

South Africa



*Roster of arrivals/indentured labour in S. Africa who were identified by their numbers only
(Photo Courtesy: Book titled "From Cane Fields to Freedom")*



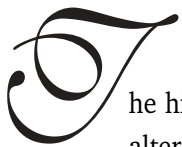
Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba Gandhi with fellow settlers at the Phoenix Settlement, Natal, South Africa (1906)



Railway Station, Pietermaritzburg where Mahatma Gandhi was thrown out of the train en route to Johannesburg on 7 June 1893



Indians working in the cane fields in S. Africa



he history of the Indian Diaspora in South Africa is a fascinating saga of suffering and triumph, alternately following each other over the last hundred and forty years. As long ago as 1904, while the indenture system of importing Indian labour on a contractual basis was nearing the end of its turbulent course, the then Governor of the British Colony of Natal, Lord Milner, thought it right to describe the Indians as ‘strangers, forcing themselves upon a community reluctant to receive them.’ The irony of this statement would be apparent if juxtaposed against the persistent demand, in earlier years, of the British settlers in Natal for large-scale imports of cheap labour from India to shore up their sinking economy. And then again, many years later, in 1948, even before the architect of apartheid, D. F. Malan, came to power in a self-governing British dominion called the Union of South Africa, his Afrikaner National Party had already made its policy towards the Indian migrants crystal clear. It had declared in its election manifesto that ‘Indians are a foreign and outlandish element which is inassimilable’. Continuing in the same vein, the manifesto had proclaimed the party’s determination to repatriate as many Indians as possible! To what extent, if at all, were such statements warranted, or were they merely expressions of a racist attitude against the Indian settlers – both under Britain’s Crown Colony of Natal and also subsequently under the Boer regime that followed it in South Africa?

Early History of Migration of Indians to South Africa

- 7.2. Contrary to the common belief that Indians had first gone to South Africa as indentured labourers in 1860, they had in fact already arrived there much earlier, in 1653. Dutch merchants, returning home from their voyages to India and the East Indies, had taken them to the then Dutch Cape Colony and sold them as slaves to the early Dutch settlers. There they were made to work as domestic servants, or to join the African slaves who were already toiling on the newly established farms. Between 1653 and the early 19th century, there were already as many as 1,195 Indians in the Cape, forming 36.40% of the slave population imported into the colony.
- 7.3. Most of these Indian slaves had been shipped from Bengal or the Coromandal coast. They were unable to preserve their distinct identity in the Cape as ‘Indians’. They married slaves from East Asia, other parts of Africa, or from the indigenous Khoikhoi and San inhabitants. Their progeny subsequently became known as ‘Malays’. This term was, in time, loosely applied to all the Muslims

in the Cape, irrespective of their geographic origin. Later on, however, in apartheid's four-fold classification of South Africa's population, they came under the appellation of 'Coloureds'. Naturally, therefore, the chapter of the Indian slaves, and that also of the Indian servants who accompanied British officers on vacation in the Cape after it had become a British colony in the 19th century, does not find its way into the general history of Indian migration to South Africa.

- 7.4. On the other hand, the Indian presence in that country owes its origin to the British Parliament's passing the Act of Abolition in 1833, whereupon slavery was banned throughout the British Empire. The immediate consequence of this was that the African slaves of British settlers in the Natal Colony decided to desert their former masters *en masse*. Their erstwhile tormentors began to feel the pinch of having to bend their own backs to manual labour! After considerable efforts to persuade the reluctant British authorities in India to replicate in South Africa the system of indentured labour that was already being implemented in Mauritius, the colonists finally succeeded in their endeavour. Thereupon, a group of Indian 'coolies', comprising 342 men, women and children arrived at the port city of Durban on board the *S. S. Truro* on 16 November 1860. They were the first of 384 such arrivals of 'human cargo' containing as many as 152,184 unfortunate persons that were going to be shipped to South Africa over the next 51 years. Of them, 62% were men, 25% women and 13% children. According to a 1985 report of Dr. Frene Ginwala, who is currently Speaker of South Africa's Parliament, two thirds of these emigrants were Tamil and Telugu speaking Hindus from the then Madras Presidency, a predominance that has persisted in subsequent years, as well as from Mysore and surrounding areas. The rest of the migrants had gone mainly from what are now Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. If the vast majority of the indentured labourers were Hindus, less than 12% were Muslims, while some 2% were Christians. Most of them were illiterate, but they all carried with them memories of their traditions, customs and rituals - which they then strove to preserve as best as they could. They spoke a variety of languages - Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Urdu, as well as dialects from Bihar and UP which would later merge to become a sort of local version of Bhojpuri, very different from what is found in Mauritius with its distinctly French and Creole influence.
- 7.5. The initial purpose of importing the Indians had been to tend the sugarcane and sisal plantations of the British settlers. The indentured labourers were bound by contract for 5 years. A carrot was held out to them in the form of a second contract for a further 5 years, with the offer after that of a free return passage to India, or grant of some land. The land grant was eventually dropped in 1891. The standard practice in the plantations was to work the labour from dawn to sunset, Sundays included. After providing them with meagre rations and the barest accommodation in crowded barracks, the planters were insensitive to all their other needs. Their main concern was to economise costs. They saved on rations by reducing them on the slightest pretext. They refused the workers permission to leave their estates, especially to complain to the authorities about their ill treatment. They grudged them even their meagre wages and often found ingenious excuses to minimise them. Arbitrary "justice" was often meted out to them in the form of fines or whipping. In brief, the conditions under which the indentured labourers worked were inhuman and akin to

