Tracing the New Indian Diaspora

Edited by Om Prakash Dwivedi

Hambakhaya! Hambauyee Bombay!
(Go home! Go to Bombay!)

Challenges Facing South African Indians
in the Post-Apartheid Era

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Introduction

THERE ARE CERTAIN COMMON THEMES evident in the indentured experience in South Africa, Mauritius, the West Indies, Fiji, and Malaysia. Indians in the indentured diaspora have had varying fortunes, and have had little or no political influence in the different colonies. They had no political ambitions and were passive by nature. Although "they have not lacked initiative and have sometimes resisted pressures, the history of the Asian communities is largely one of accommodation to the prevailing historical situation."[1] As they attempted to adjust in an alien and hostile environment, they encountered conflict initially with the colonial rulers and subsequently with the indigenous majority.

The indentured Indian diaspora is heterogeneous in terms of religion, education, language, and regional origin. Despite their different backgrounds, the various sub-ethnic groups have many common features, including the extended or joint family, as well as "sharply defined family roles and status based on patriarchy, gerontocracy and the subordination of the individual to the interests of the family."[2] Also, the influence of religion and culture is marked.

[1] Dharam P. Ghai & Yash P. Ghai, *The Asian Minorities of East and Central Africa* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1971): 5.

[2] Ravindra Kumar Jain, *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literature* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993): 45.

Indians in the indentured diaspora were always vulnerable, in both colonial and postcolonial times. The aim of this essay is to analyse some of the challenges facing South African Indians in the post-apartheid era. Indians constitute a vulnerable ethnic minority in South Africa, and have been 'sandwiched' between the economically dominant whites and the African majority. My essay is divided in three sections. The roots of indenture in South Africa are briefly assessed in the first section. In the second section, Indian political affiliation in the democratic era is discussed. This is followed by an analysis of an anti-Indian discourse, gaining momentum since 1994. There have been tensions between Indians and Africans because the former enjoyed a relatively privileged position compared to the majority, chiefly because of community survival strategies and their religious and cultural heritage.

South African Indians were not a homogeneous group, and have experienced various divisions and tensions, particularly between the traders and the working class. The commercial, merchant, and professional Indian class were perceived as an economic threat to white South Africans in the province of Natal, and this was reflected in racial prejudices, which were transformed into policies limiting their access to land, housing, and trading opportunities. There was increasing evidence that political organizations were used to articulate merchant interests, sometimes at the expense of the working classes. The latter also competed with Africans on the urban labour market, especially in secondary industry, where there was a huge demand for unskilled labourers. Indians had a comparative advantage over Africans, in that they were more highly urbanized (even compared to the rest of the indentured diaspora).

Consequently, the incipient conflict between these two groups resurfaced episodically, more so in the post-apartheid era. This has increased the vulnerability of the minority group, who also believed that they were being sidelined in affirmative action and black economic empowerment schemes. While those in the business and professional sectors thrived in the post-apartheid era, working-class Indians increasingly feel disillusioned, marginalized, and excluded from the rainbow nation.

Indentured Roots in South Africa

The origin of South African Indians can be traced back to the agricultural labour requirements of colonial Natal in the mid-nineteenth century. During this period, sugar cane had been identified as the most profitable commercial crop suited to the climate of this region. However, a major shortcoming was

an unsatisfactory labour supply. Successful cultivation of sugar cane required a high labour-per-hectare ratio. Furthermore, the labour had to be semi-skilled, especially for harvesting and milling activities.

Law 14 of 1859, passed by the Natal Legislative Council, sanctioned the importation of Indian labour. The first batch of Indian labourers arrived in Natal in 1860, and they continued to arrive until 1866, when immigration was temporarily halted because of the economic depression and the glut on the world sugar market. By 1866, 6,445 Indian men, women, and children were in Natal.[3] During this period, Indian labourers contributed significantly to the wealth and prosperity of the province. In 1863, sugar worth 26,000 pounds was exported, and in 1864 this increased to 100,000 pounds.[4] It is important to note that the first batch of Indians were engaged in all the enterprises that sustained the economy of Natal, which, in addition to sugar cane, included cotton, tobacco, arrowroot, and hill rice. This was mainly because most estates grew more than one crop.[5]

However, indentured labourers toiled under arduous conditions, subjected to inhuman abuses and exploitation – for example, flogging, inadequate medical treatment, excessive fines for minor offenses, and pay deductions for absenteeism. Such labourers were vital to Natal's economy because they "could be worked up to fourteen hours a day, with pitiful wages further reduced through excessive fines for minor transgressions."[6] They faced problems linked to race, citizenship, and identity for the greater part of a century:

> While in theory the emigration of indentured labourers was voluntary and reversible, in reality it was often involuntary, irreversible, and traumatic [...] migration under these conditions was merely a transposition of colonial oppression from one location to another, under the same masters; but in those alien places, it created ethical, cultural, civic and legal problems on an unprecedented scale.[7]

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[3] Joy Brain, "Indentured and Free Indians in the Economy of Colonial Natal," in *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony*, ed. Bill Guest & John M. Sellers (Pietermaritzburg: U of Natal P, 1985): 202.

