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**THE MAKING OF INDIAN IDENTITY  
IN DURBAN, 1914-1949**

**GOOLAM H. VAHED**

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**in the Department of History,  
Indiana University  
February 1995**

UMI Number: 9531506

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**UMI**

300 North Zeeb Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

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Doctor of Philosophy.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the moral and financial support of advisers, family, friends and research organizations. I would like to thank the Fulbright program, the History Department and African Studies Association at Indiana University, and the Social Science Research Council for their generous financial assistance. This study would not have been possible without their generous financial assistance.

I would also like to thank the various professors at Indiana University, particularly George Brooks, Aron Rodrigue, Richard Blackett, C.R.D. Halisi, Richard Stryker and Patrick O' Meara, whose perceptive minds and incisiveness enriched and broadened my academic outlook and approach. I am also grateful for the constructive criticism and advice of my Doctoral Committee.

In South Africa, I would like to thank Professor Surendra Bhana who sparked my interest in history and was instrumental in my going to the US to pursue graduate studies. I would also like to thank Gerhard Mare and Dr Iain Edwards of the University of Natal for sharing their time to discuss my ideas. This helped immensely in clarifying my thoughts. Dr Edwards has been a source of assistance for almost a decade. He not only encouraged me to pursue this topic but was particularly helpful in directing me to new sources.

I would also like to thank the many librarians and archivists who assisted in the course of research. In the United States, Nancy Schmidt and the interlibrary loan

staff of the Indiana University library, were extremely helpful in locating secondary material. The help of the staff of the Public Records Office and Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London, and the following institutions in South Africa was crucial in broadening the nature of my documentary sources and tracking down relevant material: the Killie Campbell library of the University of Natal, the Natal Archives Depot in Pietermaritzburg, the Don African Library in Durban, the William Cullen Library in Johannesburg and the Documentation Center at the University of Durban-Westville. This study would have been incomplete and arid without the perspectives provided by informants who spent many hours recalling memories of their life in Durban during the 1930s and 1940s. Their recollections increased my understanding of this period and I am thankful to them.

A number of other individuals also played significant roles. In South Africa, I would like to thank Shirley Chetty who assisted in preparing the earlier drafts, Mr Duggie Amra who, during his travels to Pietermaritzburg, photocopied valuable documents at the Natal Archives, Prea Banwari of the University of Durban-Westville, who provided the maps; Mr George Foster of the Local History Museum, Durban, who provided the photographs; and my employer, Mr M.G.M. Haffejee, for understanding the importance of this project and granting me extended leave to complete my research and writing.

In Bloomington, I would like to thank Anil Sookdeo who, when I first arrived, helped me acclimatize during a difficult phase of my life. I would also like to thank Aziz Patel for his immeasurable help in everything, from picking me up and dropping

me off at the Indianapolis airport, no mean feat in the middle of winter, to taking me grocery shopping and attending to my frequent computing problems. My experience in Bloomington would have been dull and tedious without the many friends whose company Taskeen and I were privileged to enjoy: Hind and Anil Sookdeo, Rae Ferguson, Lisa Aubrey, Barbara and Reggie Moss, Aziz Patel and Bucylimwe Mararo, to name but a few.

While the contributions of all these individuals and organizations were crucial to this project, I must make special mention of my adviser, Professor Phyllis Martin. I cannot thank Professor Martin enough for her consistent support throughout my graduate studies; for the pivotal role that she played in shaping my ideas, assistance in procuring research grants, phone calls to South Africa to check on my progress, patience as I delayed my return to Bloomington, the long hours that she spent in editing earlier drafts and the challenging and insightful comments which helped me rethink and revise the study. Her contribution is indeed inestimable.

Finally, I would like to express sincere gratitude to my extended family for their support at various stages. To my aunt and uncle, Zuby and Ismail, who financed my undergraduate education; my mother-in-law, Hawa, who was a pillar of emotional and financial support throughout the research and writing of this dissertation; and my wife, Taskeen, and children, Naseem and Yasmeen, whose love, support and patience contributed immensely to the completion of this study. To my parents, who died the year I entered graduate school, I dedicate this dissertation. This moment would have been a much happier one with them around to share it.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

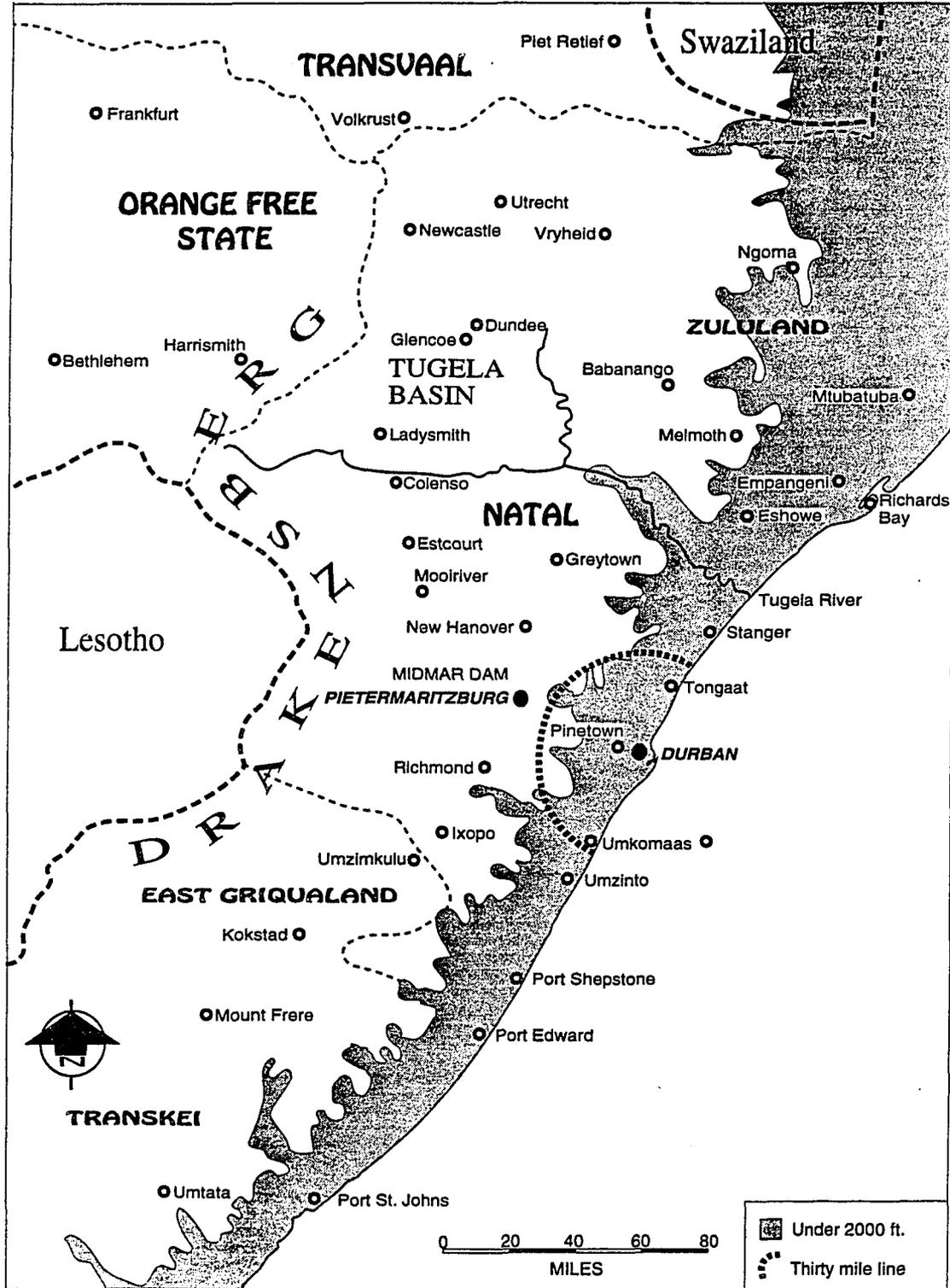
<b>ANC</b>	<b>African National Congress</b>
<b>DCC</b>	<b>Durban City Council</b>
<b>DTC</b>	<b>Durban Town Clerk</b>
<b>INC</b>	<b>Indian National Congress</b>
<b>ISSC</b>	<b>Indian Social Services Committee</b>
<b>IWA</b>	<b>Indian Women's Association</b>
<b>MOH</b>	<b>Medical Officer of Health</b>
<b>NA</b>	<b>Natal Archives</b>
<b>NGR</b>	<b>Natal Government Railways</b>
<b>NIA</b>	<b>Natal Indian Association</b>
<b>NIC</b>	<b>Natal Indian Congress</b>
<b>NIO</b>	<b>Natal Indian Organization</b>
<b>PAC</b>	<b>Pan Africanist Congress</b>
<b>SAIC</b>	<b>South African Indian Congress</b>
<b>SAIE</b>	<b>South African Indian English</b>
<b>SAIRR</b>	<b>South African Institute of Race Relations</b>
<b>TASA</b>	<b>Teacher's Association of South Africa</b>

## GLOSSARY

Andhra	A Telegu speaker whose family originated from Andhra Pradesh in South India.
Arab	An erroneous term used by whites to refer to an Indian muslim of merchant background.
Banya	A Gujarati-speaking Hindu shopkeeper.
Calcuttia	A Hindi-speaking person of North Indian extraction. A pejorative term when used in connection with early rivalry between North and South Indians.
Colonial-born	A person of Indian descent born in Natal. Usually refers to the descendants of indentured immigrants and implies a degree of westernization.
Coolie	A derogatory term used by members of other of race groups to refer to Indians.
Diwali	Hindu festival celebrated in October or November to commemorate the deeds of Rama and Krishna. Also known as 'The Festival of Lights'.
Free Indian	Refers to those who have completed their terms of indenture.
Ganja	Dagga, hemp, 'cannabis sativa'.
Girmit	An indentured worker.
Hajee	A muslim who has been on pilgrimage.
Katha	Religious gathering at which tales from Hindu scriptures are recited by a priest.
Madrassi	Tamil-speaking person of South Indian extraction. A pejorative term when used in connection with early rivalry between North and South Indians.
Madressa	School offering Islamic education.
Mahomedans	A term sometimes used to refer to muslims.

Mary	Used by whites to refer to an Indian female hawker. Possible origin is the fact that Mariamma was a common name for a girl.
Moharram	Muslim festival commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain.
Panchayat	A village council of elders.
Pandit	A Hindu priest.
Passenger	An Indian who arrived in Natal as a trader, paying his own passage, rather than as an indentured worker.
Puja	Hindu prayers held in a temple or at home.
Ramayana	A Hindu epic treating the deeds of Rama.
Red Caps	Sometimes used to refer to muslim merchants who wore red Turkish caps (fez).
Sabha	Cultural or religious association drawing upon specific groups according to religion or region of origin.
Sammy	An offensive term used by whites to refer to an Indian male hawker. Possible origin is the fact that many Indian names end in "samy".
Sathsang	Group recitals of Hindu prayers and devotional songs.
Satyagraha	Non-violent struggle, passive resistance as advocated by Gandhi.
Sirdar	An overseer on a plantation.
Six-Foot Dance	Local term for 'tirukuttu'. A dramatic recital of tales from Tamil scriptures. Also included is local comedy, song and dance, which culminates in a divine dance on a raised platform.
Thajia	Large floats designed as replicas of Hassan's and Hussein's used at Mohurram festivals.
Tiger Dance	Dance performed by men dressed as tigers at festive occasions such as Mohurram and Six-Foot.

Map 1: The Durban Region in its Wider Setting



PREA BANWARK: GIS UNIT - DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY - UDW

## INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is to examine the making of Indian identities in Durban between 1914 and 1949, a period that was witness to many significant developments. These included rapid industrial growth, urbanization, increased worker militancy, the imposition of discriminatory legislation by the state as well as passive resistance and race riots. On an individual and subjective level, these developments had important consequences for identity and consciousness. This study has present-day relevance because of the widespread publicity given to the anxiety with which Indians viewed South Africa's transition to a non-racial democracy in April 1994. For example, when ordinary people shared their uneasiness in the documentary, "South Africa: An Indian Experience", the following were typical concerns of worried individuals:<sup>1</sup>

- While Indians appreciate the peace-loving nature of Nelson Mandela they are unsure as to whether he can control the rank and file of the ANC and the trade union movement.
- They come on to our property and tell us it is Mandela's land and we have to get out.
- I have become so disillusioned with the blacks. We did so much for them and now everything has been taken away from us. I have lost faith in my liberal ideals.

This apprehension can only be understood by analyzing the history of Indians in Durban, their integration into the economy and society and relationship with Africans and whites. The identity problem is not peculiar to Indians. As the "New South Africa" becomes a fact of life the question of what it means to its diverse peoples

takes on new significance. Change has the potential to radically reshape identities and one of the key challenges for the new government will be to foster a common South Africanness out of the prevailing racial, regional, ethnic, and class identities. Prior to the election, Dr Frene Ginwala argued that Indians should assert their collective identity.

Indian South Africans have perceived themselves as part of the oppressed majority and for generations they have been a formidable component of the liberation forces of the country. Why now, on the verge of our victory to a new and democratic South Africa, should there be fears that their "rights" will be disregarded?<sup>2</sup>

There are doubtless many Indians like Dr Ginwala who identify completely with the majority. There have been a string of outstanding anti-apartheid leaders like Yusuf Dadoo, Gora Ebrahim, Jay Naidoo and Strini Moodley who have been prominent in the ANC, Pan Africanist Congress, Black Consciousness Movement and trade unions. Others like Ahmed Kathrada and Ahmed Timol have either served lengthy prison sentences or laid down their lives fighting for a just South Africa.<sup>3</sup> What they all had in common was their attempt to forge identities which cut across race and ethnic boundaries by creating alliances with Africans and whites with whom they shared the culture of apartheid. However, the vast differences of religion, language and class, the outside pressures to which Indians have been subject as a result of their minority position, and historical experience, as this study will indicate, has resulted in diverse responses to identity formation.

My life experience represents that of an 'average' person of Indian descent raised

in Durban. I was born in an "Indian" hospital to Indian parents; I grew up in a segregated neighborhood of Indians; my child playgroup comprised of Indians; the schools which I attended were populated exclusively by Indians; my social clique at university encompassed Indians; the dating group within which I searched for a spouse, the social and sporting clubs to which I affiliated, the adult clique of marrieds to which I belong, and even the cemetery in which I will be buried, is all sectarian. Like me, most follow a path from the cradle to the grave that does not require them to cross the boundaries of their Indian network. There are strong feelings of distinction between Indians, whites and Africans. There are obvious physical differences, and cultural variations in the patterns of family life, friendship, visiting, and marriage. Many still clearly regard themselves as Indian with a distinct identity. They have either kept strong ties with India or have adopted Western values but preserved certain superficial aspects of their culture.

There is no reason to assume that the masses will discard existing identities and construct a broad South African identity. As Padayachee and Desai remind us, the formation of identity is a complex process conditioned by individual mental processes as well as distinctive regional social and material conditions. Consequently, "one cannot get up one day and throw off one's ethnic tag."<sup>4</sup> Although they experienced first-hand the brutal and tyrannical effects of white rule, particularly the terrible pain and suffering wrought by the Group Areas Act, Indians remain ambivalent to Africans. The average man or woman who reads daily about instability in African states, or draws parallels between the experience of Indians in independent East

African countries and South Africa, is wary of post-apartheid conditions.<sup>5</sup> Caught between whites and Africans, many believe that their homes, their jobs, their shops are more vulnerable than those of whites.

The period 1914-1949 was pivotal in shaping Indian identities.<sup>6</sup> In 1914 they were a latent collectivity drawn together by the reason of discrimination on the basis of being labelled "Indian." They were extremely heterogenous from the perspective of class, religion, ancestry, customs and language. By 1949 Indians were organized as a group,<sup>7</sup> had strong subjective feelings of identification with the group and acted in terms of this identification. They were not predestined to respond as a group, however, and our task is to uncover how and why this community<sup>8</sup> materialized.

#### **Profile of Durban and its Indian Population:**

Durban is one of the fastest growing cities in Africa. It is a sea port on the south eastern coast of southern Africa, in latitude 20 50'. (See Map 2 on page 6) The coast line is broken by the seaward-jutting land spits of the Bluff and Point which enclose the bay of Durban, around which the city has grown. The port played and continues to play a vital role in the development of the city. With two airports, a major harbor and extensive rail links, Durban is one of the great seaports of the southern hemisphere, and the busiest and largest in all of Africa. It handles over 26 million tons of cargo each year, more than half the cargo which passes through all South African ports annually.<sup>9</sup> It also provides the nearest sea-entry to the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal triangle, the major urban industrial complex in South Africa.

Durban's industrial and commercial development is considerable and it rivals Cape Town as the second largest metropolitan complex in South Africa.<sup>10</sup>

With its mild climate, warm sub-tropical beaches, and excellent restaurants and hotels, Durban is the foremost holiday center in the country and attracts over half a million visitors each year. It is the most cosmopolitan city in South Africa in racial and cultural terms. While the Zulu form the bulk of the population, there are large numbers of Indians and whites with different foods, dress, customs and religions. This cultural variation is reflected in the churches, mosques, and temples.

The estimated population in 1989 was close to four million, the breakdown per racial category being as follows:<sup>11</sup>

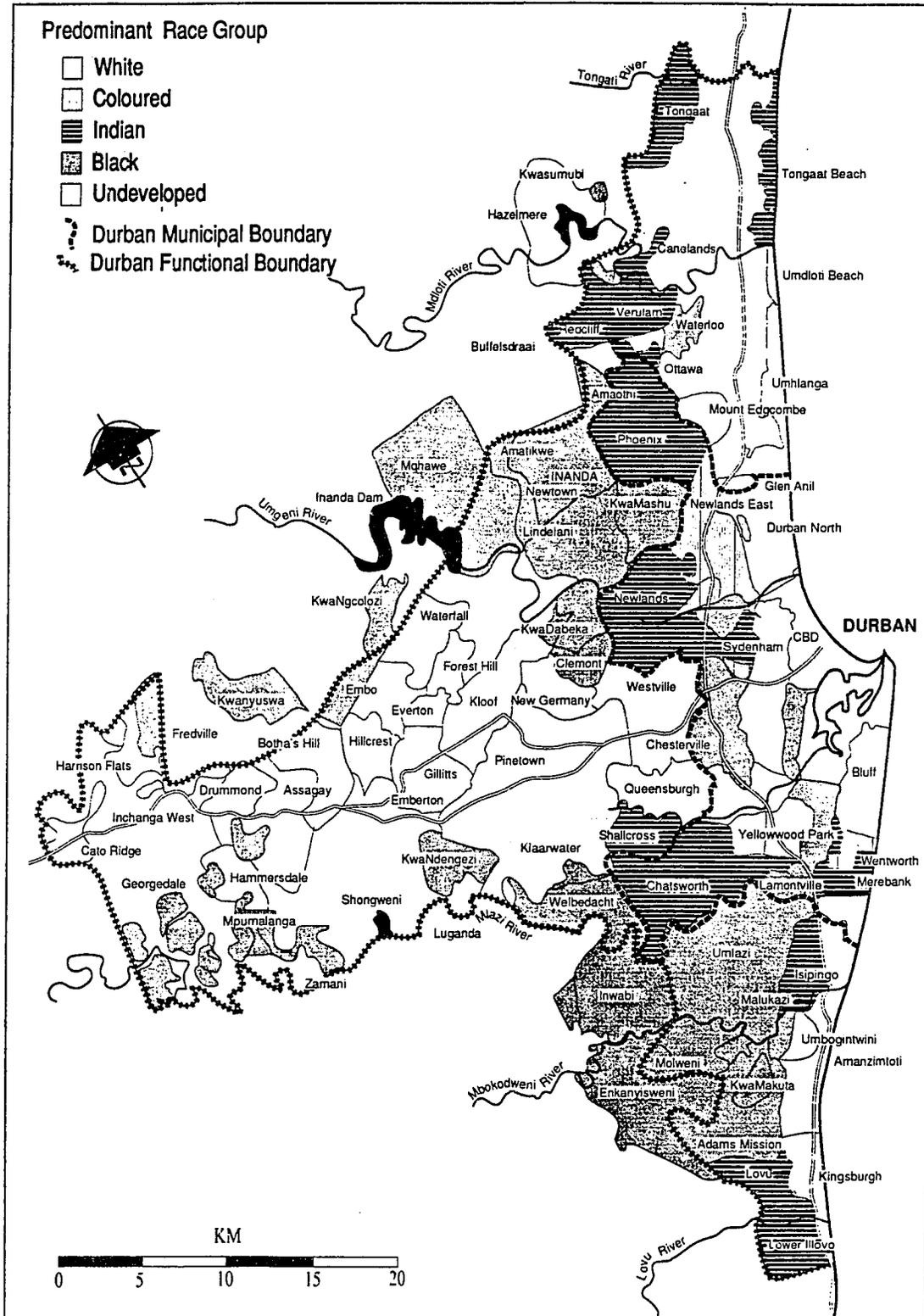
**TABLE 1** Population of Durban, 1989

Racial Group <sup>12</sup>	Number	Percentage
Coloured	69 000	2.0
Whites	381 000	11.3
Indians	624 000	18.5
African	2301 000	68.2

Source: Durban Functional Region, 1989, p.15.

Like many cities in the developing world, 43% of Durban's population, almost all African, lives in informal shack settlements which are located all over the city, primarily on broken and hilly land.<sup>13</sup> The majority of the population lives in residential areas segregated by race. The major formal townships for Africans are Umlazi, Kwa Mashu, Lamontville and Clairmont. The majority of Indians are housed in two major townships which were developed from the 1960s and which continue to

Map 2: The Durban Functional Region, 1995



grow; Phoenix, population 241,040, in the north, and Chatsworth, population 179,957, in the south.<sup>14</sup> Approximately 60% of South Africa's Indian population of 986,620 lived in Durban in 1991.<sup>15</sup> (See Map 2 on page 6) As a result of their concentration in these townships, the Indian and African poor live furthest from work opportunities and urban infrastructure.

Another conspicuous characteristic of Durban is the vast economic inequality, which largely coincides with racial divisions. This is evident in the following table:

**TABLE 2** Share of Durban's Income Per Racial Group, 1985

Racial Group	% of Pop.	% of Dbn.'s Income
Africans (shacks)	37.8	4.9
Africans (township)	23.5	14.8
Coloureds	2.5	2.0
Indians	22.5	25.4
Whites	13.7	52.9

Source: Durban Functional Region, 1989, p.65.

The tremendous expansion in education over the last three decades contributed significantly to the economic mobility of Indians. Education has resulted in better qualifications, lifestyles and incomes. However, the situation is far removed from the pervasive stereotype that most whites and Africans have of the 'rich' Indian. The luxury cars driven by some, visible presence of traders in the city center, and opulent mansions in areas like Westville all feed on this myth. In reality, although Indians are relatively better off than Africans, only 12% are traders while about 60% are working class, and engaged in a daily struggle to survive.<sup>16</sup>

Although themselves clearly heterogenous with regard to class, religion, language

and custom, Indians have historically been treated as monolithic by the government, media and other groups. As a consequence of urbanization, which resulted in more years being spent in school, greater participation in the economy and increased contact with whites, Coloureds and Africans, they have lost much that was "Indian." Many of the new values are reinforced by western television which is standard in most homes. The traditional joint family, with its emphasis on family-centered rather than individualistic goals, has come under attack from the younger generation. Companionate marriages are the norm nowadays. Most women have abandoned the sari and men the turban and loin cloth; and they place full trust in western medicine. Significantly, 97.5% consider English their home language.<sup>17</sup> This loss of the vernacular has meant that the younger generation cannot avail itself of sources of culture such as music and religious texts, while their communication with the older generation is severely restricted. However, Indians remain distinct from whites and Africans. They have gradually developed their own social traits and now form a distinct sub-culture. The purpose of this study is partly to understand the sense in which they have come to constitute a community and why we can make certain generalizations about them.

### **Scope of this Study**

Until the 1970s, the majority of studies were written within the 'liberal' tradition and focused on the minority status of Indians in a white-dominated society. The central argument was that cultural and racial differences propelled anti-Indian

legislation. For example, one early survey asserted that white colonists in Natal were prejudiced because of the experience of the British in India. They consequently saw Indians as "carriers of disease and vice" and "a very wicked people" who would in a short time become abandoned drunkards, die of disease and add to the vices already rampant among Africans.<sup>18</sup>

Many early studies were undertaken by individuals who were themselves involved in the struggle against the policies of the government.<sup>19</sup> As a consequence, they are heavily subjective, Gandhi-centered and hagiographic.<sup>20</sup> They rely largely on Gandhi's version of his South African experience and ignore inaccuracies and contradictions in his autobiographical accounts.<sup>21</sup> There is little in early writings of the role of other leaders or of the masses, nor is there any reference to the prevailing class, communal and political differences. However, these early studies provide a valuable contemporary insight into the tone and atmosphere in which Indian politics was played out in South Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Works by professionally-trained persons have emerged since the late 1950s. The bulk of these are by educationists, anthropologists, and sociologists and, as is the case with dissertations, focus primarily on current issues with little emphasis on historical antecedents. Important early general works include Kuper (1960) and Meer (1969).<sup>23</sup> However, although these have historical sections Kuper, as an anthropologist, is mainly concerned with social adaptation to the environment; as a sociologist, Meer places emphasis on the social, cultural, and religious experience in contemporary South Africa.

A pioneering historical work with a political focus is Pachai's study of Indian leaders and political organizations in the period 1860-1971, within the context of Indians living under successive white regimes bent on imposing racial discrimination.<sup>24</sup> While the study contains much valuable information on political activity, it is silent on the struggles of the masses and on socio-economic issues. Ginwala (1974), Swan (1985) and Padayachee et al. (1985) have broken with the liberal tradition and, broadly speaking, fall within the "radical" tradition which views history from the viewpoint of the underclasses and takes the approach of historical materialism and class analysis.<sup>25</sup> Their work should be seen in the context of the serious attempt by neo-Marxists, who were critical of the prevailing view of the relationship between race and class, to rewrite South African history during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>26</sup>

Ginwala, who focuses mainly on the passive resistance movements of 1906-1914 and 1946-48, argues that class consciousness resulted in workers supporting passive resistance and that this ensured the success of both movements. Her broad conclusion is that by the 1940s the growth of class consciousness led to the radicalization of politics and the realization by Indians that their fate was inextricably linked to that of Africans. Ginwala did not have access to primary archival material as she was banned from South Africa. While her study consequently has certain shortcomings, it is nonetheless an extremely important landmark. She not only presented an alternative to the liberal perspective which had prevailed to that point, but was aware of the need to move beyond the level of leadership, and her work influenced subsequent researchers

to think in this direction.

The next significant achievement was Swan's study of Gandhi which is based on an exhaustive study of archival material and periodical literature which had previously been overlooked. She examines Gandhi's constituents rather than Gandhi, and illuminates hitherto little known personalities and organizations. Swan emphasizes the divisions along class and communal lines; argues that the merchant elite dominated political activity and dissociated themselves from the underclasses; and concludes that since Gandhi was primarily interested in the concerns of merchants, and shunned a cross-race alliance with Africans, he was essentially a reformist who failed to challenge white supremacy.

Swan's study, which concludes with Gandhi's departure to India, has produced valuable new insights and raised pertinent issues which need to be explored for the period after 1914. Several works have examined aspects of the Indian experience during the inter-war years, Padayachee et al. explore the history of workers and trade unions in Durban between 1930 and 1950, focusing on the rapid rise in union membership, the structure and organization of unions, and the relationship of unions to political bodies. Their principal argument is that because of the absence of democratic structures, unions were infused with the "petty-bourgeoisie" politics of political organizations such as the NIC. This subordinated the interests of workers to those of political bodies.<sup>27</sup>

Bagwandeem's doctoral dissertation, subsequently published as a book, examines the struggle for land between whites, who monopolized power, and Indians, who were

politically powerless.<sup>28</sup> The white-controlled Durban City Council (DCC) was determined to enforce segregation and although several commissions were unable to prove that Indians were penetrating white areas, the DCC convinced the government to formally segregate them. The author sees the struggle for land as the outcome of white racial prejudice, and Indian resistance as a function of "izzat" (honor). In her study, Mesthrie examines the role of the Indian Agent-Generals in South Africa.<sup>29</sup> She focuses on issues such as the benefits that the Indian and South African governments hoped to derive from this arrangement, the calibre of persons chosen, and their influence on the course of Indian South African politics.

While Padayachee et al. focus on the militancy of workers and their relationship with political bodies, Bugwandeon on the housing question and its impact on politics, and Mesthrie on the effect that the Agency had on the course of Indian politics, this analysis will explore the impact on Indian identities of changing social and material conditions. Its premise is that identities, which provide individuals with "firm locations as social individuals,"<sup>30</sup> are fluid and are constantly being negotiated. According to Hall, identity is formed in the 'interaction' between individual and society. The inner core of an individual ('the real me') is modified in "dialogue with the cultural worlds 'outside' and the identities which they offer." Consequently, identity becomes a:

'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems that surround us. It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times.... As the systems of meanings and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible

identities, any one of which we could identify with - at least temporarily.<sup>31</sup>

For Laclau, this could result in the forging of new identities and the production of new subjects.<sup>32</sup> We cannot speak in terms of fixed, single, 'master' identities like race, class or ethnicity. A number of identity options are available and a hierarchy of loyalties emerge which match different levels of community distinguished by an individual. This is analogous to the ripples formed when a pebble is dropped into a pool of water, where each specifies a different identity and is defined by a distinct marker. Such markers could be visible symbols like shrines, or non-visual such as beliefs.<sup>33</sup>

The implication for this study is that we cannot set out to determine why Indians did not adopt certain identities, such as class or non-racialism but, rather, we need to determine what identity they embraced and why. Identification "is not automatic, but can be won or lost,"<sup>34</sup> and therefore involves negotiation. This negotiation was carried out on two levels. On the one hand, Indians manifested identities that were important in relations with other Indians. These were based on language, class, religion, customs and area of origin in India. Although, to outsiders Indians constituted a single group with one identity; in reality, a number of identities co-existed within this category "Indian." On another level, however, Indians were also involved in relations with "outsiders," principally whites and Africans. As a result of pressures from such external sources, being "Indian" assumed great importance during critical periods as political and economic pressures and structures pushed disparate community members closer together. While this study explores the tensions

tensions and divisions engendered within the Indian community due to such factors as religion, language and class, its primary goal is to explore how in over four decades a common identity, that of being "Indian," emerged amongst Durban's Indian community in relation to Africans and whites. And, furthermore, that a central part of this process was related to race and ethnic distinction.

When Indians left the sub-continent there did not exist a nation-state, India, and there were deep caste, religious and language differences among them. As whites and Africans were already in Natal when Indians arrived, our concern is how this situation played itself out in terms of identity. What identities did Indians take on for themselves in the new setting? Initially, those who had come to Natal independently as merchants tried to achieve their rights on the basis of their class position. However, they were rejected by whites because of their race. By 1914, by which time this had become clear, Indians began forming new identities in response to exclusion by whites. These were influenced by identification with India, the land of their origin, the formation of racially separate community structures, strong religious organization, and the perpetuation of a separate political tradition. The new "Indian" identity that was being promoted would exist alongside the numerous differences. Although they differed in terms of language, religion, class and customs, Indians were drawn together by the fact that they were considered and treated as 'the same' by whites on the basis of their physical similarity. According to Hall, such exclusion provides the common "'axis of equivalence' of the new identity.... [This] is an example of the political character of new identities - i.e. their positional and conjunctural character

(their formation in and for specific times and places)...<sup>35</sup>

During the inter-war years, as Indians became urbanized, and were faced with very difficult material and historical circumstances, large numbers moved into urban employment where they were confronted with poverty. Many became radicalized and took part in strikes with African workers and embarked on a long passive resistance campaign against the state. However, this did not lead to a class or non-racial identity. It is in order to understand why this was the case that we cannot restrict this study to work experience. As Bozzoli and Delius point out, the process of determining identity is complex and involves "an examination of experience, community, the various historical forces impinging on a situation, the nature of the ruling class, and the operation of spatial and other kinds of factors..."<sup>36</sup> Race, ethnicity, religion and gender often transcend class differences. The incorporation of social and cultural history cannot, however, be severed from broader political and economic forces because historical and material conditions impose limits on the options available to people.

Since there is constant reference to race, class and ethnicity these need to be defined in the context of this study. As Cohen has noted, "a person's class is established by nothing but his objective place in the network of ownership relations, however difficult it may be to identify such places neatly."<sup>37</sup> However, while we may be able to identify objective class position, we cannot deduce identity from this. Neither individuals nor groups ever act in conformity with "their assigned places in the formal scheme of things."<sup>38</sup> Ties other than work, such as ethnic, religious,

racial or gender, may be more valuable and, hence, be the source of intra-class antagonism and conflict. As Aronowitz has pointed out, "class never appears in its pure form. It is always alloyed, short of what might be called the rare instances of 'epochal' transformations, with other identities, discourses, movements."<sup>39</sup>

One of the difficulties for this study has been to clarify the use of 'race' and 'ethnicity', especially in a political and ideological context. Virtually all scholarship uses the term "ethnic" in reference to Indians. For example, Freund has written that the way in which Indians achieved economic mobility was "to assert their ethnicity" as a way of finding and retaining economic spaces in the economy, and concludes that "ethnicity became a useful tool" for Indians.<sup>40</sup> However, the differences of religion, language and customs are so great amongst Indians that it would be more accurate to look at them as a racial group comprising of a number of ethnic groups. The Tamils, Telegus, Memons, Gujaratis and so on constitute ethnic groups but, together, comprise a racial group. One way of looking at the situation is that while race is an identity imposed on Indians by others, ethnicity is an identity that is self-imposed and becomes relevant in relations amongst Indians. In this study, race and ethnicity are used interchangeably although clear distinctions exist.

### **Outline Of Chapters**

This study begins in 1914 and concludes in 1949, both because of the significance of these individual years, as well as because this period marked a turning point in the history of Indian society in Durban. It attempts to present the history of an under-

researched period by taking up and investigating issues raised by Swan, whose analysis only extends to 1914. But the choice of period is based on more important considerations based on people's historical experience. It begins in 1914, a year which saw the departure of Gandhi and the end of an epoch as he had exerted an important influence on local politics. The year 1914 is also significant because it marked the start of World War One and with it the first spurt in industrial growth and the urbanization of Indians, which was virtually complete by the 1940s. This process was crucial. Industrial employment not only presented Indians with an opportunity to learn skills, but the harsh living conditions and low pay led to radical trade unionism which held out the prospects of class identity. However, as they came into contact with Africans in the urban setting, Indians came to see them as a more immediate threat than whites. The study concludes in 1949 with the race riots which confirmed Indian fears of the risks which African advancement posed for them, and was an important factor in their rejection of radicalism.

The following chapters collectively explore the problems raised above. Chapter One concentrates on the pre-1914 period, providing background information on the arrival and settlement of indentured and passenger Indians. It also seeks to establish the areas in which they lived and traded, the sectors of the economy that they cornered and the impact of this on their relationship to whites and Africans. Also of significance is the impact of the Natal experience on pre-existing divisions. This chapter lays the foundation for chapters two to five, which focus on the period 1914-1949.

Chapter Two focuses on urbanward migration during the inter-war years and the impact of the racial division of labor on relations between Indian, African and white workers; the important social and economic role of merchants who gradually dominated a prime business area and came into conflict with whites as well as Africans who were their customers, tenants, and clients; the pervasive poverty of the masses and its effect on identities, and the extent and consequences of spatial segregation.

Chapters Three and Four examine those factors that increased group consciousness. The relationship to common space and culture was crucial. The former refers to the concentration of Indians in segregated areas where they lived and reproduced themselves, while the latter involved the various cultural traits and belief systems which carried a very strong affective load and gave the milieu where Indians grew up a distinct flavor. This is achieved by examining central aspects of life outside the workplace, including the home environment, facilities for education, religious practices, sports and recreational activities as well as the role of social welfare organizations.

Chapter Five examines the radicalization of workers and politics. It seeks to explain why workers become militant and why this was not sustained; why politics became radicalized and the effects on the masses; whether the movement had a class character; and the impact of the new politics on the relationship of Indians to Africans and whites. The conclusion, briefly, examines Indian identities for the post-1949 period. The economic mobility of Indians from generation to generation and the

impact on identities of the Group Areas Act and other apartheid legislation after 1948 constitute important themes.

### Notes on Sources

In order to capture the various dimensions of the Indian experience in Durban, this study has drawn on a wide range of sources including official records, newspapers, oral material, as well as ephemeral publications. One of the major problems in retrieving the subjective experience of the working class is the paucity of documentary sources. The records of the Durban Town Council, housed at the Natal Archives Depot in Pietermaritzburg, have proved an invaluable source on the attitude of local officials. The Durban Town Clerk's Files, which comprise several thousand boxes of correspondence and reports, is the most important documentary material. While it mostly reflects the official perspective, it does contain a wide range of written materials from ordinary Indians including petitions, resolutions of mass meetings, and letters requesting facilities, outlining grievances or requiring permission for various activities which, together, provide a useful insight into Indian life in Durban.

By far the most useful source of information for this study has been newspapers, particularly the four major Indian newspapers, Indian Opinion, Indian Views, African Chronicle and The Leader.<sup>41</sup> Taken together these have proved invaluable in capturing the mood of the period. The Indian Opinion, started by Gandhi in June 1903, was the first Indian newspaper in South Africa. It was initially printed at the

first Indian owned press, the International Printing Press, and later at the Phoenix Settlement, a communal farm founded by Gandhi at Phoenix. Although there were various editors, Gandhi gave the paper its direction until his departure in 1914. From 1918-1956 its editor was Gandhi's son Manilal. Written in English and Gujarati, the paper has a Hindu middle class perspective. The Indian Views, also a Gujarati/English paper, was founded by M.C. Anglia in July 1914. It was taken over by the prominent merchant Jeewa family in 1919 and bought by Ismail Meer, father of Fathima Meer, in 1934. Its focus was on Muslim affairs in South Africa and India and reflected a Muslim middle-class perspective. African Chronicle was founded in 1908 by P.S. Aiyar, Gandhi's great political rival in Natal. It was written in English and Tamil, which was the language of the majority of working class Indians. It was filled with news from India as well as parochial events concerning the Indian community in Durban. The Leader was an English medium paper founded in 1941 by Dhane Bramdaw who aimed it at working class Tamils. This was the first paper to include cartoons, film reviews, a gossip column and social and personal news.

Short-lived newspapers include The Dharma Vir, Call, Passive Resister and Searchlight. Written in Hindi and English, The Dharma Vir was a mainly Hindu religious and cultural magazine though space was devoted to political activity in India and South Africa. The Call was published in the early 1940s by the Liberal Study Group, which was made up of young radicals of all race groups. Passive Resister and Searchlight, launched during the passive resistance campaign from 1946, were the organs of the Passive Resistance Councils of Transvaal and Natal respectively.

Radical Indians and liberal whites contributed to the paper. There was no input from Africans.

One way to overcome the paucity of primary material reflecting the perspective of the man or woman in the street is through the use of oral history. With this objective in mind a number of oral testimonies were collected. Although it was difficult to find people who could recollect with clarity events which occurred between forty and eighty years ago, those who were located willingly shared their life experiences, and their outlook had an important effect on the perspective of this thesis. However, their recollections have not been used indiscriminately and uncritically. Like documentary sources, interviews have advantages and limitations. There were contradictions in some of the testimonies and informants tended to dwell on events which have become important in their lives. It was often a struggle to elicit material on issues which may no longer be of significance.

## NOTES

1. Program broadcast on BBC 2 on 1 October 1993. Reported in Sunday Tribune Herald, 4 October 1993.
2. *ibid.*, 6 October 1992.
3. Dr. Frene Ginwala, a South African of Indian descent, is a member of the ANC. Dr. Yusuf Dadoo was on the ANC Executive Committee until his death in 1982 while in exile in London. Gora Ebrahim is an official of the PAC. Jay Naidoo was a high ranking official in the Congress of South African Trade Unions. He is now a member of the ANC and a Minister without Portfolio. Strini Moodley was a contemporary of Steve Biko in the Black Consciousness Movement. Ahmed Kathrada, a member of the ANC, spent many years on Robben Island and was released in 1990 with Nelson Mandela. Ahmed Timol was killed when he "fell" from the tenth floor of a prison building following his arrest by the security police.
4. A. Desai and V. Padayachee, "Indian Ethnic Identity," Sunday Tribune Herald, 20 October 1992.
5. The expulsion of Indians from Uganda in 1972 is still a source of concern to many.
6. The year 1914 marked the end of an epoch as Gandhi left for India, never to return.
7. According to Rex, it is incorrect to refer to categories such as Indians as "ethnic groups" as they do not meet the requirements of what constitutes a group: "They are a collectivity amid a network of social relationships of a communal kind which is not a group but could give rise to group formation." He prefers the term "quasi-groups." In this study, "group" is used in its loosest sense. See J. Rex, Race and Ethnicity (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), pp.1-12.
8. Community, as used in this dissertation, refers to a sense of shared identity rather than a group with a fixed local territory. This type of community need not necessarily have a geographical basis and can exist among people who have not met at all. According to Cohen, it is the "arena in which people acquire their most profound and substantial experience of social life outside the confines of the home. Community, therefore, is where one learns and continues to practice how to be social." A.P. Cohen The Symbolic Construction of Community (London: Tavistock, 1985), p.15.
9. Municipal Yearbook, Durban, 1993, p.184.
10. Durban Functional Region - Planning for the 21st Century. Report 1: The Current Situation (Durban: Tongaat Hulett Properties Limited, 1989), p.3.
11. Since the coming to power of the ANC in April 1994, and the deracializing of society, classifications based on race are no longer relevant. However, these figures are included because

they are pertinent to this study.

12. The term "Coloured" was used by the former white government to classify that segment of the population which came about as a result of contact among Europeans, Khoi, San, Malays and other Africans. It will be spelt "Coloured" and not "Colored" because it was an official government classification. Coloureds will feature rarely in this study because of their small numbers in Durban. The majority are concentrated in the Cape. For an excellent examination of the construction of Coloured identity, see I. Goldin, Making Race. The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1987). Although all of Durban's population is "African," in official usage and historiography, "African" refers to the Zulu who inhabited Natal before the arrival of whites and Indians. "Whites" refers to immigrants from Europe who were originally called "Europeans" but dropped this nomenclature to signify the permanence of their stay in the country. "Indian" refers to the descendents of indentured and passenger Indians who came to Natal from the sub-continent.

13. Durban Functional Region, 1989, p.26.

14. Population Census, 1991. See Map 2 on p.5.

15. *ibid.*

16. Population Census, 1991.

17. *ibid.*

18. Holden, History of the Colony of Natal, p.178. Quoted in C.J. Ferguson-Davie, The Early History of Indians in Natal, nd. (Reprinted: Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1977), p.4.

19. See for example P. Aiyar, The Indian People in South Africa (Durban: The African Chronicle Press, 1925); P.S. Joshi, The Tyranny of Colour (Durban: E.P. & Commercial Printing Company, 1942) and G.H. Calpin, Indians in South Africa (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shuter, 1949)

20. S. Bhana, "Girmityas in Search of History," Inaugural Address, University of Durban-Westville (hereafter UD-W), (May 1985): p.6.

21. M. Swan, Gandhi: The South African Experience (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), p.xiv.

22. Bhana, "Girmityas," p.5.

23. H. Kuper, Indian People in Natal (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1960) and F. Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans (Durban: Avon House, 1969).

24. B. Pachai, The International Aspects of the South African Indian Question, 1860-1971 (Cape Town: C.Struik, 1971).

25. F. Ginwala, "Class, Consciousness and Control: Indian South Africans, 1869-1946," Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 1974; M. Swan, Gandhi: The South African Experience (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985) and V. Padayachee, S. Vawda and P. Tichmann, Indian Workers and Trades Unions in Durban: 1930-1950 (Durban: Institute for Social and Economic Research, UD-W, 1985).
26. For a detailed examination of the debates, see K. Smith, The Changing Past. Trends in South African Historical Writing (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1988).
27. Padayachee et al., Workers, p.175.
28. D. Bagwandeem, "The Question of 'Indian Penetration' in the Durban Area and Indian Penetration, 1940-1946," Ph.D thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1983, and A People on Trial - For Breaching Racism. The Struggle for Land and Housing of the Indian People of Natal: 1940-1946 (Durban: Madiba Publications, 1991).
29. U.S. Mesthrie, "From Sastri to Deshmukh: A Study of the Role of the Government of India's representatives in South Africa, 1927-1946," Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal, 1987. The Indian Agent-General was appointed as a result of the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, which will be discussed in chapter two. Although his title was later change to High Commissioner, this study will continue to refer to him as "Agent."
30. S. Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in S. Hall et al. eds, Modernity And Its Futures (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.275.
31. Hall, "Cultural Identity," p.279.
32. Hall, "Cultural Identities," p.280.
33. C. Shore, "Ethnicity as Revolutionary Strategy: Communist Identity Construction in Italy," in S. Macdonald, Inside European Identities (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), p.37.
34. Hall, "Cultural Identities," p.280.
35. Hall, "Cultural Identities," p.309.
36. B.Bozzoli and P.Delius, "Radical History and South African Society," Radical History Review (1990), p.32.
37. G.A. Cohen quoted in S. Marks and R. Rathbone, Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa. Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1879-1930 (London: Longman, 1987), p.73.
38. F. Parkin, Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeoisie Critique (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p.100.

39. S. Aronowitz, The Politics of Identity (London: Routledge, 1992), p.72.
40. "A hundred years down the road of adversity," in Sunday Tribune, 30 May 1993.
41. These are housed at the Documentation Center, UD-W, which contains a comprehensive collection on Indian South Africans.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ARRIVAL AND SETTLEMENT, PRE-1914

The British annexation of Natal in 1843 and subsequent arrival of white immigrants stimulated the growth of settler agriculture. Planters experimented with a variety of crops but were frustrated by lack of capital and the absence of cheap and reliable labor. While overseas funds solved the problem of capital, Natal had to import indentured workers from India to ease the labor crisis.

Indentured migration to Natal was part of a new international circulation of labor which evolved after the British Parliament abolished slavery in 1833. This created a labor shortage on colonial plantations where huge sums of money had been invested in the production of raw materials. In total, some 1.3 million Indian contract laborers were exported to Mauritius, Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad, St. Lucia, Granada and Natal from the middle decades of the nineteenth century to satisfy the demand for cheap labor.<sup>1</sup>

The decision to import Indian labor to Natal had serious consequences. Indentured migrants were followed by passenger Indians who went to Natal independently in search of opportunities as traders or craftsmen. Whites were ambigous about indentured labor and, as Indians became prominent in the local economy, they became increasingly anxious and used their political clout to subdue and dominate them. The tendency of the state to treat Indians as a homogenous entity should not mask the fact that they were extremely heterogenous. There were clear

differences of class, caste, religion, language and experiences of migration. These differences form as much a part of the story as the conflict between Indians, Africans and whites.