slavery. This was one of the main reasons for the high number of suicides among them. Nevertheless, the majority of these Indians remained in South Africa, as they had practically banished themselves from their own country by going abroad when crossing the seas (*kalapani*) was taboo and attracted severe *prayaschit*.

- 7.6. Their hard labour in the plantations led to a miraculous transformation of the Natal Colony's faltering economy. This was recognised by the Wragg Commission, which had been appointed in 1885 to enquire into the general condition of the Indian population of Natal. It affirmed in its report that 'the stay of Indians in Natal was, in fact, a great boon to the colony'. Nevertheless, the white settlers continued to treat them as mere 'units of labour'. So inhuman and degrading was the treatment meted out to them by the unsympathetic colonists that Henry Polak described the Indian emigrants as 'helots of the Empire', while Hugh Tinker rightly termed the system of their indentured labour in his monumental book about them as 'a new system of slavery'. In 1911, Gopal Krishna Gokhale declared in the Legislative Council in Delhi that the indentured recruitment of Indians for work in South Africa was 'a monstrous system, iniquitous in itself, based on fraud and maintained by force'.
- 7.7. While their initial recruitment had been for work in the plantations, Indian labour was also later distributed to the railways, dockyards, coal mines, municipal services and domestic employment. Even though they were not happy with the racist laws and taxes, only about 23% of Natal Indians had returned to India by 1911, when the much abused indenture system was finally terminated. Most of them had stayed on in Natal and only a few thousands had moved to the Transvaal (now called the Gauteng Province) before the imposition of a total ban on such internal migrations. Meanwhile, many of the erstwhile 'coolies' had acquired little plots of land and become kitchen gardeners and hawkers, retailing their produce in headloads to the grateful housewives of the White community. Gradually they had practically monopolised the supply of maize, tobacco and garden produce in the coastal belt.
- 7.8. Their success had prompted the entry into the colony of 'free passenger Indians' – so called, because they had paid for their fares as passengers on board a steamship bound for South Africa. The new immigrants were a community of traders, both Hindu and Muslim, who hailed mainly from Gujarat. They set up retail shops and started to compete effectively with the much more expensive stores run by the white settlers. In course of time, they constituted around 10% of Indian immigrants. Much later, teachers, accountants, priests, lawyers and other professionals arrived, also mostly from Gujarat. These developments led to much recrimination and jealousy against the Indians – all of whom were unceremoniously labelled as 'coolies'. This resulted in referring to leading members of the community in derogatory terms such as 'coolie merchant', 'coolie doctor', 'coolie barrister' and the like.
- 7.9. The colonial administration sought to curb the activities of the Indians by enacting a whole compendium of discriminatory laws against them, with a view to boxing them in and curbing their enterprise and economic progress. The Transvaal, for instance, subjected their trade to a

registration fee of 25 rands; prohibited them from becoming licence holders in any enterprise connected with mining; restricted their property rights to segregated wards; subjected them to the carrying of passes; and forbade them from walking on the pavements. The Orange Free State excluded them altogether by a law in 1895, while the Cape subjected their immigration into that province to an education test. Nevertheless, by June 1886, there were already more 'free' Indians in the Natal Colony than indentured Indians. They were free from their contracts, but not free to join the political process, or to vote as equal citizens of their adopted country.