[4] Pranshankar Someshwar Joshi, *The Tyranny of Colour: A Study of the Indian Problem in South Africa* (Durban: E.P. & Commercial Print, 1942): 46.

[5] Brain, "Indentured and Free Indians in the Economy of Colonial Natal," 202.

[6] See Fatima Meer, "Indentured Labour and Group Formations in Apartheid Society," *Race & Class* 26.4 (April 1985): 46.

[7] Aparna Dharwadker, "Diaspora and the Theatre of the Nation," *Theatre Research International* 28.3 (March 2003): 306–307.

After completing their period of indenture, many 'free Indians' became very successful market gardeners. Hence, they were "not fulfilling the desire of the planters for a settled cheap labour force."[8] In the mid-1870s, the indentured labourers were followed by traders from Gujarat. The latter were immediately viewed as a threat to the commercial interests of whites.

The Indian question in South Africa featured prominently on the national agenda for the greater part of the twentieth century. Politicians from diverse parties were unanimous on one issue – the Indian population in South Africa should be reduced to the minimum possible. This was a key issue in the Nationalist Party election manifesto in 1948:

> The party holds the view that Indians are a foreign and outlandish element which is unassimilable. They can never become part of the country and therefore must be treated as an immigrant community. The party accepts as a basis of its policy the repatriation of as many Indians as possible.[9]

In 1914, Gandhi had argued that "compulsory repatriation was a physical and political impossibility."[10] The main mechanisms to try to force repatriation was denial of political rights, limited trading and employment opportunities, and restrictions on the ownership and occupation of land through legislation which would reduce many to dependent immiseration.[11]

Indians were perceived to be an economic threat to the European and this was reflected in virtually pathological racial prejudices. This was aptly summarized by a newspaper correspondent:

> Economically the trading Indian is a 'menace' only to a section of the European trading community [...]. The supposed social 'menace' arising from the presence of the Indian in Natal is the subject of even greater exaggeration [...]. It would be difficult to get one percent of the

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[8] Frene Ginwala, "Class, Consciousness and Control: Indian South Africans 1860–1946" (doctoral dissertation, Oxford University, 1974): 80.

[9] South African Institute of Race Relations, "The Indian people in South Africa," *Information Sheet* 1 (Natal Region; 1967): 1.

[10] Eugene P. Dvorin, *Racial Separation in South Africa* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1952): 162.

[11] For a chronological list of the major anti-Indian legislation passed between 1885 and 1946, see George Singh, *The Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of South Africa: A Brief Survey of its Backgrounds, Terms and Implications* (Durban: Council for Human Rights, 1946): 10–18.

> European population of Durban to testify to specific instances of detri-
> ment, inconvenience or even annoyance caused by Indians [...] the real
> cause of the annoyance is clearly race prejudice.[12]

These prejudices were transformed into policies which limited their access to
land and housing, as well as to trading opportunities. The Durban City Coun-
cil was at the forefront of calls for such policies, and in many respects was
decades ahead of the National Party in promoting apartheid. In 1875 the
mayor of Durban, Richard Vause, stated:

> legislation will doubtless have to be resorted to, to prevent these
> people thus locating themselves in our very midst, their habits and cus-
> toms being, as is well known, so totally at variance with and repugnant
> to those of Europeans.[13]

Ironically, in July 1903, Sir Leige Hulett, former Prime Minister of Natal,
stated that "Durban was absolutely built up by the Indian population."[14]

There is little doubt that the various restrictions on Indian land tenure were
ultimately conceived to curb Indian economic expansion. Associated with this
were restrictions on trading licences and the refusal to grant loans to Indians.
Initially, these policies were confined to the local state, but as pressure from
the white electorate mounted the central state was forced to introduce sweep-
ing legislation which culminated in the Ghetto Act (1946) and the Group
Areas Act (1950). Hence, the social and economic prejudices of whites against
Indians were sanctified by legislation, and adopted as state policy.[15]

In the process, the state was going against the findings and recommen-
dations of numerous commissions of inquiry which emphasized that the
segregation of Indians and limitations on their trading practices would ulti-
mately have an adverse impact on the whole country. The Indian community

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[12] *Cape Times* (14 January 1926).