### **The Labor Shortage in Natal**

English settlers had established an unofficial trading station at Port Natal from 1824 and it remained so until about 5,000 Boers, who had migrated northwards from the Cape, arrived at the settlement in 1838. Most took advantage of the fact that Natal had been underpopulated during the rise of the Zulu state system and acquired farms. However, after Dingane's defeat by the Boers in 1838, Africans began returning to Natal and their numbers increased from 10,000 in 1838 to over 50,000 by 1843. Trekkers were unable to exert control over African land and labor and consequently did little or no farming.<sup>2</sup>

The British, fearing that the Boers would seek the protection of a foreign power and thus threaten her hegemony in the region, annexed Natal in 1843.<sup>3</sup> This caused an exodus of Boers from Natal and there were only 67 families by 1847.<sup>4</sup> British settlers were gradually attracted to Natal whose white population increased from around 8,000 in 1857 to 17,821 in 1869.<sup>5</sup> Settlers tried a variety of crops but turned to sugar which accounted for 61% of the total gross value of arable farming in 1875.<sup>6</sup>

The scarcity of cheap labor was a major problem as Africans had access to land and were unwilling to enter into a subservient labor relationship. Some lived on

locations established by colonial officials who utilized the existing distribution of power in Zulu society to achieve control. Others lived on Protestant missions where converts to Christianity responded with great vigor to market incentives. Africans also rented land from the government as well as land speculators who were waiting for an increase in immigration and a rise in land prices.<sup>7</sup> The cry for labor started shortly after whites settled in Natal and when Sir George Grey, High Commissioner over British territories in Southern Africa, visited Natal in 1855 the colonists petitioned him to import labor. Grey, who was aware of the success of Indian labor in Mauritius, recommended that it be imported to Natal.<sup>8</sup>

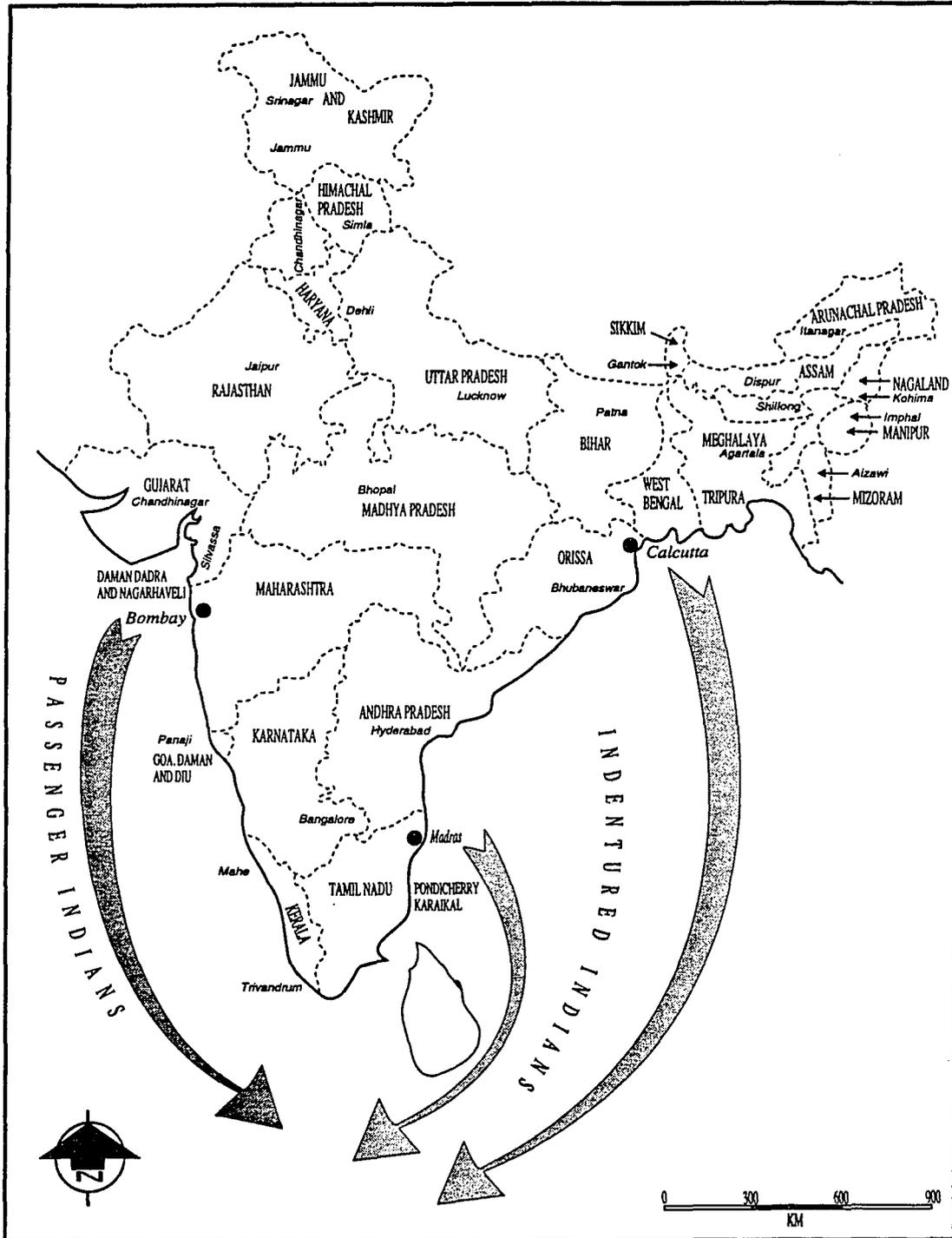
The arrival of 342 Indians aboard the *Truro* on 16 November 1860 marked the culmination of a 10 year struggle for cheap labor. The majority of the 152,641 workers who arrived between 1860 and 1911 were young males. About 70% were in the 18-30 age group and only 2% were older than 36. The average male:female ratio was approximately 64:28, while less than 20% comprised families.<sup>9</sup> The list of immigrants included several hundred castes and although the majority were middle-to-low caste there were some upper-to-middle level castes like Moodley (traders), Brahmins (priests) and Rajput (landowners).<sup>10</sup> They were drawn primarily from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in the south-east, and Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the north-east of India.<sup>11</sup> Madras was the point of departure from the south and Calcutta from the north. (See Map 3 on page 30) Migrants from south India spoke Tamil and Telegu; northerners spoke dialects of Hindi which came to form a South African Hindi.<sup>12</sup>

Although recent studies have shown that migration was a feature of pre-British Indian society,<sup>13</sup> migration overseas was an extreme step given that Indians considered the act of crossing the sea, the "kala pani" (black waters), as defiling for the soul.<sup>14</sup> The decision to emigrate was forced on most by demographic and economic dislocation which resulted from the wars that shattered the Mughal Empire, and the administrative reorganization of India under the British Empire. For example, the Madras Presidency, which supplied two-thirds of Natal's Indians and where 71% of the population was dependent on agriculture in 1902, was affected by natural disasters and the system of land tenure. Under the Zemindari system, absentee landlords charged exorbitant rents and demanded it in cash rather than kind.<sup>15</sup> This increased the number of landless and the 1882 Famine Commission reported that two-thirds of peasants were in debt. Natural disasters further impoverished the masses. For example, the Great Famine of 1876-78 killed 3.75 million people.<sup>16</sup> Poverty and landlessness forced many into cityward migration where they were enticed by recruiting agents who promised wages several times higher than those current in India.<sup>17</sup> For example, George Mutukistna told the Wragg Commission of 1885:

I came out as an indentured Indian.... I knew, when I came to the Colony, that I should be bound to the hoe fields if required, but I came, finding India too crowded: I could not find employment there. Although I accepted a very low position here, I thought that, in the long run, I should be able to better my position.<sup>18</sup>

Indentured immigrants were followed to Natal by entrepreneurs from Gujarat on the west coast of India who recognized a market for the specialized needs of their

Map 3: Main Ports of Embarkation, India



PREA BANWARI: GIS UNIT - DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY - UDU

low income Indian clientele. Termed "passengers", because they came at their own expense and were subject to the ordinary laws of the Colony, they began arriving from the mid-1870s and very soon dominated Indian trade. They were incorrectly called "Arabs" because of their Muslim religion and mode of dress which included the c"kurta" (top), "izzar" (pant) and "Turkee topee" (hat) which was the predominant dress in the middle eastern world at the time.<sup>19</sup> They were to have a significant impact on the development of society in Durban. Not only did they emerge as competitors to white traders, whose hostility they consequently aroused, but they provided credit and job opportunities for Indians, and financed many Indian institutions.

Durban's Indians comprised an amalgam of different ethno-linguistic groups and there was a great degree of internal differentiation. The main distinction was between higher caste Gujarati-speaking passengers from northern India and Telegu- and Tamil-speaking indentured Indians from south India. The former were light skinned and looked down upon the darker skinned south Indians.<sup>20</sup> An indication of the importance of physical differences is that "fair" and "beautiful" are used synonymously in most Indian languages, while folk literature emphasizes fair skin and virginity as the two most desirable qualities in a bride.<sup>21</sup> Color differences, which are on a continuum, are two-fold; northerners are fairer than southerners and upper castes fairer than lower castes.<sup>22</sup> We find in Durban, for example, that Tamils and Telegus, who were both south Indians, were themselves debating the merits of their language and color. The following letter to the Indian Opinion by D. Naidoo, while

from a much later period, provides a good illustration of this:

Telegu is full of the beauties of Sanskrit and can be said to be the purest living descendent of the ancient Sanskrit. Tamil, on the other hand, remained purely Dravidian. It is the modern form of the ancient language of the semi-civilised Dravidians who inhabited India prior to the invasion of the first Aryans. Even in physical characteristics there is a marked difference easily discernible even to the casual eye, the tall, fair Andhras of clean cut features as contrasted with the dark, squat, small-limbed Tamil. I am by no means saying that the Andhras and Tamils belong to entirely different races as it is obvious that both are Hindus and Indians. But they are distinct from each other as a Kashmiri would be from a Kannada.<sup>23</sup>

The special circumstances of passenger Indians, who were mainly Gujarati, enabled them to keep their caste consciousness and social distance from other Indians. They saw migration as temporary and maintained links with caste members in India by visiting home, marrying their sons and daughters in India, and remitting money to build wells, mosques, temples, and schools in their villages of origin.<sup>24</sup> Because of their wealth, traders developed institutions which insulated them against outside pressures. Gujarati Hindus and Muslims had more in common than Gujarati Hindus had with south Indian Hindus or Gujarati Muslims had with Urdu-speaking Muslims from Hyderabad.<sup>25</sup> George Mutukistna, a free Indian, testified before the Wragg Commission of 1885:

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 Indian merchants, who think themselves better because they are rich and think that, by observing caste distinctions, they can set themselves apart from the Natal Indian people.<sup>26</sup>

Almost half a century later, the first Indian Emigrant's Conference, which was

held in India in 1930, noted that although the caste system had received "a fatal blow" in the Colonies, the "Gujarati's of South and East Africa have, however, clung to their old customs as they have been able to maintain their social connections with their caste people at home."<sup>27</sup> This clannishness seems characteristic of Gujaratis. Writing about 1980s England, Robinson has noted that the common language and regional culture which Gujarati's share "override the divisions which exist within the group on grounds of religion or caste.... There are sufficient shared characteristics for religion to be forgotten."<sup>28</sup>

The whole experience of indenture, on the other hand, militated against caste maintenance. Recruitment as individuals made it impossible for indentured Indians to maintain the patterns of hierarchy, purity and impurity, and caste distinctions to which they had been accustomed. The cramped journey made contact inevitable and it was impossible to preserve purity of diet and touch, thus destroying one of the principal supports of the caste system.<sup>29</sup> However, during their journey to Natal passengers achieved "Jahaji Bhai" ("brotherhood of the boat") which reduced their fear of the unknown. The breakdown of caste accelerated on plantations where all Indians did the same work at the same rate, irrespective of caste status, taboos or specializations.<sup>30</sup> Further, they were housed together in barracks, and subject to communal bathing with no regard for their caste, religion or linguistic group, while all decisions, be they of a social, economic, or political nature, were taken by white managers and not caste councils. The maximum punishment for breaking caste rules is outcasting and there was no organization in Natal with the authority to inflict this penalty.<sup>31</sup> Ramadeen, a

free Indian, told the Wragg Commission:

Here (Natal), I have eaten with different people and broken my caste, my friends in India will not even eat with me. When I go back, I will ask my mother to cook, but I will tell her 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. When the coolies come here, they lose all caste.<sup>32</sup>

Although life was no longer regulated by caste structure, individual prejudice persisted. For example, about twenty Indians from Alexandra Division sent a petition to the Protector in May 1909 to complain that two of the constables in their district, Anjuru and Munsamy, were of the Pariah class. When a search had to be carried out or an arrest made, "if a Pariah touches our things or makes an arrest we are polluted.... As 9\10ths of the Indians in this division are above the Pariah caste, we hope you will take such steps to procure the immediate dismissal of these two constables."<sup>33</sup> As a result of their experience in Natal, caste structure was undermined amongst Indians; however regional origins were enhanced and caste prejudice persisted.

### **Indentured Indians in the Natal economy**

In terms of the contract which they signed, indentured workers agreed to work for five years for the employer to whom they were allocated. They were to perform all tasks assigned and were free, at the end of five years, to either reindenture or seek work elsewhere in Natal. Although they were entitled to a free return passage after 10 years, almost 58% remained in the colony after indenture.<sup>34</sup> Approximately 60% of

all indentured workers were allocated to sugar estates.<sup>35</sup> As the following table shows, they formed the backbone of the labor force on plantations.

**TABLE 3** Indians and Africans in the cane fields

Year	Indians	%	Africans	%
1860-61	436			
1875-76	5 292	42	7 457	58
1887-88	6 043	72	2 387	28
1895-96	6 632	77	1 989	23
1907-08	10 924	82	2 484	18

Source: Brain, "Indentured and Free Indians", in Guest and Sellers, Enterprise, p.210.

Indentured Indians faced numerous difficulties as their contract was abused in practice. Swan (1985), Tayal (1977) and Henning (1993) have chronicled the appalling conditions and these will not be restated.<sup>36</sup> In fact, when the first group of indentured workers returned to India in 1870 and complained of ill-treatment, the Indian government insisted that work conditions be investigated. Based on the recommendations of the 1872 Coolie Commission, a "Protector of Indian Immigrants" was appointed. In practice, the Protector had little power. Following an incident of abuse in 1906, for example, Protector Polkinghorne admitted that he was fighting "a very strong and influential company backed up in many quarters, and as Protector I have been alone in this matter simply doing my duty."<sup>37</sup>

In her analysis, Swan concludes that "there is a solid weight of evidence in the Protector's files to suggest that overwork, malnourishment, and squalid living conditions formed the pattern of daily life for most agricultural workers."<sup>38</sup> For

Tinker, social and economic life on estates amounted to "a new system of slavery."<sup>39</sup> Indentured Indians had few ways of resisting their exploitation as a series of regulations maintained rigid control. Formal control included draconian laws which viewed all contractual offenses as criminal acts and sanctioned legal action against Indians for laziness and desertion.<sup>40</sup> Indians could not go more than two miles from the estate without an employer's written permission, even if the purpose was to lay a charge against that employer. They could not live off the estate, refuse any work assigned to them, demand higher wages, or leave the employer. Most protest was consequently individualistic, and comprised of acts like absenteeism, desertion, suicide, feigning illness, and destruction of property.<sup>41</sup>

Indentured workers were also utilized in other sectors of the economy. They were instrumental in the successful extension of Natal's railway network. In 1885, for example, the NGR employed 949 Indians, 200 of whom were based in Durban as gate-keepers, signalmen, and platelayers or collected tickets, copied letters and addressed envelopes in the office.<sup>42</sup> Its total allocation of over 8,000 Indians made the NGR the largest single employer of indentured labor.<sup>43</sup> The Durban Municipality also hired large numbers of Indians in its health and sanitation department. By 1913 they numbered 1,602.<sup>44</sup> The vast majority were low-paid, unskilled general laborers who did things like street sweeping and grass cutting, while others worked as night soil men, scavengers, and in the street lighting department.<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup> For example, Indian boatmen were brought especially from Madras, and the African Boating Company and other landing and shipping agents in the Durban harbor employed 422 Indians in 1909.<sup>47</sup> Indentured Indians were also employed in very large numbers outside of Durban. The Protector noted in 1892 that they were "employed almost throughout the length and breadth of the colony," and there were 1,300 employers of indentured labor in 1904.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

#### **Free and Passenger Indians in the Durban economy:**

White hostility was aroused by non-indentured "free" and "passenger" Indians whose presence constituted a threat to the existing social structure and exploitative relationship of whites with Africans and indentured Indians. Free Indians were immigrants who had completed their indenture and were free to either reindenture, return to India, or seek an independent living as free laborers. Since Natal's economy was not based on monoculture, Indians had a wider range of economic choices than places like Mauritius. This economic diversity is reflected in the list of occupations of Indian males as per the 1904 Natal census which included accountants, shoemakers, cigarette makers, clerks, cooks, domestics, firemen, laundry workers, jewellery makers, mineral water manufacturers, plumbers, fishermen and tailors.<sup>50</sup>

At the time of Union in 1910, Durban was chiefly a port and commercial town of 9,000 acres with a population of 76,000.<sup>51</sup> Industrial development was rudimentary and comprised of metals and engineering firms which were primarily concerned with wagon and rikshaw making, and attending to repairs on sugar estates, coal mines and ships. The Hollow Block Syndicate, formed in 1905, was the only company which carried out bulk production, that of concrete blocks for building.<sup>52</sup> There was no distinct industrial area and industries were scattered around the central district, Umgeni Road and in Point Road near the harbor. As late as 1914, the Umgeni Sugar Company was still planting cane on the 80 acre property "Eastern Vlei," less than two miles north of the city center.<sup>53</sup> The Natal economy relied to such an heavy extent on railway traffic from the Rand that the historian C.W. de Kiewiet called it "possibly the most parasitic in the Empire."<sup>54</sup>

From the very beginning free Indians sought land in the vicinity of a market to grow fruits and vegetables such as potatoes, cabbages, garlic, paddy rice, melons, beans, chillies, and tobacco for the local market on land rented or purchased from absentee landlords and Land Companies.<sup>55</sup> According to Bundy, Indians had an edge over Africans as they were not tied to an area by considerations of kinship or ancestry, they probably had access to credit from Indian merchants and, because of their urban or semi-urban backgrounds in India and their indentured experience, they were at ease with the capitalist market and the cash nexus.<sup>56</sup> Their fervent market commitment was conspicuous from the earliest period. For example, there were 2,000 market gardeners in and around Durban by 1885.<sup>57</sup> According to the Wragg

Commission:

Indians do remarkably well as cultivators of small parcels of land rented on short leases. Those settled in the vicinity of Durban have succeeded in winning for themselves, almost entirely, the supplying of the local markets with vegetables. It must be conceded that this competition by free Indians has worked to the prejudice of those white colonists who once had the monopoly of the trade. In fairness to the free Indians we must observe that the competition is legitimate in its nature.<sup>58</sup>

In 1908, Ramsamy, a farmer from Cato Manor, explained why he and others like him, 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." They usually obtain land from whites who are "ever willing to receive the Indian with open hands." With the assistance of his wife and family, the beachwood and grass is cut, a wattle and daub house is constructed, and a life of "endless work" begins during which he pays his taxes, obeys the laws, makes his white landlord rich, and becomes a "useful citizen."<sup>59</sup>

Whites were hostile to independent farmers, market gardeners and hawkers. They desired the outright coercion of Indian labor and put forward stereotypes which had previously been advanced against Africans. A petition to the Legislative Council by 53 farmers from Bellair and Malvern 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." Because Indians had access to land, they

"are daily becoming more averse to labour, preferring the mischievous mode of life mentioned above." The shortage of labor "is 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>60</sup>

Whites became increasingly hostile as Indians challenged their dominance of local trade. The 1885 Wragg Commission noted that the Indian trader was the cause of "much of the irritation existing in the minds of European Colonists."<sup>61</sup> Although free Indians were the first to exploit business opportunities, Indian trade was soon dominated by passenger merchants, the first of whom, Aboobaker Amod, arrived in June 1875. Passenger merchants had a long history of overseas trade links, credit extensions and finance and in many cases sought new pastures in Natal because they were experiencing declining opportunities in India, East Africa, or Mauritius.<sup>62</sup> Although their presence in central Durban piqued whites, the latter were unable to segregate Indians as the legal equality of all British subjects was enshrined in the Natal Charter. Whites tried to impose control through sanitary and vagrancy laws, but these were ineffective and Indian squatters congregated at the end of West Street, northern end of Field Street and Eastern and Western Vlei, which came to constitute an "Indian" area.<sup>63</sup>

Indian traders imported specialized products like rice, spices, cheap jewellery, apparel and sandals, perfumed spirits, silks, brassware and cotton goods from India for their low income clientele.<sup>64</sup> Both ethnic factors such as strong kinship ties, as well as class factors like the availability of capital, skills and business acumen, were

responsible for their success. They had access to exploitable family labor, suppliers and distributors, and a tendency to work excessive hours to outcompete others. However, ethnic commonality also meant that traders were hindered by their lack of fluency in other languages, as well as a self-limiting market.

Passenger Indians had a head start for mobility in the relatively open "Indian" economy and rapidly came to dominate commerce at the expense of free Indians. Whereas in 1875, 10 free Indians and 1 passenger held trading licenses, by 1885 the figures were 26 and 40 respectively.<sup>65</sup> This was not lost on free Indians. In a letter to the Town Clerk in 1929 in which free Indians retraced their economic position in Durban, they complained that passengers had superseded them in trade from the 1890s:

Our people (Madraseses and Calcuttias) carried on business all over Durban prior to 1890 such as General Dealers, Fruit and Vegetable dealers, Bottle and Sack dealers and several other businesses of like nature. Our people since 1890 have been gradually ousted from all the above mentioned businesses by our so-called Indian brothers, the Red Caps and Banyans.<sup>66</sup>

Merchants were linked to one another and to smaller traders in an extensive network of trade, credit extension and money lending. Formal banks, particularly the Standard Bank, wanted nothing to do with "Indian, Arab or Banyan" traders. Indian traders therefore saw themselves "as a discrete community whose survival depended on co-operation" since they relied on independent funding rather than mainstream sources of financing.<sup>67</sup> Merchants rented their property to small traders and also provided the latter with loans. For example, about 400 Natal storekeepers owed over

£25,000 to M.C. Camroodeen and Company in 1898.<sup>68</sup> Loans were made on trust but failure to pay meant exclusion from the network of credit and trade.<sup>69</sup>

### **Problems encountered by Indians**

Whites were ambiguous towards indentured labor. Those who benefited from this cheap and dependent labor pointed to the advantages of a settled Indian population. Sir Liege Hulett, one of the largest sugar barons, commented in 1908 that the "condition of the Colony before the importation of Indian labour was one of gloom.... The coast has been turned into one of the most prosperous parts of South Africa."<sup>70</sup> The majority of whites, however, were opposed to Indians once their numbers reached parity, and especially after the latter became an economic threat to them. By 1894 the Natal Indian population of 46,000 exceeded the white population of 45,000.<sup>71</sup> Harry Escombe, future prime minister of Natal, told the 1885 Wragg Commission that Indian traders "entailed a competition which was simply impossible as far as Europeans were concerned, on account of the different habits of life."<sup>72</sup>

The hostility of whites increased as Natal moved towards self-government, which was achieved in 1893. Determined to end its financial responsibility for the region, Britain approved a constitution which had few safeguards for Africans and Indians and would result in no future interference by the former imperial power. The new government increasingly came to view town planning, public health, trade arrangements and other public issues in terms of racial and ethnic distinctions.<sup>73</sup> Its objective was to force Indians to reindenture or return to India upon completing their

indenture and to legally subordinate non-indentured Indians so that whites would feel secure against the "Asiatic Menace."

The depth of white hostility is lucidly captured in the demonstration against the landing of the *Naderi* and *Courland* which arrived in Durban on 18 December 1896 with about 600 Indians aboard, including Gandhi who was returning from a visit to India.<sup>74</sup> Although the mariners reported that the passengers were "absolutely free from sickness of any description whatsoever," both ships were placed under quarantine for five days on the grounds that there had been a plague in Bombay. The quarantine was extended once it had lapsed and it soon became clear that the government was attempting to harass the passengers into returning to India since it lacked the legal means to do so.

The arrival of the ships aroused mass hysteria as working class whites believed that Indian artisans were on board to take over their jobs. They formed the Colonial Patriotic Union to "prevent the influx of free Asiatics into the country." The ships were fumigated and passengers ordered to burn blankets and utensils. The quarantine was continued for 27 days and during this time there was daily disinfecting and painting of closets with lime. The government ignored all distress signals for water, food, clothing and blankets and it was left to local Indians to form a Quarantine Relief Fund which provided blankets and food.

A meeting of 2,000 working class whites on 30 December 1896 resolved that all passengers should be returned to India and they bound themselves to assist in this direction. A second meeting on 7 January 1897 called for a special sitting of

parliament to pass a law which would give the government the power to return the passengers, and a list was compiled of persons willing to proceed to the harbor to resist the landing. All white businesses were to close for the day so that workers could take part.<sup>75</sup> This demonstration was held on 16 January 1897 when a signal was received that the ships were coming to port. Some 3,500 whites and 600 Africans arrived at the port. According to a local newspaper:

Long before the owners were informed that the ships were to be brought in that day, the town knew it. The bugles to rally were sounded, the shopkeepers put up their shutters, and the people began to flock to the Point, ... the end was to be the same as originally intended - no landing at any price.<sup>76</sup>

The crowd only dispersed when the government promised to hold an early session of parliament to discuss Indian immigration and to use public funds to induce Indians to repatriate. When the passengers began disembarking about two hours after the crowd had dispersed, Gandhi was recognized by some whites who got Africans to attack him. He was kicked and whipped and had fish thrown at him. Cut on his eyes and ears, he was taken to a nearby house which was surrounded by a large white mob. He only escaped at night when he was taken to the police station dressed as a police constable. With regard to the use of Africans, the Natal Mercury commented:

There is no love lost between the Indian and native as it is, and to bring together a band of natives and incite them against the Indians may even yet be productive of serious trouble. An even more disgraceful incident was inciting the natives to attack Indians after Mr Gandhi landed and was lodged in Field Street. Had the police not been on hand and succeeded in dispersing the natives, Wednesday night would have ended in one of the most disgraceful riots any British Colony ever witnessed.<sup>77</sup>

This incident shows the politicization of race. In this case, white workers used race to safeguard their access to scarce resources by marginalizing Indians. The spate of legislation passed by the new government must be viewed in the context of this extreme anti-Indian fervor. The Indian Immigration Law of 1895 stipulated that all non-indentured Indian males over 16 and females over 13 had to pay an annual tax of £3. Edward Saunders, proprietor of the plantation Tongaati, informed the Natal Legislative Assembly that the average Indian with a wife and two children was compelled to pay £12 in tax when his/her income averaged between £12 and £15 per annum.<sup>78</sup> The merchant dominated Natal Indian Congress (NIC) also complained that the tax was intended to force Indians to return after they had completed their indenture: "... to go back 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>79</sup>

Act 8 of 1896 stipulated that in the case of non-Europeans franchise was limited to those from countries with a tradition of parliamentary elections. Since India lacked such a tradition, Indians in Natal were denied the vote. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1897 gave the state power to control Indian entry. It specified that all disembarking immigrants had to pass a literacy test in a European language. As a result 5,500 Indians were refused entry between 1897 and 1901.<sup>80</sup> Both laws had a racist dimension, although they were formulated in a manner which made the racism covert. The following example reflects the inherent bias of officials. When the Umgeni temple wanted to bring two priests to officiate at service the immigration

officer refused, pointing out that "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>81</sup> The Dealers Licenses Act gave town councils the power to deny business licenses on grounds of sanitation or if the applicant was unable to keep books of account in english. There were 393 Indian and 356 white license holders in Durban in 1895. By 1908 there were 2,034 European license holders, but only 1,008 Indians.<sup>82</sup>

The "Asiatic menace" was a myth. In 1899/1900, for example, when Indians comprised 28% of the population of Durban, they controlled just 3.9% of its property.<sup>83</sup> Although Indians were never in a position to dominate trade, exert electoral influence or own substantial property, by virtue of legislation white Natal was laying the foundation for a racist economic and social structure which would ensure its superordinate position. There were two distinct phases in the position of Indians. Very few reindentured before 1893 when opportunities were greater. Between 1860-1886, of 11,438 Indians who completed their indentures, none re-indentured and only 2,004 (17.5%) returned to India.<sup>84</sup> As Table Four indicates, the situation changed spectacularly after 1893 when, largely because of the £3 tax, there was a dramatic increase in the numbers that either reindentured or returned to India upon completion of their contract.

**TABLE 4** Percentage that Reindentured or Returned to India.

Year	Returned to India	Re-indentured	Total
1904	12.53	8.70	21.23
1905	19.65	30.45	50.10
1907	34.33	42.81	77.14
1908	38.00	42.36	80.36
1910	26.85	55.96	80.81

Source: Meer, Documents, p.654.

### **Indian Political Organizations**

Indian politics was dominated by merchants who focused largely on problems specific to them although they did occasionally take up the grievances of indentured Indians. For example, in an 1891 memorandum to the Viceroy in India and the Natal Government, the pre-Ghandian Durban Indian Committee (formed 1890), pointed out that indentured Indians "are not treated according to Law" and suggested that their contract be in the mother tongue so that they could understand its provisions, they be given free passages after 5 and not 10 years, allowed to practice their religion, and an Indian Protector fluent in Tamil and Hindi be appointed.<sup>85</sup>

In 1894 merchants formed the NIC which was the most prominent elite organization. Its strategy was primarily constitutional and comprised of long petitions to private persons and government officials, and letters to newspapers. Each of the NIC's six presidents between 1894 and 1913 was a prominent merchant. Most Indians could not afford the annual membership fee of £3 and 75% of the NIC's members were merchants, the balance being made up of the educated elite.<sup>86</sup> The NIC did

attend to some grievances of free and indentured Indians. From its 1894 and 1899 reports we find that the NIC obtained permission for railway workers to be given time off to celebrate Mohurram and for them to be supplied with wood instead of coal; when the municipality wanted hawkers to take out trade licenses the NIC challenged the decision in court and obtained a reprieve; the NIC also paid the rent for two years for a hospital opened by a mission for Indians.<sup>87</sup> On the whole, however, the NIC sought to protect the trade, franchise and residence rights of merchants. This was criticized by "A Sympathiser" who complained that:<sup>88</sup>

It is hopeless to expect the NIC to move in any matter.... Will it ever be more than a name? It can if it would only interest itself in the people whom it presumes to represent, and by allowing all Indians to participate in its deliberations.... I hope the Congress will shake off its lethargy and make itself a power among and for the Indians.

While Indians labored in Natal under the burden of the tax, between 1906-1910 Gandhi was preoccupied with the passive resistance campaign which had been launched in the Transvaal against a law requiring Indians to register. By 1909 only Gandhi and a few loyal supporters were engaged in the "movement" and between 1909 and 1913 it constituted negotiations between Gandhi and the government.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile an educated elite was gradually emerging in Durban as a result of the early opportunities provided by mission schools. The more prominent of the educated elite, such as Bernard Gabriel, son of indentured immigrants, who studied at Cambridge University and was the first colonial-born barrister,<sup>90</sup> and Joseph Royeppen, who completed a law degree at Cambridge University,<sup>91</sup> studied overseas.

This small and heterogenous elite numbered around 300 in 1904 and included lawyers, teachers, civil servants and accountants. They sought upward mobility in Natal which they saw as their home and, being descendants of indentured Indians, had strong cultural, religious, and language links with the mass of Indians.<sup>92</sup> Most were "comfortable" until the post-1903 depression resulted in a cut in the salaries of teachers, the imposition of higher taxes, and a reduction in the number of civil servants. This danger to their material position made the new elite more vocal in demanding change.<sup>93</sup>

In 1908 P.S. Aiyar, editor of African Chronicle, formed the Natal Indian Patriotic Union whose primary achievement lay in highlighting the poll tax as a terrible burden. Poor organization and lack of finance resulted in its collapse within a year.<sup>94</sup> The Colonial Born Indian Association was formed in March 1911 to protest against restrictions on inter-provincial migration. Due to shrinking opportunities in Natal many educated Indians hoped to seek jobs elsewhere in southern Africa.<sup>95</sup> The educated elite's relationship with merchants and the NIC was ambivalent. They justified their existence on the ground that while Gandhi and the Congress were concerned with the "larger" problems affecting Indians in the Union, they were concerned with problems specific to colonial-borns.<sup>96</sup>

By 1912 when Gokhale, a high-ranking Indian diplomat, visited South Africa, the tax was in the forefront of Indian grievances in Britain, India and South Africa. Gokhale discussed the tax with the Union government and left behind the impression that it would be repealed. When Smuts denied this, Gandhi considered it ethically

proper to pursue its repeal. The tax was one of several demands listed by Gandhi, the others being the removal of residential barriers in the Transvaal, the right to inter-provincial migration, the right to enter the Orange Free State, just licensing laws, the validity of Indian marriages, removal of restrictions on the entry of wives and children from India, and the right to domicile after three years absence from the country.<sup>97</sup>

When the government refused to yield, Gandhi initiated a strike by 4,000 Indian workers on 16 October 1913 at the coal mines in Northern Natal. The government took no action so Gandhi forced Smuts' hand by crossing illegally into the Transvaal on 23 October. The success of the strike was assured when 15,000 Indian workers on coastal sugar estates joined at the end of October. They struck for a variety of reasons. Some believed that Gokhale was returning to liberate them while others said that they were acting on Gandhi's orders.<sup>98</sup> The decision to strike is an indication of the depth of suffering caused by the £3 tax. About 65% of indentured Indians were serving their second or subsequent term.<sup>99</sup> Tension was greatest on the plantations because of the larger numbers, the total dependency of planters on Indian labor, the year's crop still had to be cut, and it was rumored that Africans were going to join in the strike.<sup>100</sup> Frustrated employers demanded action. The violence associated with the strike, police brutality, and the use of mine compounds as prisons led to widespread negative coverage in India and England.<sup>101</sup> In Durban 7,000 free Indians joined the strike as domestic workers left their white households, waiters abandoned hotels, railway and municipal workers did not report to work, factory

workers downed tools, newspaper and milk vendors joined in sympathy and hawkers withdrew from the streets.<sup>102</sup>

The 1913 strike was a spontaneous outburst in reaction to terrible working conditions and a realization that the poll tax meant perpetual indenture. The strike was thus not only a political phenomenon but an uprising by economically depressed Indians experiencing harsh material conditions. Mass action was only possible because merchants and workers were suppressed by the state on the basis of race. Indians of all classes and denominations shared a common position. It is also important to note that workers cited prominent Indian figures like Gandhi and Gokhale in explaining the decision to strike. Further, the strike was sustained by contributions from Indians from all over South Africa while "large sums of money poured into South Africa from all parts of the Motherland."<sup>103</sup> Indians responded to the government's use of race to marginalize and subordinate them by adopting a practice of resistance based on race.

The findings of the government-appointed 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; recognized marriages contracted according to the rites of Indian religions; and made provision for the granting of free passages to India to all Indians who gave up their right to domicile in South Africa.<sup>104</sup> However, 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>105</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>106</sup>

### **Conclusion: Race, Class and Ethnic identities**

This chapter has focused on the impact of the Natal experience, particularly the influence of white policies, on pre-existing divisions among Indians. This must be viewed in the context of the attempt by the government to promote a pattern of stratification in which race and ethnicity clearly shaped individual and communal life experiences and determined access to resources. Indians were sufficiently divided during this period for Gandhi to appeal in 1908 that "the different Indian races inhabiting South Africa have to be welded together and made to think corporately, to sink their sectarian prejudices."<sup>107</sup> The use of "different Indian races" shows the extent of the divide. Both passenger and indentured Indians were aware of these differences. Passenger Indians, who came to Natal as British subjects and were governed by the laws of the colony, initially tried to obtain equality on the basis of Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation which asserted the equality of all British subjects.<sup>108</sup> Ebrahim Camroodeen, for example, complained to the immigration restriction officer that "no distinction is made between common and better class Indians."<sup>109</sup> The Wragg Commission noted that Arabs "associate with Indians only so far as trade and labour compels them."<sup>110</sup> Traders, bound by common economic

interests, preserved caste divisions and consciousness, and maintained links with India.

Merchants had a choice of identification since they could either link with the white bourgeoisie class or disregard their class differences and engage in joint struggle with indentured and free Indians on the basis of race. For whites, race was the most effective political and ideological means of ensuring a cheap labor supply and suppressing indigenous social formation. It was used to separate the population into discrete groups by suggesting that Indians and Africans were naturally different and inferior. The privileged economic position of the middle class was neutralized by their having to confront racism, which placed them in the same situation as Indian workers. They were denied class-based rights, and had no prospect of being absorbed into the wider society. As Gandhi himself pointed out, Indians were prevented from using the tramcars, railways, hotels, and public baths:

no matter who they are.... The Indian is bitterly hated. The man in the street hates him, spits upon him, and often pushes him off the footpath. The Press almost unanimously refuses to call the Indian by his proper name. He is 'Ramsamy', he is 'Mr Sammy', he is 'Mr Coolie', he is 'the Black Man'.<sup>111</sup>

In response, middle class Indians used the object of their rejection, race, to formulate a strategy of resistance. Race came to provide a focus for political organization, with the result that class cleavages amongst Indians would not have the same significance that they might otherwise have had. The formation of a racial organization, the NIC, assisted in initially fostering and then keeping alive a separate

racial political identity. The social structure in Durban militated against contact on a class basis and Indians came to form a separate social and economic pyramid and established organizations which were concerned with their 'own' issues.

The relations of credit and patronage which traders established with indentured Indians were important for the latter, and were not simply exploitative. For example, when about 1,000 Indians, the majority of whom were indentured, served as stretcher-bearers during the Anglo-Boer war, traders organized a Relief Committee and supplied items like cigarettes, pipes and tobacco, while Indian women prepared pillowcases and handkerchiefs from cloth supplied by merchants.<sup>112</sup>

The floods of 1905 and 1917 provide further examples of early cooperation. The June 1905 floods resulted in 113 deaths and left about 1,500 homeless. The entire NGR barracks at South Coast Junction was destroyed when the Umbilo river overflowed. The response of the government "have been most conspicuous - from their entire absence. Had it not been for the prompt and practical generosity of the Indian community, how much more pitiable would have been the plight of the survivors." The Durban Storm Relief Committee, formed by merchants like Parsee Rustomjee and E.M. Paruk, provided food and shelter for 1,100 destitute Indians in Durban.<sup>113</sup>

Indians were regularly subject to flooding because many lived on low-lying lands. In October 1917, 2,000 were left homeless when the Umgeni River burst its banks. The response was prompt: "the Indian community in Durban rendered all help possible in finding shelter and food for the people who had been rescued.... Each

volunteer vied with his neighbour in rendering the utmost assistance." The Relief Committee included merchants like E.M. Paruk, M.C. Coovadia and Parsee Rustomjee, as well as many of the educated elite.<sup>114</sup> Assistance was received from India; Indians in Salt River, Cape Town, collected relief funds; and Indians in Johannesburg held several plays to raise funds.<sup>115</sup> In his report on the activity of the Flood Relief Fund, Rev. Bone observed:

It should be remembered that the rich Indian merchants are Mahomedans, and of an entirely different race from the sufferers, most of whom are Hindus. The latter have no more claim upon the former than they have upon Europeans. And yet we think it speaks volumes for the growing unity of the Indian races that the former have done as much for the cause as they have done, and that a large number of prominent Indian merchants are on the relief committee.<sup>116</sup>

This statement highlights the fact that there were clear differences among Indians to the point where the contemporary observer regarded them as "different races;" it also shows that in the absence of government assistance they were being forced to cohere on the basis of color. In appealing for funds it was stressed that no effort should be spared in ensuring the well-being of "our own people."

These are independent workers who have emancipated themselves from the conditions of the "coolie lines", and every effort should be made to maintain them in the position they have brought themselves to by industry... We would appeal to our countrymen to heartily respond, and show that we do not fail in our practical sympathy towards our own people.<sup>117</sup>

Economic advancement had to be sustained through joint help, and expressions like "our own people" and "countrymen" show the affective nature of the appeals. The fact that the stereotypes of the day saw Indians as one, regardless of their

language or religious roots, forced a "made-in-Natal" consciousness. When Imam Bawazeer, a Muslim priest, was departing for India in 1915 he remarked:

We are all Indians in the eyes of the Europeans in this country. We have never drawn distinctions between Mahomedans and Hindus in public matters. Mahomedans, like the Hindus, look upon India as our Motherland, and so is it a matter of fact, and when it is a matter of serving India, we must set aside any differences and be united.<sup>118</sup>

Prior to 1914 Indians placed Indian boundaries around the struggle and did not proceed to joint collective action with Africans. An important factor in keeping apart Indian and African workers was that they were subject to different conditions of reproduction. African labor was freer and, on sugar estates, Africans were used to oversee and whip Indians. The Indian middle class felt that they had to keep their struggle separate from Africans since they used the 1858 Proclamation as the basis of their demands.

During the inter-war years, Indian society in Durban underwent radical change as discrimination increased and their situation deteriorated. What forms of identity and consciousness did the common experience of urban poverty throw up? In any given situation an individual has a choice of identifications, with multiple identification often the rule. The objective of this study is to determine which identifications Indians embraced. By 1914, although there were instances of Indians turning inward in search of group cohesiveness, the boundaries were still fluid. It was in the interwar years that they would become more defined. The following chapter will focus on the economic transformation which was critical in this development.

## NOTES

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## CHAPTER 2

### URBANIZATION, POVERTY AND RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

The Smuts-Gandhi Agreement of 1914 had left many issues unresolved and the declaration by Smuts that the Agreement was "a final settlement" was not shared by most. P.S. Aiyar was forthright on this question when he declared that:

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>1</sup>

The position of Indians deteriorated during the inter-war years as the majority became part of an urban-based proletariat, and economic and political discrimination produced a harsh environment in which they found it difficult to advance. Most were poor and illiterate, and had no immediate respite for their problems because of slow economic growth, competition from African labor, rampant unemployment and discrimination. The changing conditions presented new challenges and a wider choice of group membership, which had a significant impact on Indian identities.

#### **The Cape Town Agreement:**

While not directly connected to the main issues in this chapter, a discussion of the Agreement is essential since there will be regular reference to its provisions. Although Indians had been discriminated against, they continued to see themselves as

part of the British Empire. At the outbreak of war in 1914, a mass meeting "declared its loyalty to the King-Emperor, and its readiness to serve the Crown and to co-operate with the government in defence of the country."<sup>2</sup> This was done with longer term benefits in mind: "in future years to come, better prospects are awaiting us, under the aegis of the same Empire when it has emerged triumphantly from the present ordeal."<sup>3</sup> The Indian Opinion was more emphatic:

We should be sorry to admit that the Indian community allowed itself to lag behind in any patriotic duty.... One word to those who feel that the community is labouring under disabilities because of their race, and that, therefore, they have little inclination to come forward and help. Now is not the time to hold back the hand. Give freely, do your duty, and afterwards you will be able to claim justice and equal treatment.<sup>4</sup>

Indians were accepted as stretcher-bearers and over 700 served in East Africa. A "Comforts Committee" was formed to take care of volunteers before and after their stint in East Africa. War Fairs, soccer tournaments, boxing exhibitions, street collections and plays were held to raise money, and women sewed and knitted pillows and blankets. All classes contributed. Market gardeners donated a day's produce when Fair's were held and up to £1,000 was collected at each fair. Politicians went from house-to-house and shop-to-shop selling flowers. At the market, every stallholder contributed on a daily basis, even "the Indian women who carry on a petty grocer's trade in the market, and whose earnings cannot average more than 6d per day." Fairs and other fund raising programs were concluded with cheers for "His Majesty the King-Emperor" and the singing of the national anthem.<sup>5</sup> At the conclusion of the war Indians held special prayers "in accordance with the desire of our king." A committee

was formed to raise funds for "Our Day" celebrations which were held on 24 October 1918.<sup>6</sup>

The expectation that this effort would be rewarded with better treatment was shattered with the revival of anti-Indian agitation after the war. The South African League, which was formed in 1919, declared that Asiatics were a "serious moral, economic and political menace" and demanded their repatriation "as speedily as possible." They were considered the cause of unemployment and low living standards among whites and the League wanted Asiatics segregated in reserves and banned from employment in "positions of responsibility" such as clerks, traffic officers, storemen and drivers.<sup>7</sup> The following is characteristic of the invective employed to incite hostility:

Go to Umzinto; one white store only, but scores of coolie shanties extending on both sides of the long street. Tongaat, Stanger, Glencoe, Waschbank, not a white store there. Danhauser, a city of coolie shacks and shanties. Natal swamped in every quarter with unwanted Asiatics, and yet we are told that "the menace is much exaggerated." What of the thousand white lads at present at school in Durban. These lads should be regarded as national assets but ... they are far more likely to become, for want of employment, national liabilities of a dangerous order. The time for direct and forceful action has arrived. The menace has to be stopped and right soon.<sup>8</sup>

In response to this pressure, the government appointed an Asiatic Inquiry Commission in 1920. The League was one of many parties which gave evidence to the Commission and argued its case along the lines outlined above. At the same time that Indian leaders were demanding equality with whites, they objected to being placed on the same footing as Africans. P.S. Aiyar told the Commission:

The Indian community now resident in the Union, are inheritors of a very ancient and historic civilisation, and therefore it must be obvious that to stigmatize a race such as the Indians and to declare that they are fit to be placed on an equal footing with the aboriginal tribes of Africa is not only unfair, but it is calculated to offer gratuitous insult to three hundred millions of the people of India.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Commission found that the "Asiatic menace" was a myth, it recommended that the right of Asians to acquire land for agricultural purposes be restricted to a distance of twenty to thirty miles inland, voluntary segregation be encouraged, specific areas be set aside for trading, and immigration laws be firmly implemented.<sup>10</sup> While the Smuts government was ousted before it could implement these suggestions, the all-white DCC passed legislation that restricted trade and voting rights. The 1922 Land Alienation Ordinance empowered the DCC to prevent the sale of municipal land to Indians. The DCC was also authorized to include a clause in any land purchased from it to prevent the future sale of that land to an Indian. In 1924 Indians were deprived of the municipal franchise.<sup>11</sup>

In 1925 the government introduced the Areas Reservation Bill which provided for compulsory segregation. According to the DCC, "Durban wanted this legislation ... and a great deal more than the Bill would achieve."<sup>12</sup> The DCC also wanted to "create an atmosphere in favor of the compulsory repatriation of Asiatics, whether born in South Africa or not" because whites objected to being "ousted by a less civilized race."<sup>13</sup> This Bill struck directly at the material interests of traders who suggested that the Union government hold a round-table conference with the Imperial and Indian governments.<sup>14</sup> A conference was held in Cape Town in December-

January 1926-27. South Africa hoped to solicit India's help in repatriating Indians, while the Indian government took part to placate public opinion which was agitated by discrimination against Indians in the British Empire. The Indian government did not expect the conference to produce meaningful change and handpicked a delegation to pursue very limited objectives:

At best the conference is only likely to result in a compromise.... I think it will be wise to rope in one or two leaders who will be likely to command popular support whatever the conference does and who will take a sober and reasonable view when they are under the guidance of a competent chairman.<sup>15</sup>

The leader of the Indian delegation, Sir Muhammad Habibullah, was chosen to placate Muslim opinion in South Africa even though it was felt that "he is not endowed with many brains and I could only think of choosing him if I could get the kind of deputation I have in mind.... However, he is a Muhammadan, and suitable Muhammadans do not grow on every mulberry bush."<sup>16</sup> Sastri was chosen because "it is very desirable from the angle of Indian opinion ... and he is on friendly terms with both Corbett and Paddison who will have no difficulty in keeping him straight."<sup>17</sup>

Sastri accepted at the outset that "the right of the European to political domination must be neither disputed nor endangered.... The European mind must be relieved of the fear of being swamped by an excess of Indians."<sup>18</sup> He also felt that whites had sacrificed enormously to attain a "western" standard of life and had the right to protect it. While there was no exact definition of these "higher standards",

"those who visit Durban and notice the difference between the quarters which are predominantly white and the quarters which are predominantly Indian will not ask for precise definitions of standards."<sup>19</sup> Given this attitude it is not surprising that the conference achieved very little.