Barrister M. K. Gandhi's Sojourn in South Africa

- 7.10. A new chapter of Indian emigration to South Africa began in May 1893 when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a young Indian barrister from Porbander, arrived in Durban. Abdul Karim Jhaveri of Dada Abdullah & Co. had secured his services in a £40,000 legal suit against a rival Indian firm in Pretoria. The young Gandhi's arrival coincided with the determination of the Whites to put an end to 'the Indian merchant menace'. This campaign had been directed against the ex-indentured labourers who had started working in other sectors of the economy, and especially against the more prosperous 'passenger Indians' who had become the principal rivals of the Whites in trade and commerce. In addition to the restrictions and prohibitions already enumerated above, the entire Indian community was also being subjected to a long list of petty indignities to humiliate them. They were not allowed to sit on 'European' benches in public parks or bathe in beaches reserved for Europeans. Nor could they enter a restaurant, tearoom, barber's shop or a hotel as they did not have the 'uniform of a white skin'. Instead of admiring the energy and productivity of the Indian immigrants, which had brought prosperity to their colony, the White settlers were outraged by their very presence in their midst. They resented the far-sighted perseverance and skill of the Indians, their economic lifestyle, their food habits, their pride in their customs and traditions, and their attention to the education of their children - all of which had ensured that the Indian community would continue to prosper.
- 7.11. With his legal training, Gandhi insisted that the colonial government should strictly implement Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 in which she had promised her Indian subjects equality with all her other subjects throughout the Empire. Accordingly, his fight for non-discriminatory treatment was waged only on behalf of the Indians. He apparently felt that the native Blacks would want to fight their own battles. Despite his youth, with his newly minted philosophy of non-violence and *satyagraha*, Gandhi was able to provide the Indian community the leadership and inspiration that was needed to resist the racist policies of the Whites. He started the *Indian Opinion*, a weekly newspaper, to give expression to the feelings and aspirations of his fellow Indians, and as an instrument to guide them in their struggle for equality and fair play. He also set up the Phoenix Settlement near Durban and, later on, the Tolstoy Farm outside Johannesburg, to provide shelter for the families of those who followed his advice and peacefully courted arrest and detention. It was during his sojourn in South Africa that the Natal Indian Congress was established on 22 May 1894, and later also the forerunner of the Transvaal Indian Congress. A

mass movement of labourers, traders and industrial workers followed him in his courageous fight against the discriminatory laws that restricted even their movements. They could not, for instance, cross from Natal into the Transvaal, the new British colony where gold had recently been discovered. Nor had the White administration shown any respect for Indian customs and traditions.

- 7.12. By the time Gandhi finally left South Africa in 1914, this exemplary *Pravasi Bharatiya* had obtained some concessions from the Premier, Field Marshal Jan Smuts. They included frustrating and delaying the Government's efforts to register Indians in the Transvaal; abolition of the £3 poll tax; and formal recognition of Hindu, Muslim and Parsi marriages. But the future Mahatma's real legacy to succeeding generations of resistance workers in South Africa, and that included also the majority Blacks, was to rid them of their fear of imprisonment and torture. Though most of the restrictive legislative measures against Indians remained when Gandhi finally left South Africa on 18 July 1914, he had sown the seeds for future generations to fight courageously against injustice and racial discrimination in South Africa. But Field Marshal Jan Smuts, who had come to admire greatly Gandhi's courage and ideals, did not really care much for his policies. In the event, racism continued to rear its ugly head in the country with increasing viciousness for a long time after that.

The Beginning of Collaboration between Indian and Black South Africans

- 7.13. Scores of laws continued to be enacted to restrain and cripple the economic progress of the Indian emigrants and to compel them 'voluntarily' to leave the country. It is worth noting here that, between 1885 and 1941, as many as 61 pieces of anti-Indian legislation had been, or were going to be enacted, and more were to follow. But in the meanwhile, there was a momentous development that had a far-reaching effect on the status and position of the Indian community, namely, the Cape Town Agreement of 1927 between South Africa and the then British Government in India. Both parties had agreed in it to encourage and facilitate the repatriation of Indians. As a *quid pro quo*, South Africa had solemnly undertaken, in terms of the Agreement's 'upliftment clause', to improve the lot of those that decided to remain in the country.
- 7.14. Very few Indians opted for repatriation. Pretoria soon forgot or ignored what it had agreed to. The same old discriminatory measures were continued by it, culminating in the 'Pegging Act' of 1943 and the 'Ghetto Act' of 1946. These two infamous laws were the proverbial 'last straw' and the Interim Government which had by then been formed in India under Jawaharlal Nehru, decided to snap all diplomatic and trade relations with South Africa. It also took the 'Indian Question' to the United Nations. But in South Africa, the Indian emigrants came to the conclusion that their future would be considerably eased if they were to adopt whatever they could of the western way of life. The result of this decision, undeterred by various arbitrary acts of omission and commission on the part of the apartheid government, are more than evident today in the life style of the Indians in South Africa.