[13] Leo Kuper et al., *Durban: A Study in Racial Ecology* (London: Jonathan Cape,
1958): 32.

[14] Gagathura Mohambry Naicker, *A Historical Synopsis of the Indian Question in
South Africa* (Durban: Anti-Segregation Council, 1945): 2.

[15] For detailed discussion of this issue, see Brij Maharaj, "The local state and resi-
dential segregation: Durban and the prelude to the Group Areas Act," *South African
Geographical Journal* 77.1 (1995): 33–41; Maharaj, "Apartheid, Urban Segregation
and the Local State: Durban and the Group Areas Act in South Africa," *Urban Geo-
graphy* 18.2 (1997): 135–54.

was vehemently opposed to any form of statutory segregation and measures which denied them their rights as law-abiding citizens.

Although Indians were a disenfranchised and voiceless group, their aspirations were articulated at different times by the various political organizations – the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), the Natal Indian Association (NIA), the Natal Indian Organisation, the South African Indian Congress, and the South African Indian Organisation (SAIO). These differed in terms of their strategies, but their objective was the same – to fight for the rights of the Indian community. In an atmosphere of increasing hostility and intolerance, they utilized every peaceful measure to expose the injustice and violation of human rights in South Africa. This included passive resistance, recourse to the law, and appeals to India and the United Nations.

While they claimed to represent the Indian community, there was very little evidence of mobilization of the working class. Political action mainly "consisted of constitutional protest – letters, petitions and deputations" to government officials in South Africa or India.[16] These organizations, however, were primarily concerned with protecting trading and middle class interests: Socially and politically they were conservative. They worked within the framework of the "existing social order, and although they protested against white discrimination against Indians (hence their claim to represent the entire 'community') they protested from a class rather than a national or racial position."[17]

The major players in Durban, the NIC and NIA, had access to central state structures, and both adopted accommodationist strategies of negotiating with the state to protect their commercial, residential, and investment interests. A telling indictment against the political leadership of the period was the failure to mobilize across racial barriers:

> A study of the working class areas of Durban would surely reveal that even by the 1930s there was a considerable intermingling of African and Indian workers. Much of this was superficial - on the race track, in the cinema, or in the bus – but some was more durable, in terms of worker or home relationships. This urban intermingling might have become the basis for a political movement, if the Indian leaders had

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[16] Maureen Swan, "Ideology in Organised Indian Politics, 1891–1948," in *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, ed. Shula Marks & Stanley Trapido (London: Longman, 1987): 192.

[17] Maureen Swan, "Ideology in Organised Indian Politics, 1891–1948," 193.

not remained so completely middle class, whether they were mode-
rates or radicals in their ideology.[18]

There were tensions between indentured labourers and Zulu labourers ever
since 1860. It had been conventionally argued that the abundant indigenous
Zulu labour was inadequate and unsuitable, hence the need for indenture.
However, on the contrary, the local Zulus comprised a proficient labour force
and were "by no means disinclined to labour, or unwilling to render it to the
planters, but upon their own terms and at their own times."[19] There is ade-
quate evidence revealing that, while Natal was arranging for the introduction
of indentured labour, the Zulus were working diligently in both the skilled
and the unskilled sectors of the economy.[20] As a result of the relative material
progress of the traders vis-à-vis the Africans, Indo-African relations in Natal
were characterized by incipient tension and conflict.

The interaction between African workers and the Indian petty bourgeoisie
was primarily exploitive in Durban. However, Indian businesses provided op-
portunities for African workers and their families to escape from the austerity
of direct local state control. The traders

provided the basic infrastructure of the squatters' slums: the bus ser-
vices and retail outlets – the services which could be provided because
of the particular position of Indian people as a 'buffer group' in the
racial hierarchy of urban segregation.[21]

The nascent tensions between Zulus and Indians burst into riots in Cato
Manor in 1949. The apartheid state viewed the violence as a racial conflict
between Indians and Africans, and argued that this justified its policy of racial
separation. However, while there was Indian–African tension, the riot was a
"complex phenomenon, fed by white prejudice and Government policy as
well as by the aspirations of an embryonic African bourgeoisie."[22]

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[18] Hugh Tinker, "The Politics of Racialism: South African Indians," *Journal of Afri-
can History* 14.3 (1973): 525.