The Indian Government agreed to a scheme for the voluntary repatriation of Indians; the Union Government promised to "uplift" the social and economic position of those who remained; and the Indian government was to appoint an Agent to monitor the workings of the Agreement and to facilitate relations between Indians and the Union Government. It was through the Agent, who was to be the channel through which Indians were to direct their problems to the government, that the Indian government hoped to keep a check on Indian South African politics. It was also the Agent's task to facilitate contact with sympathetic whites in order to make public opinion more favorable towards Indians.<sup>20</sup> For moderates, the "uplift" clause was the "sheet anchor" on which they pinned their faith for progress. They saw it as leading to full citizenship and socio-economic parity with whites.<sup>21</sup>

The appointment of an Agent ensured that for the foreseeable future the struggle of Indians would be fought in isolation from Africans. Just as the Indian Relief Act had been important in forging an Indian identity, the Cape Town Agreement was another step in the same direction. Though Indians and Africans were both disadvantaged, there were important differences. The government persisted in considering Indians an "alien" population which caused many to see their problems as being disconnected from those of Africans. Indians also had a strong middle class and

international leverage, which Africans lacked. The Reverend John L. Dube told an NIC meeting that Africans could not stand competition with whites "as you Indians do. You have India and influential people behind you, and have influential friends in the Empire - who are our friends?"<sup>22</sup>

### **Economic Change:**

The transformation to an urban-based proletariat took place in the industrial revolution that followed the mineral discoveries on the Rand. Although an African free peasantry thrived in many parts of southern Africa in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this was not sustained. Its decline was due to a number of factors, including the imposition of taxes by the government, unfavorable market prices for raw commodities, a series of natural disasters between 1890-1910, tension within African society and the appropriation of land by whites. The crowning moment was the Land Act of 1913 which reserved just 13% of South Africa's land for its African population.<sup>23</sup> The availability of African labor rendered Indians superfluous in farming, mining and the public sector.

When the Indian Legislative Council banned indentured emigration to Natal from 1 July 1911, the South African government welcomed the decision.<sup>24</sup> Employers turned to African labor and the number of Indians dropped in most of the major sectors; on Natal's mines the number fell from 3,739 in 1911 to 488 in 1945;<sup>25</sup> on the railways their numbers decreased from 6,000 in 1910 to 400 by the mid-1930s;<sup>26</sup> and in general farming the percentage of Indians in the labor force fell

from 32 in 1911 to 11 in 1936.<sup>27</sup> As the following table shows, the situation was especially dramatic on sugar estates:

**TABLE 5** Indian and African labor on Sugar Estates

Year	Indians		Africans	
	No.	%	No.	%
1910	18 270	88	2 380	12
1925	11 440	29	27 873	71
1933	8 020	17	40 263	83
1945	4 500	7	55 778	93

Source: A.J. Arkin, Contributions of Indians to the South African Economy, p.143.

For employers, African migrant labor was cheaper because wives and families did not have to be accommodated and fed, they were spared importing expensive staples like rice and dhal and Africans could be employed seasonally.<sup>28</sup> African labor was substantially cheaper and when there was a shortage of Zulu labor, migrant workers were imported from the Transkei.<sup>29</sup> These developments perpetuated the association of race and employment which made more difficult the attaining of non-racial working class unity, and also spurred the urbanward migration of dispensable Indian labor. The following table reflects this rapid and extensive urbanization:

**TABLE 6** Racial Composition of Durban's Population

YEAR	Whites	Coloureds	Indians	Africans	Total
1904	31 302	1 980	15 631	18 929	67 842
1911	31 903	2 497	17 015	17 750	69 165
1921	46 113	4 000	16 400	29 011	93 515
1931	59 250	4 240	17 860	43 750	125 100
1936	88 065	7 336	80 384	63 762	239 547
1949	129 683	11 280	123 165	109 543	373 771

Source: University of Natal, The Durban Housing Survey,  
(Durban: University of Natal, 1952), p.35.

The dramatic increase in population between 1931 and 1936 was due to the extension of Durban's municipal boundary in 1932 from 13 to 70 square miles, which resulted in the incorporation of 101,786 persons.<sup>30</sup> (See Map 4 on page 73) About half (51,322) the added population comprised of Indians who consequently increased from 14% to just over 30% of Durban's population.<sup>31</sup> As Burrows has pointed out, this flow to Durban was "due less to the offer of attractive employment or even of any employment at all than to economic pressure driving them off the land."<sup>32</sup> There were significant differences between Indians and Africans. While both were subject to racist policies, unlike Africans, Indians could join formal trade unions, they had the legal right to participate in strikes, and there were fewer restrictions on their movement and property ownership. At least until 1940 the main barrier to Indian advancement were whites, it was only thereafter that Africans became competitors.

Map 4: City of Durban – Old and New Boundaries

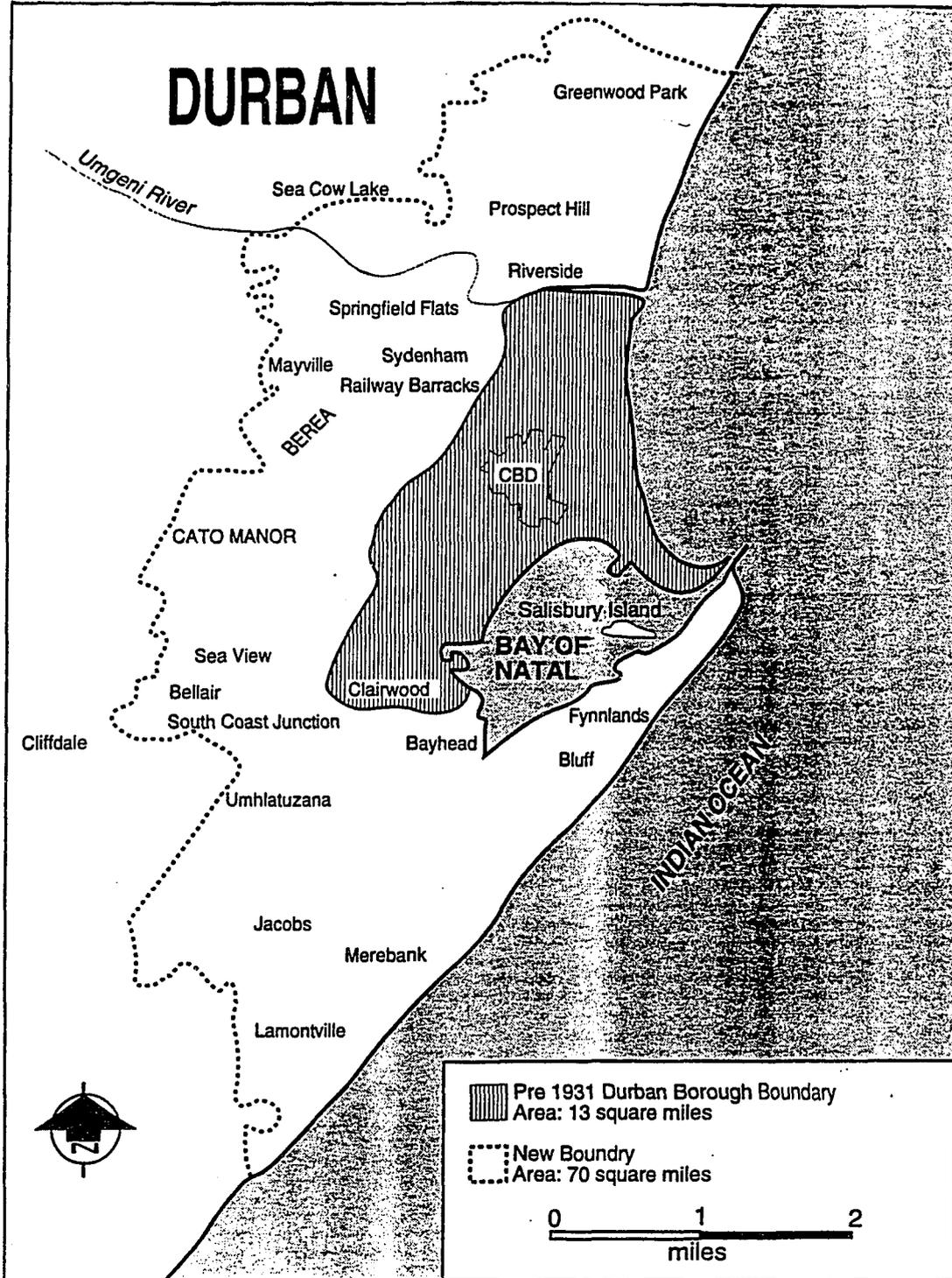


Table 7 provides a clear picture of the occupational change during the inter war years:

**TABLE 7** Occupational Distribution of Durban's Indians:  
(expressed as a percentage of gainfully employed)

	1921	1936	1946	1951
Agriculture	25.4	7.8	4.9	3.6
Industry	14.5	28.5	36.5	32.7
Commerce	12.8	18.2	18.7	17.4
Services	22.7	23.5	22.4	23.5
Transport	6.5	4.2	4.9	3.9
Other (incl. not adequately described)	8.1	17.8	12.6	18.9
				100.00

Source: From Population Census, 1921; Katzen, Industry, p.5 and L. Kuper et al. Durban. A Study in Racial Ecology (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), p.45.

The following section will focus on workers in the service sector, agriculture and industry since they account for the bulk of Indian economic activity in Durban and provide an excellent indication of the conditions under which the majority lived and labored.

#### **Market Gardeners and Hawkers:**

The transition to urban wage employment was not linear, partly because the industrial sector developed slowly and partly because many made a deliberate attempt to avoid wage labor. A large number took to market gardening 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. A 1940 survey reported

that, excluding Cato Manor, Indians farmed 2,326 acres in Clairwood, Springfield, Mayville, Sea Cow Lake, Riverside, Umhlatuzana and Bayhead on land leased or bought from private landowners, the South African Railways and the DCC.<sup>33</sup>

Although it was becoming increasingly difficult to continue gardening, as late as 1949 Indian market gardeners supplied 75% of the vegetables for the general public in Durban.<sup>34</sup> Market gardeners utilized the labor of the entire family as hoeing and watering was done by women, while children did the weeding, gathering, washing and preparing of crops.<sup>35</sup>

The majority of gardeners sold their produce at the Early Morning or "Squatters" market which was held in Victoria street from 1910. Farmers lined both sides of the street with their carts and animals. Those who did not own carts brought their produce in baskets, boxes and sacks. Towards the center of the road, "under the wheels and surrounding the vehicles were hundreds of women and children vendors of vegetables." Produce was sold "from a basket, or by placing them in small lots upon a sack or a sheet of cloth spread upon the ground," while sellers squatted cross-legged on the street, hence the name "Squatters" market. A number of women sold cooked meat, beans and mealies. The turnout was very large. For example, it was estimated in 1925 that almost 2,000 farmers and squatters attended each day.<sup>36</sup>

Mr N.G.'s mother was a vendor at this market during the 1920s and 1930s. He was the youngest of ten children born to indentured parents. Although their father went back to India when they were very young, their mother decided that their future was in South Africa. He recalls that, because places were not reserved on the street,



'Sammy' and 'Mary' hawking fruits and vegetables  
from house-to-house  
(Local History Museum, Durban)





Early Morning Squatters' Market  
Victoria Street, c.1920

(Local History Museum, Durban)



Indian Fishermen, c.1920s

(Local History Museum, Durban)

they arrived from 10 P.M. at night for trading which began at 4 A.M. and ceased at 9 A.M. the following morning. They did not own a garden but bought fruits and vegetables from farmers. Once a suitable spot was found, farmers and their families spent the night on the street, sleeping in or under the cart.<sup>37</sup> The DCC refused a request for shelter and accommodation by farmers "who sat in the street with no protection from rain and sunshine." The Markets And Abattoir Committee felt that "the accommodation required should be provided by the Indian community itself in the interests of the Indian farmers."<sup>38</sup>

The following letter to the Mayor in 1928 provides a clue to the attitude of stallholders and hawkers, who were mainly poor, to Africans and a sense of how they perceived them. Although, or because, contact was minimal, Indians even objected to Africans using the same toilet.

A very frequent complaint is made by the Indian market gardeners, squatters and others that the lavatory built near the Market is constantly used by Natives also. We certainly think that this practice should be stopped if any serious affray is to be avoided.<sup>39</sup>

Many whites found the conditions at the market intolerable. For example, Mr Thomas Watson complained in 1915 that:

The way coolies have accomandeed this thoroughfare one would believe they had assumed military control, the road being completely blocked with carts and boxes. At night no lights are about and the men make camp fires and sleep there.... It contains about ten of the filthiest benches in Durban, which have never felt a bucket of hot water since they were made; ... There are about six ice-cream carts, everyone breaking bye-laws. In a few years time if you wish to remove them the coolies will write to the papers: "For thirty years we have bought ice-

cream when we went to purchase our fish, the pleasure of going to buy fish is gone if you take our ice-cream away." To complete the picture we have a miniature coolie temple, with its tom-toms, the halt, the lamps, the blind, and, during last season, there was a band.<sup>40</sup>

Whites continued to send similar complaints to the Town Clerk with the result that, although it procrastinated for many years, the DCC was finally forced yield to pressure for an enclosed market. A new market, opened in 1934, was situated at the corner of Warwick and Victoria streets.<sup>41</sup> A survey during the mid-1940s showed that about 18,000 to 20,000 people attended each Saturday.<sup>42</sup>

Those who did not sell at the early morning market hawked their fruits and vegetables. As we have seen in the previous chapter Indian hawkers were a feature of Durban life from the 1880s. This was noted by early reports such as the Wragg Commission of 1885. A 1909 report on hawking noted that women hawkers, referred to as "Mary" by whites, and male hawkers, called "vegetable sammy", piled their fruits and vegetables in baskets which they carried on their heads from house to house each day in "rain or sunshine, spring or winter."<sup>43</sup> During this early period, while white farmers objected to Indian hawkers, white working class housewives considered this an invaluable service. "An Australian," for example, wrote to the African Chronicle in 1908 that:

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 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" and "Mary" are 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 readily imagine what the abolishing of the Indian hawker would mean to the poor people living on the outskirts of the city.<sup>44</sup>

While this might have been an invaluable service for whites, being called "Mary" and "Sammy" was offensive. As Indians became urbanized and radicalized, they despised such racist treatment. B.D. Lalla's mid-1940s poem suggests the sense of resentment felt by many:

Is my wife a Coolie Mary  
And thy a blessed fairy?  
Is my wife a Sammy Mary?  
Is she in her way contrary?  
Why is there this hated difference?  
Must thy cup be filled with sweetness  
And my own with vileness?  
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  
Doubled as a Coolie Mary?  
If you choose to call her Mary  
Think of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>45</sup>

Hawkers continued to be a significant presence during the inter-war, both in the central business district as well in outlying areas. In the city center, where hawkers had to be licensed, there were, for example, 1,106 hawkers in 1916, 1,358 in 1928 and 1,294 in 1944.<sup>46</sup> They were poorly compensated as an estimate showed that their stock was worth less than £5 each in 1946.<sup>47</sup> About 80% of all licensed hawkers and peddlers sold fruit and vegetables, which they purchased from the Squatters market; the rest were flower sellers who bought their flowers from white farmers.<sup>48</sup> With many hawkers hovering near or below the poverty line, child labor

was used in the early years to supplement income and keep their economic heads above the water. Children, who sold pea-nuts, were on the street as late as midnight.<sup>49</sup> The chief constable felt that "when children of this age are employed at this work their associates and surroundings are bound to have a most injurious affect on their character. In fact they are certain to grow up evil-doers." The DCC consequently banned children under 13 from street trading.<sup>50</sup>

The activities of street and market traders did not tie in with white ideas of a "civilized" city. They were seen as a public nuisance, as the cause of pedestrian and vehicular traffic and as constituting a public health nuisance. According to a local editor, the freedom of private enterprise did "not necessarily mean urban hordes of itinerant hawkers should be allowed to congest busy thoroughfares. Liberty ends where license begins."<sup>51</sup> More ominously for hawkers, white traders objected to their presence on the grounds that hawkers undercut their business. Since whites could muster political support, they applied pressure for legislation to curb the activities of hawkers. In 1929, ten white-owned fruit and vegetable stores complained that their businesses were seriously prejudiced by hawkers who "go round to the various offices, banks and other business premises in the Town, and also waylay pedestrians." The petitioners argued that this was unfair since hawkers did not have expenses like rent and wages: "We therefore request that they should not be allowed this freedom in the business center of Town."<sup>52</sup> An April 1930 bye-law prohibited hawkers from areas where white trade predominated. The result of complaints was further restrictions against hawkers in 1931 and 1944. The prohibited areas became larger

and movement severely restricted. Hawkers were peripheralized from the best trading areas and vigilantly monitored. During 1945, for example, 814 persons, mainly Indian, were charged with offenses such as exposing food on the pavement, taking up a fixed stand or not possessing a hawker's license.<sup>53</sup>

African traders lodged similar complaints. In 1920, the overseer of the Native Eating House in Victoria Street complained that in the vicinity of the market "there is a tendency towards friction between the Natives and Indians on account of their [Indian] occupation in the mornings, on our veranda, and an old standing sore exists over the ground on which the present Fish Market stands."<sup>54</sup> Such complaints continued to be made. In 1948, for example, a Mr Ngcobo considered it "wrong" that most hawkers in Dalton road were Indians. He felt that since the customers were African, only they should be allowed to hawk in the area.<sup>55</sup> Africans believed that Indians were receiving favorable treatment and as the competition for sparse resources intensified, it tended to be defined in racial terms. However, unlike whites, Africans did not have the state on their side and little was done to address their problems. Squeezed out by whites and Indians, and lacking state support, they took matters into their own hands in 1949.<sup>56</sup>

It was not only at the point of sale that hawkers and gardeners were being squeezed out. From the 1930s, there was no land for new gardeners, while existing gardeners had to eventually give way to industrial expansion and an attempt by the state to impose racial segregation. For example, from the 1941 protest of the NIA we learn that the DCC planned to expropriate 1,095 acres of Indian-owned land in

Riverside, Merebank, Wentworth, Sydenham, and Springfield where they had lived for several generations and were well established.<sup>57</sup> Halliday found in 1940 that market gardeners faced a perpetual struggle to survive and that "very few wished their sons to follow in their footsteps."<sup>58</sup> This statement is supported by numerous surveys and memorandums which show that farmers were forced to combine gardening with non-agricultural wage labor. For example, a 1939 survey in Springfield revealed that of 507 gainfully employed persons, 134 were market gardeners, 247 were employed in town in various trades and 126 elsewhere as casual workers.<sup>59</sup> A 1941 memorandum stated that about 50% of males of working age in Durban North were hawkers or market gardeners, the rest were employed at the Lion Match Factory, Model Steam Laundry, National Paper Factory, Natal Canvas Company, Umgeni Wool Washery, and Pyotts Biscuit Factory.<sup>60</sup> A 1944 memorandum pointed out that in Springfield land was so small that farmers "are barely able to eke out a living.... Consequently most of these farmers and small gardeners are compelled to seek employment in other spheres and make farming a spare time occupation."<sup>61</sup> A 1945 report noted that of 40 families who were to be evicted from Riverside, 25 depended on market gardening for their livelihood; the rest were dependent on work in town.<sup>62</sup> A 1949 survey found that 36% of market gardeners were forced to seek outside work to supplement their incomes.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to land lost at Riverside and Springfield, Indian-owned or occupied land was expropriated for industrial expansion at South Coast Junction, Lamont Industrial Estate and Umgeni; at Isipingo land was taken for building an airport; and

at Wentworth land was taken for the building of a road and for use by the South African Railways.<sup>64</sup> This increased the number and plight of the urban poor. Those who lost their land were moved to sub-economic housing units where no land was available for market gardening. When the NIC complained that farmers were losing their livelihood, the attitude of the DCC was that "there is no obligation upon the City Council whatsoever to find land for gardening purposes.... I know of no other land suitable for the purpose which is in the ownership of the City Council."<sup>65</sup> The situation continued to deteriorate after 1949. The Group Areas Act and industrial expansion during the 1960s were the final blows to market gardeners. As the following recollection reveals, the impact of relocation was severe:

It was at a home in Riverside, a woman was having a miscarriage. After I had treated her I came out of the house. There was a man sitting under a tree. He called me and asked: "You coming from Congress, Ma?" I said: "Yes". Then he fiddled with the turban he was wearing and took out a note from his pocket. It stated: "You, Venkatsamy, are now notified by the City Council to leave your plot number so and so..." When I had finished reading, he said: "Ma, I've been living in this place for the last fifty years. Where do I go now? I've got a smallholding here where I grow sharlottes (spring onions) and a few other household vegetables which bring me income. Where can I go now? Why do they want to do this to me? Can't Congress do something about it?" I said that I would speak to Congress but I knew nothing could be done. When I went back a few weeks later to visit the woman, the old man had died. I know what he died of. It was the death of one who did not want to live anymore. I saw many people whither like this.<sup>66</sup>

## **Service Sector:**

The majority of workers in the service sector were employed by the Durban Municipality. Their numbers remained fairly constant: 1,601 in 1913, 2,068 in 1930 and 2,344 in 1947.<sup>67</sup> This does not reflect the actual situation. In 1949, for example, workers, together with their dependents, totalled 10,000.<sup>68</sup> The vast majority did unskilled work like street sweeping and grass cutting and were among the lowest paid in Durban. This was due to the policy laid down by the DCC in 1920 that "the practice of employing Indians in clerical positions be discontinued as vacancies occur, and that such appointments then be offered to white youths and girls."<sup>69</sup>

Municipal employees were housed in the Magazine, Railway and Greyville barracks. According to a 1935 DCC report, barracks were cheap and helped maintain discipline, increase efficiency and underpay workers.

Apart from the economies obtained from the provision of communal sanitary washing and bathing blocks, there are undoubted advantages in having an adequate labour supply available at any hour for emergency work, and the possibility of following up all cases of absenteeism as they arise. A further advantage is the continuous supervision which is only possible in large barracks or compounds and we are further of the opinion that the training and control they receive under that system must be beneficial to the Indians themselves.... Would the provision of cottage type of house-the presumptive alternative -not constitute an unnecessary incentive to the increase of the size of families?<sup>70</sup>

Conditions were deplorable. According to the Indian Opinion, this was because "some Councilors have felt and said that the more wretchedly the Indians are housed and paid the more likely they will be willing to be repatriated."<sup>71</sup> Following an inspection in 1928, the ISSC reported that men and women had to bath in toilets

which had no doors; there were no ventilators with the result that the whole house was filled with smoke when food was cooked; the kitchen was so small that food and utensils had to be stored in the bedroom; the roofs were old and rusty; and stagnant water bred disease because there were no gutters and drains.<sup>72</sup> The situation did not improve in subsequent years. A 1943 report by the M.O.H. noted that acute intestinal diseases like dysentery, diarrhoea and enteritis accounted for 40% of deaths at the Barracks that year. He attributed this to fly plagues, overcrowding, communal latrines, and the shortage of foods containing vitamins.<sup>73</sup>

Municipal employees suffered numerous other disabilities. From 1923, the DCC refused to provide pensions for widows with the result that women faced a severe crisis in the event of the loss of a breadwinner.<sup>74</sup> To force widows to leave, their rations were withheld until they vacated the premises.<sup>75</sup> The following is a typical case. Nassa was the widow of Palnai who had worked for the Corporation for 54 years, from 1874 to 1928, and died while on duty. The DCC granted her one year's rations subject to her vacating the barracks.<sup>76</sup> In a single year, 1932, 74 women were evicted. From 1928, retired male employees were forced to leave the barracks and their pensions were withheld if they failed to move out.<sup>77</sup> Old men and women who had lived in Municipal housing for most of their lives were expected to find housing on their meager pensions in a situation where the housing shortage was critical and rents exorbitant.

The DCC ruled in 1932 that all unhealthy Indians over 60 were to be given two months notice and dismissed. Only those who had worked for longer than 20

years were to be given a pension but were to vacate the barracks.<sup>78</sup> The law was applied strictly. For example, in 1933 Chinniah, who had worked for 28 years, was denied a pension on the grounds that he did not work for the same division within the Corporation.<sup>79</sup> During the depression, the DCC made it official policy to reduce Indian employees by at least 10%, with the result that their number dropped from 2,068 in 1930 to 1,856 in 1933.<sup>80</sup>

The situation did not get any better after the depression and the position of Indian municipal workers remained desperate. A 1946 survey of the Magazine Barracks found that the average family size was 6.1 and that there were 1.4 wage earners per household.<sup>81</sup> The income of municipal employees only accounted for 61.74% of the total income. The balance consisted of the income of women peddlers and domestic servants, and males who worked in the evenings or on weekends to supplement their meager incomes.<sup>82</sup> The survey also found that 70% of families were in debt, the major causes being payment for food, clothing, and medical fees.<sup>83</sup>

### **Manufacturing Employment**

Two-thirds of Natal's manufacturing industry and industrial workforce is concentrated around Durban which has emerged as the core industrial area of the province. Durban is the premier port of entry to the Witwatersrand, Orange Free State, Lesotho and the Transkei.<sup>84</sup> The port has resulted in chemical and textile industries, which are dependent on raw --materials or semi-processed materials, being located here.<sup>85</sup> An abundant water supply, inexpensive land and cheap labor has also

been important.<sup>86</sup> Food and drink industries have established themselves in Durban because of the sugar refinery.<sup>87</sup> Industrial growth took off after 1935 and the five most important sectors are textile, footwear, clothing, chemicals and paper.<sup>88</sup>

The number of Indians in manufacturing employment more than doubled between 1925 and 1949, from 5,237 to 13,711. However, this picture must be qualified. Indian employment actually fell relative to white and African employment.<sup>89</sup> Industrial employment was primarily the preserve of males. In 1936, for example, only 3.3% of employees were women.<sup>90</sup> As the following table shows, Indians were concentrated in certain industries:

**TABLE 8** Distribution of Industrial Workers, 1946

Sector	Percentage of Workers
Food	27
Clothing and Textile	26
Leather	11
Furniture	7
Paper and Printing	6

Source: Padayachee et al., *Workers*, p.36

Further, Indians were hampered by the White Labor Policy. The Apprenticeship Act laid down basic requirements for acceptance as apprentices at a time when only whites had adequate access to education. In 1942, for example, there were only 17 Indian apprentices in Durban, 15 in the furniture industry and 2 in the building trade.<sup>91</sup> Only whites were represented on conciliation boards which had been set up by the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act which created the mechanism for wages to be agreed upon by mutual agreement. The Minimum Wage Act of 1925,

which fixed the rate of wages for jobs, resulted in preference being given to white workers.

Legislation, coupled with the prejudice of white employers, denied Indians access to higher paying skilled positions. They established a position as semi-skilled and unskilled industrial operatives where they earned extremely low wages. In the labor hierarchy that was emerging in Durban whites were far better placed than Indians and Africans. Indians were better off than Africans but only marginally so for the period under review. This is reflected in the 1951 per capita income which was £40.02 for Indians, £45.00 for Africans and £282.74 for whites.<sup>92</sup> Whites used race to confine Indians and Africans to lower positions in the hierarchy of class relations. They considered this natural and desirable as it fitted in with the conception that they had about the relative abilities of white, African and Indian workers. According to a 1936 report in The Farmer, an agricultural magazine:

Natives, Asiatics and Europeans are of course employed according to their gifts in ascending scale of intelligence. While the Native, usually a good, honest worker, cheerful and industrious, is necessarily restricted to the lower and rougher forms of work, the Asiatic is, as a rule, capable of performing duties calling for a far greater measure of skill and intelligence, while the positions of responsibility, entailing duties of supervision and organisation, are naturally allocated to the European.<sup>93</sup>

As a result of low pay and threat of unemployment, Indian workers became radicalized and formed or joined trade unions from the mid-1930s in an attempt to improve their economic position. Later, however, as they rose on the labor hierarchy, and were relatively better off than Africans, and were concentrated in certain sectors

of the manufacturing industry, they became conservative and tried to protect and consolidate their position.<sup>94</sup>

### **Traders and Professionals:**

Although the number of wealthy Indians was extremely small, traders occupied an important structural position. When free and passenger Indians began establishing shops in the city center during the 1870s, they could not compete with the established white businesses and built their shops and shacks on swampy land at the northwestern periphery of the white business area.<sup>95</sup> Later, as the Indian and white business areas expanded and impinged, whites used the 1897 Dealer's License Act to restrict Indian traders to this area. Brigadier G Molyneux, the then Licensing Officer, told the 1921 Lange Commission that "a European license is granted almost as a matter of course; whereas the Indian license is refused as a matter of course."<sup>96</sup> About a decade later, Molyneux congratulated himself for having successfully implemented segregation:

As regards licenses, the plain facts are that although vastly more trades and things are licensed than was the case 30 years ago, there is a great decrease in the number of Asiatic traders. Thirty years ago, Asiatic stores extended on both sides of West Street from Greenacres to Toll Gate; there were others opposite McNamees, near Union Street. There were also many in Point Road, Umbilo Road, and at the Point. The whole length of Umgeni Road was Asiatic. Today there are but a few Asiatics in West Street... Umbilo Road is today a European thoroughfare,... a handful near Umgeni, and far fewer in Pine Street and Commercial Road.<sup>97</sup>

Indians had greater access to capital and credit than Africans and dominated trade in the Grey-Victoria streets and Warwick Avenue trading area, which came to

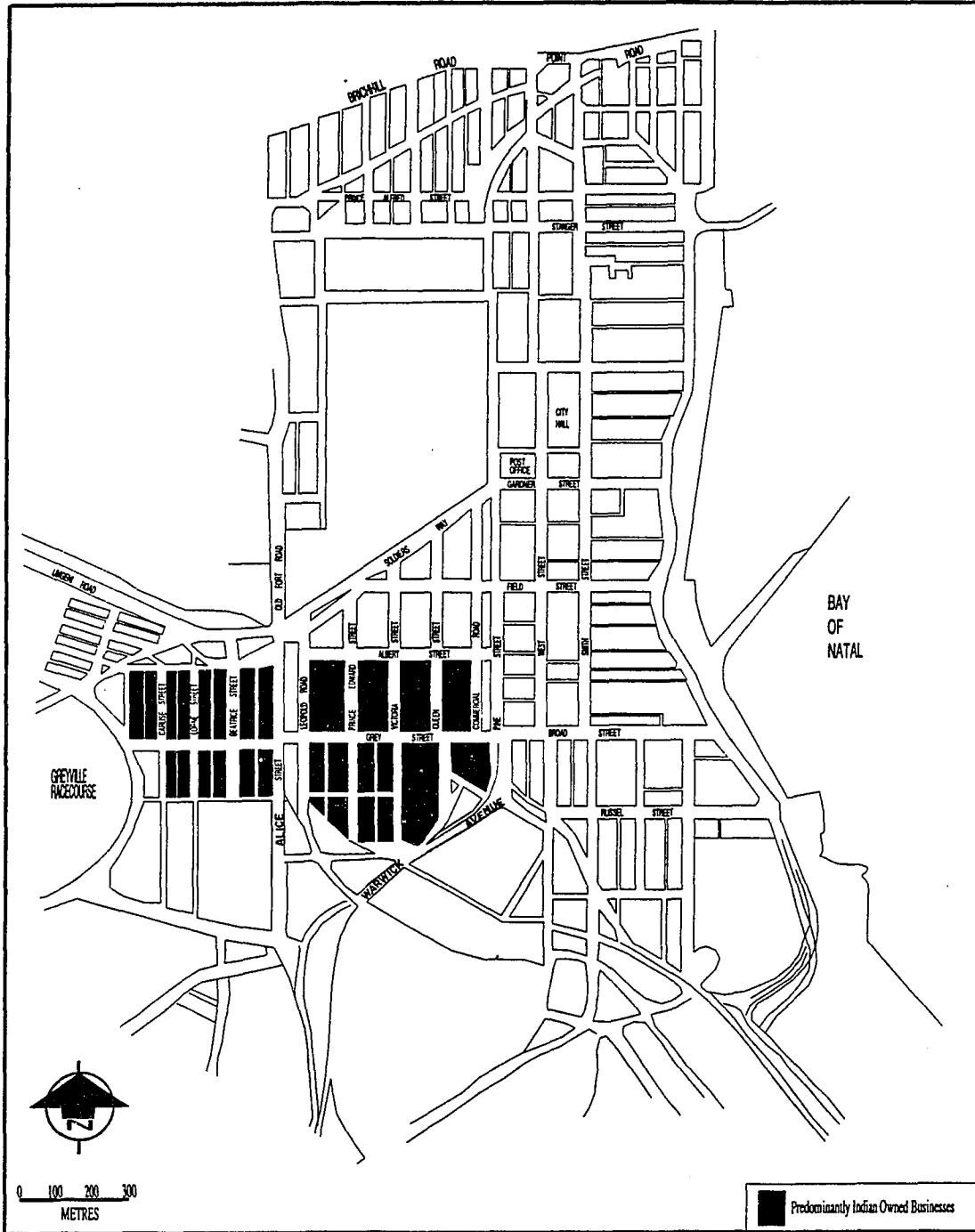
form a segregated non-white business district. (See Map 5 on page 90) Indians also dominated the markets which were located in this area and Indian hawkers had a strong presence on the streets of Durban. While their number was small, as a result of their conspicuousness, African entrepreneurs felt that Indians were responsible for retarding their economic progress while African consumers, obliged to deal with Indian traders, saw the latter as an exploiting class.

The professional class, 70% of which comprised teachers, was very small and subject to some of the same difficulties as workers. In 1941, for example, 45% of teachers earned about £5 per month, which was slightly more than that paid to unskilled workers in the municipality.<sup>98</sup> Such were their conditions that The Guardian commented that "we have seen scandalous conditions among industrial workers, but the condition of Indian teachers has no parallel."<sup>99</sup> Like teachers, other professionals were experiencing declining economic opportunities and shabby living conditions and worked with union leaders to dislodge the moderate political leadership.

### **Unemployment and Poverty:**

During the inter-war years unemployment and low pay resulted in widescale poverty. While the depression was a significant cause, the situation was exacerbated by the White Labor Policy which resulted in a drop in Indian employment in industry, the municipality and railways. For example, 1,600 workers lost their jobs at the coal mines, the Lion Match Factory, in the laundries, printing press and the furniture trade

Map 5: Indian Business District, 1940s



PREA BANWARI: GIS UNIT - DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY - UOW

during 1931, being replaced mainly by unemployed whites.<sup>100</sup> The government offered a subsidy to municipalities to get rid of Indians and the DCC dismissed 49 workers between June and November 1931. The desperate position is reflected in the fact that whereas 633 Indians repatriated during 1930, 1,509 repatriated between February and October 1931.<sup>101</sup> In the absence of state assistance Kurma Reddy, the Agent, advised:

Now is the time for those of our brethren who are blessed with wealth to act.... When an honest attempt is made, we feel sure that help will come to us from unexpected sources and we will rise in the estimation alike of our friends and enemies. Generously respond and we will have the satisfaction to feel that we have aided the authorities in solving the problem of unemployment.<sup>102</sup>

Such advice was of little use to the unemployed who needed material assistance. They therefore took matters into their own hands and, following a mass meeting, over 500 "weary, footsore, and hungry" workers marched to the Agent's house.<sup>103</sup> It is significant that the working class also saw the Agent as their guardian, significant because it suggests that it was not only merchants who were externally oriented and saw India as a protector. This demonstration induced an instant response and the NIC held a mass meeting in September 1931 at which government apathy was criticized. At the end of the meeting, an Unemployment Register was started and the Sir Kurma Reddy Unemployment Fund established.<sup>104</sup> By August over 4,000 workers had registered. The list included tinsmiths, bakers, butchers, bakers, waiters, clerks and teachers. The Agent personally visited merchants and collected almost £450.<sup>105</sup> The Committee initially handed out dry rations but

later arranged a food kitchen which was maintained on donations in kind from "the smaller men." By November an average of 300 men were fed each day at the sport's ground by volunteer workers while women and children, who came "clamouring for food," were given food parcels to take home.<sup>106</sup>

A mass meeting in September 1932 called on the DCC to provide funds to the Relief Committee and to provide relief work for the unemployed.<sup>107</sup> Although the DCC set aside £12,000 in 1932 to assist poor whites, it turned down a similar request by Indians.<sup>108</sup> A deputation consisting of the Agent and the NIC met with the DCC and, in February 1933, after the government offered to subsidize 50% of the cost, the DCC agreed to provide relief work to 300 Indians, provided the work was restricted to Indian areas.<sup>109</sup> Relief workers found it virtually impossible to survive as they were paid a third of that paid to whites. Further, because the work was in outlying "Indian" areas they had to pay train fare from their meager allowance. Although some walked as much as two hours each day to work, they were sent home without pay if more than five minutes late, and dismissed if absent for two days, irrespective of the reason.<sup>110</sup> Relief work barely scratched the surface of unemployment:

My Committee is being inundated each day at the Sport's Grounds by the distressed people clamouring for some relief. We have stopped registering men as the mere filling in of the forms fills in them some hope and they become incessant in their calls for work.<sup>111</sup>

Despite the critical situation, the DCC decided in October 1932 that although it had only employed 247 of the 300 workers that it had originally agreed to employ, it would cease employing any more Indians in order to cut costs.<sup>112</sup> The problem of

unemployment was never adequately addressed and remained a serious problem even after the industrial expansion of Durban from 1935. The list of applications for employment via the government exchanges show that 5,614 Indians applied in 1947.<sup>113</sup> The NIO estimated that 7,000 Indians were unemployed in 1949.<sup>114</sup> This was supported by an independent study by the NIC which further reported that only 400 were provided with unemployment benefits. Even then, the few who collected benefits had to queue up for three to four hours on each Monday to "sign" in and several more hours on Thursday to collect their money. They were treated poorly with one unemployed man complaining that "on Mondays you've had your chips if you haven't found a job. You are bullied about by them but beggars can't be choosers."<sup>115</sup>

Low pay and unemployment manifested itself in extensive poverty which was a pervasive feature of Indian life in Durban. In 1940, for example, C.S. Smith, a visitor to Durban, reflected on Indian poverty in a letter to the Town Clerk:

As a stranger to Durban from overseas, one of the first things that struck me was the appalling conditions of the majority of Indians here, malnourished and housed in hovels, without any sanitation. These people, like the Natives, do all the manual work and menial work of this country; they put money into the pocket of the white man, but he is regardless of their well-being, and seemingly utterly callous to their sufferings. I have been working in South Africa for two years. Just before Xmas I was working at Hulett's in Rosburgh and had to give out the meagre Xmas boxes to the Indians. I have never seen such hopeless, emaciated specimens of humanity. Some were too dazed to say "thank you" and had the apathetical look of the half-starved.<sup>116</sup>

Dr. Goonam, who worked among poor Indians from the mid-1930s,

remembers that "the children were ill-nourished. I could see pinched faces, big potbellies. When they came to my surgery I asked what they ate, ... it was mainly dhal and rice - no meat, no protein at all. It went on - some lived, some died."<sup>117</sup> Such observations are supported by contemporary studies. A 1941 survey found that 36% of Indian families in Clairwood were in debt, 38% barely made ends meet and only 26% were able to save money.<sup>118</sup> The University of Natal reported in 1943/44 that 70.6% of Indians were living below the poverty datum line and that 40% were destitute.<sup>119</sup> A six year study of the clothing industry reported in 1944 that 90% of Indians suffered from malnutrition and 60% from amoebic dysentery.<sup>120</sup> Further, as the population grew younger and the proportion of males decreased, the dependency ratio of Indians increased from 205.9 in 1921 to 260.3 in 1946, at which point it was 167.1 for whites.<sup>121</sup> This placed a tremendous burden on wage earners. Poverty occupied the thoughts of many and was often the subject of social commentary, such as the following anonymous poem:

Ours is a good system of society, isn't it, Daddy?  
I believe so, son.  
Daddy, did you read in the paper that a woman was crushed while trying to get into Curries Fountain for 2lb rice?  
I did, son.  
And that old woman soaked in the drizzle waited for two hours to buy 2lbs or rice?  
Yes, son.  
But, Daddy, you said ours was a good system of society.  
Shut-up, son.  
But Daddy...  
Shut-up, son, I said.<sup>122</sup>

Poverty manifested itself in the diseases which afflicted Indians. For example,

Dr G.H. Gunn, Durban's MOH, reported in 1935 that higher disease and death rates among Indians were due to:

The low standard of living conditions which poverty imposes upon those sections of the population; ... slum housing, overcrowding and defective nutrition combine to create a favourable climate for the spread of disease. If non-European labour is worth employing and indeed it is indispensable - the health of the non-European is worth conserving.<sup>123</sup>

Later reports show that the situation remained much the same. Dr Goonam reported in 1943 that in Clairwood, TB and bronchial asthma, which were rampant, were caused by living in a hollow, while the loose dusty soil of the roads led to infectious diseases. In Cato Manor the clay soil and cement floors caused rheumatism, arthritis and chest infections.<sup>124</sup> The following table shows the extent of diseases of poverty as dysentery, diarrhoea and pneumonia are caused by poor diet, defective sanitation, overcrowding and lack of ventilation.<sup>125</sup>

**TABLE 9** Cause of Adult Deaths, Durban, 1951

Cause of Death	Whites	Indians
Tuberculosis	35	163
Malnutrition	--	30
Broncho pneumonia	26	256
Diarrhoea and Enteritis	9	145
First Year Diseases	51	142

Source: Mayor's Minute, 1951

**TABLE 10** Causes of Infant Deaths, Durban, 1951

Cause of Death	Whites	Indians
Prematurity	0	78
Gastro-enteritis	7	136
Malnutrition	0	24
Pneumonia	6	236
Tuberculosis	3	28
Other	43	151

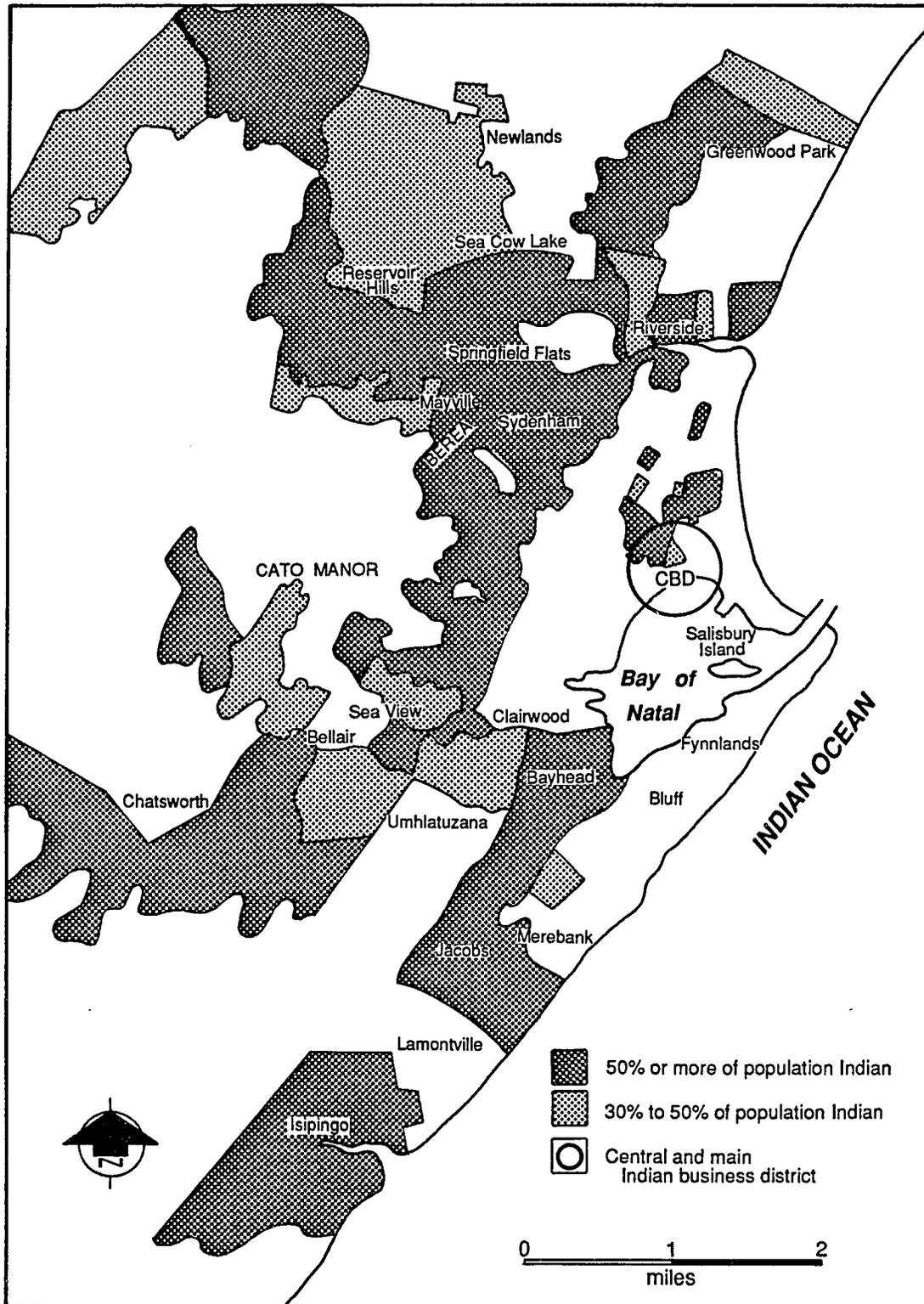
Source: Mayor's Minute, 1951

### **Residential Segregation:**

The most significant observations on Indian housing are that residential areas were segregated according to race (See Map 6 on page 97), the rich and poor lived side by side in many areas, and that conditions were woeful. A number of studies have noted that clearly defined residential areas emerged, either because whites were dissatisfied with the climate or topography, the great disparity in incomes, or the attempts of the local state to implement segregation.<sup>126</sup> In its extensive mid-1940s survey, the NIC commented that "the established communities should remain undisturbed, as there is already a broad separatism of races in existence due to natural affinities and the situation of these communities fulfills direct social and economic needs."<sup>127</sup> In fact, there was 91% residential segregation between Indians and whites in the Old Borough and 88% in the Added Areas in 1951.<sup>128</sup>

The first whites had established residences on the sea-facing slopes of the Berea ridge. Although there was some integration at the bottom of the ridge, the bulk of Indians were settled in a racially exclusive central area. They comprised mainly merchant class Muslims who had their businesses in the area. Indians predominated in

Map 6: Residential Segregation, Durban, c. 1949



Adapted from SAIRR, *The Indian South African*, p. 14 (based on 1951 census)

three zones: a business and commercial area bounded by Pine Street, Albert Street, the railway line and the West Street cemetery; an area around Garnet road and bordering Umgeni Road; and the area between Alice Street and the Greyville race course. They owned most of this land since at least the turn of the century.<sup>129</sup>

As the Berea became crowded, whites established residence along the expanding railway line in Westville, Sea View and Malvern, with the result that Indian residence and market gardens developed in the rate-free just outside the Old Borough. In fact, the majority of Indians, 65.64% in 1911, lived in this area. In comparison, about 80% of whites and Africans lived in the Old Borough.<sup>130</sup> The earliest settlements included Clairwood and Merebank in the south, Sydenham, Overport, Clare Estate, Mayville and Cato Manor in the west, and Riverside in the north.<sup>131</sup> This cheap way of life was necessary to avoid proletarianization. The Borough Boundaries Commission reported that housing was "deplorable in the extreme" as a "considerable Indian population established itself as close to their occupations and markets" outside Durban's boundaries where they eked out a cheap living without municipal control or supervision. Most did not enjoy lighting, sanitation was primitive, and water was obtained from streams, rivers or wells, while roads were extremely poor.<sup>132</sup>

A striking feature of these areas was that the rich and poor lived side by side. Burrows has recorded that high and low income family units lived near each other and that there was no distinction based on income.<sup>133</sup> The Housing Survey noted that "Indian families in all areas are of widely differing economic standards." In Mayville,

"one feature was the mingling of well-constructed houses and small clusters of shacks."<sup>134</sup> Bagwandeem observed that "areas occupied by Indians came to be characterised by a welter of shacks and shanties amid substantial homes."<sup>135</sup> This was significant in that the richer, better educated class took the lead in the drive for improved facilities and amenities and, as will emerge in the following chapters, this increased the respect of the working classes for them.