- 7.15. Meanwhile, the character of the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses (NIC & TIC) had changed dramatically. A second generation of locally born persons had assumed the leadership of both these organisations. Dr. Y. M. Dadoo had become undisputed Indian leader in the Transvaal; and so also Dr. G. M. ('Monty') Naicker in Natal. They were imbued with the conviction that the future of the Indians did not lie in fighting the racism of the whites on a compartmental basis. It had to be a multi-racial joint struggle of all the oppressed people of South Africa and, particularly so, in conjunction with the indigenous Blacks who formed the overwhelming majority of the country's population. This realistic and wise policy resulted in what came to be known as the 'Three Doctors Pact' which was concluded in 1947 by Drs. A. B. Xuma, Y. M. Dadoo and G. M. Naicker - Presidents, respectively, of the ANC, the TIC and the NIC. These three organisations soon launched the 'Defiance Campaign', which was a joint passive resistance movement. It resulted in over 8,000 Blacks and Indians being arrested and imprisoned. In 1955, at a place called Cliptown near SOWETO, the 'Freedom Charter' was endorsed by the Blacks, the Indians and also by the Coloured people. It proclaimed 'that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White'. Steve Biko, hero of the Black Consciousness Movement, had already defined the term 'Black' as any person who was 'not White' and that was the meaning attached to it in the Freedom Charter.

The Apartheid Government's Policy of 'Divide and Rule'

- 7.16. The apartheid regime reacted in alarm to these developments. It tried to sow discord among the non-Whites. Its carefully crafted policy of 'divide and rule' envisaged differential treatment being accorded to each of the three racial groups. For instance, some contemporary witnesses of the Durban riots of 1949, which had pitted Blacks against Indians, suspected that it must have been at least encouraged, if not also instigated by White agents! But the strategy of separating the Indian community from the other two oppressed races was not always consistently followed. The impartial oppression of all the non-Whites continued unabated. The Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act of 2 June 1946 (commonly called the 'Ghetto Act', which has already been referred to in an earlier paragraph) was soon followed in 1950 by the impartial and equally infamous Group Areas Act. In a monogram published by her in 1985, Dr Frene Ginwala wrote that between 1966 and 1984, no less than 83,691 Coloured and 40,067 Indian families had been moved under that law, to new locations. Many more were to follow. As for the Blacks, they had been relegated to ten so-called 'homelands' located in the most inhospitable parts of the country, from where they had to obtain special passes to re-enter their own country!
- 7.17. On the other hand, special efforts were simultaneously launched to put the Indians in a relatively more privileged position *vis à vis* the Blacks. It is ironic that in 1962, a year after Prime Minister Verwoerd had declared the withdrawal of South Africa from the British Commonwealth, the Indian immigrants were finally granted the status of permanent residents and thus admitted to South African citizenship. This was a little more than a century after the docking of the *S.S. Truro* in Durban harbour! Local Affairs or Consultative Committees were established in Natal and the

Transvaal, with the loudly proclaimed objective of giving the Indian South Africans a voice in matters affecting them. In 1973, state-financed education was made compulsory for Indian children up to the age of 15. Two years later, the obnoxious inter-provincial travel and residence barriers were relaxed. A state-sponsored Indian Development Corporation was established in 1977 and permission was granted to set up an all-Indian New Republic Bank to promote the growth of Indian entrepreneurship. These diverse measures facilitated the increased participation of Indians in secondary industries. Weaving and clothing factories, footwear manufacture, garages and service stations, tyre retreading shops, furniture making establishments, printing presses, bakeries, food preparation units and super bazaars, as well as many other such small scale industries sprang up to give gainful employment to thousands of Indians. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the descendants of former indentured labour and of 'free passenger Indians' that had followed them to South Africa, were now much better off than they had ever been before. In contrast, the majority of the Blacks stayed where they were, at the very bottom of the social pyramid.

- 7.18. Perhaps the most unpopular of the dirty tricks thought up by the apartheid government to break the unity of the non-Whites was the 1982 decision to amend the constitution. A Tricameral Parliament was going to be set up with separate chambers for Whites, Coloureds and Indians. There would be no place in it for the Blacks. White political supremacy would be continued as the other two chambers would only be in innocuous charge of their 'own affairs' like education, health and social welfare, but with little financial resources and no policy-making powers. The NIC and the TIC launched a massive campaign to persuade the Indian community to defeat this project by not participating in the elections to the Indian chamber. However, a relatively small number did exercise their franchise and some of them became MPs and even Cabinet Ministers, with fat salaries and all the other perks of office. For them, the temptation of 'proximity to the centres of power' was too much to resist, even though they earned the resentment and scorn of their fellow Indians.

