to our Longing Land, the Dark Continent. There we will find happiness and peace.<sup>22</sup>

HL Smith, the Governor General's secretary, acknowledged the letter on 21 June 1927 but did not follow up. Munshi wrote again on 3 August 1927, signing the letter 'The African Family':

We Africans are awaiting in the name of the Lord God for our order to our born country because we have no more to life ourselves and none to put life into us. Secondly, two of the African family are no more in this wicked world. Your Excellency surely could make out why my two young brothers died in India. Its that they came into a town known as Bombay to earn for a living that they met their last because, My Lord, not even our father can give us a piece of bread nor my mother for they are of age old. Now we young ones have to support them. Your Excellency we do not want to come to South Africa for business making. No, we have those who have stores of supply and their own houses. What more do we want when we shall have enough for our stomach and live like human beings.

The government did not reply, so the persevering Munshi wrote again on 2 September 1927:

We have none of our known relations, nor have we money and the worst of all is that we cannot get employment for we know none of the native tongues...We are born British and we have been deceived by our father for he told us that we are to come along to his native country for a period of three years and would return after the time mentioned...Now as British Subjects we claim the British Right.

Munshi's letter of 12 October 1927 was even more desperate:

My Papa brought us to India to stay at his home for a couple of years and should again return to Motherland. But we have passed two couples of years, but no return, no money, no clothes, no home, no near relations, nothing in India to go ahead of our living industry.

The family tried year after year without luck. Eventually, on 10 October 1936, the mother, Mrs AM Munshi, appealed to the Governor General:

For twelve years I have been sitting at the feet of the rulers but never have I been shown any mercy. For twelve weary years have I written dozens of petitions to the Governments to send me back to my Native Land. Your Excellency, what have I and my children done that we can't be permitted to return to our Native land? What crime have we committed to be deported to a foreign land? What have we done that we have been cast out of our land, and sent as exiles to this land of starvation? Oh God, how am I suffering in this world! I have lost my two dear sons and my husband. I am actually starving. I

am stranded. I don't know backwards nor forwards. Every day new horrors gaze on me and my children. I don't know what will be my fate unless Your Excellency will take immediate steps for relieving us from the calamities that has befallen us. As God is our Judge that ever since we came back to India I had to starve, two days, three days. Must I sit hungry? We are perishing like beasts. For God's sake, can't you rulers relieve me from this dreaded living which I am facing? Am I and my children serving a life imprisonment in this foreign land? Your Excellency, I must fight till the end. I must as I am getting worse and worster. In the name of God consider my case, have pity on a poor widow. Must I perish in this dreaded land? Will no one care for us in this world?

In October 1938, Mrs Munshi finally received passports, dated 2 May 1938, for two of her sons. They were numbered 111902 and 111903. As for their fate in South Africa and that of the rest of the family in India, the archives are silent.

Unfortunately, too little is known about the subjective responses of returned migrants aside from the obvious ones of poverty, caste loss, and social and cultural rejection by village society. The case studies of Munigadu and Munshi also allude to the theme of citizenship, which we highlighted in our discussion of the South African War. Border controls based on the implicit idea of bounded nation states were instrumental in defining subjecthood within the macro context of the British Empire.<sup>23</sup> As Jonathan Hyslop has shown, 'Indian nationalists, diasporic British labour, new settler-state leaderships, and the contending political factions in the imperial centre' engaged in a 'multi-faceted discursive struggle over imperial citizenship',<sup>24</sup> in which white labour and white settler-state leaderships were in the ascendancy. 'Coolie' agency was limited by this official system of interpellation which made them legitimate one minute, illegitimate the next. While Gandhi, among others, held out the argument of equal rights under the Empire, white colonists in places like Natal, Australia and New Zealand used 'race' as a mechanism to exclude and limit the notion of citizenship by reserving the franchise exclusively for whites.<sup>25</sup>

## Of scamps, scoundrels and vagabonds

[People] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. KARL MARX<sup>26</sup>

The indentured came to Natal as part of the imperial movement of labour to various British colonies. Their personal profiles, name, sex, caste, age, home village, employer, and parents, names were meticulously recorded, and we know that they were diverse in many respects. Among the indentured were single mothers, widows, the landless, outcasts – both for personal 'misdemeanours' or because of the status system – adventurers and, above all, the vast majority who were poor and perhaps saw no immediate respite in their circumstances.

While colonial officials referred to the indentured as the 'dregs' of Indian society, this label has been debunked in a number of studies. Although our study alludes to the diverse origins of the indentured, it is not our intention to 'set the record straight'. What we have shown,

however, is that the label 'dregs' became an excuse, a reason, a justification, for employers and colonial authorities to subject the indentured to appalling conditions and to treat them without a sense of the fact that they were human beings.

As the experience of Indians in Natal suggests, it is one thing to empirically show that many indentured came from the middle to higher castes of Indian society but quite another for them to have used this to prove that they were 'civilised'. And what would this imply of those who came from the lower castes? The focus on caste to prove the 'higher' status of the indentured is to accept the very idea of caste as a marker of ability, of civility, of learning, the kind of thinking that allowed caste to return with a vengeance – as well as racism mainly directed against Africans – on the basis of superior 'breeding'.

In debunking labels, in seeking to present a more nuanced story than Hugh Tinker's *A New System of Slavery*, a magisterial study despite its shortcomings, we do not intend to repeat the mistake by going to the opposite extreme and presenting a sanitised version of indenture. In pointing to the complex set of reasons which prompted Indians to indenture, we are not discounting that many had already fallen on hard times, may have been displaced, or were living on the streets of Calcutta and Madras. To deny economic hardship as a factor inducing Indians into indenture would be to ignore reality. After all, India was in a state of turmoil as the British tried to turn it into an economic asset for the Crown and its attendant business allies. There were many victims in this quest. We have already shown how, as the railway spread, so did British rule, and with it taxation, landlessness, hunger and migrancy.

Indenture sought to turn people into cogs in a labouring machine. For five years, even elementary aspects of the lives of Indians, like experiencing cold, being tired, the need to relieve themselves, being in love, being hungry, fear, were all tied in to their indenture. If the indentured showed signs of not performing, the colonists had an array of weapons to call upon, ranging from whipping, fining and denial of rations to deportation. These 'weapons of humanity' were supposedly meant to drag the dregs of society into civilisation, but in reality were designed to intimidate and ensure compliance with the dictates of the masters. As we reflect on the important corrective of writing in the agency of the colonised, and challenging the idea of the colonised as simply victims, we must not ignore the fact that 'Europe did colonise, not the other way around, and in so doing perpetrated and provoked a great deal of violence, both physical and cultural. To acknowledge this fact, the fact that imperialism had real effects, is not to remove agency. It is merely to refuse to trivialise it.'<sup>27</sup>

In focusing on how the indentured responded, we need to reiterate that they were arriving in a new land, mostly labouring with people whom they had just met, often pining for wives and children they had left behind, and forced by law to keep within the confines of the plantation, among a host of other rules to produce conformity and acquiescence. In this context, deference, overt and covert resistance, and fatalism were all part of the indentured response. Many 'reacted for the most part by silence, taciturnity and a withdrawal into a close-knit and for the most part impenetrable circle of fellow-workers'.<sup>28</sup>

But as we have been at pains to show, resignation did not mean an absence of resentment. Sometimes the resentment translated into a singular challenge like Whootum Singh's '*Bhen*

*Choodh'*; at other times into collective planned revenge, as in the case of the killing of Alexander Arnold; and at other times taking advantage of the presence of authorities to raise issues of maltreatment, like Ismail Baksh on the occasion of the visit of the Protector. There were other challenges, too, like Angel's outright defiance, Votti's use of the legal system, and Rungabee's single-minded pursuit of justice. Often, the 'subalterns' failed to get justice because it mattered more who was speaking than what was being said, but it was not for want of trying.

There were other defences too. The acting out of 'Coolie Christmas', which saw the indentured take over the streets of Durban, created a collective spirit and confronted the notion of the indentured as numbers as they turned their bodies from instruments of labour into instruments of pleasure and confrontation with the authorities. The atmosphere was reminiscent of Bakhtin's characterisation of medieval carnival as the 'second world and second life outside officialdom...one might say that carnival celebrated a temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions'.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, the indentured determinedly built religious buildings akin to the ones back home. This was important, as were the songs, plays and dances carried over the *kala pani*, in ensuring that the white masters could not reduce the indentured to a *tabula rasa* and write on their bodies what they desired. In fact, the body was also an act of resistance in this context. The indentured were stripped nearly naked, forced to hold identifying numbers in front of their bodies (see opposite page 1), and bundled off to the plantation. They, in return, dressed themselves up at every opportunity in the best finery they could lay their hands on, and alongside this fought incredible battles to turn their status as heathens into one in which their religion and right to family was recognised. The many transformations included a pragmatic 'making do'. The inversion of the dowry system is one example, as is marrying across caste and religious lines.

The link with India also allowed for the raising of afflictions and injustices on a global plane. As the British tried to co-opt resistance in India, so it had to be seen to take seriously the voices of 'insiders' like Gokhale. While the limitations of what could be done were exposed in the lead-up to the 1913 strike, and the caste, class and gender prejudices of those in the forefront of the Indian nationalist struggle were revealed in the ways they challenged the system of indenture, at least the struggles of the indentured entered into the Indian nationalist movement and created conditions for them to have access to a wider canvas, even while isolated in and bounded by the plantation. Sometimes this link was more personal, as shown by the example of Kanniah Appavoo who tried to coordinate a plan of action with his sister in India to effect a transfer from his employer in Natal.

The main form of resistance, though, was to be found in the breaking of tools, malingering, feigning illness and, importantly, desertion. Desertion was sometimes for a limited period, although as the diamond and gold mines offered opportunities further afield, it became a one-way ticket. We also touched upon suicide as a form of ultimate defiance, while recognising that it was an act propelled by a myriad of reasons.

The authorities would refer to the indentured who circumvented the system and mitigated its excesses as scamps, scoundrels and vagabonds, and many were precisely this. It might be

apposite to quote from an example of lower-caste resistance in India in the twentieth century to make the point regarding the form and nature of indentured resistance in Natal:

Lifelong indentured servants most characteristically expressed discontent about their relationship with their master by performing their work carelessly and inefficiently. They could intentionally or unconsciously feign illness, ignorance or incompetence, driving their master to distraction. Even though the master could retaliate by refusing to give his servant the extra fringe benefits, he was still obliged to maintain him at a subsistence level if he did not want to lose his investment completely. *This method of passive resistance, provided it was not expressed as open defiance, was nearly unbeatable; it reinforced the Havik's stereotype concerning the character of low caste persons, but gave them little recourse to action.*<sup>30</sup>

While highlighting resistance, we also pointed to the internal violence that permeated the life of indenture, and how the evolving religious institutions, while on the one hand creating conditions that protected the indentured from the harshest aspects of indenture, also produced an environment that reinforced divisions and reeled in the collective spirit that animated the celebration of events like 'Coolie Christmas'.

The indentured created spaces for themselves within the system and it would erase too much of the life of indenture to see them simply as 'survivors'. Subject positions were prescribed in the system; a hierarchy of relations was part and parcel of *girmit*: masters, managers, overseers, Sirdars, house servants, 'coolies'. Notwithstanding this, many not only resisted but took advantage of spaces to advance themselves economically, with Nulliah and Bodasing the most obvious examples.

In the post-indenture period, class would thus be added to the variables that differentiated indentured migrants. The indentured, in some cases, accepted the white man's bar of civilisation, his claim to the right to rule, and the legitimacy of Empire. David Vinden and the South African Gandhi, in different ways, attest to this.

The task of providing a nuanced story of indenture meant resisting the temptation to wax lyrical about the amazing lives of the indentured. We started our journey through indenture with such rose-tinted archival spectacles. And the story of indenture was truly an eye-opener. The challenge was how to present it in a manner which confronted descriptions of the indentured as a 'floating caravan of barbarian tourists', as one colonial official put it, without sliding into a celebratory history infused with narrow ethnic pride and chauvinism, even racism. While a multiplicity of triumphs and feats of overcoming difficult odds litter the story, the narrative cannot be reduced to almost biblical terms of persecution and redemption.

There is no need to paint the indentured as long-suffering, 'pure' individuals. In the case of women this denialism is most persistent, mostly because it is a reaction to colonial critics and officials who claimed that most women who emigrated were prostitutes or of 'loose morals'.

Women came for a variety of reasons. There were widows escaping *sati*,<sup>31</sup> others escaping forced marriages, some escaping the twin strictures of a patriarchal and caste-ridden society.

Most came as ordinary migrants, 'did their time' and became part of settled communities. Many took advantage of new opportunities. This was doubly difficult because their status was not equal to that of indentured men. As Vijay Mishra points out, 'indenture was especially cruel to women, their past histories grossly misrepresented and their role as workers (on plantations) invariably under the interdict of sexual assault'.<sup>32</sup>

When Veeramah sued Nulliah's estate for cancellation of the postnuptial contract, Justice Broome gave judgment against her. But he made an important observation:

The normal medium of conversation in the house was originally Telegu or Tamil, but from the time when the elder children began going to school, where they were educated in the English medium, English began to compete with Tamil and Telegu as the home language ... Veeramah became proficient in English. She could understand English fairly well and could even read and write figures and simple words. During recent years she used to look at English newspapers and magazines – one witness described her as an avid reader of detective stories. Her knowledge of English undoubtedly improved after 1931, as she came into contact with more and more school-going grandchildren, and a European visitor to the house during the last five years described her English as fluent.<sup>33</sup>

This is fascinating for the way it tracks Veeramah's development through self-education. Rajkumari Singh's poem 'Per Ajie' (Great-grandmother), which she dedicated to the first indentured woman, is apposite in the case of Veeramah:

Per Ajie  
I can see  
How in stature  
Thou didst grow  
Shoulders up  
Head held high  
The challenge  
In thine eye<sup>34</sup>

There were many like Veeramah; equally, there were some who refused to bow to the dictates of male morality and patriarchy, both of the indentured and white colonial type. That is why we highlighted the life of Angel, who declined to be disciplined. There is something noble about her spirit of challenge and refusal to conform. Her life, too, like that of Votti's, is that of an indentured migrant whose agency and power came from both confronting and carving spaces within an oppressive system.

We hope that we have succeeded in contributing to the 'ongoing archaeological project of excavating gender-differentiated data' in order to deepen our understanding of indentured migration to Natal, aware that much still needs to be done.<sup>35</sup>

## A new beginning

A man's destination is not his destiny,  
Every country is home to one man  
And exile to another...

SATANDRA NANDAN<sup>36</sup>

By the time the 1913 strike had run its course and Gandhi had returned to India in June 1914, indentured labourers had been in South Africa for over half a century. Their presence was carved into the very landscape, with the minarets of mosques vying for attention with Shaivite or Vaishnavite temples, and Indian Baptists replete with saris carrying Bibles marked in Tamil. Crucially, these forms were, according to Vijay Mishra, 'spatially reproduced without India as their material referent...because India had no real, tangible existence in the socio-political consciousness of the people...India...existed as a pure imaginary space of epic plenitude'.<sup>37</sup> Sudesh Mishra refers to these deterritorialised cultural markers as 'milieu effects' which 'have the virtue of transforming any alienating territory into hospitable terrain, or *habitus*'.<sup>38</sup> The cultural markers of Indians included temples and mosques, festivals, language, collective memories, the bonds of *jahajibhai*, and diet, since food rations were the same for all the indentured.

There were other markers too. Among the starkest were the graves of those who died in such great numbers on the cane fields, in the coal mines in the north, and alongside the railway tracks stretching outwards from Natal to Lobito Bay in Angola.

But if the 1913 strike galvanised across class and religious lines, this was to conceal for a moment new fissures built on old constructs. Telegu and Tamil Baptists went their separate ways. The carnival of 'Coolie Christmas' lost its shine and exuberant participation as Hindus boycotted, while celebrating Deepavali. 'Celebrate' might be the wrong word, for the gatekeepers of Hinduism ensured that it was recognised not by celebration, but rather by an austere procession that ended, unlike Muharram, not with confrontation but in a garlanding of white authorities. Indentured Islam, too, as it met its brethren passing by in the form of wealthy Muslim traders who often held sway in the institutions of Islam, left the street for the mosque and the sound of the tom-toms for the word of the Imams.

The emphasis on collective memories can often occlude and conceal more than it reveals. The rubric of 'Indian' was riven with fissures and divisions, some new and others borrowed from remembered traditions. Some indentured, like Bodasing, Gabriel, Saib and Nulliah, were becoming wealthy, while many other ex-indentured could scarcely pay the £3 tax. Religious differences, the debate about identity and political alliances with other racial groups, the form and nature of family reconstruction, and class were markers that would trespass with different levels of intensity into the body politic.

At the same time, white power was being consolidated and the hand of capital considerably strengthened as it sought African labour to feed mining and the myriad of industries that arose alongside it. The 1913 Native Land Act reserved 13 per cent of the land for two-thirds of the population. Sol Plaatje, in a powerful eyewitness account, *Native Life in South Africa*, wrote: 'Awaking on Friday morning, June 20, 1913 the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth.'<sup>39</sup> The Act, of course, came



in the wake of the pincer of taxation and progressive white land invasions over several decades. In Natal, the defeat of Bambatha in 1906 put large numbers of Zulus on the move, and dramatically increased 'the number of migrants seeking work on the Rand and elsewhere into the migrant labour system'.<sup>40</sup>

Compulsion lay at the heart of this transformation for the majority, and 'that compulsion ranged from the insistence of chiefs and homestead heads, and the perception of an escape from the constraints of an ascriptive society, to indebtedness to traders, and the operations of recruiters and the demands of the state for forced labour and tax'. How like the impulse to sign on for indenture this sounds. On the eve of the First World War, it seemed that white power was never stronger, or capital's reach more widespread and lethal.