[19] *Daily News* (13 November 1960).

[20] Dhupelia, Uma. "African Labour in Natal: Attempts at Coercion and Control
1893–1903," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 5.1 (1982): 36–48; Fatima, "Inden-
tured Labour and Group Formations in Apartheid Society," 46–60.

[21] David Hemson, "Dock Workers, Labour Circulation, and Class Struggles in Dur-
ban, 1940–59," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 4.1 (1977): 103.

[22] Linda Ladlau, "The Cato Manor Riots, 1959–60" (MA thesis, University of
Natal, Durban, 1975): 19.

While the riots appeared to be unplanned, structurally they were predetermined by the nature of the South African social formation, where Indians were perceived to be occupying a 'middleman' buffer position between whites and Africans. The social anthropologist Hilda Kuper argued that Indians, like Jews in other countries, were being used as 'scapegoats' by the dominant ethnic groups:

> Sufficiently wealthy to serve as a bait for greed, too few to be feared and, in the main, ideologically opposed to counter aggression with physical violence, their ethnic difference and cultural diversity serve as excuses for discrimination and oppression.[23]

The riots were followed by probably the most intense cooperation between Indian and African organizations, culminating in the NIC's forming an alliance with the ANC and participating in the 1952 Defiance campaign and the drawing up of the Freedom Charter in 1955.This tradition of non-cooperation with the apartheid regime continued into the 1980s, when more than eighty percent of the Indian community rejected participation in the tricameral parliament because it excluded blacks. However, there were dramatic shifts in political affiliation in the post-apartheid era.

Democracy and Political Affiliation

The ANC leadership was astounded when two-thirds of the South African Indians voted for the National Party in the first democratic elections in 1994. Nelson Mandela expressed his own disappointment in no uncertain terms:

> In the Indian and Coloured areas you found as much as seventy percent of the population voted against an African government. They decided to vote to be part of a minority and not the majority, they decided to be part of a past which has divided us, created conflict, hostility, instead of being part of the future. [...] We have had the most difficult task in the government of National Unity because the fact that the Indian and Coloured communities identified themselves with the oppressors, has created problems for me in promoting a spirit of reconciliation and the building of a nation which should be the joint activity of all South Africans.[24]

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[23] *The Star* (4 June 1979).

[24] Nelson Mandela, speech delivered on receiving the freedom of Tongaat, 21 October 1994.

While the disappointment of Nelson Mandela and others in the ANC leadership was understandable, his comments only served to exacerbate the vulnerability and minority status of Indians. The contradictions of apartheid and the complexities of a fractured society played an important role in influencing political affiliations, and this was emphasized by the community leader, the late Satish Juggernath:

> The ANC cannot underestimate the system's capacity to score heavily on the fears, uncertainties and confusion of a significant number of those who can influence which way the poll swings. Bring in the bogeys of violence, religious and cultural intolerance [...] and you have very frightened people indeed.[25]

Fear and vulnerability became pervasive. Just as physical security was an issue, security at the level of the job market was a major concern for Indians. Affirmative action was seen as a major threat. Although a large proportion of Indians belong to the lower classes, their average socio-economic situation is above the South African generally. Some Indian 'tenderpreneurs' (business persons closely aligned symbiotically with the ruling party and awarded lucrative government contracts) succeeded in taking advantage of the post-apartheid black-empowerment deals, distanced themselves from the.local community, and ingratiated themselves shamelessly with the ruling elite.

The poorest sections of the Indian community have been adversely affected by the "simultaneous application of an affirmative action policy with a neo-liberal economic programme."[26] Indians with low levels of skills and training are vulnerable and can be easily replaced by Africans when companies are forced to change the demographic profile of their employees.

The government response was that Indians also ought to be favoured by affirmative action, and that any attempt to exclude them from such programmes was a deliberate misinterpretation of the legislation. In 1998, President Mandela maintained:

> affirmative action is never used to advance any one group at the expense of others [...] we do need corrective action to put right the historical wrongs caused by discrimination and prejudice against Africans, Coloureds, Indians, women and the disabled.[27]

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[25] *The Herald* (30 January 1994).

[26] Adam Habib & Sanusha Naidu, "Race, Class and Voting Patterns in South Africa's Electoral System: Ten Years of Democracy," *Africa Development* 31.3 (2006): 90.