Living conditions were pathetic, being characterized by overcrowded neighborhoods and high rents. A 1933 report of the DCC noted that 16,100 Indians lived in housing categorized as "unsuitable owing to inferior design and construction, decay and dilapidation, lack of ventilation and lighting and hygienic necessities."<sup>136</sup> Following a visit to some of these areas, the Agent, Sir Maharaj Singh, was moved to remark that "they were like places where the untouchables stayed in India."<sup>137</sup> In 1936, only 20% of Indian-owned houses in Durban were made of brick, stone, or concrete; the remainder were short-lived, wood and iron structures.<sup>138</sup> The MOH reported in 1937 that of 393 houses in Springfield, population 2,408, 276 did not have sanitary accommodation. In general, the report concluded, houses were of scrap iron construction, unlined, unceiled, poorly lit and ventilated, undersized, had earth floors and were "filthy, soot begrimed and vermin-infested." Electricity was not provided because the Council felt that Indians could "not be trusted to use an electric plate properly."<sup>139</sup> The situation did not improve as residents complained in 1946 that they shared one communal tap and, in the absence of toilets, "the primitive and unhygienic system of going into the bushes is being practiced." Other complaints



1920s shack selling hand-made clay pots made by women  
(Local History Museum, Durban)



Typical Indian Slum Shack at  
Springfield Flats, 1944. This  
shack houses 11 people - five  
adults and six children

(The Daily News, 1944)

included the lack of schools, kindergartens, street lights, proper roads and transport.<sup>140</sup> In its extensive 1944 survey, the NIC found that in terms of the criteria laid down by the DCC, 59.58% of dwellings were "unfit for human habitation and must be demolished."<sup>141</sup> A 1943/44 survey found that 3.3 % of whites, 26.7% of Africans and 54.8% of Indians lived in overcrowded dwellings. The situation was so desperate that 1,700 Indians were found living in stables which had previously been used as shelters for animals.<sup>142</sup>

An area by area survey falls outside the scope of this study but the above is the general picture painted by contemporary studies. This cheap way of life was crucial for Indians to reproduce themselves. When the feasibility of extending Durban's boundaries was being debated during the late 1920s most who lived in the Added Areas opposed incorporation. For example, B. Naidoo of the Cato Manor Indian District Farmer's Association told the commission that the residents of the area were not in favor of incorporation because they feared that their rates would be increased to those prevailing in Durban. They were also concerned that most homes would be considered a public menace and destroyed. He felt that higher rates and the cost of home improvements would result in the financial ruin of most of the residents of the district who were market gardeners.<sup>143</sup> A.I. Kajee blamed poverty: the question was "purely an economic one." The mode of living of Indians who had acquired wealth "approximates, if not excel, the white man. The remedy therefore, primarily and fundamentally, lies in the improving of the economic condition of the mass of the Indian people."<sup>144</sup>

Whites were concerned about the health hazard that this kind of living posed for them. This danger was expressed lucidly by Councillor Kemp in 1924:<sup>145</sup>

The Asiatic population, ... living as they do in dirty, dilapidated, tin huts, without adequate means of ventilation and light, and huddled together regardless of air, space or any other sanitary conditions, are a great menace to the Public Health of Durban. The numerous houses and yards unfit for human habitation, the narrowness and bad condition of the streets, and houses, or groups of houses, together with the want of ventilation and proper conveniences, as well as other sanitary defects are dangerous and injurious to the health of the inhabitants both of the area and its vicinity.... As this class of the community mingle daily as food vendors and servants with the rest of the community, they are a great and constant menace to the health of Durban generally.

Although, because of its racist attitude, the DCC did not provide housing, it was concerned about the consequences of large numbers living in unsatisfactory conditions on Durban's periphery, hence its decision to extend the boundary in 1932. The Borough Boundaries Commission noted that a "black belt" comprising Indians and Africans, living in huts and shanties without proper sanitation, had grown "within a stone's throw of some of the best residential areas." It was necessary to take control of these areas "to protect the Borough itself from impending danger."<sup>146</sup>

Another concern was racial intermingling. Dr S.J. Clegg, MOH, told a Public Health Congress in 1928 that:

In certain areas of Durban, Asians and Natives live alongside Europeans intermingling with them closely in various forms. Both races have admittedly lower ideas of hygiene and sanitation and live under conditions which would not be tolerated for a European. It is dangerous to view this as the natural order of things.<sup>147</sup>

This theme was taken up in 1937 by A.H. Eaton, United Party MP, who told a public meeting that in Sea Cow Lake, parts of Overport, and in the vicinity of Sydenham Road he saw "Europeans living cheek by jowl with natives and Indians," while children of different races were playing together. He was adamant that: "We will see these "black spots" cleaned out. We cannot hold up our heads until they are cleared."<sup>148</sup>

For the DCC, the only solution was segregation, which it did all in its power to achieve. The racist attitude of the DCC is reflected in its response when the Administrator of Natal enquired whether land was available for Indian housing in Durban. A 1923 report noted that the 200 acres in Umgeni Valley could not be used because "it contains some of the finest sea and inland views.... The occupation by Indians would depreciate the rest of the Umgeni Valley lands." Giving land to Indians in Stellawood "would completely ruin the whole lay-out of this very fine district." Land in Congella and Umbilo district "is reserved for industrial purposes." One and half acres was available but it was felt that:

To recommend an area of one and half acres for Indian residential occupation would be farcical. I, therefore, summarise the whole position by stating that there is no land within the Borough which may be set aside for Indian occupation.<sup>149</sup>

The Council took steps to segregate Indians. The Durban Alienation Ordinance No. 14 of 1922 empowered the DCC to set aside different areas for Indians and whites when selling unalienated land.<sup>150</sup> As the NIC later reported, this was used to prevent Indians from purchasing land in newly opened "white" areas such as

Morningside and Glenwood.<sup>151</sup> In another incident, when a decision was taken in 1924 to spend £10,000 on developing land for housing, Councillor Kemp requested a clause "to prevent some wealthy Arabs from Grey Street bidding higher prices than Europeans and thus spoiling the property." When Councillor Knight argued that Indians were in need of land, the reply was that there was plenty available in India.<sup>152</sup>

In terms of the 1923 Public Health Ordinance each district was to appoint a committee, comprising of local residents, to monitor public health. In a letter to the Administrator of Natal the NIC complained that Health Boards levied extremely high rates and when the poor could not afford these, dwellings were sold to recover rates. The letter concluded: "there is just reason to believe that the motive is no other than to make it intolerable for Indians to live in these Areas and thus oust them."<sup>153</sup> Only whites were represented on these Boards, although there were twice as many Indians as whites in the Added Areas.<sup>154</sup> According to Indian Opinion the Boards were neither elected nor accountable and were anti-Indian.<sup>155</sup>

The hand of the DCC was strengthened with the passing of the Slums Bill in 1934 which gave it the authority to clear areas considered to be slums. In fact, the DCC went beyond the provisions of the law when it resolved that buildings should be condemned "from the point of view of unsightliness as well as from the Public Health standpoint."<sup>156</sup> When evicted, Indians were to receive no more than 30% of the municipal valuation of these properties.<sup>157</sup> It was ludicrous to enforce health regulations when no new houses were being provided and the Act was used to

facilitate segregation. Indians warned the government that although the Bill had worthy objectives it would be used unfairly to enforce residential segregation and acquire land for industrial purposes, at the expense of working class Indians.<sup>158</sup>

There were numerous instances of this. For example, 750 Indians were evicted from 16 acres of land in Mayville even though they had lived there for over 30 years and not all the homes were considered "slum." The MOH recommended the site because it "presents a non-European salient penetrating into a good class European residential area. I recommend the sight be utilised for European housing and recreational purposes."<sup>159</sup> By November 1935, 1,600 Indians had been thrown out of 675 rooms without any alternative housing and most became shack dwellers.<sup>160</sup> The SAIC informed the government that the DCC was "actuated by racial consideration" and using the Slums Act unfairly to fulfil its desire to get rid of the "black belt." It was further argued that if the DCC was serious about eliminating slums it would have improved those localities which had been declared slums as was done with whites.<sup>161</sup> Such objections served no purpose as evictions continued. At Virginia Estate eviction notices were served as the area "possesses all the features desirable and essential for an attractive European housing scheme."<sup>162</sup> To move people from Bell Street, the DCC removed the roofs and doors of the homes so that the occupants had to move, even though no provision had been made to re-house them.<sup>163</sup>

In 1941 the DCC applied to the Minister of Public Health for permission to expropriate 1,095 acres of land owned by Indians for over 50 years in Riverside,

Merebank, Sydenham, and Springfield. At the same time land was set aside in other areas for them, thus lending credence to the argument that expropriation was designed to relegate Indians to the outermost parts of the city.<sup>164</sup> Also of interest is the fact that the plight of the working class was taken up by organizations like the NIC, NIA, Merebank Indian Ratepayers' Association, Riverside-Briardene Indian Ratepayers' Association, Riverside Indian Slums Committee, Springfield Indian Housing Tenants Association and so on. The fact that these bodies comprised of Indians only, and included the merchant and educated classes further served to promote communal feelings. At a protest meeting attended by over 2,000, Dr Goonam stated that to fight expropriation Indians "have only one weapon, and that is unity."<sup>165</sup>

The DCC did virtually nothing for Indian housing. In terms of the "upliftment clause" of the Cape Town Agreement, the Thornton Commission had been appointed to investigate the sanitary and housing conditions in Durban. The Commission reported in 1928 that "whereas the Corporation has done a great deal for the better housing of Europeans, little or nothing has been done for the Indian population" and got the Union Government to set £50,000 for the DCC to use for Indian housing.<sup>166</sup> The DCC refused to use this money for almost a decade. It was only when Malan, the Minister of Interior, threatened to withdraw the subsidy that the DCC agreed in December 1937 to build 50 homes in Cato Manor, a site which had been recommended by the City Estates Manager because it was "well clear of the Borough boundary and ... gradual segregation of the Indians from the Borough can be arrived at."<sup>167</sup> This is a clear indication that segregation was the guiding principle in

housing. The reluctance to build homes for Indians was later justified on the grounds that to spend money on them "would have been to spend money on an alien population, a large but unknown proportion of which was likely at any time, to be removed to their own country."<sup>168</sup>

It was this attitude which prompted one newspaper to remark that while the DCC spent £100,000 for a concert hall for whites, "it has yet to provide a decent latrine for Durban's 90,000 Indians."<sup>169</sup> Between 1939 and 1941 the DCC only built 175 homes in Springfield and Cato Manor.<sup>170</sup> This was totally inadequate and the waiting list was so long that applications were closed in 1947. A May 1943 report by the MOH estimated that to meet its immediate housing shortage, Durban needed 1,252 homes for whites, 6,422 for Africans and 12,386 for Indians.<sup>171</sup> The housing question will be taken up in chapter five for, as Bagwandeem points out, in the 1940s land "became the epicentre of the maelstrom of Indian politics in South Africa."<sup>172</sup> For present purposes we need to note that residential segregation was a fact of life in Durban long before the Group Areas Act.

### **Conclusion:**

In the two decades which followed Gandhi's departure from South Africa in 1914 the economic situation of Indians was radically transformed. Indians arrived in the city earlier than Africans and secured better employment, established stable families and formed impressive community networks. As a result, prior to the 1940s, they dominated the urban economy in comparison to Africans who comprised a

largely male, migrant group with no fixed link to the city. Notwithstanding this, there was widespread unemployment and poverty among Indians. This, coupled with the fact that until the 1940s the State did not provide meaningful social welfare assistance to the destitute and indigent, or see to the provision of housing, education and other facilities, meant that for the majority the urban experience was precarious.

This was an important juncture for Indians. In the urban milieu they were confronted with new social and material challenges and choices of group membership. This experience created a climate and an opportunity for workers to think along class lines and pursue their goals in combination with white and African workers. However, identities are not shaped by work experience alone. In order to ascertain a more complete picture, cognizance must be taken of the world outside the workplace. The following two chapters will examine the consequences and impact of the fact that Durban was a racial city dominated by cross-class segregated neighborhoods with most aspects of social life centering around the racial group.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **COMMUNITY WELFARE, EDUCATION AND SPORTS INSTITUTIONS**

An important element of Indian life in Durban was the establishment of welfare and service institutions to attend to the many problems which assailed them. Educational bodies to facilitate their social and economic progress and sporting associations which attempted to productively occupy their leisure time were also established. Our analysis of these must be located within the context of the abject poverty and miserable conditions in which the majority lived, and the failure of the state to provide assistance. Merchants contributed considerable sums of money for projects which benefited all classes, including the poor. The leadership comprised of persons from different class, religious and ethnic backgrounds, showing that these were not critical in shaping relations. As a result of their involvement in these undertakings, leaders were able to assume positions of social dominance and influence. The same individuals feature regularly in political, social, religious, educational, and sporting bodies, which is not surprising since ideas like 'civilization' and 'progress' were important to them. Their attempt to mold the working class in this image led to conflict, and their right to speak for the 'community' was challenged.

#### **Welfare Organizations**

As a result of the government's indifferent attitude welfare work was carried out mainly by private agencies administered by Indians. In examining the formation of

welfare bodies, what stands out is that when appeals were made for funds, this was done on the basis that Indians constituted a "nation" and that to contribute to such projects was "patriotic." Indians were represented as belonging to "one people" even though they did not constitute one cultural or class identity. The following exhortation in 1922 is typical of this attitude:

For a nation that wishes to be independent it is the primary duty of the rich to look after the needs of the poor. If they cannot utilise even a meagre portion of their riches for the benefit of their poor and have no care for them, that nation cannot call herself a nation and does not deserve freedom. It would be a worthy act on the part of the wealthy members of our community if they were to come forward and give their full support ... to institutions for the sole benefit of Indians, and our community, is therefore the more bound to support it. We can only obtain just and fair conditions by being generous to our own flesh and blood. Let us, to put it another way, be patriotic.<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest organizations was the Aryan Benevolent Home (ABH) which was opened in 1921 by the Arya Yuvuk Sabha (AYS), a religious group established in 1914 to preserve and extend Vedic culture. The AYS was afraid that Indians would be attracted to Christianity because of their poverty and sought to provide basic necessities such as food, clean water and medical services.<sup>2</sup> Nyanah Rajh, a Hindu priest, S.L. Singh, a businessman, and S.D. Geriou, president of the AYS, formed a committee and organized dramatic plays to raise money, with AYS members performing without reimbursement. Once sufficient money had been collected, a property was purchased in Mayville and the Home officially opened in May 1921.<sup>3</sup>

The Home depended on stallholders and squatters at the Indian Market, who

donated fruits and vegetables, and on the staging of plays, films and street collections to raise money.<sup>4</sup> From 1924 the ABH was given an annual grant of £50 by the government. By 1929, when the ABH celebrated its eight anniversary, it housed 280 inmates and was running a school with an enrollment of 200.<sup>5</sup> Although the ABH was founded by Hindus and run with strong adherence to Hindu rituals, non-Hindus helped in the running of the Home. For example A.I. Kajee, a Muslim, collected £229 for building the school.<sup>6</sup> This is just one example of cooperation across religious lines. In this regard, the Administrator of Natal, Mr Plowman, remarked in 1920 that among Indians there "was a strong disposition to look after the needs of their own people.... It was well known that the Indians had a large number of castes and distinctions and, while in their everyday life these might obtrude, they all combine in works of charity and philanthropy."<sup>7</sup>

The following examples support this claim. When an influenza epidemic struck Durban in 1918, many Indians were killed and a large number of children rendered orphans. Reverend Lucas of the Wesleyan Institute raised £300 from merchants through a house-to-house collection and rented a cottage to take care of orphans. Parsee Rusomjee subsequently donated £1,500 to build a permanent home and, following additional contributions from other merchants, the Parsee Rustomjee Home was officially opened on 31 December 1920.<sup>8</sup> Shortly thereafter Parsee Rustomjee donated £1,500 to the Roman Catholic Indian Mission for another orphanage for Indian boys. That religious divisions were secondary is evident in the fact that at the opening ceremony a Muslim, Omar Amod Jhaveri, spoke on behalf of the main donor

Parsee Rustomjee. Although Indians were in conflict with the government, the Mayor, Administrator of Natal, and other prominent whites were always guests of honor at opening ceremonies and all functions concluded with the singing of the national anthem.<sup>9</sup>

Muslims led by A.I. Kajee formed the Muslim Darul Yatama Wal Masakeen [Muslim Home for Orphans and Destitutes] in 1934 to prevent indigency and maladjustment by providing secular and religious education, and to enable the needy to receive assistance at all times.<sup>10</sup> The Institution occupied a wood and iron cottage in Westville donated by the E.M. Paruk family. Hajee M.A. Motala who arrived from India in 1903, started out as a small retailer but was one of the richest merchants by the time of his death in 1957. In 1922 he founded a school for the children of employees of the Durban Corporation. In 1939 he established the M.A. Motala Boys Hostel near Pinetown for delinquent boys between the ages of 12 and 18. He was also the second largest contributor to the Sastri College and donated land to the Natal Indian Blind Society in 1945 for the building of a Home and Vocational Training Centre.<sup>11</sup>

In the absence of government involvement it was also left to Indians to take care of their medical requirements. Prior to 1915 the only hospital available to them was the government-run Depot Hospital where they were treated very shoddily: "We have known people who have shuddered at the very name of that hospital and they have expressed their willingness to die rather than be removed there."<sup>12</sup> Indians were encouraged to support the St. Aidans Hospital which was established in 1915. When

this hospital was extended in 1922, Indian Opinion argued that for a "nation" that wishes to be "independent it is the primary duty of the rich to look after the poor ... otherwise that nation cannot call herself a nation and does not deserve her freedom. This institution is for the sole benefit of Indians, and our community is therefore bound to support it."<sup>13</sup> The use of "nation" and "community" reflect the evolving notion of a common identity. An extension in 1937, which resulted in the number of beds increasing from from 15 to 63, was funded by the R.K. Khan Trust, the Lockhat Family, V.N Naik and V.L. Pather.<sup>14</sup> A further extension in 1949 cost £26,000 of which the government provided £5,000; the balance was provided by Indian donors such as the Indian Medical Services Trust, which had been formed by doctors in 1947 to provide medical services for the Indian community, as well as the donors listed above.<sup>15</sup>

The R.K. Khan Hospital and Dispensary Trust, which also held clinics at Somtseu Road, Clairwood and Sea Cow Lake from the mid-1930s treated a large number of patients annually. In 1943, for example, 43,917 Indians were given free treatment.<sup>16</sup> This was made possible by the philanthropic gesture of Advocate R.K. Khan who was born in Bombay in 1874, educated in England and brought to South Africa by Gandhi.<sup>17</sup> During his stay there he acted as leader of the Ambulance Corps during the Anglo-Boer war, was joint-secretary of the NIC for many years until his death in 1932, president of the Orient Club, trustee in educational and Charity Trusts created by Parsee Rustomjee, and a generous contributor to various educational projects.<sup>18</sup> His major contribution lay in his bequeathing £40,000 for establishing

hospitals and dispensaries for Indians.<sup>19</sup> The clinics subsequently evolved into a fully-fledged hospital which was opened in Chatsworth in 1969 with facilities for training doctors and nurses, as well as conducting medical research. The following plea from Dr Goonam, who was part of the radical NIC which advocated a non-racial identity, shows the depth of communal thinking:

This project is vitally and urgently necessary for the future health and welfare of our people.... We are confident that the Indian public is alive and conscious of the lamentable state of affairs existing in Natal. The largest population of Indians reside in and around Durban and the Indians should rightly have a place of their own, where they could go with pride and courage.... We are confident that the public will rise to the occasion as they have always done in the past, when Indians have given willingly and freely to all purposes that meant their welfare and progress.<sup>20</sup>

The Durban Indian Child Welfare Society, which was formed in August 1927 by Sastri with Mrs S. Moodley as chairperson, had as its objectives to protect the interests and well being of Indian children, to promote their physical and moral welfare, and to investigate and deal with poverty, neglect, and mental deficiency amongst children.<sup>21</sup> The other members of the committee included Mrs V. Lawrence, Mrs P.R. Pather, Mrs Godfrey and Mrs M. Gandhi whose husbands were all members of the conservative NIC. Parsee Rustomjee was elected president while prominent moderate politicians like A.I. Kajee and A. Christopher had close links with the body. They greatly appreciated the few whites who attended meetings: "We are very grateful to our European friends for their kind interest and we would like to impress upon them that they will not find Indians backward in repaying even the smallest act of generosity shown to them by the ruling class."<sup>22</sup>

Agents and their wives were very concerned about the backwardness of Indian women and saw education as the key to their progress. Sir Kurma Reddy told a gathering of prominent Indians that unless women were educated Indians would not be able to "maintain a western standard of civilisation.... The small number of Indian girls at school is a disgrace for which we shall have to suffer later on.... [We] will fall far behind in the march of civilisation."<sup>23</sup> Lady Maharaj Singh, wife of an Agent, formed the Indian Women's Association in 1933 to teach women "useful knowledge" such as first aid and home nursing and to foster contact with whites: "I want to create contacts between European and Indian women to help the latter to become an asset to the country."<sup>24</sup> She hoped that through this contact, Indian women would learn the values of modern civilization and model their families along respectable white middle class lines. The officials of the Association, once again, included the women from the families of prominent politicians: Mrs M Gandhi, Mrs H. Jhavary, Mrs A. Christopher and Mrs Royeppen.<sup>25</sup> The mayoress and other prominent white women were invited to all meetings.<sup>26</sup> From its AGM in 1936 we find that Councillor Edith Benson was chairwoman and that the mayoress of Durban, Mrs George Cyrns, presided.<sup>27</sup> In Durban the IWA had group leaders in various areas who were responsible for social welfare, house hygiene and general improvement.<sup>28</sup>

The Indian Women's Reading and Educational Circle was started in February 1935. Members met once a month at the home of one the members of the IWA. It was run by a white, Alice Acutt. In addition to talks on the achievements of Helen Keller and Florence Nightingale, guest speakers spoke on things like "Nursing,"

"Greece" and "Life of Women in America." Such gatherings always ended with tea and cakes and a rendering of the national anthem.<sup>29</sup> Members were advised not to be distracted by politics. At the 1939 AGM, it was pointed out that "while our minds are made so restless by political events, we cannot think of social service work!"<sup>30</sup>

When Rama Rau was Agent, his wife felt that the lack of education of women and their non-involvement in community affairs diminished the status of Indians in the estimation of whites. For her, it was only through the progress of women in "education, social and domestic affairs that ultimately the stigma of inferiority can be erased."<sup>31</sup> She formed the Indian Women's Club in 1939:

In short, the Club will function in much the same way as those of Europeans. The backwardness of Indian women in South Africa has repeatedly been commented on by high authorities.... The important practical value of the scheme from the point of view of helping to remove common grounds of complaint against the Indian community cannot be overestimated.... A number of European ladies interested in social welfare have already intimated their desire to help.<sup>32</sup>

On the whole, middle class women stood apart from men. When Lord Clarendon, the Governor-General, visited Durban in 1934 he told Indians: "I would, however, express one regret, and that is that I have not had the pleasure of meeting some of the wives of the prominent members of the community."<sup>33</sup> While their involvement in associations like the IWA meant that for the first time women were meeting other women, discussing tactics and procedure, and taking important decisions, their concerns were still confined to children and welfare which, in a sense, was a continuation of the functions that they fulfilled within the family. As

Sylvia Lawrence noted, Indian society was highly gendered: "By and large, their place was in the home. Most women got in touch with community affairs via temples, churches, etc. where they organised rituals and ceremonies."<sup>34</sup> The situation was different for working class women who were forced to work by economic circumstances.

The Indian Women's Association was castigated by Goonam Naidoo for its conservative nature:

They do nothing but attend receptions and tea parties. If this is what they call working for the poor, then they have certainly done something! You, unfortunately, do not belong to the working class. Take a walk any day across the Dorpsruit and see the condition of your fellow women and men, and just ask yourself if you have done your duty.... You and the other handful of women who actually run the association are too much on the aristocratic side.<sup>35</sup>

Convinced that "the mere drinking of tea in one's home will not uplift the Indian women," she formed the Indian Women's League in 1938, arguing that "there is much work that can be done by our educated women. The work yearns for voluntary workers amongst Indian women."<sup>36</sup> When Dr Goonam approached an official of the NIC she was told that Indian women "were not sufficiently advanced" to be represented on the organization.<sup>37</sup> It was only after radicals took over that Dr Goonam, Dr Ansuniyah Singh, Janaki Naidoo and Miss Rathmoney were elected to the NIC committee.<sup>38</sup>

The Indian Social Service Committee was another prominent body. Its origins date back to the observations of the Government of India Deputation during the

Round Table Conference. The Deputation felt that the poor sanitary habits of Indians was an important stumbling block to better relations with whites. They felt that this was due to ignorance or poverty and that the solution lay in proper education, sanitation and a "comprehensive and sympathetic" system of town planning.<sup>39</sup> Many middle class Indians agreed with this observation. The Indian Opinion, for example, wondered:

Do we, the Indian community in South Africa, always observe this good habit (cleanliness)? Are we, in this regard, always "good South Africans"?... One day I said in fun to a friend in Durban: "I believe I could settle the Indian question of Natal in a month's time! I would form a white wash and paint Brigade, and would go round the whole of Natal white washing and painting Indian houses, both outside and inside. That would settle the Natal Indian question. Of course I said this in fun, but there was a great deal of truth behind the exaggeration."<sup>40</sup>

Following a lecture by Sastri, in which he said that there were fields other than politics to which Indians needed to pay attention, V. Lawrence formed the Indian Social Services Committee (ISSC) under the aegis of the NIC.<sup>41</sup> The aims of the committee were "to improve the sanitary and housing conditions of the poorer classes of our community," to provide free medicines for the poor and destitute and to investigate and deal with causes of poverty.<sup>42</sup> V. Lawrence was a Catholic born in Madras. He qualified as a teacher and came to Natal to work for Gandhi. In 1901 he married Josephine Gabriel, whose mother, Amonee, had come to South Africa as an indentured worker. It was their strong desire to escape the "coolie" image which resulted in the Lawrences' giving all ten of their children a sound education and making them proficient in western musical instruments like the piano, violin or

saxophone.<sup>43</sup>

Lawrence epitomized the western educated Indian. His achievements are monumental. He received a medal from Queen Victoria for being part of the Ambulance Corps during the Anglo-Boer War, the King's Coronation Medal for serving in World War I, and the South African War Medal for World War II.<sup>44</sup> At one time or another he was chairman of the Durban and District Indian Educational Advisory Committee; president of the Natal Indian Football Association; president of the Durban Indian Sports Ground Association; vice-president of the NIC; acting-chairman of the SAIC; vice-chairman of the Indo-European Council; member of the SAIRR; foundation member of the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society; president of the Catholic Indian Young Men's Society and a host of other organizations.<sup>45</sup>

The projects of the ISSC were seen as a crucial first step toward assimilation with whites. Members of the ISSC visited private homes, the Indian Market, cinemas, restaurants and meat stalls to teach hygiene. They translated pamphlets written by the MOH into Indian languages. The ISSC also dispensed medicines to the needy, held an annual health week, arranged soup kitchens for children, paid burial expenses for the needy, and helped people get exemption from personal tax.<sup>46</sup> The ISSC was determined to foster good relations with whites. At public meetings the chairman thanked "European guests for their presence which was proof of their sympathy and interest in our work." The Mayor was garlanded at all annual meetings and the Mayoress presented with a bouquet.<sup>47</sup> The respective Agents' also placed great emphasis on contact with whites. Speaking to whites at the Durban Rotary Club,

Kunwar Maharaj Singh said:

Very few of the Indians know you individually, they only know you as a community and they are apt to regard it as a hostile community. If only they would know you as individuals, as I have known Europeans from the time of my youth, I am perfectly convinced that a great deal of this suspicion and mistrust will, if not disappear, at any rate diminish.... I should be the first to criticise the faults and defects in my own community. I know that the way they live is not altogether as sanitary as you and I would desire; I know that in certain aspects of business morality there is room for improvement. But remember that a community which has no voice and no vote ... is apt to degenerate.<sup>48</sup>

Our focus on organizations established by the middle classes is not meant to imply that working class Indians were passive and powerless recipients of such projects. They also undertook independent projects for their advancement. A good example is the Oriental Benefit Association which was formed by municipal workers at the Magazine Barracks in 1931 with the aim of encouraging thrift among members, acquiring and selling properties on a mutual basis, and providing loans to members.<sup>49</sup> As a result of monthly contributions by members the OBA had over £400 on hand by June 1935 and attempted to lease land within the barracks to open a store to supply essentials cheaply.<sup>50</sup> However, bodies like the OBA remained parochial and confined to specific areas because of the limited resources of their founders.

Organizations formed by the middle classes were important because they affected a greater number of Indians and also because of the impact that they had on community formation. In the course of interviews with working class Indians who lived during the 1930s and 1940s, most recall merchants affectionately and none

spoke in terms of the exploitative class position of merchants. For example Mr F.B.M., who worked for Spices Stationary in Jacobs during the late 1920s, at a time when Indians could not join unions, remarked that A.I. Kajee got him into a union: "He was instrumental in us getting into the typographical union. Because of the White Labor Policy we were not qualified and could not join the union but Kajee got us an exemption. I joined in 1929. Mr Kajee fought for us. He was a bold speaker. He started small but he did this and that and became a very big merchant but he never forgot us."<sup>51</sup>

The same individuals were involved in a wide number of organizations and their activities cut across religious and ethnic lines. Hajee Dawood Mohamed, for example, was secretary of the NIC, founder member of the Natal British Muslim League, trustee of the West Street Mosque, member of the Rice Advisory Committee, as well as the 1917 Floods Committee. Although a Muslim, when he died all businesses in Durban, including the Indian Market, where it was mainly Hindus who owned stalls, closed as a mark of respect for his contribution to the community. An obituary in a Hindu newspaper pointed out that "his heart ever pulsated for the welfare of the entire Indian community. He was a truly and thoroughly patriotic man; ... his genuinely ardent patriotic zeal to lift up his compatriots ever commenced him to the community."<sup>52</sup> When M.E. Lakhi died, Sorabjee Rustomjee noted in his eulogy that "he knew no communalism. He was first an Indian and always an Indian.... The vast concourse of Muslim, Hindu, Parsee, and Christian Indians that followed the funeral was a striking testimony to the esteem and respect that he was

held by all.<sup>53</sup>

Due to the considerable extent of poverty and lack of government assistance, numerous other bodies were formed. The Durban Indian Child Welfare Society, Durban Blind Society and Durban Indian Benevolent Society are a few such societies. In fact, Gardener has estimated that 44 Indian organizations were registered by 1950 under the Welfare Organizations Act.<sup>54</sup> But as Drage and Hall point out, even this was insufficient: "Indians were unable to look after themselves as there were much fewer rich Indians than rich Europeans and they faced a far greater volume of poverty and social need."<sup>55</sup>

## **EDUCATION**

The provision of facilities for their educational advancement was virtually an obsession for Indians. When Professor Parmanand of Lahore University visited in 1905 he warned that "there is no earthly use in giving birth to children and leaving them to grope in darkness and superstition." These sentiments were expressed at the home of a muslim merchant Hassim Juma and others in attendance included muslims and christians like Abdul Kadir, Dawood Mahomed and H.L. Paul.<sup>56</sup> Gandhi, who felt that "if the Government does nothing for our education, the responsibility of the Indian community becomes all the greater," suggested that the rich build schools and supply equipment for the working class, the educated place their training at the disposal of the community "all but free of charge" and parents "push" their children to excel. This was imperative for "we cannot find a single period in history when an

uneducated people has become prosperous."<sup>57</sup> Ordinary Indians expressed similar sentiments. "May Street Resident", for example, urged that a public fund be established to build schools since talking to the authorities was like talking to "brickwalls"; "it is our bounden duty to put the shoulder to the wheels and help ourselves."<sup>58</sup>

Personal and communal upliftment were deemed inseparable. The wealthy were encouraged to recognize the common plight of all and make interest in the community a greater duty than individual concerns. The following plea from the Indian Opinion is a typical middle class exhortation:

The best way to combat all prejudice and race hatred is to raise ourselves by educating our children. We can only obtain just and fair conditions by being generous to our own flesh and blood. Let us, to put it another way, be patriotic. Money spent on schools or hostels for students will be well spent.... In spite of a rather dark cloud at present hanging over us, there is hope for the future. That hope can only rest in our willingness to put education before business, culture before wealth and luxury.... Let us then be up and doing in this first of all things - Education!<sup>59</sup>

For the first few decades after the arrival of indentured Indians, neither the Government nor employers made any provision for education. The first schools, which were established by missions from around 1880, were handicapped by a shortage of funds and facilities, poor attendance, language difficulties and a dearth of capable teachers.<sup>60</sup> In some cases Indians played a prominent role in establishing schools. In Newlands, the Church of England opened a school when it was presented with a petition by 100 residents from the area. Mr Muruguppa Govinder erected the building himself on his own property.<sup>61</sup> At Cato Manor Aach Naidoo built a school

under the auspices of the Church of England.<sup>62</sup> V. Lawrence was largely responsible for collecting £800 to pay for the school opened by the Roman Catholic Church in Durban.<sup>63</sup> In Malvern the mission opened a school "at the request of the residents of the district."<sup>64</sup> On the whole, however, most parents were reluctant to send their children to mission schools because they feared proselytization. J.S. Done, an Indian Christian teacher, pointed out that Indians objected to their children being taught "the Christian faith and doctrine. The schools should concern themselves with the education of the rising generation and leave the part of Christianity to the missionaries."<sup>65</sup> By 1920 missions realized that education was not leading to evangelization and lost much of their earlier zeal.

The first Higher Grade Government school, which allowed Indians to go as far as grade nine, was only established in 1899. When the government wanted to open the school to "all Coloured children" in 1905 parents handed a petition, dated 29 September 1905, to the chief magistrate to protest this "unjust" decision. They argued that the school was opened for Indians, hence the "Indian" in its name and considered it only fair that "British Indians should have in the largest town in the Colony a school reserved for them." Mixing should be avoided because of "practical serious objection" and "religious sentiment."<sup>66</sup> The same thing happened many years later when the Richmond Indian Girls School refused entry to Coloured girls.<sup>67</sup>

The 1909 Natal Education Commission noted that the Government was seriously lagging in providing schools for Indians whose "contributions to the revenue entitle them as our fellow subjects to elementary education at least."<sup>68</sup> In the absence

of government interest it was left to merchants and educated Indians to provide facilities for education. In August 1911 they formed the Durban Indian Educational Institute which provided education beyond grade nine. The main driving force was H.L. Paul, a teacher, while merchants like Abdul Kadir, Ismail Gora and S. Emamally provided the funding.<sup>69</sup> By 1914 this Institute had prepared 108 students for the Cape University Junior Certificate examination. The Durban and District Indian Educational Committee was formed in 1918 to "secure education for Indians in the Province not inferior to that provided for other sections." H.L. Paul, a Christian, was president; M.C. Anglia, a Muslim, and B.A. Meghraj, a Hindu, were vice-presidents.<sup>70</sup>

Working class parents saw education as a means to achieve economic progress and escape poverty. Most informants point out that their parents, in most cases the mother, placed tremendous value on education and wanted their children to achieve what they could not. If the family was very poor one member usually studied while others worked to finance the education. Parents stressed that self-improvement could only be achieved through education which was seen as the key to material wealth, community respect and status in society.<sup>71</sup>

Merchants played a vital role in making facilities available for education. For example, when the prominent merchant Abdul Kadir was leaving for India in 1906, R.C. Naidoo of the Higher Grade Old Boy's Association read the following address:

Since the establishment of the school in 1899, you have been closely identified with us, and we can bear testimony to the keen interest and liberality you have displayed in its welfare and progress. You have been generous in more ways

than one, giving so freely with your purse and thus assisting us in both education and sports. The education required for our boys and girls could not sufficiently advance and prosper without also the support and co-operation of the merchants.<sup>72</sup>

There was continuity in this trend. When working class parents from the Magazine Barracks complained in 1941 that there was no place for 300 children at the existing school, A.I. Kajee offered to provide two-thirds of the cost of a school from the Moosa Hajee Charitable Trust provided the DCC made land available.<sup>73</sup> The same Trust built the Fannin Government-Aided School in Wyebank in 1941 on land donated by the M.A. Motala Trust. In his speech at the opening of the school, Abdulla Moosa, a trustee, pointed out that this was the second school built by the Trust and that whenever a request was made "we will do our best to answer the call." A.I. Kajee stated that merchants did not see education as "merely a sort of learning; its greatest task was to abolish poverty." M. E. Lakhi donated desks and Ismail Jooma cupboards for the school which was for working class children of all religious persuasions. Hindus and Christians like V. Lawrence and R. Naidoo were at the opening ceremony and over 300 messages of goodwill were received from Indians from all over South Africa.<sup>74</sup>

Middle class Indians saw important benefits in education. For Indian Opinion education could make the "the different Indian races inhabiting South Africa think corporately ... [by] training the children, so that by reason of their power of intellect, they may remove those prejudices which today exist."<sup>75</sup> The president of the Natal Indian Teachers Society, Mr A. Rai, stressed that "by birth we are South Africans

and by nationality Indians. Let us remember that we are South Africans of Indian nationality."<sup>76</sup> The Indian Opinion concurred:

Indeed that is what Indian children should be taught. And what is more they should be taught not to be ashamed of their nationality because they are looked down upon as Indians in this country, not to deceive their conscience and to pocket their national honour under even the most dire circumstances but to be proud of their nationality and sacrifice everything to uphold their national honour.<sup>77</sup>

A. Christopher, prominent politician and influential member of virtually every education body, felt that education had to combine the best of British and Indian values by making children "productive" like the British without losing their family values: "Where he [the Indian] is wise is that he kept his home life. The modern Western civilisation not only not appeals to Indians, but is abhorrent to them."<sup>78</sup> These ideas are also evident in the St Aidan's School song, sung from around 1905, which reflects the ambiguity of identity. It stresses loyalty to India, to the school, and to Africa. The common thread running through all is loyalty to the British Empire.

Sons of Hind! rally round, join hands!  
Join hands in strong endeavour!  
In distant clime, 'mid Afric's sands.  
Our College claims us forever.  
India's Sons where'er they be  
Ne'er forget their loyalty  
Parted by the ocean-wave,  
India, still for thee we crave.  
Parted, yet united, we  
Own the bonds of loyalty  
Homeland, though to thee we turn,  
Here to find a home we learn.<sup>79</sup>

Educational accomplishments were occasions for public celebration. When Bernard Gabriel, son of indentured parents, returned from Cambridge as a barrister in 1905, he was honored at a public reception attended by prominent merchants like Abdul Kadir, S.E. Emamally, and Dada Osman of the NIC as well as colonial-borns like J.L. Roberts and H.L. Paul. Gabriel was praised by Indian Opinion for his achievement:

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." Gabriel concluded: "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>80</sup> There is continuity in this over time. When B.L.E. Sigamoney returned in 1927 from England, where he had studied theology, he was given a public reception and garlanded. Although he had just become a priest, the list of speakers included Muslim and Hindu merchants like A.I. Kajee, Rooknoodeen, and R. Bugwan, as well as colonial-borns like J.L. Roberts, Sorabjee Rustomjee, and V. Lawrence.<sup>81</sup> These sentiments were not only expressed in the early days. When I.M. Bawa,

barrister-at-law, and Dr S.R. Deenadayalan returned from England during the 1940s they were given a reception at the Orient Club at which A.I. Kajee stated that when professionals "expect us to honour them they must first honour the community.... It was not the degree that counted as an end all and be all - but his desire to serve his fellow man." Dawood Seedat said that: "If they fight the colour-bar menace then I can call them professional men, otherwise they are no better than the ordinary man." The presence of Dawud Seedat at the function is engaging since he was a communist and radical and this shows the cross-class contact. Dr Deenadayalan replied: "If we did not have the interests of our community at heart we would not dared the seas to come back."<sup>82</sup> Through such public gatherings, the idea that education was a ticket to economic mobility and middle class identities were the only legitimate option, and therefore worthy of emulation, was being reinforced.

While education was valued, there was a paucity of suitable facilities and the following table provides a clear indictment of the government's failure in this regard.

**TABLE 11** Indian Children in School, Natal

Year	Schools	Govt. Schools	Pupils in School	Total no. of Children	% in School
1875	2	0	85	500	17
1880	8	0	196	1000	19.6
1909	35	4	3284	12000	27.4
1915	39	4	5189	18000	28.8
1926	52	9	9913	32000	30.9

Source: Henning, Indentured Indians, p.167.

Education was given a great boost by the "upliftment clause" of the Cape



**Early Indian School: A single teacher taught  
classes comprising children of different ages**

**(Local History Museum, Durban)**

Town Agreement which specified that Indians should not "lag behind other sections of the population." The number of pupils rose from 8,250 in 1925 to 35,397 in 1946.<sup>83</sup> However, this increase was mainly in "aided" schools which were the result of community effort since Indians had to buy land, build a school and pay for its upkeep while the government only reimbursed 50% of the building cost. In 1949, for example, 84% of Indian schools in Natal were aided.<sup>84</sup> By comparison 83% of white schools were government-run in 1945.<sup>85</sup> Indians saw this as another example of the government avoiding its obligation. Even radical Indians, when they took over the NIC, acknowledged the importance of merchants. The Education Committee of the NIC reported that merchants led collection drives for building schools, erecting school kitchens and implementing a feeding scheme which was a feature of most schools. "Were it not for the self-help, sacrifice and initiative of the Indian people, the number of Indian children out of schools today would have been not 30,000 but 60,000."<sup>86</sup>

The pride of Durban's Indians was Sastri College, the first high school for Indians in South Africa. Opened on 14 October 1929, it was the brainchild of Sastri who, within a few months, had collected £16,000 from merchants. This was seen as a "concrete example of 'self-help' on the part of the Indians themselves" and of "personal effort by individuals for the good of the community." The staff comprised of local white teachers and a few Indian teachers from India.<sup>87</sup> Indians were upset that the principal remained white. When one white replaced another in 1949 the Education Committee of the radical NIC commented that "an Indian will be better fitted for this position, from the angle that he is aware of the difficulties and problems of the Indian

students than any European, and deal with them sympathetically." With "highly qualified" Indians now available it was felt that an Indian should have been appointed: "The same can be said about the Durban Indian Girls High School, Dartnell Crescent, and other schools with Europeans."<sup>88</sup>

The reaction of whites to the building of Sastri College shows the obstacles faced by Indians. When the Sastri College tried to obtain additional land in 1932, whites who lived nearby sent a petition to the DCC arguing that the school dropped the value of their homes and subjected their wives and children to the sight of "dirty" caretakers at the school.<sup>89</sup> This was followed by a second petition, signed by over 1,000 people, "not to allow our Council to jeopardise the future by Indianising what will be an arterial centre in a few year's time.... Clairwood, Cato Manor or Somtseu Road will be much more suitable spots for Indian institutions."<sup>90</sup> Similarly, when the Orient Education Institute sought permission to build a high school on the Bluff on land which it owned, a mass meeting of whites urged the DCC to "unanimously condemn" the project: "Is the Council going to allow the Bluff lands to be used for Indian scholastic institutions when the European housing needs are so vital and pressing?"<sup>91</sup> A.I. Kajee informed the DCC that the Bluff was predominantly Indian-occupied since the turn of the century whereas only 20 to 30 whites had built homes there since 1925. He argued further, but ultimately to no avail that:

On the one hand, Indians are despised because popular opinion says they do nothing to improve themselves, and, on the other hand, whenever any attempt is made by Indians towards social improvement, Europeans at all times place obstacles in the way. Is the Indian community ever going to get what it wants? Surely we have some rights. You talk of Indian penetration but in this case

there has been European penetration.... We are prepared to spend thousands of pounds for the education of our people and in so doing make them better citizens. Have you realised that? We are bitter and we may become more bitter but we know it is of no use because you have the whip hand, we know that the weapons are in your hands.<sup>92</sup>

The system of schooling which evolved in Durban had important consequences for Indian identities. It is at school that social selection takes place for adult life, adult ideas are shaped and made rigid, and the primary group contacts of children are arranged. Since schooling was segregated, it eliminated an important source of contact between Indians, Africans and whites. This restricted interaction became a characteristic of the life-style of both children and adults. School reinforced in children the idea that they belonged to a specific race by virtue of the absence of Africans and whites.