Most of Natal's rural Africans headed for the Rand, but large numbers also made their way to the urban centres of Natal, especially Durban, where they jostled for living space with the Indian working class, and developed ambiguous relationships with Indian landlords in places like Cato Manor. As the Indian and African working classes were taking shape in greater Durban, so the racial contours of urban South African society were being forged. In Natal, this process would see African labour replacing Indians in farming, mining and the public sector. There were dramatic changes on sugar estates. In 1910, 88 per cent of the workforce was Indian and 12 per cent African; by 1925, 71 per cent was African.<sup>41</sup>

The 1913 strike convinced sugar planters that they had to switch to African labour. David Fowler of the Natal Sugar Association wrote to RH Addison, Chief Native Commissioner, on 1 December 1913 that the Association was 'most anxious to consider means whereby the supply of Native Labour to the Planters can be permanently increased...The moral effect upon the Indians would be enormous.'<sup>42</sup> On the south coast, migrant workers were imported from Pondoland. While indenture had ended, the working conditions of African labour mirrored its worst excesses. The stationmaster of Inzingolweni near Port Shepstone, EJ Larsen, wrote in 1922:

The boy stated that he came from Messrs. Reynolds Sugar Estate and was bound for Lusikisiki [a distance of 100 miles from Inzingolweni]. This boy was conveyed by wheelbarrow to a hut situated on hotel property which was generally used by natives recruited to Pondoland. [The] hotel proprietor was kind enough to attend and feed the boy but despite this attention the unfortunate lad had died...and was buried the same day.<sup>43</sup>

The name of the 14-year-old was Faku; he 'was severely emaciated'. Faku was by no means the first; 'natives are continually arriving at Inzingolweni station from various sugar estates in a state of collapse and frequently die within a few hours after arrival'. Violence permeated the lives of 'new migrants' and the *sjambok* remained a ubiquitous instrument of control. Diseases also took their toll as sugar estates largely refused to provide decent housing and managers forced sick workers to continue to labour. The general approach remained one of 'utilising the hospitals generally as morgues, and to send their sick Native employees to die'. How like indenture!

It was against this background of turmoil and new possibilities that the indentured were leaving the plantations in droves, seeking a foothold in urban areas, (re)building their places

of worship and cultural organisations, and eyeing opportunities in the manufacturing industry and market gardening. Openings were not limited to the manufacturing industry. As Charles van Onselen has pointed out, 'The South African transition to capitalism, like that elsewhere, was fraught with contradictions and conflicts and its cities were thus capable of opening as well as closing economic avenues, and there certainly was always more than one route in or out of the working class.'<sup>44</sup> As we have seen from the many lives we intruded upon, many took to market gardening and hawking. The majority were to eventually find employment in the manufacturing industry. Some who found jobs in factories joined trade unions, linking up, albeit for brief moments in the late 1930s and early 1940s, with African workers. The 1940s would also witness a heroic attempt by MP Naicker to organise Indian and African sugar workers into the Natal Sugar Field Workers' Union.

As Indians settled in urban centres, largely on the periphery of cities, schools, sporting clubs, and religious and cultural associations emerged. A sense of 'Indianness' developed in relation to Africans and whites, alongside one of becoming African, fighting to stay rather than pining for return. This 'settling in' was met with increasing antagonism by whites. What Sartre would later observe as the racist question that white-dominated states ask about the 'Other', 'What do we do with them now?', already applied to white South Africa and the presumed solution of 'the Indian problem'.<sup>45</sup> Race became the denoter to subjugate, accumulate and construct the South African 'nation' around a narrative of 'whiteness'.

Indians were pariahs in this reconfiguration of power and dominance. The South African League was formed in 1919 to ensure that they were not allowed to compete with whites at all levels of society, from jobs to land to business. The preferred solution was repatriation. The comments of Labour Party member TG Strachan were symptomatic of a growing feeling among whites: 'Durban will become one huge Indian bazaar, and little Asiatic children [the descendants of the original indentured Indians] will be playing around the graves of all that remains of the descendants of the old sugar planters.'<sup>46</sup>

The antagonism of whites that spread its tentacles across the country stimulated the constitution of the South African Indian Congress in the early 1920s. Up ahead lay more schemes of repatriation and colonisation; the tightening squeeze of racial segregation; the controversial marriage of a Muslim Indian Agent-General to a Hindu woman; the emergence of powerful trade unions in the 1930s that saw Indian and African workers unite, even while hostility between Indians and Africans was increasing; the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign; and a struggle for the soul of the Natal Indian Congress. Just beyond lay the coming to power of the National Party, the 1949 African-Indian violence, apartheid and defiance.

These are all stories for another time.

## Glossary

<i>arkatis</i>	unlicensed agents
<i>ayah</i>	nursemaid
<i>barakah/barakat</i>	blessings
<i>chadars</i>	sheets
<i>chait</i>	first month of Hindu calendar, corresponding to March in Gregorian year
<i>chapti</i>	flat, disk-shaped bread of northern India
<i>chitti</i>	lottery
<i>chowkidar</i>	watchman
<i>darshana</i>	visual imagery
<i>dawni</i>	the two-and-a-half yards of material with an embroidered border which Muslim women wear as a head scarf, draping the head and shoulders
<i>dharmsala</i>	free shelter
<i>dhobi</i>	laundry worker
<i>dhoti</i>	one-piece cloth worn around the waist
<i>doolie</i>	covered stretcher
<i>dopattah</i>	shawl
<i>fakirs</i>	a community of mendicants whose name is derived from the Arabic word <i>faqr</i> , meaning 'poverty'; beggars
<i>gai mata</i>	the notion of 'the cow as the mother of all'
<i>girmit</i>	indenture
<i>girmityas</i>	indentured migrants
<i>godna</i>	tattoo
<i>Gurkhas</i>	Nepalese who took their name from the eighteenth-century Hindu warrior-saint Guru Goraknath. They were seen as a 'martial race' and recruited into the British army.
<i>havan</i>	Hindu ritual prayers
<i>imambada</i>	sacred prayer room used by some Muslims during the 10 days of Muharram
<i>jahaji</i>	passenger on a ship
<i>jahajibhai</i>	shipmates
<i>kala pani</i>	literally 'black water', refers to the ocean and to the concept of emigration/indenture (see esp. p.56)
<i>kapal karay</i>	boat friends
<i>karâmât</i>	shrine
<i>karma</i>	a person's action (bad or good) that determines his or her destiny
<i>Katha</i>	a Hindu text that focuses on the theme of mystical spirituality
<i>koluthukar</i>	bricklayer
<i>komali</i>	clown in the <i>terukuttu</i> dance

<i>kuli</i>	In Tamil, referred to payment for menial work for persons without customary rights, from the lowest level in the industrial labour market, while the Gujarati root of <i>kuli</i> referred to a person belonging to the Kuli tribe. The 'personhood' of Kuli and payment of <i>kuli</i> were combined to create a new entity: the 'coolie'.
<i>kushti</i>	wrestling
<i>lascars</i>	a Persian word adopted by the British to refer to Indian seamen
<i>logies</i>	barracks
<i>lota/lotah</i>	bowl
<i>madrassah</i>	Islamic school
<i>mohurs</i>	sovereigns
<i>narak</i>	hell
<i>natchania</i>	popular form of song sung in Hindi and accompanied by the kettle drum and harmonium
<i>Nawab</i>	ruling prince
<i>paglaa samundar</i>	the 'mad ocean'
<i>panchayat</i>	sub-caste councils; assembly of five ( <i>panch</i> ) elders chosen to resolve disputes
<i>panjas</i>	replicas of the right hand of Husain
<i>pir</i>	holy man/guru
<i>puja</i>	a Hindu ritual
<i>pundits</i>	Brahmin scholars
<i>Puthu</i>	according to legend, a mound similar to an anthill in appearance, and which is regarded as home to the sacred Snake Goddess
<i>ryot</i>	subsistence farmer
<i>ryotwari</i>	a land revenue and taxation system put in place in India by the British. It imposed a greater burden on villagers than had been the case under the Moghuls. The system was known as <i>zamindari</i> in Bengal and <i>ryotwari</i> in Madras.
<i>sadhus</i>	Hindu holy men
<i>sandhya</i>	ritual prayer
<i>sati</i>	a Hindu custom in India in which the widow was burnt to ashes on her dead husband's pyre
<i>satyagraha</i>	passive resistance
<i>satyagrahis</i>	passive resisters; those who engage in passive resistance
<i>shuddhi</i>	'reconversion' and uplifting untouchables
<i>swaraj</i>	self-rule
<i>terukuttu</i>	literally, 'street-dance'
<i>tevaram</i>	first seven volumes of <i>Tirumurai</i> , a collection of Tamil devotional poetry
<i>ummah</i>	Islamic global community of believers

<i>urs</i>	weddings
<i>wâli</i>	saint
<i>zakah</i>	obligatory charity (Islam)
<i>zamindar</i>	collector of land revenue
<i>zamindari</i>	see <i>ryotwari</i>

## A note on terminology

We consider terms like *kaffir* (also spelt *kafir*), ‘native’ and ‘coolie’ derogatory, but have used them as they appeared in official documentation and newspapers; we also use ‘Maritzburg’ instead of ‘Pietermaritzburg’ because this was used in much of the correspondence and in the newspapers of the time; the ‘Coolie Commission Report’ refers to the 1872 Commission, while the Wragg Commission was completed in the period 1885–1887. These commissions were appointed in response to complaints of ill-treatment by indentured and ex-indentured Indians but, as we discuss in Chapter 4, they did not materially improve the conditions of indenture. We generally do not repeat the dates when referring to these commissions in the text.

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# Notes

This study is based largely on primary sources housed at the KwaZulu-Natal Archives in Maritzburg (NAB), Durban (TBD) and Pretoria (SAB). The most important sources were the papers of the Indian Immigrants (II) Department, Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO), Chief Native Commissioner (CNC), Attorney-General Office (AGO), Registrar, Supreme Court (RSC), Estates of the Dead (MSCE), Immigration Restriction Department (IRD), Minister of Justice and Public Works (MJPW), Public Works Department (PWD), Maritzburg Town Clerk (3/PMB), and Durban Town Clerk (3/DBN). KCM refers to documents in the Killie Campbell Manuscript Collection.

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- 4 Wolf (1982: x).
- 5 Shepherd (2002a: xxviii).
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## CHAPTER 1

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- 30 See Datta (2007) for the idea of South Africa–India as a continuous space. We would like to thank Isabel Hofmeyr for pointing us to this work.
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- 14 In Tinker (1947: 157–158).
- 15 In Northrup (1995: 86).
- 16 Lal (2000).
- 17 In Tinker (1947: 155).
- 18 Grierson, *Diary*, 8 January 1883, in Kale (1999: 128).
- 19 Tinker (1947: 155).
- 20 Lal (2000: 29).
- 21 Correspondence from Brij V Lal regarding incidents related by his grandfather, 21 May 2007; also in Roopnaraine (2007: 67).
- 22 Correspondence from Brij V Lal, 21 May 2007.
- 23 Laing, *Handbook for Surgeons Superintendent*, in Kale (1999: 128).
- 24 Tinker (1947: 166).
- 25 NAB, II, I/122, 630/1903, 29 June 1903.
- 26 Watson (1960b: 85–86).
- 27 NAB, II, I/12, 1130/82, diary of H Hitchcock, Surgeon-Superintendent of the *Umvoti*.
- 28 NAB, II, I/47, 494/88.
- 29 'Dr. William Johnson en route to Trinidad' in Tinker (1947: 150).
- 30 Watson (1960b: 85).
- 31 Carter (1995: 94).
- 32 Bhana (1991).
- 33 Watson (1960b: 85).
- 34 The case of Dr R Bowrie is based on NAB, II, I/49, 646/89, 26 June 1889; NAB, II, I/49, 3535/1889, 24 June 1889.

- 35 NAB, II, I/169, 988/1909, 5 October 1909, King & Sons to the Chief Engineer on the *Umzinto*.
- 36 This and the preceding quote are from NAB, II, I/87, 434/97, 8 December 1897.
- 37 NAB, II, I/87, 768/97, affidavit of Appalsamy, night Sirdar on the *Pongola*, to Protector Mason.
- 38 The case of Dr George Paterson is based on NAB, II, I/36, 412/86.
- 39 NAB, II, I/51, 6623/89, 14 November 1889, depositions to Protector.
- 40 NAB, II, I/16, 940/83.
- 41 NAB, II, I/28, 834/85.
- 42 '*paglaa samundar*' (the 'mad ocean') in Mahabir (1985: 52).
- 43 Kuper (1960: 14).
- 44 Lal (2000: 30).
- 45 Espinet (2004: 297) in Mehta (2006: 27).
- 46 Mehta (2006: 27).
- 47 Mishra (2002: 73).
- 48 NAB, II, I/59, 1298/90, Medical Report by Dr WP Tritton for 1890.
- 28 NAB, II, I/37, 5167/1886, 5 July 1886.
- 29 NAB, II, I/61, 1571/91, F Louch to the Protector.
- 30 Carter (1995: 41).
- 31 Roopnaraine (2007).
- 32 Lai (1993).
- 33 Moore (1993: 347).
- 34 In Lai (1993: 23).
- 35 Lai (1993: 24).
- 36 NAB, II, I/43, 193/90, 23 February 1890, letter from Le Febour, Surgeon on the *Pongola*, to the Natal Indian Immigration Trust Board.
- 37 In Carter & Torabully (2002: 30).
- 38 Davis (2001: 7).
- 39 Davis (2001: 51, 9).
- 40 Clarke (1986).
- 41 Kernial Sandhu in Roopnaraine (2007: 19).
- 42 See Lal (2000).
- 43 Takravarty (1978: 266).
- 44 Vatuk (1964: 224) in Lal (1983: 10).
- 45 See Lal (2000: 75–80). The largest recipients of indentured labour were Mauritius, which received 453 064 Indians between 1834 and 1900; British Guiana, 238 909 between 1838 and 1916; Trinidad, 143 939 between 1845 and 1916; and Fiji, 60 965 between 1879 and 1916. Other colonies to receive indentured labour were Jamaica, Grenada, St Lucia, St Kitts, St Vincent, Reunion, Surinam, East Africa and Seychelles.
- 46 See Lal (2000) for a comprehensive discussion of all aspects of recruitment; Bhana (1991); Carter (1995).
- 47 NAB, II, I/117, 832/03, 16 April 1903, WRW James, Medical Officer, Avoca Circle, to AJ Polkinghorne, Acting Protector of Immigrants.
- 48 Lal (2000: 83).
- 49 Northrup (1995).
- 50 Tinker (1947: 122).
- 51 Mongia (2004).
- 52 Northrup (1995).
- 53 Kale (1999: 132).
- 54 In Mishra (2007: 53).
- 55 In Tinker (1947: 124).
- 56 In Myers (1998: 17).
- 57 Tinker (1947: 137).
- 58 Meer (2003: 205).
- 59 Sitas (2000: 31).
- 60 Tinker (1947: 140).
- 61 Carter (1995: 4).
- 62 Tinker (1947: 139).
- 63 Northrup (1995).
- 64 NAB, II, I/43, 193/90, 23 February 1890, Le Febour to the Natal Indian Immigration Trust Board.
- 65 NAB, II, I/172, 23 December 1910, Emigration Agent to the Protector.
- 66 NAB, II/45, 3803/88, Dr Raju Gopaul, Surgeon in India, to the Protector.
- 67 Lal (2000: 90–91).
- 68 NAB, II, I/119, 2168/03, 11 July 1903, Genash Ganeria to the Protector.

### CHAPTER 3

- 1 Mishra (2002: 73).
- 2 This and preceding quotations are from Meer (1980: 369–370).
- 3 NAB, II, I/172, 322/1910, JV Pearson to the Protector.
- 4 All quotations in this paragraph are from Mehta (2006: 22).
- 5 This and the next quote are from Meer (2003: 205, 206).
- 6 NAB, II, I/103, 1658/1901, recruiter Syed Cassim to the Madras Protector.
- 7 NAB, II, I/172, 1416/1910.
- 8 Mangah's story is based on NAB, II, I/111, 1717/02.
- 9 Goordeen's story is based on NAB, MSCE 35615/1942; Bramdaw (1935: 68).
- 10 NAB, II, I/158, 3 January 1908; NAB, MSCE 627/1947; NAB, MSCE 628/1947; NAB, MSCE 2873/1960.
- 11 NAB, II, I/158, 3 January 1908; NAB, MSCE 627/1947; NAB, MSCE 628/1947; NAB, MSCE 2873/1960.
- 12 Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1877. Also see Carter (1995: 53–61) on the role of returnees.
- 13 NAB, II, I/49, 1646/1889.
- 14 NAB, II, I/173, 2055/1910, Protector to the Colonial Secretary.
- 15 Meer (1980: 283).
- 16 Lingiah and Devane's story is based on NAB, II, I/172, 374/1910.
- 17 NAB, II, I/188, 689/1910, 18 December 1910, Manager, SA Collieries, and Protector.
- 18 Ambica's story is based on NAB, II, I/181, 692/1911.
- 19 NAB, II, I/24, 401/85, Alamalu Savu to the Protector.
- 20 Moonien's story is based on NAB, II, I/117, 709, 1903.
- 21 NAB, II, I/102, 1168/1901, Marimuthu Tulukanam to the Protector.
- 22 Thunnycody Suther's story is based on NAB, II, I/6, 737/79.
- 23 Lutchamma and Ramengu's story is based on NAB, II, I/90, 1211/98.
- 24 Chhaju Zaharia's story is based on NAB, II, I/182, 38/1912.
- 25 In Carter & Torabully (2002: 25).
- 26 This and the next quote are from Meer (1980: 138, 392).
- 27 NAB, II, I/43, 865/85, 7 July 1885, Govindasamy Suppan to the Protector.