Current Status of the Indian South Africans

- 7.19. It was not surprising, therefore, that the indigenous Blacks felt a growing resentment against the ISAs due to the preferential treatment given to them by the government. It did not matter to them that the two Indian Congresses had continued to march in step with the ANC and its *Umkhonto we Swizwe* ('Spear of the Nation'). Nor that the NIC and the TIC were part of the UDF (United Democratic Front) that was fast making South Africa ungovernable for the regime. Nor again, that so many of the ISAs had, like their own Black heroes, borne the most horrendous torture in apartheid's infamous Robben Island. It was the relative prosperity of the PIOs that marked them out as objects of envy and resentment by the majority community. The contrast between Indian Phoenix and Black KwaMashu, for instance, which confront each other across a highway, was as clear as daylight. With apartheid's policy of separate and unequal development, the only areas of contact between Blacks and Indians were unfortunate ones - as across a shop counter between

trader and customer; in a domestic situation between housewife and maid; or in a work environment between supervisor and manual labour.

- 7.20. From 1984, the UDF (which was a broad coalition of student groups, youth congresses, civil associations, women's organisations, church societies and trade unions), later joined by the ANC and the two Indian Congresses, grew in strength. Its joint action programme of demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins threatened the country's economic collapse. After the replacement in 1992 of the uncompromising President P. W. Botha by the pragmatic Frederik Wilhelm de Klerk, the political climate in South Africa underwent a dramatic change. While the tortuous negotiations for the end of apartheid ran their course with all their many ups and downs, ending in the birth of Mandela's New South Africa, it was a period of anxiety for the Indian community. It was only the politically active persons among them, such as members of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress, who were emphatic that the transition would be peaceful and orderly. They were sure that their contribution to the common struggle was well known to the African leaders. And that, therefore, there was little to fear for the future.
- 7.21. That was not, however, the general feeling of the community. There was considerable concern among them that the simmering resentment against them of the general Black population, due to the superior status of the Indians in apartheid days, would be translated into reprisals once White rule was ended. Even if some of the well-heeled Indians could conceivably leave South Africa for distant shores if local conditions were to become intolerable, the vast silent majority would stay on in the land of their birth, as they knew no other. For them, India was 'no more than a geographic expression'. They too would weather the storm as best as they could, even as their ancestors had faced the dreadful years of indenture and white domination. Sensing the prevalent mood among the Indian community, Mandela and his senior colleagues in the ANC went out of their way, as the date for the first free elections drew near, to reassure them that there would be no reprisals. But apparently this was not effective enough. It is generally believed that most of the PIOs voted for de Klerk's National Party in the first non-racial elections in 1994, in the hope that a united opposition of all the minority parties against preponderant Black domination would be the best guarantee for their common future. A similar performance was repeated in the next general elections of 1999, when most of the ISA votes were again cast in favour of the newly formed, White-dominated Democratic Alliance.
- 7.22. The all-forgiving, statesman-like, newly elected President Mandela seemed to take the ISA attitude in his stride. Ahmed Kathrada, his old friend and companion since before their incarceration on Robben Island, continued in the President's inner circle to advise him. The Cabinet had many Indian faces in it. Abdulah Mohamed ('Dullah') Omar was Minister of Justice. The Transport portfolio was given to Mac Maharaj. Water Affairs & Forestry went to Kadar Asmal. Jay Naidoo was Minister without Portfolio, but entrusted with overseeing the implementation of the ambitious RDP (the government's Reconstruction & Development Programme). Essop Pahad and Vali Moosa were Deputy Ministers, respectively, for Foreign and Provincial Affairs. Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim,

Aziz Pahad, Mohamed Valli Moosa and Billy Nair were elected to the all-powerful ANC National Executive.