[27] For the entire speech, see "Speech by Nelson Mandela to a May day rally,"

The journalist Marlan Padayachee posed the following questions:

> Did the propaganda of apartheid's vicious social engineering system
> turn Indians into a racist rightwing enclave, reactionaries or mere in-
> sulated observers of a political system? A community with a double-
> layered identity of looking to India for its spiritual, religious and cul-
> tural succor and to South Africa for its economic well- being and
> security has reached the cross roads. Have Indians become so disillu-
> sioned with a rapidly changing society in which black people have the
> political crown and whites the political crown jewels, that they have
> become mesmerised by the social latitude between Bollywood and
> Blue Lagoon?[28]

During President Mbeki's tenure there was a betrayal of the non-racial pro-
ject (and a deliberate sidelining of minorities and the simultaneous rise of
'tenderpreneurs'. The ANC retreated to the politics of racism, and in the pro-
cess marginalized minority ethnic groups. Not surprisingly, there has been a
significant increase in Indian support for the Democratic Alliance, a political
party with historically white roots which is beginning to attract some black
voters.

Largely as a result of a lack of astute, credible leadership which can genu-
inely represent the working class and the poor, Indians face the possibility of
being politically marginalized in the post-apartheid era. Those in the business
and professional sectors thrived and jostled with the political elites for power,
privilege, patronage, and position. However, the new Indian elite are increa-
singly being implicated in corruption, which appears to permeate all facets of
South African society. Working-class Indians feel dazed, disenchanted, and
despondent.

The so-called Indian leadership in ANC (some with exaggerated struggle
credentials who try to mobilize invisible constituencies by remote control) is
largely disconnected from the community:

> When a number of Indians were high up on the [electoral] list, did they
> in any way represent the interests of the poor in the community, or did

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http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2954 (accessed 18 May 2013).

[28] The Blue Lagoon is an historically popular Indian recreation site on the Durban
beachfront; Marlan Padayachee, "Indians at crossroads," *Sowetan Sunday World* (30
June 2002): 14.

they use their position to represent themselves and hangers-on? [...]
With rare exception, position was used for personal advancement.[29]

Certainly, there is no record of any of them publicly articulating the concerns and anxieties of the community. In fact, it would appear that they have been rewarded for their silence, subservience, and submission. On the other hand, there is evidence that ANC-aligned politicians have actively undermined the community's heritage – for example, by supporting the destruction of Warwick Market and the closure of the Indian Documentation Centre in Durban. A disturbing trend was the increasing anti-Indian invective in the public domain.

Anti-Indian Diatribe

The oppression of Indian indentured labourers and their descendants, and their resistance and support for non-racialism during the British colonial and apartheid eras, is well known and documented. Axiomatically, there were great expectations that everyone will be equal in South Africa's non-racial, rainbow democracy.

Sadly, since 1994 there have been several racist attacks against South African Indians from those aligned with the ANC and IFP. With the exception of Madiba's lone, fading voice (now silenced by death), there has been a raucous silence on such attacks from the ruling party, which may be interpreted as tacit support. An insidious anti-Indianism is intensifying in the post-apartheid era, as the following examples illustrate.

In March 1999, the editor of the Inkatha Freedom Party-owned Zulu newspaper *Ilanga* blamed Indians for continuing to oppress Africans, and wished that "maybe here in South Africa as well an African mother will be blessed to give birth to another Idi Amin"[30] (an allusion to the 1971 expulsion of 60.000 Indians out of Uganda by Idi Amin Dada). The editor, Amos Maphumulo, was later suspended, but the controversy persisted in the Indian community. In early 2002, the internationally renowned playwright and composer Mbongeni Ngema released an inflammatory anti-Indian song, "Amai Niya," in the Zulu language, in which he called for "strong and brave men"

[29] Ashwin Desai, "Indians who masala their own agendas," *Sunday Tribune Herald* (22 February 2009): 4.

[30] Edward Ramsamy, "Between non-racialism and multiculturalism: Indian identity and nation building in South Africa," *TESG* 98.4 (2007): 475.