Non-formal, technical and university education were also emphasized as merchants tried to 'improve' the community as a whole so that they could compete on equal terms with whites. Hassim Joosab, M.C. Camroodeen and E.M. Paruk, all Muslim merchants, contributed to the establishment of the Durban Indian Public Library, a scheme initiated by H. L. Paul and begun in September 1906, for "the benefit of the general Indian public" since Indians were prevented from using the Municipal Library.<sup>93</sup> By 1921 it evolved into the M.K. Gandhi library, thanks to Parsee Rustomjee who contributed £17,500. In 1931 it had a total of 2,500 books in English, Gujarati, Tamil, Hindi and Urdu and 202 newspapers and periodicals. On the executive were merchants like R.K. Khan, V. Lawrence and Dada Osman.<sup>94</sup> A 1948 report noted that it was costing £500 per month to maintain the library and that

requests to the DCC since 1930 for a library for Indians had fallen on deaf ears.<sup>95</sup> A letter to the newspaper provides another indication of the attitude to Africans. Although they were permitted to use the library they were confined to the rear: "the rear of the library is occupied by Natives and during the nights a large number of friends congregate and enter into quite a rowdy indaba (discussion) which seriously interrupts the readers.... Surely the authorities can do something to prevent the readers being disturbed."<sup>96</sup>

Another area deemed important was the education of workers whose "well-being has always been neglected." For Indian workers to compete with Europeans:

It is highly necessary that the education of the workers should be raised to a standard that is obtaining amongst the Europeans. The conditions in which the poor class of Indians have been living made it impossible for them to sufficiently educate their children, the result being that the majority of the Indians have been drifting into the various industries in Natal with little or no education at all.<sup>97</sup>

The Natal Worker's Congress and the Indian Teachers Society initiated the Worker's Continuation Classes which began in August 1929 with A. Christopher as president and A.I. Kajee and P.R. Pather as honorary secretaries.<sup>98</sup> Classes were held three times a week and enrolment reached 165 within a few months.<sup>99</sup> On 27 June 1930 the Indian Technical Education Committee was formed with B.M. Narbeth as chairman and Albert Christopher as vice-chairman.<sup>100</sup> In a 1942 report retracing its history, the Technical Committee noted that its aims were to provide evening continuation classes to alleviate defects in the general education of Indians, part-time classes in commercial and technical education for those who are in employment, and

full-time education to prepare the young for their future careers.<sup>101</sup> Despite pleas to the government for premises and financial help "no assistance is yet had from the authorities.... Indians are enthusiastic but they find it difficult to make the government respond."<sup>102</sup> The Committee was only able to carry out its programs because of generous contributions and free tuition many teachers.<sup>103</sup>

In 1934 B.M. Narbeth complained to the Town Clerk that "the premises in which these classes are held... are a ramshackle building in a more or less dilapidated condition."<sup>104</sup> Although the MOH concurred with this assessment after his investigation, reporting that "the structural condition is substantially as described by Mr Narbeth. The Hall is not suitable for educational purposes," no such provision was made.<sup>105</sup> The situation was critical by 1938 when enrolment reached 390 and the Committee discussed the position with the Agent, Sir Sayed Raza Ali. Together, they met with the Mayor in May 1938 and the Finance Committee in July 1938.<sup>106</sup> Although correspondence with the DCC continued in 1939, 1940 and 1941, nothing materialized.

The first tangible development occurred in January 1942 when the M.L. Sultan Trust donated £17,500.<sup>107</sup> Just prior to his death in 1953, M.L. Sultan doubled this contribution.<sup>108</sup> Mulukmahomed Lappa (M.L.) Sultan, who was born in Malabar, South India, in 1874, came to Durban as an indentured laborer in 1890 and worked as a railway porter for the NGR. Upon completion of his indenture in 1895 he went to the Transvaal where he worked as a waiter. After his marriage in 1905, he returned to Natal where, initially, he took up banana and tobacco farming, and later went into

the property market. When his wife died in 1933, M.L. Sultan established the Mariam Bee Charitable and Educational Trust in her memory with a contribution of £100,000 to promote cultural, educational spiritual and economic activities amongst Indians in Natal "irrespective of creed, caste or religion."<sup>109</sup> The effect of M.L. Sultan's donation was to place before the public the whole question of Indian higher education. The Committee's application for land was supported by the Mayor and following further negotiation, land was finally granted on 15 July 1942. The M.L. Sultan Technical College is now one of the largest technikons in South Africa.

An equally important concern was university education since it was very difficult to gain entry into white universities. In 1942 about 50 Indian students were studying at the predominantly African University of Fort Hare.<sup>110</sup> Some were unhappy at being forced to study with Africans and Abdul Karrim pointed out that "respecting the provision for higher education at the Fort Hare College, the Indian community would prefer separate educational institutions."<sup>111</sup> Even the Agent wanted a university built in Durban to cater for Indians in "all of Africa, from Mombasa to Cape Town."<sup>112</sup> Natal University eased the plight by arranging "non-European classes," as they came to be called, at Sastri College. These were popular and 97 Indians were enrolled in 1942.<sup>113</sup> Strict segregation was enforced as Indians had their own library, wrote examinations separately, could not enter the university buildings and were seated separately at graduation.<sup>114</sup> The establishment of a university was central to most Indians' thinking. In 1942, when the Government was considering establishing an Indian university, the NIA considered it:<sup>115</sup>

the duty of every Indian to lend wholehearted support to this noble venture for in it alone lies the salvation of our community. No scheme of this kind has been launched for the community since our forefathers set their foot on this soil nearly eighty years ago. If we lose this opportunity now, we may not get another chance for nearly fifty years. It is now essential that Indians of all sections should speak on this subject with one voice and one mind and on this question there should be no difference of opinion, for in it our future as a community is wholly dependent. Unity of policy on this issue is vital, and we must now earnestly beseech Indians of all classes to keep this aim in view in the study of this question.

However, Indians had to wait over two decades before their wish was granted with the establishment of the University of Durban-Westville in the mid-1960s.

This expansion in education enabled Indians to gain a vital advantage over Africans. While large numbers of children were still out of school, an estimated 30,000 in 1949, facilities were substantially better than those of Africans. Further, the infrastructure was put into place for the post-1960 education explosion which allowed Indians earlier access to better paid jobs and was a significant factor in their economic mobility. The merchant and educated classes played a vital role in this process. Merchants not only applied pressure on the government to provide better educational facilities but initiated and financed many projects which were for the benefit of all. Education played an important role in easing class tensions since schools were attended by students from a wide section of the population, including the poor. Mr K.N., for example, remembers that his friends at school included the "Asmalls, Paruks and Jeevan Karas ... all big boys. I still see them sometimes."<sup>16</sup> The gradual improvement in material condition and inter-generational occupational mobility reduced the emotive element of social class.

### **Sport and Recreation:**

The most significant observation is that Indians spent most of their leisure time with other Indians. They rarely associated or socialized with members of other racial groups and sport failed to transcend the sectional divisions of Durban's social order. It is also conspicuous that individuals like A. Christopher, B.L.E. Sigamoney, E.M. Paruk and S. Emmammally, who were prominent in various welfare, religious, educational and political bodies, also comprised the leadership of most sports bodies. Some of them tried to use sport to mold the working classes along lines that conformed to white ideals in the hope that the community would be better placed to pursue their political demands. While the 1930s was a period when whites became aware of the "dangerous leisure" of Africans and sought to utilize "free time" constructively to produce a fit and competent workforce, in Durban these paternal notions were only expressed with regard to Africans with whom whites enjoyed a relationship which bordered on trusteeship. In contrast, very little was done for Indians who were not seen as a permanent part of the population. This further marginalized them as they had to develop their own facilities.

Although Indians participated in sports such as soccer, cricket, tennis, athletics, boxing and wrestling, our focus will be on soccer since it was the most popular sport and the broad trends which emerge apply to other sports as well. Such was the enthusiasm for soccer that a Natal Indian Football Association was formed as early as 1886 and consisted of four clubs: Union Jacks, Eastern Stars, Yorkshire and Western Stars.<sup>117</sup> The concentration of the merchant and educated classes in the Old

Borough was the reason for soccer being placed on a coordinated footing there first. Organized soccer gradually spread in other districts which formed their own associations. The Durban District Indian Football Association was formed in 1892, Mayville in 1902<sup>118</sup> and South Coast in 1914 with its grounds in Clairwood. By 1912 there were 40 clubs in Durban, with about about 1,000 players.<sup>119</sup> As late as 1949 these three areas and Sea View remained the hub of activity in Durban.<sup>120</sup> Popular enthusiasm is shown by the sports stories and reports that filled the newspapers, including the more parochial political Passive Resister and Searchlight.

The educated elite stressed the benefits of sport. They felt that it would entrench a healthy value system and teach social values such as allegiance to fellow players, respect for rules and authority, and fortitude. Writing in Indian Opinion, Joseph Royeppen, colonial-born but English educated, explained the "greater purpose" of sport:

Here is the meaning and the interpretation of the famous saying, "the battles of England have been won on the playing fields of Eton." As yet there are little signs of our battles being won upon our playing fields of South Africa, and the reason is not far to seek; for, so long as young men will 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>121</sup>

Even teachers were urged to encourage sport at school: "What a lot of good could be done if our teachers were not so effeminate in their habits! They forget that, in the hollow of their hands, they hold the Indian nation of the future in this part of

the world. Will our teachers rise to the occasion?<sup>122</sup> The middle class made a concerted effort to develop facilities so that Indians could play in the true spirit of the game and honor Victorian ideals of 'civilization' and 'fair play.' Spectators and administrators were expected to live up to extremely high standards, hence the complaint that "if sport ever was intended to simply win cups, then our boys should leave the game alone. Somehow or other, our young fellows have a wrong notion in their heads, they are to win cups and nothing else. It was instituted for healthy recreation and to give and take."<sup>123</sup> Sastri, the first Agent, also felt that sport would lead to Indians becoming "good South Africans" since football and "teach people to play together, to play for the team, and to endure hardship, without becoming angry and losing one's temper."<sup>124</sup>

The way that sport developed had important consequences for identity and consciousness. Rigid segregation was perhaps inevitable in the severely race stratified society. This reinforced social distancing which was considered crucial by the state to maintain order. Sport failed to foster assimilation as spectators, administrators and players were exclusively Indian. This was not confined to those Durban Indians. Games were also organized against Indians elsewhere in Natal, in the Union and India. When the South African Indian Football Association was formed in 1903, Mr Chinakanoo Moodley of Kimberly, known popularly as Sam China, presented a splendid silver trophy for an annual inter-provincial tournament. From then on the Sam China Cup became the sporting highlight of the year. "Indo-Junius" explained that the "far-reaching and beneficial result of the Tournament is the bringing together

of Indians from all parts of the Union and the better understanding between them - which would but prepare the way for South African Indians acting as one body."<sup>125</sup> There was continuity in this thinking as the same sentiments were expressed during the 1940s when participants were welcomed to the tournament in Durban:

The personal contacts and bonds of friendship created between us ... are yet another advantage of these inter-Provincial tournaments. There can be no other medium more universal to bring us closer, more united and make for better understanding.... Soccer, being the most popular game as far as South African Indians are concerned, must be recognised as a dynamic force in the way of character building. It is for this reason that Indian soccer administrators wield a big influence in the lives of our people.... The matter of winning the trophy must not detract from the spirit of give and take which should prevail throughout the tournament.<sup>126</sup>

When the Natal team was refused permits to enter the Transvaal in 1904 because of the outbreak of a plague there, A. Mohambry, secretary of NIFA, wanted the Transvaal authorities to reconsider the decision since the "team are all respectable men chiefly employed as clerks and I see no danger..."<sup>127</sup> Although the refusal was reiterated this argument suggests that, during these early days, it was mainly the educated elite, better off economically, who had the time and money to indulge in organized soccer. The vast majority were barely surviving as indentured workers, market gardeners and hawkers and could not pursue such leisure pursuits, except on a casual basis. The team to represent Natal was selected on the basis of performances in matches between the various soccer districts of Natal, such as Durban, Greytown, Pietermaritzburg, Dundee, Stanger and Ladysmith, which played 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>128</sup> Once again an opportunity was created for greater contact between Indians.

The highlight for most were the series against India which were seen by C.F. Andrews and A. Christopher as a means of fostering contact between Indians of both countries. Arrangements for these games commenced shortly after Gandhi's departure in 1914 and were realized when South African Indians toured India in 1920. When the Indians returned the compliment in June 1934, the Indian Opinion commented:

We extend to our distinguished visitors a very cordial welcome and wish that their visit to this country will not mean the mere playing of soccer but that it will draw the minds of their brethren living in this far off land more towards the Motherland and her great ancient culture. Our sincere wish will be that India will give a jolly good licking to South Africa so that South Africa may remember India with reverence as the victor and not as the vanquished.<sup>129</sup>

The editor's prayers were answered for the Indian team, which played barefoot, won all 14 of its matches throughout South Africa. Most of the games were before crowds of up to 10,000 and were won by huge margins.<sup>130</sup> Such visits were considered important, as indicated by The Leader when a tour by the Indian olympic team was proposed in 1948:

It is no more a matter of sport concerning people who play football but it has become a national affair for the Indian people.... On the last visit (1934) even those men and women who had passed the century mark in years turned up not so much to see football but to get a glimpse of the people way back from home.... It made the Indian people conscious of their tradition and background. We are South African by birth ... but we still maintain our cultural heritage and spiritual ties with India. The visit will serve to throw all Indians together, for they will have a common purpose to meet, see and talk with people from the Motherland. It has been estimated that over 80 per cent of the Indian people of this country are South African-born ... but ties of

language, culture and tradition cannot be thrown off overnight.... India is the fountain-head of our origin and when the proposed visit materialises the Indian people in South Africa will take a special pride in recognising the fact that they are Indians and they have connections with the Motherland.<sup>131</sup>

A recurring theme is the resolute effort to acquire better facilities and the reluctance of the DCC to comply. Neither schools nor residential areas were provided with grounds. Mr N.G. recalls that growing up, he and his friends played soccer at a timber yard in Berea Road.<sup>132</sup> Indians formed the Durban United Indian Sports Association in 1911 to apply pressure for a sports ground. This body included merchants like Parsee Rustomjee and E.M. Paruk as well as colonial-borns like A. Christopher and B.L.E. Sigamoney.<sup>133</sup> In May 1912 Royeppen wrote to the DCC for a meeting to discuss the project.<sup>134</sup> Indians considered themselves sufficiently different to warrant their own facilities. The DCC replied in June that it had allocated a site and would develop it at an appropriate time.<sup>135</sup> The Sports Association complained in 1915 that the DCC "after a lapse of so many years the Corporation were bound, in bare justice and fairness to all concerned, to materialise their promises."<sup>136</sup> However, the DCC resolved that in view of a shortage of funds it was unable to take any action.<sup>137</sup> The Sports Association, via its secretary M.C. Anglia, again appealed to the Mayor in 1919, almost four years later:

In the name of the Indian Sportsmen we earnestly appeal to you to give effect to the scheme and thereby provide for the amusement, pleasure and happiness of a very large number of the inhabitants of the Borough who owing to the congestion in the existing Parks and playing grounds are in need much more so to-day than they were in 1912 when the Corporation agreed to provide facilities.<sup>138</sup>

To compound the problem the DCC took away the DDIFA's best ground in 1920 to build a school. The authorities did not even inform the association: "we did not know of it until the Builders came on the ground one Saturday afternoon during the progress of a match and informed us that the ground would not be available next Saturday.... I wish to point out that our fixtures have been considerably disorganized owing to this fact".<sup>139</sup> The DCC responded that the "various bodies should rely more upon their own efforts for maintaining their playing areas.... Accordingly we are not prepared to recommend that the Council incur any expenditure in laying out and improving the Indian Recreation Grounds".<sup>140</sup> The following appeal by A. Christopher, on behalf of the Sports Association, again expressed protest in ethnic and racial terms:

These and other grounds in this locality have been in the use of Indian sportsmen for about 30 years and were maintained at their expense.... It will be within the knowledge of the Council that although Indian Ratepayers and Burgesses are in theory entitled to the amenities, amusements and recreations provided by the Council they do not in practice enjoy any of these facilities.... We appeal to you to deal out justice to us irrespective of our race or colour so that there may be no occasion for it to be said that the gift of the Council was a scrap of paper where the rights of the minority were concerned.<sup>141</sup>

In 1921 J. Royeppen wrote to the DCC on behalf of the Sports Association:

The Indian community are not making any "claim" as if from today. They made their claim ten years ago and that claim was recognized by your Council and the resultant right was vouchsafed to the Indians. It is that right Indian sportsmen are concerned about now. Your Council's predecessors in office ... granted the right to the Indians.<sup>142</sup>

In March 1924 the DCC finally agreed to lease an area of 23 acres for a

period of 25 years, although "the onus of laying out and equipping the grounds be upon the Indian Sports Bodies..."<sup>143</sup> The first trustees of the DISGA were Parsee Rustomjee, E.M. Paruk, B.M. Singh, V.S.C. Pather, J.M. Francis, S. Emmammally, A. Sookdeo, B.L.E. Sigamoney and A. Christopher. The same pattern emerges: merchants and colonial-borns, Muslim, Hindu and Christians all co-operated to improve conditions. The drive for better sporting facilities emanated from every district in Durban. In response to this spate of demands, the Town Clerk requested a report on existing facilities. There were 57,534 Indians living in the Added Areas. A total of 22 acres had been bought to serve a population of 18,033, although this land had not been developed. No land had been set aside, or facilities envisaged, for the remaining 39,501 people.<sup>144</sup>

The names of the sports bodies formed in each area say much: Durban District Indian Football Association, Natal Indian Football Association, Durban United Indian Sports Association, and Greenwood Park Ward Indian Ratepayers Association, to name a few. These were formed by Indians and comprised of Indian players and administrators only. This was only possible because Indians lived largely in segregated neighborhoods. They continued to demand facilities and the following examples reflect their concern. The South Coast Area Indian Ratepayers Association informed the Town Clerk in 1934 that:

The South Coast Junction Area ... which has an estimated Indian population of 18,000 has not yet been provided with recreation grounds. In this connection the Indian Ratepayers feel that their bare necessities have been neglected.<sup>145</sup>

In 1940 the Overport Indian Social Club complained that:

There is an increasing population of between six and seven thousand whose standard of living makes it imperative that there should be provision for wise use of leisure. It is so easy for the young people, whose homes are not too attractive and who have no way of using their leisure time, to become a disorderly element in the community, which is your care.<sup>146</sup>

In 1941 the Sydenham District Indian Sports Association protested that:

The Sydenham Ward has a large Indian population, the majority of whom is employed in the centre of the city. That means 5 days in the week they have to leave their home early in the morning and return late in the evenings. You will appreciate that it would be highly detrimental to the health and well-being of the younger of our community in Sydenham if they do not receive any relaxation during the week-ends. There is a large number of sporting clubs ... but the most depressing factor to contend with is that the players living in Clare Estate, Sydenham, Overport and Springfield, have to travel several miles to have a game at Curries Fountain.<sup>147</sup>

Together, these complaints show that the constructive use of leisure time was an important concern, that this was not possible because of the paucity of facilities and that the lack of facilities in certain areas increased contact between those from different parts of Durban. In response the DCC called a conference of Indian sporting organizations on 29th June 1945, under the chairmanship of Councillor R.M. Thomas. He asked each organization to submit its complaints and requirements in writing.<sup>148</sup> This was done by August.<sup>149</sup> The conclusion arrived at by the Mayville Indian Sports Ground Association in its memorandum was echoed by all:

We do not get something commensurate, in return for the rates we pay, notwithstanding the district being predominantly Indian. The promotion of sports of any denomination imbues an individual with a spirit of co-operation

and that essential team play, what is more, he learns to respect an opponent and to accept defeat generously without loss of confidence and this brings out all that is best in oneself. We are thus forced to question if sufficient amount of space is not provided to give ones physical conscience free play, how then can one attain the goal to play the game for the games sake and to make oneself a better citizen.<sup>150</sup>

The DCC heard the grievances but took no action. In 1947 the South Coast District Indian Sports Association pointed that "it is about two years since we pointed out our disabilities. Since then we are sorry to say nothing - absolutely nothing, has been done to alleviate our difficulties."<sup>151</sup> In contrast, the municipality saw the provision of facilities for Africans as one of its more important tasks. Sport was seen as a means of social control, of keeping Africans away from prostitution, beer drinking and other vices. A Native Welfare Officer, J.T. Rawlins, was appointed in 1929 to ensure that Africans were well provided with facilities. In 1931 Rawlins pointed out that the DCC "is very sympathetic and had spent large sums of money on Native Recreation Grounds to bring Native sport into the same standard as that of Europeans."<sup>152</sup> This was often at the expense of Indians. For example, in 1929, Indians were given "one months notice" to "remove" their temple to allow in Somtseu Road for the "preparing of Native Recreation grounds..."<sup>153</sup> In September 1929, the DCC decided to build additional grounds in Dalton Road and at the Tramway Sheds,<sup>154</sup> even though "this ground is at present used by the Indian community as a football ground."<sup>155</sup> This further marginalized Indians and made them believe that they could only advance by seeing to their needs together. A 1949 mass meeting of Indians "viewed with serious alarm and strongly objected to the proposal to take land

for African sports fields from Indian owners in Riverside." The meeting "further objected" to the ground at nearby Prospect Hall being used temporarily by Africans, and argued that it remain "for the use of Indians."<sup>156</sup>

From the memorandum submitted by the Mayville Sports Association in 1946 we learn that because of the lack of facilities in most areas, Indian sportsmen from Westville, Bellair, Umgeni and Sydenham went to Mayville every week-end to play sport. This increased contact and interaction reinforced an Indian identity. Limited as they were, the sports field remained the hub of Indian life as far as recreation was concerned: "this amenity is regarded as a rendezvous by a very large number of adults of the district." Over 3,000 people were in attendance every week-end. Here, players, supporters and administrators mixed every week. They wanted the ground fenced because Africans walked on to the fields and this led to "such incidents as assaults by gangs of drunken Natives who use these paths and when accosted not to do so while matches are in progress are not infrequent."<sup>157</sup>

The importance of the ground as a weekly gathering point was stressed by informants. Mr. N.G. pointed out that he and his friends spent most of Sunday on the sports fields, either playing or watching soccer. He was "happy to say" that, unlike today, it was an all-male affair.<sup>158</sup> Nr A.N. also spent his Sunday at the ground. However, he attended temple in the morning and thereafter would go with the temple bus to play soccer. He also pointed out that this was an all-male affair although some women stood in the houses surrounding the ground and watched.<sup>159</sup> The absence of women was probably not due to lack of interest on their part. In 1947, "Interested

spectator" complained that:<sup>160</sup>

Do you encourage your wives in games? Have you ever taken them to see a football match? We are not so ignorant, mind you. We know that when the ball comes into the net its a goal and we know all about centre halves and wings and goalies. I doubt not, because of your inherent fear of your parents and the community.

Attempts to use sport to discipline and teach appropriate values did not succeed. Rowdy scenes and fighting were common occurrences. The soccer fields allowed men to escape their poverty-stricken and pathetic conditions, and give vent to their frustrations in the worst possible manner. Mr A.N. recalls an incident where he was playing for Clare Estate against Mayville in an important cup match. The team from Mayville got hold of his team's goalkeeper a few days before the game and threatened to harm his family if he played in the match. As a result, the player failed to turn up for the game. Mr A.N., being the captain of his team, had to play in the nets and his team lost miserably.<sup>161</sup>

Newspaper reports support these sentiments. Headings like "Spectators Slash Soccer Officials's Nose - Police Make Baton Charge," "Soccer Officials Weak-Kneed?," "Soccer Body Calls for Drastic Action," "Referee's Tooth Knocked Out," "Crowd Demands 'Money Back' at Curries Fountain," "Police, Fence, Stewards - No Peace," "Crowd Surges On Ground" and "Rowdy Element in Soccer" provide a good indication of conditions under which soccer took place.<sup>162</sup> For example, when a team was unhappy with a referee's decision "the official was then struck in the face by a player who then divested himself of his jersey preparatory to another assault on

the referee.... The match was abandoned and the crowd then swarmed on to the playing area and surged round the referee. The crowd dispersed when the police arrived.... The referee had a tooth knocked loose."<sup>163</sup> When another game was abandoned, "the crowd swarmed the offices and demanded their money back. A commotion was started which by degree developed into a pandemonium. While the pandemonium raged officials were assaulted, sworn at, and threatened. Police reinforcements arrived and restored order."<sup>164</sup> The following report captures the essence of the problem:

The 1949 season is two weeks old but the rowdy element is again forcing itself into soccer. Season after season the same things occur. Matches are abandoned because of "dirty play"; not abiding by a referee's decision; referees, players, spectators being assaulted by the rowdy element; spectators instigating players to play rough, and so on. A series of unpleasant incidents culminated in a referee's strike last season which caused fixtures to be discontinued. Betting, which is prohibited, takes place unofficially amongst spectators, and there is no doubt that this contrinuted to the trouble.<sup>165</sup>

While soccer did not achieve the objective that middle class Indians had in mind, it is as significant that sport and recreation were largely segregated racially and were definitely not a medium of cross-racial contact. Most clubs were from specific neighborhoods and had a single racial affiliation, Indian, while their ethnic and religious composition was heterogenous as is reflected in the team lists which appear in the Indian Opinion, Indian Views and African Chronicle. It was usually merchants and colonial-borns who took the lead in petitioning for better facilities, and in forming clubs and associations which allowed the masses to take part. This resulted in cross-class, cross-ethnic and cross-religious contact.

As in sport, the working class created a neo-Indian world that differed radically from that which middle class Indians had in mind for them. It was a world in which alcoholism, dagga smoking, gambling, prostitution, singing and card-playing were all crucial means of escaping the drudgery of their every day lives. This life style was sufficiently unlike the visions of middle class Indians for the Indian Opinion to complain that "this indiscriminate attachment to all sorts of unpleasant and disreputable vices can only have the worst consequences ... every son of India who falls into sin is a traitor to the race from which he springs."<sup>166</sup> "Freelance" complained that "women, drink and gambling are the ruination of our boys. Look at the rising generation; they lack the vitality and sustaining power to make them successful."<sup>167</sup> However, what is important for our purposes is that this lifestyle was distinct from that of whites and Africans.

## **Conclusion**

The middle-class took the lead in forming welfare agencies, building schools and obtaining facilities for sports. The strong emphasis that they placed on self-help and upliftment is typified by the following sarcastic reflection:

You believe me if I wrote and told  
That there are a few of our Indian folk  
Who are not interested in uplifting their fellow-men?  
They wish they were not Indian,  
And wish that nobody else were ever born Indian  
Believe me - There are a few  
I hope you're not one of them<sup>168</sup>

Not all Indians were equally affected. Gender was a crucial organizing principle of Indian society in Durban. Patriarchial social relations endured as the new choices of group membership did not apply to women. They were denied education, which gave Indians the greatest capacity to exercise control over their lives, because the family gave boys unequal support in the pursuit of education. In sport there was a masculinization of group membership since only men were encouraged to take part. In community work, women were involved in a few bodies, particularly those that cared for children, which did not threaten male dominance. Overall, males were socialized into believing that their dominance over women was inherent and acceptable.

The idea that the government did nothing for them and that whatever improvement was achieved was the result of self-help and their value system is deeply ingrained in the psyche of most Indians, even to this day.<sup>169</sup> The fact that Indians faced different historical and material conditions, which presented them with different obstacles from those confronted by Africans, is lost sight of. For example, a principal noted in the 1981 brochure of his school that:

With self-help and self-sacrifice as characteristics of the Indian community, it was no strange happening that fifty years ago, a group of parents met, under a fig tree which still stands on the school grounds, with a view to establishing a school to cater for the educational needs of a rural community.<sup>170</sup>

The activities of the middle class severely undercut conventional class loyalties. Since sporting clubs, civic associations and the like were formed along racial and ethnic lines the conditions it was difficult to foster class identifications. Racial and ethnic identity was reinforced by family and religious life which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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Area	Pop.	Facility
Greenwood Park	8,054	None
Sydenham	14,123	None
Mayville	14,821	15 acres set aside-not dev.
Umhlatuzana	3,212	7 acres set aside-not dev.
South Coast Junction	17,324	None

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FAMILY, RELIGION AND LANGUAGE

A number of elements contributed to the formation of the Indian community in Durban. Like sport, welfare and education organizations, family and religion were crucial in strengthening and bolstering a racial and ethnic identity. The consequence of large numbers of Indians living together cannot be emphasized enough; this clustering in an environment that was value-strengthening rather than value-challenging allowed them to rebuild aspects of their social and economic life with the minimum of outside influence.

The way of life that was recreated was not a replica of that left behind in India since that culture was modified by new occupations and circumstances and through contact with others from different parts of India, as well as with Africans and whites. However, it was sufficiently distinctive to mark Indians off from whites and Africans. The family and religion promoted communal values which had an important bearing on how Indians acted in the workplace, made their political choices and interacted with Africans and whites.

#### **Family Life:**

Family membership was probably the most crucial element of society in Durban as most aspects of culture, which affected Indians' sense of who they were, were mediated through it. As a result of differences in class, religion and custom we cannot

speak of "the Indian family" but there were certain broad similarities, especially with regard to the impact of the family on individuals and its role in sustaining and promoting an ethnic identity. For most, the family signified a potentially large group of closely related people sharing property, work, food, and love. 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>1</sup> There was a clear hierarchy with several patterns of domination; father over sons, men over women, elders over the young, and members of the in-group over outsiders.

The structure of the family was influenced by the fact that the majority of indentured Indians who arrived between 1860 and 1911 were single males, the actual proportion of males to females being 64:28.<sup>2</sup> This made it difficult to establish stable family life and, during the indenture period, led to disputes and even suicide. Rangassamy told the 1872 Coolie Commission that the "scarcity of females causes many debauches and in many cases they committed suicide."<sup>3</sup> Another factor contributing to unstable marriages was the fact Indians had to pay a £5 fee to register marriages. Most could not afford this and simply married according to religious rites, which were not valid in court.<sup>4</sup>

The gradual move towards demographic maturity, reflected in the following table, was due to more males than females returning to India under the repatriation scheme, the high death rate of the older male population, and the fact that immigration was restricted to the wives of males already domiciled in South Africa.

**Table 12** Rate of Males to Females in Natal

Year	Masculinity Rate
1921	130.9
1936	112.1
1946	106.4
1951	104.9

Source: Padayachee et al. Indian Workers, p.199

A strong feature of Indian marriages was endogamy and marriage across race, language and religious lines was rare. Not only has this been noted by contemporary studies<sup>5</sup> but is evident from correspondence in the press. Marriages across religious lines aroused great passion. The seriousness with which such marriages were viewed can be gauged from the incident involving the Agent, Raza Ali, a Muslim, who married a local Hindu woman in 1936. Twenty one Hindu members of the NIC resigned, including the President, four vice-presidents, two secretaries and treasurer.<sup>6</sup> A mass meeting of Hindus condemned the Agent because "there was no denying the fact that he had violated the sanctity of the Hindu people" and that he "tramples underfoot the religious sentiments of the Hindu section. Our battle will not be a success until the Agent leaves South Africa."<sup>7</sup> This also applied to ordinary people. In 1941, for example, when it was learnt, for example, that a Christian teacher was to marry a Hindu woman, 12 Hindu organizations held a mass meeting in Overport which was attended by about a thousand people. "Feelings ran high" as S.L. Singh told the crowd:

These wrongs must not be allowed to go on indefinitely. Right must predominate. There is no question of friendship. We have been a tolerant community even to the point of absurdity, but now Hinduism must prevail. If Hindus marry out of

the religion, they must be made to suffer the full penalty of ostracism.<sup>8</sup>

When it was suggested that language barriers be overlooked in marriage in order to foster unity amongst Indians, "Hindustani" wrote in 1941:

Does the writer know what mixed marriages mean?... Marriage between Hindustani, Telegu and Tamils is incorrect and won't work. The point is this: amongst the women, the Tamil and Telegu dress alike and the Hindustani women have a different style of dressing. Also the language spoken amongst these three is quite different. If mixed marriages take place, what will happen with the dressing and the mother tongue?<sup>9</sup>

There was even less tolerance of marriage across color lines and this is reflected over a long time span. In 1933, for example, Bala Moodley complained that during the celebrations in West Street on New Years Day, "there was one thing that proved disgraceful from the Indian community's point of view. There appeared a band of Indian youth arm in arm with Coloured girls.... I hope that every Indian parent will try their utmost to prevent their children from being ruined by these awful creatures."<sup>10</sup> The depth of feeling on the color issue is evident in the fact that when the government introduced a Bill to proscribe mixed marriages it was welcomed by Indian Opinion, which was staunchly anti-segregation on every other issue. It argued that "mixed marriages of any kind ought really to be prohibited. It would save the Asiatic from degradation. Would Asiatics, as a race, be proud to see a sister of theirs taken away?"<sup>11</sup> When Cassim Amra asserted that he wanted to marry a woman who would be his companion and that even if he went around Durban with a telescope he would not find a suitable partner, with the result that men like him were forced to marry Coloured

women, "Devout Muslim" asked: "Will Mr Amra like to see our Muslim sisters marry Coloured men? Will he also like to have a Coloured man as his brother-in-law?"<sup>12</sup> In fact, association with Coloured women was considered serious. "Concerned" felt that Indian men "were caught in a gigantic anti-Indian girls' trap and a release from it means a herculean task... Unless an attempt is made, the survival of the Indian community is at stake."<sup>13</sup> As we learn from "Coloured Victim" such liaisons rarely led to marriage:

Do your mothers want modern, educated daughters-in-law? Do your parents want their sons to be married to girls who can play tennis, read books, go to meetings, talk intelligently to their friends and enjoy life in general? Knowing the Indian parents as I do ... its better to be married to one "pukka" (pure) Indian girl and have ten short-skirts outside (girlfriends). Your parents tolerate things like that.... A share in your father's business means more to you than happiness.<sup>14</sup>

Marriage within the group was extremely important for maintaining group identity. In addition to endogamy, the community exerted control over marriage. Marriage was not viewed as the uniting of two individuals but as an agreement binding families. Most informants recall that their needs were subordinate to group ends and that marriages were arranged with partners suitable to the family. Partners were sometimes complete strangers but accepted the situation because that is what parents and culture decreed. It was parents' duty to find appropriate marriage partners and the duty of children to accept. Mr N.G. reported: "When mother saw me gallavating, she and her good friend Mrs Dickson took me to see Mrs Dickson's niece, Annapuri, the name means a mountain in the Malayas. Mother said that I should marry her and I had to please her."<sup>15</sup> The following report in a local newspaper provides another illustration of this:

The groom disappeared the night before the wedding. The father of the intending bridegroom, rather than postpone the marriage, to which guests were invited, decided to carry on. He had a younger son unmarried, who sportingly came to the rescue of the father, and agreed to accept his brother's place. The would be bride's relations were notified of the change. They accepted the new arrangement and the marriage went ahead as planned.<sup>16</sup>

The following case studies<sup>17</sup> are examples of the extended family in operation.

Choudhry, (1864-1920) who came to Durban as an indentured laborer in 1886, worked as a fisherman upon completion of his contract. He had 2 sons and 3 daughters and although he was not educated, Choudhry ensured that both his sons were educated to grade 6 at the Higher Grade Government School. The family did market gardening at Greyville until Choudhry opened a dairy in Sydenham where he moved with his sons Ramataur and Ben, who were both married by now. After Choudhry's death in 1920, Ramataur and Ben lived together until they split in 1930 over a business dispute. Ramataur now lived with his mother, wife, 3 sons and 2 daughters. He sold the dairy and opened a small shop. The two eldest sons left school early to help in the business and supported the youngest son who obtained a university degree. Business flourished and Ramataur opened a second shop in Isipingo as well as a cinema. By the 1960s Ramataur had become very prominent in the social field, and contributed to various charitable trusts, and promoted the vernacular language and Hindu culture. All three of his sons continued to live with him but each wife had her own kitchen. They were held together by the fact that they all worked for the common good of the family business which made them all rich together.

Jithoo cites another example of a poor family held together by poverty.<sup>18</sup> Chellan

came to Natal in the 1860s, aged 17. He worked at Glendale and, upon completing his indenture, married a woman from Springfield where he lived with his 6 sons and 2 daughters. Chellan was a market gardener but all 6 of his sons were chefs at white-owned hotels in Durban. By 1918, 4 of them were married and it became impossible for the family to continue to live together. Three of the sons moved to accommodation very close to the house while Chellan lived with his wife, his two unmarried sons, his eldest son Poonsamy and Poonsamy's wife and children. Chellan died in 1921. They had no option but to live together because of poverty. In such instances the joint family gave its members material security against poverty and provided internal economies of scale through joint management and division of labor.

As a result of differences in the process of urbanization the urban Indian family was more cohesive than the urban African and Afrikaner families. Kuper attributes this to the fact that while Africans left their families on the reserves and Afrikaners theirs on the platteland, Indians moved to the city with their entire families. In a 1945 survey of Merebank and Springfield, Kuper reported that 47% of households were extended and only 43% nuclear.<sup>19</sup> This would have been higher during the 1920s and 1930s when larger numbers were still dependent on the land for a living. These demographic differences had important repercussions. It meant that whereas in the case of Africans and Afrikaners patterns of authority weakened within the family because the young moved to the city on their own, in the case of Indians they persisted, and even when they lived in separate residences the young remained close enough for elders to exercise control in their affairs. This led to greater individualism amongst Africans and

Afrikaners. Further, physical dispersion did not lead to an abrogation of the ties of the extended family which continued to be regarded as an undivided unit. According to Mrs S.L.:

Families were united even when they stopped living under one roof. They were so poor that they had no option.... Children asked parents or uncles and aunts for advice before they did anything. All important occasions were celebrated by the whole (extended) family. In fact, the burden of paying the costs was not left to one person. Brother and sisters contributed whatever they could. The old never went into homes. If one's nephew or niece wanted education, everybody helped. From early on parents taught children not to be selfish but to take care of their blood.... Building strong family ties was looked upon as the most important thing a father could do.<sup>20</sup>

Respect was the cornerstone of Indian social life and there were clear guidelines for behavior between men and women, adults and youth, and siblings of different ages. Parents and elders did not have to earn the respect of children; this was their automatic right since Hinduism gives great authority to the old and upper classes. The joint family would not have worked without this respect for authority. As one informant remarked about his father: "I could not tell him anything. Those days as soon as they looked at us we would shit in our pants. Those were good days. We had real unity in the family. Now we are only interested in our own stomachs."<sup>21</sup>

Women played a crucial role in the reconstruction of Indian social and economic life in Durban. For many informants the mother was pivotal. Comments such as "I was brought up by mother who said education was the only way to improve;" "Mother was very strict and made sure we knew Tamil;" and "Mother had a Tamil book. She use to make me sit and read from one end to the other" suggest that they socialized children

into rituals and religion and remained the emotional anchor of urban life.<sup>22</sup> Further, as already noted, large numbers of working class women worked as market gardeners, hawkers and domestics. For example, Mr P.D. recalls: "I was born in 1910.... Mother cut sugar cane on the estate. In 1926 we moved to the magazine Barracks where I use to work for the City Council. Mother now sewed sacks for the coal and wood merchants."<sup>23</sup> Mr K.N. remembers: "We were nine brothers and one sister. Father went back to India without us. Mother had a stall in the market and brought us up."<sup>24</sup> These are just a few examples which indicate that the working class Indian housewife was not a domesticated wife; her labor outside the home was crucial for family survival.<sup>25</sup>

Although wives were subservient to their husbands in public, they asserted their dominance over their sons and daughters-in-law and also controlled household finances. This was noted by most informants as well as in a recent recollection by Ameen Akhalwaya:

I relate this story because she was supposedly a woman of no substance and little standing except to be known as the house-bound wife of the boss of a big business. Every week day, her husband would return home for lunch. He had to give the old lady a run-down of events at his outlet.... She'd listen patiently, then suggest to him exactly what he should do. No, she didn't have to be aggressive. She didn't even have to order him to do it.... It would turn out that he had done exactly what she had suggested. She merely managed to give him the impression that he was implementing his own brilliant ideas.... He never let on that his wife was the real power behind the throne. Come to think of it, I doubt if he ever realised that he was merely the front man for his wife.<sup>26</sup>

The extended family was not an institution put into force because of traditions brought from India but an essential means of surviving in the urban milieu. Social and economic responsibilities were clearly demarcated and scarce resources pooled in the

common family budget. This allowed many to escape the most devastating effects of poverty. As Mr P.D. recalls: "We only survived because we helped one another. The family was our bank when we needed money. The family was our hospital when we were sick. The family was our support when we were hungry. Without the family we were nothing."<sup>27</sup> The salience of the family was further reinforced by the economic organization of family life whereby children handed their wage packet to the head. According to Mr B.R.: "I worked for my father. It wasn't my money. We had no say. I gave them all the money. I couldn't take out anything. He would kill me. And then what I'll do. Where can I go?"<sup>28</sup> It was also common for some members of the family to drop out of school early and obtain a job, usually unskilled, in order to contribute to the family income and to perhaps help a younger child get through school. Mr A.N., for example, dropped out of school so that his brother could become a staff nurse. Mr K.N., on the other hand, was able to obtain a better education only because his brothers went to work at an early age.<sup>29</sup> Since their economic destiny was connected to that of their family, members came to see that the notion of personal and family improvement were inseparable. As a result individuals often lost their identity within the family. Income pooling and co-residence further contributed to family cohesion.

The social control which the family exerted over the young produced a relatively common family identity and status. One study found that children were encouraged to suppress their individualism in the interests of the family.<sup>30</sup> Family loyalty and mutual responsibility was emphasized, and interdependence encouraged, with children emotionally and financially dependent on parents. For most, the "generation gap" did not

exist. According to Dr Goonam:

The generation gap did not exist among the Indians at that time. In most homes the young were glad to spend time with their parents. The white man talks about the generation gap but we didn't experience that at all. When I went to England I noticed the generation gap. I noticed why it had come. The white man wants to live away from his children and vice versa. This results in the generation gap being wide and in loneliness in their old age.<sup>31</sup>

The purpose of this section is not to romanticize the Indian family. In a situation of intense poverty there were many areas of tension. The Leader reported that wife-beating was common. A typical example is that of a 28 year old woman whose husband worked for the Corporation. Every night the husband would gather with other males from the Barracks and they would drink until late at night: "If I asked him to come early I was ill-used at his hands. The children shrink in terror from him when he is drunk and he picks quarrels and hits me."<sup>32</sup> The following folk-verse recorded in Riverside also points to similar problems faced by women.

My husband comes home at dead of night knocking at the door  
The clothes I wear in my sleep cause his eyes to glitter  
My heart has become disenchanted

My husband comes home high with dagga and raises havoc  
Should I say something then he makes eyes at me  
My heart has become disenchanted<sup>33</sup>

This is not an isolated incident as another informant recalled that working class women in Clairwood, where she grew up, sang the following song in response to the excessive drinking, gambling and wife-beating of their husbands:

Women must take it patiently  
If they start their nonsense  
they'll only be lighting a fire  
Only pray to God for help.<sup>34</sup>

Another feature of families was that socialization produced and promoted patriarchal social relationships. Males were socialized into believing that their dominance of women was natural and acceptable and that they deserved access to wealth and power before women. They had greater access to education and jobs, were more involved in sports, community and political organizations, and had greater freedom of movement. However, our focus is not so much on these tensions within the family as on its impact on individuals. The family emphasized a community-minded ethic and promoted and strengthened an ethnic identity. This was reinforced by ethnic and racial clustering which meant that children maintained close ties with their cultural heritage since they were able to play with others whose backgrounds were similar to their own and they shared values and beliefs that were rooted in ethnic family traditions.

**Religion:**

Striking religious-cultural differences played a decisive role in establishing group boundaries between Indians, Africans and whites. The latter looked upon Hinduism and Islam, which Indians retained as they set about re-establishing their culture and religion, as heathenistic and donated generously to the various missions which were propagating Christianity.<sup>35</sup> The majority of Durban's Indians were Hindu. In 1936, for example, there were 79.64% Hindus and 14.74% Muslims.<sup>36</sup> Since only a tiny percentage were

Christians our discussion will be confined to Hindus and Muslims. Hindus were Sanathanists which is more popular and less scriptually oriented, and places strong emphasis on the myths, legends and vibrant stories which abound in ancient Hindu epic scriptures. This religious culture affected every aspect of life and, because it was part of folk tradition in all parts of India, enabled local Hindus to transcend regional, cultural and linguistic differences.<sup>37</sup>

An important step in reconstructing religious life was the building of mosques and temples which became the community center. The building of temples was considered a sacred act and was a community effort. From very early on Indians erected tiny wattle, daub, and thatch shrines and temples on sugar estates. Early temples include those at Umbilo (1869), Mount Edgecombe (1875), Newlands (1896), Cato Manor (1882), Isipingo Rail (1870) and Sea View (1910). The first wood and iron temple was built in Rossburgh, near Clairwood, in 1869.<sup>38</sup> Free Indians continued this tradition and built temples wherever they established communities. Given their poverty, arduous work and confinement to specific plantations the building of temples was a major achievement. Temples helped preserve religion and culture, and became a source of security for many. It was at temples that communal worship was experienced, communal birth, marriage and death ceremonies observed and festivals carried out.

The mosque was the center of Muslim worship and congregational prayer was a means to build community spirit. The first mosque was built in Grey Street in 1881 by the passenger Indians Aboobakr Jhavery and Hajee Mahomed Dada and is today the largest mosque in the southern hemisphere. In 1885, Ahmed Tilly and Hoosen Meeran

built a mosque in nearby West Street. Mahomed Ebrahim Soofie, known popularly as Soofie Saheb, established mosques and madrasahs all over Durban in an effort to teach Islam to adults and children alike. He was born near Bombay and arrived in Durban in 1895. He displayed mystic tendencies and was very interested in sufism. Seeing the state of poor Muslims in Durban he built mosques and madrasahs in Riverside (1896), Springfield (1904), Westville (1904), Overport (1905), Sherwood (1905), and Sea Cow Lake (1906). He had built 13 mosques by the time of his death in 1910.<sup>39</sup>

Visits by missionaries from India were vital for increasing knowledge and awareness. They established bodies which attempted to unite Hindus and impose common practices and festivals, as well as provide direction in the fields of vernacular education and religious training. Professor Bhai Parmanand, who arrived in Durban on 5 August 1905, formed the Hindu Young Men's Society in 1906, which encouraged its members to study Tamil, engage in missionary work and visit India in order to understand their culture and heritage.<sup>40</sup> He was followed by Swami Shankeranand who, shortly after his arrival in 1908, established Hindu societies in Sydenham, Mayville and Sea Cow Lake. The Swami urged Hindus to circulate money amongst themselves in order to establish co-operative movements, educational institutions and political bodies. He also organized the Indian Farmer's Association to unite Hindu market gardeners.<sup>41</sup>

The Swami was very conservative politically as he was determined to forge a strong Hindu identity by creating an environment, through conciliation with white authorities, that was conducive to teaching Hindu culture, religion and the mother tongue. In 1909, for example, he got the Durban Veda Dharma Sabha to choose the

licensing officer to present an address to the retiring Governor of Natal. Given the licensing problems that Indians were experiencing many considered this "most inappropriate since it implied all is well with Indians when the writing on the wall says all is ill."<sup>42</sup> When King Edward died in May 1910, the Swami called on Hindus to "observe the strict rules of mourning and to take no part in any sort of amusements." He also obtained leave for indentured Indians to attend funeral services and tried to organize a "Grand Indian Sports and Festivities Day" to mark the coronation of the new king.<sup>43</sup> He opposed Gandhi, especially on passive resistance, because "the authorities become 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."<sup>44</sup>

The Swami organized a Conference in 1912 to systematize Hinduism. This led to the formation of the Hindu Maha Sabha whose objectives were to promote friendship and unity among Hindus, improve general knowledge through reading, encourage the growth of Hindi, create a love for the Motherland and assist the needy.<sup>45</sup> The Swami's actions increased religious awareness. For example, when the authorities wanted to destroy two cows in 1909, which were afflicted by tick-fever, he organized a mass meeting in Mayville which was attended by over 2,000 Hindus. Pandits and "respected Hindoo colonists" gave speeches in which they stressed 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." The African Chronicle reported that:

The indignation caused in consequence of the threatened shooting of two cows, among the Hindoos 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.<sup>46</sup>

At a subsequent meeting with the Administrator of Natal, it was pointed out that "the women of the district are going to offer themselves to the officials who may come to shoot the cattle, to say that they should be shot before the cattle." They also emphasized that the area "for some miles around is occupied by Hindoos and there is scarcely a person of any other religion in the district", thus illustrating the point that spatial segregation made it easier for Indians to institute religious practices and mobilize ordinary people around them.<sup>47</sup> The delegation had its way and the cows were not slaughtered. Such incidents served to raise religious consciousness.