- 7.23. In May 1999, Thabo Mbeki became President of South Africa after the second general elections. By then, the official attitude towards the ISAs appeared to have undergone a subtle change. Several of the old Indian names did not figure in the new Cabinet. Only Kader Asmal (for Education) and Vali Moosa (for Environment and Tourism) had been included in it.
- 7.24. Nelson Mandela had once said: “India came to our aid when the rest of the world stood by or gave succour to our oppressors. When the doors of international councils were closed to us, India opened the way. You took up our battles, as if they were your own. Now that we have been victorious, it cannot be said too often that our victory is also India’s”. Both Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, his former Deputy, had been generally sympathetic towards the Indian minority in view of the sacrifices made by them during the struggle against apartheid. Both of them had reassured them that they too belonged to the country’s majority. But the poor and lower middle class Indians had not been able to perceive any of the socio-economic benefits that they had hoped for.
- 7.25. It was not surprising, therefore, that in the months prior to the December 2000 local elections in the KwaZulu Natal Province, it was generally anticipated by ANC leaders that the Indian community’s votes were likely to be cast mainly in favour of the Democratic Alliance Party. As that party had been formed by a group of Whites who had left the National Party, President Mbeki could not hide his disappointment. He is reported to have said at an election rally on 26 November: “Why does the Indian population in Durban which, for a century, was very active in the struggle for liberation, vote for the party of apartheid?” KwaZulu Natal’s Transport Minister S’Ndebele, also of the ANC, was even more blunt when he declared that those Blacks, Coloureds and Indians who voted for other parties would have problems as far as the delivery of services from the government was concerned. This raised a hue and cry and was criticised by the opposition parties. Despite its electoral rhetoric, the attitude of the government continued to be correct towards the Indian community and Loggie Naidoo was nominated as Deputy Mayor of Durban.
- 7.26. If the official policy towards the Indian South Africans had seemingly displayed a subtle, yet dramatic change in 1999, the general attitude of the Blacks towards them seemed to have altered even before that. The *Indicator* (a newspaper published in Lenasia by Ameen Akhalwaya) had reported in October 1992 that this Indian township near SOWETO had been ‘in the grip of unprecedented fear due to an upsurge of violent crime by Blacks against Indians’. Were the Indian South Africans being gradually targeted for reprisal and, if so, why? Was it only because of the relatively preferential treatment that had been accorded to them during apartheid days, resulting in their higher social and economic status? Or were there any other reasons as well? The economic disparity separating the Indians from the Blacks may have been an important factor in the resentment felt against them by the indigenous people of South Africa. It is true that ‘Millionaires Rows’ abound in various Indian townships – like Winchester Drive in Durban’s Reservoir Hills; Mbeni Heights in Chatsworth, near Durban; and Seal Crescent in Lenasia, not far

from Johannesburg. But they do not reflect the correct overall picture of the Indian community as there are still many places like Malagazi near Isipingo and Hill Heads Estate outside Verulam, where thousands of Indians live in wood and iron shacks without plumbing, without electricity, and without sewage disposal. In fact, when the High Level Committee visited South Africa in January this year, prominent members of the local Indian Diaspora informed it that 65 to 70% of the PIOs are still living under the poverty line. The unemployment rate is also high in the community. According to some estimates, one to two percent of Indians (between 10,000 to 20,000) has tested HIV positive. But in spite of the grim reality of their general poverty, there have been frequent instances of violence directed against the community, as indeed also against the Whites.

- 7.27. Such all-too-frequent eruptions of anti-Indian sentiment among the Blacks are no doubt due also to the feeling ingrained in them during apartheid days that the ISAs had been exploiting them by sharp trade practices, an allegation that is not entirely correct. But perhaps a more important reason for inter-racial antagonism is the social aloofness and cultural superiority, even arrogance, that some Indians apparently still find it difficult to overcome or conceal against their Black compatriots. Perhaps even more important, is the fact that economic deprivation seems to have been transmuted into ethnic animosity and directed against relatively softer targets. Meanwhile, the richer members of the Indian community have been living in 'gilded cages', protecting themselves behind iron grills and electronic alert systems. It is relevant to take note here of a recent public opinion poll conducted by the *Southern African Democracy Barometre*. This survey revealed that 56% of all the ISAs who responded had manifested their 'apartheid nostalgia', by their lack of faith in the democratic transition that had taken place in the country!
- 7.28. The HLC found ample evidence in South Africa to corroborate the fact that the PIOs in this country are South Africans, first and foremost. The fact that they look like us, very often eat the same kind of food, and have many of the cultural values that we cherish, does not make them a little more Indian than South African. A century and a half of existence in an alien land, and four or five generations of acculturation in a dominant White society, has diluted their Indianness. Ms. Ela Gandhi, MP (ANC) and a granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, clearly summed up her Indian South African identity when she said: "I am a South African; a very proud South African. The Indianness comes in at the level of culture, the way we eat, the kind of things we eat, the kind of things we appreciate - like music, drama, the language we speak. We only enrich our country by having all these different tastes and habits. What I am basically saying is that that is where the Indianness stops". And it is only right and proper that this sentiment should be generally recognised and respected.
- 7.29. The Indian Diaspora in South Africa numbers at least a million people. More than 75% of them live in KwazuluNatal. Durban, the capital of this province, accounts for a considerable part of the largely urbanised Indian population in this country. In its meeting with representatives of the Indian community in Johannesburg and Durban, the HLC was informed that the remaining 25%