- 69 Lal (2000: 94).
- 70 Buckhory (1979: 76).
- 71 Lal (2000).
- 72 Northrup (1995: 88).
- 73 Myers (1998).
- 74 Naidoo (1984: 11–12).
- 75 Tinker (1947: 116).
- 76 Kuper (1960: 12–13).
- 77 In Tinker (1947: 121).
- 78 Espinet (2004: 4) in Mehta (2006: 20).
- 79 Clarke (1986).
- 80 Mehta (2006: 23).
- 81 Myers (1998).
- 82 'Report on Indian Indentured Emigration, 1882' in Emmer (1986: 95).
- 83 Mehta (2006: 23).
- 84 Long & Oxfeld (2004: 11).
- 85 NAB, BNS 386, 26/74, March 1924.
- 86 Lal (2000: 44).

#### CHAPTER 4

- 1 Walcott (1979: 48).
- 2 Mishra (2007: 82).
- 3 *Natal Mercury* 22 November 1860.
- 4 In Hocking (1912: 47).
- 5 Mann (2002) in Machin (2002: 12).
- 6 This and the next quotation are from Machin (2002: 13, 17).
- 7 Guy (1994: 244).
- 8 In Carter & Torabully (2002: 25).
- 9 Henning (1993).
- 10 Naidoo (1984: 12).
- 11 Meer (1980: 6).
- 12 *Natal Mercury* 22 November 1860.
- 13 Mishra (2007: 82–83).
- 14 Bhana (1991: 13).
- 15 *Natal Mercury* 22 November 1860.
- 16 *Natal Mercury* 22 November 1860.
- 17 See Anderson (2004: 16).
- 18 Meer (1980).
- 19 Meer (1980: 5).
- 20 Meer (1980).
- 21 Meer (1980).
- 22 Meer (1980).
- 23 Badsha Peer Mazar Society (2002).
- 24 This and the preceding quotation are from Cannadine (2000: 5).
- 25 Prasad (2004: 91).
- 26 Henning (1993: 37).
- 27 Lubbock (1981: 58).
- 28 NAB, II, AGO 1/8/5, 172A, 4 December 1860, Captain WB Atkinson to the Attorney-General.
- 29 Meer (1980: 6).
- 30 Watson (1960b: 81–83).
- 31 *Natal Mercury* 25 April 1855.

- 32 Mishra (1992: 13).
- 33 In Watson (1960b: 85).
- 34 Quotations and figures in this paragraph are from Meer (1980: 157).
- 35 This and the quotations in the preceding four paragraphs are from Meer (1980: 158–160, 112–114).
- 36 Meer (1980: 161).
- 37 Indentured immigration was originally stopped in 1866 because of a general depression in Natal, in part caused by war between the Boers and the Basotho, led by the brilliant strategist Mosheshwe, which resulted in the collapse of the Overberg export trade. This was compounded by the failure of early varieties of cane like Bourbon Purple and Ribbon to maintain their yields on hilltops and sandy soil.
- 38 Ashcroft (1990: 7).
- 39 Meer (1980: 139).
- 40 Meer (1980: 143).
- 41 Meer (1980: 132).
- 42 Meer (1980: 104).
- 43 Foucault, *Truth and Power*, in Mongia (2004: 753).
- 44 Mongia (2004).
- 45 NAB, MSCE 39/1945.
- 46 Mongia (2004: 757).
- 47 This and the next two quotations are from Meer (1980: 129, 124, 130).
- 48 Mongia (2004: 762).
- 49 Osborne (1971).
- 50 Meer (1980: 138–139).
- 51 The quotations in this paragraph are from Meer (1980: 142, 150–152).
- 52 Meer (1980: 142).
- 53 Meer (1980: 388).
- 54 NAB, MSCE 218/1916.
- 55 NAB, AGO, 1/8/45, 89A/1894.
- 56 Calpin (1949: 7–8).
- 57 Du Bois (1989: 87).
- 58 Du Bois (1989: 89).
- 59 Meer (1980).
- 60 NAB, II, I/37, 78/87.
- 61 This and the next quotation are from Breman & Daniel (1992: 269, 270).
- 62 Meer (1980: 130).

#### CHAPTER 5

- 1 Myers (1998: 24–25).
- 2 Mishra (2005: 23).
- 3 Carter (1996: 101).
- 4 'Editorial', *Indian Opinion* 14 January 1905.
- 5 NAB, II, I/119, 379/84, 19 March 1884, Magistrate WP Jackson to the Protector.
- 6 This and the next quotation are from NAB, II, I/170, 2423/09, 29 November 1909, Attorney BO McRitchie to the Protector.
- 7 Bhana & Pachai (1984: 4–5).
- 8 NAB, MSCE 10/1/79, 1550/7/29; NAB, RSC 1/5/165, 33/1900.
- 9 NAB, RSC 1/5/149, 54/1895.



- 10 This and the preceding four quotations are from *Natal Witness* 11 March 1896.
- 11 This and the preceding two quotations are from NAB, AGO 1/8/52, 239/1896, 17 March 1896, evidence presented to Attorney-General Harry Escombe.
- 12 The quotations in the next two paragraphs are from NAB, II, I/36, 1089/86, 25 March 1887.
- 13 Le Carré (2006: 14).
- 14 This section draws heavily on Prinisha Badassy's (2002) excellent study of the powerful influence of Indian interpreters in Natal.
- 15 NAB, II, I/80, 1357/95.
- 16 Rich (1994: 149).
- 17 Meer (1980: 93).
- 18 Meer (1980: 128).
- 19 Meer (1980: 139) in Badassy (2002: 22).
- 20 This and the quotations in the next paragraph are from Meer (1980: 133, 391, 285–286).
- 21 The quotations in this paragraph are from Meer (1980: 284, 286).
- 22 Britton (1999: 139–140).
- 23 NAB, CSO, 1177/1888/141; Badassy (2002: 10).
- 24 NAB, II, I/24, 262/85, December 1884, Report of the Deputy Protector.
- 25 The quotations in this paragraph are from Badassy (2002: 31–32).
- 26 Anthony Peters' case is based on NAB, CSO 2600/C46/1908.
- 27 Naipaul (1969: 36).
- 28 NAB, CSO 2593, C77/1901.
- 29 Badassy (2002).
- 30 In Badassy (2002).
- 31 NAB, CSO 2593, C77/1901, 20 December 1901, Magistrate's Office, Verulam, to Protector.
- 32 This and the preceding quote are from Russell (1899) in Badassy (2002: 18).
- 33 Badassy (2002).
- 34 The quotations in this and the next three paragraphs are from Badassy (2002: 74–93, 44, 42).
- 35 Vinden's story is based on NAB, CSO 1187, 1888/2011; NAB, CSO 1340, 1892/C46, C51 and C52; NAB, MSCE 22396/1937.
- 36 Based on the following references: Bramdaw (1935: 46–47); MSCE 1574/1947 (Phulukwar Bramdaw); MSCE 23359/1935 (Dabee Bramdaw); and MSCE 2023/1952 (Dhane Bramdaw); NAB, RSC 1/5/326, 144/1920; NAB, RSC 1/5/329, 93/1921; NAB, RSC 1/5/388, 93/1930.
- 37 NAB, RSC 1/5/388, 93/1930.
- 38 Letter to the *Natal Mercury* by Bernard Gabriel, republished in *Indian Opinion* on 25 November 1905.
- 39 Meer (1980: 128).
- 40 Mongia (2004: 759).
- 41 Meer (1980: 128).
- 42 NAB, CSO 540, 1875/198, 19 January 1875.
- 43 *Natal Mercury* 17 February 1877.
- 44 NAB, II I/77, 588/1883, 9 May 1884, Colonial Secretary Bulwer to W Mitchell.
- 45 Thomson (1952).
- 46 The quotations in this and the next two paragraphs are from NAB, II, I/20, 123/84, 25 February 1884.

- 47 NAB, II, I/20, 123/84, 6 March 1884.
- 48 The quotations in this paragraph are from Meer (1980: 418, 431).
- 49 The quotations in this paragraph are from Meer (1980: 433).
- 50 Meer (1980: 448).
- 51 NAB, II, I/29, 616/851, 4 September 1885, Deputy Protector Manning to the Trust Board.
- 52 Meer (1980: 283).
- 53 Walvin (2000: 63).

## CHAPTER 6

- 1 'Song of the Creole Gang Women' in Dabydeen (1995: 47).
- 2 Said (1979: 207).
- 3 NAB, II, I/198, 609/1900, 21 June 1900, Dr Jones, Medical Officer in Stanger, to the Protector.
- 4 NAB, II, I/64, 1137/91, 3 September 1891, Protector to the Colonial Secretary.
- 5 Meer (1980: 147–148).
- 6 *Natal Advertiser* 19 September 1908.
- 7 Brain (1990: 210).
- 8 The National Government Railways' total allocation of over 8 000 Indians made it the largest single employer of indentured labour. The Durban Municipality hired large numbers of Indians in its health and sanitation department. In 1913, for example, Indians numbered 1 602. Emigration Agents also recruited Indians with special skills to work in hospitals, hotels, private clubs and dockyards. They were usually recruited in urban areas in India, could speak some English and commanded a higher salary because of their skills. There were 1 300 employers of indentured labour in 1904. The Clayton Commission of 1909 noted that the tea industry employed 1 722 Indians, 6 149 were indentured in general farming (non-sugar), 606 on wattle plantations and 3 239 on the coal mines. See Bhana (1991), Brain (1990) and Bhana & Brain (1990).
- 9 Walvin (2000: 63).
- 10 Beckford (1972: 55). While employers had aspirations of turning the plantations into total institutions, as we show, they never managed to attain this. Rather, the indentured, in a variety of ways, subverted this control.
- 11 Prasad (2004: 91).
- 12 Carter (1996).
- 13 Meer (1980).
- 14 North-Coombes (1980).
- 15 In Lai (1993: 127).
- 16 Indian Centenary Commemoration Brochure 1860–1960, Durban.
- 17 Richardson (1985).
- 18 Guest (1989: 315).
- 19 Osborne (1971).
- 20 NAB, II, I/146, 1008/06, 26 March 1906, Protector Polkinghorne on the death rate among indentured Indians.
- 21 See Foucault (1984).
- 22 Swan (1991: 121).
- 23 Prasad (2004: 89).
- 24 NAB, II, I/98, 609/1900, 16 June 1900, Dr HW Jones to sugar baron Hulett.
- 25 Meer (1980: 401).
- 26 The JH Smith and Protector Manning quotes are from NAB, II, I/167, I49/1909, 13 September 1909.

- 27 NAB, II, I/167, 144/1909, 27 August 1909.
- 28 Polak (1909: 35).
- 29 Polak (1909: 38–39).
- 30 Meer (1980: 393).
- 31 Carter (1996: 124).
- 32 The Umhloti Valley case is based on NAB, II, I/104, 2033/1901, 30 January 1902.
- 33 Henning (1993: 84).
- 34 NAB, II, I/ 91, 199/91, 30 January 1891, deposition of Cunny of Blackburn.
- 35 NAB, II, I/55, 1507/1890.
- 36 NAB, II, I/82, 2977/1896, 21 May 1896, Protector to the Colonial Secretary.
- 37 See Bhana & Vahed (2005: 16); all the quotes linked to the Sheosaran story are from NAB, II, I/53, 3282/1890, June 1890.
- 38 Beall (1991: 108).
- 39 Report of Dr Henry Mitchell, Superintendent of Immigrants, 1851, in Lai (1993: 112).
- 40 NAB, II, I/173, 325/1910, 14 April 1910, Arumoogam Govender to Deputy Protector Dunning.
- 41 Meer (1980: 422).
- 42 Meer (1980: 451).
- 43 NAB, II, I/98, 609/1900, 16 June 1900, description by Dr HW Jones.
- 44 NAB, II, I/106, 385/02, 17 February 1902, Maddu Samul to the Protector.
- 45 NAB, II, I/89, 1179/98, 27 June 1898, testimony of Dr Miller of Isipingo.
- 46 Bhoola (1996: 35).
- 47 NAB, II, I/114, 9861/1902, 15 December 1902, Polkinghorne to Colonial Secretary Hime.
- 48 NAB, II, I/114, 9861/1902, 24 December 1902, Attorney-General to Colonial Secretary Hime.
- 49 This and the next quote are from Meer (1980: 412, 418).
- 50 NAB, II, I/6, 549/1880, 23 September 1877, 'Immigration Notice'.
- 51 NAB, II, I/6, 51/1880, January 1880, Dr LP Booth to the Protector.
- 52 NAB, II, I/10, 139/82, 6 February 1877; NAB, II, I/12, 198/82, Govinthan et al. to the Protector.
- 53 NAB, II, I/3, 548/1877, 27 November 1877, Runglal to the Protector.
- 54 NAB, II, I/171, 2442/09.
- 55 The quotations in this paragraph are from Beall (1991: 96).
- 56 The case of J Morphew is based on NAB, II, I/186, 2299/12, 18 August 1912, Magistrate Geo. Bunton Warner to the Protector.
- 57 This and the preceding quote are from Meer (1980: 108).
- 58 This and the preceding quote are from Polak (1909: 42).
- 59 Beall & North-Coombes (1983: 67).
- 60 Parle (2007).
- 61 NAB, II, I/98, 609/1900, 21 June 1900, HW Jones to the Protector.
- 62 Meer (1980: 302).
- 63 NAB, II, I/9, 51/1880, January 1880, Medical Officer in Umzinto to the Protector.
- 64 NAB, II, I/1, 120/1877, 25 April 1877, Magistrate Mason to the Protector.
- 65 Lal (2000: 115). CSR was the sugar company in Fiji.
- 66 Meer (1980).
- 67 NAB II, I/37, 112/87, 29 January 1887, Medical Officer in Avoca to the Protector.
- 68 Meer (1980: 551).
- 69 NAB, II, I/96, 819/1900, 7 March 1900.
- 70 'Song of the Creole Gang Women' in Dabydeen (1995: 47).
- 71 NAB, II, I/182, 405/1911, 19 December 1911, Protector Polkinghorne to the Trust Board.
- 72 NAB, II, I/182, 509/1912.
- 73 NAB, II, I/1, 1249/1877, 25 April 1877, Dr Kretschmar to Harry Binns.
- 74 Parle (2007: 228–229).
- 75 NAB, II, I/33, 386/86. Report prepared by George Lindsay Bonnar, 18 March 1886.
- 76 The remaining quotes in the 'Railway workers' section are from NAB, II, I/30, 1241/85.
- 77 Rushdie (2002: 238).
- 78 Judd (2001: 229).

## CHAPTER 7

- 1 Hocking (1912: 102–103).
- 2 Kincaid (2001: 137).
- 3 As noted earlier, Esperanza was one of many estates under the control of the Reynolds brothers. It was the estate that first came to the attention of authorities for its brutal working conditions.
- 4 Desai (2006: 33).
- 5 Osborne (1971).
- 6 See <http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/SOUTH-AFRICA-EASTERN-CAPE/2006-11/1164609582>. Accessed on 1 July 2007.
- 7 In Osborne (1971: 304).
- 8 This and the following quote are from Osborne (1971: 323, 305).
- 9 In Osborne (1971: 244, 322).
- 10 In Osborne (1971: 324).
- 11 Hocking (1912).
- 12 Morrell (2001: 24–27).
- 13 'Song of the Creole Gang Women' in Dabydeen (1995: 47). Booker was the British sugar company that owned Guyana.
- 14 NAB, CSO 2854, Statement of Polkinghorne to a Commission of Inquiry in 1906.
- 15 Mungi Dhan Sing's story is based on NAB, II, I/9, 105a/81.
- 16 NAB, II, I/9, 105a/81, 4 November 1881, Dr Garland, Chairman of the Medical Board, to the Protector.
- 17 Thomas Reynolds to Colonial Secretary, 12 February 1879. Quoted in the *Natal Mounted Rifles Regimental History* (p. 34). See <http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/SOUTH-AFRICA-EASTERN-CAPE/2006-11/1164609582>. Accessed on 1 July 2007.
- 18 Meer (1980).
- 19 This and the preceding quote are from NAB, II, I/10, 939/82.
- 20 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, testimony of Frank Mellon to a 1906 commission.
- 21 Osborne (1971: 325).
- 22 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, EB Gaultier, Manager at Reynolds, to a 1906 commission.
- 23 Myers (1998: 14).