As a result of the efforts of visiting scholars, 12 Hindu organizations emerged between 1905 and 1915. Other prominent persons to visit include Pandit Pravinsingh (1922), Pandit Karam Chand (1927), Dr Bhagatram Sahagal (1929), Professor Ralaram (1931), Swami Adhyanand (1934) and Pandit Rishiram (1937). In 1946 the Gandhi-Tagore Lectureship Trust, was established with the intention to bring out a lecturer each year "to interpret Hindu culture, philosophy, ethics and civilisation."<sup>48</sup> In 1943 the Maha Sabha adopted a badge as a form of identification to wear on all occasions so that they could display a common outlook and override differences in dialect, customs and rituals. Its motto was: "Be proud of your sages, gain wisdom from their lore, and you have done well."<sup>49</sup> In 1946 the organization designed a flag for use at "temples, schools and even at private homes. This will infuse enthusiasm in the people whenever and wherever hoisted, and give them food for thought in the cause of Hinduism."<sup>50</sup>

### **Drama and Religious Education:**

While temples provided a source of community bonding and overseas scholars organizational strength, it was really through their everyday life that most Hindus learnt their religion. Hinduism was not taught formally to the young. Parents were the first teachers and their importance can be seen in the following advice given by an elderly man to his grandson:

The father and mother are the first real gods who give you the knowledge. They must learn how to convey the matter powerfully but in simple language. They must guide the children with the glorious songs of the saints which are based on real knowledge. They must explain how people will be benefited by these. Words are necessary to awaken the spirit but these words should not be used in vain.<sup>51</sup>

Elders recited mythological stories from Hindu literature to the young or told religious stories orally. Informants point out that the tradition of Awwayaer, where elders give advice to the young via simple rhythmic verses, was crucial. They remember being given simple advice like "Do your duty without any reward", "Duty itself is an opportunity", and "Do it perfectly so that perfection will lead to Godliness."<sup>52</sup> V.M.M. Archary, whose father was an indentured, wrote the Thotra Malai ("Garland of Prayers") in 1931 which contained 16 short prayers which were to be sung at different times of the day. It was not specific to religion but a general guide to living. In fact books on prayers, histories of the divine saints and places, and praise poems were sold by Moothoosamy Bros. in Grey Street, Durban, from the early 1900s.<sup>53</sup> Informants also noted that they were put to sleep by the reading or telling of extracts from mythological, historical and social stories. Dr Goonam relates that her mother was "influenced by

Tamil literature and Tamil philosophy and she communicated that influence to us. Through her, we learnt to think beyond our surroundings for she transported us to ancient times in India. "<sup>54</sup>

Taken collectively, the recollections of informants indicate that every significant event was accompanied by a household ceremony dedicated to a particular deity. This ceremony is called "puja" and lasted two days. It was performed by a pandit and prayer flags ("jhandi") were raised in front of the house. These were tall bamboo poles which flew a red pennant and remained there until the next puja was performed. Because of the jhandi it was easy to recognize Hindu homes in any area. Other actions include the katha readings (stories and songs with a religious point which are read by a priest to mark an important occasion or fulfil some vow), "satsangs" (readings and songs from scriptures) and "yagnas" which were intricate and costly sets of rites and sermons which lasted for seven to fourteen days. All Hindu informants, from the middle class Dr. Goonam to the working class family of Mr B.R., who lived at the barracks, note that a room or part of a room was set aside for devotional prayer with the mother lighting the God-lamp at sunset or sun-rise for the whole family to pray. This gave the family a sense of common worship and was critical nurturing collective feeling.

There was a strong link between drama and religious education. Until the advent of films in the 1940s, mythologically oriented theater was the focal point of life in Durban and religious epics were an important source of knowledge for many Hindus. The Ramayana, one of the earliest compositions of Sanskrit literature, describes the social, religious and economic lives of the Aryas of North India. It tells the story of the

marriage of its main characters Rama and Sita, the latter's kidnapping by Ravana, the King of Ceylon, and rescue by Rama with the aid of the warrior monkey, Hanuman.<sup>55</sup> The Mahabharata deals with pride, greed, injustice, love, selfishness and duplicity. It contains numerous vivid descriptions of verbal and physical battles. The story of Krishna in the epic Bhagavad Gita is part of the Mahabharata. The Gita stresses that salvation is available to all and that class distinctions are not a barrier but a way of securing salvation. It outlines the duties of various castes and emphasizes that the Lord can only be achieved through observance of these.<sup>56</sup>

Informants recall how before the age of films, radio and television they gathered in the evenings and on weekends to communally sing verses of these 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, theater, entertainment and community were intimately linked since virtually every mutual aid scheme relied on theatrical entertainment to raise funds. According to Dr Goonam, Indians were "very alive to their need for theater, sing-songs and so on. They were especially fond of singing, particularly the Tamil section. They sang religious songs that were taught by the older people, and in unison sang and entertained themselves."<sup>57</sup> For Mr B.R.:

Life was good then. All Saturday night the whole community sat and enjoyed music. They played the "sorangi" (fiddle), "tabla" (drums), and "nagara" (very high and wide drum). The music we played was "Bajan" and "kirtal" - about Rama and Hanuman. The wives cooked and we had a big feast. Anyone could sing or act. We had no TV or Hi-Fi so we spent more time with each other.<sup>58</sup>

Mr P.D. recalled:

We worked hard all week and looked forward to weekends. Music was very popular. Everyone loved the "six-foot" dance.<sup>59</sup> People dressed unusually and looked like wild animals. They wore skins and hides and painted their faces. It was scary if you were not used to it. The crowd would sit in a circle while 15 people would dance. They 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>60</sup>

Drama was the most popular and prevalent art form during the inter-war years. Plays were initially performed on streets or in sheds but moved to community halls once these had been built by the 1930s. Mr N.G. recalls that the "Maypole Dance" was an extremely popular street dance. It was used to raise funds, particularly for schools. Groups of 6 to 8 boys would stand in a circle and attach themselves to a pole which was placed in the middle. They would then dance in a criss-cross manner around the pole, all the while singing religious songs, until they became knotted to the pole and stuck together. This was done on streets and members of the community gathered around and contributed whatever they could. Such performances helped foster neighborhood loyalties.<sup>61</sup> While the music, dance and poetry made for an entertaining evening the drama was educational as it taught and reinforced the tenets of Hinduism. Hindus recited with great pride verses from these epics and set up, as ideals for their children, the qualities of these heroes. This also increased identification with India because they could link its culture to these works of art and literature.<sup>62</sup>

Unlike Hindus, Muslims received formal religious education from a very young

age at madrasahs which were attached to each mosque. For example, the Durban Anjuman Islam School, attached to the West Street Mosque, was opened in 1909 with an enrolment of 150, including 14 girls, in response to the decision of the government not to allow children over 14 into government schools.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, a madrasah attached to the May Street Mosque had an average attendance of 79 in 1920.<sup>64</sup> A.M. Lockhat, who started off as a small retailer but in time came to own a large wholesaling and import business, established the Hajee Ahmed Mohammed Lockhat Wakuff (Trust) in 1922 which founded a number of madrasahs. In addition to the tenets of Islam, Gujarati, Urdu and Arabic were also taught.<sup>65</sup> It was only when leaders like A.I. Kajee and A.M. Moolla came to the fore that Muslims attempted to combine religious and secular education. They built schools like the South Coast Madrasah State Aided School, Ahmedia State Aided Indian School, Anjuman Islam State Aided School and Orient Islamic High School during the 1940s and 1950s.

### **Rituals and Festivals:**

Festivals and rituals were very visible markers of racial and ethnic identity. They not only served to distance Indians from Africans and whites but also strengthened the links between individuals and the "community" as large numbers took an active role in encouraging and providing moral and spiritual support to participants. The community, in turn, benefited since the communal eating of food is deemed to draw all in attendance into the spiritual unit. The major Muslim festival was the Mohurram Festival which was held on the tenth day of Mohurram, a month in the Islamic calendar, to commemorate



**Firewalking Ceremony: Devotees ('Soutris') walking across a 10 metre long firepit in a trance, their bodies pierced with hooks bearing limes and flowers**

**(Local History Museum, Durban)**



Indian Procession marching through  
the streets of Durban, early 1900s

(Local History Museum, Durban)



**'Tigers' being painted for the Mohurram Festival  
(Local History Museum, Durban)**



Family dressed for a festival  
(Local History Museum, Durban)



Tajjia being dumped in to Umgeni River

Courtesy of Prof. J. Brain  
University of Durban-Westville

the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grand-son of the Prophet Muhammed, who was killed in battle on this day. Although this was a Muslim festival Hindus participated in large numbers. According to Mr B.R. "Mohurram was celebrated by all Indians, even Hindus. We had unity in those days. There was no segregation."<sup>66</sup> The Deputy Protector, A.R. Dunning, noted in 1910 that the festival is "always well attended by Hindu indentured workers although it is a Mohammedan occasion of mourning."<sup>67</sup>

Preparations began at least two weeks prior to the festival as bamboo and other materials were collected to build the tadjia, a miniature mausoleum constructed in wood and covered in colored paper and gold and silver tinsel. It consisted of three levels, each rising from within the other with the base, about 10 feet square, being the largest, and ranging between 15 and 25 feet in height. The craft of building tadjias was passed on from generation to generation and undertaken with great care and pride as each area attempted to build the most attractive tadjia. Middle class Indians considered this a waste of valuable community resources. The African Chronicle complained in 1907 that:

The public would be well advised in practicing economy at present and we earnestly hope that our countrymen would, instead of squandering their money in a manner which benefits no-one but the beer shops and the tom-tom drummer do better service by utilising the same amount for some national purpose.<sup>68</sup>

On the tenth of Mohurram, groups of people gathered around each tadjia and pulled it by hand, all the while singing songs to the memory of Hussain, beating on drums, dancing wildly or carrying out stick fights. The chariots were led by dancers known as "tigers" because they painted their faces and bodies black and yellow. The tigers are supposed to prevent the corpses of slain martyrs from being crushed at the

battle where Hussain was killed. Tigers were excellent wrestlers and, at some point during the day, those from different districts competed against each other to determine the best wrestler. Mr P.D. recalls that although Mohurram was a Muslim festival, "the Corporation gave the people the day off. It was more important than Diwali. The Tamils also did the tiger dance. People were drumming and fights took place everywhere while we marched to the Umgeni river. The tigers painted their bodies and wore a "langoti" - a small cloth."<sup>69</sup>

The procession was usually several miles long and ended with the tajiias being dumped into a river or the sea. Local newspapers carried extensive coverage of this festival as it was a major event on the local calendar from the 1880s. The following report of the 1914 festival provides a vivid description of how the day unfolded, as well the attitude of whites:

The Mohurram Festival, or Coolie Christmas, has now become an occasion for the Easterns on which all their innate fanatical ideas seem to be let loose. The hideously decked Indians, ochre striped "tigers" and gaudily attired women, alike, become insane. The nerve shocking yells of those almost naked fanatics, together with the motionless 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. 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.... By two o' clock, when the Corporation coolies arrived in Umgeni the assembly exceeded 10,000 while carriages and rikshas continued to arrive with hundreds of passengers. The pagodas were soon taken to the River and smashed, and the "gods" were thus honoured.<sup>70</sup>

There was a strong police presence because the festival often ended with the spilling of blood. In 1914, for example, when employees of the Durban Corporation had completed their rituals they were moved to one side to allow those from the NGR to

proceed to the river:

No sooner had the pagoda (tajjia) arrived at the top of the incline leading to the bridge than the corporation employees hurled a volley of stones and bottles [and] a number of coolies are now lying in hospital. When the two forces came within striking distance, the air was blackened with a shower of missiles of all descriptions but mostly chunks of road metal. The police galloped right amongst the infuriated Indians and caused the coolies to give them heed.... When the forces were so separated as to be beyond range of each other, the one which the Borough Police were attending to turned on the officers, and many of them had narrow escapes from serious injury.<sup>71</sup>

When Corporation employees were being escorted back to their barracks by the police, as soon as they passed the Railway Barracks, they "were pelted with a storm of missiles of every description, mostly coal". The following morning the Railway Indians went to the Corporation Barracks and challenged them to a fight. "The invitation was promptly accepted, and they swarmed out in hundreds." The police arrived on the scene and forced both parties to retire to their Barracks. At the Railway Barracks about 1,000 Indian men stoned the police. "The Police were called out again, and at first had to retreat, so dangerous was the "fire" to which they were subjected. After some time "peace was restored." The Police Inspector stated that for the two decades that he had held the position "there had always been a natural jealousy between the different parties respecting their ability to build pagodas and other artistic devices," and advised that the festival be "suppressed. It is only made an excuse for a day's holiday in which to get drunk, and render themselves useless for the remainder of the week. The Indians have no right to carry out this debauchery in our main streets."<sup>72</sup>

During his stay in Natal, Swami Shankeranand repeatedly "denounced and

rebuked the Hindoos in strong terms for taking part in Muslim festivals but ignoring their own, yet insisting on being called Hindoo."<sup>73</sup> In a letter to African Chronicle in 1909, "Bhessmasoor" also objected to Hindu participation:

We see the Hindoos participating by tom-tomming, the donning of hideous disguises, illicit drinking and a regular general jollification. The Hindoos ought to consider that the world is laughing at them on their moral degradation and stupidity in taking part in the Festival of the Mohammedans. We Hindoos have our own Festivals to celebrate and pay due respect to and it is a matter of great regret that such festivals are slurred. Let me hope that the Hindoos would try to put a stop to their compatriots taking part in this Festival.<sup>74</sup>

That Hindus continued to participate in the Mohurram is evident in the complaint by the Arya Yuvuk Sabha, a Hindu organization, in 1933 to the Town Clerk that the festival "is a purely Mohammedan one, and the majority of Hindu participants labouring under a delusion intermingle freely with the Mohammedans, and with your kind co-operation this can be easily remedied, in so far, that no leave be granted to non-Mohammedans under your charge."<sup>75</sup>

The Muslim clergy and middle class condemned the festival because of the merriment and festivity. They looked on the tajiias as idolatrous and wanted an end to the celebrations. The Indian Views complained that with "drink, wine and exhilarating tom-toming and dancing indulged in, ... the illiterate Mussulmans and their ignorant non-Muslim friends adopted tazia-making to make a nuisance of themselves. Educated Muslims feel insulted at the way the hideous performance is conducted."<sup>76</sup> A large group of Muslims even sent a petition to the Commissioner of Police each year to get him to outlaw the festival by refusing permission for the procession to be held, and

banning tom-tomming and the display of naked bodies in public.<sup>77</sup> This was to no avail and this practice continues to be a feature of life in Durban up till the present, although it is no longer as boisterous.

The Mohurram provided an opportunity for expressing local community and neighborhood identity. The intermingling, wrestling, music and dancing skills brought together families and neighborhoods. It provided an escape from the drudgery of everyday life, and recreation at a time when this was in short supply. It gave the working class an opportunity to demonstrate their freedom and independence by celebrating in public in an ebullient manner opposed by whites as well as middle class Indians. In fact, so many recreational elements came into it that some of the religious fervor was lost. This, more than any festival, was recalled with greatest enthusiasm by informants. According to Mr B.R. this was the only occasion when Indians could do as they pleased and they used it to demonstrate their freedom and power. People prepared by smoking ganja and drinking which got them into the "mood" for the pleasures of the day.<sup>78</sup>

The major Hindu festivals were Kavadi, Draupadi and Mariamman. The Kavadi is celebrated in February and May each year in honor of the God Muruga who, it is believed, has the power to cure people of their illness and get rid of misfortune. Kavadi is a means of fasting, prayers and penance by those who in the course of the year have been afflicted with disease or sickness. Participants stick needles and pins in their tongues and cheeks, or draw chariots with strings knotted into large hooks protruding from the fleshy parts of the backs. The procession starts from a river bank and proceeds to a temple. The kavadi itself is a bamboo arch decorated with marigolds, ferns, palm shoots,

peacock feathers and coconuts. On each end is a brass container filled with milk with which the devotee has to wash the statuette of the deity. Thousands who may not have taken a vow attend to be blessed by participants. In the early days, because there were fewer temples, people travelled long distances with clothing and utensils, and stayed for several days at the temple. In this the link between the individual and the community becomes clear. A white reporter who attended the Kavadi festival at the Umbilo Temple in 1935 reported that:

The approaches to the Temple were gaily decorated with multi-coloured bunting and vegetation, and vivid splashes of colour were lent to the scene by the bright-hued, flowing garments of the Indian women, who formed a large percentage of the concourse inside and outside the Temple.... The chanting of the priests, the piping of Indian flutes, and the beating of the nagarars (drums fashioned like tom-toms) mingled with the subdued hub-hub of conversation as the devotees, bearing on their shoulders "kavadies", marched in procession round the exterior of the Temple prior to concluding their penance within. Altogether between 30 and 40 Hindoos went through this ritual yesterday afternoon. They were drawn from all over the Borough. Each community arrived in procession on their own, accompanied by one or more sacred images drawn on low wagons or carts.<sup>79</sup>

It is also interesting to note that at the start of the kavadi festival at the Umgeni Temple, one of the organizers, K.M. Pillay, gave a speech in which he considered it a blessing that the British flag was flying all over the world and thanked God that they were under British rule. He then prayed for the well-being of the Royal family in general and King Edward VII specifically. He also blessed the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Privy council which always "saw to the good of India." Mr Pillay also hoped that the blessing of God would descend on the Government of Natal which had "always been very good to Indians."<sup>80</sup> This suggests that being oppressed by the

government did not automatically lead to class identity or to a revolutionary agenda. Many ordinary people simply wanted to create conditions which would allow them to continue to live and flourish as Indians and these festivals were not aimed at political resistance.

The Mariamman "Porridge" festival is associated with the Goddess Mariamman who is believed to be the cause and cure of various infectious diseases including smallpox and measles. Her ambiguous character is seen in her name which, literally translated, means "Mother of Rain and Death", invoking images of life and death. During this festival devotees offer "cooling" foods such as milk, porridge, pumpkin and coconut to the Goddess to cool her anger. The food is placed in buckets around the temple and eaten by devotees. A chicken or a goat is also sacrificed and its blood spilt on the earth to represent life and fertility.<sup>81</sup>

This festival, celebrated on Good Friday, a public holiday, from c.1910-1911, was annually attended by massive crowds. In 1916, for example, 18,000 people attended at the Isipingo Temple.<sup>82</sup> When C.V. Pillay criticized the festival because "ignorant people who did not understand the Indian religion, spent their money in useless pursuits," the proprietor of the temple, Annandie, sued for defamation. At the trial it emerged that in the course of this festival devotees offered as sacrifice about 300 chickens, approximately £200 in cash, camphor, cocoa-nuts and jewellery which the proprietor kept for herself.<sup>83</sup> The first witness, Pandaram, stated that the festival lasted three days. No cooking, sanitary, or lodging provisions were made for accommodating the thousands who attended. People had to bathe in the pond and drink water from a well, which was

inadequate and unclean. M.P. Pather testified that the crowd was so large and attendants so few that it was impossible to carry out the ceremony properly and most did not even make it into the temple to offer their sacrifices.<sup>84</sup> The Chief Magistrate gave judgement in favor of the plaintiff on the grounds that people were going there on their own will but he did not award the £300 in damages which the plaintiff had claimed.<sup>85</sup>

The Draupadi (firewalking) festival is celebrated annually in March in honor of the Goddess Draupadi who is regarded by Hindus as "the model of duty, love and devotion, who bore various trials with great fortitude."<sup>86</sup> South Indian traditions contain stories of her walking on fire to cleanse herself from attempts to degrade her. On the night preceding the ceremony large crowds gather at the temple where mythological stories are told and sung to the accompaniment of drums. This is a festive occasion as the tune is lively and lasts almost all night. This ceremony culminates with devotees, called "Soutris," walking through a ten meter long firepit covered almost a foot deep with burning embers. Devotees believe that Draupadi precedes them across the firepit, and cools the coals for those who have faith in her. Devotees bless the crowd by placing a dot of ash, which is considered holy, on their forehead. Attendance was not confined to Hindus. For example, the Indian Opinion reported in 1933 that at the Umbilo Temple, "the annual firewalking 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, Mahommedans."<sup>87</sup>

Middle class Hindus considered these festivals a distortion and vehemently opposed their celebration. In 1909, the African Chronicle claimed that it "is 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-Toming and hideous display of fantastic figures, can have any sanction from the religious doctrines."<sup>88</sup> The Dharma Vir argued in 1925 that these "practices and usages have entered into our religion.... [They] 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>89</sup> After pointing out that "the most heathenish customs still prevalent are the firewalking 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" the Indian Opinion opined in 1936 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>90</sup> The fact that this opposition spanned several decades is a clear indication of agency. While the working class used and benefited from facilities provided by the middle classes, they were not going to be molded in the image which the latter had in mind.

What the middle class and religious leaders had in mind was the celebration of less boisterous festivals like Diwali. When Swami Shankeranand arrived in Durban in 1906 the major festival of Hindus was Mohurram. He was annoyed that most employers gave Hindus the day off to celebrate Mohurram but not Diwali, the "festival of lights" which is celebrated at the end of the autumn harvest with ceremonial worship of the goddess of wealth and learning. Swami Shankeranand asked the Town Clerk to set aside time for workers to celebrate Diwali.<sup>91</sup> A 1909 memorandum circulating in the Town

Clerk's office observed that Hindus could not be given leave to attend all their festivals since they celebrated 18 festivals in all and these had different degrees of importance: "as regards the people in Durban who are observing this festival (Diwali), they would belong to the better class and I am not at all convinced that the general indentured Indian population of the Colony would wish this day set apart."<sup>92</sup> When the opinion of the Protector 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>93</sup>

What the Protector meant by "few people" was that Diwali was essentially a festival of the middle classes. Dr Goonam 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 Diwali 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."<sup>94</sup> In 1907, for example, Hindu merchants arranged a Diwali celebration at the premises of a Muslim, Abdool Latif, which was attended by non-Hindus like Sheth Rustomjee and Dada Osman.<sup>95</sup> There was a major difference in the way Diwali was celebrated. In general, Hindu merchants closed their businesses and a large crowd gathered at a community hall. After speeches were rendered milk and other refreshments were distributed. Thereafter a picnic was held at a park at which people took part in various sporting activities and meals were served. Non-Hindus also attended. In 1911, for example, Muslims like Dawad Mahomed, M.C.

Anglia, and Ismail Gora as well as Parsee Sorabji Rustomjee attended the Diwali celebrations. In his speech Mahomed commended the unity and considered these "happy gatherings" of the two communities "an excellent thing."<sup>96</sup>

Whites objected to many of the practices of Indians, especially the playing of music when processions marched through districts occupied by them. For example, in 1916, D.P. 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>97</sup> White officials also regarded these practices as heathenistic and looked at them with suspicion. For example, Chief Constable Donovan felt that J. Daniel of the Umgeni Road Temple was "carrying on this worship principally for the purpose of making money out of it. These processions are generally money making devices and a positive nuisance to the Police. These religious observances cause annoyance to others ... any tom-tomming or disturbance would likely cause serious trouble from the European residents there."<sup>98</sup> In 1936 commandants of the various police stations called on the City Council to ban all festivals as they were a "public nuisance."<sup>99</sup>

Although the state did not ban Indian festivals, it attempted to control the course of events by requiring organizers to obtain permission from the police. Letters seeking permission were extremely detailed, and contained such information as the route to be followed, the time of the procession, and whether music was to be played. For example, when Soobraya Reddy of the Cato Manor Temple was holding a festival in 1934 he had

to outline the program for the whole weekend. Members were to travel with "our Temple music house-to-house to notify our people;" the pipe band was to play between 5.30 PM and 10.30 PM on Friday evening; he detailed the exact route to be followed on Saturday; "in honour of this festival" an Indian Dance was to be held throughout Saturday night; and on Sunday "small festivals will be held in the Temple, when various Indian ratepayers of the district will assemble to offer prayers.... It is earnestly hoped that you will be kind enough to favourably consider this application, for which the Indians will be ever grateful."<sup>100</sup> Notwithstanding this, permission was not always granted. When the Chief Constable refused permission on one occasion, he explained why:

The question of Indian processions is a constant source of trouble owing to the fact 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 - always accompanied by tom-toms &c., and sometimes continued late into the night or small hours of the morning.<sup>101</sup>

Whites sometimes opposed Indians with force. For example, when Hindus congregated near the beachfront with their 'Roth', a chariot on which they were carrying their god and goddesses, they were attacked by 400 troops armed with sticks, although they had written permission to observe these rites. The priest and about 50 men and women required treatment. Such incidents drew Indians together. In this particular case the NIC, led by Parsee Sorabjee Rustomjee and A.I. Kajee, a Muslim, took up this affair with the government on behalf of Hindus.<sup>102</sup>

Hindus and Muslims sometimes complained of each other's practices. In

November 1916 the Chief Constable forbade Hindu processions passing the Grey Street Mosque because of possible altercations "owing to bitter religious tension which exists between Hindus and Mahommedans.... I have ample proof that they only desire to pass this mosque wholly and solely for the purpose of jeering at Mahommedans."<sup>103</sup> When Muslims in Clairwood complained that Hindu processions were disrupting their prayers, Hindus boycotted Muslim-owned businesses. The dispute was resolved "after much negotiation" but extra police were called in whenever religious processions were held: "the fear was that any chance spark would set the 'Pathan' element on fire. Such men are fanatics and would take some beating."<sup>104</sup> In 1922 the Hindu Maha Sabha called for a ban on "indecently clad coolie tigers" dancing in the streets as this "barbaric display is decidedly against our best notions of civilization."<sup>105</sup> Indians had multiple identities. While religious identity sometimes assumed significance in matters internal to the group, such differences were not important in terms of the relationship of Indians to whites and Africans. The latter classified them on the basis of their race and formulated policies based on race, with the result that it was impossible to escape the category "Indian."

Indian rituals and festivals were so different from those of Africans and whites that they were unmistakable markers for Indian identity. The joint participation of Hindus and Muslims caused them to focus on their common status. This religious-oriented culture, which gave Indians stability and strength, was a vital source of psychological protection in a hostile society. Further, the fact that rich and poor Indians lived side by side in many areas was vital in strengthening the vertical ties of ethnicity. The factory was not the only arena of conflict. Working class Indians struggled to establish their

festivals and much of this was marked by hostility and conflict, not only against the authorities but also against middle class Indians who did not approve of the annual acts of vandalism and rowdyism. This area was contested and the working class was not malleable in this regard. According to Dr. Goonam festivals fulfilled an important need:

I was very interested in the social life of Indians. Once the people had gained my confidence they invited me to their festivals.... I was quite surprised to see the Six Foot dance and epic stories coming alive on stage. It was one of the outlets that people had. Like having open air theater where they all sat all night long. Then, of course, they were interested in the Isipingo Festival and most of them carried kavadi. I thought a lot of it was 'hooley'. However, they came in large numbers and there was quite a lot of fun-fair there for them and it seems to have satisfied their need for a real life for themselves.<sup>106</sup>

#### **Language:**

The retention of the vernacular was an important concern of most Indians. A 1943 conference, for example, attended by the most educated and politically radical of Durban's Indians considered the vernacular important for the maintenance of identity.

The conference emphasized that:

Language is an integral part of patriotism and nationalism demands proficiency in the mother tongue.... There are certain traits, customs, traditions, peculiar to a nation, that can only be understood and appreciated by those versed in their mother tongue. Anyone unversed in it loses his identity.<sup>107</sup>

This, in fact, was a persistent theme. The Natal Hindi Educational Conference of October 1948 noted that "the mother tongue is like mother's milk;" therefore all needed to be nourished in their mother tongue: "Indians can only maintain their identity by giving greater prominence to the study of Hindi."<sup>108</sup> One of the aims of the Sabha,

which had been formed in 1912, was to encourage the growth of Hindi. After Swami Shankeranand's departure the cause of the vernaculars was taken up by Pandit Bawani Dayal. The Pandit, whose father had come to Natal in 1880 as an indentured Indian, was born in Johannesburg in 1892. Although educated at the Wesleyan Methodist School, he was extremely concerned about the future of Hindi and, when he moved to Durban in 1915, he opened a Hindi Ashram in Clare Estate, comprising a school and library, a Hindi Prachini Sabha in Jacobs where all speeches and discussion were in Hindi, and the Hindi Football Club where all members were compelled to speak Hindi.<sup>109</sup>

The Pandit also organized Hindi Literary Conferences in 1916 and 1917, attended by Hindu organizations from all over South Africa, which passed a number of resolutions: Hindi should be the lingua franca of India so that the "motherland" could have one national language, the vernaculars be included in the syllabi of government schools in South Africa, Hindi teachers be brought from India, a library be established, and all government circulars be published in Hindi.<sup>110</sup> The intensity of the Pandit is evident in his altercation with Sastri who had advised the government in 1927 that vernaculars should not be part of the school syllabus. When delegates voted with Sastri at the 1927 SAIC Congress, the Pandit delivered a stirring speech following which Sastri was defeated. He pointed out that in spite of the "identity of dress, manners and customs, the difference of language itself has given birth to so many nationalities in the West... If our language is dead ... it will be like a flower without scent, a body without souls."<sup>111</sup>

The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha was formed in 1925 to promote the art, culture and civilization of India and to encourage the study Indian languages.<sup>112</sup> The Sabha held

national conferences in 1925, 1926, 1929, 1939, 1942, and 1947 and its key concern was the maintenance of the mother tongue. To set an example, it was resolved that all its proceedings would be conducted in Hindi. By 1945 the Sabha had 29 affiliated institutions with each following a uniform syllabus.<sup>113</sup> Tamils, Gujarati's and Telegus also formed similar organizations to teach the vernacular. A 1943 report noted that vernacular schools were run after school, between 3 PM and 5 PM and that such schools taught grammar, singing and provided general religious knowledge.<sup>114</sup> Dr Goonam, born 1906, recalls her attendance at a Tamil school between 1912-1917:

Our Tamil school, Sathia Gnana Sabbai, was a cottage in Prince Edward Street.... The headmaster, Mr V.R.R. Moodley lived upstairs. He was a court interpreter who ran the school privately with his wife and daughter, Gonarathnam, after whom I was named.... We began with Tamil school at 7 am., singing hymns and practicing reading and writing. We hurried from Tamil school, within the hour to reach English school by 8 am.... We returned to Tamil school at 3.30 pm. and stayed there till 5.30 pm. learning grammar and poetry.<sup>115</sup>

Working class recalled similar experiences. Mrs Moodley said that because her mother knew Tamil she taught all the children in the area from books which her grandfather had brought from India. Mr N.G. attended Tamil school in Umgeni Road every afternoon. Mr K.N. also attended language school every afternoon and "on Sundays we used to go to school prayers like church - we sang and prayed all morning. I hated it but mother was very strict and made sure we knew Tamil."<sup>116</sup> The following extract from a letter from H.R. Pathy, who had moved to Johannesburg, to his grandson in Durban reflects a similar concern:

Let the divine mother of the Tamil language show grace to Tamilians. I am a

pure Tamilian and every Tamilian must have these feelings. I have a country, I have a language, I have music in my language, I have grammar in my language, I have literature in my language, I have special character and everyone must beat his heart heroically and awaken the spirit in all.... Don't miss your Tamil language training. Read many books, try how to speak nicely, practice well and spend your spare time with intelligent people. The future is expecting you. Be a hero to your beautiful Tamil.<sup>117</sup>

In addition to formal training, the vernacular was preserved through a number of other ways. From 1936 the Vedic Educational Society organized free vernacular classes for adults. These classes were held on wednesday evenings, the teachers offered their services free and enrolment was 180 in 1936. The organizers felt that vernacular education "allowed the education system to bear a national character."<sup>118</sup> Journalism also contributed to the cultivation of language. The Indian Opinion and Indian Views (Gujarati), African Chronicle and Viveka Banoo (Tamil), The Dharma Vir and Hindi (Hindi) all contained articles in the vernaculars.

The arrival of Hindi music records from the 1920s and sound-films from the late 1930s were extremely significant. The cinema became a regular feature of Indian life in Durban and films were played to packed houses. From newspaper advertisements we note that there was a theater in Mayville and one in Jacobs in addition to the five or six in central Durban.<sup>119</sup> The cinema was an important part of the lives of most informants and replaced live drama as the most popular form of entertainment from the 1940s. Attendance was regular, friday or saturday evenings for those who played soccer, and saturday afternoons for others. Cinema attendance was such a major attraction that people often travelled great distances to get to see a movie because of the concentration of theaters in central Durban. Theaters were Indian owned, particularly by the Rawat and

Moosa families, prominent merchant families. While this is not directly connected to language, most informants spoke with great fondness about films and cinema attendance and a slight digression throws light on how they they spent their recreation time.

Mr K.N. remembers attending shows at the magazine barracks which were organized for almost twenty years by Mr Pather. Although the sound and quality was not very good, he and many other working class Indians patronized the barracks because the shows were half the price of that at a regular theater: "We saw some good films. I use to love my Tamil films. S.S. Koko was my main actor. Nobody missed his film. We even saw Tamil westerns and a Tamil tarzan. We saw horses, tigers and elephants in the movies."<sup>120</sup> The cinema was also important in the life of Mr N.G. He recalls the trouble that he had to go through to see a film. He was living in Clairwood and attended the Royal Picture Palace in Victoria Street, about 8 to 10 miles away: "I loved movies. We use to catch a train on Friday to town. We got off at Berea station and walked to the Royal. There was no return train because the movie finished late, so we walked home. I always took my shoes off because it was more comfortable and because it was the only good shoe I had. After I got married I used to go to Mayville Theater which was more for families. Thiagaraja Bhagavathar was the big Tamil star and I used to sing his songs. We had to wait days to see his film."<sup>121</sup> Mr A.N. points out that the theater was usually full, irrespective of the appeal of the film, because there was little else to do. There was always the compensation of the songs if the story line was weak.<sup>122</sup>

The October 1943 TASA conference noted the "positive" impact of Indian films for language retention and as a source of religious education because of their "religious

atmosphere."<sup>123</sup> Sound films made accessible a large number of songs which singers of local origin mastered and sang regularly. The process of learning, singing and listening to songs was important in cultivating Indian languages. Songs were available from a number of music outlets, the most popular being Roopanan Brothers and Orient Music Saloon.<sup>124</sup> Indians also had a special program on radio on Mondays and Fridays, which was organized by Mr A.A. Peters during the 1930s.<sup>125</sup> Ironically, one of the first acts of the radical NIC after it came into power in 1945 was to request more radio time for Indians.<sup>126</sup> A.G. Pillay recalls his first music oriented film, "Seva Sedanan":

People went in their hundreds ... for the first time they were seeing a trained Indian person singing. She had a very pleasing voice. It was very inspiring even for a person who didn't know music. And thereafter the young ones who could play ... they tried, they sang, they bought the record, they put it on over and over again. And I was one of them till that record was worn off by the needle.<sup>127</sup>

This is not intended to suggest that the cinema made the working class compliant and their leisure more acceptable to middle class norms. On the contrary, while the cinema was important as a source of language education, it was also an outlet for the working class. Some of the informants (Mr N.G.) have alluded to respectable theaters which families could attend and those patronized by single men, while the cinema at the magazine barracks was patronized by the working class only. Contemporary reports point to the "improper" behavior of cinema patrons and the negative influence of films. In a letter to Indian Views in 1933, M. Bawa complained that the youth "sacrifice their morals" for the cinema. The consequences are unhealthy. They learn about love prematurely which "induces the tender brains to vile deeds.... This evil spirit is fast

permeating the souls of many young men, and for the sake of moral preservation, its existence must be extirpated from the circle of young Indians."<sup>128</sup> In another letter to the same newspaper, M. Pather argued that Indians deserved the treatment meted out to them by whites because "what we reap is what we sow." He felt that instead of doing things to uplift themselves Indians "think it honourable to use obscene and filthy languages." In the cinema "one's attention is drawn to some of the vilest words on earth and coming from the lips of Indians fills one with feelings of great pain and remorse." In addition "the hooligan element is very prominent. Have we who claim an ancient civilisation reached such depths of degradation that it should be necessary for the police to guard the inside of our Play houses as they have done ... because brawls had reached such heights."<sup>129</sup>

As a result of language differences amongst them, Indians could not get by with the vernacular only. While they grew up in a neo-Indian world where the vernacular played an important role in reinforcing Indianness, they also operated in a colonial urban milieu where they had to communicate with Indians who spoke different languages as well as with non-Indians. They initially used Fanagalo, a mixture of Zulu, English and Afrikaans, but over time a distinct South African Indian English (SAIE) became the main language of communication between Indians.<sup>130</sup> As a result of the use of Fanagalo, the small numbers of children in school and segregation in housing and schooling, the linguistic characteristics of SAIE has an "average value" and is not close to that used by whites in Natal.<sup>131</sup>

Only 11% of Indian children in Natal under the age of 7 could speak English in

1936.<sup>132</sup> In fact, the vernacular remained the language of the home for most until 1960.<sup>133</sup> Thereafter, mainly because of the rapid expansion in education, English became the main language and 97.5% regarded English as their first language in 1990.<sup>134</sup> Most educated Indians can speak an English that is close to standard English but this is different from that which they employ in their homes, street and neighborhood.<sup>135</sup> Thus, although Indians were acquiring English, the distinctiveness of SAIE was another mark of separateness.

### **Conclusion:**

The process which led to Indians reconstituting their culture and thus strengthening group identity was aided by the sense of persecution which they experienced in Durban. They were seen as intruders by Africans, as people who lowered wages, while whites saw them as uncivilized laborers brought to Natal to accomplish a set assignment. They were different in every aspect from whites and Africans; in color, culture, and values. Whites ignored class and religious differences among Indians and regarded all as "coolies."

Differences between Muslims and Hindus only had relevance in relations among Indians. Even then, a serious attempt was made to overcome divisive issues. This is best reflected in the reaction to the establishment of Pakistan. At one of the meetings to mark Indian Independence Day, A.I. Kajee, a Muslim, made it clear that they "were not assembled as Hindus, Christians and Muslims but as Indians. The religious politics of India have not been imported into South Africa. Indians in this country must be Indians

alone and not Mussulmans and Hindus."<sup>136</sup> At the same time, Muslims celebrated Jinnah's birthday annually and sent funds to him in his attempt to create Pakistan. At the 1946 celebration, for example, Kajee regarded Jinnah as a "leader of the entire Muslim world." They received a cable from Jinnah thanking them for financial aid and making it clear that "as far as South Africa is concerned it will be treated as an all-Indian problem and I will help the Indians as Indians and not as Hindus or Muslims."<sup>137</sup> While Muslims celebrated the creation of Pakistan, Muslims and Hindus together celebrated the independence of India. At the 1947 Indian Independence celebrations in Durban, the NIC held a meeting in Durban at which the flags of both India and Pakistan were unfurled side by side and there were pictures of all the major leaders, including Jinnah.<sup>138</sup>

The life of Indians centered largely around the family and religion. These aspects of community life were pivotal in providing Indians with a sense of who they were as well as with material and moral support. Although urbanization strained the extended family, it continued to socialize and acculturate individuals and protected them against the world. The family was also a unit for economic mobilization, which strengthened members bond. As a result of segregation, children lived, schooled and played with other Indian children. This meant that there was no fundamental clash of values over marriage, religion, and language. The young were spared having to negotiate between the cultural values of their parents and those of their peers in the wider society. For the vast majority the values emphasized by parents largely coincided with those of their peers, the media and the educational system.

Unlike Europe, where the concentration of workers in class-based neighborhoods

made it possible for class loyalties and consciousness to be forged in everyday life at play as well as at work, in Durban, sporting clubs, civic associations, religious institutions and family life were organized along racial and ethnic lines. This absence of a shared culture must be kept in mind when considering the next chapter, which focuses on the attempts to form non-racial trade unions and establish a non-racial political tradition.

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37. A. Diesel and P. Maxwell, Hinduism in Natal, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1993), p.16-19.
38. Henning, Indentured Indians, p.156.
39. Mahida, Muslims, pp.17, 32,44 and 69.

40. African Chronicle, 4 May 1907.
41. African Chronicle, 9 June 1909.
42. Indian Opinion, 25 December 1909.
43. Indian Opinion, 6 June 1911.
44. Indian Opinion, 8 June 1912.
45. Indian Opinion, 18 January 1913.
46. African Chronicle, 25 September 1909.
47. African Chronicle, 9 October 1909.
48. The Leader, 19 January 1946.
49. The Leader, 9 January 1943.
50. The Leader, 16 August 1946.
51. Mr S. Subramaniam, a lecturer in Tamil at UD-W, is researching the use of Tamil in Durban. He has collected family letters dating back to the early years of this century and was kind enough, not only to allow me access to this material, but to translate relevant documents. This will be referred to as the "Subramaniam Collection." This particular letter was from an elderly man to his grandson, Ompathy, 12 June 1944.
52. Interview with Mr Kenny Naidoo, 18 May 1995 and Mr Poonsamy Daearinathan, 19 August 1990.
53. These books are in the possession of Mr Subramaniam.
54. Dr. Goonam, Coolie Doctor (Durban: Madiba Publishers, 1991), p.12.
55. Clarke, East Indians, p.100.
56. R. Hammer, "Roots: The Development of Hindu Religion," in R.P. Bearer ed., The World's Religions (Inckfields Way, Herts: Lion Publisher, 1982), p.182.
57. Interview with Dr Goonam, 31 May 1989.
58. Interview with Mr Baiju Ramdeen, 8 July 1990.
59. The "six-foot" dance is known as "Thirukooth" in Tamil, "thiru" meaning "street" and "kooth" meaning dance. Its name originates in the intricate foot patterns used in its execution.

60. Interview with Mr Poonsamy Daearinathan, 19 August 1990.
61. Interview with Mr Nadesan Gounden, 3 June 1994.
62. M.B. Jackson, "An Introduction to the History of Music Amongst Indian South Africans in Natal, 1860-1948: Towards a Politico-Cultural Understanding," M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1988, p.127.
63. Indian Opinion, 5 February 1910.
64. Indian Opinion, 15 April 1921.
65. Mahida, Muslims, p.57.
66. Interview with Mr Baiju Ramdeen, 8 July 1990.
67. Annual Report of the Deputy Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1910.
68. African Chronicle, 2 January 1909.
69. Interview with Mr Poonsamy Daearinathan, 19 August 1990.
70. The Natal Advertiser, 22 April 1914. UD-W Accession Papers 957/2056.
71. *ibid.*
72. *ibid.*
73. African Chronicle, 9 January 1909.
74. African Chronicle, 24 April 1909.
75. Letter from G. Sohawan, Secretary, Arya Yuvuk Sabha, to Town Clerk, 17 September 1934. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/1187, 16/134.
76. Indian Views, 28 April 1933.
77. See for example copy of such a letter in Indian Views, 28 April 1933.
78. Interview with Mr Baiju Ramdeen, 8 July 1990.
79. The Natal Mercury, 10 February 1935.
80. African Chronicle, 13 February 1909.
81. Diesel and Maxwell, Hinduism, p.49.

82. African Chronicle, 16 September 1916.
83. African Chronicle, 30 September 1916.
84. African Chronicle, 30 September 1916.
85. African Chronicle, 14 October 1916.
86. Diesel and Maxwell, Hinduism, p.51.
87. Indian Views, 21 April 1933.
88. African Chronicle, 13 February 1909.
89. The Dharma Vir, 25 January 1925.
90. Indian Opinion, 10 April 1936.
91. Letter from Swami Shankeranand to the Town Clerk, 11 November 1909. NA, II/1/1/70, 2280/09. Document from "Bhana Collection" which is available at the UD-W Doc. Center.
92. Report from Mr Leslie to the Town Clerk, 1909. NA, II/1/1/70, 2280/09. Document from "Bhana Collection" which is available at the UD-W Doc. Center.
93. Letter from Protector Polkinhorne to Town Clerk, 1910. NA, CSO, 299/1910.
94. Interview with Dr Goonam, 31 May 1989.
95. Indian Opinion, 16 November 1907.
96. Indian Opinion, 21 October 1911.
97. Letter to Town Clerk, 10 February 1916. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/440, 134.
98. Letter from Chief Constable Donovan to Town Clerk, 24 July 1916. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/440, 16/134.
99. Indian Opinion, 10 April 1936.
100. Soobraya Reddy to SAP, Mayville, March 1934. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/441, 134.
101. Letter from Chief Constable to Town Clerk explaining why he had refused permission to S.R. Pather of the Umbilo Temple to hold a festival, 7 January 1934. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/441, 16/134.
102. The Natal Advertiser, 16 March 1936.

103. Chief Constable to Town Clerk, 24 November 1916. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/440, 16/134.
104. Letter from Chief Magistrate to Town Clerk, 20 November 1916. NA, 3/DBN,4/1/2/440, 134.
105. Letter from Hindu Maha Sabha to Town Clerk, 22 October 1922. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/440, 16/134.
106. Interview with Dr Goonam, 31 May 1989.
107. Report on Special Conference on "Indians in Durban," October 1943. TASA Collection, UD-W Doc. Center, Accession Number 1441/11538.
108. The Leader, 28 October 1948.
109. P.N. Agrawal, Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi. A Public Worker of South Africa (Etawah, Uttar Pradesh: Indian Colonial Association, 1939), pp.163-65.
110. The Dharma Vir, 11 January 1918.
111. Agrawal, Pandit Bhawani Dayal, p.165.
112. Henning, Indentured Indians, p.151.
113. R.S. Nowbath, Hindu Heritage in South Africa (Durban: The South African Hindu Maha Sabha, 1960), p.69.
114. "Special Conference," TASA Collection, 1943.
115. Goonam, Coolie Doctor, p.15.
116. Interviews with Mrs Moodley, 6 July 1994; Mr Nadesan Gounden, 3 June 1994 and Mr K. Naidoo, 18 May 1994.
117. Private letter from H.R. Pathy to Ompathy, 12 June 1944. "Subraminayan Collection".
118. Indian Opinion, 14 August 1936.
119. The Leader, 30 November 1940.
120. Interview with Mr Kenny Naidoo, 18 May 1994.
121. Interview with Mr Nadesan Gounden, 3 June 1994.
122. Interview with Mr Appalsamy Naidoo, 8 June 1994.