of the ISAs are dispersed in the rest of the country, with the old Transvaal accounting for most of them. The South African Indians represent a variety of Indian characteristics. This is not surprising because of the miscellany of languages, religions, costumes, food habits, and other traits that they have inherited from their Indian ancestors who had migrated to South Africa from different regions and communities of India. Accordingly, they reflect the rich and diverse texture of the land of their origin.

- 7.30. During the tallying operations for the 1990 census, as many as 94.93% of the ISAs had declared English as their 'home language'. Among all the Indian languages, it is only Gujarati that is still generally spoken, and that too among themselves, by persons whose ancestors had come from Gujarat. But it is said that many children of Gujarati families are known to resent having to spend time at Sunday schools learning a language that they consider of little use to them in their daily lives.
- 7.31. Interestingly, a little over 39% of the community had declared in 1999 that their religion was Hindu. But then it was a form of Hinduism that was being practised by people who had rid themselves of traditions and customs like *jaati* and *sati*, *gotra* and *sutra*, *kutum*, endogamy and dowry. The ruthless ironing out of mutual differences during the indenture years, when their ancestors had been forced into co-existing with people from whom caste or tradition would have kept them apart in their earlier Indian environment, had resulted in forging for their descendants a new identity.
- 7.32. Various Christian sects, and particularly the Pentecostal Church, appear to have made some inroads into the Hindu community, with the result that there are now almost 13% of the ISAs who belong to one or other of the Christian groups. And as a reaction to this development, various Hindu sects have activated themselves, such as the Arya Samaj, the Divine Life Society, the Ramakrishna Mission, Sai Baba Samitis and the ISKCON. The last of them organises a very popular *rath jatra*, pulled by jeeps, along the Durban sea front every year, to coincide with the festival in Puri.
- 7.33. Muslim ISAs constitute around 20% of the ISA population. The Central Islamic Trust is very active in South Africa. The destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 had a ripple effect in the fire-bombing of the Shree Pretoria Hindu Seva Samaj Temple at Laudium near Pretoria. But all the local Muslim leaders publicly apologised to the Hindu community, ascribing the vandalism to the thoughtless act of criminal elements or *agents provocateurs*. The President of the Islamic Council of South Africa even went to the extent of saying that both communities should display restraint and caution and not allow the inter-religious strife in India to destroy the harmonious relationship between them in South Africa. Inter-caste marriages are quite common among Hindus and Muslims, though not inter-communal ones between the two communities.
- 7.34. Western influence is predominant in social, cultural and familial relationships. But it is important to note that there is wide consensus among the ISAs for increased cultural interaction with India. In common with other large, long-established overseas Indian communities, the Indians in South

Africa have a deep emotional bond with the culture of their 'mother country'. Our classical dance and music continue to evince widespread interest in them. There are a number of local cultural groups that are trying to attract PIOs to attend classes conducted by them. At the same time, Bollywood stars are quite popular. A radio station relays Hindi and Tamil *filmi ganas* round the clock, together with a lot of pop music. The opening of Indian Cultural Centres in Durban and Johannesburg was enthusiastically welcomed as a meaningful response to the interest displayed by local PIOs to preserve and develop their cultural heritage. Some among them would even like to see the establishment here of the kind of institutions that have been set up in Mauritius, namely, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture. Such an initiative, they feel, would showcase our culture to all the races in South Africa and thus enhance the Indian community's standing in the country. They would also welcome the organisation in this country of a 'Festival of India' as such an event would be able to present their 'mother country' in a proper perspective and thus disabuse their Black compatriots of their distorted and derogatory perception of India.