- 24 This and the next three quotes are from Meer (1980: 254, 54, 256).  
 25 Warhurst (1984: 31–40).  
 26 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, evidence of Mr Renaud, a manager on the Reynolds Estate.  
 27 Meer (1980: 54).  
 28 The quotations in this paragraph are from NAB, II, I/70, 386/1893.  
 29 NAB, II, I/76, 23 November 1894, Secretary of Reynolds Bros. to Protector.  
 30 NAB, II, 550/92, Protector to Colonial Secretary.  
 31 NAB, II, I/82, 2977/1896, 21 May 1896, Protector to Colonial Secretary.  
 32 Gordon (1978).  
 33 NAB, AGO 1/1/224, 64/1900, Volume 7.  
 34 NAB, II, I/479/1900; NAB, CSO 8287/1900; NAB, AGO 2326/1900; NAB, II, I/99, 1615/1900; *Natal Advertiser* 8 October 1900.  
 35 See Swan (1985).  
 36 *Natal Advertiser* 8 October 1900.  
 37 The quotations in the section 'Walking on coals' are from NAB, II, I/123, 1479/1900; NAB, CSO 8287/1900; NAB, AGO 2326/1900.  
 38 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, Protector's Report to Colonial Secretary, 1905.  
 39 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, Statement of Protector Polkinghorne.  
 40 This and subsequent quotes in this section are from NAB, CSO 2854/1906, Statement of Protector Polkinghorne.  
 41 The quotes in this paragraph are from Mongia (2004: 762).  
 42 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, Protector's Report to Colonial Secretary, 1905.  
 43 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, 5 December 1906, Protector Polkinghorne to Colonial Secretary.  
 44 Bhana & Bhana (1991: 145).  
 45 NAB, II, I/133, I334f/1905.  
 46 The quotes in this and the preceding paragraph are from Henning (1993: 84–85).  
 47 NAB, CSO 2854/1906.  
 48 Average death rate

Year	Colony (per 1 000)		Reynolds Bros. (per 1 000)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1902	25	23	55	60
1903	22	18	30	32
1904	16	18	43	21
1905 (11 mths)	15	20	35	58

Source: *Bhana & Bhana (1991: 144)*

- 49 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, Protector Polkinghorne's Report to Colonial Secretary.  
 50 Parle (2007).  
 51 This and the quotes that follow are from NAB, CSO 2854, Statement of Protector Polkinghorne, subsection 'Excessive Work'.  
 52 'Song of the Creole Gang Women' in Dabydeen (1995: 47).  
 53 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, Statement of Protector Polkinghorne, subsection 'Excessive Work'.  
 54 In Beall (1991: 105).  
 55 NAB, CSO 2854, Statement of Protector Polkinghorne.  
 56 NAB, CSO 2854.

- 57 NAB, CSO 2854, Statement of Protector Polkinghorne, subsection 'Dr. Rouillard and Disease through overwork'.  
 58 NAB, CSO 2854, 22 March 1905, Dr Conran to Protector.  
 59 Beall & North-Coombes (1983).  
 60 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, evidence of Dr E Hill.  
 61 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, evidence of McLaren, an employee at the estate hospital.  
 62 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, evidence of WT Pemberton.  
 63 NAB, II, I/156, Protector Polkinghorne to Colonial Secretary.  
 64 Evidence of Leon Renaud from NAB, CSO 2854.  
 65 NAB, MSCE 20624/1934.  
 66 Evidence of C Reynolds from NAB, CSO 2854.  
 67 NAB, CSO 2854, 317/1905, 9 October 1905.  
 68 NAB, CSO 2854, Evidence of C Reynolds.  
 69 NAB, CSO 2854.  
 70 NAB, II, I/157, 3338/1906, Colonial Secretary to Polkinghorne.  
 71 In Henning (1993: 87).  
 72 NAB, CSO 6270/1907, Statement of Polkinghorne.  
 73 NAB, II, I/158, 593/08.  
 74 NAB, II, I/156, 1 June 1908, Polkinghorne to Colonial Secretary.  
 75 Batcha Kannamma's deposition to Magistrate Chas McKenzie is based on NAB, II, I/169, 945/09.  
 76 Hocking (1912: 138).  
 77 NAB, CSO 2854/1906, 5 December 1906, Protector to Colonial Secretary.

## CHAPTER 8

- 1 NAB, II, I/3, 586/1877. *Bhen Choodh* (also spelled *Bhen-Chod*) literally means 'sister fucker' but it is usually used as a punctuation, or for emphasis, like 'shit' or 'damn'.  
 2 Thrift (1997: 124).  
 3 Thompson (1967).  
 4 McRobbie (1994: 162).  
 5 Scott (1985: 32).  
 6 De Certeau (1984: xix).  
 7 Scott (1990: 4).  
 8 Prakash (1992: 180).  
 9 Scott (1985: xvi).  
 10 Roonaraine (2007: 44).  
 11 Ginwala (1974).  
 12 De Certeau (1984).  
 13 See Lal (2000).  
 14 The eight 'Madras Coolies' were Chellapen, Gengaloo, Vergegen, Caniah, Coopen, Cathlingum, Caniah and Jogee; the 14 'Bengalee Coolies' were Maunsha, Lutchman, Parboo, Chadiroy, Keesendoyl, Ruggoo, Molly, Jug, Breejan, Chillroy, Keesendoyl, Gopee, Doorbujay and Dooklist.  
 15 The quotations in the rest of this section are from Meer (1980: 93–99).  
 16 NAB, II, I/34, 654/86, Protector to Deputy Protector, 20 May 1886.  
 17 NAB, II, I/38, Return of Criminal Cases.  
 18 The quotations in this paragraph are from Meer (1980: 369, 411).  
 19 The Reuben Aubrey Swales case is based on NAB, II, I/169, 1996/09.  
 20 The Ramsay Collieries case is based on NAB, II, I/158, 998/08.

- 21 In Meer (1980: 440).
- 22 Tinker (1947: 225).
- 23 De Kock (2006: 73).
- 24 NAB, II, I/42, 1402/87/1889.
- 25 Henning (1993: 228–231).
- 26 De Certeau (1984: 18).
- 27 NAB, II, I/107, I577/1902.
- 28 NAB, II, I/112, I2136/1902.
- 29 NAB, II, I/116, I/276, 1903.
- 30 Kanniah's story is based on NAB, II, I/127, I1232/1904; NAB, II, I/116, I/276, 1903. Also in Badassy (2005: 52–53).
- 31 NAB, I/138, I2011/1905, Kanniah to the Protector.
- 32 NAB, I/154, I2149/1907.
- 33 Douglass (1982: 113).
- 34 NAB, II, I/22, 345/84, September 1884, Report of the Deputy Protector.
- 35 NAB, II, I/30, I297/85, 8 October 1885, Daljeet to the Protector.
- 36 NAB, II, I/22, September 1884, Report of the Deputy Protector.
- 37 'The Servants' Song' in Dabydeen (1986: 45).
- 38 Ramthumiah's story is from Badassy (2005: 84–96).
- 39 NAB, II, I/151, I1157/1907, Sergeant to Protector.
- 40 NAB, II, I/35, 296/86, 9 July 1886, Mungli to Protector.
- 41 Henning (1993: 111).
- 42 NAB, II, I/67, 157/1892, 31 October 1892.
- 43 Polak (1909: 413).
- 44 NAB, II, I/20, 158/84, 19 April 1884, correspondence between the Protector and the Colonial Secretary.
- 45 NAB, II, I/20, 158/84, 19 April 1884, JF Manistry, Superintendent of Indian and Native Labour, NGR, to the Protector.
- 46 NAB, II, I/30, 5449/85, Iyaloo Naidoo to the Protector.
- 47 NAB, II, I/6, 737/79.
- 48 NAB, II, I/17, 96/84.
- 49 The story of Coopa Mutha, Mangalam and their children is from NAB, II, I/32, 121/86.
- 50 NAB, II, I/16, 187/83, 17 December 1883.
- 51 NAB, II, I/18, 365/84, 9 April 1884.
- 52 NAB, II, I/96, I459/1900, WB Lyle to the Trust Board.
- 53 NAB, II, I/78, 1 December 1910, JA Freeks to the Protector.
- 54 NAB, II, I/70, 27 September 1894, deposition of Lasha Chellan to Umzinto Magistrate.
- 55 NAB, II, I/30, 313/85, 16 October 1885, Marshall Campbell to the Protector.
- 56 Carter & Torabully (2002: 30).
- 57 Ponappa's story is from NAB, II, I/43, 223/06.
- 58 Arthur Schopenhauer in Lal (2000: 234).
- 59 NAB, II, I/21, 195/84, Report of Dr Richmond R Allen.
- 60 Henning (1993: 67).
- 61 Bhana & Bhana (1991: 168).
- 62 Lal (2000: 234).
- 63 Sitas (2000: 108).
- 64 Mohapatra (1997: 10).
- 65 Scott (1985: 36).
- 66 Scott (1990).
- 67 Bush (2000: viii).

- 68 NAB, II, I/22, I455/84.
- 69 NAB, II, I/26, 519/85.
- 70 NAB, II, I/147, 302/08.
- 71 This and the following quote are from NAB, II, I/140, 1124/06.
- 72 Tinker (1947: 226).
- 73 Roopnaraine (2007: 52–53).
- 74 De Certeau (1984: 18).

## CHAPTER 9

- 1 Knott (2000: 22).
- 2 The case of Charlie Nulliah is based on NAB, AGO 1/8/101, 206A/1905.
- 3 NAB, MSCE 37329/1943.
- 4 *Indian Opinion* 17 October 1930.
- 5 NAB, MSCE 4800/1919.
- 6 Greico (1998).
- 7 Greico (1998).
- 8 Jayawardena (1968: 434).
- 9 Roopnaraine (2007).
- 10 Caste, formalised as an administrative category by the British to facilitate governance, involved four broad categories: Brahmins (priestly caste); Kshatriyas (warrior caste); Vaishyas (merchant caste); and Sudras (agriculturalists or labourers). Lying outside of 'the system' were the Parias or 'untouchables', who had no access to the religious and social life of the Brahmanic world. Caste had many more designations but the British were determined to fit them all in these five categories.
- 11 Bhana (1991: 75–83).
- 12 Roopnaraine (2007).
- 13 NAB, II, I/114, 17 December 1902.
- 14 Laing (1889: 41–42) in Kale (1999: 127).
- 15 Roopnaraine (2007: 65).
- 16 NAB, II, I/64, I597, 91, 12 January 1892.
- 17 This and the next quote are from Meer (1980: 370, 388).
- 18 Tinker (1947: 175).
- 19 Mishra (2007: 34).
- 20 This and the next quote are from Meer (1980: 378, 393).
- 21 Greico (1998).
- 22 Meer (1980: 125).
- 23 NAB, II, I/38, 24 December 1886, Sherwood to the Protector.
- 24 NAB, II, I/26, 559/85, JW Watts to the Protector.
- 25 Meer (1980: 402).
- 26 Tinker (1947: 209)
- 27 Mesthrie (1992: 7).
- 28 Veeramootoo's story is based on NAB, II, I/17, 142/84.
- 29 George North is rumoured to have fathered several children from indentured women. As the story goes, indentured women had to spend their first night of marriage with him.
- 30 Chimania Parasuraman's story is based on NAB, II, I/14, 3239/85.
- 31 NAB, II, I/158, 998/08, 4 May 1908.
- 32 NAB, II, I/159, May 1908, 'Report on Estates visited by the Deputy-Protector'.
- 33 NAB, II, I/159, 818/08, November 1908.
- 34 NAB, II, I/29, 1186/85.
- 35 Mehta (2004: 543).

- 36 Roopnaraine (2007: 28).  
 37 This and the next quote are from Meer (1980: 370, 391).  
 38 Mehta (2004: 543).  
 39 Beteille (1969).  
 40 Lawrence (2006: 22).  
 41 Mehta (2004: 543).  
 42 Lal (2000: 232).  
 43 Dirks (2001: 5–8).  
 44 Jayawardena (1968).  
 45 Nathaniel (1979).  
 46 Jayawardena (1968).  
 47 NAB, SNA, 1/1/318, 1905/678.  
 48 Meer (1985: 54).  
 49 Kale (1999: 110–111).  
 50 *Natal Mercury* 22 November 1860, 20 December 1860.  
 51 This and the next four quotes are from NAB, II, I/2, 73/1877.  
 52 Meer (1980: 131).  
 53 See Bhana & Vahed (2005: chapter 2). This section draws from this chapter.  
 54 NAB, II, I/29, 1049/85, Edward Mason, Manager of the Natal Harbour Board, to Protector Mason.  
 55 NAB, II, I/22, 1467/84, 1 November 1884, Dr HW Jones to the Protector.  
 56 NAB, II, I/156, 3102/07.  
 57 NAB, II, I/176, 789/07, 30 August 1910.  
 58 Meer (1980: 387).  
 59 NAB, II, I/22, 5 November 1884, Alice Dykes, Camperdown, to Protector.  
 60 Brain (1990: 210).  
 61 Perri (1994: 68).  
 62 Ruthere's story is based on NAB, II, I/43, 78/88, January 1888.  
 63 NAB, II, I/114, I2744/1902, 28 November 1902.  
 64 NAB, II, 1048/82, 10 November 1882; II I/26, 1475/85, Dorasamy to the Protector.  
 65 NAB, II, I/65, 412/92, Veerasami to the Protector.  
 66 This and the next quote are from Meer (1980: 388, 391).  
 67 Bhana & Pachai (1984: 10–12).  
 68 *Indian Opinion* 15 April 1905.  
 69 NAB, II, I/107, 492/02, GE Hutchinson to the Inspector of Police.  
 70 NAB, II, I/2, 209/1877, 19 May 1877.  
 71 *Natal Mercury* 23 September 1890.  
 72 This and the next quote are from Meer (1980: 410, 407).  
 73 Meer (1980).  
 74 Gandhi (1881–1926).  
 75 Gandhi (1881–1926: viii, 293).  
 76 'Coolie Mother' in Dabydeen (1995: 64).  
 77 Brain (1983: 198).  
 78 Naidoo (1989: 104).  
 79 Brain (1983).  
 80 Henning (1993).  
 81 Naidoo (1989).  
 82 Brain (1983: 204).  
 83 Henning (1993: 164).  
 84 Naidoo (1989).

85 Indian children in school:

Year	Schools	State schools	Pupils in school	Total no. of children in school	%
1875	2	0	85	500	17.0
1880	8	0	196	1 000	19.6
1909	35	4	3 284	12 000	27.4
1915	39	4	5 189	18 000	28.8
1926	52	4	9 913	32 000	30.9

Source: Henning (1993: 167)

- 86 Naidoo (1989: 104).  
 87 'Two Cultures' in Dabydeen (1986: 64).  
 88 *Indian Opinion* 23 September 1905.  
 89 NAB CSO 2916, 9 December 1901, evidence of B Gabriel and affidavit of WD Turnbull before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.  
 90 Lawrence (2006: 18).  
 91 NAB, MSCE/1940 (Bernard Gabriel); NAB, MSCE 5069/1920 (Constance Ethel); NAB, CSO 1630, 8638/99; NAB, CSO 1803, 1905/6053.  
 92 The quotes in this and the preceding paragraph are from SAB, GG889, 15/127, 11 May 1911.  
 93 Kale (1999: 157).  
 94 Freund (1995: 37).  
 95 Jayawardena (1968: 442).  
 96 *Indian Opinion* 14 April 1908.  
 97 *Natal Mercury* 17 October 1913.

**CHAPTER 10**

- 'On Her Unfaithfulness' in Dabydeen (1995: 60).
- Tejia, Shewdal and Muthoora's story is based on NAB, MSCE 1674/1949 (Tejia); NAB, MSCE 16193/1930 (Shewdal); NAB, II, 10/1/83, I1729/7/1930 (Muthoora).
- Meer (1980: 530–532).
- Sen (1998).
- NAB, GH 1589, Report of the Protector.
- Bhana (1991: 20).
- Tinker (1947: 201).
- Essop-Sheik (2005: 76–79); NAB, II, I/141, 285/06, February and March 1906; NAB, CSO 932/1906; NAB AGO 745/1906, 3091/1900; NAB, AGO 745/1906, 452/1900.
- NAB, II, 679/1901, 8 October 1911; NAB, II, 10/1/13, 3143/1911.
- NAB, II, I/170, 117/93, 9 February 1885.
- NAB, II, I/46; NAB, MSCE 892/1945.
- The Turnbull case is based on NAB, II, I/14, 689/83, 7 August 1883.
- See <http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-gra-1.htm>.
- 'Ma Talking Words' in Dabydeen (1995: 58–59).
- Angel's story is based on NAB, II, I/151, 890/1907; NAB, II, I/167, 528/1909.
- This and the next quote are from Meer (1980: 260, 365).
- See Mehta (2006) for a discussion of this theme.
- Henning (1993: 72).