> to confront Indians [who] do not want to change [...] Even Mandela
> has failed to convince them to change. Whites were far better than
> Indians [...] we are poor because all things have been taken by In-
> dians. They are oppressing us.[31]

The song was condemned by the South African Human Rights Commission,
and was subsequently banned from the airwaves. Ngema responded that, as an
artist, he was merely reflecting the views of many Africans. There was sup-
port for Ngema's views, as encapsulated in the following letter to the Sowetan
newspaper, which had an African readership:

> I was disgusted by the banning of Mbongeni Ngema's beautiful song,
> which laments the oppression of blacks by Indians. It is a known fact
> that most Indians are worst racists than whites. [...] The Indian people
> are opportunists and the real racists in South Africa and the rest of
> Africa. Our people are treated like dogs when working for Indians. In
> most workplaces Indians treat black people like nothing. They do not
> think blacks have brains to shape their own destiny. In Parliament
> today and in government parastatals, you find more Indians than black
> people holding senior positions. In KwaZulu–Natal total racism is
> meted out to blacks by Indians.[32]

Another view from within the Indian community (albeit a minority one) was
that, rather attacking Ngema, there was need for honest reflection and intro-
spection:

> Instead of making hypocritical indignant accusations of racism in the
> light of MbongeniNgema's attempt at getting some dialogue going,
> Indians should rather honestly ask themselves why is it that Africans
> generally despise them so much. Using jealousy as an argument is a
> stupid over-simplification of a much more complex issue. As an In-
> dian, I witness daily the attitude that Indians display towards Africans,
> sometimes in their presence but most times, cowardly in their absence
> [...] Indians must extricate themselves from their little enclaves and
> start integrating themselves as South Africans and stop marginalising

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[31] Mbongeni Ngema,"Song of Calumny," http://outlookindia.com/article.aspx?
216988 (accessed 18 May 2013).

[32] Mokoena Jackson, "Indians 'hide behind mask'," *Sowetan* (26 June 2002): 16
(Letter to Editor).

themselves. Africans, on the other hand, must give them a chance and stop treating them like foreigners in their own country.[33]

Bronwyn Harris, a former Project Manager at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation at the University of Cape Town, contended that Ngema's song was xenophobic and also raised questions of identity and citizenship:

> AmaNdiya does not only portray negative stereotypes that are drawn on racial lines. It also creates prejudice through the language of xenophobia. By presenting "Indians" as outsiders from India, the song raises questions about belonging within South Africa. This moves beyond race alone because it introduces concepts of citizenship and nationality. It implies that "Indians" are not South African and therefore have less legitimate claim to their citizenship than others.[34]

Contrary to the assertion of Ngema (who has benefitted enormously from the largesse of the state), there are exploiters in all communities. He revealed his prejudice and bias by focusing on only one community. Ngema's defence, that he intended to start and public debate, is spurious, and his fear of debating with intellectuals committed to non-racial politics was revealing. Ngema's closeness to the ruling elite may explain the deafening silence from political leaders and the government on the song, which would normally have elicited spontaneous and unequivocal condemnation from those committed to non-racialism.

In November 2004, Professor Aaron Ndlovu, Vice-Chancellor (with the highest pay in South Africa) of the Mangosuthu Technikon in Umlazi (south of Durban), said that Indians employed at his institution did not want their children to study there and instead enrolled them in white institutions. He apparently said that "the attitude of Indians on campus supported playwright Mbongeni Ngema's statements on the attitude of Indians towards blacks."[35] He also referred to an incident where a female Indian shop assistant at the Gateway Mall refused to put change in his hand, placed it instead on the counter.

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[33] Durrane Thaver, "Indians should stop marginalizing themselves," *Independent on Saturday* (6 July 2002): 9 (Letter to the Editor).

[34] Bronwyn Harris, "New song, same old tune?," *City Press* (16 June 2002), http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/articles/arthar3.htm (accessed on 18 February 2005).

[35] Bongani Mthethwa, "Mayor denies supporting 'anti-Indian' remarks," *Sunday Times* (21 November 2004): 1.

More recently, the attacks against South African Indians have escalated.
For example, since 2009 Indians opposed to the destruction of the century-
old Warwick market which had an umbilical connection with the descendants
of indentured labourers, were taunted with chants of '*Hambakhaya!
Hambauyee Bombay*' (Go home! Go home to Mumbai!), from groups aligned
to the ruling party in front of senior ANC leaders with impunity. One possible
reason for the anti-Indian hype was that when Africans

> compare their material standards with that of minority communities,
> they find themselves seriously disadvantaged [...]. When the majority
> community is beset by want, anxiety, dissatisfaction and fear, it tends
> to exhibit a lack of compassion and tolerance for minorities. It may
> become dangerously hostile when the minority community next to it
> [...] is prospering and on the rise socially, economically and politi-
> cally.[36]

The David and Goliath battle between the eThekwini Metro and those whose
livelihoods depended on the Warwick market has made international
headlines since 2009. According to City Manager Mike Sutcliffe and Deputy
Mayor Logie Naidoo, those who were opposing the development of the mall
in Warwick Avenue were variously: preventing poor people from enjoying
the privileges associated with malls; pursuing narrow, ethnic, racist agendas;
opposing a "golden opportunity for investment," opposing the democratic
majority; and wanting the traders to remain "trapped in the second
economy."[37]