123. "Special Conference," TASA Collection, 1943.
124. The Leader, 30 November 1940.
125. Indian Opinion, 14 May 1937.
126. The Leader, 6 April 1946.
127. Jackson, "Indian Music," 194.
128. Indian Views, 21 February 1933.
129. Indian Views, 21 April 1933.
130. Mesthrie, SAIE, p.195.
131. Mesthrie, SAIE, p.22.
132. Population Census, 1936.
133. Mesthrie, SAIE, p.28.
134. Population Census, 1990.
135. Mesthrie, SAIE, p.33.
136. The Leader, 30 January 1943.
137. The Leader, 5 January 1946.
138. The Leader, 2 September 1947.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE RISE AND DECLINE OF RADICALISM

The transformation of the political economy during the inter-war years resulted in most Indians becoming part of an urban-based proletariat. This presented them with new challenges as well as additional choices of group membership. They came into contact with African and white workers in their places of employment, as well as with Indians from different language and religious backgrounds at home, school and work. Until the late 1930s organized politics was dominated by conservatives who relied on India to intervene on their behalf, favored negotiation and compromise with the government, and were reluctant to foster a close relationship with Africans. Instead, they attempted to carve a niche in Durban's political economy as an Indian, urban, middle class group with a homogenous identity. The urban experience spawned a working class which embraced strike action to improve its position, as well as a younger and more radical professional leadership, with a wider outlook, which contested the narrow notion of community. This led to the rise of radicalism which, however, was to prove difficult to sustain while race and ethnicity remained the paramount identities.

#### **Response of Moderates to Discrimination**

The revival of anti-Indian legislation after World War One, which closed loopholes which had allowed Indians to purchase property outside locations in the

Transvaal, was seen by Indians as a precursor to discrimination on a national level and stimulated moves towards unity. At a conference of South African Indians in Cape Town in January 1919, Durban was represented by a number of merchants in their individual capacities, but not the NIC which had become defunct in 1915. This conference failed to achieve national unity.<sup>1</sup> A second South African Indian conference was held in August 1919 to discuss the appointment of the Asiatic Commission. This conference summed up the essence of moderate politics. Delegates emphasized the binding link with India by stressing that failure to act would be tantamount to letting down the "Indian nation." According to one delegate, "our countrymen, ... the cream of Indian society, have suffered every indignity rather than submit.... We as Indians here have sympathised with them because blood is thicker than water. The destinies of India and ourselves are one, and we cannot afford to dissociate ourselves from our Motherland."<sup>2</sup> The conference also stressed moderation. The chairman, E.I. Patel, argued that the best option was to adopt constitutional protest since the sparse white population "has a natural objection to being swamped by Indian immigrants in addition to being outnumbered by its aboriginal peoples."<sup>3</sup>

Although these conferences did not lead to a national body, steps were taken to strengthen links with India. In 1919 Swami Bawani Dayal represented South African Indians at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress at Amritsar. In 1922 he got the INC to agree that South Africa could send 10 delegates to their annual meetings.<sup>4</sup> The NIC, which was revived in May 1921, pushed for national unity and

convened a third conference in May 1923. This session, opened by the Mayor of Durban, Councillor Walter Gilbert, led to the formation of a South African Indian Congress (SAIC). When Mrs Sarojini Naidu, the acclaimed Indian poetess and politician, visited South Africa in February 1924, she was elected its president.<sup>5</sup> Her election is remarkable given the absence of women in moderate politics, and reflects the attachment of moderates to India.

As discrimination increased, the SAIC proposed that the Union government hold a round-table conference with the Imperial and Indian governments.<sup>6</sup> The conference resulted in the Cape Town Agreement which had three main provisions: a system of voluntary repatriation was introduced, the government agreed to "uplift" the social and economic position of those who remained, and an Agent was to be appointed to facilitate relations with the Union government. The most controversial provision was repatriation. Each adult was to receive a bonus of £20 and those under 16, £10.<sup>7</sup> Repatriation failed to achieve the South African government's primary objective, which was to reduce the number of Indians resident in the country. Between 1926 and 1930, for example, when emigration was at its highest, the Indian population actually increased by 11.8%.<sup>8</sup>

For moderates, the most important provision was "upliftment." Calpin's description of what it meant for A.I. Kajeer applies to moderate politics as a whole: "It became the foundation for all his future works and hopes. It was the rock on which he erected his hopes, his policy, and his political ideology."<sup>9</sup> The appointment of an Agent served as a reminder of the link to India and ensured that in the

immediate future the struggle of Indians would continue to be fought in isolation from Africans. It also served as a moderating influence. When radical leaders came to the fore from the mid-1930s they complained that the Agency, "being muzzled by the dictates of Whitehall, has become a very useful medium of holding back any form of radical and progressive leadership.... It has become the spearhead of compromise and defeatism."<sup>10</sup>

### **Attitude of Moderates towards Africans and whites**

Whites used race to depict Indians and Africans as inferior, as suitable only to providing labor, in order to achieve social, economic and political relations of domination. Rejected by whites because of their race, middle class Indians, in turn, emphasized that Indians were a homogenous collectivity with common interests. The commonality of race was used to transcend conflicts which might arise from the differential class positions of Indians. They argued that differences had to be surmounted and unity achieved so that Indians could press for their rights as a unified body. For example, the Indian Opinion explained in 1919 that capitalism and labor were not the only forces which divide society. It was pointed out that in times of crises, Indian capitalists "joined hands with the labourers; both have suffered together in the same cause. It must never be forgotten that Indians have a common foe to combat - race prejudice."<sup>11</sup> This message was constantly reaffirmed. In 1934, for example, Albert Christopher, a colonial-born, argued that all Indians had to work "for equality within the community. Our ideal is to work for a common brotherhood in

South Africa, the members of which will help one another in all undertakings regardless of religious, language and other considerations. Then only can we see a happy, contented, Indian community in South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the middle class eschewed an alliance with Africans. Moderates felt that it would be retrogressive to forge a link with Africans in a situation where race was used to create a naturalized hierarchy. In fact, there was constant comparison with Africans in order to emphasize the unity and superior position of Indians. For example, when the government prohibited Indians from using express railway services in 1918, a mass meeting attended by merchants like Parsee Rustomjee as well as colonial-borns like P.S. Aiyar and B.L.E. Sigamoney resolved that the new regulations "were calculated to reduce the Indian community to the category of the raw natives of this land." Further, they "were an act of wanton injustice and degradation to the local Indian community, and through them, to the whole of the Indian nation within the Indian Empire."<sup>13</sup>

Moderates also declined an opportunity to participate in the Non-European Cooperation Conference in June 1927. The SAIC sent a delegation but pointed out that in view of the Cape Town Agreement, they could not involve themselves with Africans without recourse to India and the Agent.<sup>14</sup> The Indian Opinion explained that Indians were citizens of the British Empire and had a different status from Africans who possessed the right "to ask the rulers to quit. They have, however, not attained the standard of education or civilization to enable them to do so."<sup>15</sup> This was a position that moderates maintained throughout the period of this study. In 1936,

for example, the Indian Opinion argued that there was no benefit in a closer relationship with Africans who were at an "undeveloped stage yet and there is very little that we can learn from them, excepting what little they have been taught by the Christian Missionaries and what they have aped from the Europeans."<sup>16</sup>

A very important influence on moderates was Sastri. He warned that in the event of unity with Africans, India would not be able to take up the grievances of Indians and that white public opinion and the government would be antagonized. As late as 1941, long after he had left South Africa, Sastri argued at a public meeting in India, where he shared the platform with the radical Dr Goonam, that Indians stood a better chance of getting redress "if we fight our own battle, for their (African) status is greatly inferior to ours and by making common cause with them, our community will only be disabling themselves in the very severe combat that has fallen their lot."<sup>17</sup> During his stay in Natal, Sastri advocated an alliance with white liberals who could exert pressure on the authorities to be more generous in their treatment of Indians. He was instrumental in forming the Durban Indo-European Council in 1928 which focused on social services, education and child welfare. The work of the Council was "of the Fabian type, accumulating facts, undertaking investigations and informing public opinion and making representations to the authorities."<sup>18</sup> Although such councils had existed for Africans and whites since 1921, Sastri insisted on a separate council in order to avoid a formal alliance with Africans.<sup>19</sup>

As part of his program, Sastri encouraged merchants to entertain whites lavishly. The most extravagant gatherings were at the Orient Club "where prominent

merchants meet." The club, opened in 1924, was situated on 35 acres of land, with a tennis court, fruit trees, and "magnificent building."<sup>20</sup> According to a visitor: "having seen great parks with their fascinating fountains playing at London, Cairo, Versailles, and Constantinople I can assure you that this club in its beauty, layout and approach, can compare well with any of the gardens..."<sup>21</sup> Merchants also discussed and formulated political strategy at the club. For example, it was at the club that a decision was taken in 1925 and money raised to send a delegation to India in connection with the Areas Reservation Bill.<sup>22</sup> The Club took advantage of the Agents' presence at lunch on Sundays and invited a number of whites. The Governor-General of South Africa (1930) and the Chief Magistrate of Durban (1936) were two of many prominent white guests. One contemporary visitor observed that the luncheons were so lavish that "I fancy that the majority of Europeans ... have left wondering what Indians have to complain about, so pleasant are surroundings and so obvious the signs of hospitality."<sup>23</sup> This Club continued to grow in importance during the inter-war years, as we learn from the Agent, Sir Shafa'at Khan, who said in 1941:

The club has now become not only a rendezvous for all that is best in our community but also a rallying point for Indians in Natal. It has played a part in the formation of public opinion in Natal.... It must remain the focus not merely of our social but also of our economic endeavour. This club will become the foundry in which our national opinion may be melted and cast. The Orient Club has, as we know, been the clearing house of ideas in the past.... It is the inspiration to members of our community - Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsees -to bring about a synthesis of our culture and custom. This Club embracing as it does the cream of the community is a source of a sacred and philanthropic understanding.<sup>24</sup>

The position advocated by Sastri was reinforced by his successor, Sir Kurma Reddi, who also encouraged reliance on white paternalism for an evolutionary improvement in the position of Indians. He told one public meeting that the universities were turning out white students who are "being taught so much better than their forebears, you may take it that they will treat you more liberally."<sup>25</sup> That this policy did not work was acknowledged by A.I. Kajeer, the moderate politician, when he pointed out in 1944 that:

Superimposed on the race struggle is the class struggle, and this class struggle occurs within the races as well as outside them. Some signs of this approach are discernable between the workers of the different races as a result of common interests. So far practically no signs of this approach are to be seen between the commercial sections of Europeans and Indians; though their interests are identical.<sup>26</sup>

From the mid-1930s younger politicians and trade unionists challenged the strategy of moderates, who had constructed ethnic and racial boundaries around the struggle. The failure of the trader and professional classes to procure meaningful change induced large numbers to gravitate to the emerging leadership. Many of the new leaders were products of the working class and members of the Communist Party. Having experienced the harshness of working class life, they identified with workers and addressed their problems in earnest. The new leadership dealt with isolation from the mainstream of African resistance by actively forging a cross-race alliance.

## **Trade Unions and Class Identity**

There were several attempts to organize Indian workers prior to the 1930s. The Industrial Socialist League established night classes and issued pamphlets on marxism in Tamil and Telegu during World War One. The most prominent Indian in the ISL was B.L.E. Sigamoney, later to become a priest. In March 1917 the Indian Workers Industrial Union was inaugurated with Gordon Lee of the ISL as chairman and Sigamoney as secretary. They formed separate unions because whites refused to accept Indian members.<sup>27</sup> Dockworkers, painters, hotel employees, tobacco workers, catering, garment and shop assistants were unionized by July 1917.<sup>28</sup> As a result of being separate, these early unions were reinforcing a racial identity.

In the mid-1920s there was a break in union activity because of Sigamoney's departure to study in England, the lack of an industrial base, government repression and the Cape Town Agreement which served as a moderating influence. This coincided with increasing discrimination against Indian and African workers after the 1922 Rand Strike by white workers. A crucial legislation in establishing new industrial relations was the Industrial Conciliation Act which recognized white, Coloured and Indian trade unions but denied this right to Africans, thus dividing the working class. Unions also had the right to insert a clause prohibiting the employment of non-members. The problems of Indian and African workers intensified with the coming to power of the Pact Government (1924) which implemented a White Labor Policy.

The organizing of workers was stimulated by the 1927 Liquor Bill which

stipulated that Indians could not be employed in establishments which served liquor. This was a serious threat to Indians who comprised 97% of hotel employees in Natal.<sup>29</sup> The NIC considered this a violation of the terms and spirit of the Cape Town Agreement and arranged a conference of workers, merchants and professionals in December 1928. Sastri warned that the meeting should be conducted with all the "moderation that they could command and be satisfied with half a loaf if it was not possible to get the full loaf immediately." Rustomjee, president of the NIC, was optimistic that "with the spirit of goodwill that is emanating from the Cape Town Agreement the Indian worker will in time be treated equally with the European worker." Albert Christopher appealed "to European workers to help them [Indians] to rise to the level of European workers so that ... they may maintain a civilised standard of living."<sup>30</sup> The Indian bourgeoisie promoted unions because they regarded an improvement in the status of workers as part of the process of enhancing the position of the community.

Following the conference, the Natal Workers Congress was formed with A. Christopher as president, and A.I. Kajee and P.R. Pather as vice-presidents.<sup>31</sup> The NWC, which formed five unions, hoped to minimize the impact of the White Labor policy. The adoption of this paternalistic attitude by merchants meant that workers were again organized along racially exclusive lines. This also increased the appreciation of workers for merchants and made stronger the link between them. For example Mr F.B.M., who worked at Spices Stationery in Jacobs from 1927, recalls that "Mr Kajee and Sastri were instrumental in us getting in the Typographical Union.

I could not get in because I was not qualified. We were not allowed to qualify in those days. Mr Kajee got us an exemption. I registered and joined after 1929. I remember Mr Kajee. He was a bold speaker. He had a place in Avoca. He started as a rice merchant. He did this and that and became big. Mr Kajee fought for us."<sup>32</sup>

As a result of widespread unemployment and poverty during the depression, the NWC was unable to pursue the grievances of workers and gradually ceased to be an influence. By the mid-1930s, however, the desperate economic conditions caused many workers to see unions as the only means to improve their living conditions. This coincided with the emergence of a new generation of leaders who devoted themselves to the task of organizing workers. The poems of B.D. Lalla, a teacher and staunch Hindu, who wrote "Black Coolie" and "The Ugly Duckling" in the mid-1940s, lucidly capture the revolutionary zeal of the young. In "The Hammer and the Sickle", he wrote:

Defiantly I flaunt my red cap  
of alien soil  
And declare my hope in  
Communism fanatically  
You see, I am bolder  
than bold  
Fearless and regardless of any  
consequence  
For no logic can reason with  
my flaming soul  
My soul flourishes in this barren  
land of hope  
Where Democracy has failed to  
thrive  
Why then the Hammer and  
the Sickle  
Must remain the emblem of my

hope  
Democracy! I wooed her  
long  
She's turned a deaf ear to all  
my pleadings;  
Broken-hearted I've sought  
solace elsewhere;  
Why, then, be apprehensive of  
my Russian maid...<sup>33</sup>

The fertile conditions were exploited by dynamic and charismatic young leaders. A CP activist from that period recalls that the Party had won over to its ranks two Indian workers, H.A. Naidoo and George Poonen, who were "brilliant, enthusiastic, hardworking trade unionists.... These two were to dominate the trade union movement, not from the aspect of manipulating but from the aspect of building the trade unions."<sup>34</sup> Another activist recalls that "an endless stream of workers came knocking on our doors, pleading to be organised, wanting to be unionised. Their first choice for secretary or chairman was inevitably H.A. or Poonen. They knew, they said, that these were men who could stand up to their bosses."<sup>35</sup>

Poonen, who was born in 1913, was forced by family poverty to leave school at the age of nine. Over the next decade he held four or five jobs and attended night school where he completed grade six. By the early 1930s both he and Naidoo worked at the same clothing company. Sometime in 1934 an Indian worker was caught stealing at the factory. In response the employer drilled holes in the door of the toilet used by women so that guards could keep watch. Naidoo and Poonen organized a protest strike and were fired. Shortly thereafter they met a CP member, Ramotla, who introduced them to Edward Roux. Roux explained communism to them and provided

them with literature. About a month later the CP held its annual general meeting in Durban. Only seven persons attended. Naidoo was elected secretary and Poonen party organizer of the Durban district. Poonen was elected chairman of the CP (Durban district) in 1938.<sup>36</sup>

Although there was no direct alliance, a number of CP members held significant positions in unions and hence influenced their policies. Further, the association of organizers with several unions resulted in strong inter-union co-operation. George Poonen, for example, was a member of the Tea and Coffee Workers Union, the Broom and Brush Workers Union, Tobacco Workers Union, and Brewery Workers Union as well as an advisor to numerous other unions.<sup>37</sup> Billy Peters, also a member of the CP, was organizer or secretary of the Durban Indian Municipal Employees Society, the Shops Assistants Union, and the Indian Railways Union.<sup>38</sup> Most unions were housed in the same building and helped each other during strikes. Pauline Podbrey, recalls:

[In] a derelict building ... we erected thin partitions to provide offices for the mushrooming number of trade unions.... We begged and borrowed desks, chairs and filing cabinets and as new unions were formed so the space was divided and sub-divided to accommodate each newcomer. Overnight, it seemed were born trade unions for cigar and tobacco workers, bus drivers, workers in the chemical, tin, shoe and leather, and rubber industries, jewellers and many more.<sup>39</sup>

The organization of workers was extensive. Between 1934 and 1945, 43 unions with Indian membership were registered in Durban, covering railway workers, coal miners, employees in the sugar industry, industrial workers and even teachers.

Union demands included a living wage, holiday pay, shorter working hours, payment for overtime, and sick and unemployment benefits. By 1943, 16,617 Indians in Durban were members of trade unions.<sup>40</sup> Between 1937 and 1942 Indian workers were involved in 46 strikes in Durban.<sup>41</sup> Our discussion will be confined to three which highlight themes pertinent to this study.

One of the most important strikes was that at Durban Falkirk Co. Ltd where skilled white and Coloured unionized workers struck for higher wages in February 1937. Though supported by unskilled Indians and Africans they accepted a separate deal.<sup>42</sup> When Indian and African workers formed an unregistered union, the Natal Iron and Steel Workers Union, management dismissed 15 Indians and one African as part of a "retrenchment" program.<sup>43</sup> About 400 workers, over 300 of whom were Indian, went on strike under Indian leadership, demanding an end to victimization, as well as higher wages, better working conditions and recognition of their union.<sup>44</sup> The strike was only resolved on 11 July 1937, following the intervention of the SAIC which worked out an agreement with the Minister of Labor.<sup>45</sup> Only 119 workers were taken back, the rest were to be re-hired when "circumstances permitted."<sup>46</sup>

Of special significance for our study is the involvement of merchants. According to Poonen strike organizers approached the NIC for aid: "We went to them - the Congress (NIC) - we said, look, you're supposed to represent the Indian workers.... We were able to convince them it was their duty to support the workers."<sup>47</sup> The NIC organized several mass meetings. At one meeting the "hall was packed to capacity." The Agent said that he had attended as "it was his duty to do

what he could to help and make a full report to the Government of India." A merchant, E.M. Paruk, said that the firing of Indian workers was a violation of the Cape Town Agreement and had "become the affair of the whole community." A.I. Kajee said that "this is the turning point. We demand justice from higher powers not only for these Indians but all other Indians who are ground down. Let us remember we are Indians first and everything else after" wanted the workers re-employed; felt that the White Labor Policy was being used "to retard the progress of the Indian working class, ... this has assigned Indian workers to a perpetual state of disorganisation and helplessness;" and wanted the right of "Indian workers to form trade unions or to join existing unions be vindicated."<sup>48</sup>

Merchants saw the dismissals as an infringement of the Cape Town Agreement and, hence, as the violation of an agreement with the community. They saw the situation in racial and ethnic terms and stressed communal solidarity. In appealing for relief, E.M. Paruk pointed out that the "daily bread of 1,500 to 2,000 innocent women and children was involved. I ask you to stand by your fellow countrymen ... and extend to them your moral and material support."<sup>49</sup> Traders, hawkers and market stall-holders contributed items like rice, mealie meal, salt, fruit, vegetables and bread to provide rations for the workers and their dependents, totalling 1,850, for the duration of the strike.<sup>50</sup> To workers and their dependents, merchant involvement was the difference between eating and starving. To strike leaders, it was the difference between sustaining the strike and its collapse. The attitude of merchants was that the basis of the struggle was economic and that they had to concern

themselves with the upliftment of the lowest paid "sections of our community. Trade unions must be formed and receive recognition officially ... with the purpose of raising the general standard of living."<sup>51</sup> To this end, the NIC and SAIC requested permission from the Minister of Labor in April 1937 to establish parallel unions for Indians because of the racism of white unions. This was turned down.<sup>52</sup>

At the Dunlop Tyre Company, management replaced Indians with white and African labor, with the result that the number of Indian employees dropped from 282 in March 1942 to 149 by December 1942. The situation erupted when 13 Indian employees, with long periods of service, were dismissed in December 1942. Indian and African workers went on strike to demand the reinstatement of the dismissed workers and recognition of their union. The company used scab African labor to break the strike.<sup>53</sup> At a meeting of 30 organizations and trade unions on 16 January 1943, it was stressed that the strike had "assumed a Indian national aspect" because of the racial dimension. The NIC agreed to take the matter up with the government as well as Dunlop management and to provide support. According to an official, "the Congress is always prepared to assist in the alleviation of the distress that may arise through any cause in which Indian men, women and children are involved."<sup>54</sup>

On 21 January 1943 the NIC asked the Minister of Labor to appoint an arbitrator to settle the dispute. This was to no avail as management made it clear that all vacancies created by the strike had been filled. The NIC then tried to ascertain from Dunlop whether Indians had been employed to replace strikers because it was "vitaly concerned in the national and racial aspects of the employment of Indians....

If your policy aims at the exclusion of Indians, the matter is one of grave concern and creates a precedent which can only be regarded as a serious threat to the security and living standards of thousands of Indian workers." Dunlop's reply was that none had been employed.<sup>55</sup> The only assurance obtained was one from the Minister of Labor that Indians would be reemployed as and when vacancies occurred to restore the pre-strike ratio.<sup>56</sup> However, no Indian worker was ever again employed at the company.<sup>57</sup>

The third major strike was that by about 800 laundry workers, mainly Indian, at 25 laundries, who struck from December 1945 in the face of a number of grievances.<sup>58</sup> Once again, African scab labor was used to break the strike which lasted three months. Very few Indians were rehired. One of them was Mr A.N., a professional boxer, who recalls: "I worked for 13 years for the Natal Steam Laundry. We went on strike for more wages. I was a member of the union. They were helpful. I went back after two months. They got rid of most of the Indians. I was lucky that the foreman liked boxing. I was on good terms with him so he took me back. I was the only breadwinner and couldn't strike any longer. After that we hated strikes."<sup>59</sup> The Indian Views felt that the failure of strike leaders to heed the lessons of Falkirk and Dunlop had resulted in "hundreds of the poorest Indians being rendered unemployed." It also criticized strike organizers for "irresponsibly" calling for strikes and then going about for donations to support the workers. In this particular instance, assistance had come from as far afield as Johannesburg. For Indian Views there was a lesson to be heeded:

The laundry strike has taught a bitter lesson. The potential danger of scabs among Africans was lost sight of.... In the unskilled field the Indian is not indispensable. There are any number of African workers available for that kind of work. Thousands of Africans are walking the streets in search of employment.... Indian workers would be well advised to weigh their future.<sup>60</sup>

Many employers willfully replaced Indian workers. A white union activist of the 1940s recalls that Indians were far more militant than African workers who had "just come into the towns without trade union experience or history.... A lot of employers decided that if the African workers weren't agitated by the Indian workers and by the communists, then everything would be fine."<sup>61</sup> Most Indian workers were semi-skilled and unskilled and were dispensable because of the large scale urbanization of Africans during the war years. This is a recurring theme during the 1940s. Dairy workers were replaced by Africans "who appeared less likely to demand higher wages and improved conditions" and in many cases "they even accept lower than prevailing wages."<sup>62</sup> Sugar workers complained that since they had formed a union, employers were replacing them with Africans.<sup>63</sup> The DCC adopted the same strategy because of the increasingly militant attitude of the Durban Indian Municipal Employees' Society (DIMES). The number of Indian employees fell from 2,344 to 2,169 between June 1947 and June 1948. The chairman of DIMES, R.K. Gounden, warned that the union must be "more vigilant and see to it that Indian workers are not victimised or unnecessarily retrenched."<sup>64</sup> In a letter to the Town Clerk, he pointed out that he was "perturbed" that Indians were retrenched on the grounds that they were not needed yet Africans were employed to replace them. The reason, the letter

continued, was that Indians were unionized and Africans not.<sup>65</sup>

Even after the radicals, who espoused unity with Africans, had taken over the NIC, the securing of jobs for Indians remained an important concern. When housing schemes were being developed the NIC wanted to know from the DCC whether Indians were being employed as artisans, what measures had been taken to encourage their employment, and what "long range plan" exists to encourage their employment.<sup>66</sup> The Indian Branch of the Building Workers' Industrial Union asked that Indian artisans be employed for Indian housing schemes.<sup>67</sup> The Town Clerk replied that the matter "is at present under consideration but as yet no decision has been arrived at."<sup>68</sup> The NIC found it "inexplicable" that at a time when the erection of housing schemes was proceeding so rapidly this issue "should be receiving such protracted consideration."<sup>69</sup> There was little the DCC could do in light of a pre-emptive warning by white workers that if it employed artisans at lower rates, "we will take drastic action to uphold our standard."<sup>70</sup> The situation was viewed so seriously that 17 trade unions and the NIC felt compelled to put out the following warning:<sup>71</sup>

In the present situation of a contracting market ... we want to issue a warning to those employers who are seizing the present opportunity to embark upon a policy of indiscriminate victimisation of their Indian employees.... If European employers continue their policy of retrenching Indians as a political weapon, the direct consequence of such a policy would be to drive Indian workers into the hands of Indian employers who would not hesitate to use the occasion to enter into unfair competition with their European counterparts.

This marked an important change in orientation for Indians. Whereas prior to the 1930s they were engaged primarily against white racism, the African presence

after this time added a new dimension as Indians were sandwiched between white racism and the attempts of Africans to carve a niche in the racialized urban economy. Indian monopoly was threatened in areas that they had once dominated. They became disenchanted with unions, were averse to strike action, and sought to protect particular industries for their employment. This, coupled with the patronage of merchants in strike action, reinforced a sense of Indianness. Radicalism declined as workers became conservative and passive. The failure of non-racial unionism resulted in many of the radical leaders turning to nationalist politics which, in turn, promoted a racial and ethnic resistance identity.

#### **Political Radicalism:**

At the same time that communists and trade unionists were making their mark, a radical professional class was also emerging. The most prominent members of this class were Dr G.M. (Monty) Naicker and Dr Goonam both of whose fathers were farmers. Dr Naicker, whose grandfather had come to South Africa as an indentured worker, was born in 1910, and qualified as a doctor in Edinburgh in 1934. He was a committee member of the Edinburgh Indian Association from 1932.<sup>72</sup> His contemporaries there were Drs Goonam and Dadoo. Dr Goonam's going abroad was considered extreme as it was unheard of for an Indian girl to acquire much education, let alone become a doctor. The Edinburgh experience was crucial in their politicization.<sup>73</sup> Dr Goonam recalls:

The most compelling influence on me was that of Indian students. They were

intensely patriotic, highly critical of the British and passionately supportive of Gandhi. The Ali sisters had made me alive to what was going on in India. Eighteen months in Britain had opened my eyes to the inequalities of the white Raj.... It was very easy for me to feel a kindred spirit with them for I too was Indian. I was attracted to the firebrands in the college and came to feel a strong affiliation with India.... We realised that we had changed and that we had a far lower tolerance for colour discrimination than our parents.<sup>74</sup>

All three returned in the mid-1930s. While Dr Dadoo was based in the Transvaal, Drs Goonam and Naicker became involved in the social and economic problems of the poor in Durban.

H.A. Naidoo, George Poonen and other union organizers had initially remained aloof from organized politics. Around 1937 they were advised by the CP to enter politics. This was the era of the "Popular Front" and communists world-wide were seeking to forge a united front of all liberals and democrats to counter Fascism.<sup>75</sup> The new leaders were also prominent in the Non-European United Front, which had been initiated by the Coloured petty bourgeoisie in the Cape. Dr. Dadoo and H.A. Naidoo were elected to the National Council of the NEUF in April 1939. Naidoo and Seedat were also members of the Durban Provisional Committee of the NEUF.<sup>76</sup> This was the first attempt to forge a common "Non-European" identity since moderates and successive Agents had opposed alliances with non-Indians, except with white liberals.

Naidoo and Poonen set about finding recruits to bolster their position. The Natal Indian Youth League, formed in February 1939 with Poonen as vice-president, brought together about 40 sectional and religious youth bodies. According to Poonen, this was an important step: "From there we were able to mobilize the youth, and we

had the majority of the higher class [grade] students of Sastri College joining us. And from there we recruited important people like Devi Singh, Cassim Amra, Dawud Seedat, all holding leading positions." To educate workers in outlying areas, Poonen formed a Worker's Study Circle in Clairwood.<sup>77</sup> George Singh organized the Merebank Literary and Debating Society.<sup>78</sup> A sarcastic letter to the press in 1947 alluded to the radicalization of the youth:

They know for instance that Lenin was a man who lived in Russia; to be a communist means wearing a red tie and paying monthly subscriptions to the Party office; they know that India wants her freedom ... but who spoke about women's freedom? They learned that Chopin wrote the "Polonaise" and Strauss the "Blue Danube" but whether Constable was a policeman or a housepainter is a matter of wild conjecture. They have been told to read "Das Kapital," and so off they go to the bookshops and order ten volumes on Communism and other "isms" that look imposing enough. And, of course, they pat each other on the back and call themselves dear comrades: and they know that Natasha and Vera are girls' names.<sup>79</sup>

The Liberal Study Group, which had a membership of approximately 200, was another important organization. Dr Goonam and Dr Naicker, who became president of the NIC in 1945, were both members of the Group. Other members included C.M. Jadwat, I.C. Meer, and A.K. Docrat.<sup>80</sup> Although Dr Goonam was the only Indian woman member, there were a number of white women members like Fay King Goldie, Pauline Podbrey and Sarah Rubins. The Group asked lecturers from Natal University to give weekly lectures on subjects like political economy and public speaking.<sup>81</sup> These meetings provided a forum for debating and discussing policy and provided the foundation for the political beliefs and actions of most of the members. Dr Goonam recalls:

In this claustrophobic political environment, we founded the Liberal Study Group. A dark and dingy staircase of an old building, led to a fair sized room which was our meeting place. A few crude benches and rickety chairs provided the seating, a temperamental bulb the lighting. The Group was composed of radical students, young lawyers, doctors and trade unionists.<sup>82</sup>

Radicals tried to unite the NIC which had split in 1936 over the marriage of the Agent to a Muslim woman. This they achieved when the Natal Indian Association was formed in October 1939, with trade unionists and radical professionals part of the leadership. The issue that had the greatest ramifications for politics was land. From the mid-1930s whites pushed for legislation to prevent Indians purchasing or occupying property in certain areas. The Lawrence Committee, which included 6 NIA members, was appointed in February 1940, to examine cases of penetration and to talk the purchaser out of the transaction. Moderates co-operated in order not to concede the principle of segregation.<sup>83</sup> This was condemned by radicals who tried to reverse the decision at a mass meeting in 1940 but failed and were expelled. They reconstituted themselves as the Nationalist Bloc within the NIA and carried out an extensive campaign among workers.<sup>84</sup>

Whites felt that the Lawrence Committee did not go far enough and continued to agitate against "Indian penetration." An indication of the depth of white feeling on this issue is that when P.R. Pather, a moderate politician of long standing, bought a house in Greyville, city councilors Boyd and Pritchard issued a statement that they could "muster 200 men who will certainly see that Mr Pather does not occupy his house."<sup>85</sup> Pressure by whites paid off when the government introduced the "Pegging Act" in April 1943 which banned white-Indian property transactions in Durban for a

period of three years. Indian radicals saw this as a first step to racial segregation and returned to the NIA, which was again named the NIC. The new executive of the NIC included both moderates like Kajee and Pather, as well as radicals like George Poonen and Dr Monty Naicker. This fragile unity broke down when moderates met with Smuts and agreed to the Pretoria Agreement of April 1944 which suspended the Pegging Act and appointed a body to monitor voluntary segregation.<sup>86</sup> This was the last straw for the radicals who formed the Anti-Segregation Council (ASC) in April 1944, a broad front of intellectuals, trade unions, sports, cultural, youth and farmers associations such as the CP, Liberal Study Group, Overport Social Club, Hindustan Youth Club and Springfield Farmer's Association.<sup>87</sup> They rejected the Pretoria Agreement and set about mobilizing the masses. According to Poonen:

We had our own mass meetings, we went out to all the areas, suburbs and so on, telling the people what the new policy should be, for the real Indian political organisation. We want unity, not Kajee, Pather and Sorabjee running their own shows.... This was the real political campaign among the working class of Natal, where we had factory meetings - every factory lunch time or evening meetings, and public meetings in the Red Square, calling on the Indian workers to join the NIC.... That was a tremendous task.<sup>88</sup>

This campaign was certainly extensive. A report in The Guardian noted that H.A. Naidoo came to Durban from the Cape especially to plan and assist in the campaign. Some of the workers addressed were Bus Employees' Union, Biscuit Workers Union, Tin Workers Union, Chemical Workers' Union and Laundry Workers Union. Other associations addressed were the Springfield Indian Farmers' Association, the Malvern District Indian Association, and Overport Social Club. The

policy of appeasement of moderates was blamed for the deterioration in the position of workers and it was resolved to fight segregation to the very end.<sup>89</sup> It is significant to note that although radical leaders espoused unity with Africans, the way their campaign was conducted served to reinforce Indianness. For example, at a meeting of the NIC branch in Sydenham and Overport, Dr Naicker said that the area needed a strong branch as it was "predominantly Indian - the people must make the Congress an effective instrument for supporting Indian demands. All branches should be an integral portion of the Congress machinery thus rendering the Congress truly national in character." Debi Singh, organizing secretary of the NIC, said that the campaigns were aimed at getting mass backing for the aims of the NIC and to people in India more conscious of the problems of Indians in South Africa. Reports of every meeting were sent to interested parties in India and "every available means was being used to get India's intervention."<sup>90</sup> A total of 31 meetings were held in 3 months and the NIC's registered membership increased from 3,000 to 22,000.<sup>91</sup> By June 1947 it had 34 branches with a registered membership of 34,875.<sup>92</sup>

Moderates were aware that support for the radicals was overwhelming. Their feeling of isolation is perceptively captured in a farewell speech by Advocate J.W. Godfrey who was going to settle in India.

Men today do not recognise that there was a community in the past, for the generation of today considers that the community begins and ends with them. Today a generation has arisen that knows no law other than its own. It is drunk with its own prosperity. At one time youth and age had stood together in battle. Today, youth in its impetuosity and dynamic strength, over the last 12 months, has made miserable the lives of the older people.<sup>93</sup>

Moderates tried to delay the mandatory election. Radicals took them to court, and it was ruled that the delay was against the constitution of the NIC. Moderates did not turn up at the election, which was held on 21 October 1945. The 7,000 Indians in attendance elected all 46 nominees of the ASC, 12 of whom were CP members, to the executive of the NIC. Dr Goonam was made a vice president, the first woman to hold an executive position.<sup>94</sup> The radicalization of politics must be seen in the context of conditions created by urban poverty. Most Indians joined unions to improve their material conditions and joining the NIC was a logical next step.

This transformation took place in a context where other developments also served to radicalize Indians and reinforce a racial identity. Participation in the Second World War increased racial and ethnic pride. At the outbreak of war the NIA held a pro-war meeting at which it advised Indians to join the war "out of loyalty to the Empire." The NIA organized a War and Comforts Fund, the patrons of which were the Agent-General Rama Rau and the Mayor of Durban.<sup>95</sup> A.I. Kajee said that "we, as a community, in common with our mother country ... offer all the resources of which our community is possessed."<sup>96</sup> 17 schools were set up as depots for collecting contributions for the war.<sup>97</sup> Parcels comprising razors, blades, biscuits, soap, cigarettes, handkerchiefs and other items were sent monthly by the Indian Service Corps Comforts Committee to soldiers. Schools performed plays to raise funds. For example the St Anthony's school performed "Gengamah" ("Beauty and the Beast" in Tamil) to a packed house.<sup>98</sup> In November 1940, DIWA formed a Committee to help those serving in the war. They made it clear that they "expect

every Indian woman who is not otherwise engaged to make it her duty to help." The mayoress, Mrs Ellis Brown, was usually the guest of honor at their meetings. Speeches were rendered in Hindi, Tamil and Gujarati as most women did not understand English. At one meeting it was pointed out that "every Indian woman in Durban be able to say: 'I have sent a gift myself to the Indian soldiers'." <sup>99</sup> Although radicals had initially opposed the war, their attitude changed once the Soviet Union entered. Indians looked on soldiers with pride, as is reflected in the article "Our Boys Come Home" which described a group of soldiers who had returned on leave:

These young men are symbolic of the position of the Indian community of South Africa. They represent the idea of service which is the duty of every section of the population to render to the country of his birth in this time of need. These young men have the honour of the Indians not only of the Union but outside as well. Their march past in the streets of Durban was indeed a moving spectacle. They presented a sight that no Indian could have remained untouched and without a sense of pride.... They stand in the eyes of the world as the custodians of their community. <sup>100</sup>

When Gandhi was observing a fast in 1943, there was a "solemn gathering" at the City Hall where "Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsees offered prayers for the preservation of the life of the greatest living Indian - Mahatma Gandhi". A resolution demanded Gandhi's immediate release while a fast of sympathy was observed from 6PM to 6AM. <sup>101</sup> Both the Nationalist Bloc and CP held meetings in Durban to protest the arrest of Gandhi, Nehru, and Moulana Azad and sent a cable to Churchill demanding their release. <sup>102</sup> At a meeting of women, chaired by Dr Goonam, speeches were given in Hindi, Tamil and Gujarati and a resolution passed that the British Government was "offending womanhood by imprisoning Mrs Gandhi, Mrs

Sarojini Naidu and other women ... they had deeply injured the feelings of the women of Durban by their acts in India".<sup>103</sup> It is not surprising that shortly after it came to power the NIC discussed forming a federation of all Indians outside India "to protect and champion the cause of Indians abroad," as their status in the British Colonies, Zanzibar, Tanganyika and Uganda was linked.<sup>104</sup>

These developments also coincided with the formation of an interim government in India under Nehru. Indian nationalism exerted a strong ideological leverage and was crucial in reinforcing a sense of Indianness. All important events were observed in Durban. The Indian Independence Day celebration was organized from 26 January 1942 by the Indian League of Durban.<sup>105</sup> Portraits of Sarojini Naidu, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Moulana Azad were hung on stage as the history and activities of each was recounted. The "playing of national songs added to the atmosphere of solemnity."<sup>106</sup> Dr Goonam, H.A. Naidoo, Dr Dadoo and other radicals attended and addressed these gatherings annually. They emphasized the link with India. For Dr Goonam "all Indians must observe this day. It is their duty..."<sup>107</sup> Leaders considered these celebrations "a historic step in the natural consciousness of the Indian and their kinship with the people of India." From 1946, when radicals assumed control of the NIC, they organized the observance of Independence Day.<sup>108</sup>

When India achieved her independence on 15 August 1947, Dr Naicker requested that "this happy occasion of our Motherland's march towards her cherished goal be celebrated in a fitting manner." The NIC appealed to all Indians to close their places of business and asked religious bodies to hold "special services for the safety

and progress of our Motherland." A meeting was held at Albert Park, attended by 15,000, where the flags of India and Pakistan were unfurled side by side, pictures of the national leaders hung on stage, and women stood on stage with saris in their national colors.<sup>109</sup> India's first Independence Day celebrations were held in August 1948 on the beach where the Indian Tricolour was hoisted. Nehru sent a message that those "of our countrymen who abroad represent India in some way or other,... each must remember his duty and service to India and resolve afresh to be worthy of this great country of ours."<sup>110</sup>

Although there was a change in consciousness of workers and leaders, the barriers of race did not break down. Events such as discussed above helped sustain a racial and ethnic identity. Two other incidents, the passive resistance campaign and the Durban Riots, also played a critical role in drawing Indians together and promoting a racial resistance identity.

#### **Passive Resistance, 1946-1948:**

The "new" NIC faced a crisis almost immediately. The Smuts Government passed the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill in March 1946 which made the "Pegging Act" permanent by segregating Indians.<sup>111</sup> There was internal and external reaction to this Act which became law in June 1946. Externally, the Indian government severed all trade links and also withdrew Ramrao Deshmukh, its last Agent.<sup>112</sup> This ended an epoch as the Agent was a link to India and a continual reminder that Indians differed in status from Africans and Coloureds. Successive



Rally at 'Red Square' (Now Nicol Square) during the 1940s.

(Local History Museum, Durban)

Agents were also extremely moderate and sought to restrain Indian opinion in South Africa at the same time that they placated whites.

Internally, a passive resistance campaign was launched. This was tangible proof that the politics of moderation had ended. Leaders blamed compromise, "a policy which has enabled the Government to introduce measure after measure of racially discriminative legislation," for the deterioration in the position of Indians.<sup>113</sup> Although the new leaders spoke about non-racial action, the policy of the NIC resulted in exclusive Indian mobilization over an issue which concerned them only. The rhetoric was couched in racial and ethnic terms and much faith was placed in India, with Dr Naicker even calling for a Round Table Conference.<sup>114</sup> A delegation was also sent to India to conduct a propaganda campaign. In its "Manifesto of the Indian Community," the NIC emphasized communal sentiments in appealing to India: "Brothers and Sisters ... Render all support, financial, moral and otherwise, to our struggle of resistance. Ours is a common struggle!" The local appeal was also on communal lines:

We appeal to the Indian people of South Africa to rally to the just cause of the community. Workers, businessmen, professionals and farmers. Either we perish as a whole or we resist as a whole.... Any Indian who obstructs the struggle in any way whatsoever, will be guilty of an act of despicable treachery against his family and his community.<sup>115</sup>

The campaign began on 13 June 1946: "The response was magnificent; petty individual interests gave way to the larger national interests. Durban was dead on Thursday. The Indian quarter bore an atmosphere of quietness associated with

Sunday."<sup>116</sup> It continued for exactly two years. By the time it was halted in June 1948, over 2,000 arrests had been made. The process of courting arrest was not haphazard but very well orchestrated. Volunteers forwarded their names to the Passive Resistance Council. They were mostly put into batches of five to 20, with an appointed leader, and offered themselves for arrest as a group. A Farewell Reception was held, usually at Red Square, the day or night before, where prominent leaders reiterated the history of the struggle, the implications of the Bill, the best way to cope with prison life, and so on.<sup>117</sup> Speeches were in English and the vernacular and the common theme was that the purpose of sacrifice was to secure the future for their children. Volunteers were then garlanded.<sup>118</sup> When resisters were released, "thousands of Indians" gathered at Red Square to welcome them back.<sup>119</sup>

The Passive Resistance Council also formed a Resisters' Volunteer Corps in 1946 to work for the welfare of resisters, foster comradeship and organize regular political classes to improve understanding of the struggle.<sup>120</sup> There was an extremely long delay between arrest and imprisonment as the police deliberately delayed completing records. During this time the Passive Resistance Council provided coffee and sandwiches for volunteers at the charge office.<sup>121</sup> Donations were received from Indians throughout South Africa as well as from India.<sup>122</sup> It was not only merchants who contributed. For example, in July 1946 some 200 workers donated a full day's pay which amounted to £30.<sup>123</sup> In January 1947, 30 members of the Natal Fishermen's Association at Fynnlans contributed £50. About 50% of resisters were given an allowance to maintain their families during their absence.<sup>124</sup>

A breakdown of the list of resisters makes interesting reading. An analysis of the first 1,303 resisters revealed that 42 were under age 20 and 1,092 between 20 and 25, indicating the involvement of the young.<sup>125</sup> A 1947 report revealed that the list of 1,710 resisters included 492 factory workers, 235 housewives, 26 laundryworkers, 53 municipal workers, 29 jewellers, 28 shop keepers, 13 tailors, 117 waiters, as well as bus conductors, students managers, ushers, and welders.<sup>126</sup> The involvement of workers indicates that although the law primarily affected merchants as it closed an important avenue of investment, resistance was not confined to any particular class. While this reflects radicalization and a change in consciousness, various factors reinforced Indianness and made it difficult for the barriers of race to break down.

Interviews with volunteers suggest that the welfare of the "community" was a crucial consideration. Mr Sunkar Bagath, a hawker, felt that "it is the duty of all Indians to rally behind the banner of the passive resisters. To do otherwise would be to help the government to strangle the Indian community politically, economically and socially."<sup>127</sup> Mr Anba Naidoo, a market agent: It is my duty as an Indian to throw in my lot. I am not prepared to see my people subjected to a tyrannical piece of legislation."<sup>128</sup> Jack Govender: "I am a factory worker.... The Ghetto Act applies to me as much as any other member of the Indian community. It is an act which gives my people an inferior status. The rich and poor are affected."<sup>129</sup> Mr Mungal: "As a trade unionist I fully realise the ruination that awaits the Indian community. It is for this reason that the Indians stand solidly united in opposition to this unjust act."<sup>130</sup> Even radical leaders spoke in racial and ethnic terms. In his statement in court where

he was sentenced to three months' imprisonment in June 1946, Dr Dadoo said:<sup>131</sup>

It is for the removal of the difficulties of the Indian community and for the upholding of the honour of the Indians that we have launched upon this campaign.... We consider this inhuman Act derogatory to the honour and dignity of the Indian community as a whole and to the Indian nation.