- 19 Henning (1993: 98).
- 20 NAB, II, I/12, 379/83.
- 21 Gajadhar's story is based on NAB, II, I/104, 2114/1901, 21 December 1901.
- 22 *Natal Advertiser* 2 March 1978.
- 23 Meer (1980: 377).
- 24 Meer (1980: 417).
- 25 NAB, GH 1589, Report of the Protector.
- 26 Mohapatra (1995).
- 27 Roopnaraine (2007).
- 28 Mishra (2003: 225).
- 29 Lal (2000).
- 30 NAB, II, I/159, 723/08, Govind Naicker to the Protector.
- 31 Lal (2000).
- 32 NAB, II, I/9, 969/81, 28 September 1881.
- 33 Tinker (1947: 222).
- 34 Roopnaraine (2007: 100).
- 35 NAB, II, I/4, 1387/1878; also Bhana & Pachai (1984: 6–9).
- 36 Beall (1990: 162).
- 37 'Ma Talking Words' in Dabydeen (1995: 56).
- 38 The incidents described in this and the preceding paragraph are from Badassy (2005: 130–131).
- 39 In Mishra (2007: 31).
- 40 NAB, CSO 1046, 1885/5003.
- 41 NAB, RSC 1/1/74, 39/1903.
- 42 NAB, RSC 1/1/80, 25/1904.
- 43 For Behron, see NAB, RSC 1/1/84, 10/1905; for Ramsingh, see NAB, RSC 1/1/84, 13/1905.
- 44 Meer (1980: 258).
- 45 NAB, II, I/35, 30 June 1886, Protector to Justice Wragg; Meer (1980: 261–262).
- 46 Meer (1980: 260).
- 47 This and the next quote are from NAB, II, I/18, 784/84, 1 January 1884.
- 48 Meer (1980: 262).
- 49 Report of Deputy Protector Manning, 9 June 1883. This report is available at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, where it was consulted.
- 50 NAB, II, I/1, 11 June 1877, Protector to Colonial Secretary.
- 51 'Men and Women' in Dabydeen (1995: 66).
- 52 Meer (1980: 260).
- 53 NAB, GH 1589, Report of the Protector.
- 54 Soyrib and Mahadeo's case is based on NAB, II, I/3, 4270/77.
- 55 In Mishra (2007: 87).
- 56 NAB, II, I/17, 107/85, 24 February 1885, Manning to Campbell, Registrar of Supreme Court.
- 57 NAB, II, I/4, Protector's Annual Report for 1876.
- 58 Essop-Sheik (2005).
- 59 Thoyee's story is based on NAB, CSO 892, 336/83, 25 January and 4 July 1883.
- 60 Nulliah's story is based on NAB, RSC 1/5/472, 1101/1945.
- 61 Essop-Sheik (2005).
- 62 Padayachee et al. (1985: 199).
- 63 Kuper (1960: 19).

- 64 Jithoo (1970: 64).
- 65 Jithoo (1970).
- 66 De Vos (1941).
- 67 Roopnaraine (2007: 84).
- 68 *Natal Advertiser* 19 September 1908.
- 69 Anderson (1983).
- 70 Freund (1991: 420).
- 71 Freund (1991: 420).
- 72 Meer (1980: 424).

## CHAPTER 11

- 1 Bakhtin (1968: 37).
- 2 Muharram was held to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet, who was killed in battle on the plains of Karbala in Iraq by the army of Caliph Yazid I on 10 Muharram 680. Although denied water by the enemy, Husain's vastly outnumbered group survived for the first nine days of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. On the tenth, the enemy's arrows killed Husain, whose body was left to rot in the desert sun. His head was decapitated, placed on a spear and paraded in Damsacus, while surviving women members of Husain's family, including his sister Zaynab, were marched in shackles before Caliph Yazid. Karbala became for Shi'ites 'a metahistorical cosmic drama of universal significance'. The events at Karbala are seen to transcend ordinary reality and provide a definite model for human behaviour (Schubel 1993: 186).
- 3 Mulvey (1987: 11).
- 4 NAB, CSO 299/1910, 11 November 1909, Protector Polkinghorne to Town Clerk.
- 5 NAB, II, I/30, 28 September 1885, H Peron of the Victoria Planters Association to the Protector.
- 6 NAB, II, 24, I/18/85, February 1885, Report of Deputy Protector.
- 7 TBD, DTC, 5/2/5/3/5, 20 August 1890, Alexander to Town Clerk.
- 8 NAB, NPP, 645, 18 October 1886, Petition 18 of 1886.
- 9 NAB, II, I/86, 820/96, 12 April 1896, Naidoo to Mayor of Maritzburg.
- 10 NAB, II, I/86, 820/96, May 1899, Naidoo to Protector.
- 11 Thrift (1997: 149).
- 12 Meldrum J, 'The Moharrem Festival in Natal'. Title of journal unknown, dated 1893. Killie Campbell Library, PAM 297 MEL.
- 13 Meer (1969).
- 14 The story of Hassenbaccus is based on NAB, II, 11, 1176/82, 13 December 1882, Report 10.999.
- 15 *Natal Advertiser* 23 April 1902.
- 16 This and the next quote are from Meldrum, 'Moharrem Festival' (1893: 2).
- 17 TBD, 5/2/5/3/5, 20 August 1890.
- 18 NAB, II, 64, 4740/91, August 1891, Alexander to Mayor of Durban.
- 19 NAB, II, I/96, 814/99, 19 May 1896, Goodwin to Mayor of Pietermaritzburg.
- 20 *Natal Mercury* 9 December 1910.
- 21 Galeano (1998: 321).
- 22 NAB, II, 51, 1017/1889, August 1889, Report on rape of Patchay.
- 23 NAB, II, 51, 1017/1889, August 1889, Report on rape of Patchay.
- 24 *Natal Advertiser* 23 April 1902.
- 25 De Tassy (1995).
- 26 *Natal Mercury* 9 December 1910.

- 27 Meldrum, 'Moharrem Festival' (1893).
- 28 *Natal Mercury* 22 April 1902.
- 29 *Natal Advertiser* 23 April 1902.
- 30 This and the next two quotes are from *Natal Mercury* 9 December 1913.
- 31 Meldrum, 'Moharrem Festival' (1893: 3).
- 32 *Natal Advertiser* 7 February 1906.
- 33 *Natal Advertiser* 23 April 1902.
- 34 NAB, II, I/51, 1017/1889, August 1889, Report on rape of Patchay.
- 35 'Bone Sculpture' in Carter & Torabully (2002: 3).
- 36 *Natal Advertiser* 23 April 1904.
- 37 *Natal Mercury* 3 November 1884.
- 38 NAB, II, 16, 1071/83, 4 November 1883, D Hunter to the Protector.
- 39 *Natal Mercury* 15 October 1892.
- 40 NAB, II, 64, 1437/91, 11 September 1891, Hunter to Colonial Secretary.
- 41 NAB, II, I/64, 4740/90, 13 August 1891, Parnee to Alexander.
- 42 The quotes in this and the preceding paragraph are from NAB, II, I/64, 4740/91, August 1891, Alexander to Mayor.
- 43 *Natal Advertiser* 23 April 1902.
- 44 *Natal Advertiser* 22 April 1902.
- 45 The quotes in this and the next paragraph are from *Natal Advertiser* 23 and 24 April 1902.
- 46 Pile (1997: 16).
- 47 NAB, II, I/64, 4740/91, August 1891, Alexander to Mayor.
- 48 'Annual Police Report', 1902. Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Accession No. 957/2059.
- 49 Meldrum, 'Moharrem Festival' (1893: 4).
- 50 NAB, II, I/64, 4740/91, 1 October 1891, Mayor to Colonial Secretary.
- 51 Alexander to Mayor, 23 April 1902. Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Accession No. 957/2057.
- 52 TBD, 5/2/5/4/1, 6 April 1904, Report of the Superintendent of Police.
- 53 TBD, 5/2/5/3/2, 3 April 1905, Report of the Superintendent of Police.
- 54 *Natal Advertiser* 5 February 1906.
- 55 *African Chronicle* 13 December 1909.
- 56 *African Chronicle* 24 April 1909.
- 57 This and the next quote are from *African Chronicle* 13 December 1909.
- 58 In Bobb (1988: 194).
- 59 Foucault (1984: 235).
- 60 *Natal Mercury* 9 December 1913.
- 61 Sen (2006: 113).
- CHAPTER 12**
- 1 In Roopnaraine (2007: 54).
- 2 Brain (1983: 207).
- 3 Sugirtharajah (2003: 133–134).
- 4 Kelly (1991: 43).
- 5 Lal (2004: 17).
- 6 Kelly (1991: 42).
- 7 NAB, II, I/170, 1170/93, Olagammal of Madurai to the Emigration Office in Madras.
- 8 NAB, II, I/1293/85, October 1885.
- 9 NAB, II, I/38, 187/87, 7 March 1887.
- 10 Report of the Protector, December 1905: 12. All the Protector's reports are available at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 11 NAB, II, I/159, March 1908, Report of the visit of the Deputy Protector to estates.
- 12 IRD, 78, 1276/1909, 6 October 1909. From 'Bhana Collection' at Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 13 NAB, CSO 1018, 1885/2041, cited in Parle (2007: 71–72).
- 14 Vatuk (1964: 230–231) in Roopnaraine (2007: 74).
- 15 This and the next two quotes are from Meer (1980: 389, 138–139, 141).
- 16 Bhana (1997a).
- 17 Henning (1993: 150); Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 18 Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 19 Bramdaw (1935).
- 20 Bramdaw (1935).
- 21 Bramdaw (1935).
- 22 NAB, RSC 1/5/291, 85/1914; NAB, MSCE 2273/1917 (N Reddy); NAB, MSCE 23713/1936 (Ayyavu); 26935/1935 (Ayyavu). In terms of the Agreement drawn up on 23 June 1909, Soubiah provided one acre of land on the farm Umbelbeli near Umzinto. The land was transferred into the name of the Trust, which had to pay him £8 per annum for 1909 and 1910; £20 on 1 January 1911; and an honorarium of £10 per annum from 1 January 1912 until his death, for preparing the balance sheet annually and serving as priest. The Trust also had to give Soubiah 'as a gift and free of expense' 30 sheets of new corrugated iron, nine feet long, to build the temple. Soubiah would have no claim to any rent, receipts, or monies collected. The Trust was unable to pay Soubiah any of the funds. In the period 1909–1913, it raised £44.4 in rent, goods and donations, but spent £50.6. Not only did Soubiah not receive the money owed to him, but he was out of pocket for a further £6. Soubiah died in 1917. An indication of how names changed in Natal is that he died as Narraido Reddy.
- 23 *Indian Opinion* 23 September 1906.
- 24 Roopnaraine (2007: 118).
- 25 Lal (2005).
- 26 One possible explanation is that many South Indians regard Thirupathi, a Vishnu temple in South India, as important; another is that Vishnu, who symbolised good fortune and prosperity, related to the immediacy of the situation in which they found themselves; it may also be that during the early period there were more migrants from the North, and they may have founded the temple. The distinction between Vaishnavite and Shaivite traditions, as Diesel and Maxwell point out, 'has never been watertight' in South Africa. While the main deity to whom the temple is dedicated is placed in the main sanctuary, images from other Hindu traditions are usually found in other parts of the building. See Diesel & Maxwell (1993: 21).
- 27 Meer (1969).
- 28 Meer (1969).
- 29 *Natal Witness* 6 November 1925, in Diesel & Maxwell (1993: 35).
- 30 Kelly (2004: 55).
- 31 Shree Emperumal Hindu Temple Society (1990, 2001).
- 32 Diesel & Maxwell (1993: 51).
- 33 See Sayce (1933: 2–7); *Indian Views* 21 April 1933.

- 34 TBD, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/440, 134, 10 February 1916, Letter to Town Clerk.
- 35 TBD, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/404, 134 (2), 7 January 1921, Chief Constable to Town Clerk.
- 36 TBD, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/440, 334 (i), 31 December 1920, SR Pather of the Umbilo Temple to Town Clerk.
- 37 *African Chronicle* 13 February 1909.
- 38 *Dharma Vir* 25 January 1925.
- 39 Pandit Vedalanka (1949: 15).
- 40 Naidoo (1992).
- 41 Kelly (1991).
- 42 Naidoo (1992).
- 43 *African Chronicle* 4 May 1907.
- 44 *Indian Opinion* 29 September 1906.
- 45 *Indian Opinion* 9 January 1909.
- 46 *Indian Opinion* 8 July 1908.
- 47 This and the next two quotes are from Kelly (1991: 123).
- 48 For example, Anand Rai (1883–1956) was born in Phoenix while his parents were under indenture. He studied at the Boys Model School and joined the Natal Government Railways as a clerk. He transferred to the Railway Government Indian School, later renamed Depot Road School, and devoted his life to education. He was a founder-member and first president of the Natal Indian Teachers' Society, member of the Indo-European Council, secretary of the Prince of Wales Reception Committee, vice-president of the Durban Indian Club and member of the Arya Samaj (Bramdaw 1935: 131; NAB, MSCE 1852/1956). BA Megraj, who owned a photographic business, was a passenger migrant from Mauritius who was active in sports and politics, being president of the NIC in the 1930s, a member of the Indo-European Council, and involved in the Durban Arya Samaj and Arya Prithivi Sabha of Natal (Bramdaw 1935: 93). Joe Soobiah was the first secretary of HYMA, Natal. He was born in Estcourt in 1888 to indentured parents, attended the Higher Grade School in Maritzburg and opened a vegetable store. His positions included the presidency of the Maritzburg Indian Voters Association and Colonial Born Indian Association (Bramdaw 1935: 146).
- 49 Bhai Parmanand, who left an important legacy, cuts a fascinating figure. In 1909, he came to the notice of police, who searched his house in Lahore and found a manual on explosives and 'seditious' correspondence. He lost his job at Lahore College and was placed on probation 'for three years as a dangerous character'. In 1910, he left for Europe, ostensibly to study medicine, but joined the Ghadar ('Mutiny') Association in America, a movement of overseas Indians to free India from British rule. Parmanand returned to India in late 1913 to further Ghadar's aims. When Sikh emigrants returned from America in 1915, Parmanand joined them in an attempt to overthrow the British government. A number were arrested and tried in what became known as the 'Lahore Conspiracy Case'. He was sentenced to death, but this was revoked to life imprisonment. He was conditionally released in 1920 under Royal Amnesty, and took an active part in Gandhi's non-violence movement. Parmanand's prominence in the anti-colonial struggle resulted in him being refused a visa when South African Hindus invited him for another visit in 1922. 'Representatives of Hindu Religious Bodies in South Africa' petitioned the Minister of Interior on 25 January 1922 for visas for Professor Parmanand, then based in Lahore, and Swami Vedachalam of Madras to visit on a religious mission. Parmanand was versed in Hindi and the Swami in Tamil;

both also spoke excellent English. They would therefore meet the needs of 'all sections of Hindus'. The petition was supported by numerous organisations and contained around a thousand signatures, illustrating the broad network of Hindu organisations in existence. Prominent supporters included CV Pillay, editor of *The Vineka Banoo*; M Beethasee, editor of *Swaraj* and president of the Shree Hindu Jigyasa Sabha; RG Bhatta, proprietor and editor of *Dharma Vir*, and treasurer of the Umbilo Temple; John Walker of the Theosophical Society of South Africa; and RSB Pather, trustee of the Hindu Tamil Institute of Durban. Organisations in support of the petition included the Malvern Indian Progressive Association, Durban Indian Municipal Employees Union, Railway and Harbour Workers Union, Tongaat Hindu Samarana Association, Andhra Association of Tongaat, Hindu Young Men's Association of Newcastle, Hindu Tirukutam Association of Ladysmith, Veda Dharma Sabha of Durban, Hindu Young Men's Association of Pietermaritzburg, Kathiawar Arya Mandal, Shree Parsooram Tailor of Durban, Durban Mayavat Association, Young Men's Vedic Society of Durban, and numerous other organisations from throughout South Africa. The government made 'further enquiries' because of the need to 'be careful as to the men we admit from India in view of the present state of affairs there'. After studying a confidential report by F Isemonger, Deputy Inspector-General of Police of the CID in Lahore, dated 20 May 1922, the government refused visas. Its reason was that Parmanand's activities after leaving Natal 'were of a revolutionary nature'. He went to King's College in London in 1907, where he came under the influence of 'Indians with revolutionary tendencies'. When he returned to India, he became a professor of history at Lahore, and toured India propagating the Arya Samaj message. Parmanand was again refused a visa when he tried to visit South Africa in 1928, even though the Viceroy in Simla reported on 4 August 1928 that Professor Parmanand had participated in Gandhi's movement of non-violent protest between 1920 and 1924, but had subsequently given up protest politics and focused on 'politics in the interest of the Hindustan community only'. Though he was no longer associated with 'subversive' activities, he was again denied a visa. Parmanand remained active in Indian politics until his death on 8 December 1947. See SAB, BNS 466, A2222 (2); BNS A 466 A2222 (3) 1921–1928.

- 50 Kelly (2004: 59).
- 51 Diesel & Maxwell (1993).
- 52 *African Chronicle* 16 September 1916.
- 53 *The Vineka Bhanoo* 1 April 1916.
- 54 *African Chronicle* 23 September 1916, 30 September 1916, 14 October 1916.
- 55 *Indian Opinion* 10 April 1936.
- 56 *Indian Opinion* 21 March, 1908.
- 57 *Indian Opinion* 20 June 1908.
- 58 *African Chronicle* 5 December 1908.
- 59 *Indian Opinion* 17 October 1908.
- 60 *African Chronicle* 10 October 1908.
- 61 In Carter & Torabully (2002: 112).
- 62 *African Chronicle* 14 November 1907.
- 63 NAB, II, I/1/70, 2280/09, 11 November 1909.
- 64 NAB, II, I/1/70, 2280/09, 1909, Leslie to Town Clerk.
- 65 NAB, CSO, 299/1910, 1910, Protector Polkinghorne to Town Clerk.
- 66 NAB, II, I/185, 1910, Report of Deputy Protector AR Dunning.
- 67 NAB, II, I/185, 1912, Report of Deputy Protector AR Dunning.