The bureaucratic and political leadership in Durban violated all regulations
pertaining to democratic consultation and public participation, as well as the
common human decency demanded by the South African Constitution, as it
favoured mall developers over the poor and disadvantaged Indians and
Africans whose livelihoods depended on the Warwick Market. Outdated laws
were dusted off the shelves to restrict the market operations and frustrate
those who engaged in honest labour, in order to favour 'tenderpreneurs'. In
true Gandhian, passive resistance tradition, the traders resorted successfully to
legal action and interdicts to keep the market open. In early 2011 the

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[36] Fatima Meer, "Is our national psyche shot with racism?," *Indigo* (April–May
2000): 59.

[37] Brij Maharaj, "Post-apartheid urban contestations: the struggle for the Warwick
Market in Durban," paper presented at the Association of American Geographers An-
nual Conference, Washington DC, 14–18 April 2010.

'tenderpreneurs' abandoned their bid for the mall project as other more lucrative ventures funded by the public purse beckoned.

The dominant discourse was racist and blatantly anti-Indian, and cries of *'hambakhayae Bambayi'* were bellowed by the rent-a-mob at meetings convened by the city leadership to rubber-stamp the destruction of the market. This has now been confirmed by a Wikileaks report on the 17 July 2009 public meeting organized by the eThekwini municipality:

> Durban Mayor Obed Mlaba opened the meeting with an address in Zulu and accused 'certain business elements' of not wanting to give up control of the Warwick and of hiding behind the plight of poor vendors. The chairperson of eThekwini Business and Market Committee, Faso Majola, spoke after the mayor and said in Zulu: "Indians only want to protect their interests in the Warwick area and they don't want township people moving in." The head of eThekwini Business Support and Markets, Philip Sithole, declared: "Let us take the food from the mouths of the Indians! Now is the time for Africans to be in power! We will remove them all and replace them with blacks!"[38]

According to an eyewitness, the activist intellectual Trevor Ngwane, "many people left the ICC thinking that the main social benefit of getting rid of the market was getting rid of the Indians and that the proposed mall would provide business opportunities to long-denied Africans."[39]

According to the Wikileaks report,

> The anti-Indian sentiments expressed by local ANC-appointed leaders and supporters [...] stand in contrast to the multi-racial ideals of the ANC [...] at its core, the [Warwick mall project] is about the displacement of South Africans of Indian descent by black South Africans. The [Warwick mall] plan is backed by the ANC, and it is simply a matter of time before the EMM is changed forever. Indians are increasingly becoming marginalised in Durban and their political influence has diminished over the years.[40]

A positive outcome from opposing relocation of the market was the emergence of non-racial solidarity, a bane to those who demonstrate a callous dis-

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[38] Anon. "Cable Viewer," http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/08/09DURBAN 94.html#par10 (accessed 10 February 2013).

[39] Abhali baseMjondolo, http://www.abahlali.org/node/5495 (accessed 10 February 2013).

[40] Anon. "Cable Viewer."

regard for the needs of the poor, and who are used to defending mediocrity and dividing with racial barbs.

Other attacks include the head of South Africa's Government Communication and Information Services, and the suggestion by Jimmy Manyi, President of the Black Management Forum, that there are too many Indians in KwaZulu–Natal, and that many of them buy their way to the top. The leader of the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema, made reference to 'amakula' (coolie – a derogatory term for Indians) when addressing a meeting in Thembelihle, "where service-delivery protests have been lent a sharper edge by perceptions that Indian residents of nearby Lenasia are treated better by the government."[41] *The Times* newspaper questioned Melama's motives, and warned of its ominous consequences:

> What is Malema's intention in using such language - perhaps to incite a Rwandan-style genocide? We are no rainbow nation. That much is clear. And the glibness with which supposed leaders manipulate race and dispossession to fight their causes will surely come back to haunt us all. We have already witnessed the shocking atrocity of foreigners being attacked and killed in South Africa. This time, if we are not careful, it will be our people who are targeted.[42]

Then there was the racist attack on the respected Judge Chiman Patel when he was a candidate for the position of Judge President of KwaZulu–Natal province. According to Judge Isaac Madondo, a candidate for the same position, a person of Indian descent should not be appointed as KwaZulu–Natal Judge President, because of "all kinds of things which need more insight which a person who is not African cannot be privy to – We were oppressed, but not in the same way."[43] The Struggle stalwart and retired Judge Thumba Pillay responded with outrage that this attack was an indictment on the Indian leadership in the ANC:

> The statement attributed to him (Madondo) shows his ignorance of the history of the Indian South Africans, both in terms of their suffering

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[41] Editorial, "No Room for Racism," http://mg.co.za/article/2011-10-21-no-room-for-racism (accessed 18 May 2013).