Informants who recalled the strike spoke not only about land but general discrimination against Indians. Mr F.B.M. who was a worker in the printing trade for most of his life, said: "I told my boss I wanted to join. He said I was stupid so I was just a supporter. There was passive resistance because we couldn't go on the tramcar, can't use the library, also they wanted us to move. P.R. Pather went in. They took Paruk's place away too. I put up a fight. This was not fair. One day I sat in a white seat in the tram car. The conductor asked me "What are you?" I said: "Are you color blind?"<sup>132</sup>

We should note that while all classes participated and those who did so saw the situation in racial terms, there were many others who approved of segregation, long before it was decided to embark on passive resistance. For example, "The Cato Manor Indian Economic Housing Scheme Ratepayers' Association", which represented the first group of Indian to be provide with Council homes, made it clear to the Town Clerk that it "wanted to collaborate with the authorities for the efficient maintenance and improvement of the facilities." It emphasized that it was:

Non-political and prefers to negotiate directly rather than through any political association. Its aims are entirely social and educational. The Association deeply appreciates the attempts of the City Council to provide suitable houses for its Indian citizens; and is desirous of doing all in its power to assist the

expansion of the Housing Scheme. We realise that the success or failure of the Scheme as a whole will depend not only on the benevolent provisions of the City Council, but also on the intelligent co-operation of those for whom the houses are provided.... We support the Scheme in spite of the opposition from Indian political organisations. We desire to remove the possibility of future friction and to substitute harmonious co-operation.<sup>133</sup>

"X.Y.Z." felt that the land legislation only affected the rich, the majority of the poor, like him, "are just ordinary workers endeavouring to eke out a living to keep body and soul together. We favour segregation, and do not consider it a stigma, or an affront to our national pride... We welcome townships well laid out with all the amenities, solely for Indian occupation."<sup>134</sup> "A.B.C." also called for a "modern township for Indians with all the transport, educational, sporting, medical and spiritual facilities."<sup>135</sup> "A Woman" felt that it was time the authorities distinguished between the Indian "who is an ordinary worker" and the "penetrator". Two townships should be built for the latter in Durban. When these are ready, sympathetic whites "would be asked to assist in making the township an ideal centre."<sup>136</sup>

The way the issue was handled internationally also reinforced Indianness. The NIC asked the Government of India to raise the question at the General Assembly of the UNO "to uphold the honour and dignity of Indians abroad."<sup>137</sup> India placed the matter before the UN and in December 1946 the UN called upon the South African Government to treat Indians in conformity with past treaty obligations between India and South Africa and to take into account the provisions of the UN Charter.<sup>138</sup> In practice the resolution amounted to little since the UN lacked the means to force a member State to implement any resolution. South African Indian continued to

strengthen their link with India. In December 1946, February 1947 and again in April 1947 the NIC called for a Round Table Conference to discuss the problems of Indians.<sup>139</sup> In the midst of the passive resistance campaign, Drs Dadoo and Naicker attended the All-Asia Conference in March 1947. Shortly after his return, Dr Naicker told the 1947 conference of the NIC:

Every political party in India pledges its full support. We were inspired ... also by the fighting spirit of the masses who everywhere encouraged us to fight with increased vigour.... India recognised that we in South Africa were not only fighting for our just rights but also to preserve the national honour and dignity of all Indians.... A mighty India is arising and will allow no country to trifle with her sons and daughters in other countries.<sup>140</sup>

In a speech on 29 February 1948, Dr Dadoo said: "That great champion of our cause, the Father of our struggle, Mahatma Gandhi, is no more with us.... But we are fortunate in having a worthy successor in Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru whom we have accepted in the Resistance Movement as our undisputed leader and adviser."<sup>141</sup> The passive resistance campaign ended suddenly in June 1948. When the NP defeated Smuts in the general election, the NIC sent a telegram congratulating Malan and announced that it was suspending the campaign until the new government had made a clear pronouncement on the future of Indians.<sup>142</sup> The following recollection by Dr Goonam, an executive member of the NIC who was also jailed during the resistance, points to the significant role played by the campaign in promoting an ethnic and racial identity.

We organised fun fairs, dances, bouquets, beauty contests; some money's came from overseas. But the mainstay of our donations were the moneys we

collected locally from the storekeepers and professionals, that part of the community that had money to spare. It was an altogether Indian campaign, financially and ideologically.<sup>143</sup>

### **The 1949 Riots And Its Aftermath**

The leadership of the NIC was aware that the struggle could not be fought in isolation from Africans. In March 1947, Dadoo and Naicker signed a joint declaration of co-operation with Dr A.B. Xuma, president-general of the ANC, pledging "the fullest co-operation between the African and Indian peoples."<sup>144</sup> This "Doctor's Pact" was intended to herald significant joint political campaigns during the 1950s. This never happened because the support base of the NIC remained firmly rooted in the Indian community and only Indian issues successfully mobilized the masses. The attempt to forge a non-racial identity led only to unity at the level of leadership. In fact, Selby Msimang, an executive member of the Natal ANC, warned that Dr Naicker "had done nothing to foster the spirit of cooperation.... Our Executive Committee has refrained from declaring what it knows to be the universal feeling of the Africans in this Province as it would not like to hasten a rupture within the ranks of Congress."<sup>145</sup>

The identity of non-racialism did not permeate to the masses. In their daily lives Indians and Africans were not only socially apart but competed for very limited resources as Durban's population more than doubled between 1936 and 1951. The signs of this tension were evident in correspondences to the press. For example, when Indians were refused permission to use the City Hall in 1943 and the Natal Witness

criticized the decision, "A Native Soldier of the Last Great War" wrote the that newspaper:

As you are so insistent on behalf of the Indians - who are after all, newcomers, and besides having very materially bettered themselves in various ways, have many privileges not granted the natives ... you should now all the more strongly support the interests of the aborigines who are denied privileges so granted to recent Asiatic arrivals ... Have we not contributed to the progress of our land as much as, or far more than, the Asiatics and numerous Arab merchants ... [who] depend so largely on the natives for their riches never enjoyed in India.<sup>146</sup>

An "insulted Native" complained in 1944 that:

The Indians still look at the sons of Africa as their inferior types of human beings upon whom they must also apply the niggardly and inhuman treatment which they themselves suffer from the white supermen! It is indeed humiliating to see in the non-European cinemas, which are run by Indians, a colossal amount of segregation.... We Natives are also human beings, and we ask the Indians to treat us as such. The Indian people depend largely on the native purchasing power to keep their businesses going. It is an insult to segregate and maltreat people upon whom they depend for the most part on their livelihood.<sup>147</sup>

Simmering tensions finally boiled over on 13 January 1949, when large-scale rioting broke out in Durban. George Madondo, an African youth of 14, got involved in an argument with a 16 year old Indian shop assistant. Madondo slapped the boy who complained to his employer. The employer pushed Madondo through a glass window and he was cut on his head. Madondo was taken to hospital where he was treated and sent home. The employer was later fined £1 or 7 days for common assault.<sup>148</sup> This seemingly trivial argument ignited a major riot. The incident took place at around 5.00 PM at the Indian market. A large crowd of Africans had

congregated at the nearby Victoria Street Bus Rank and the Berea Road Railway Station. Word of Madondo's assault spread and Africans attacked Indians all over the city for three days.<sup>149</sup>

When the riots were finally subdued by force, 142 people had been killed and 1,087 injured.<sup>150</sup> In addition, 768 assaulted Indians were treated in hospital and 2,590 treated in refugee camps which had been set up in community halls, schools, temples and mosques all over Durban by volunteer doctors to attend to the injured and homeless.<sup>151</sup> On 17 January 1949 a total of 44,738 Indians were housed in such camps.<sup>152</sup> A total of 268 Indian homes were looted and completely burnt and 1,690 were partially destroyed and looted. 47 Indian businesses were completely burnt and 791 partially destroyed and looted. Indian-owned vehicles to the value of £49,980 were destroyed.<sup>153</sup>

The causes of the riots should be examined with the following in mind. Indians, Africans and whites were incorporated separately into the local economy. Indians were incorporated earlier than Africans and although disadvantaged relative to whites, were much better placed than Africans. Industry was dominated by white capital while commerce was dominated by Indians and whites. Indians dominated trade in the "non-European" sector of the city as well as in African areas. Africans were not welcome in white shops and patronized Indian-owned shops. As inflation cut the level of African real wage levels from the mid-1940s the most tangible index of declining living standards were the prices of goods in Indian stores.<sup>154</sup> Similarly, in the absence of municipal transport Indians controlled bus transport to the added areas.

For the African poor who had to travel great distances to work, became another arena of struggle.<sup>155</sup>

From the 1940s Africans began waging a number of struggles in trade, housing and transport to improve their economic situation. Many believed that ethnic mobilization and racism had been responsible for the success of Indians and that they had to mobilize likewise. "Establishment" middle class politicians like A.W.G. Champion tried to use segregation to their advantage by obtaining concessions at the expense of Indian bus and land owners and traders. This was particularly so in Cato Manor where Africans and Indians were economic competitors.<sup>156</sup> Indians were seen as traders who sent profits abroad, who were party to price-cutting and usurious lending practices, who were part of a separate trade clientage system which benefited them only, and who kept to themselves. The stereotype of the "trader" was useful for mobilizing against Indians. This is corroborated by evidence before the Riots Commission. The principal grievances of Africans were: insolent treatment by Indians, overcharging by traders, ill-treatment on buses and incorrect change given, loose relations between African women and Indian men, exorbitant rents by Indian landlords, competition between Africans and Indians for bus certificates, the superior position of Indians in industry, and general economic competition between African and Indian traders.<sup>157</sup>

Phineas Cilane, a resident of Chesterville, who was employed as a general laborer by the Municipality, told the Commission that the 1949 riots were due to overcharging in Indian stores: "when you query that over-price, they gather together

and you are assaulted." On buses "you do not receive change and if you do demand change, that is the signal for trouble. You are assaulted, invariably with the fists."<sup>158</sup> Muzomubi Ndhlovu felt that "the bad relations are due to the general treatment which we receive from the Indian community, who look upon us as just nobody.... What is more, they have now taken to abusing us. They call us "kaffirs".<sup>159</sup> S. Mcunu, an insurance agent, told the Commission that Indians hindered African economic initiative. He further objected to "our women giving birth to Indian children. We as a people respect the women folk of the Indian, but the Indian does not in turn respect our women folk.... I cannot think that any Native parent will be happy to see his daughter give birth to an Indian child." He was also aggrieved that Indian traders' "money goes one way only. The Indian sells to us, we are the ones who support their businesses by buying from them, but there is no way by which we in turn can get back some of that money which we have paid to them."<sup>160</sup>

Indians denied such allegations and, in fact, the NIC boycotted the Commission because it considered it "unrepresentative." In a Statement to the Riots Commission, the NIO tendered evidence to disprove these accusations. It accepted that Africans suffered from numerous disabilities but argued that Indians were targeted because the African "knew that his oppressor was the European, but he also knew the might of the European.... He was afraid to show his hostility to the European. He found in the Indian a convenient scapegoat."<sup>161</sup> The NIO also suggested that anti-Indian inflammatory speeches by White politicians "have tended to

single out the Indians in Natal as an unwanted entity. These must inevitably reach the ears of the Africans.... The Native would not fail to observe that the general attitude of the European is to send the Indians back to their country, lock, stock and barrel."<sup>162</sup>

Indians also believed that the riots were not spontaneous but organized. In fact, a rumor had been circulating in Durban that Africans would attack Indians on 16 December 1948. The secretary of the Cato Manor Indian Economic Housing Scheme had even sent a letter to Major Bosman, Chief Commandant of Police, Cato Manor, in December 1948 informing him that residents of the area had held two mass meetings to discuss the impending attack and required protection on the 16th. The riot took place a month later.<sup>163</sup> Indians also questioned why the attacks mainly affected the working class if traders were the problem and that it was whites who determined access to trade licenses and other resources.<sup>164</sup> The view of white connivance is shared by virtually all informants. For Dr Goonam the riots were "inspired by the whites. I say this because if all the Africans were against the Indians there wouldn't be one Indian left. The European attitude was bad. I remember a councillor saying: "Votes ... what votes? Its not votes we must give them, we must give them boats." Mr K.N. "Whites put them up to get businessmen out of town. I was working in Jacobs. The Afrikaner driver put us in the back of the truck, covered us with a sail and brought us to safety. It was instigated not by the Dutch but by the English." For Mr F.B.M. "Oh man! That was a real stage up done by whites. Whites encouraged them because they saw Africans and Indians coming together. Africans went into the

shops during the day and hit Indians - the police watched but did nothing. They only took action when India said they'll send an army."<sup>165</sup>

Africans saw Indians as their antagonists, and as standing in the way of their advancement. This completely undermined the political alliance between the ANC and NIC and emphasized the boundaries which existed between ordinary Indians and Africans. That perceptions of trade competition were embedded in the African mind is corroborated by a public meeting of Africans a few weeks after the riots. The meeting was chaired by A.W.G. Champion, who wanted ANC to:

impress on the Indians that African economic progress can no longer be delayed or obstructed; ensure that whenever the African expresses willingness to take over the services at present in Indian hands in predominantly African areas the Indian should give proof of his goodwill by disposing of these to the African at a reasonable price and that the African be given every facility to trade and to run buses to and from African areas; ensure that where Indian buses run or shops are established, and where these do not come under African management, African drivers and conductors and salesmen be employed.<sup>166</sup>

Following the riots, Africans clearly saw an opportunity which they tried to capitalize on. The Native Locations Combined Advisory Board met with the mayor and requested that non-Native hawkers be excluded from locations, that health regulations governing storage of unsold goods be relaxed and that sites be erected for African trading in locations as well in other areas where Africans were in the majority.<sup>167</sup> The Native Vigilance Committee organized a boycott of Indian buses and demanded that Cato Manor be set aside for them.<sup>168</sup> A middle class African newspaper looked on the riots as a positive development for Africans in that they had shown "the extent to which our people were ready for economic development. None

will deny that they have shown an amazing eagerness to look after themselves. Just now people are rushing to buy buses, establish stores or set themselves up as hawkers."<sup>169</sup>

The riots had a significant impact on the consciousness of Indians.

Immediately after, R.S. Nowbath, a former editor of The Leader wrote:

Those who have seen their homes destroyed in front of their eyes, those who have seen a life-time's savings go up in smoke, those who have seen their children hacked in front of them, and those who helplessly watched their daughters raped, will not, they cannot, forget. The generation that lived through that night of terror, January 14-15, will never forgive the African. For two generations at least the embers of hate will smoulder.<sup>170</sup>

The scare and horror stories which filled the Indian press served to increase fear and hatred. "He Died A Hero" narrated the story of "Longy" Naidoo. When confronted by a "horde of blood thirsty impis" he exhorted his friends to escape while he took on the "savage mob." "Burning with rage at the impudence one that solitary Indian had the audacity to display by inviting them to a battle, they set upon him with a will, allowing his companions ample time to flee."<sup>171</sup> "Ferocious Attacks by Natives on Indian Women and Children" reported on a man who was assaulted and thrown into his burning house by a mob which then assaulted and raped the wife and 11 year old daughter. In another incident a woman and her 19 year old daughter were made to watch her husband being hacked before they were both raped.<sup>172</sup> "Indian Boy Burned Alive" recounted "one of the most horrifying, gruesome and treacherous acts of savagery yet perpetrated." It was the story of a 13 year old boy Harrichand Mahabeer who was caught and gagged by two Africans. They tied a sack around his

waist and set it alight. His screams could not be heard because he was gagged and he burnt to death.<sup>173</sup> "Indian Girls Assaulted by Native Hooligans" told of girls being "assaulted by African youths who also hurl filthy phrases at them. As a result many parents have withdrawn their daughters from school."<sup>174</sup> While these stories may have been exaggerated they were important in hardening the attitudes of Indians.

Informants also felt that the riot resulted in an important and definite change in relations with Africans. The African felt he had "whipped" the Indian into shape and could now dominate him and, consequently, became insolent, arrogant and hostile. Mr B.R.: "At first they were good and humble and respected us. After the riots the tables turned. They didn't care a damn for Indians. Before they called us "Numzaan" and "Baas". Now we must plead with them to do anything and we have to call them "Numzaan". " Mr K.N.: "We used to help Africans - they came to us for food. After that [the riots] we were afraid of them." Mr F.B.M.: "The Africans became 'the man'. They had the money and the power. After that they became the boss. Some Indians tried to patronize them. The 'Ba-Baa' days were over."<sup>175</sup>

The riots marked an important change in relations because Indians and Africans had now become competitors and were no longer living detached lives. As Durban experienced an economic boom during the 1950s and 1960s whites monopolized the best jobs. The mass of Indians, who had earlier access to education and English, were better placed than Africans. They became conservative and passive, and concentrated on consolidating their economic position. Many of the radical leaders, both unionists and intellectuals, joined the ANC in their desire to obtain

justice but were not followed by the masses.

## **Conclusion**

The changing social and material conditions in the period 1914-1949 had important consequences for Indian identities and consciousness. Bolstered by the support of the urban poor, a radical professional and working class leadership challenged the domination of politics by the conservative merchant and professional leadership which had been trying to assert an Indian identity. The radical leadership discredited the policy of appeasement and compromise. They favored confrontation and worked for unity with Africans. The collective action by thousands of workers during the 1930s and 1940s, the formation of the Non-European Unity Front and signing of "Doctors Pact" seemed to bode well for Indian-African unity.

However, even these served to promote an ethnic identity. Trade union leaders, for example, did not break with the bourgeoisie. The latter had the resources and union leaders were compelled to call on them during strikes. The masses, who had joined unions in response to their poverty, depended on the patronage of the bourgeoisie. As the economic position of workers came under threat from Africans, and it was becoming difficult to sustain unionism, radical leaders moved their focus to passive resistance which was over an issue of immediate concern to Indians only. The fact that passive resistance took place in the context of India's transition to independence, coupled with that country's direct involvement via the United Nations, spurred ethnic and racial identification. Further, by calling for a Round Table

Conference, the leadership was turning away from a valuable source of local support, Africans, and raising the possibility of compromise which would have resulted from give-and-take negotiations. They would also have had to accept benefits for Indians only. The leaders also congratulated Malan and suspended passive resistance when the NP had outlined its policy well before the election. In short, the NIC abandoned its original rhetoric of equality for a separate struggle in which only the Indian mattered.

We can appreciate this policy when we consider that in their day-to-day interaction, Indians and Africans lived detached lives and held numerous negative stereotypes about each other. Miss S.L. recalls:

The Indian always regarded himself as something a little better. His relationship with the African was mainly a master-servant relationship. His relationship was not good at all. It was deplorable in many, many ways. The Africans was not given a decent place to live, nor was he regarded as part of the household. He was always a servant and thats how it stood for many long years.<sup>176</sup>

This is borne out by various objections raised against Africans. A mass meeting of Springfield Indians complained to the DCC in 1942 about the behavior of Africans passing through on their way home. They "attack the innocent people in the evenings and rob them of their clothing and money." They demanded adequate police patrols "to avoid any further disturbances by these criminals."<sup>177</sup> A report from the District Commandant, South African Police, found that these allegations were unfounded and that the real troublemakers were Indians "returning from the Sydenham hotel in a drunken condition."<sup>178</sup> In 1943, the Cato Manor Ratepayers' Association noted with "deep concern" the large number of African shacks being built

in the area, "with no regard to the bye-laws," sanitation was absent, "Native women" washed their clothes in streams thus polluting the water, and they were "propagating" disease. Further, the area was now unsafe and the produce of market gardeners was "being stolen by the neighbouring natives. We trust and hope that some relief will be given to the property owners in the area. There were 15,000 shack dwellers and "something should be done to safeguard the public health before it is too late."<sup>179</sup> It is ironical that Indians, in this case working class, were now voicing the same complaints against Africans that whites had once voiced against them.

It was difficult to forge a class or non-racial identity. This is epitomized in the life stories of those who lived during this period. The story of Mr M. points to the ambiguous nature of identity.<sup>180</sup> Mr M., who was born in Cato Manor, left school in 1931 at a very young age to work in the clothing industry. He was a member of the Garment Workers Union from the time that it was formed in 1934. He joined a mineral water firm in 1940. There were eight such firms in Durban at this time and he formed the Mineral Water Works Union. Mr M. was also a member of the CP from the late 1930s, secretary of the NIC during the 1940s, as well as a member of a religious body, the Arya Samaj and was associated with the activities of the Hindu Youth Organization. He was also involved in the work of the Anti-Segregation Council and was arrested during the passive resistance campaign. Given his working class background, Mr M.'s comments are fascinating:

Before 1949 too we didn't want to have anything to do with the Africans. Even to this day, we had that tiff with Farouk Meer [Prominent NIC member]. We told him if you want to rub shoulders with the Africans, you can do it; ...

we don't want to rub shoulders with the Africans. I'm still a member of the NIC. My leanings are towards the left.... The 1949 riots made us have nothing to do with the African. That suffering we underwent, the misery which has been caused at the hands of the Africans made us more anti-African. Our feelings became more bitter. That is why you find the Cato Manor Indian is anti-black. We hate Africans to be quite honest with you and you can't blame us.<sup>181</sup>

This recollection brings to light the ambiguous nature of identity. Like Mr. M. many did not see a contradiction between leftist and racial identities, and in most cases, class identity coexisted with racial identity. This is not incongruous if we take cognizance of the social world in which changes took place. There was a close link between race, ethnicity, culture and identity. The masses joined unions because of poverty and supporting the NIC was the next step. After all, it was the "Indian" Congress. According to Mr N.G. "All I remember is passive resistance. I used to go listen to them - in Red Square. I used to listen. I thought politics is no good but I went to all the meetings. I remember Monty Naicker. My goal was to work hard and look after my mother." Another informant, Mr K.N., said: "We supported the NIC - went to Red Square - right in front of West Street. We never used to fright for whites. We Indians loved meetings." Mr A.N. "I wasn't political. I used to go for fun - we used to stand on boxes. It was always packed." Mr F.B.M. said that he "was very interested in the Congress but not the CP. I liked the Congress - Mr Badat, Mr Christopher, and so on." According to Mr N.G. "I worked for Wentworth Textile in Jacobs. I joined the union. A white chappie, Wanless, was in charge. Mostly Indians worked here.... They asked us to join the CP, but no ways. What could we get back?"<sup>182</sup>

Similarly, the radical leadership did not emerge from a vacuum. They grew up in Indian society and many belonged to religious and cultural organizations. To take Dr Goonam as an example, the link with her Indian background is ever present. Through mother "we learnt to think beyond our surroundings for she transported us to ancient times in India..." Prior to her departure to Edinburgh to study medicine, "I moved about almost involuntarily, submerged in this Indian world of high domesticity and profound ritual, internalising above all, the example set by my mother."<sup>183</sup> Following her politicization at Edinburgh, she returned to Durban where she was a member of the "Left Book Club", the "Liberal Studies Group" and the radical NIC. Despite involvement with the poor and extensive political campaigns, her Indian identity remained. In light of this her comments at a public meeting when visiting India in 1941, where she shared the platform with Sastri, are not surprising:

I would like to clear a misapprehension some people have in India that Indians in South Africa were no longer Indians... Mr Sastri would be able to testify to the good conduct of Indians there. The Indian continues to be Indian and will never lose his traditions but, on the other hand, guard them zealously.<sup>184</sup>

In London, where she was in exile during the 1960s and 1970s, Dr Goonam was a member of the Tamil Sangam.<sup>185</sup> In exile in Zimbabwe during the 1980s: "I found that the local Indians did not have any cultural bodies and so founded the Zimbabwe Tamil Sangam, and organized classical dancing, theatrical shows, and a Tamil school. Our members were drawn from Sri Lanka, Singapore, South Africa, Mauritius and various parts of India."<sup>186</sup>

This was not lost on the African bourgeoisie. They argued that Indians were

using Africans in industry to further their own ends but doing nothing for them otherwise. As early as 1935, a meeting of approximately 500 Africans in Durban noted "with alarm that not a single native has been employed at a living wage by any Indian as a clerk, bookkeeper, salesman, tailor, printer or carpenter".<sup>187</sup> Although no action was taken until 1949, this statement shows that there was an awareness amongst Africans that they and Indians were more likely to be competitors than allies. An African middle class newspaper noted shortly after the riots:

The leaders of the Indian people have found it difficult to convince the other non-Europeans - particularly the Africans - that they are willing to work genuinely for the betterment of the other non-Europeans as well. If the Indian community takes the initiative in convincing the African that it does genuinely seek to work with him too for a better South Africa for all, there is every reason to look forward to a very bright and secure future. But if the Indian leaders are not gifted in the direction of making friends with those who might guarantee them a safe and secure future then if their people's morale breaks down they cannot claim that their hands are altogether clean.<sup>188</sup>

This chapter will close by relating an incident that best captures the ambiguous meaning of radicalism. It must be seen in the context of urban poverty, labor strikes, and passive resistance, all of which placed Indians in opposition to capital and the state. When the Royal family visited South Africa in 1947, the NIC's position was that although it had "the greatest respect" for the royal family Indians could not join in the celebrations knowing that they "were being treated as common criminals for the crime of upholding the rights of Indian people to be treated as human beings." An Emergency Conference of the NIC called for a boycott of the celebrations.<sup>189</sup> Moderates led by A.I. Kajeer, however, formed the Durban Indian Royal Visit

Committee and assured Mayor Ellis Brown that the king and queen would get a "right royal welcome." This Committee included bodies as diverse as the Liquor and Catering Trades Union, representatives from the municipal barracks, Durban and District Indian Cricket Union, Durban and District Girl Guides Association, Natal Indian Football Association, Hindu Tamil Institute, Early Morning Market, Riverside Muslim Madressa, and Indian Durban Scouts Association.<sup>190</sup>

The function went ahead despite the boycott call by the NIC. Indian and western music was played and the Indian Girl Guides and Boys Scout formed a guard of honor as the king and queen arrived. Both South African national anthems were played and bouquets were presented to Queen Elizabeth. The ceremony took place on a dais which was a replica of the taj mahal. There were 65,000 Indians in attendance at Curries Fountain, the largest ever public gathering of South Africa Indians.<sup>191</sup> This is remarkable given that the visit took place in the midst of the passive resistance campaign and the NIC was enjoying popularity as never before. This is another illustration of the ambiguous nature of Indian identities. Support for the NIC and CP, and membership of trade unions did not result in non-racial class identity. Indians lived in segregated areas, family and religion was central in their lives, and the merchant and professional class sponsored and promoted education and social welfare bodies which bolstered a racial and ethnic identity. Loyalties to these group memberships thus influenced and shaped class identities.

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## CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the making of Indian identity in Durban by examining a formative period in their history. The years 1914-1949 were witness to rapid and extensive transformation in social and material conditions as the mass of Indians became urbanized and depended less on agriculture and more and more on the city's resources to which they had limited access for a living. Considerable numbers were impoverished and endured a hand-to-mouth existence. For most, families were large and uneducated, they lived in urban slums where lighting, sanitation and water supplies were absent, wage rates extremely low and diseases rampant. Many joined trade unions and vociferously demanded a greater stake in the city.

South African scholars have differed widely on the impact of this dislocation on Indian identities. Pahad saw the involvement of Indian leaders in the Congress Alliance as evidence of the forging of a non-racial identity.<sup>1</sup> Ginwala, on the other hand, has argued that the newly urbanized workers acquired a class identity and that it was their class consciousness which radicalized politics and propelled Indians into joint action with Africans and Coloureds.<sup>2</sup> For Meer it was during these years that Indians acquired a Black identity as they perceived that their "class formation" would only be "truly effective" if it included Africans and Coloureds.<sup>3</sup> Padayachee et al. argue that although there was considerable growth in trade union activity, because of the absence of democratic structures within these unions and lack of shop-floor leadership, class-based politics did not endure after the second world war.<sup>4</sup> For Bagwandeem, Indian politics underwent "a metamorphosis from an accomodationist to

a more militant approach [during these years]. In the post-1946 period Indian politics gave way to a general non-White agitation...."<sup>5</sup>

This study has shown that we may speak in terms of large collectivities like race, class and ethnicity but lived experience is more complex. Identities are situational and people have multiple identifications. In fact, the formation of identity is an on-going process; it always remains "incomplete, is always in process, always being formed."<sup>6</sup> Indians in Durban were not presented with an array of fixed group memberships from which to build their identities; rather the situation was continually evolving, which resulted in 'shifting' identities. As Bhabha points out, identities do not "settle into primordial polarities" and the very idea of an 'organic' ethnic community needs redefinition.<sup>7</sup>

Adherence to one form of identification does not mean that all other boundaries simply disintegrate. Indian identities were negotiated on two levels: in relation to other Indians as well as to Africans and whites. With regard to the former, one could be a Hindu in relation to a Muslim, a north Indian in relation to a south Indian, a Tamil in relation to a Telegu, an educated Indian in relation to an uneducated one, and so on. Class, religion, education, gender, language, customs, tradition and origins all had a claim to identity. As Hall reminds us:

The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling us in different directions, so that our identifications are constantly being shifted about.... The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy.<sup>8</sup>

While the multiplicity of identification is important, as we have stressed at the beginning, this study is primarily concerned with Indian identity mobilized in the political arena, in relation to whites and Africans. For Hall, any new identity that is being forged, in this case "Indian," would "continue to exist alongside a wide range of other differences.... Identity and differences are inextricably articulated or knitted together in different identities, the one never wholly obliterating the other."<sup>9</sup> Indians could exist as Indians in relation to whites and Africans but fragment into sub-categories of religion, language, region, language and so on for other purposes.

This Indian identity was not a reflection of pre-existing ethnic or cultural traits "set in the fixed tablet of tradition,"<sup>10</sup> but a negotiated one that came directly from the evolving South African context. The question, as posed by Stuart Hall, is how were differences 'stitched up'?<sup>11</sup> The idea of an Indian community was both imposed on Indians and fostered from within. In terms of outside forces, the institutional racism of the government militated against cross race contact and alliances. Durban was an ethnic and racial city in which social and economic life focused around specific groups. Whites used race to subordinate and exclude Indians who were denied the right to vote, to form political parties, sell their labor as they desired, live where they pleased and even access to state-resources like education and housing. Whites made no distinction and considered all Indians an undesired presence.

This created boundary markers and resulted in different social institutions, separate political traditions and limited contact between Indians, Africans and whites as each used race to organize, which resulted in race being reified. Although there

were a number of class groups, there was a lack of solidarity with non-Indian members of the same class. There were distinct Indian political, cultural, union, community and religious organizations, Indian media, and Indian leadership which included charismatic leaders like Gandhi, Dadoo and Naicker. Working class Indians identified with many of the institutions formed by merchants because it was their only means of gaining access to scarce resources. Further, as Africans attempted to carve a niche in the urban economy they became the main competitors of Indians who, apprehensive about their position, became defensive.

The identities of Indians cannot be determined by examining their work experience only. Cognizance has also been taken of the world outside the workplace since class identity and consciousness is also shaped outside work time and place, with distinctive languages, religions, festivals, family life, music, films and food prevailing. These diacritics provided common attributes for group membership. The tie between Indians was not simply political and circumstantial but encompassed an attempt to create strong social bonds. Social and biological reproduction played a crucial role in maintaining group identity. Marriage within the community, the vitality of the family, and the linking of classes through networks such as schools, sports bodies, religious associations and welfare organizations were vital in group reproduction. Besides providing basic and important resources, many of these associations strengthened a communal identity through their teachings.

Indians also lived in occupationally heterogenous, but racially segregated, neighborhoods. As a result, boundaries between them and Africans and whites were

made more rigid. While the workplace was important because structural restrictions governed choices and life chances, the fact that these groups did not share a culture or values hindered the growth of class-based politics and class consciousness. This is not to assert the primacy of race over class but to suggest that there was a complex connection between these forces. As Rex reminds us, it is easier to achieve the unity of interest groups when members are united by bonds of race and ethnicity, which involve a "consciousness of kind," rather than on a rational perception of the common good, which starts out with a plurality of individuals.<sup>12</sup>

At the time of Gandhi's departure from South Africa in 1914, Indians lacked cohesion. This is not surprising given that when indentured workers embarked on their long journey to Natal there did not exist a nation-state, India, and that "Indians" were severely split by caste, class, language and religion. It was in the inter-war years that an Indian community emerged in South Africa with an established group identity in relation to Africans and whites. Although differences remained and the nature of this community was the subject of on-going negotiations, they were gradually drawn together because the government treated all Indians alike. They had the same status and the threat of repatriation hung over all until 1961, when they were formally endowed with the legal racial status of "Indian." The upward mobility of ex-indentured workers increased group resources and reduced tensions between them and merchants. The various anti-government political campaigns which were fought along racially divided lines increased feelings of Indianness, with the result that established class divisions did not have the same subjective significance that they might have had

in a deracialized society.

### **Indian Identities, Post-1949: Some Reflections**

When the NP came to power in 1948 it was determined to entrench racial and ethnic identities by establishing "nations". Most Indians were urbanized and could not be relocated to a "homeland", but apartheid legislation restricted contact between them and those defined as African, Coloured or white in all areas of life. The Minister of the Interior, Dr T.E. Donges, also made it clear that "the government's long-term policy was to reduce the Indian population to an irreducible minimum" by repatriating as many as possible to India.<sup>13</sup>

While apartheid reinforced social barriers and racial segregation, the NIC tried to build on the "Doctors Pact" by carrying out joint campaigns with the ANC. Over 8,000 were arrested during the Defiance Campaign from June 1952 to protest against the pass law and influx control. However, there were only 246 arrests in Durban.<sup>14</sup> In June 1955 the Congress of Democrats, which comprised a small group of radical whites, the South African Coloured People's Organisation, and the ANC and SAIC adopted the Freedom Charter, which embraced a non-racial identity. The close bond between these parties was strengthened by the Treason Trial which was held in the late 1950s.<sup>15</sup> Some African leaders believed in an Africanist identity and launched the PAC in November 1958. The PAC's defiance campaign, launched on 21 March 1960, resulted in 67 deaths at Sharpeville, and the banning of the ANC and PAC. Although the NIC was not banned most of its leaders were served restrictive orders

and the organization effectively silenced.

The alliance between the NIC and ANC failed to effect a transition to non-racial politics at the level of the masses. The NIC continued to see Indians as a separate group. For example, in his 1961 address to the twenty-third conference of the SAIC, Dr Naicker stated that "this Conference meets ... at a time when we as the smallest minority group in our country are facing great challenges and history has destined that we must play our rightful role."<sup>16</sup> The failure of the NIC to involve the masses in non-racial campaigns and its tendency of mobilize them on issues which were race-specific, perpetuated the racial divisions of resistance and reinforced racial identities. The continued existence of the Natal "Indian" Congress, with its membership confined to Indians, meant that it was giving credence to the NP ideology of distinct "nations" even though it might not have been actively seeking to sustain a separate identity. As the masses were uprooted by the Group Areas Act and segregated in townships, where they had access to better schools and amenities, and achieved considerable economic mobility, the boundaries between them and Africans became more definite.

The banning of the ANC and silencing of most of the leaders of the NIC not only ended an important link, however tenuous, between Indians and Africans but allowed moderates to prosper. Apartheid did not create communities. They existed before 1948 and the implementation of apartheid marked a continuity in existing policy in Durban. Apartheid had ambiguous consequences. While many suffered immensely there was a relative advantage in being Indian as certain restrictions, such

as the pass laws and influx control, only applied to Africans. Further, the restructuring of urban space resulted in the provision of mass housing in two large culturally separate and geographically disparate townships, Chatsworth and Phoenix. The reaction of Kerminder Kaur, Miss India Worldwide 1994, when she visited Chatsworth in October 1994, shows just how comprehensive segregation was: "So many Indian people, all living in one area, displaying their culture openly, gave me the idea that it was like a place in a corner of India".<sup>17</sup> At the same time areas like Reservoir Hills, La Mercy and Westville were made available for middle class housing. As a result of forced removals 140,000 Indians were moved in Durban from their original homes to new residential areas between 1950 and 1978.<sup>18</sup> While this disrupted family life and caused much distress and heartache, for many it also meant moving to a much improved physical environment where housing and living conditions were substantially better.

These changing material conditions of Indians were accompanied by a change in their legal position. It was only in 1961, when they were granted the status of permanent residents in South Africa, that the threat of repatriation subsided. A Department of Indian Affairs was established as part of government strategy to make a race and nation of Indians so that they could fit into the neat categories which were being created. This was a crucial moment as the Indian was finally made into a South African. The government invested in their housing and education and attempted to incorporate them politically. A number of Indian advisory bodies were created to divide them from Africans and Coloureds and cement a distinct Indian identity. The

South African Indian Council, which comprised of nominated members, was an advisory body inaugurated in 1968. Local Affairs Committees were also established to advise municipalities and local authorities on Indian matters.

Considerable upward mobility after 1960 was due in large measure to an expansion in education. The control of Indian education shifted to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1965 and free and compulsory education was available from 1970. The rapid increase in the building of schools resulted in adequate space for all by 1983.<sup>19</sup> The success of this growth can be seen in the fact that the number that passed the Senior Certificate examination (12 years schooling) increased from 1,496 in 1968 to 9,056 in 1984.<sup>20</sup> The enlargement of the M.L. Sultan Technical College, and establishment of the Springfield College of Education and the University of Durban-Westville in the mid-1960s increased the number of Indian professionals and artisans.

Economic mobility and residential segregation were the twin pillars which preserved group identity after 1960. In addition to the rise of the professional and artisan classes, the working class benefited from the emergence of a substantial number of Indian industrialists in the garment industry. With their greater education and earlier command of English, Indians dominated semi-skilled positions, particularly in the clothing, footwear, textile and food sectors. Family income was also augmented by large numbers of women entering wage employment from the 1960s, not as a mark of their liberation but as a means to increase the family income. Most important was the fact that the trade unions to which Indians belonged,

particularly those in the sugar, municipal and clothing industries, became less radical than in the 1940s and concentrated on improving the economic position of employees. While apartheid suppressed Indians, by stifling Africans even more it created economic spaces for Indian advancement. As a result of their mobility Indians became moderate ideologically. They had a stake in the society and were seeking to protect their position as a group and not as a class. Indians were much better placed relative to Africans as they were concentrated in the higher paying jobs. This is clearly reflected in the following table:

**TABLE 13** Average Household Income, 1991

Race Group	Income (rands)
Whites	4 679
Indians	2 476
Coloureds	1 067
Africans	779

Source: Race Relations Survey 1992/93  
(Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1993),  
p.192.

The dominance of politics by moderates was challenged from the mid-1970s as extra-parliamentary opposition bodies were re-established on several fronts. The philosophy of Black Consciousness, which specifically included Indians, Africans and Coloureds, challenged the government's ethnic and racial terminology and attempted to construct a new identity. Young radicals like Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley found this philosophy appealing and challenged the politics of both the NIC and SAIC, but ultimately remained peripheral as this outlook was confined to intellectuals.

Indian identity was also challenged by the rapid growth of the trade union movement during the 1970s, culminating in the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in April 1979. Its membership increased from 70,000 in 1979 to 320,000 in 1983.<sup>21</sup> Later in the decade COSATU became a powerful player in the South African political game. Also crucial were student protests which began on 16 June 1976 in Soweto and continued to gather momentum. These developments spawned a whole host of other protests, the issues involved running the gamut from housing and rent to transport and health. There was a profusion of community organizations and consumer boycotts which impacted on Indian identities.

The protest of Indians centered largely around racially exclusive issues. When the NIC was revived in June 1971, Dr Naidoo emphasized that: "We meet today as Indians. We are resigned in this by the realities of power and circumstances."<sup>22</sup> The NIC felt that its task was to mobilize the Indian 'community' and thereafter join with Africans and Coloureds in opposing the government. The NIC formed the Anti-SAIC Committee and later joined the UDF to oppose participation in government created ethnic structures. The United Democratic Front (UDF), based on the principles of the Freedom Charter, was launched on 20 August 1983 to protest against the tri-cameral dispensation, which created Indian and Coloured parliaments but did not give any power to Africans. The NIC was a member of this body which included trade unions, religious bodies, student organisations, and civic associations. The formation of the UDF marked another attempt to reinstate the heritage of non-racialism. The NIC's vigorous anti-election programme included mass and local rallies as well as house-to-

house visits. This resulted in low voter registration and turnout.

However, the NIC's anti-government campaigns emphasized the racial and ethnic exclusivity of Indians. With regard to the South African Indian Council elections in November 1981, Dr Jassat of the anti-S.A.I.C. Committee argued that "the S.A.I.C. has achieved nothing of importance for our community.... We have a political tradition which preceded this limited forum which was foisted upon us."<sup>23</sup> To warn people against the tri-cameral dispensation the following advertisement was placed in the **Sunday Tribune**:

1. Let us protect our future now.
2. Ever since we were brought to this country we have faced many problems. Our grandparents worked under harsh conditions on the sugar plantations and mines...
3. Our achievements in improving our communities were destroyed by the Group Areas Act...
4. We urge the community to reject the constitution offered to us. Our history and tradition has been a proud one in demanding equality for all.<sup>24</sup>

The mass campaign of the UDF against the tri-cameral parliament heralded a cycle of protest centered around townships, schools and factories. This, coupled with the economic crisis induced by lack of skills and capital, forced the government into reform which led to the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the unbanning of political organisations, multi-party negotiations and, ultimately, South Africa's first democratically elected government in 27 April 1994. Approximately 70% of Indians voted NP in the April 1994 elections. This support was based on class lines with the majority of the working class in Chatsworth and Phoenix voting NP. The bulk of the support for the ANC came from professionals and students.<sup>25</sup> This does not

necessarily mean that Indians support white minority rule. Rather, it reflects their hesitancy to identify with the African majority and their own concern about their right to be different.

The NIC was not responsible for constructing an Indian identity. As we have already seen that was due to a combination of state policy which discriminated against Indians on the basis of their race and thus welded an Indian identity, the efforts of Indian merchants and professional classes whose discourse and action stressed cultural unity, racial exclusivity, and the use of racial and ethnic resources for the economic empowerment and progress of the 'community', as well as the social and material conditions which fostered racially and ethnically exclusive group memberships. As a result there were profound differences in the level of consciousness, the intensity and pattern of oppression, the magnitude and form of organization and material conditions of Indians and Africans. However, the program and discourse of the NIC reinforced exclusive Indian identities and countered attempts to construct Black and non-racial identities.

At the level of individuals, spatial segregation and material inequalities have increased the social distance and tension between Indians and Africans. Neither black consciousness nor the non-racial ideology of the Congress tradition made much of an impact on the Indian masses. Many of the issues under which Indians were mobilized ceased to have importance as apartheid was gradually disappearing and majority rule looming. What became important to Indians was maintaining their religious, cultural and economic interests. Statements by various local African leaders have reinforced

the fears of Indians. In 1974 Chief Sithole, executive councillor for agriculture and forestry in KwaZulu, told the Kwazulu Legislative Assembly that Indians had not been repatriated from South Africa because they went to Pretoria with "their bags full of money."<sup>26</sup> In 1976 Chief Sithole told the KLA that: "We must be wary of Indians because they want to use us as their tools, as a ladder for them to reach their goals."<sup>27</sup> In 1983 Chief Gatsha Buthezi warned Indians against the new tricameral parliament, telling them that: "We have seen racial outbursts in this country and we know what mob anger can do", in reference to the 1949 riots.<sup>28</sup> More recently "Zulu Hunter" warned Indians that:

Zulu history has it that after the indigenous people of Natal had been conquered by Whites, Zulus refused to work for white settlers or work on the white man's sugarcane and agricultural fields. The Zulu boycotted the white occupation and rule of Natal with the express purpose of chasing the white man out.

When the white man failed to harness Zulus as farm labourers they brought the Indians from India. The Indians came with delight seeking wealth. They scabbed on the conquered Zulu boycotters. The Indians did not bring prosperity to Natal but to white rule and themselves. They helped defeat a black nation. They brought support to the white man. They worked and cultivated the fields despite the protest by Zulus and their leaders.<sup>29</sup>

Many surveys have corroborated the view that there exists a vast social distance between Indians and Africans. A mid-1980s survey of African townships in Durban found that the social distance of Africans was greatest from Indians. An April 1987 study by Markinor found that 53% of Indians worried "really often" or "quite often" while 27% worried sometimes that Africans would again riot against Indians while 53% "strongly disagreed" that Indians would be safe under African

rule.<sup>30</sup> A 1992 survey by the HSRC found that over 70% of Indians supported F.W. De Klerk and the NP while a mere 12% supported the ANC.<sup>31</sup> A July 1990 survey of Durban's Indians found that 63% supported segregated neighborhoods and schools. More remarkable is the fact that only 24% felt that "Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika" should be the national anthem while 22% wanted "Die Stem" to remain.<sup>32</sup>

Events prior to the election seemed to justify these fears. In April 1993, 4,000 Africans attacked and looted Indian-owned shops in Thoyandou, the capital of Venda, for over three hours. More than 70 families were forced to flee their homes. According to an eye witness: "Every single Indian trader was targeted. The white-owned shops next to us were not touched. It was a blatant racial attack".<sup>33</sup> In November 1993 African families from the squatter settlement at Chesterville took occupation of 800 houses which had been built for Indians in Cato Manor, Durban, many of whom had waited many years for these homes. The chairman of the Indian LAC Mr Lazarus Job said: "This is an Indian area and we don't want any other race group here. These houses were funded and built by the HOD for Indians."<sup>34</sup>

Caught between the economically dominant whites and numerically powerful Africans, Indians believe that their homes, their jobs, their shops, are more vulnerable than those of whites. Working class Indians are usually the most hostile to Africans and fear that just as apartheid had denied them opportunities so too will they be sidelined by "affirmative action". Unlike Indians in East Africa after independence, Indian South Africans no longer consider India their home. They have come to regard South Africa as their country. They are fully integrated into the local economy,

engage in a wide range of economic activities and not just trade, and they do not enjoy citizenship rights in any other country. With a new non-racial democracy in place, the label "Indian" no longer has any legal standing. The deracializing of South African society has created new challenges which are again forcing Indians to reconsider their group memberships. People have multiple identifications and the challenge for Indians is to reconcile their ethnic, racial, class, religious and national identities.

One possibility is that because of the common position that they have historically occupied and the fact that they have been treated as a group by others, the perception of being Indian may be bolstered and strengthened in the difficult social and material conditions all South Africans now face. Alternately, given the dropping of legal distinctions and the opening up of schools, businesses, sports facilities, etc., and the fact that there will most likely not be any opportunities in future to mobilize as a group, the significance of racial identifications may diminish and they may come to adopt a broad non-racial national identity which recognises unity in diversity and attempts to accommodate differences. This will be difficult to achieve. Apartheid has cast a long shadow. The problem with South Africa is that it is a country and not a nation. It does not possess a self-identity, as yet. While tensions have eased the majority of Indians and Africans still live in racially segregated areas, social mixing is confined to elites and mixed marriages uncommon. If African aspirations are not met by the new government, they could well vent their frustrations on the relatively privileged Indians, especially in Durban where they are so closely juxtaposed. This

will play an important role in determining whether Indians accentuate their homogeneity or heterogeneity in future.

Extremely significant in this regard was a recent conference of the NIC to celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the organization and to debate its continued existence. The crucial issue was whether there was a role for the NIC in a deracialized South African. Should the organization drop the "I" to give meaning to the idea of non-racialism? Dr Goonam argued that: "The NIC did a lot of wonderful work since it was founded 100 years ago but now it is time to let go. It failed miserably in mobilising Indian support for the ANC in the April election. People just no longer have any faith in the organisation." Hers was a lone voice. Mr Abdul Randeree felt that "the movement still has a vital role to play, even in politics, and can make a valuable contribution to society if future". Mr J.N. Singh, a senior NIC member felt that it "can become a watchdog to ensure that human rights are not trampled."<sup>35</sup> What this debate shows is the ambiguity of Indians identities. Even in post-apartheid South Africa, when society is being deracialized, even Indians who are members of the ANC and campaigned on its behalf during the April 1994 elections, cannot let go of their ties to this racially exclusive organization.

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Working class housewife.

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Durban. Born 1910 to indentured workers. Unskilled worker for city  
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Medical doctor from middle class background. She was involved in political and welfare organizations.

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