- 68 Pandit Vedalanka (1949).
- 69 *African Chronicle* 22 January 1910. Deepavali was essentially a festival of the middle classes. Dr Keseval Goonam, the first Indian woman medical doctor in Durban, pointed out that when she was invited by her poor patients to festivals, 'it wasn't the festivals that we had grown up with. Theirs was different. The real festival of Deepavali was not seen by them very much. It was more important to most of us in the urban situation where we clung to these festivals...We celebrated with our Muslim and Hindu friends' (interview, Dr Goonam). Hindu merchants usually closed their businesses for the day and gathered at a community hall, where speeches were given and milk and refreshments distributed. This was followed by a picnic at a park, at which people played sport and meals were served. Non-Hindu traders and friends also attended. In 1911, for example, Muslims like Dawad Mahomed, MC Anglia and Ismail Gora, as well as Parsee Sorabji Rustomjee, attended Deepavali celebrations. In his speech, Mahomed commended the unity among Hindus, and considered these 'happy gatherings' of the two communities 'an excellent thing' (*Indian Opinion* 21 October 1911).
- 70 *African Chronicle* 20 November 1907.
- 71 Sugirtharajah (2003: 133).
- 72 *African Chronicle* 23 April 1910.
- 73 *African Chronicle* 23 April 1910.
- 74 *African Chronicle* 12 December 1908.
- 75 *African Chronicle* 12 December 1908.
- 76 *Indian Opinion* 26 December 1909.
- 77 Lal (2005: 154, 147).
- 78 The quotes in this and the next paragraph are from *African Chronicle* 25 September and 9 October 1909.
- 79 *Indian Opinion* 18 January 1913.
- 80 *African Chronicle* 17 October 1908.
- 81 Swan (1985).
- 82 *African Chronicle* 2 June 1909.
- 83 *African Chronicle* 4 September 1909.
- 84 *African Chronicle* 14 August 1909. In a recent study, Hardiman (2007) showed that, during the period 1895–1930, as in Natal, the Arya Samaj movement in Gujarat initially made headway among the urban middle classes and higher farming castes, and played a central role in the upsurge in communal antagonism during the 1920s.
- 85 Hindus, Muslims, Roman Catholics and Anglicans sent separate representatives. The IFA stated that it represented Hindu farmers and was formed under the guidance of the Swami, 'a great religious teacher who had advised these communities [Hindus] to leave politics to the Mahomedans and Mr. Gandhi'. They hoped that 'in everything the Town Council did they would seek the aid of the great Swami Shankerandam, who is highly respected by Indians in the colony'. This was disputed by Vincent Lawrence, representing Roman Catholics, who said that 'Mr. Gandhi was a far more highly respected gentleman, not only in Natal but the whole of South Africa and the British Indian Empire, than the so-called Swami'. Rather than a 'saviour', the Swami was the 'cause of the troubles as Indians had lived amicably before his arrival' (*African Chronicle* 4 September 1909).
- 86 *African Chronicle* 4 September 1909.
- 87 NAB, CSO 1881, 6529/1909, 21 November 1909, Maritzburg Licensing Officer to Colonial Secretary.
- 88 *Indian Opinion* 16 April 1910.
- 89 The quotes in this paragraph are from *Indian Opinion* 3 April and 27 March 1909.
- 90 *Indian Opinion* 25 December 1909.
- 91 *African Chronicle* 14 May 1910.
- 92 NAB, I/I/174, 1066/1910.
- 93 NAB, I/I/174, 1066/1910, 14 May 1910.
- 94 *African Chronicle* 14 May 1910.
- 95 *Indian Opinion* 24 June 1910.
- 96 *African Chronicle* 14 May 1910.
- 97 *Indian Opinion* 5 June 1909.
- 98 *African Chronicle* 9 July 1910.
- 99 *African Chronicle* 8 June 1912.
- 100 This and the next quote are from *Indian Opinion* 8 June 1912.
- 101 This and the next quote are from *African Chronicle* 8 June 1912.
- 102 *African Chronicle* 15 June 1912.
- 103 *African Chronicle* 3 July 1909.
- 104 Pandit Vedalanka (1949: 22).
- 105 Meer (1969: 143).

### CHAPTER 13

- 1 Mishra (2007: 165).
- 2 Brain (1991: 219).
- 3 Brain (1983: 204–206).
- 4 Meer (1969: 99).
- 5 Communication with Dr Betty Govinden.
- 6 Brain (1983: 206).
- 7 Carter (1995).
- 8 Brain (1983: 244).
- 9 Brain (1991: 223).
- 10 John (2007: 170).
- 11 Brain (1983).
- 12 Lawrence (2006: 19).
- 13 Brain (1991: 220).
- 14 *Leader* 10 April 1963.
- 15 *Sepoy*, from the Persian *sipāhi*, meaning 'soldier', referred to Indians employed as soldiers in the British army.
- 16 NAB, CSO 1409, 4892/1892, 14 October 1892, Sigamoney to Colonial Secretary. Also see CSO 2570, C50C/1892 and CSO 1780/1892.
- 17 The quotes in this paragraph are from NAB, CSO 1409, 4892/1892, 10 November 1892, Report of Medical Board. Also see CSO 2570, C50C/1892 and CSO 1780/1892.
- 18 NAB, MSCE 32/150.
- 19 SAB, E4165, 261, I/R/4165, 6 January 1907, Registrar of Asiatics to AH Smith, St Aidan's Mission House.
- 20 Desai et al. (2002).
- 21 *Latest* 15 April 1916.
- 22 *Latest* 6 January 1923.
- 23 Report republished in *Latest* 5 January 1924.
- 24 *Latest* 2 April 1927.
- 25 SAB, NTS 7607, 52/328, W.D. 10/3/71, 10 August 1931, W Binnie, Divisional CID, for Deputy Commissioner, Commanding, Witwatersrand Division.
- 26 SAB, NTS 7607, 52/328, P.A. 13/1, 21 July 1931, Sergeant MJ

- Duddy, Sub-inspector, CID, Durban, to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Natal Division.
- 27 Henning (1993: 219).
- 28 See Guy (1985).
- 29 This and the next quote are from Brain (1983: 212).
- 30 Govinden (2002: 30–31).
- 31 Govinden (2002).
- 32 Brain (1983).
- 33 Brain (1983: 195).
- 34 Govinden (2002: 20).
- 35 Brain (1983: 195).
- 36 Brain (1991).
- 37 Brain (1983: 194–195).
- 38 Brain (1983).
- 39 The authors would like to thank Dr Josephine Naidoo, Vincent Lawrence's granddaughter, for assistance in reconstructing the Lawrence and Gabriel family histories.
- 40 Based on NAB, MSCE 5978/1922 (Perumall Gabriel); NAB, MSCE 28443/1939 (Amonnee Gabriel).
- 41 John (2007: 189).
- 42 Brain (1991).
- 43 NAB, MSCE 38/162.
- 44 NAB, MSCE, 3908/1965 (Vincent Lawrence); Bramdaw (1935: 92).
- 45 *Indian Opinion* 18 August 1906. Lawrence was involved in education and sports organisations; was secretary of the South African Council of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, which provided aid to the poor; vice-president of the NIC; chairman of the organising committee during Sarojini Naidu's visit in 1922; chairman of the SAIC; vice-chairman of the Indo-European Council; and member of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR).
- 46 This quote and those in the next paragraph are from Lawrence (2006: 14, 16–17).
- 47 Lawrence (2006: 20). May played the piano, Sylvia the violin, and Christina the cello. May and Sylvia were licentiates of the London College of Music, while Sylvia was an associate of the Trinity College of Music.
- 48 Lawrence (2006). Claude was a chaplain in the Burma Campaign during the Second World War. After the war, he became a lecturer in theology at the seminary in Jaffna and also served as private secretary to Cardinal Cooray, the Archbishop of Colombo.
- 49 Ralph Lawrence emigrated to the United Kingdom, where he married Bronwen Arthur. He completed another medical degree, became an active member and president of the British Medical Association, was prominent in the National Health Service and given an Order of the British Empire (OBE).
- 50 In Mishra (2007: 153).
- 51 Brain (1983: 202).
- 52 Brain (1983).
- 53 This and the next quote are from *Natal Mercury* 6 March 1877.
- 54 Bramdaw (1935).
- 55 Samuel et al. (2004).
- 56 Samuel et al. (2004).
- 57 See Israel (1991).
- 58 NAB, II, I/123, I2499/1903.
- 59 NAB, II, I/158, 371/08.
- 60 Brain (1983: 228).
- 61 *Natal Mercury* 10 July 1903, in Israel (1991).
- 62 Israel (1991).
- 63 Brain (1983).
- 64 Israel (1991).
- 65 Govinden (n.d.).
- 66 NAB, MSCE 253/1948 (Bundy Nagamma, 101278).
- 67 *Indian Opinion* 6 May 1914.
- 68 *Fiat Lux* January 1984.
- 69 *Sunday Times Extra* 12 May 2002.
- 70 *Indian Opinion* 10 May 1915.
- 71 *Indian Opinion* 6 November 1909.
- 72 Brain (1983: 197).
- 73 Govinden (2002: 29).
- 74 This and the next quote are from Synod Report, Diocese of Natal, July 1907, in Govinden (2002: 51, 52).
- 75 In Henning (1993: 157).
- 76 Bhabha (1994: 88).

#### CHAPTER 14

- 1 Ali (2004: 75).
- 2 NAB, II, I/187, 89/1910, 7 April 1910, Protector to RP Gibbes, Calcutta.
- 3 *Condenser* December 1960: 13–14.
- 4 Waterson (2007: 4).
- 5 Based on NAB, II, 10/1/50; *Condenser* December 1960: 13–14; NAB, MSCE 7332/1916.
- 6 *Condenser* December 1960: 13–14.
- 7 Bramdaw (1939).
- 8 NAB, MSCE 2150/1963.
- 9 Manjoo (1972: 329).
- 10 *Condenser* December 1960: 13–14.
- 11 Ali (2004: 74). We have substituted Natal for Fiji.
- 12 Siddiqi (1992).
- 13 Rislely & Gait (1903: 543–544).
- 14 Sikand (2003).
- 15 Gujarat State Gazetteers, Surat District. Ahmedabad: Government Printing, Gujarat State. Original 1872, reprint 1962.
- 16 Neville (1911: 90).
- 17 Mishra (1985).
- 18 Omer (1992).
- 19 Thurston & Rangachari (1909: 199).
- 20 Shackle & Snell (1990).
- 21 Mesthrie (1991).
- 22 NAB, II, 1/23, 1696/84, 11 December 1884.
- 23 NAB, II, 1/191, 23 September 1915, Protector's visit to plantations.
- 24 NAB, II, 1/175, 1682/09, 23 August 1909.
- 25 NAB, II, 1/187, 4 October 1912.
- 26 NAB, II, 1/187, 9 December 1912.
- 27 NAB, II, 1/171, 29 January 1910, Magistrate, Stanger, to Protector.
- 28 NAB, II, 1/88, 15 March 1898.

- 29 NAR, II, 1/172, 5 March 1910.
- 30 NAB, II, 1/102, 1450/1901, 19 September 1901.
- 31 Meer (1980: 433).
- 32 NAB, II, I/177, 2349/1910.
- 33 The information about returnees is based on NAB, II, I/24, 5 March 1885.
- 34 NAB, II, I/187, 89/1910, 7 April 1910, Protector to RP Gibbes, Calcutta.
- 35 NAB, CSO 299/1910, 11 November 1909, Polkinghorne to Town Clerk.
- 36 NAB, II, I/177, 15 June 1910.
- 37 NAB, II, I/8, 17 January 1881, Prison Warden to Protector.
- 38 NAB, II, I/30, 18 January 1887, Protector's Minute Paper.
- 39 NAB, II, I/190, 2461/1911, 9 November 1914, Medical Officer, Stanger Hospital, to Protector.
- 40 NAB, II, I/190, 2463/1914, 10 November 1914, Magistrate, Inanda Division, to Protector.
- 41 NAB, II, I/179, 824/1911, 21 March 1911, W Daugherty, Inspector of Nuisance, to Protector.
- 42 NAB, II, I/6, 1476/1880, 5 March 1880.
- 43 NAB, II, I/6, 1476/1880, 11 October 1880, Colonial Secretary to magistrates.
- 44 NAB, II, I/190, 934/1914, 13 June 1914.
- 45 NAB, II, I/186, 614/1910, 16 March 1910, Inspector Waller to the Protector.
- 46 Meer (1980: 289).
- 47 NAB, II, I/167, 1408/09, 19 July 1909.
- 48 NAB, II, I/171, 2324/1909, 10 November 1909, M Doomah to the Protector.
- 49 NAB, II, I/30, 1334/85, 18 January 1887.
- 50 NAB, II, I/11, 93/84, 27 September 1882.
- 51 Rumi (1995: 249).
- 52 Ansari (1992: 13).
- 53 Alavi (1988: 94).
- 54 Bayly (1989: 76–77).
- 55 NAB, II, I/177, 13 October 1910, Protector's Report.
- 56 NAB, II, I/75, 13 September 1894, Medical Officer's report.
- 57 NAB, II, I/104, 18 December 1901, Shaik Moidin to the Protector.
- 58 Singh (1998).
- 59 NAB, II, I/16, 459/84, 22 January 1884.
- 60 NAR, II, I/17, 132/84, 28 January 1884.
- 61 Meer (1980).
- 62 *Sunday Times Extra* (Johannesburg) 28 September 1986 and 14 February 1988.
- 63 *Natal Post* 30 August 1978.
- 64 Badsha Peer Mazar Society (2002).
- 65 Reeves (1995: 310).
- 66 Greaves (2000: 18).
- 67 Soofie & Soofie (1999: 42).
- 68 *Sunday Times Extra* 28 September 1986 and 14 February 1988; Badsha Peer Mazar Society (2002: 25).
- 69 Translated by Kabir Helminski and Refik Algan – 'The Drop That Became Sea', available at [http://wahiduddin.net/sufi/sufi\\_poetry.htm](http://wahiduddin.net/sufi/sufi_poetry.htm).
- 70 Soofie & Soofie (1999).
- 71 Edwardes (1909).
- 72 Mahida (1993).
- 73 Bayly (1989: 93–94).
- 74 Soofie & Soofie (1999).
- 75 Mahida (1993).
- 76 Mahomed (1970: 3).
- 77 Baderoon (2003).
- 78 NAB, MJPW 146; 2064/1910.
- 79 Bramdaw (1939).
- 80 Interview, Yusuf Emamally.
- 81 NAB, MSCE 1010/1950.
- 82 Interview, Yusuf Emamally.
- 83 In Ali (2004: 87).

## CHAPTER 15

- 1 'Slave Song' in Dabydeen (1986: 56).
- 2 Duncombe (2002: 5).
- 3 Clarke & Critcher (1995: 228).
- 4 Galeano (1997: 2).
- 5 Page 4 of a brochure on the Sam China Cup Tournament, 1960.
- 6 In Bhana & Brain (1990: 101).
- 7 Bhana & Brain (1990).
- 8 The information about Sam China is based on NAB, CSO 1683, 1901/6972; NAB, IRD 5, 919/1901; NAB, IRD 10, 682/1902; NAB, II, I/111, 1633/1902; interview, Sam China 'Booysie' Moodley; various Sam China Cup Tournament brochures; Bhana & Brain (1990: 100–108).
- 9 Prasad (2004: 92).
- 10 This and the preceding quotes about boxing matches are from *Mercury Pictorial* 12 December 1907.
- 11 Henning (1993).
- 12 *Indian Opinion* 3 March 1915.
- 13 Desai et al. (2002).
- 14 *Colonial Indian News* 1 November 1901.
- 15 *Latest* 30 November 1918.
- 16 *Indian Opinion* 5 October 1912.
- 17 Tulsidas's, *Ramcharitmanas* in Mishra (2007: i).
- 18 Kelly (1991: 43).
- 19 Interview, Dr K Goonam.
- 20 Interview, Mr Baiju Ramdeen.
- 21 NAB, II, I/48, 303/89, 11 March 1889, WE Bale to the Protector.
- 22 Badassy (2005: 69).
- 23 Rumi (1995: 34).
- 24 This refers to Tamil devotional poetry dating from the seventh to ninth centuries, which was dedicated to three popular poets (known as *Nayanars*) – Campantar, Appar and Cuntarar.
- 25 Jackson (1991).
- 26 Mesthrie (1988: 205).
- 27 Jackson (1988: 127).
- 28 Annamalai (1992).
- 29 *Indian Opinion* 2 February 1907.
- 30 Interview, Mr M Poonsamy.
- 31 Annamalai (1992: 75).
- 32 'Suicide of a Moderate Dictator', The Academy of American Poets, sourced at <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/19146>. Accessed on 13 June 2006.

- 33 Andee's story is based on NAB, II, I/30, 1261/86.
- 34 NAB, II, I/181, 1694/1911, 19 May 1911.
- 35 NAB, II, I/41, 1204/87, 16 November 1887.
- 36 NAB, II, I/156, 3196/09.
- 37 Parle (2007: 215).
- 38 'Love Song' in Dabydeen (1986: 52).
- 39 Tayal (1978: 429).
- 40 NAB, II, I/99, 1783/1900, 10 December 1900.
- 41 NAB, II, I/81, February 1896, Magistrate, Inanda.
- 42 NAB, II, I/65, 438/1892, 13 April 1892, Lang to the Protector.
- 43 University of KwaZulu-Natal Accession Papers No. 957/2044, 4 July 1892, Police Chief Richard Alexander to the Mayor.
- 44 Annual Report of the Protector (Mason) for 1883. Accessed at Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 45 Annual Report of the Protector (Mason) for 1883. Accessed at Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 46 Durmah and Kaysaven's story is based on NAB, II, I/28, August–September 1883.
- 47 NAB, II, I/46, 69/91, Protector Mason to the Colonial Secretary.
- 48 NAB, II, I/59, 1298/1890, 22 January 1891, Report of the Umzinto Medical Officer.
- 49 *Indian Opinion* 21 October 1914.
- 50 *Indian Opinion* 16 June 1916.
- 51 *Indian Opinion* 22 December 1906.
- 52 Prasad (2004: 90).
- 53 *Indian Opinion* 16 and 21 January 1909.
- 54 *African Chronicle* 4 February 1911.
- 55 *Indian Opinion* 21 January 1911.
- 56 *Indian Opinion* 28 January 1911.
- 57 *Indian Opinion* 18 May 1917.
- 58 *Indian Opinion* 29 March 1918.
- 59 *African Chronicle* 29 March 1918.
- 60 *Indian Opinion* 16 September 1921.
- 61 Badassy (2005: 63–66).
- 62 Badassy (2005: 42).
- 63 Meer (1980).
- 64 Meer (1980: 256–257).
- 65 NAB, II, I/43, 274/1888, 5 February 1888.
- 66 NAB, II, I/32, 3/86, 18 January 1886, Report of Dr Richard Allen.
- 67 NAB, II, I/178, 2826/1911, 6 January 1911, Report of Dr AA Rouillard.
- 68 NAB, II, I/188, 3062/1912, 31 October 1912.
- 69 NAB, II, I/188, 3071/1912, 1 November 1912.
- 70 NAB, II, I/188, 3215/1912, 20 November 1912, Inspector Chas Waller to the Protector.
- 71 *Indian Opinion* 4 May 1917.
- 72 *Indian Opinion* 23 November 1917.
- 73 *Indian Opinion* 8 November 1918.
- 74 Joshi (2005: 15).
- 75 Pile (1997: 15).
- 76 Couzens (1982).