[42] The Editor, "Manipulation of race for gain has no place in this SA," http://www.timeslive.co.za/opinion/editorials/2011/10/20/manipulation-of-race-for-gain-has-no-place-in-this-sa (accessed 18 May 2013).

[43] Editorial, "No Room for Racism," http://mg.co.za/article/2011-10-21-no-room-for-racism (accessed 18 May 2013).

> from the time of indenture and the complete lack of knowledge of their struggle for freedom. [...] What is most surprising is that there is an almost deafening silence from the high profile leadership within the Indian community; those who enjoy the confidence of, and pay homage to, the ruling party.[44]

In an editorial comment, *The Times* newspaper acknowledged that while there were many stereotypes about race in South Africa,

> when public officials, in positions of power and responsibility, use race to deny, blame and negate the value of others it becomes dangerous. Such talk, whether in private chatter or a public utterance, is unacceptable. But it is an especially sad day for this country when a judge, being interviewed to occupy a leadership position on the bench, uses race to dismiss the ambitions of a brother judge [...] If the commission appointed Madondo, could Indian South Africans expect an unbiased judge if they were to appear before him?[45]

A silent question was whether it was possible to build a democratic, progressive platform from the grassroots level that could articulate the problems and challenges facing the South African Indian community without becoming the surrogate of a political party. There have been whispers about forming an "Indian" political party, even reviving the NIC (which was mercifully aborted and a return to cabal politics averted). Minority political parties are inevitably destined for the fringes. Politics is about power. In South Africa, minorities have to engage with the mainstream political parties and government, which often only respond to the language of mass action and mobilization. A return to constituency-based electoral systems could increase the voice and influence of minority voters.

Conclusion

As racism, ethnic chauvinism, xenophobia, cronyism, and the celebration of mediocrity become more pronounced in the new South Africa, and the ruling elite flout democratic principles forged on the anvil of struggle, the dis-

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[44] Tribune Reporters, "Indian Outrage Against Racist jibe," http://www.iol.co.za /news/politics/indian-outrage-over-racist-jibes-1.1162702?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPage Layout.ot (accessed 18 May 2018).

[45] The Editor, "Manipulation of race for gain has no place in this SA," Manhttp: //www.timeslive.co.za/opinion/editorials/2011/10/20/manipulation-of-race-for-gain-has-no-place-in-this-sa (accessed 18 May 2013).

illusioned descendants of indentured labourers retreat anxiously into their religious and cultural cocoons, which is sometimes interpreted as a form of racism. However, racism is clearly not the preserve of one community. If Indians are prone to withdraw into their own culture, other communities are just as much swayed by racial considerations. The anti-Indian vitriol in the post-apartheid era is disturbing.

South African Indians need to consider ways in which they can contribute to nurturing and consolidating our fledgling democracy, as well as assisting in the process of reconciliation, reconstruction, and development. There is also a need to reach out to other communities in a way that is not condescending – but out of genuine concern to shed prejudices and break down barriers set up by apartheid.

The various deprecatory comments and racial slurs made over the last decade may well be an appropriate warning to the South African Indian community to arise from their apathetic slumber – or else the history of East Africa may well repeat itself. There are ominous signals that the non-racial, democratic experiment may well be over.Perhaps it is time to take a leaf from the book of the indentured. As Desai and Vahed (2007) reveal,

> the indentured were not simply prisoners of 'the system' but often imaginative, creative human beings who found all manner of means to resist, survive or escape the strictures of indenture [...] who resisted and contested the attempts of employers and the state to control their lives.[46]

The challenge for South African Indians is to decide whether they would identify with the majority and in the process develop a platform for constructive engagement with the government of the day, or whether they would continue to regard themselves as a minority and hanker after some form of connection with India. A major problem has been a dearth of astute, credible leadership in the community, who can genuinely represent the working class and the poor. Largely as a result of a lack of astute leadership, Indians face the possibility of being politically marginalized in the post-apartheid era.

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[46] Ashwin Desai & Vahed Goolam, *Inside Indenture: A South African Story, 1860– 1914* (Durban: Madiba, 2007): 26, 13.

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