- 7.35. Recently, the Diaspora's feelings towards India were clearly exhibited when they contributed a large amount of money and material for the relief of victims of the Gujarat Earthquake. But unlike the PIOs in North America and Western Europe, there is no interest in South Africa in acquiring dual citizenship. In fact, there is a fear that gaining such a status might only prejudice their local position with the Black majority who would then be able to accuse them of divided loyalties.
- 7.36. Many ISAs would be interested in visiting India, if only to trace their roots. There are demands for direct Air India flights to Durban. But there is resentment that foreign citizens of Indian origin are subjected in India to higher fares on domestic airlines and hotels, and also higher entry fees at museums and tourist spots.
- 7.37. The long history of Indian philanthropy in South Africa seems to be ignored or forgotten by a Black majority that has to face life in the raw because of its poverty and deprivation, neither of which has disappeared with the dawn of the New South Africa. But it must be recorded here that many ISAs have been responsible for numerous public-spirited activities to alleviate the suffering of the poor and deprived Blacks. Whether it is Indian doctors offering lower cost medical attention to African patients, or Indian businessmen building schools for Black children or raising bursaries for Black university students, there have been innumerable instances of the Indian Diaspora's concern for their unfortunate compatriots. Apart from individual instances of generosity, many Indian organisations have had an unblemished record of pursuing a humanistic programme, strongly motivated by their belief that alleviating human suffering is itself a kind of spiritual offering to God. Mention may briefly be made here of organisations like the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, the Aga Khan Foundation, the Divine Life Society and the Ramakrishna Mission, the Zakaat Association of South Africa and the A.M.Lockat Charitable Trust. Many other names could form part of this Roll of Honour.

- 7.38. The Committee found ample evidence of the cardinal truth that the PIOs in South Africa are a class by themselves, totally different from their counterparts in other countries. Unlike the large number of persons in the Diasporas in North America and the UK, the PIOs in South Africa are not generally prosperous. Unlike the situation in the Caribbean or Mauritius, here they have to contend with the rights and expectations of an indigenous population that does not easily condone any kind of superior social status of immigrants. And unlike the Indian Fijians who have faced an almost identical situation, the Indians of South Africa have been able successfully to resist the onslaught of an alien administration that treated them with scant regard. Here they made common cause with the indigenous people. Along with them, they bore tremendous hardships and suffering in the fight against apartheid and shared their triumph when it was finally routed. But now they face another challenge - of finding their feet once again in a difficult environment.
- 7.39. There is a feeling among some members of the community that the South African Indians are going through a crisis of leadership. No single person seems to have emerged so far to assume such a role, or be commonly accepted as suitable for it, even though the PIOs do not lack in talent or imagination. At the same time, there is growing recognition of the fact that the community must try to integrate, and be seen to integrate, with the Black majority. That is, of course, easier said than done. The exclusive nature and stereotype vision of the ISAs makes integration a difficult task. There is also the ominous fact that they are currently reeling under a crime wave that is targeted against them by the Black majority, if only because they are the easier target.
- 7.40. Thus it would be right to conclude that the Indian South Africans are once more faced with a critical and complex situation in their long and turbulent history in the land of their adoption. It is a totally different situation from the one that had confronted their forbears in the same country. No doubt their ancestors had to overcome many challenges. Initially, they had to submit themselves to hard labour and servitude without due appreciation. That was followed by mindless racial oppression. And finally, they had to wage a relentless fight against the evils of apartheid that they completed in partnership with all the oppressed people. But now it is a totally different ball game. The present generation of ISAs has to find the *modus vivendi* to co-exist and live harmoniously with an indigenous population that does not fully appreciate or accept their relative prosperity and their alien ethnicity. It even suspects them of disloyalty against the indigenous majority because of their making common cause with the former White oppressors of both of them, out of a mistaken feeling that their safety lies in forging a common front with other minority groups.
- 7.41. Nelson Mandela is once reported to have said that the Indians in South Africa should “be part of a solution and not themselves become the problem”. The integrity of the Indian Diaspora in South Africa will be judged by its ability to subject its values to the test of whether they unite people on the basis of their ethnic identity or of their common humanity. It remains to be seen if the Indian community can achieve this integrity, which, in turn, will depend on the quality of the leaders, and role models who will emerge from among the Indian community in the new South Africa. It is time again for South African Indians to overcome tremendous odds and make genuine

efforts to join the mainstream. The basic precondition for success in such an endeavour would be their ability to integrate themselves with the black majority, not ethnically but in the diverse fields of human endeavour – social, economic and political. They have to accept with grace the inevitable process of increasing Africanisation and make even more meaningful contributions to improving the living conditions of South Africans in general. They have to join in the struggle to alleviate poverty, which continues to be race-bound and also affects the Indians. Non-racialism, for which so much has been sacrificed, will not be adequately advanced without the integration of Indians into the mainstream of South African society. Their future depends on their ability to realign themselves to the multi-cultural melting pot of the African Renaissance. And they should be seen to be doing so.

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