## CHAPTER 16

- 1 Mills & Williams (2006: 80).
- 2 NAB, II, I/97, I588/1900, 30 April 1900, Report of the Protector.
- 3 NAB, II, I/97, I6668/1900.
- 4 *Leader* 26 March 1999.
- 5 This and the following three quotes are from Pakenham (1979: 130, 140, 237, 343).
- 6 In Meer (1996: 744).
- 7 *Times of India* 9 December 1899, in Gandhi (1881–1926: 120).
- 8 NAB, CSO 1632, 8047/1899, 19 October 1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary.
- 9 *Natal Mercury* 31 October 1899.
- 10 Pakenham (1979: 225).
- 11 Gandhi (1895).
- 12 Datta (2007: 41).
- 13 NAB, CSO 1632, 8047/1899, 19 October 1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary. Nazar was influential in Indian politics in Natal. He was an agent acting on behalf of business firms, secretary of the NIC and first editor of *Indian Opinion*. He died prematurely in 1906. See Bhana & Hunt (1989).
- 14 Joseph Royeppen completed a law degree at Cambridge University; RK Khan was the secretary of the NIC and a major benefactor of the Indian community. Lawrence, Christopher and the others were instrumental in forming organisations like the Natal Indian Patriotic Union (1908), and Colonial Born Indian Association (1911) and South African Indian Committee (1911) in opposition to the merchant-dominated NIC.
- 15 *Times of India* 9 December 1899, in Gandhi (1881–1926: 120).
- 16 NAB, PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, June 1900, Chief Engineer's List of Indian Ambulance Corps Leaders. It is unclear how Kitchin became part of the Corps. The Chief Engineer merely noted that he was a 'European electrician but identified himself with Indians'. In subsequent years Kitchin joined Gandhi in the Phoenix community and was editor of *Indian Opinion* briefly in 1906. Booth, a medical practitioner trained in Durham, arrived in Natal in 1876. He took charge of the Indian mission in Natal, and built the St Aidan's Church in Cross Street in 1883 and a clinic and dispensary in 1898.
- 17 *Times of India* 9 December 1899, in Gandhi (1881–1926).
- 18 Bramdaw (1935).
- 19 Bramdaw (1935).
- 20 Bramdaw (1935 116); NAB, MSCE 12135/1927 (Seebaluk Panday); NAB, MSCE 5242/1920 (Shanee Panday); NAB, MSCE 29479/1939 (Lutchman); NAB, MSCE 2868/1950.
- 21 *The Times* 28 January 1900.
- 22 The *Gurkhas* were Nepalese who took their name from the eighteenth-century Hindu warrior-saint Guru Goraknath. Like the Sikhs, they were seen as a 'martial race' and recruited into the British army.
- 23 *Natal Mercury* 16 January 1900.
- 24 *Natal Mercury* 13 October 1899.
- 25 *Times of India* 14 March 1900, in Meer (1996: 750).
- 26 Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 3: Document 63: 127) in Meer (1996: 745).
- 27 *Natal Mercury* 4 December 1899.
- 28 *Natal Mercury* 4 December 1899.
- 29 *Natal Mercury* 6 December 1899.

- 30 *Natal Mercury* 18 December 1899.
- 31 *Times of India* 16 June 1900, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 3: 141).
- 32 Gandhi, 'Indian Ambulance Corps in Natal', *Times of India* 14 March 1900, in Gandhi (1881–1926: 140).
- 33 NAB, PWD 4694/99, 21 December 1899, Donnelly to Barnes.
- 34 NAB, PWD 4694/99, 13 December 1899, Barnes to Col. Johnston.
- 35 NAB, II, I/96, I1921/99, 10 December 1899.
- 36 NAB, PWD 2/71, 4964/1900, 30 January 1900, Barnes, Chief Engineer, to AL Griffin, Accounting Department.
- 37 Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1899, 10. Accessed at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 38 *Natal Mercury* 14 December 1899.
- 39 NAB, CSO, 1633, 9588/1899, 15 December 1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary.
- 40 Gandhi to Donnelly, District Engineer, 13 December 1899, in Gandhi (1881–1926).
- 41 NAB, CSO, 1633, 9588/1899, 15 December 1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary.
- 42 NAB, PWD, 2/71, 4964/1900, 30 January 1900, Barnes, Chief Engineer to AL Griffin, Accounting Department.
- 43 NAB, PWD, 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899, Percy F Clarence to Chief Engineer, PWD.
- 44 NAB, PWD, 2/71, 4694/99, 22 December 1899, Gallwey to Barnes.
- 45 NAB, PWD, 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899, Barnes to Gallwey.
- 46 NAB, PWD, 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899, Percy F Clarence to Chief Engineer, PWD.
- 47 The Battle of Colenso, fought on 15 December 1899, marked the first attempt to relieve the besieged British garrison at Ladysmith. With 20 000 men the British made four attempts to cross the Tugela River, but were driven back by General Louis Botha. The Boers lost 38 men; 1 127 British soldiers were killed, wounded or taken prisoner.
- 48 *Times of India* 16 June 1900, in Gandhi (1881–1926: 138–139).
- 49 NAB, PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899, Percy F Clarence to Barnes.
- 50 *Times of India* 16 June 1900, in Gandhi (1881–1926: 138).
- 51 NAB, PWD, 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899, Percy F Clarence to Chief Engineer, PWD.
- 52 NAB, PWD, 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899, Chief Engineer Barnes to Principal Medical Officer Gallwey.
- 53 NAB, PWD, 2/71, 5117/1899, 25 December 1899, Gallwey to Clarence.
- 54 NAB, II, Protector's Letter Books: General 15 August 1899–7 May 1900, 6 January 1900, Mason to Donnelly.
- 55 NAB, PWD, 147/1900, 13 January 1900, Chief Engineer to Minister, Lands and Works.
- 56 NAB, II, I/97, 12 January 1900, Clarence to Protector.
- 57 *Times of India (Weekly edition)* 16 March 1900, in Meer (1996: 750). Report provided by Gandhi.
- 58 *Times of India* 16 June 1900, in Meer (1996: 753). Report mailed by Gandhi on 14 March 1900.
- 59 *Times of India* 16 June 1900, in Meer (1996: 754). Report provided by Gandhi on 14 March 1900.
- 60 This and the following quote are from Pakenham (1979: 147, 325).
- 61 NAB, PWD, 2/79, 2458/1900, June 1900, Chief Engineer's List of Corps Leaders.
- 62 NAB, CSO, 1641, 1462/1900, 22 February 1900, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary.
- 63 NAB, CSO, 1641, 1462/1900, 9 March 1900, Colonial Secretary to Gandhi.
- 64 Report of the Indian Immigration Trust Board of Natal, 1900: 1. Copy held at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 65 *Times of India* 9 December 1899, in Gandhi (1881–1926: 119).
- 66 *Natal Mercury* 18 October 1899.
- 67 Report of the Protector, 1899: 19. Accessed at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 68 NAB, CSO 2916, Lutchman Singh, Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, 8 October 1901.
- 69 Report of the Indian Immigration Trust Board of Natal, 1900. Accessed at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 70 NAB, CSO 2916, 14 December 1901, Ramatar to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 71 NAB, CSO 2915, 4 October 1901, Kadir Adam to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 72 NAB, CSO 2915, 17 December 1901, Cuthvaroolala to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 73 NAB, CSO 2916, 8 October 1901, L Singh to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 74 NAB, CSO 2916, 17 December 1901, Birogi to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 75 NAB, CSO 2916, 25 July 1901, Narainsamy to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 76 NAB, CSO 2915, 18 March 1901, Ghorahoo to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 77 NAB, CSO 2915, 7 February 1901, Bandhu to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 78 NAB, CSO 2915/2916, Testimony to the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 79 NAB, II, I 1926/99, I/97, 14 December 1899, Protector to Colonial Secretary.
- 80 NAB, CSO 2925, 18 October 1901, Lutchman to Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.
- 81 *Natal Mercury* 11 December 1899.
- 82 Report of the Protector, 1899. Accessed at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 83 The quotes in this paragraph are from *Natal Mercury* 14 December 1899.
- 84 *Natal Mercury* 11 December 1899.
- 85 Report of the Protector, 1899: 19. Accessed at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 86 NAB, II, I/96, I 475/1900, 7 April 1900, David Harris, Manager, Elandslaagte, to Protector.
- 87 Report of the Protector, 1899. Accessed at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 88 Watt (1999: 13, 19).
- 89 H Hurst, 'The Funny Side of Some Old Natal Wars', Broadcast at SABC, 11 May 1940. KCM, Dawes Collection, File B, No. 16.
- 90 TBD, 3/DBN, *Mayor's Minute* 1900.
- 91 TBD, 3/DBN, *Mayor's Minute* 1899: 3.
- 92 'Medical Officer's Report' in TBD, 3/DBN, *Mayor's Minute* 1899: 28. The number of refugees was probably much higher as this

figure only included Indians in Durban. The boundary of Durban was about a third of what it was, when extended in 1933. Many Indians lived with relatives in surrounding areas.

- 93 *Natal Mercury* 1 November 1899.
- 94 Watson (1960a: 10).
- 95 *Natal Mercury* 15 March 1900.
- 96 Bhana & Brain (1990: 116–117).
- 97 NAB, CSO, 1641, 1605/1900, 1 March 1900, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary.
- 98 *Times of India* 14 March 1900, in Meer (1996: 754). Report provided by Gandhi on 14 March 1900.
- 99 *Natal Mercury* 2 March 1900.
- 100 This quote and those in the preceding paragraph are from *Natal Mercury* 15 March 1900.
- 101 Letters to Leaders and Stretcher-Bearers, 24 April 1900, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol 3: 148).
- 102 Speech at Albert Hall, Calcutta, January 1902, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol 3: 219).
- 103 Gandhi's correspondence to Chief Engineer Barnes is based on NAB, PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, 11 June 1900.
- 104 NAB, PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, 12 July 1900, Donnolly to Barnes.
- 105 NAB, PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, 14 July 1900, Clarence to Barnes.
- 106 NAB, PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, 26 July 1900, Barnes to Gandhi.
- 107 NAB, PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, 4 August 1900, Gandhi to Chief Engineer Barnes.
- 108 NAB, PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, 20 August 1900, Barnes to GOC, Lines of Communication.
- 109 *Natal Mercury* 3 February 1900.
- 110 *Natal Mercury* 14 December 1899.
- 111 'Notes on the Present Situation of the British Indians in South Africa', 12 October 1900, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol 3: 159).
- 112 *Natal Mercury* 13 December 1899.
- 113 In Carter & Torabully (2002: 137).
- 114 NAB, CSO 1632, 9294/1899, 19 October 1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary.
- 115 Pakenham (1979: 576).
- 116 Gandhi (1881–1926: 174–175).
- 117 In Bhana (1994: 9).
- 118 Letter from Gandhi to selected persons, 16 September 1899, in Gandhi (1881–1926: 111).
- 119 Datta (2007: 43–44).
- 120 In De Kock (2006: 128).
- 121 In De Kock (2006: 130).
- 122 Datta (2007: 59).

## CHAPTER 17

- 1 'Coolie Mary' in Lalla (1960: 7).
- 2 *African Chronicle* 3 July 1909.
- 3 Meer (1980: 320).
- 4 In *African Chronicle* 22 August 1908.
- 5 Chittenden (1915: 925).
- 6 Meer (1980: 433).
- 7 See Vahed (1999).
- 8 Quoted in *Indian Opinion* 23 December 1905.
- 9 Rooke (1953: 35).

- 10 Freund (1995).
- 11 Meer (1980).
- 12 In Brain (1990: 211).
- 13 Bhana & Brain (1990: 45).
- 14 *African Chronicle* 7 April 1908.
- 15 Neame (1907: 35).
- 16 Brain (1990: 211).
- 17 Brain (1990: 216).
- 18 University of Natal (1961).
- 19 See Vahed (1999).
- 20 Freund (1995: 25).
- 21 NAB, MSCE 654/1949.
- 22 NAB, MSCE 2290/1956; Bramdaw (1935).
- 23 Bramdaw (1939).
- 24 WR Bodasing's story is based on NAB, MSCE 12761/1927; NAB, CNC 228, 1916/109; and NAB CSO 1784, 1905/2190.
- 25 L. Bodasing's story is based on NAB, MSCE 34144/1942.
- 26 Basdaw's story is based on NAB, MSCE 29058/1939.
- 27 Rajadhaysing Bodasing's story is based on NAB, MSCE 1401/1962; Gangadevi's story has been extracted from NAB, MSCE 2310/56.
- 28 NAB, MSCE 36138/1942 and NAB, MSCE 2470/1961.
- 29 See Sing (1999).
- 30 Freund (1995).
- 31 *Natal Blue Books*, Census of 1904. Available at the Killie Campbell Library.
- 32 For a general discussion, see Bhana & Brain (1990) and Brain (1990).
- 33 Petition to the Legislative Council, 24 June 1890. From 'Bhana Collection' at Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 34 Meer (1980: 411).
- 35 Cooper & Smith (2000: 21).
- 36 Meer (1980: 384).
- 37 Swan (1985: 6).
- 38 Meer (1980: 314).
- 39 Swan (1985: 9).
- 40 Bhana (1985).
- 41 Swan (1985: 9).
- 42 Swanson (1983: 406).
- 43 Kuper et al. (1958: 32).
- 44 *Natal Witness* 8 April 1886.
- 45 This and the following quote are from Martens (2006: 327).
- 46 Martens (2006: 329).
- 47 *Natal Mercury* 15 January 1923.
- 48 NAB, II, I/112, 8 December 1905.
- 49 NAB, PMG 48, GPO 520/1895.
- 50 NAB, RSC 1/5/331, 119/1921.
- 51 NAB, RSC 1/5/165, 33/1900.
- 52 *Indian Opinion* 17 October 1930.
- 53 Meer (1980: 81).
- 54 Swanson (1983).
- 55 Martens (2002: 387).
- 56 NAB, II, I/68, 256/93, Henry Bale to the Protector.
- 57 This and the quotes that follow are from NAB, II, I/68, 170/93.

## CHAPTER 18

- 1 *Indian Opinion* 25 November 1905.
- 2 Swanson (1983).
- 3 Martens (2006: 336).
- 4 Swanson (1983: 416).
- 5 Bhana & Pachai (1984).
- 6 NAB, 1894, Natal Government Delegation to India, Government Notice No. 144.
- 7 In Henning (1993: 95).
- 8 Henning (1993: 97).
- 9 Watson (1960b: 136).
- 10 Petition by Abdullah Haji Adam and 60 others to the Natal Legislative Assembly, March 1898. In F Meer Collection.
- 11 Cooper & Smith (2000: 20).
- 12 Meer (1980: 78).
- 13 Meer (1980: 654).
- 14 Henning (1993: 127).
- 15 Swan (1991: 130).
- 16 Tinker (1947: 175).
- 17 NAB, II, I/187, 139/87, 1 November 1912, Deputy Protector to City Court, Pietermaritzburg.
- 18 Watson (1960b: 135).
- 19 NAB, II, I/143, 3144/1906, April–June 1906, Magistrate, Lower Umzimkulu, to Protector.
- 20 NAB, II, I/171, 175/1910 and NAB, II, I/172, 506/1910.
- 21 *Indian Opinion* 27 October 1906.
- 22 *Rand Daily News* 5 January 1907, in Hansrajh (1986: 13).
- 23 *Indian Opinion* 28 October 1905.
- 24 Heydenrych (1986: 1) in Hansrajh (1986: 46).
- 25 *Indian Opinion* 23 March 1907.
- 26 *Natal Advertiser* 5 July 1907.
- 27 *Natal Mercury* 16 July 1907.
- 28 Hansrajh (1986: 75).
- 29 Hansrajh (1986).
- 30 NAB, II, I/159/ 1921/08, 24 September 1908, Dr H Fernandez to Protector.
- 31 Hansrajh (1986: 76).
- 32 *Indian Opinion* 11 April 1908, in Hansrajh (1986: 80).
- 33 *Indian Opinion* 25 April 1908.
- 34 This and the preceding quote are from NAB, II, I/159, 1921/08.
- 35 This and the following quote are from Varian (1973: 165).
- 36 NAB, MSCE 874/1961.
- 37 NAB, MSCE 34323/1941.
- 38 NAB, MSCE 2485/1947.
- 39 SAB, GG 88, 15/89, January to May 1911.
- 40 *Indian Opinion* 5 March 1910.
- 41 Meer (1980: 637).
- 42 This and the preceding three quotes are from SAB, GG 88, 15/89, January to May 1911.
- 43 This quote and those in the rest of this section are from Bhana & Pachai (1984: 27–29).
- 44 *Cape Times* 4 January 1911.
- 45 Public Records Office, L/E/7/1184, J&P 145, PD 35, 1911. Telegram from South African Government to the Secretary of

- State for the Colonies, in Correspondence from Crewe of the India Office to Governor-General of India, 17 February 1911.
- 46 Guy (1994: xx).
- 47 Hudis & Anderson (2004: 110).
- 48 For more detailed studies on Natal, see Ballard & Lenta (1985: 121–150); Guy, 'Destruction and reconstruction of Zulu society', in Marks & Rathbone (1982: 167–194). For a general discussion on South Africa, see Bundy (1979) and Lewis (1984: 1–24).
- 49 Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1933. Housed at the Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 50 Beinart (1990).
- 51 Burrows (1952: 161).
- 52 Smith (1945: 76).
- 53 Arkin (1981: 143).
- 54 Henning (1993: 127).

## CHAPTER 19

- 1 In Bobb (1988: 206).
- 2 See Bhana (1997b) for a comprehensive discussion of the Natal Indian Congress.
- 3 Swan (1985).
- 4 In Naidoo (1984: 48).
- 5 Gandhi (1881–1926: *Collected Works* 5: 318).
- 6 Naidoo (1984: 48).
- 7 Swan (1985).
- 8 Swan (1985).
- 9 Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 10 *The Friend* 30 October 1912. This was a Bloemfontein-based newspaper.
- 11 *Cape Argus* 22 October 1912.
- 12 The quotes in this paragraph are from *Cape Times* 23 October 1912.
- 13 Chada (1997: 175).
- 14 All the quotes in this section are from Kale (1999: 167–171).
- 15 This quote and those in the next paragraph are from *Cape Times* 23 October 1912.
- 16 *The Diamond Fields Advertiser* 26 October 1912.
- 17 *The Star* 28 October 1912.
- 18 The quotes in this and the following three paragraphs are from *Rand Daily Mail* 30 October 1912.
- 19 *Rand Daily Mail* 29 October 1912.
- 20 *Transvaal Leader* 1 November 1912.
- 21 *Rand Daily Mail* 1 November 1912.
- 22 *Transvaal Leader* 2 November 1912.
- 23 Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 24 Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 25 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914.
- 26 Bose (2006).
- 27 Bose (2006: 163–164).
- 28 *Indian Opinion* 24 August 1913.
- 29 L/E/7/1184, J&P 30038, PD 3008 1911, 9 August 1911.
- 30 *Indian Opinion* 24 September 1913.
- 31 Naidoo (1984: 48).
- 32 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914: 22.

- 33 Interview, Dr Safoora Doolarkhan.
- 34 *Natal Mercury* 23 September 1913.
- 35 See Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 36 Tinker (1947: 303).
- 37 *Natal Mercury* 17 October 1913.
- 38 *Natal Advertiser* 15 November 1913.
- 39 Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 40 Henning (1993).
- 41 *Indian Opinion* 15 October 1913.
- 42 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 12: 508–510).
- 43 *Natal Witness* 18 October 1913.
- 44 *Natal Mercury* 16 November 1913.
- 45 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 12: 508–510).
- 46 *Indian Opinion* 22 October 1913.
- 47 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914: 26.
- 48 Beall & North-Coombes (1983).
- 49 *Natal Witness* 18 October 1913.
- 50 *Indian Opinion* 29 October 1913.
- 51 *Natal Witness* 18 October 1913.
- 52 *Natal Mercury* 22 October 1913.
- 53 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 18 October 1913, Attorney-General, Natal, to Minister of Justice.
- 54 The quotes in this paragraph are from NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 18 October 1913, Telegram number B325.
- 55 This and the following quote are from NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 18 October 1913, Telegram number B321.
- 56 *Natal Mercury* 27 October 1913.
- 57 Bhana & Vahed (2005: 115).
- 58 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 17 October 1913, Secretary, Minister of Justice, to Attorney-General, Natal.
- 59 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 22 October 1913, Deputy Protector Dunning to Attorney-General, Natal.
- 60 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 23 October 1913, Deputy Protector Dunning to Attorney-General, Natal.
- 61 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 24 October 1913, Deputy Protector Dunning to Attorney-General Douglas, Natal.
- 62 Bhana & Pachai (1984: 142).
- 63 *Natal Witness* 25 October 1913.
- 64 *Natal Mercury* 27 October 1913.
- 65 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 12: 508–510).
- 66 NAB, 1/LDS, L3150/1/13.
- 67 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 25 October 1913, W Mann to Attorney-General Douglas, Natal.
- 68 NAB, 1/LDS, L3057/1/13, Messages 649 and 651.
- 69 NAB, 1/PMB, 3/1/1/1/2, MC248/13, 17 October 1913, Department of Justice, Pretoria, to magistrates.
- 70 *Natal Mercury* 29 October 1913.
- 71 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 30 October 1913, Deputy Protector Dunning to Attorney-General Douglas, Natal.
- 72 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 413, 30 October 1913, Correspondence between South African Mounted Rifles, Dundee, and Attorney-General, Natal.
- 73 *Natal Advertiser* 30 October 1913.
- 74 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 12: 508).
- 75 Bhana & Pachai (1984: 142–143).
- 76 'Vande Mataram.' <http://www.vandemataram.com/html/vande/index.htm>. Accessed on 3 November 2009.
- 77 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 212/1913, 31 October 1913, Prosecutor, Newcastle, to Attorney-General Douglas.
- 78 This and the next quote are from NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 782/73, 30 October 1913.
- 79 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 782/73, 31 October 1913.
- 80 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 782/73, 30 October 1913, Deputy Protector Dunning to Attorney-General Douglas.
- 81 *Natal Advertiser* 7 November 1913.
- 82 The quotes in this paragraph are from Henning (1993: 180).
- 83 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 12: 508).
- 84 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 12: 509).
- 85 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 5 November 1913, Deputy Protector Dunning to Attorney-General Douglas.
- 86 This and the next three quotes are from NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 6 November 1913, Deputy Protector Dunning to Attorney-General.
- 87 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 98, 6 November 1913, Deputy Protector Dunning to Attorney-General.
- 88 Gandhi (2001: 303).
- 89 Henning (1993: 180).
- 90 In Henning (1993: 181).
- 91 This and the preceding quote are from NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, D84, 7 November 1913, Deputy Protector to Attorney-General.
- 92 NAB, 1/MTU, 3/4/2/1, DD1/66/13.
- 93 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 7 November 1913, Deputy Protector to Attorney-General.
- 94 The quotes in this paragraph are from NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 826/1913, 9 November 1913, Detective Elton to Attorney-General.
- 95 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 8 November 1913, Deputy Protector to Attorney-General.
- 96 Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 97 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 12).
- 98 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914, in Gandhi (1881–1926 Vol. 12: 510).
- 99 This quote and those in the next two paragraphs are from NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913.
- 100 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 826/1913.
- 101 This quote and those in the next four paragraphs are from NAB, AGO, 1/8/146, 782/13.
- 102 *Natal Advertiser* 22 November 1913.
- 103 *Natal Advertiser* 7 November 1913.
- 104 Swan (1985: 253).
- 105 Swan (1984).
- 106 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 782/73.
- 107 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 19 November 1913, Magistrate Lyle to the Attorney-General.



- 108 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 18 November 1913, Telegram 192, Chief Magistrate of Durban to the Attorney-General.
- 109 *Natal Advertiser* 7 November 1913.
- 110 The quotes in this and the preceding paragraph are from *Natal Advertiser* 15 November 1913.
- 111 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913.
- 112 *Natal Advertiser* 24 November 1913.
- 113 This and the next quote are from NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 10 November 1913, Minister of Justice to Attorney-General.

## CHAPTER 20

- 1 Joshi (2005: 13).
- 2 Beall & North-Coombes (1983), Swan (1984), and Bhana & Vahed (2005) do point to instances of violence without examining these in detail.
- 3 Bhana & Dhupelia (1981: 3).
- 4 Beall & North-Coombes (1983).
- 5 Beall & North-Coombes (1983: 58).
- 6 *Natal Advertiser* 14 November 1913.
- 7 *Natal Advertiser* 21 November 1913.
- 8 *Natal Advertiser* 22 November 1913.
- 9 *Natal Advertiser* 25 November 1913.
- 10 *Natal Advertiser* 23 November 1913.
- 11 *Natal Advertiser* 27 November 1913.
- 12 *Natal Advertiser* 25 November 1913.
- 13 *Natal Advertiser* 10 December 1913; NAB, AGO 756/1913, 1130/1913, 12 December 1913.
- 14 *Natal Mercury* 27 November 1913.
- 15 Gordon (1978: 328).
- 16 NAB, AGO, 1/8/146, 756/13. We were unable to locate his report, if one was produced.
- 17 *Natal Mercury* 6 November 1913.
- 18 *Natal Advertiser* 14 November 1913.
- 19 This and the preceding quote are from *Natal Advertiser* 14 November 1913.
- 20 *Natal Advertiser* 14 November 1913.
- 21 *Natal Advertiser* 13 November 1913.
- 22 This and the next quote are from *Natal Mercury* 13 November 1913.
- 23 *Natal Advertiser* 13 November 1913.
- 24 *Natal Advertiser* 13 November 1913.
- 25 *Natal Advertiser* 14 November 1913.
- 26 *Natal Advertiser* 15 November 1913.
- 27 *Natal Advertiser* 15 November 1913.
- 28 *Natal Advertiser* 15 November 1913.
- 29 *Natal Advertiser* 15 November 1913.
- 30 *Natal Advertiser* 17 November 1913.
- 31 *Natal Advertiser* 17 November 1913.
- 32 *Natal Advertiser* 17 November 1913; NAB, CNC 148, 1913/2035.
- 33 *Natal Advertiser* 17 November 1913.
- 34 *Natal Advertiser* 19 November 1913.
- 35 *Natal Advertiser* 21 November 1913.
- 36 *Natal Advertiser* 25 November 1913.
- 37 *Natal Advertiser* 28 November 1913.
- 38 *Natal Advertiser* 27 November 1913.
- 39 *Natal Advertiser* 28 November 1913.
- 40 *Natal Mercury* 28 November 1913; NAB, AGO 1/8/147, 12A/1914; NAB, AGO 1/8/146 252A/1913. The 12 who gave evidence against Campbell and Marimuthu were Kistnasamy, Vardhan, Parasaraman, Anthoni, Muthu, Gunga Raju, Pallaynee, Moonsamy, Penchilloo, , Kullan, Manganuma and Hoosengadu. Manganuma was the wife of deceased Patchappan.
- 41 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 783/1913, 31 December 1913.
- 42 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 783/1913, 31 December 1913.
- 43 *Natal Advertiser* 5 December 1913.
- 44 NAB, CNC 148, 2035/1913.
- 45 *Natal Advertiser* 17 November 1913.
- 46 *Natal Advertiser* 20 November 1913.
- 47 *Natal Advertiser* 20 November 1913.
- 48 *Natal Advertiser* 17 November 1913.
- 49 *Natal Advertiser* 17 November 1913.
- 50 *Natal Advertiser* 17 November 1913.
- 51 *Natal Mercury* 17 November 1913.
- 52 *Natal Mercury* 17 November 1913.
- 53 *Natal Advertiser* 19 November 1913.
- 54 *Natal Advertiser* 19 November 1913.
- 55 *Natal Advertiser* 19 November 1913.
- 56 *Natal Advertiser* 21 November 1913.
- 57 *Natal Advertiser* 24 November 1913.
- 58 *Natal Advertiser* 26 November 1913.
- 59 *Natal Witness* 11 October 1913. The 16 were Kasturba Gandhi, Kashibehn Gandhi, Santokbehn Gandhi, Jayakunvar P Mehta, Parsee Rustomjee, Chhaganlal Gandhi, Maganlal Gandhi, Rawijibhai M Patel, Maganbhai H Patel, Solomon Royeppen, Shipujan Badri, V Govindrajulu, Coopoosamy Moonlight Mudaliar, Gokuldas Hansraj, Revashanker R Sodha and Ramdas Gandhi. See Bhana & Vahed (2005: 134).
- 60 *Natal Advertiser* 25 November 1913.
- 61 NAB, 1 PMB, 3/1/1/1/2, MC 382/13, 25 November 1913, Clarence to the Minister of Justice, Pretoria.
- 62 *Natal Advertiser* 25 November 1913.
- 63 NAB, 1 PMB, 3/1/1/1/2, MC 382/13, 29 November 1913.
- 64 *Natal Advertiser* 24 November 1913.
- 65 *Natal Witness* 29 November 1913.
- 66 *Natal Advertiser* 29 November 1913.
- 67 *Natal Advertiser* 27 November 1913.
- 68 *Natal Advertiser* 29 November 1913.
- 69 *Natal Witness* 29 November 1913.
- 70 *Natal Advertiser* 27 November 1913.
- 71 *Natal Advertiser* 27 November 1913.
- 72 *Natal Mercury* 28 November 1913.
- 73 *Natal Mercury* 4 December 1912.
- 74 *Natal Mercury* 8 December 1913; NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 242A/1913; NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 246A/1913.
- 75 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 248A/1913.
- 76 NAB, AGO 756/1913, 1130/1913.
- 77 NAB, AGO 756/1913, 1130/1913, Public Prosecutor to Attorney-General.

- 78 NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 248A/1913, Attorney-General to Public Prosecutor.
- 79 Judd (1996: 226).
- 80 In Beall & North-Coombes (1983).
- 81 Kaiwar (2005: 355).
- 82 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914: 27.
- 83 Campbell (1938: 253).
- 84 Bhana & Pachai (1984: 142–143).
- 85 *Natal Mercury* 25 October 1913.
- 86 In Chada (1997: 187).
- 87 In Kelly (2004: 55–56).
- 88 *Indian Opinion, Golden Number*, December 1914: 10.
- 89 Beall & North-Coombes (1983).
- 90 *African Chronicle* 9 September 1911.
- 91 In Beall & North-Coombes (1983: 67).
- 92 See Kelly (2004).
- 93 *Natal Advertiser* 19 November 1913.
- 94 In Beall & North-Coombes (1983: 73).
- 95 Bhana & Vahed (2005).
- 96 Meer (1969); Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2004).
- 97 Joshi (1942).
- 98 Calpin (1949).
- 99 *African Chronicle* 11 July 1914.
- 100 Kaiwar (2006: 355).
- 101 Henning (1993: 109).
- 102 Pearson (1914: 637).
- 21 'A Far Cry from Africa' in Sen (2006: 37). Adapted for this study.
- 22 This and the following four quotes are from SAB, PM 1/2/322, PM91/11, Ahmed Mahomed Munshi, Application for Repatriation to the Union of South Africa, 1927–1938; KAB, IRC 1/1/1057, 14755A, Immigration Papers, Ahmed Mahomed Munshi.
- 23 See Karatani (2003).
- 24 Hyslop (2006: 362).
- 25 We would like to thank Sudesh Mishra for his comments.
- 26 Marx (1963: 15).
- 27 Comaroff & Comaroff (1997: 117).
- 28 H Newby in Reay (1988: 97).
- 29 Bakhtin (1968: 37).
- 30 In Scott (1985: 31).
- 31 A Hindu custom in India in which the widow was burnt to ashes on her dead husband's pyre.
- 32 Mishra (2007: 83).
- 33 NAB, RSC 1/5/472, 1101/1945.
- 34 In Mishra (2007: 88).
- 35 Shepherd (2002a: xiii).
- 36 Nandan (2001: 284).
- 37 Mishra (2007: 33).
- 38 Mishra (2006: 102).
- 39 Plaatje (2002: 6).
- 40 This and the next quote are from Marks & Rathbone (1982: 22, 13).
- 41 Arkin (1981: 143).
- 42 NAB, CNC 2035/1913.
- 43 This quote and those in the next paragraph are from Beinart (1997: 152).
- 44 Van Onselen (1982: 74).
- 45 Mishra (1996).
- 46 Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2004: 162).

## CHAPTER 21

- 1 In Bobb (1988: 183).
- 2 Watson (1960a: 11).
- 3 Lal (2000: 13).
- 4 In Mishra (2006: 103).
- 5 Sen (2006: 19).
- 6 Mishra (1996).
- 7 Naipaul, *House for Mr Biswas*, in Lal (2000: 136).
- 8 SAB, BNS A1409, June 1919.
- 9 See Mesthrie (1987) for a discussion of repatriation schemes.
- 10 Gmelch (2004: 214).
- 11 Mishra (2007: 34).
- 12 Espinet (2004: 91) in Mehta (2006: 30).
- 13 Espinet (2004: 91) in Mehta (2006: 30).
- 14 J Hullah, Secretary to the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, India, quoted in Tinker (1947: 365–366).
- 15 SAB, BNS 1/2/57, A4299, Repatriated Indians Claiming Re-admission. The authors would like to thank Isabel Hofmeyr for providing this archival material.
- 16 NAB, 10/1/49, 17/7/1921, Deceased Estate, Thai.
- 17 Sitas (2000: 111–112).
- 18 This quote and those in the next two paragraphs are from SAB, BNS 1/2/57, A4299.
- 19 *Natal Advertiser* 28 September 1923; *Rand Daily Mail* 6 October 1923.
- 20 This quote and those in the rest of this section are from SAB, BNS 1/2/57, A4299.

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